

ACTS

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

VOLUME 1

ACTS

**DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
VOLUME I**

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ACTS Devotional Guide, Volume I

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INTRODUCTION

Brian Lowe

Who doesn't like a good story? Stories have a way of drawing us into their world. They fill our minds with visions of courage, bravery, and heroism. We share the victories, feel the defeats, and rejoice in the resurgence of the hero. A good story envelops us so that we ultimately learn not just about the players in the story, but ourselves as well.

Acts is not just a good story, it's a true story written by a physician, missionary, and historian named Luke. He begins the story of Acts with the greatest event in the history of the world - the Resurrection of Jesus. Then, like a master storyteller, Luke fills the narrative with reports of adventure, arrests, imprisonments, beatings, riots, narrow escapes, a shipwreck, trial scenes, and rescues. Ultimately, Luke writes Acts as a thrilling historical narrative drawing us into the explosive growth of the gospel in the Early Church.

Like any good story, Acts fills our minds with ideals of courage, bravery, and heroism. We see Peter the Denier become Peter the Evangelist. We see Paul the Murderer transformed into Paul the Missionary. We see nameless Christians taking the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We are drawn into their story and this gives us hope that we might have some part in the Story as well.

Our hope for our study of Acts is that God would give us a greater vision for how the Holy Spirit might empower us to play our parts well in his Grand Story - God's Mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 1:1-26

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Acts 1:1-3

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Prayer

I thank you, Father, that you have raised up so many eyewitnesses for your glory. I pray that you will use these passages of your word to help me realize the power of testimony. Grant that I might sing with David, "I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation." (Psalm 40:10) Help me be a bold witness of your gospel. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 1:4-8

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

John 14:25-26

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

John 16:7-11

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Prayer

I praise you, Father, that you have not left us like orphans but continually abide in us through your Holy Spirit. You have adopted us in the true spirit of adoption and have granted us new hearts and new minds that we may show the world that you fix the broken. Lord, teach us to yield ourselves to your Holy Spirit and to trust in you alone for our sanctification. Amen.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 1:9-11

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were

gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Prayer

My dear Jesus, you ascended into heaven before many eyes and sat down on the right hand of Majesty where you rule the world with sovereign grace. Still your presence is near to us in your Spirit, and we wait eagerly for your return. Kindle our hopes, preserve our patience, and stimulate our hearts to proclaim your gospel around us, so that when you come back you will see your servants working and not being idle. Excite our hearts with your imminent return and help us prepare the world, for you are making all things new. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 1:12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Psalm 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
 when brothers dwell in unity!
 It is like the precious oil on the head,
 running down on the beard,
 on the beard of Aaron,
 running down on the collar of his robes!
 It is like the dew of Hermon,
 which falls on the mountains of Zion!
 For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
 life forevermore.

John 17:22-23

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Prayer

My King of Kings, you would not have it that your kingdom should be divided, for how then could your kingdom stand? But you hold all things together, including the church by the word of your power! The ultimate unity of your church does not rest in our hands, but in yours, and we are privileged with the opportunity to do your work.

We are not ignorant of the Devil's designs; we despise our pride and bitterness which cause so much self-destruction and division. Humble us, Father. Teach us to forgive one another as you forgive us. Help us devote ourselves to prayer together more often, just as the disciples did in the upper room as they waited for your Spirit. We are comforted by the prayers of Jesus and find promise of unity in his love for us. Thank you. Amen.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 1:15-26

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

'May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it';
and
'Let another take his office.'

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;
he turns it wherever he will.

Prayer

Father, I am comforted when I am reminded that you know the hearts of all people and that you are sovereign over all our leaders. Thank you for our church leaders; help us remember to pray for them often and to serve them even as they serve us. Bless them and guard them from the enemy. Please raise up more leaders; your flock is great and your shepherds few. Establish the order of your body, the Church, with humility, truth, and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Devotional 1*The Ascension**Acts 1:6-11*

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

After Jesus died on a cross and rose from the grave and became alive again, he spent the next 40 days teaching the disciples. Near the end of those 40 days, the disciples asked if Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, because Israel was ruled over by the Romans. Jesus told them that it wasn't for them to know the times and seasons set by the Father, but told them that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit to witness about Jesus everywhere around the world. Then the disciples watched as Jesus ascended into heaven and they were told by angels that he would one day return the same way he left.

Questions

1. Where did Jesus go?
2. Why didn't Jesus tell them when he was going to restore the kingdom of Israel?
3. Why did Jesus go? (see also John 16:7)

Application

Jesus told his followers that they weren't allowed to know everything about how and when God was going to act. Does not knowing all the information you want frustrate you? Can you think of a situation when it's good not to know anything (for example, a birthday surprise or all the possible complications of an upcoming surgery)?

Devotional 2

The Replacement of Judas Iscariot

Due to the graphic nature of this content you should read through this before a family devotional time. Depending on the age of your children or family, it may be helpful to share a creative summary of the more graphic material.

Acts 1:15-26

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

'May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it';
and

'Let another take his office.'

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the followers of Jesus returned to Jerusalem to an upper room where they stayed. Peter explained to everyone through scripture that Judas Iscariot needed to be replaced because he had died. So they chose two men who knew Jesus since the baptism of John and were with him up until Jesus' ascension. These two men were named Matthias and Barsabbas. The disciples prayed over these men, asking God to reveal who should take Judas's place. Afterwards they cast lots, and Matthias was chosen as the twelfth apostle.

Questions

1. What were the disciples doing before they chose a replacement for Judas?
2. What were the criteria to become an apostle in Judas's place? Why were these criteria important?
3. Why did the disciples need to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot? (see also Psalm 109:8)

Application

The disciples carefully prayed over two men who could fulfill the role of godly leadership. Do you pray for more leadership in the church? Can you think of anyone who has the potential to be a Godly leader?

Matthew 9:36-38

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

ACTS 2:1-41

Pentecost Preached

Joel McMillon

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Acts 2:1-12

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please forgive us for our arrogance and pride. Forgive us for those moments in life when we feel like our ways are higher than your ways and that our plans are greater than yours. Open our eyes to see our misguidance before you have to intervene with divine judgment. We submit to you and your leadership in our lives. Please, God, allow us to hear your voice and see your hand. We trust you and humbly acknowledge that you are God and we are not. Thank you for your grace, mercy, provision, and power. Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Joel 2:28-32

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Luke 24:44-49

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.”

Acts 2:22-24

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for the salvation you provide through your Son, Jesus Christ! From the beginning of time, you had a plan for the redemption of mankind. Only by your grace and mercy do we experience the goodness and power that you promise those who call upon the name of the Lord. Please forgive us for trusting in ourselves rather than submitting to you. You alone are worthy of our trust, praise, worship, and submission. May we truly delight in you as we seek to live lives that bring you glory and honor. Use us as you see fit. We know you are sovereign. Amen.

Day 3

Reading

2 Samuel 7:11b-16

“...Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

Psalms 16:8-11

I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Acts 2:29-33

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

Prayer

Dear God, please show us how to live. Cleanse us and allow us to be a people who build your kingdom rather than those who impede it. May our desires be aligned with yours. May our hearts follow you more fervently today than yesterday but even more tomorrow. We repent of our willful ignorance and our shortsighted, selfish, sinful ways. We do not deserve your love and blessings, yet you willingly and freely bestow them upon us. Jesus, you are the risen Savior, and we lay ourselves prostrate at your feet. Amen.

Day 4

Reading

Isaiah 44:3-5

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, ‘I am the Lord’s,’ another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘The Lord’s,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.”

John 7:37-39

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Acts 2:36-39

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Prayer

O great God and Counselor, thank you for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit to all those who repent and trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness! It is no small gift yet we often ignore it and take it for granted. May we truly repent and seek to follow the gentle guidance of God within us. O holy Comforter, convict our hearts of sin and give us a passion for seeking and doing God’s will. Please empower us in boldness to share the gospel with our friends, family members, coworkers, neighbors,

and even complete strangers! May our love for you compel us to share your love with the world! Amen.

Day 5

Reading

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Philippians 2:3-8

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Prayer

Omnipotent Savior, we are awestruck by your love and shamed by your example of humility and grace. You are first among all, and we bow before you singing praises and adoration to your name. God, we come together as a community of believers asking you to be present among us corporately but also with us as individual parts of the whole body of Christ! Please help us to love like you love and to see others through your eyes. May we be believers who are passionate and intentional in serving others and reaching the lost with your gospel. Amen.

Devotional 1

Where did that come from?!

Acts 2:1-12

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

People from many different nations had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, a traditional religious celebration of God's people. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit fills the place and gives Jesus' apostles the ability to speak the gospel in the many different languages of the people present. The apostles had not known these languages beforehand, and the people were amazed at being able to understand what these men were saying. People wondered what this meant!

Questions

1. Why were all these people in Jerusalem?
2. Why do you think the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the ability to speak in the different languages of all the people present?
3. Some of the people witnessed this event and asked, "What does this mean?" How would you answer this question? (You may reference Acts 2:22-24,36-39.)

Application

There are sometimes situations in life where we need God to do something only He can do. The apostles had a unique opportunity to share God's truth with a huge gathering of people from all around the known world. Do you think the apostles could have shared God's truth as effectively without the presence of the Holy Spirit? How often do we try to do something in our own power rather than asking the Holy Spirit to empower us to accomplish his will? Have you ever experienced a situation in which you feel like God gave you the words or knowledge that you needed for

someone or even for yourself? How does a person become more dependent upon the Holy Spirit rather than his/her own abilities?

Devotional 2

Community Demonstrated

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

After having an amazing experience with the Holy Spirit and the direct teaching of God's truth by Peter, many people became followers of Jesus Christ. Because of this, they made new friends and found a new meaning to life. They wanted to learn as much as they could about God and his teachings. This created within them a sense of community or oneness that was shown in their care for one another. As these people continued to learn, pray, fellowship, and praise God together, other people noticed and became followers of Jesus, too!

Questions

1. What things did these people enjoy doing together?
2. What was the main focus of all these people that brought them together?
3. The last verse says that the Lord added newly saved people to their number every day. What do you think "outsiders" saw in these believers that drew them in? (Check out John 13:34-35. Do you think people today would find this appealing?)

Application

The followers of Jesus in this passage became a unified community that took care of one another. They also enjoyed spending time learning about God and singing praises to his name. Why do you think these people were able to enjoy such sweet fellowship? Do you think this is something we can experience as followers of Jesus today? If so, how could we as a body and you as an individual start living this way?

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

David Keen

My daughter Lucy, like every other child in America, loves the movie “Frozen.” So... spoiler alert if you have been under a rock the last couple years and haven’t seen this movie yet. Prince Hans is the character in the movie who plays the role of the main villain. However, this is not revealed until towards the end of the story. Recently I read an article explaining how Disney showed us that Prince Hans was always hiding his true colors because he wore gloves the entire movie right up until he pulled them off to tell Anna he did not love her and would not save her. It was only then that we saw his true colors. Once you see the story unfold with Prince Hans revealing his true self, you understand that even in the beginning he was always the villain. In a similar way, Christ is revealed in the New Testament to be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament was pointing to. Unlike Hans, Jesus is the hero of the story. Now that we know this, it is easy to see how clearly we see Christ throughout the Old Testament as the true story of the Bible unfolds from Genesis to Revelation.

One Whole Story

The Bible is not 66 different books telling different isolated stories with no unity nor is it merely a book full of good advice and wise quotations. Just like any good book or movie, the Bible is one complete story with one main subject and one hero. In fact, it is the one true story on which all other stories are based. This story, like all good stories, must have time to develop and unfold before it comes to a climax and resolution. That is exactly what the Bible does. Each of the 66 books of the Bible make up one grand story that shows us how the redemptive history of the world is unfolding. This is what is happening in the Old Testament. The story, God’s story, is unfolding. The Old Testament is preparing the way and pointing to Christ on every page.

The Fulfillment

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all things promised in the Old Testament. Luke makes this very clear in his gospel as well as in Acts. Luke records a conversation Jesus is having with two men on the road to Emmaus. He writes, “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27)

Then in Acts 2 at the end of the first recorded sermon being preached, Christ is shown to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament. After preaching Christ from Joel and the Psalms, Peter says, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Speaking again of Jesus in Acts 10, Luke records Peter as saying, “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).

Vaughan Roberts writes in his book “God’s Big Picture,” “The Old Testament on its own is an unfinished story; a promise without a fulfillment. We must read on to the New Testament if we want to know what it really means. And the New Testament constantly looks back to the promise it fulfills. We shall not make much sense of it if we are not aware of what has come before. What does it mean that Jesus is the Christ, the Passover lamb, the Son of Abraham, and Son of David, the true vine or the good shepherd? The answers are all found in the Old Testament.”

Jesus is the perfect prophet, priest, and king. As Tim Keller says, “Jesus is the true and better” version of most every character in the Old Testament. Each story and each character is pointing us to the person and work of Christ.

Keeping the end in mind

Once Prince Hans was revealed to be the villain, one can never watch “Frozen” again without seeing him and the story for what it is. It’s obvious once you know how the story ends. In a similar way, we have the privilege of being on this side of the resurrection of Christ with the completed Word of God readily available at our fingertips. We know that Jesus is the hero. We know how the story ends. Now, when we read the Old Testament we always do it with the end in mind ... namely Jesus Christ. As Sally Lloyd-Jones says, “every story whispers his name.”

ACTS 2:42-47

Pentecost Lived

Julie Croshaw

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

I John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

I Timothy 4:11-16

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, sustain us in our need to be devoted to your teachings. We confess our tendency to flit from one sound bite of culture to another, like children chasing bubbles. Teach us to discern and treasure truth.

May our lives be so filled with your fellowship that we experience your word and express prayer as frequently and in the same way that we breathe in and breathe out.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 2:43

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

Mark 16:14-20

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

John 14:12-14

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we confess that in our finite understanding of how our world works, we underestimate the miraculous things you are capable of doing. And, in our limited understanding of your generous heart, we also underestimate the abundance of wonders and signs you want to pour out on your people. We pray that you would fill our hearts with faith to see what you want to do in our lives.

And, oh God, in our darkened world, we so desperately pray that once again, you will fill everyone with an awe of you as they witness the work of your hands through your people.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 2:44-45

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

Luke 18:18-30

And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray wholeheartedly that you would fashion our hearts and minds to think rightly about our property and possessions. Open our eyes to the abundance you have given us to share. Give us discernment to give to those who are truly in need. Help us to obediently hold fast to you. Teach us to loosen our grip on your gifts and live with a worshipful, reckless abandon to your will! And in the same breath, we pray for wisdom to balance your directives to earn, save, provide, steward, and give. And, when we are in need, help us to faithfully ask and receive.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 2:46

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

Luke 24:28-35

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray you will draw us deeper into fellowship with believers. We confess we are unaccustomed to the idea of devotion; our lives are saturated with instant gratification and devoid of long-lasting commitment. Teach us to spend time with one another, enjoying the blessing of sharing meals together.

We pray that we recognize the holiness you infuse into meals shared in your presence. And, may we frequently enjoy the fellowship of meals shared with other believers. We realize that increasing how often we share meals with other believers will take intentional restructuring of our daily schedules and priorities.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 2:47

(The believers were) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

John 12:32

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Acts 5:14

And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

Acts 6:7

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Acts 16:5

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

Prayer

Oh God, it is such a blessing to be a part of the outpouring of your Holy Spirit on a church growing and drawing others into your gracious fellowship. Oh, that you would keep us close to you, that we may wholeheartedly exclaim with the Psalmist, “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere!” (Psalm 84:10a)

And yet, our flesh is so weak, with that blessing, guard us against any selfish pride, for it is never the result of our efforts that furthers your kingdom. We are merely vessels that long to be filled.

Devotional 1*Pentecost Lived: A Caring Community**Acts 2:42-45*

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Shortly after the Holy Spirit was revealed in fullness on Pentecost in Acts 2:42-45, the believers began to live differently. They began to take care of the needs of fellow believers. The power of the Holy Spirit was so prominent in their lives, that they were easily prompted to miraculously care for one another. They were readily trusting of God's provision and relinquished ownership of possessions which once brought a sense of security and fulfillment. They quickly became so entrenched in gospel fellowship, that they saw fellow believers as extensions of their own selves and families. Indeed, many of them began to take better care of fellow believers than many families take care of each other.

Later in the New Testament, in Hebrews, believers are called to the same type of fellowship. The writer of Hebrews draws a picture of the believer's access to God's presence and provision via the work of Christ on the cross. Though the revealing of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was a distant memory for the Hebrews, as well as for us, the power and presence of God is just as accessible. The fellowship of believers growing together and providing for one another is also just as possible for those who seek it!

Questions

1. Who does the pronoun "they" refer to in verse 42?
2. What was being done through the apostles?
3. What did they do for each other?
4. Why were the believers suddenly able to perform signs and wonders and willing to give all their stuff away?
5. Because performing signs and wonders alongside sacrificially providing for others was something to be done by the first Christians and throughout the New Testament, we believe this is how God wants us to live. What does all this mean for our lives?

Application

One of the most amazing themes of the New Testament is Jesus' display of power over the natural world to heal people and calm storms. God continues to have power over the laws of nature and as we pray, he hears and answers. Jesus said in John 14:12, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

Oh that we would never sell short God's prerogative to do miracles of healing, provision, and protection through believers, even us!

Devotional 2

Pentecost Lived - A Growing Community

Acts 2:46-47

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 11:19-26

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

As the believers actively allowed the power of the Holy Spirit to miraculously bring healing, provision, and protection through them to fellow believers, others outside the faith took notice. People were being drawn into the beautiful commotion with awe and gratitude.

There are several places in Acts where the writer records the act of God adding to the number of people in the early Church. The work of God in this way produced glad hearts in the lives of recipients and onlookers who were given grace to believe. In much the same way, we as modern-day Christians get a little giddy when we see God bringing large numbers of people into the churches in our community, especially when he blesses the church of which we happen to be a part!

Questions

1. What did the early believers do together?
2. How did being together make them feel?
3. How did others around them react to their loving each other?
4. Why did the Lord add to their numbers daily?
5. Based on these verses, how do you feel God wants Christians to live and what he wants to do in our lives and churches?

Application

Many times, we grow weary with reaching the lost for Christ when we envision our work as being that of a child trying to fill a swimming pool one bucket of water at a time. In reality, God's vision for us is that we simply need to grab hold of a surfboard and ride the tidal wave he produces as we exalt him and he is lifted up! In John 12:32, Jesus says, "And I, when I am lifted up [*The Greek for lifted up also means exalted.*] from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

CHURCH IN COMMUNITY

Nathan Chapman

Acts 2:45-47

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In Acts 2, we see a picture of what our hearts long for relationally within the body of believers. This passage paints a beautiful picture of the community life of believers in the early church. There can be a temptation to become disillusioned when we imagine these first believers doing life together in such a beautiful way. However, throughout the New Testament, the church needed to be reminded of how to behave within community. Just like church communities today, the early church was full of flaws because it was full of people. Sometimes it is hard to continue to hope for the best and believe the best about the company of people Christ is redeeming around you. It's also daunting when you think about the difficulty of living like the early Church in a time and culture when we are overly busy and superficially connected to one another. There are several observations from this text that should encourage us because these examples are not hard to understand, though they may require some discipline to pursue. One of our hopes as a church is that we would reflect the healthy parts of the New Testament church and, in so doing, that we would reflect the glory of Christ in the Church. *Our mission for community groups at our church is that we would pursue one another, so that Jesus is seen, and disciples are made.*

Pursue One Another

The believers were together. This seems so simple, but you get the picture that they were not only working alongside one another to accomplish things, they were present with one another — relationally knowing one another and spiritually growing as they devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings. They were witnesses not only to the life of Jesus, but the lives of one another. Both of these things were important to their health as they sought to live out their new faith. Their spiritual relationship with God was not disconnected from their relationships with one another. Their gladness spilled over from worship and praise with one another to sharing meals and burdens. They were together and this required intentional pursuit. It still requires intentional pursuit and cultivation. Our hope is that we would be engaged together in similar ways by doing the following.

- Worship - Our gathered time of worship and teaching is so important that it is done in community. We are not only meeting with the Lord through song, preaching, communion, and prayer, but through the fellowship of the saints.
- Sharing meals - Everyone makes time for eating. You can redeem your meal time by spending it with your family, or with others. They were not only in the

shared space of gathered worship, but also in one another's homes, showing hospitality and welcoming outsiders.

- Discussing God's Word - Our application of God's word is best done with others around us, both for accountability and for the shared joy of God's work being witnessed.

Jesus is Seen

The people of God have always been marked by their concern and care for one another, as well as their willingness to sacrifice for the sake of God's purposes. The manner in which these sacrifices have been made have always been equally important to what they have sacrificed. Here we see the attitude of their sacrifice was with gladness and generosity, that didn't come from compulsion or manipulation. If you look around you, there are always opportunities like this. There seems to be a heart attitude and position of freedom to both give and receive from one another and ultimately from God. One of the ways that we witness the glory of Jesus alive, is through the life of the community of God. The people of God display his glory so that his traits are seen and witnessed in his people. There are several ways that we can reflect these qualities.

- Offering our time, energy, and resources to others within our community and church family with willing and generous hearts.
- The sharing of burdens both physically and emotionally. There will be times when we are able to give and there will be opportunities to receive. In both, we are able to reflect the beauty of the gospel.

Disciples Are Made

The reality that they had favor with all people and that they were growing in number each day means that the Holy Spirit was working through the church. Others were being welcomed into the fold as they grew. The gospel was shaping this new people to spread the message to others and to welcome them with open arms. There were distinctives about both the message and the ways in which the community functioned that were compelling and attractive to those who were being called and redeemed. There were disciples being made. They were not only growing in number, but in the knowledge of truth and the understanding of what this redeemed life should look like. The number of people being drawn in can be sometimes be a litmus test of our own faithfulness in these things. So as an evaluation, consider these things:

How can we?

- Pursue one another?
- See and savor Jesus together?
- Open your healthiest relationships to others?
- Pray, strategize and take action towards making disciples of Jesus?
- What areas need repentance and faith in order to engage in these ways we see in the description of God's people in Acts?

Our hope is not to be a perfect people, but to be a people who are moving towards faithfulness in these areas of how our lives interact and intersect with one another. Within the context of community groups at our church we hope to see

people *pursuing one another, so that Jesus is seen and disciples are made*. We pray that God's word would stretch our imagination for what relationships can look like today as we live out the gospel together.

ACTS 3-4:22

Boldness

Kate Stranathan

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 3:1-10

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Romans 15:26-27

For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

Prayer

God, I thank you for being my Healer and Provider, and I will praise you like a lame beggar healed to walk again, like a dead man brought to life! I also ask for forgiveness where I have withheld what you have provided me to help others. I use your gifts to make sacrifices to my own petty idols. There are beggars all around while I live in luxury. Open my eyes to areas of need in my community. Give me a generous heart, a servant's heart. Show me where I can fill a practical need.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 3:11-16

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

John 1:9-13

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Prayer

Father, I have looked on others and judged them for the way they deny you and your Son. But I am as guilty as they. I doubt your power over my life, your power to perform miracles. Still you sent your son, and still he died willingly to save my sinful soul. This is the greatest miracle of all, that you redeemed your unfaithful people. You have loved Israel from the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to David and Solomon, to Jesus, to now, and to the end of the age. You have made me your own, and I can rest in your love, knowing that you are a good, good Father.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 3:17-26

"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the

Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 22:15-18

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Prayer

Yahweh, you are the I Am. You created the world and you will destroy it. You are so much more than we could ever imagine. Give me just a glimpse of who you are today. Let me see the world with a sense of urgency, understanding that all that happens is a part of your plan, and every minute, your plan is drawing nearer to the close. I rest in you, but there are some who don't. I pray for specific people in my life who are not under the covenant of Abraham, who don't know your name. Let my acts reflect you and inspire in them a desire to know you.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 4:1-12

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed

because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Psalm 118:21-23

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

Prayer

God, you are three in one, the Trinity. You are Father, Son, and Spirit. This is a wonder that I cannot fathom! I marvel at who you are! The Father leads and guides, the Son redeems, and the Spirit empowers. Spirit, I ask you to fill me today, to give me strength to be bold. I know that even if I fail to be bold (and I have!), Jesus Christ has atoned for me. He is the cornerstone of my life, and this is the Father's doing. It is marvelous in my eyes.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 4:13-22

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a

notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

Philippians 1:12-14

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Prayer

God, I am afraid to be bold. I'm afraid of what others will think. I make excuses, like I'm too young or I'm too sinful or I'm uneducated. But you worked through David when he was a boy, through Paul when he had persecuted Christians, and through Peter and John when they were uneducated. I cast off these doubts, Lord, break these shackles! Make me bold through the work of your Spirit! Remind me who you are, a God worthy of praise, worthy of sacrifice!

Devotional 1

Service and the Gospel

Acts 3:1-26

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had

happened to him.

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

In a land of Jews and Gentiles, a man named Jesus died on the cross, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven. Now twelve men are faced with one mission — bring the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In Chapter 2, we saw the twelve disciples get struck with the power of the Holy Spirit. This brings us to the next part of the story. Peter and John are walking to the temple, and they pass a beggar who can't walk. Peter sees that the beggar has a need, so he fixes that need by healing the beggar. Everyone around is really surprised at this because Peter just did something seemingly impossible. Peter tells the people how amazing God is and how it's no surprise that the power of God can make beggars walk.

Questions

1. What did the beggar ask for and what did Peter do instead?
2. Why did Peter heal the beggar before he shared the gospel?
3. What does Peter mean when he says, "And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all," in verse 16? (see also Ephesians 2:4-10)

Application

Peter healed the beggar then preached the gospel. It is important for Christians to fill needs in the community. Think of a need in your life and a way that you can fill it. Maybe there's a chore that needs to be done, a meal that needs to be taken to someone in your community group, a child that you can babysit for free. Filling simple needs like this will bring you closer to having a constant mentality of service.

Devotional 2

Bold

Acts 4:1-22

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

So far in Acts, we've seen the Holy Spirit come to the disciples and give them the power to be bold. In Chapter 3, Peter boldly healed the beggar then boldly preached the gospel. Now, Peter and John are being arrested for boldly teaching people about Jesus. The church leaders (who don't believe in Jesus) know that they can't keep Peter and John in jail, because that would make the people angry. So they decide to command Peter and John not to teach the gospel anymore. Peter and John then have a choice — they can be safe and decide not to tell people about Jesus, or keep sharing the gospel at the risk of being arrested or even killed. Peter and John are given the boldness to stand up for what they believe in. They tell the church leaders that they will not stop sharing the gospel, and they are allowed to go freely.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be bold?
2. Why is it important for followers of Christ to be bold?
3. What does it mean to be “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and what does it have to do with boldness? (see John 14:16-17 and 26)

Application

Think of an area in your life where you're afraid to share the gospel or do the right thing. Pray to God for the Holy Spirit to give you boldness. Maybe you could even share this area where you struggle with someone else and ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable.

ACTS 4:23-31

Prayer

Darren Bolick

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 4:23

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Prayer

Lord of all creation, we offer ourselves to be a living sacrifice for the church. We pray for our church family and our elders. We are so very grateful for your grace in establishing a place where we can worship and serve you. We are also grateful for your provision and foresight to show us the importance of living in community and depending on one another. Thank you for Jesus and his example of sacrificial living. Thank you for loving us so much that you sacrificed him in order that we might be saved. We love you and honor you with our lives. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 4:24-28

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

'Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,

and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'
for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Psalm 18:2

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Exodus 14:13

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again."

Prayer

Jesus, we come to you today recognizing your authority and your place in our lives. You, LORD, are our creator, redeemer, and king. May we never forget just who you are. Search out the areas we try to hide from you. Break our idols, oh LORD. Smash them and replace them with something eternal and fully satisfying. Be all things to us so we will not be compelled to search in other places for joy and contentment. Jesus, give us your heart and your desires. Replace our simple earthly hearts with hearts of glory. May we always look to you for our joy! We ask all these things in the name of the only one who can grant them, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 4:29-30

"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Psalm 107:19-20

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

Acts 10:38

“...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Prayer

Lord of our salvation and healing, please continue to show your graciousness and mercy by healing our physical bodies as well as our spirits. We long for the day we will be made whole and we are able to be in your presence. We know you are in control, LORD, and we know you love us sacrificially because you sacrificed what was most dear to you, Jesus your own son and our savior. Please teach us to love this way. Teach us the joy of serving others without seeking our own glory. Show us how to wash each other's feet. In Jesus' beautiful name we pray. Amen.

Day 4*Reading**Acts 4:31*

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Ephesians 6:19

And also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Prayer

Father, we come to you empty and weak. We want you to use us for great things for your kingdom, but we also seek your Holy Spirit daily in the everyday, mundane aspects of life. We know we will quickly fall apart when we rely on our own power. And as each day tends to grind us into submission, let us remember we have a power source that is limitless! Let us truly believe, “You cannot love us more and will not love us less.” Let us take that joyous good news and redirect it into our daily lives. Let us show people who you are by giving of ourselves sacrificially because you first did it for us. Let us boldly approach the throne of mercy and boldly take your Word to the world. We ask all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Day 5

Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

John 14:13-14

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Prayer

LORD, we long to live in community the way you have taught us. We long for the feeling of completeness that comes from worshipping and serving you with our church family. We desire to give of ourselves in a way that glorifies you in the world. Please keep us from seeking our own glory. Help us rejoice with one another during the good times, grieve with one another when we are suffering, and serve one another daily as a reflection of your service to your disciples. Please allow us to accept your gift of faith and salvation. Let us melt into your grace. Help us be your witnesses and disciples in our homes and workplaces. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Devotional 1

Living and Praying in Community

Hebrews 10:25

Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Acts 1:14

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

When Peter and John were released, what did they first do? They went to their small group of friends (verse 23) and shared with them all that had happened and prayed together.

As followers of Christ we have a lasting relationship with an eternal God who sacrificed his own son to purchase his people. This is why community is so very important. We gather together to pray and study God's Word and remind each other of the goodness and greatness of our Heavenly Father. We gather to remind one another we are valuable and we are loved.

Questions

1. Do you look forward to seeing your friends? Do you find yourself excited when you know you get to spend time with them? Do you think of Jesus as your friend? Do you get excited when you get to talk to him (prayer)?
2. What does living in community mean to you? Is it about one night a week? Is it about gathering at church on Sundays? Are you fully involved in your community group? Is your group committed to taking God's Word into the community?
3. Read Matthew 18:19. How does this relate to your time spent together in your community group?

Application

Our community group is very close. We've taken meals to each other, we've grieved together, we encourage each other on mission at work or in our community. If you are "all in" and are sacrificing your time to help each other, you will experience something this culture says is impossible. It is a feeling of completeness that only comes through sacrificing in order that another may be fulfilled. May we be a people who yearn to live life in a way that reflects the sacrifice that Christ chose over 2000 years ago. In choosing the cross, he chose you and me over his own comfort. In what ways are you choosing others over yourself?

Devotional 2

Power of Prayer, the Faithfulness of God

Matthew 21:22

"And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

John 16:13

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Exodus 14:13

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.

Psalms 18:2

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

What did the apostles pray for upon their release? They prayed for boldness to continue preaching the good news of the gospel of Jesus and for power to heal and do "signs of wonder" in the name of Jesus.

When I saw I was assigned a section on prayer (boldness in prayer), fear crept in. So I BOLDLY approached the throne of the Lord in prayer. If Peter, a simple fisherman, can preach to the leaders of the day, then who am I to question the power of the Holy Spirit in my own life?

This "boldness" of prayer is a matter of knowing in advance that God loves me and will work all things out for me because I call him Lord (Romans 8:28). Intellectually, I understand this, but deep down, I didn't believe it. I needed to see God in

the flesh — Christ in action. Not very long ago, after over 20 years in management and holding countless meetings, I found myself crippled by fear when I had to speak in front of a group of people. I tried different things to help. I spoke with my boss, I saw a doctor and tried medication, but nothing changed. I gradually came to see that God wanted me to rely on him every time I felt this way. Only by going through this trial can I be a witness his glory. This is a tender mercy of our great God! He allows my affliction to continue so that I can see his glory and love!

Questions

1. What does Psalm 18:2 say about the faithfulness of the Lord?
2. Why do you think God wants you to depend on him?
3. What does prayer mean to you? Is it real? Do you feel connected with the Holy Spirit when you pray? Have you seen God answer prayers in your life?

Application

How do you pray? How do you approach the mercy seat? Are you the type of person who prays at the same time every day? Are you someone who prays only when things are bad? Do you seek God's help and wisdom daily as you work, play, go to school? We are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This scripture needs to be real for all of us. Paul follows that scripture with "this is the will of Christ in all of us." We are closest to Christ and we are transformed daily when we fellowship with our creator. To quote Brian Lowe, "If we are to value God supremely we must intentionally pursue him." So, the real question is, do we value God supremely?

BELIEVERS PRAY

Bubba Hines

Prayer, one of the most important activities in our Christian life, is a conversation with God; a conversation in which the entire Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) is involved. In Acts 4, we see the apostles gather with their friends and pray.

In Acts 4:24 we see believers pray to God the Father, as Jesus commands and demonstrates in Matthew 6:6,9 respectively. When we pray, we are talking to the Sovereign Lord, the Creator of the universe. He is far greater and more powerful than the universe he created, and yet he is there with us when we pray!

We also pray through Jesus and in the Spirit. The final refrain of Acts 4:30 reminds you of many prayers that end “in Jesus’ name.” We have no hope apart from Christ and his righteousness. We know from Romans 8:26-27 that the Spirit empowers our prayer, and we see an outpouring of the Spirit’s power through prayer in Acts 4:31.

Through prayer, we are developing our relationship with God through active obedience and spending time with him. Our Sovereign Lord who can do “whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:28) already knows what we want and need. We do not pray for God’s sake, we pray to demonstrate, to ourselves first, our dependence and faith through prayer.

When we invest time in growing our faith, our fellowship with God deepens and blooms. The greater our relationship and faith, the greater our desire to pursue deeper fellowship and be involved in his work. Prayer provides us the grand opportunity to be involved in a significant way in the eternal work of God’s Kingdom.

Another amazing aspect of prayer is that God always answers. There are times when we choose to be unsatisfied with the answer, yet the answer is always one of three responses:

- **Yes**
- **No**
- **Wait**

We are an impatient people who do not like being told no. How wonderful it is that God stoops to answer every one of his children’s prayers! That being said, there are certainly acts and attitudes that can complicate our communication through prayer.

Unconfessed sin (Isaiah 59:1-2) harms us, and retards our relationship with God. Disobedience (1 John 2:21-22) is unconfessed sin’s kissing cousin, and it tears at our prayers with sharp claws. Many times our motives are wrong (James 4:2-3) and we are simply attempting to use God as Aladdin did the genie.

God gives only “good gifts” (Matthew 7:11) and when we ask for things that aren’t good for us, it is unreasonable for us to be upset when the answer is no. Everytime God says no or wait, we should remember that he would only say yes if it were good for us, and He withholds nothing good for us.

Prayer is an integral part of our relationship with God and therefore we are free to talk to him as we wish. God is not interested in hearing us repeat meaningless

words. Having said that, some people find it helpful to have a pattern for prayer. The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) is an excellent model for prayer taught by Jesus himself. For some years I have also used the mnemonic ACTS.

A—Adoration That is praising God for who he is and what he has done.

C—Confession This is where we ask God's forgiveness for anything we have done wrong.

T—Thanksgiving This is where we thank God for all he has done in our life.

S—Supplication This is where we ask God to act on our behalf, on behalf of friends, and for others.

While there is no set formula for "how" we pray, God is straightforward in telling us "when" to pray. The New Testament tells us to pray "always" (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18).

This may take place in the presence of others, but don't forget Jesus said, "when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to the Father, who is unseen" (Matthew 6:6). He himself went off to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35).

As well as praying alone, it is important to pray with other believers, as we see in Acts 4. Jesus also said, "I tell you that if two or more of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19).

Prayer is at the heart of Christianity, because the heart of Christianity is a relationship with God. That is why it is a most important activity of our lives. As the saying goes: **Satan laughs at our words; mocks at our toil; but trembles when we pray.**

ACTS 4:32-5:11

Generosity

Debbie Miller

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 4:32, 34

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

Ezekiel 11:19

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put in them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.

Philippians 1:27

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

1 John 3:17

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

Prayer

Father, Sovereign God of the universe, I know you, who has numbered the hairs on our head, care for us. You are infinitely able to meet every need according to your riches in heaven, and you choose to use us as channels of blessing to others many times. Forgive me for my selfishness. I confess that I think too often of “my” paycheck, “my” savings, “my” belongings. Thank you for the provision you make for my

family. Help me to hold loosely worldly goods and to hold fast to the sound words, to the gospel. Help me to see with your eyes of compassion the needs of my brothers and sisters, and also the needs of the lost. Thank you for my church family. Help me to love them well and be glorified in my stewarding of the resources which you have entrusted to me. Help us to walk in the spirit of unity and one heart described in these passages that your power and glory would shine in our community.

Day 2

Reading

1 Timothy 6:17-19

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Luke 16:11

If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

Prayer

Father, you are love and you give good gifts to us beyond what we deserve. Though I confess the comforts of a warm house, clothes, and food to eat are pleasing, I know they are only temporal gifts. The best gift that you gave us is your Son and our redemption which he paid. Thank you for knowing what we needed and still need and having compassion on us. Forgive me when I think of now rather than eternity. Help me to remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive, to be rich in good works, and generous in sharing of worldly possessions so that I can learn to be generous with the most valuable gift, the gospel. Give us opportunities to be generous, especially with eternal truths. Be glorified in my life today. May others see you in me so they will ask the reason for my hope. Give me your gracious words so others will be drawn to you.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 4:33, 36

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus.

Acts 9:27

But Barnabas took him (Paul) and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

Prayer

Our Father, My heart overflows with gratitude. Thank you for your power which is limitless and the grace you have shown us and the grace you continue to show us. You showed your power over death by raising Jesus and you promise to raise your children as well. Thank you for the testimony of the apostles; the story of how you worked in ordinary men to teach them and strengthen them to do extraordinary things, and how you worked in the hearts of others who heard them. Help me to believe that same power can be effective in my life as I yield myself to the leading of your Spirit. Thank you Father for the inspiration you gave to write these stories, these testimonies of your great power so that I and other brothers and sisters down through the ages would hear and believe. Thank you for the example of Barnabas's encouragement to Paul even though his past may have scared many from helping him. Help me to encourage others, to share your love and the grace that I have been shown to those who need it. Use me, Lord, for your glory. As Isaiah said, Here am I, send me.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 5:1-11

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard these things.

Psalm 139:1-4,7

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for allowing me to call you Father. Why do I think I can lie to you? You know everything about me, even the words before I speak them. This knowledge should give me great comfort that you are concerned about me specifically. I might deceive men, but I cannot deceive you who know me so well. Forgive me for prideful thinking, sometimes wanting the praise of others when I was created to bring you praise and glory. Only you are worthy of praise. Help me to hold loosely all worldly possessions and to allow your Spirit to guide my stewardship. Help me to resist the lies of Satan and to seek your kingdom and your righteousness. Thank you for providing for my needs. Help me to value you, the giver, more than the gifts. I praise you for men and women who hold us accountable. Thank you for your holiness and your desire for your church to also be holy so that others will glorify you. Help us to keep our eyes on you and not others. Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. Order our steps and teach us to number our days. Cleanse your church that we can be vessels of honor for your glory.

Day 5

Reading

1 Corinthians 10:11-12

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction...Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 Peter 1:16

It is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

1 Timothy 6:10

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Proverbs 15:8

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

Luke 16:13

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Prayer

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Thank you for inspiring Luke to write the account of Ananias and Sapphira for our benefit. It shows how seriously you consider sin and how susceptible we can be to the wiles of Satan. Help me to flee. Help me to hide your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Lord, you know my frailties and have given your Holy Spirit to guide and correct. Help me to walk in the Spirit rather than my flesh. I cannot resist on my own. Forgive me when I am not content with the provision you have made for me. Search me and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Thank you for your promise to forgive us and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. O Lord, I wait for the day when you will have completed the good work you began. By your grace and example, let my giving be generous and in love; let my focus be eternal, and be glorified in my actions. I pray also for the whole of our church, that our desires would reflect your desires and that many in our communities would praise you for your mighty works.

Devotional 1

Everything belongs to God so what does that say about us?

Acts 4:32-34

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

1 Chronicles 29:10-13

Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name."

In this passage in 1 Chronicles, King David blessed and thanked God, acknowledging that the reason the Israelites could build a temple was that God, himself, had provided the resources, given them strength, and placed them in positions of honor. He said everything in the heavens and in the earth belonged to God. We learn the word "mine" very early. This passage tells us that nothing is truly "mine." John 3:16 says God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. God generously provided and provides for us that we can be his hands and feet here on earth. Romans 12:1 says we should present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. The church in Acts 4, and even back to Acts chapter 2, showed the believers demonstrating gospel love as they generously shared their possessions to the extent that no one in the church was in need.

Questions

1. What can you share with the needy?
2. Why are there needy people among us?
3. Why did the group of people in Acts 4 have "one heart and soul"? How did this help them to give generously?

Application

This demonstration of giving was voluntary, not forced. Since everything in the heavens and earth belongs to God, how can we live out these principles at our church? In our family?

Devotional 2

Two pictures of giving: Gospel giving and Religious giving

Acts 4:34-5:4

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."

Matthew 6:1-3

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

We see contrasting pictures of giving in these verses. Joseph, called Barnabas, gave the total proceeds from selling a piece of land to the apostles for distribution. Ananias and Sapphira brought only a part of the proceeds of selling their property. The difference in giving in these stories is not the amount, but the motivation of the gift. Verse 36 begins with "Thus" signifying that Barnabas gave out of the gospel generosity described previously, to meet the needs of those less fortunate in the congregation. Acts 5:1 begins with "But," signifying a contrast to Barnabas. In verse 3, Peter says "Satan filled your heart to lie." The Greek word for "keep back" is *nospizzo*, which means embezzled.

Questions

1. Whose gift was more pleasing to God, Barnabas' or Ananias'?
2. Why did Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit and to the apostles?
3. What kind of gift is pleasing to God? Would the amount of Ananias' gift been acceptable if he had not lied? (See also 2 Corinthians 9:7, Romans 12:8, and Exodus 35:5.)

Application

God does not require all of us to sell everything we have to the church. He does, however, tell us in Malachi 3:10 to put him to the test of providing for our needs by giving the full tithe to the storehouse (church). Is God directing you to change your stewardship practices? Are you truthful with God? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. As God molds us into the image of his Son, we should reflect his truthfulness in our lives.

GIVING

Ben Hoersch

Based on Acts 4:32 - 5:11

While reading the Sunday paper this spring my wife pointed out to me the mixed messages communicated in an advertisement. A large retailer was in large bold print asking the question “what will you give up for Lent” and simultaneously in equally large bold print nudging us to “get what you want because you deserve it.” So are we supposed to give up something or get whatever we want because we deserve it?

While these mixed messages are all around us, if I am to be honest, the same conflict routinely rises from within my heart. The truth is that if we seek to find satisfaction in either self-indulgence or in ritualistic sacrifice we will find we are still empty and lack any lasting joy. The problem with these conflicting perspectives however is not solely the absence of a well-constructed plan, missing knowledge, or an undisciplined ability to carry out our goals. The problem is not first in our head, the problem begins in our hearts.

God's Plan

God revealed to us how we should live by providing us with instruction from the Bible, and the Bible is not silent on the topic of money. In short, God instructs us that he owns everything (Psalm 24:1), entrusts his possessions to our care (Matthew 6:31-33), and asks us to manage them according to his plans (1 Corinthians 4:2). A critical part of his plan includes the demonstration of selfless love shown through generosity (Acts 20:35).

Our Plans

So, if God's plan is perfect, why don't we simply follow his plan? The problem is our rebellion against God which we call sin. Ever since Adam and Eve allowed themselves to be deceived in the Garden of Eden, choosing their way over God's way, man has had a desire to establish his own kingdom rather than joyfully submitting to our King and building up his kingdom. Because of sin, usual responses to the idea of giving are either rebellious and simply not done, or religious and done dutifully with pride.

The rebellious plan abhors the idea of giving away what's been acquired. Those following this plan have other ideas for our money and while they may not admit it; we seek to find pleasure, identity, and ultimate satisfaction in things. Giving is something that will be done one day, but first they need “enough” for themselves. The problem with this is that ultimate joy doesn't come from bigger bank accounts, or the most toys, and a day of “enough” will never come.

The Religious Plan pays its tithe much like a bill that is due. It is typically paid on time in the exact amount owed. Those following this plan may not admit it, however, their dutiful payments rarely spark any emotion in them apart from pride. The problem with this is that ultimate joy doesn't come from arrogant offerings and there is no way we can ever “pay” the debt owed. That was why Jesus came.

There is however a third response which we can call the Gospel Plan. Those following this plan have a changed heart, making them grateful for and contented with what the Lord provides (1 Timothy 6:6-8). They are reminded when giving of the ultimate demonstration of love that Jesus gave us through his victory on the cross. Those following this plan know that lasting joy doesn't come from things, or from following rules, but that ultimate joy comes from our relationship with our Savior and Lord (Matthew 13:44-45).

So how do I take steps toward gospel-fueled giving? Trying harder? No. We begin by repenting of our rebellious selfishness or our religious performance and turning toward the cross. At the cross we find the ultimate example of giving that Jesus demonstrated for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Then, we plan for and take care of the needs of our household, we enjoy life, save for the future, joyfully participate in supporting our local church, and eagerly pray for wisdom in demonstrating God's love through additional giving opportunities. In short, we participate, we plan, and we pray. We start giving now, we seek wisdom and counsel in how to do this faithfully, and we pray for both thanksgiving and guidance (Philippians 4:6).

So what emotion is growing in you now? Do you feel guilty or embarrassed for not participating? Repent. Do you feel angry and defensive from giving fueled by pride? Repent. Do you feel humbled and encouraged because of opportunities you've had to obey with joy the giving plan of our King? Rejoice! Rejoice, and remember true joy is found in Christ alone (John 4:14).

ACTS 5:12-41

Testimony

Rici Reid

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 5:12-16

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Matthew 14: 35-36

And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Mark 16: 14-18

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 6: 55

And ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was.

Prayer

Father, how I long to have the faith of those gathered in Acts 5:12-16, those who brought their sick and their suffering mere inches from Peter, who was gifted by the Holy Spirit, trusting that healing would come even by contact with a shadow.

I want to come, face down and full of faith. I want to seek you when I am weakest. I want to seek you when I am heavy laden and the darkness has closed me in.

I never want to lose my feeling of awe at the wonders of your hand. I never want to lose faith in your love, your grace, and your control.

I want to seek you as the people sought out the Holy Spirit in Peter. I want to open up my heart and be vulnerable. I pray that when the realities of life strike that I am seeking that shadow. That my eyes are to the cross and my focus is on you.

I want to be brave enough to be used as the apostles; allowing the Holy Spirit to shine outward from me even when it is hard and the burden feels heavy. Let there be no question of my faith in you.

Stir in my heart the longing to be faithful and to repent so my heart is seeking of you and not earthly things. Stir in my heart a bravery and a fullness of my faith in you.

You are good, God. Come, please. I am yours. Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 5: 17-26

But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

John 6: 63-65

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he

said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

Philippians 2:16

Holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Prayer

Father God,

I can often feel imprisoned. I often feel the world around me — my life, my to-do lists — cages me like a prison. Help me find perseverance by seeking your word and your truth. Help me do those tedious tasks well.

It is hard to be joyous in the place that seeps exhaustion and frustration. It is hard to continue to speak goodness and truth in the shadows. It seems like life has us going into or coming out of hard and difficult places; wondering where the next one will be.

Help me to seek truth in your word. Fill my heart with joy in the difficulties. Allow me to see how beautiful your grace is; even more so on the hard edges.

Help me to seek friends of the faith, family of the faith, to come in those hard times with me when I find it hard to find the light. Forgive my lack of faith. Come to me, Father. Only you can set me free.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 5:27-32

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Hebrews 2:4

While God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Prayer

Strong and protecting Father,

What boldness of faith! To be on trial like the apostles would make my stomach twist in knots and sweat come to my brow. But you never left them and in my heart of hearts I know you never leave me.

I feel awestruck at the boldness of the apostles, but you've said throughout your Word that you grant boldness to those who ask. It is readily there if I would just grasp it. It is hard to imagine being challenged by judge and jury for my faith in you. I cannot imagine standing in defense of your truth. However, it comes to me daily in the ways I might not see. The trials come to me in my spouse, my children, my co-workers, and my friends. It meets me when I am struck by the opportunity to let your light shine in difficult situations. I might not be on trial, but they are watching. I am a daily example of you to the world. I am daily on trial.

Help me be bold, help me be faithful, help my knotted stomach and wet brow remember that you are always there and always close. Amen.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 5: 33-39

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice.

Deuteronomy 25:3

Forty stripes may be given him, but not more, lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than these, your brother be degraded in your sight.

Prayer

Father,

How often I have said that I want to know more of you, of the Bible, of history? How many excuses have I given? Could I recite the history of Judas the Galilean? Could I give verses that coincide with Theudas? My heart has longed for this knowledge but my flesh has been so weak.

There are so many excuses that I allow myself to use. There are projects to finish, mouths to feed, and e-mails to answer.

Place in my heart a fire that will not be quenched with the seeking of your Word, of your truth. Allow me to never have enough and increase my longing with the more I seek. I want to be able to know what I believe and the history behind it. I want your Word to roll off my tongue without a stutter.

Give me the fire, Father. Amen.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 5: 40-42

And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 3: 3-5

That no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Romans 5: 3-5

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Prayer

Sweet Jesus,

Suffering is such a strong word. When I hear suffering, I imagine You and the cross. I imagine a cross, nails, and a crown of thorns. I imagine stones and tears and whips. I imagine embarrassment and sadness and so much pain. When I think of suffering I think of physical first and then I remember emotional pain and how much it can feel like whips and stones. You suffered both for me. You suffered because you love me and you want me and I was more important to you than anything else in that moment. I am yours and you suffered the ultimate for me.

I know that there are different forms; suffering can be caused by myself and it can be caused by others. There is a rough beauty in both. There is a story being written that ends with your goodness and grace woven through every chapter. Eventually, the darkness breaks and there is light.

Allow me to find my joy there, Messiah. Allow me to focus on the cross and on the story being written. Allow my focus to be on the ways your glory will shine through my darkness and be visible to others.

Meet me here. I want the story to be written. I want to find joy in the suffering. I want to find joy in being worthy to suffer for your name. Amen.

Devotional 1

Meeting the Needs of Others

Acts 5:12-16

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

In those days, there was sickness of all kinds. There were no hospitals or urgent care facilities. The people would be driven to desperation in the search for healing for a loved one. The apostles were given the task to spread the good news of truth and the Holy Spirit was with them. Sometimes you have to meet a person's physical needs before you can speak to their heart and their spiritual needs.

Questions

1. Where were they gathered together?
2. If signs and wonders were so regularly done among the people then why would the people still continue to come? Why would there not be a feeling of complacency?

3. Do you think people were drawn to the miracles and the physical healing and then with it came the healing of the heart or do you think their heart was drawn to the Holy Spirit and the physical healing was secondary? How does this apply today when you see the preachers of the “be healed” gospel?

Application

How can you gather with fellow believers? How can you show the Holy Spirit through your works or deeds? How can you speak to their hearts?

What do these verses mean to you?

Devotional 2

Suffering in Joy

Acts 5: 40-42

And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

We are called to suffer for the mission. We are counted worthy to suffer for the sharing of the gospel. This call does not just apply to Elders and Pastors, or worship leaders and missionaries and Sunday school teachers. This call comes directly to us, as “normal” people. We are called to speak openly about Jesus and the cross even when it’s not the popular thing to do. We are called to stand up for what we know is true even when our friends or family think it’s silly or want to challenge us. We are called, like the apostles, and have been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ Jesus.

Questions

1. Do you think it was easy for the apostles to still be joyful and happy after being punished for loving Jesus?
2. Why would a person or set of persons continue to speak of something even after being punished for it? Do you think they continued because their friends were?
3. What does this look like in your life? Have you ever been punished or dishonored in the name of Jesus? Do you feel like you would continue to seek Him and find joy in the hard places?

Application

In what way is it hard to show others Jesus? What would it take to find joy in the hard places of showing people Jesus? Where do you need to rejoice in the places you suffer? What is an example of this that you have seen in others? What does this look like in your life?

ACTS 6:1-7

Ministry

Aaron Wilson

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Prayer

God, it's easy to ignore the first half of Acts 6. I want to skip ahead to stories of miracles and visions, shipwrecks and prison breaks. Surely those events have more to teach me than this story about rationing groceries.

Ah, but quiet my spirit. Cause me not to think lowly of what seems like small service. Remind me of the importance of character, the necessity of your word, and the value of prayer in the local church. Teach me the connection between service and disciple-making. I submit myself to your instruction, Lord. Teach me to play my part well!

Day 2

Reading

Matthew 25:14-23

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went

away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

John 1:26-27

John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

Zechariah 4:8-10a

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel."

Prayer

Lord, like John, I know I'm not worthy to handle your shoelaces. Yet, you place a sampling of resources in my care. Remind me of the eternal connection between what I handle on earth and what you will assign to me for eternity.

In pride, I gravitate toward acts of service which put me in the spotlight. For the sake of your church, make me content to steward the "small things" you've put in my care. My name doesn't deserve bold print in salvation's story, but yours does. May I be faithful in the role you've called me to so that others may see Jesus.

Day 3

Reading

Psalms 1

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

1 Peter 2:4-5

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Make me like those who were chosen to serve tables, disciples who were of “good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Help me intentionally spend time with you every day so that I might be equipped by the Spirit to live for the good of others.

By privately drawing close to God, these early disciples proved worthy of serving tables so the apostles could dedicate themselves to prayer and to the word for the corporate good of the church. What an awesome cycle of spiritual care you have built into your people! Whether alone in a prayer closet or serving in community, allow me to play my part well for the sake of your church.

Day 4

Reading

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 6:7

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Prayer

Lord, too often I see my salvation as the end result of the gospel. But the straight and narrow doesn't dead end at my life. No, your word teaches that you're orchestrating a saving story reaching to all nations. Involve me in your plans to keep this great story going.

Remind me that the proclamation of the gospel is adorned by acts of love. Quite often, it is this service which enables the gospel to be spoken and received. Whatever service you have called me to today, allow me to see it as a means through which the gospel might go forth. Use the common, table-serving efforts of my life to make disciples for your Kingdom!

Day 5

Reading

Acts 6:2-3

And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."

Exodus 18:13-18, 21-22

The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone...Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you."

Prayer

God, sometimes I think too highly of my abilities. In those moments, enable me to relinquish responsibility and ask for help. Remind me that you are the only one who holds all things together. Teach me to seek your glory side-by-side with other laborers.

Give me wisdom to know what roles you've called me to. If a role is demanding, give me a humble heart to seek others for help. And if I see brothers and sisters with heavy burdens, give me a spirit willing to assist them. Prepare my heart so that I'm willing to lead and follow, to serve and be served, all to the glory of God.

Devotional 1

Attention Please!

Acts 6:1-4

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Have you ever tried to play a video game while doing homework? I bet it didn't work out so well. It turns out, humans are quite bad at focusing attention on two activities at the same time. The apostles in Acts 6 realized this. They couldn't preach and serve tables without doing a poor job at both. Instead, they found others who wanted to serve food and were good at it. With the tables taken care of, the apostles could again focus on praying and preaching. No one is supposed to do everything in the church. In fact, God designs his people with different giftings so that everyone has a special part to play. When everyone plays their part well, the church is healthy and God gets glory!

Questions

1. What did the apostles do when they had two things needing attention?
2. What do you think would have happened if the apostles had tried to do everything themselves (preach and serve tables)? Read Acts 6:7 to see what happened instead when they let others play their roles well!
3. Even though we know we shouldn't text and drive, many of us are tempted at times to try it. Why do we fight against the fact that we can't do two things well at the same time? What do physical repercussions of doing two things at the same time (texting and driving) teach us about attempting the same thing spiritually?

Application

Sometimes we take on too much and need to let others serve. Other times, God calls us to be the person who takes on a new responsibility. What is God teaching you about the role he has for you in serving his church?

Devotional 2

Your Role Matters

Matthew 13:31-33

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

Have you ever grown a garden in your back yard? If so, you know it takes a long time for little seeds to produce fruits or vegetables fit for eating. Plants need lots of care, but some of the work they require doesn't feel very special at the time. Before they sprout, you might even wonder if the seeds are still in the ground! God says his kingdom grows like a plant that comes from an extremely small seed. Sometimes the activities that grow God's people don't look very special from the outside. But God says every role in the church is important. We should play our part well and trust God to grow his Kingdom through us, even if our role seems ordinary at the time.

Questions

1. Jesus said his kingdom is like a mustard seed. Mustard seeds are extremely tiny. What happens when mustard seeds are planted?
2. Why is it important to remember Jesus' parable about the mustard seed? Can you think of any other stories in the Bible that started with something small?
3. In what ways have you seen the kingdom grow from small beginnings in your life?

Application

God calls us to do things which require courage, and serve in ways that seem ordinary, all for the sake of growing his kingdom. What are some "big" kingdom things you might be avoiding because they seem too hard? What are some "small" kingdom things you might be ignoring because they don't seem significant enough?

ELDERS, DEACONS, AND MEMBERS

Brian Lowe

Acts is the historical record of the early life of the church. In this narrative history, we see how the Spirit is taking the gospel through normal, everyday believers to the ends of the earth as Jesus promised. We see the first church-planting churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. We see missionaries and planters structure and establish the church for faithful ministry.

In Acts 6, widows are not being served well by the church. This creates potential for disunity in the young church at Jerusalem. The leaders (apostles) understood their role in the church to be about the word and prayer and yet, there was a very real need to be met for these widows and the church as a whole. Structure and delegated ministry was needed.

Many writers point out that this passage was not so much the establishment of an office as it was the precedent for what was to come. I agree with their assessment; however, we do see roles established for leaders and members of the church that grow and develop over the course of church expansion into three primary roles in the church: elders, deacons, and members.

Elders

Elders are biblically qualified men who serve Jesus by overseeing his church. Elders must meet qualifications to hold the office and lead in a manner that reflects the character of Jesus. Elders are to shepherd the flock by exercising oversight (1 Peter 4), guarding the doctrine (Titus 1), leading and teaching (1 Timothy 6), and watching over the flock (Acts 20). The role of elder is closely tied to the role of apostle in Acts 6 — prayer and the ministry of the word.

Deacons

The word deacon doesn't appear in Acts 6 or in the New Testament until Philippians. Paul never appoints deacons in his ministry during the second part of Acts nor does he mention them in his letter to Titus. However, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul mentions not just the role, but the qualifications for deacons. Deacons are biblically qualified men and women (Romans 16) who serve Jesus by assisting the elders in the work of ministry. Deacons must meet biblical qualifications and serve in a manner that reflects the character of Jesus. By serving Jesus in this way, deacons free the elders to focus on their ministry of word, shepherding, and leadership.

Members

The final role in the church is that of a member. Members of a local body of believers are those who have been saved by Jesus. They have a place to belong and a part to play. Not only are we members of God's family, we play a part that is significant and eternally important.

In Ephesians 4, Paul uses a metaphor of the body to show the importance of each part.

Ephesians 4:11-16

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Do you see that last part? The Body (Church) grows when each part is working properly. When elders lead, deacons serve, and members faithfully participate, the Body grows. If we are to be a faithful church, we must have elders who shepherd and lead, deacons who serve and assist, and members who play their parts well.

ACTS 6:8-7:60

Stephen

Leah Ammons

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 6:3, 5

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.”

And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

Acts 6:8

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for showing your power through your servant Stephen. Thank you that your Holy Spirit resides in those who believe and provides us with your comfort, power, discernment, and leading. Holy Spirit, move with power in us to serve and walk in the good works you have prepared for us to do. In the name of your son, Jesus, we humbly ask that our lives make much of you.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 6:8-15

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and

the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Luke 12:11-13

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

1 Peter 3:14-16

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Prayer

Father God, let our speech be seasoned with grace; let our dealings with others be in truth and love. Holy Spirit, work through us with your words and wisdom that opponents of the gospel cannot withstand. Strengthen our inner beings to endure hardship, trials, and persecution. Christ, be honored as holy in our hearts.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 7:2-3

And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’”

Acts 7:6-10

“And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said

God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household."

Acts 7:17-22

"But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds."

Acts 7:35-41

"This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands."

Acts 7:44-45

"Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers."

Prayer

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Covenant-keeper, throughout history you have been redeeming a people for yourself. By faith, we are Abraham's children and take great joy in seeing your hand working all things for your glory from ancient times until now. Give us the boldness of Stephen, and the wisdom to speak your words for your name's sake. Bring your kingdom, Lord.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 7:51-53

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

Acts 4:10-12

“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Prayer

God, your word is living and active, piercing into the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Enlighten the eyes of our hearts to know more deeply the hope of our calling. May the gospel of Christ continue to uncover the ways by which we try to rejoice in the works of our own hands, and lead us in your ways so that your name and your renown may be our desire. Let us boast only in knowing you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 7: 54-60

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Prayer

Jesus, if you were not accepted by the world, we shall not be either. Let us count all things as loss for the sake of knowing you, Lord. Let us have ears that hear your leading, Holy Spirit, and let us walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Our bodies are temples of your Spirit; we are not our own — give us wisdom in how we steward ourselves in honoring you. May our lives and deaths lift you up in such a way that others would look to you and glorify you, God, who has removed death's sting.

Devotional 1

Who was Stephen?

Acts 6:3-5

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

Acts 6:8-15

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen was one of seven chosen by the disciples to serve among the early believers. He was described as full of faith, grace, power, and the Holy Spirit. But there were some who argued against him, and using lies and deceit, had him tried before a council and killed.

Questions

1. What was Stephen chosen to do?
2. Why was Stephen seized and brought before the council?
3. What does it mean in Acts 6:10 when it says, “But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking?” (see also Matthew 10:18-20, 1 Corinthians 1:18, and 2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

Application

It’s significant that Stephen was chosen to serve — his role as a deacon was service — yet it was the words and actions of his life that so clearly preached the gospel and were so filled with the wisdom and authority of the Spirit, that no one could argue against him. In whatever capacity we are called, the gospel should be clear — in both our words and actions.

Devotional 2

Whether in Life or Death, All for the Glory of God

Acts 7:51-60

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen’s words angered his accusers because he pointed to:

- **Jesus’ work fulfilling the law of Moses**
- **their failure at seeing Jesus as the promised one**
- **their role in murdering the Messiah**
- **their failure to take the law to heart**

As Stephen is being wrongfully stoned, God gives him the gift of seeing his glory, and Jesus, standing to welcome him into eternity. Even Stephen’s brutal death points to Jesus.

Questions

1. What happened to Stephen?
2. Why were Stephen's accusers enraged at his speech?
3. What similarities can we draw between Stephen's death and the death of Jesus?

Application

The gospel truly cuts to the heart. To some, it is the fragrance of life; to others, it is the stench of death. The gospel provoked Stephen's accusers to twist his message and set up false witnesses. Despite that the council could literally see his innocence (Acts 6:15... "saw that his face was like the face of an angel"), the truth of his message evoked such rage that they did not even wait to deliver a verdict. Yet even Stephen's death glorified God. We see here that in both life and death, Christ is all in all. Think about Paul's (who witnessed the stoning of Stephen) perspective on life and death in Philippians 1:20-21:

as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

ACTS 8

Philip

Christie Simons

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 8:1-3

And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Prayer

Father, thank you for how the saving power of your Son Jesus washes away our sin. This same Saul who is persecuting your people is the man that you redeem, restore, and use to plant churches all over the world and to whom you entrust the writing of your Word. No matter my history, you see me as righteous because of Jesus' sacrifice. I know that you can use me for amazing things to bring glory to your name. I thank you that I do not live in a place where I must fear persecution for sharing your name. Thank you that I can worship you and share your Word with others freely. I pray for our brothers and sisters who continue to be persecuted for your name and for those who, even today, continue to be martyrs for your Word as Stephen was.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 8:9-13

But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

Prayer

Father, how easy it is to turn our attention to things other than you. Though I may not be enticed by magic, or believe someone other than your Son to be the power of God, I do know that I am daily inundated with messages from culture that say that something other than you can bring me peace and satisfaction. Convict my heart, Holy Spirit, of anything I'm following other than the one worthy of praise. Raise up ordinary people like me to be witness to your great works, so that you may change the hearts of people like Simon, proclaiming their own name. Keep my heart from becoming proud, Father, lest I ever fall into the trap of seeking my own glory over yours. Help me to simply be a witness to your miracles and your saving power, and to have an open heart constantly in awe and wonder of your name.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 8:14-24

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the community of believers. Thank you that you have not created us to be alone and independent, but rather to be completely dependent on one another. Thank you for the beautiful example of community you give us in the Trinity. Father, our hearts are so quick to stray and to sin. I pray that you help me to have a humble heart open to the loving rebuke of my brothers and sisters in Christ. I pray that I never forget the importance of surrounding myself with people who will lift me up and lead me closer to you. I also pray that I may be that person for

someone else, Father. I pray that when one of my brothers or sisters is living in sin, I don't turn away, but that I might have the courage to point them to you. Thank you, Jesus, for being the perfect example of the balance between loving people without condemning them and pointing out their sin to point them to the Father.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 8:26-35

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, you are so good in the way that you will meet people wherever they are. You graciously send Philip right to the eunuch and prompt him to share about Jesus beginning from where the eunuch is. Thank you, Father, that if we simply allow your Holy Spirit to speak through us, we can meet people wherever they are. We can be missionaries to everyone we come in contact with if we simply use their situation as the starting point for sharing the gospel. It seems simple, but I know that it also requires obedience to you, Lord. Philip followed your instruction. He only had the opportunity to share your name with the eunuch at all because he followed you in obedience. Help me to swiftly follow any calling or prompting of the Spirit according to your will. And thank you, Father, for the way that you were working out our redemption from the beginning of time. All scripture and all truth points to Jesus by your design, not by accident. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross for me.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 8:36-40

And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Luke 15:10

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Prayer

Father, as I read about this eunuch joyously accepting Christ and being baptized, I remember the truth in your Word that you and all the heavenly hosts rejoice over a sinner being baptized just as much, if not more, than that sinner rejoices in being saved. What an amazing truth, Father, that the God of all the universe loves each of his children so much that he rejoices over each sinner who repents. Lord, I confess that I also find myself almost envious of how Philip was able to share your gospel with so many and change so many hearts, throughout Samaria, Judea, Azotus, Caesarea, and countless others. And yet I know, Lord, that it was the Holy Spirit speaking and working through Philip that brought change in people's hearts. And it was only through a humble and obedient heart that Philip was able to allow the Spirit to work. I pray that I might have a humble, open, and courageous heart ready and willing to speak truth into each person's life that you bring across my path, because I know that even though I may not be called to travel the world sharing the gospel, you will provide just as much opportunity for me to share the saving power of Jesus. Help me, Father, to be a missionary in my home, my neighborhood, my church, my workplace, my school, and to speak love wherever I go.

Devotional 1

Proclaiming the Gospel

Acts 8:4-8

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Just as Jesus had explained to the apostles would happen, they were scattered throughout the world to share the gospel. Philip was in Samaria and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was able to perform signs and miracles to bring people to Christ.

Questions

1. What was Philip proclaiming to the people of Samaria?
2. Why was there joy in the city of Samaria?
3. Who had foretold this scattering of the apostles and what enabled Philip to perform the signs and miracles that he did? (See Acts 1:8)

Application

Even in the midst of the persecution in the Church by Saul in Jerusalem, Jesus sent men like Philip out into the world to continue to spread the gospel. Philip had the Holy Spirit, his helper, who enabled him to perform signs and miracles. We may not perform signs and miracles every day, but how can the Holy Spirit help us to share the truth of the gospel?

Devotional 2

God's Gifts Cannot Be Bought

Acts 8:14-24

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and

they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

1 Timothy 6:17-19

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Summary

Peter and John go to Samaria in order to lay their hands on new believers so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Simon saw that Peter and John had this authority from God and wanted it as well, so he tried to pay them to receive that gift. Peter rebuked Simon, showing him the sin in his heart and calling him to repentance. Simon repents and asks Peter to pray for him.

Questions

1. Who tried to give Peter and John money in exchange for a gift of God?
2. Why does Peter say that Simon is "in the bond of iniquity" and of what does he need to repent?
3. What does Peter mean by Simon's heart not being right before God and the intent of his heart needing to be forgiven? (See 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Application

Simon had accepted the truth of the gospel and was even baptized. Yet his heart was still sinful. Simon did not recognize that we are all given different gifts from God and believed that his money could buy what he wanted — even the spiritual gifts of God. How often are you lured by the belief that money gives power? How do you need to repent of any sinful intentions in your heart?

ACTS 9:1-31

Saul

Joy La Prade

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 9:1-2

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 7:39-41; 51-53

“Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

John 3:19-20

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”

Prayer

O God, I have given so much of my life to building up reasons for confidence in myself. Indeed, day by day I craft my gods of control, approval, success, and comfort. I bow down before them in search of rest and fulfillment and deliverance. As it was for Saul, your gospel is an offense to all my efforts at self-justification, for its light reveals the filth and emptiness of my works. Your words confront me: Christ was crucified for my sins; bore my iniquities. Without your mercy, I would rage against all that exposes my weakness and threatens my self-made righteousness. Holy God, convict me of my sin.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 9:3-9

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Isaiah 42:6-8

I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

1 Corinthians 15:3-10

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Prayer

O Lord, I have loved the darkness and pursued the path that leads to death. Unless you reveal yourself to me, I would remain your enemy. Without your mercy, my heart would only harden in response to your call. I would search your Scriptures, yet never know the one they reveal. Let your light shine into the darkness of my heart. Open my eyes to behold your glory. Let me see you and live; let me hear and obey. Grant me daily the joy of repentance, the turning from darkness to light. Son of David, have mercy on me, a sinner!

Day 3

Reading

Acts 9:10-19

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.

Exodus 34:5-7

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Romans 10:13

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Prayer

Father, the awesome might of your name is a promise of judgment to all who set themselves against you. Yet, how can it be? You have given us a safe place within the I Am. In Jesus Christ, your name is no longer our fear but our only hope. In your name, you have granted us refuge and life! You have set the glory of Christ's name upon us, and we carry it as we go into all the world. Grant us to suffer for your sake, so that your name may be seen as more precious than our own.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 9:19-22

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

John 5:39

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."

Prayer

Sovereign God, as you said to Moses, no man may see you and live. But by Christ's perfect life, atoning death, and resurrection power, you have granted us the holiness without which no one may see the Lord. In all your word, you have given us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Show yourself to us there, that we might cry, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Reveal yourself to us so that we may be transformed. Let others see Christ in us, that your glory and praise may fill all the earth!

Day 5

*Reading**Acts 9:23-31*

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Philippians 3:8-11

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith — that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I might attain the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 1:27-28

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

Prayer

Lord, reveal yourself to us day by day. Show us your glory so that we cannot help but speak of what we have seen. Let us lay aside all that falsely promises peace to our hearts and press on towards the life that is truly life. May our boldness in faith never come from self-confidence. Make us fearless, knowing we have nothing to lose, for in you, our inheritance is sure. Give us bold love for one another. Grant us to see your work, Christ formed in those you have called. Let us tell each other of his wondrous deeds so that your church might be built up in love, and your name exalted above all!

Devotional 1

Saul's Response to Jesus

Acts 9:1-9

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Saul was part of the Pharisees, a group of Jewish leaders who had developed many strict rules so as not to break any of God's commandments. They believed they were able to keep God's law. They killed Jesus and persecuted his followers because he told them their rules did not make them righteous before God. Saul and the Pharisees were also afraid of losing their power and influence in the community if more people trusted Jesus.

Questions

1. What was Saul going to do in Damascus?
2. Why did the gospel make Saul so angry?
3. What does Saul's response to Jesus tell us about how we come to understand and believe the gospel? (see also 1 Corinthians 15:3-10)

Application

What if someone offered you ice cream for dessert but you had never tasted it? Would you want it more if they described it to you and told you it was good, or would you be more excited to have it after you tried it? Saul knew about Jesus and had spent his whole life studying God's word and its promises about Jesus, but he didn't believe or want to follow Jesus until he actually met him. Just like Saul, we need Jesus to show himself to us so that we can know, love, and desire to obey him, not just know about him.

Devotional 2

Saul's Conversion

Acts 9:10-25

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

After his encounter with Jesus, Saul was blind for three days. He stayed in a house in Damascus, praying. Then, Jesus appeared to a disciple named Ananias and told him to find Saul and lay his hands on him so he would regain his sight. Jesus said he had chosen Saul to carry the message of the gospel to many people including Jews, Gentiles, and kings.

Questions

1. What did Saul do after he regained his sight?
2. Why did Saul put himself in danger by proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues?
3. Compare what motivated Saul before and after he met Jesus. How do we respond to the risk of losing something compared to the promise of a reward? (see also Philippians 3:4-11)

Application

Discuss some difficult, silly or dangerous things you might do if you were paid enough (e.g. eat a live worm, climb a mountain, jump out of an airplane) What would you do to earn a penny? What about ten dollars? A million dollars? Before he met Jesus, Saul was afraid of losing all the power and self-righteousness he had gained as a Pharisee. Even though he did lose these things after Jesus revealed himself, Saul was no longer afraid. Jesus was all he wanted and Saul knew he could never lose Jesus. He was willing to risk his life so others could see and know Jesus too.

ACTS 9:32-10:48

Peter's Vision

D. Brian Nettles

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Luke 8:40-42a, 49-56

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.

While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

Acts 9:32-43

Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it be-

came known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

Prayer

Father, you bring the dead back to life. You are the giver of life. People turn and believe in you because only you give life. In spite of this, so many times, I have foolishly thought that I could manage my life without you. Yet, I am crippled. I cannot even stand. I can only feel tears at my sorrowful state. Forgive me of my arrogance and cleanse my heart. Make me well spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. Renew my life with your abundant life. I need you, my healer — open my eyes to see how much.

Day 2

Reading

Proverbs 8:17

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

Acts 10:1-8

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Prayer

God of my salvation, look on my heart! I need your salvation and I cannot live without you. I want truth that can only come from you. I am lost in a world running as fast as it can from your light. I cannot see my way. I cannot save myself. Yet, you have put this longing in my heart and you will come and lead me to the light of your salvation. You will turn towards me as I diligently seek you. Show me the wisdom of seeking you with abandon. Your gospel is precious. Show me the brilliance of your gospel in a new way in my life.

Day 3

*Reading**Acts 10:9-33*

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me." And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

Prayer

Lord, you have placed this call on me to share your gospel with them. They are so different from me and I do not understand them nor do I even know how to talk to them. You have even compelled them to come to me with the sole purpose of sharing your gospel. My heart is desperately wicked and I do not want to! Yet, I know you can change my heart. Transform my heart. Give me your eyes to see them with your love. Place someone in my path today to whom I can declare your goodness and help me to be faithful to share you well.

Day 4

Reading

John 17:20-23

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

Acts 10:34-43

So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Prayer

Your salvation is as boundless as your love. All forms of disunity are banished from your vision for us. All barriers between you and us are destroyed in Christ. All unity in your people can be found through your gospel. The very things that divide people do not separate us from you! Money, race, and culture do not stand between

your salvation and us. Your most valuable gospel can forgive us from our sins. Thank you, Jesus, for being the sacrifice in my place and for making us brothers and sisters even though we are nothing alike! Your multifaceted grace is infinite.

Day 5

Reading

Romans 8:16

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, you have filled my life. You have changed me. I am becoming more like Jesus every day because of your power. You have made me a child of the Most High. I love you, Jesus, my Lord and my God. I give you all of the credit for doing what only you can do. I pray for you to overflow me with your Spirit. Your Spirit makes me love you all the more by filling me with truth, peace, courage, and grace. Thank you for transforming my heart and my life to be more like you!

Devotional 1

Who gets the Glory?

Acts 9:31-43

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

The church is beginning to experience a time of peace, free from persecution. During this time, Peter begins preaching in some of the coastal towns and villages. While there, Peter participates in the extraordinary healing of two people, one in Lydda and one in Joppa. The first is the restoration of someone with paralysis. Up to this point, Peter participated in several such healings. The second is bringing some who has died back to life. Peter always gives Jesus the glory for these amazing healings. Because of these healings, people who hear of it in both places turn and begin believing in Jesus.

Questions

1. Who did God use to heal Aeneas & Tabitha?
2. Why does this kind of healing cause the people in Lydda and Joppa to turn to God?
3. Miracles motivated belief in this chapter. What motivates your belief? What motivates the belief of those around you?

Application

God uses Peter in an incredible way and we see people begin to respond with faith to the gospel he is preaching. While we did not witness these miracles directly, how can our faith and the faith of others around us be increased? What steps can you take towards this?

Devotional 2

The only way is the Gospel way

Acts 10:1-48

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually

to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of

God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

God uses Peter to bring the gospel to a Gentile who is seeking God. This shocking and unexpected turn of events has global repercussions because now, even those who are outside of Judaism can become Christians without first becoming Jewish converts. God shows that when we seek him, he will find a way to meet us. God also does not show partiality based on the divisions created by man, such as race, gender, or affluence. The only way to be saved is with the gospel. No one can be saved apart from God’s good news.

Questions

1. Using your own words, what is today’s story about? (What happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story?)
2. Why do you think Peter was so hesitant to eat the unclean animals in his vision?
3. Read Galatians 3:27-28. What is the connection to Peter’s dream? What is the connection to our lives today?

Application

God will meet those who seek him. How are you seeking him today? God is creating a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. How are we showing partiality in sharing the gospel? How can we honor God with unity this week?

ACTS 11:1-18

Peter's Report

Holly Murray

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 11:1-10

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But Peter began and explained it to them in order: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven.

Matthew 6:9-10

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Prayer

God, you are holy, infinite, and loving. We are poor sinners, with limited understanding and a desire to exert our own will. You desire for all people to be drawn to you. We are so humbled that you allow ordinary sinners, redeemed by Christ, to be a part of your mission on earth. We are often tempted to be "religious" like the circumcision party, and establish unnecessary rules and regulations to unfairly judge others and ourselves. Please help us not to exert our own standards and criticisms onto those like Peter who are faithfully doing the work of your ministry. We pray that you would change our hearts to truly love those you love, to desire your will and your ways above our own, and to faithfully follow you wherever you are at work in the world.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 11:11-14

“And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’”

Luke 24:45-47

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Acts 2:38-39

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for sending Peter to Cornelius and for giving him the message of your salvation to proclaim to the Gentiles. We are so grateful for those in our own lives who have faithfully proclaimed your gospel so that we might learn about your redeeming love, repent, and be forgiven. As believers in Christ, we pray that you would equip us to go into our own mission fields, whether they may be at home, in the community, in another state, or in another country altogether. We humbly ask for you to grant us the grace and boldness to proclaim your story of salvation to others.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided

tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 11:15-16

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

John 14:26

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the promise of the Holy Spirit. It is such a privilege to know that you are always with those who trust in you. Your Spirit living in us and guiding us in your truth is an astounding comfort to believers. We are so grateful that you made a way for us to know you, and you sent your Holy Spirit in power onto all believers — both Jews and Gentiles alike. In your loving-kindness, you make no distinctions between nations, and you have graciously made a way for all who believe to know you intimately. We praise you, Lord, for sending your Spirit to live in all who believe and for being so near to us. What a joy to know you, Lord!

Day 4

Reading

Acts 11:17

“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

Acts 2:38-39

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Matthew 28:19

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Lord, sometimes things happen in our lives that we simply do not understand. Peter seeing Gentiles believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit must have been confounding to him. However, just as Peter was obedient and submitted to your authority and leading, we ask that you would grant us a willing heart to do the same. We pray that we would never use our preferences and our limited knowledge to stand in the way of you calling your children to yourself. We may not all have opportunities like Peter did to travel and teach other people groups about you, however we are blessed with the opportunity to support those who do. As our church supports international missions, we humbly ask that you would stir our hearts as we consider the nations yet to be reached in your name, O Lord, and how you may be calling us to participate in your global mission.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 11:2-3

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Acts 11:18

When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Acts 10:45

And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

Prayer

We see in your word that you are mighty to save even religious people like the circumcision party, who think they have it all figured out and know exactly what

to do to please you, Lord. Thank you for your mercy to be faithful and patient with them in this story of Acts, where we are encouraged to know that those who were originally critical of Peter's mission to the Gentiles had nothing except praise for you in response to witnessing your work in and among these new converts. We praise you for the ways you are working around us, and we pray that you might open our eyes and our hearts to you. May it be that when we truly see you, our great God, that we stand amazed and silent, repenting of our unbelief, and glorifying you without reservation for who you are, what you have done, and what you will do in our lives.

Devotional 1

Peter's Report

Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But Peter began and explained it to them in order: "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

The Gentiles became believers in Christ, and some groups in the early church were critical about how this happened. Peter shared how he saw a vision from God which he interpreted to mean that he should make no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. So when some curious Gentiles sent for Peter to tell them about salvation, he went and talked with them. God was working in the hearts of these Gentiles, and Peter did not stand in his way. The Gentiles believed, and they received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jewish Christians had earlier in Jerusalem.

Questions

1. In this story, what was Peter explaining to the members of the circumcision party?
2. How does hearing someone's story about how God has worked in his or her life help you understand more about how God might work in yours?
3. Have you ever felt criticized by someone for doing something good? If so, how did you respond? Were you more likely to react in a way that defended yourself and your pride, or did you simply share your story and let God be the one who received the glory?

Application

Peter was obedient to God's leading in his life and these Gentiles became true believers. When others did not understand, Peter allowed the work of God in his life to speak for itself, and God got the glory for the salvation of all and the growth of his church. May we serve God in such a way that our own pride and desire for praise is removed, so that his work and his ways might be clearly known and he might receive all the glory.

Devotional 2

One in Christ

Acts 11:15-18

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

As the Gentiles listened to Peter's message, they truly believed in Christ for salvation. They received the Holy Spirit, and Peter recognized that this gift of God came to them, just as it had to the Jewish Christians when they first believed. When the members of the circumcision party heard about these events, they rejoiced that God granted salvation to the Gentiles.

Questions

1. Who did the Holy Spirit fall on at the beginning of this story? (See Acts 2:1-4, if needed.) Who did the Holy Spirit fall on in Peter's story?
2. How did members of the circumcision party react to the news of the Holy Spirit coming to the Gentiles? How do you think other early Christians might have reacted to this development in the early church?
3. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. How are both Jewish and Gentile believers now one in Christ?

Application

Think for a moment how Peter's obedience to God to go and share the gospel with the Gentiles opened the door for so many to know the redeeming love of Christ. What wonderful news, that through the cross of Christ, all peoples can come to know Jesus and experience his salvation. Like the circumcision party, may our criticisms be silenced and our praise erupt as we witness how God is working in our world.

ACTS 11:19-30

Antioch

Alex Kneen

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 11:19-30

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Isaiah 42:1-12

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no

other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the habitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise in the coastlands.

Prayer

How mighty and gracious you are, Lord God, to give light to the world through your Son, Jesus! You have shown favor to undeserving and unsuspecting people. I confess that I never deserved to be adopted into your family. Thank you that you saw fit to give such joy to the early Jewish believers that it overflowed to others. Let my joy overflow, so that those who are blind to the gospel might see the light of Christ, and that those who do not know you might declare your praises!

Day 2

Reading

Acts 11:19

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

Matthew 2:1-2

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Luke 2:18, 20

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 4:42-44

And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

Prayer

Merciful God, you abundantly provided salvation for the whole world through your Son, who is the savior of all who believe, whether Jew or Greek. I confess at times I would rather be comfortable and keep you to myself. For various reasons, I have been hesitant to boldly proclaim the good news of salvation. Come alongside me, Holy Spirit, and give me boldness to share the news of Christ without fear of rejection, just as you gave your Son, though you knew the world would reject him and kill him. Grant me a generosity that reflects yours.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 11:21

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Matthew 16:13-17

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

Prayer

I praise you, Father, that you have revealed to my blind eyes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God! Keep me from the pride of taking credit for what can only be your work. Lord, would you work in the lives of those I know and love who do not believe? Let your hand be with me as I share the gospel. I long to see those I love blessed by your revelation. Strengthen me to give of myself through the gospel, that my eyes might witness the full work of your salvation in my life.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 11:21-26

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit

and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Ephesians 4:11-16

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Prayer

Your generosity toward us is more than we can ask or imagine! Not only did you abundantly provide for salvation from our sins through Jesus, but you placed us in a body and equipped us with all we need for the work of ministry. You have chosen us, foolish and weak, to bless those who belong to you. Give me discernment to see how I might give of myself in love for the benefit of others and the glory of Christ. Increase my joy as I worship with my brothers and sisters.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 11:27-30

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may

abound in every good work. As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the inexpressible gift of grace through your Son, Jesus Christ! In him, we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In him, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. In him, you have lavished on us grace upon grace to meet every need. Make all grace abound to me, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, I would abound in every good work. Make me a cheerful giver as I think on and submit to the gospel, so that my giving overflows in many thanksgivings to you!

Devotional 1

Spreading the good news

Acts 11:19-25

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.

There were believers living in Jerusalem who decided, perhaps, to return home when they experienced persecution. They carried with them a wonderful secret. News so astounding that they could not contain it! Most of the believers at this time were Jewish, and they shared the gospel only with other Jews. They thought the gospel was only for the Jews. But there were some who could not seem to contain their joy, and they shared the gospel with even the Gentiles, or the people who were not Jews. God continued to prove to the believers that the gospel was not just for the Jews, but for everyone!

Questions

1. Who shared the gospel with the Hellenists, or Gentiles?
2. What do you think motivated them to share the gospel?
3. Read Matthew 2:1-2, Luke 2:18-20. Who knew about the birth of Jesus? Only Jewish people?

Application

Have you ever been told something wonderful, something so exciting, that you couldn't help but tell others? Can you share that experience? What is it about the gospel that brings you so much joy? How can we as a family celebrate events like Christmas in such a way that shows the world the joy we have in the gospel?

Devotional 2

Called Christians

Acts 11:23-26

When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

This is the first time that those who followed Jesus were called "Christians." The new believers were most likely labeled "Christians" by those who were not believers. It seemed they recognized something different about these people who talked about Jesus.

Questions

1. What did Barnabas see when he came to Antioch? (see verse 23)
2. What things might Barnabas have noticed about the believers?
3. Read Galatians 5:17-23. How would you notice the difference between believers and non-believers?

Application

If you could choose what people call you, what would you like to be known for? Being strong? Fast? Smart? Kind? What labels do we use today? (some examples: Christian, Catholic, geek, nerd, athlete, popular, etc.) How do you know who belongs under what label? Consider the Christmas season; is there a way that Christians celebrate this season that is different from the ways non-Christians celebrate?

ACTS 12:1-24

Martyrs and Mission

Justin Whitener

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 12:1-5

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Timothy 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Prayer

Father, I pray for those facing persecution right now. I pray for the families of those who have faced persecution. I pray that you give them the boldness and peace that comes from you alone. I pray for the persecution I will face today, tomorrow, or this week. Lord, prepare me for those times, that I would focus on the mission and glorify you. How good are your sovereign hands and how you love me! Thank you for sending Jesus to suffer the ultimate persecution that I might glorify you. I long for your kingdom and presence!

Day 2

Reading

Acts 12:6-11

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

Exodus 13:22

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Prayer

Oh Father, how you sovereignly protect us and lead us! Today I ask that you awaken my heart and mind to your mission. Protect and lead me in your grand mission, that I may glorify you today! Let us not be focused on our own mission, but trust in you for sustenance, boldness, and grace for the journey. Just as you promised to be with Moses and the people of Israel, I know that through Jesus you have promised to be with me. Let your light shine through me today, to my family, friends, and other people you place in my life.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 12:12-17

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But

she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Prayer

Father, you never cease to amaze us! Let me find your joy and amazement daily as we are on your glorious and redemptive mission! God, give me the grace to have boldness and assurance in the truth of your glorious gospel. Let me pray with earnestness and the faith that coincides with your mission. When the time comes, I pray that, by your grace, I am full of faith and ready for the mission so that I might know you more deeply.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 12:18-23

Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

Proverbs 10:19-21; 27

When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
 but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
 The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;
 the heart of the wicked is of little worth.
 The lips of the righteous feed many,
 but fools die for lack of sense.

The fear of the Lord prolongs life,
but the years of the wicked will be short.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prayer

Father, let my words be few, full of grace, and honoring to you. Forgive me for when I do not watch my words with my spouse, children, friends, and you. Forgive me for giving away your praises. Guide my tongue toward your praise and use it as a tool to speak encouraging, gospel-centered words to others. Help me to understand and grow in the fear of the Lord. Your word teaches us of your wisdom and gives us the perfect example in Christ. Oh, how gracious you are to use us as vessels for your beautiful mission!

Day 5

Reading

Acts 12:24

But the word of God increased and multiplied.

Colossians 1:5-6

...because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing — as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

Prayer

Father, I pray for the word of God to increase and multiply in my life and in my church. I know the hope that I have. Give me the boldness and opportunities to share that with others. Oh Lord, be with our small groups; I pray that we would be a biblical example of community. Give us grace for our daily lives to live out the mission. Jesus, you provided me with this gift of sharing the gospel. You came into this world facing persecution, but you abstained from sin and conquered the grave. Jesus, you truly are the gift.

Devotional 1

Prayer and Faith

Acts 12:5, 15-16

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

They said to her, “You are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!” But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.

In Acts 12:5, friends and family gather to pray for Peter’s release, peace, and well-being. They prayed the same things we would pray for if one of our own loved ones was in captivity with death looming. The verse states that they prayed “earnestly.” Later, we learn that miraculously, Peter is released from imprisonment by the help of an angel. Peter goes to John Mark’s mother’s home, where they are gathered praying for him. In spite of their earnest petitions to God to save Peter, those praying still do not believe Rhoda, when she tells them that Peter himself is standing at the door.

Questions

1. What were Peter’s friends doing while he was in prison?
2. Why are Peter’s friends amazed that he is at their house?
3. Do you “earnestly” pray for people or situations in your life, only to find yourself faithless hours, days, or weeks later?

Application

Earnest prayer is given to situations in our lives that need God’s intervention, but we often lose zeal or faith. Do you trust in God, in his timing and answer? No matter his answer, do you find joy and amazement in him?

Devotional 2

Herod < Jesus

Acts 12:18-23

Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a

man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

Matthew 2:1-23

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

"A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over

Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Persecution has always followed Jesus and those following him. Jesus faced adversity as a man called to ministry. Ultimately, he faced adversity as he was nailed to the cross. Jesus' disciples faced adversity and persecution for following Jesus. Herod the Great couldn't kill Jesus as a child, because God protected him. God also protected Peter in Acts 12 from Herod Agrippa I, because God is sovereign and has a mission for each of our lives.

Questions

1. Who came to visit Jesus?
2. Why did God protect Jesus and Peter?
3. As we can see throughout Jesus' life and the lives of his followers, persecution is imminent. Do you face persecution and how do you embrace it?

Application

Jesus is our perfect example of how to face adversity and persecution. What do you fear about persecution and adversity? Is it death, instability, or people not liking you? How can persecution and adversity bring God glory?

The devotionals at Exodus Church would not be possible without a large pool of volunteers. We want to extend our gratitude to the talented people who have shared their God-given gifts to pray, prepare, write, edit, review, design, and layout.

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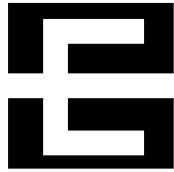
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This devotional guide is our gift to you. We pray that it is a blessing to you and your family, that it increases your knowledge of God and brings you into a closer relationship with Christ.



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