

ACTS

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

VOLUME 2

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Belmont, North Carolina

ACTS Devotional Guide, Volume 2

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Printed in the United States of America.

First Printing, 2015.

ISBN-13 978-0-9863657-8-2 (Paperback)

ISBN-13 978-0-9863657-9-9 (PDF)

ISBN-13 978-0-9971407-0-5 (Kindle)

ISBN-13 978-0-9971407-1-2 (ePub)

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ACTS series logo design by Kirk Brown.

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Published by:

Exodus Church

PO Box 126

Belmont, NC 28012

<http://www.theexoduschurch.org>

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INTRODUCTION

Brian Lowe

Acts Devotional Guide, Volume 1 demonstrated that Jesus is alive and active. He has empowered a people for himself, gathered them into intentional community, and sent them on mission to the ends of the earth. The first part of Acts served as a unique chapter in the Grand Story of God's gospel spreading throughout the whole earth. His glory will cover the earth like water covers the seas. We see the beginning of that in our previous devotional, *Acts Devotional Guide, Volume 1*.

We've also seen some unlikely leaders emerge. Peter, who was once cowering in a courtyard denying Jesus, is now leading God's people on mission and will give his life for the name and glory of Jesus. Servants like Stephen and Philip have been faithful, not just to serve, but to preach and evangelize.

Perhaps the most unlikely leader to emerge in Acts 1-12 is the apostle Paul. Once a hater of the Way, bent on destroying this new upstart faith, Paul has now been radically saved, changed, and sent on a mission to take the gospel to the nations. *Acts Devotional Guide, Volume 2* (chapters 13-28) will focus primarily on his mission to share the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches in all corners of the world.

Our tendency when we read the book of Acts is to elevate guys like Peter and Paul to a heroic status. To be sure, they deserve honor and gratitude. We are here today because of their faithfulness. But, as Paul says in Acts 14, they are simply "men, of like nature" with us. In other words, they are just ordinary men being used by an extraordinary God to make disciples and plant churches that take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Alongside men like Peter and Paul, we'll see other ordinary men and women like Barnabas, John Mark, Lydia, Priscilla, and Aquila. We see companions like Luke, Timothy, and Titus, as well as a myriad of men and women who are not named: in other words, "Normal People." All of these are used by the Lord for his mission.

Our hope for *Acts Devotional Guide, Volume 2* is that we would link arms with them, as ordinary men and women in the hands of an extraordinary God, called and sent on God's mission to make disciples and plant churches to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 13:1-12

Paul and Barnabas

Hilary Ross

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

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."

Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving us the gospel and entrusting your church to spread the good news through the earth. What you've done for us through Christ's sacrifice is the greatest story I can tell; I want to be excited to share it with others. Give me boldness and courage to go where you've called me, whether near or far, and words to speak when I get there. Give me faith and generosity to be a sender when it's time for another to go and give me the gift of encouragement to build up all who are on this mission together.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 13:4-5

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Prayer

Lord, you have promised that your word will not return empty but will accomplish what you purpose; it will succeed. Draw me to your word, write it on my heart, keep it on my lips, send me out with purpose. Just as Paul and Barnabas set out on a journey in faithfulness to you and the Holy Spirit’s calling on their lives, help me to see and follow you in obedience to spread your word to a world that is longing to know the One True God.

Day 3***Reading******Acts 13:6-8***

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Matthew 7:15-20

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word and for the ability to study, learn, and grow in wisdom. Give me discernment in a world that is constantly screaming at me that there is no truth. Fill me with your truth and help me to bear good fruit. Help me to see it in my life and in the lives of others around me, that we may grow together as a church that proclaims your truth.

Day 4***Reading******Acts 13:9-10***

But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”

Matthew 21:12-13

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

Psalm 94:16-19

Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against evildoers? If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. When I thought, “My foot slips,” your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I know you see the sin of this world and it grieves you. When I consider all of the darkness and true evil, it can seem so overwhelming. How can I do enough right to cancel the evil? Just like Jesus, Paul, and the Old Testament prophets, give me faith and courage to speak truth in the face of evil. May my words be bold and seasoned with your grace so that I can point others to repentance. Use me, Lord, to proclaim your gospel.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 13:11-12

“And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

1 Samuel 16:9-13

And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.” Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Isaiah 53:2-3

For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Prayer

Lord, thank you that you use unlikely events and unlikely people to build your church and speak your gospel. You are just and wise in all your ways and not even sin can stand in the way of your plan. Fill us with your Spirit to accomplish your mission even when the world would look at us as the last choice. Use us as a church to reach the cities in which you've placed us, raise up new disciples in our midst, and astonish us with your word.

Devotional 1

Diverse Discipleship

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.

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

We see in Acts 11 how God used the persecution of the Christ-followers in Jerusalem to scatter the new believers to various cities, one of which was Antioch, where some of the first Gentiles joined and the disciples were first called Christians. By chapter 13, the great number that converted is now joined by many important leaders, both from the church and the general community. This diverse group—Jew and Gentile, prominent and humble, rich and poor—are now brothers and sisters united in Christ, worshiping and praying together.

Questions

1. Who was attending the church in Antioch?
2. Many historians refer to Antioch as "the cradle of Christianity." Why do you think they call it that?
3. Why is it important that the church has people who are different from each other?

Application

In a time when the class system and social hierarchy was nearly immovable and people were divided by where they were born, how rich they were, their citizenship,

their job, and many other factors, we see a church growing that is including people across classes and even religious backgrounds. The gospel was then and is now a unifying foundation that brings people together in Jesus' name, on his mission, and for his glory. How can you reach out to or encourage someone who is different from you this week?

Devotional 2

Speaking Boldly

Acts 7:51-58

[Stephen speaking to the Jewish Council and High Priest] “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.

Act 13:4-12

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

When Paul interacted with Elymas he was faced with a decision: walk away from the opposition or speak out against this leader, who was likely an advisor to the very powerful proconsul, Sergius. Paul had seen this type of situation before, only then he was known as Saul and was stoning Christians who wouldn't recant their faith. But here, now converted and filled with the Spirit, Paul spoke the words of truth faithfully. Elymas was punished for his attempted deception, Sergius believed, and God was given glory through his conversion. God didn't spare Stephen when he took a stand for his faith, but as a result of Stephen's death, some Christians were scattered, new churches were formed, and the gospel was spread farther.

Questions

1. How are the two stories similar?
2. Why wasn't Paul afraid to speak so openly?
3. How do the end results, though different, bring God glory?

Application

God will call each of us to do hard things for him that may result in us being less popular or less comfortable, or may even require us quite literally to lay down our life. But we can be assured that regardless of whatever it costs us to be obedient, God will be glorified in our obedience. What is an area that God is calling you to take a bold stand? Do you believe that if you ask him for boldness, he will give you the strength to do hard things?

Notes

Notes

Notes

AXIS CHURCH

Joy La Prade

Jeremy Rose was at the beach when God called him to plant a church. His choice of books for beach reading may have had something to do with it. Rose was reading the book of Acts along with a commentary for one of his seminary classes.

Today, he remembers the call clearly:

“It just hit me. God spoke to me and told me to plant a church.” Rose added that God has given him a heart for those who may be alienated from or uncomfortable with existing churches: the “artistic, herbal, green, tattooed, pierced, punk, post-postmodern, city dwellers of our culture.”

Rose heard God’s call in early 2007, at Sunset Beach, N.C. Today, he is pastor of The Axis Church, which is attended by around 300 of Nashville’s urbanites. Rose explains that God called him to these people, rather than to the activity of “church planting.”

“Church planting is not mainly about planting churches. It’s mainly about making disciples.” Even though his father, grandfather, and great grandfather were pastors and church planters, and although Rose himself has been preaching and involved in ministry since he was a teenager, he says God’s call to plant a church came from relationships he had outside of the church.

“Many of my friends who I have been close to throughout school sports and construction (I have been an electrician for nearly 20 years) wanted nothing to do with church. It broke my heart. I wanted them to be involved in something I loved, but I understood why they didn’t like it or were confused by it. A lot of Axis is the way it is in order to be sensitive to those who haven’t been raised in the church or for those who have been deeply wounded by the church.” Rose said he understands the reasons these people have rejected what they know of the church and Christianity, and he sees them too: hypocrisy and self-righteousness, “ignoring Jesus except for Sundays and the election.”

“In some ways I feel I know what’s busted with ‘church’ today which makes it easy to hate on it, to throw rocks at it — OR — I could love on it, and I could use the rocks that are being thrown at it as the very resource to help rebuild it. This is my calling.”

In this calling to reach those who haven’t been part of the church, Rose is not aiming to give them a church, but instead to bring them into relationship with Jesus. This is reflected in The Axis Church vision statement: “Our vision is to see the Real Jesus made famous in our city because He changes everything.”

ACTS 13:13-52

Paul and Barnabas: Antioch

John Yasenchok

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 13:13-15

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”

Luke 16:14-17

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”

Luke 24:25-27

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.

Prayer

Father, when I read the Old Testament scriptures, oftentimes I do not understand them. Holy Spirit, open my eyes and help me to realize that every word of Scripture not only comes from you, but pertains to you. Open my heart to the reality that every word of Scripture concerns Jesus Christ and the story of his crucifixion on my behalf. Thank you for making these truths known to me in my salvation. Spirit, break through my flesh and help me see what your servants Paul, Barnabas, and even your very Son so passionately and fervently taught from the Old Testament. I ask this in the powerful name of Jesus, Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 13:16-25

So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’”

Psalm 132:11

The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.”

Prayer

Father, each year we celebrate one of the greatest holidays on the calendar when we remember the day you chose to enter into human history as the God-man, Jesus Christ. Christmas keeps us grounded in the reality that you designed all of human history to lead up to the death, burial, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus. More importantly than the elation of gifts, sweets, and other cultural byproducts, help us to remember the promise that Paul stood up and proclaimed to the Jews at Antioch – that “God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.” Calm my fear, doubt, and discouragement by reminding me that your love and promise run so deep that you did not even withhold your son from the gravest destruction in order to call me your child. Empower me to live not only this day, but also the rest of my life, with Jesus Christ at the center. I pray this with the hope of Christ at the center of my very being, Amen.

Day 3*Reading**Acts 13:26-36*

“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ Therefore he says also in another psalm, ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.”

Acts 3:17

“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.”

Luke 1:67-75

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
 for he has visited and redeemed his people
 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
 in the house of his servant David,
 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
 that we should be saved from our enemies
 and from the hand of all who hate us;
 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
 and to remember his holy covenant,
 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
 might serve him without fear,
 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

Prayer

Jesus, you are the purpose of all that I read in the Old Testament. As I prayed a few days ago, when I read passages in scripture that are difficult to understand, help me remember that they are all about you! Thank you for being a God who has not remained hidden from me. Instead, you make yourself known to me through the Scripture and through the gift of salvation. Jesus, just like you spent your last days teaching your disciples the things concerning you in the Old Testament scriptures, help me see those same things every time I read the pages of my Bible. In your name and by the power of the Holy Spirit, I pray, Amen.

Day 4***Reading******Acts 13:38-43***

“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

‘Look, you scoffers,

be astounded and perish;

for I am doing a work in your days,

a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

1 John 2:12

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

Romans 8:3-4

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Prayer

Father God, thank you for making a way for salvation by sending your Son to die in my place for my sin. The debt I have incurred with my sin and rebellion far outweighs any strength I could muster to pay it. The penalty for my own sin is death. No good deed or diligent adherence to your law that I could fathom with my finite

and fallen imagination could even come close to resembling the mildest sufficiency in your holy presence. But, in your mercy you have forgiven my sin by accepting your Son, Jesus Christ's, death sentence on my behalf. Thank you for not condemning me in the law, but instead fulfilling the law in your Son who kept it perfectly as the God-man here on Earth. Because of your mercy, I don't have to walk in my flesh, but instead I can walk in freedom in the Holy Spirit. Help me do just that today and every day, Amen.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 13:44-52

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:1-4

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.

1 Thessalonians 1:6

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit...

Prayer

Lord, you are sovereign in every way. You spoke the world into existence, you hold it together with the word of your power, and you know whose name is in the Book of Life. It is both mysterious and also beautiful that you chose to adopt us as your sons and daughters before the foundation of the world. Thank you for your love, grace, and mercy. I pray for wisdom in my ministry to understand that reality. Holy Spirit, please empower me to simply proclaim Christ and him crucified and give my mind and heart the assurance that you will work out the rest for your glory and my good. Also, thank you that you spread your salvation to the nations! I cannot wait to rejoice in your kingdom with people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Grant me the joy of Paul and Barnabas that only comes from your Spirit. I love you and trust you, Amen.

Devotional 1*The Bible is all about Jesus****Acts 13:13-39***

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed.

And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’

And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

Therefore he says also in another psalm,

‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”

Toward the beginning of their missionary journey throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Paul and Barnabas reach Antioch and come upon a synagogue on the Sabbath. Much like Jesus did during his last few days on Earth, Paul specifically points out to the members of the synagogue that, from beginning to end, God’s Word is all about Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. What are some specific Old Testament scriptures that come to mind when you think about how they all pertain to Jesus?
2. Why are you and I so often tempted to read the Old Testament in a way that we are at the center rather than Jesus at the center?
3. What does Paul mean when he says, “...everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses”?

Application

Paul quotes John the Baptist as saying, “What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.” Discuss how we can better emulate his humility by the power of the gospel working in our lives.

Devotional 2

Some Believed, Some Rejected

Acts 13:40-52

"Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: 'Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.'" As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Questions

1. Does Paul's exhortation remind you of a similar passage earlier in Acts? (See Acts 3)
2. Why does Paul make sure to point out to his fellow men of Israel that their very own leaders put Jesus to death even after finding no fault in him?
3. Why is it significant that the gospel of Christ spread not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles (the nations)?

Application

Some of the people listening to Paul felt incredibly offended by Paul's presentation of the gospel, but others were radically saved by God's grace. How have you specifically seen either reaction in your life? Do you remember being hostile to the gospel at one point in your life? Are you currently responding in a hostile manner to the gospel either outwardly or inwardly? Consider the response of both the Jews and the Gentiles in verses 43 and 48, respectively.

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EPIPHANY FELLOWSHIP

Carrie Siftar

Deep inside of every human heart lives a special love for one's hometown. This couldn't be more accurate for Doug Logan, pastor of Epiphany Fellowship Church in Camden, New Jersey. When he was just 12 years old, Logan's mother passed away and he was sent from the Garden State to live with his sister in North Carolina. "Living in the South was miserable for me," Logan comments. "All I thought about was getting back home to New Jersey." Logan remained in North Carolina to study political science at North Carolina A&T and then returned home when he was just 20 years old. "I packed my bags and moved back to New Jersey without hesitation. I love New Jersey. I love Jersey folk! I want to see cities all over New Jersey transformed by the power of the gospel."

And, unsurprisingly, this is exactly what the Lord intended as well.

"In 2003, my mentor, Dr. Bill Crispin, unpacked for me the church planting methods of Paul as described in the book of Acts," says Logan. "Reading the stories of men going to dangerous places to start churches moved me. It was then that Dr. Crispin showed me that those dangerous places of today are the inner-city communities strewn throughout America. From then on I have felt a burden and a passion to reach the inner city for Jesus Christ."

Pastor Logan and his family received the call to ministry in Camden in the spring of 2009. Just two years later in April 2011, Epiphany's core team began meeting. As with most church plants, ministry in Camden comes with its own unique set of challenges. "My political science major helps me to think about making long-term community wide impact. True political scientists must have a love for the city, make inroads with community influencers, and put resources to work to make changes. In other words, that's Church Planting 101."

Pastor Logan shares an example of a Camden-specific challenge they faced and how Epiphany worked to beat the obstacle in a way that would bless the community. "The city of Camden is largely run down and dilapidated, so children are often forced to play among broken glass, used needles, and old, rusted-out playgrounds. We saw this as a significant need in our community. So we created the 'E-Spot.' Basically, we restored the unkempt basketball courts in our neighborhood. We cleared out overgrown trees, repaved the cracked and broken-up basketball courts, replaced the goals, and planted shrubs and hedges to beautify the area. Now the whole community can play basketball or just hang out in a clean and well-tended environment."

When establishing a ministry, most church planters begin from scratch, without an existing congregation, building, or bank account. Pastor Logan remarks, "A major challenge we face is long-term financial sustainability. With most of our residents living in poverty and most churches only supporting church plants for 1-3 years, this puts us in a uniquely difficult position. So, pray for us as we seek to continually establish partnerships that will stand with us as we seek to glorify God in the city."

God's will is carried out in mysterious ways. The challenges of church planting often become a means for the Lord to cultivate trust in his provision. Logan recounts one instance where God used an obstacle to demonstrate His sovereignty. "We were so excited to be meeting in a space near downtown Camden...too bad it

didn't last. One Thursday morning, I received a call telling me that the church needed to move out and could not meet there the upcoming Sunday or anytime in the future. So we improvised. We moved church to my yard. We put up a makeshift tent made with tarps and 2x4s. We thought we were finished. Surprisingly, almost the entire neighborhood came out. To date, that's been one of our most highly attended gatherings."

There's no perfect prescription for a successful church planter, just a perfect God. While challenges can be expected, the people at Epiphany Fellowship in Camden are illustrating that faith, rather than worldly measures of failure or success, is the ultimate goal. "I love Jesus. I love to see people come to know Jesus and walk in his ways. And I love people, especially people on the block," Logan concludes. "When I think about church planting, those are the key ingredients: a missional disposition, a deep love for people in a particular context, and a passion for Jesus."

ACTS 14

Paul and Barnabas: Lystra

Alex Kneen

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 14:1-7

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.

John 10:24-26; 30-38

It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me … I and the Father are one.” The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

Prayer

(from Psalm 96)

Lord God, you are great and greatly to be praised! We fear you above all gods. All other gods are worthless, but you made the heavens. Grant us boldness to declare

your works among the nations! You reign, and in you, all nations will rejoice. Father, may we be so bold to ask that you confirm the words of the gospel as we tell of your salvation day by day by your work in us and around us.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 14:8-13

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

Matthew 11:2-6

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Prayer

(from Psalm 146)

As long as I have breath, let me praise you! You set the prisoners free, you open the eyes of the blind, you lift up those who are bowed down. What is man but the breath in his nostrils? There is no salvation in him. But you, Lord, made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them. You keep faith forever. Keep me, in steadfast love, from chasing after salvation in man. I confess I am just as quick to put my hope in man as the men at Lystra. Bless me, Lord, as I hope in you alone.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 14:14-18

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

John 3:26-30

And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Prayer

(from Psalm 115)

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! You are in the heavens and you do all you please. Those who make idols become empty like them, but you, O God, are our strength and our shield. Bless us, Father, both the great and small among us. You caused the earth, which you have given us, to bear fruit for our gladness. Work in us, Holy Spirit, to bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore, for you, Lord, alone are good.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 14:19-23

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose

up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Mark 10:28-30

Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Prayer

(from Psalm 34)

I am poor and needy. Oh Lord, hear my cry and deliver me out of all my troubles. I desire life, and to see good. Turn your eyes toward me and do not let me be put to shame as I boldly proclaim your salvation. Many are my afflictions, oh Lord, but I take refuge in you. In you alone will I boast. Surround me with those who will rejoice with me as they see your salvation. I hope in you. Do not let me be put to shame as I follow you in hope that you will bless me abundantly.

Day 5***Reading******Acts 14:24-28***

Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples.

Luke 10:17-20

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Prayer

(from Psalm 145)

You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You are good to all; your mercy is over all that you have made. All your works give thanks to you, O Lord. Strengthen all your saints to bless you! Embolden us to speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Uphold us though we fall and raise up all who are bowed down.

We all look to you. Open your hand and satisfy our desires. Be near as we call on you in truth. Fulfill our desires. We rejoice that you have written our names in heaven, that we belong to an everlasting kingdom. You have heard our cries and saved us!

Devotional 1

Boldness

Acts 14:1-7

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.

When Paul and Barnabas went to tell people about Jesus, they spoke with boldness and courage. Some people believed and were filled with joy, but many people became angry with them, and even spoke lies about them, trying to turn everyone against them. Still, they continued to speak with boldness, and God proved to everyone that what they said was true by performing mighty acts.

Questions

1. What were two ways that people responded to Paul and Barnabas?
2. Why did Paul and Barnabas speak so boldly? (see Acts 14:3)
3. What did Jesus mean when he said, “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father”? (John 10:37-38)

Application

What makes you afraid to share the gospel? What gives you courage to share the gospel? Think about the courage and boldness of Paul and Barnabas. What gave them courage to speak? How does their story encourage you?

Devotional 2*Glory to God Alone**Acts 14:8-18*

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Paul heals a man lame from birth, and everyone who sees it thinks that he and Barnabas are gods and rush to praise them and even offer them sacrifices. Paul and Barnabas try to stop them and tell them that they were just men, and that the true God was the one who healed the lame man.

Questions

1. Why did the people at Lystra call Paul and Barnabas gods?
2. Why did the people want to worship Paul and Barnabas? What did Paul and Barnabas say in order to keep them from worshipping them?
3. How does this story relate to the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me?” (Exodus 20:3)

Application

Can you think of a time when you received a lot of praise from people? Do you ever dream of being famous and having lots of people follow you around, watch you on TV, or say wonderful things about you? On the other hand, do you have heroes,

people that you look up to, read about, look for on TV, or always want to listen to their music? Sometimes we worship other people for the way they look or their strength or their talents. Sometimes, we want others to praise us for being smart or strong or doing something good. Paul and Barnabas knew they could not take the credit for healing the lame man. They knew that God gave them everything, and that God did the work through them. How can you give glory to God the next time you receive a compliment? When you think of your own heroes, how do they compare with God?

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ACTS 15

Paul and Barnabas: Jerusalem

Emma McNamara

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Galatians 2:14

But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Acts 15:1-5

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for offering salvation to everyone, even Gentiles like me. We all come from different backgrounds and can get caught up in our own spiritual and personal traditions, forgetting the meaning behind those traditions. Help us to identify those traditions that may be a stumbling block to us or others, that we would always rely on the finished work of Jesus Christ. We need to remember to look to your perfect Word as our guide, and not to add to it. Thank you for being gracious to us, and please help us to do the same with other people in our church community.

Day 2

Reading

1 Thessalonians 1:5

Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Galatians 3:2

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Acts 15:6-11

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Romans 3:21-24

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Prayer

Father, we confess that we get caught up in the busyness of life—going there, doing this and that, and spending less and less time with you. We go to church and hear the gospel, but we quickly forget that it should be the center of our lives. Everything we do should revolve around you, not as efforts we make for your acceptance, but because we are forever humbled and grateful for your free gift of salvation. Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit, to comfort and guide us, and let us remember the gravity as well as the freedom of your gospel.

Day 3

Reading

Acts: 15:19-21

“Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

Galatians 3:23-29

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you that Jesus fulfilled the law that we couldn't by becoming the perfect sacrifice. Thank you for the faithfulness of the early church, that through your Holy Spirit and their faithful preaching and sharing of your word, Gentiles and Jews alike are part of your flock and able to worship alongside each other. Please let us remember that we are all equal in your sight, and that there truly is no Jew nor Greek, and that because of your death on the cross, we are all able to enjoy the wonderful fulfillment of living for you.

Day 4

Reading

Proverbs 25:11

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Acts 15:22-29

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas,

leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

Prayer

Lord, you saved us from death and showed us the most beautiful story of love and redemption that we should long to share with others, but often we remain silent out of a fear of being rejected. Give us the boldness and clarity of speech to share the salvation you gave us with the nations, that you might use us to bring many people to you.

Day 5

Reading

Hebrews 10:23-25

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.

Acts 15:30-35

So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, you are our heavenly father, and fellow believers are our brothers and sisters. Thank you so much for giving us the gift of fellowship and commu-

nity. Community is one of the most beautiful things you created, a group of people gathering together to share hopes and fears, laughter and tears, and, above all, to worship you together as a family. Let us encourage and strengthen our brothers and sisters in the fight like the believers in Acts 15.

Devotional 1

Keeping the Gospel Central and Not Adding to It

Acts 15:6-19

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

‘After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,
that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.”

Galatians 1:6-9

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Romans 3:22-24

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul and the members of the early church traded their former lives for a life completely dedicated to God. Paul, who was once a persecutor of Christ's followers, became a leader of the early church, and it is obvious from Acts that his life completely revolved around Christ and the gospel. He spread the Word and started churches all over the known world. If anyone's life revolved around the gospel of salvation, it was certainly his. Though his mission may have seemed difficult, you can see the joy—not happiness that depends on circumstances—but joy in Christ that he had even in the darkest places. That joy came from a gospel-centered life of worship. But like any church, the early church was not perfect, and they ran into some issues. More and more Gentiles were being saved, and many Jews were saying that these new believers should take on the Jewish traditions, specifically circumcision. Paul finally addressed them and talked about how they were all equal in Christ, Jew and Gentile, and that they did not need to burden the Gentile believers with these traditions that were not part of the gospel.

Questions

1. Are Christians saved because we believe in Jesus or because we follow lots of rules?
2. Why do our lives need to revolve around the true gospel?
3. What happens when we add extra rules for ourselves and other people to follow?

Application

What is the center of your life? It could be your family, social media, a TV show, or work, but have you noticed how it affects your life, how everything you do revolves around it, and you constantly think about it and prioritize it above other things? As followers of Christ, we strive to keep God and his gospel as the center of our lives. We want everything we do to revolve around the gospel, like planets orbiting the sun. Everything we do or say should be shaped by God's gospel.

Devotional 2***Encouraging Believers******Acts 15:22-35***

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The

brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

With the church arguing about Gentile believers, Paul was sent to Antioch to settle their minds, and give them instruction on what to do on this subject. In Acts 15:32, it says that Judas and Silas "encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words." Paul was planting churches, but also visiting them. He didn't just plant a church, then move on and never think about it again. He would come back to check on them and, most of all, encourage them. Encouraging and strengthening the brothers in Christ helped keep the early church alive, everyone supporting and teaching each other so that as a whole, they would grow closer to God.

Questions

1. What was the letter delivered to the church in Antioch about?
2. Why was the letter encouraging to the believers?
3. Why do you think the church sent two more men to go with Paul and Barnabas?

Application

Can you remember a time a friend encouraged you, and it gave you the strength to continue in the fight? Encouraging and strengthening can happen in many ways, from bringing a meal when they are going through a rough time, to having a heart-to-heart talk with another believer. It's a true blessing and essential to a church community.

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ACTS 15:36-ACTS 16

Plant: Philippi

Amber Diffley

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 15:36-41

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Colossians 3:12-15

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Prayer

God, we are thankful that you are sovereign even when we quarrel with one another. We bow before you and ask that you continue to grow us in maturity. Father, help us want to have hearts like Paul and Barnabas, where we put others before ourselves. Lord, we can never understand you fully, but how blessed are we that we may look back and see how your hand has guided our path. We pray that we would always seek you and your gospel before anything else. Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 16:1-10

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Proverbs 2:1-5

My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.

Romans 1:4b-6

...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord, how blessed are we! Often we forget about your goodness towards us; we allow life to get in the way. We earnestly pray that we would be a people who seek your word daily, that we would come before you in genuine awe and amazement. Father, we ask that when you urge us to do things, we would do so in obedience and

with a joyful heart. Help us to use discernment, through prayer and your gospel, when seeking to follow the path you have set for our lives. Thank you, Lord, for shepherding your children. Amen.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 16:11-15

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Matthew 7:7-8

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

Luke 24:45

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know that only through Jesus Christ can we be saved and brought into the family of God. We ask that we would be examples of what it means to be sons and daughters of Christ. We pray that we seek you fully and that through our growth in knowledge of you, you would flow out of us like living water. We are a blessed people, those who call you Father. I pray that during every hour of our lives we would live out this truth. Amen.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 16:16-24

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

James 2:19

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder!

Prayer

Oh Lord, even the demons can't help but shudder before your greatness! How much more should we! We come before you dirty, sinful creatures and you wash us

clean by Jesus' blood. What a gracious God you are! We ask that you speak to us now and show us the areas in our lives where we don't fully bow before you. Help us to repent of these. You are a merciful God who loves us and is always waiting for our return. We pray that we would speak truth and do so with a boldness that can only come from the power of Christ. Amen.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 16:25-40

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Psalm 9:13-14

Be gracious to me, O Lord!

See my affliction from those who hate me,

O you who lift me up from the gates of death,

that I may recount all your praises,

that in the gates of the daughter of Zion

I may rejoice in your salvation.

Prayer

Lord, you sent your son, Jesus, to die for our sin and shame; because of this gift, we should never stop praising you. You grant us life and too often we take this for granted. We pray that we would fall to our knees when we think of all you have done for us. Through this, our songs of praise should be heard over all the nations! We should be so filled with thankfulness that our only response is to worship. We repent for the many times when this isn't true and ask for you to fill us so it can come to be. Thank you for giving us the best and perfect gift, your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Devotional 1*Sometimes God Tells Us No**Acts 16:6-10*

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul and his fellow believers wanted to go all over and preach the gospel. Paul, being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance, refrained from going into certain cities. During a dream, Paul receives a vision telling him where God wants him to go and Paul obeys this command.

Questions

1. What was the mission for Paul and his fellow believers?
2. What happened that caused them to not be able to go into certain cities?
3. How well do you listen to God's guidance in your life? How do we find the answers to those questions? (see John 14:13-14)

Application

No one likes to be told no. When God tells us no, he is doing so for our benefit. Let's pray that when he tells us no through prayer or through other believers, we would praise and thank him for caring for us.

Devotional 2

Praising During our Trials

Acts 16:25-34

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

Paul and Silas were praising Jesus after being beaten and thrown in prison. All the prisoners were listening when an earthquake happened. Everyone's chains were broken, but none of the prisoners left. The jailer was so moved by this act that it caused him to follow Christ.

Questions

1. Why were Paul and Silas in prison? (see Acts 16:16-24)
2. Why did all the prisoners stay? How would this make you feel if you were the guard?
3. How is praising God during our sufferings pleasing to him? (see Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 12:10, 1 Peter 4:14)

Application

We know that we will suffer for our beliefs. How would you handle a situation where you were being attacked for them? Let's pray that we would bring honor and glory to Christ during those times.

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ACTS 17:1-15

Plant: Thessalonica & Berea

J. Tyler Deaton

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 17:1-4

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Proverbs 1:1-6

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:
To know wisdom and instruction,
 to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
 in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
 knowledge and discretion to the youth —
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
 and the one who understands obtain guidance,

to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

Prayer

Lord, you are the Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, and your Word is without fail and without error. It is because of the Holy Scriptures that we know salvation is found in no one else except through Jesus Christ. We confess our inability to save ourselves and our weakness to believe we can somehow reach you through our own might or will. We give thanks for who you are and what you have done through Paul and his companions, but ultimately through the saving work of Jesus. Even if it means torture, suffering, and death, help us to have a heart for people, a mind for scripture, and a passion to proclaim the gospel of Christ.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 17:5-9

But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

1 Thessalonians 2:11-16

For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved — so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

Proverbs 1:7

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

Prayer

You show us, Lord, that your Word is powerful, filled with wisdom and instruction. You also tell us that it is dangerous, a two-edged sword, and that it will always elicit a response from those who hear it. Whether that response is positive or negative, whether it draws a person to you and your grace or it drives a person away in fear and anger, Lord, thank you for showing us over and over again that you are greater and higher and real. You cannot be ignored. Thank you for seeking me and opening my heart to hear your word as an invitation. Help me to continue sharing that invitation without fear of the response.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 17:10-12

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Prayer

Lord, the persistence and passion shown by Paul and Silas to continually preach the gospel is such an encouragement to me. They preached urgently in spite of rejection and threats and violence in many towns. Responses like that from the Jews in Berea must have been a welcome time of encouragement for Paul and Silas. Help us to respond the way the Bereans did. Help us to receive your teaching with “eagerness,” to be “examining the Scriptures daily” so that we may be assured of your truth and know your Word so well that we can tell the difference between true teachers who preach your gospel and false teachers who twist things to make us feel better. Give me the wisdom and understanding to be a true teacher and example to others so that I can fulfill the ministry you have given to me.

Day 4**Reading*****Acts 17:13-15***

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you — I, Paul, again and again — but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

2 Timothy 2:22-26

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Prayer

Reading about the Thessalonians, Lord, traveling 40 miles to a small town just to cause trouble for a few men seems like such an overreaction, but it's also far too familiar of a reaction. Like the Jews from Thessalonica, we love to stir up trouble and will often go out of our way to do it. Controversies, protests, marches, social media flame wars—even we as Christians all too often find ourselves involved in negativity and destructive behavior. Your word, God, tells us to have nothing to do with such things. Help us to stay away from pointless arguments, to approach everything and everyone with compassion and patience. Teach us to deal peacefully and truthfully with those who are trying to cause problems, even when it means walking away.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 17:5

But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

Acts 17:13

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.

2 Corinthians 11:16-29

I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

Prayer

Lord, you are the giver of strength and courage. You gave Paul a supernatural ability to persevere even in the worst of circumstances. We confess that we cannot rely on our own strength to persevere and we need your help. Even as the world may seem to be crashing down all around us and even when our physical bodies fail, you give us strength and help us to move onward toward further sanctification, drawing nearer to you. We thank you, O Lord, for showing us through Paul what reliance on you and your son looks like. We thank you that we can look to your Word for truth, guidance, and practice. Lord, we ask for your continued help to give us a humble strength, a persevering courage, a patient heart, and a spirit of total reliance on you.

Devotional 1

Thessalonica: Reasoned Argument for the Truth

Acts 17:1-9

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

"To the center..." This was Paul's church planting and preaching strategy. Throughout his journeys, Paul strategically targeted capital centers and influential cities. In the case of Acts 17:1-9, he arrives in the prosperous city of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. Paul spent about three weeks teaching in the synagogue, as was his normal practice. During this time, Paul was focused on the Old Testament and its relation to Jesus. Despite their animosity, the Jews respected the fact that Paul had been trained by Gamaliel and was knowledgeable about the Scriptures. Paul teaching about the Old Testament was not a "shoot from the hip" move; it was strategic. Paul knew that for the Jews to receive the argument that "Jesus is the Christ,"

he had to make the connection between the Messiah, suffering and the resurrection.

Though some Thessalonian Jews eagerly received the word, most became jealous that the gospel would be extended to the Gentiles. As in many circumstances where Paul was preaching the gospel, the Jews formed a mob, hoping to drive him out and kill him. Their plan failed, as the Jews did not find Paul and Silas in the house of Jason. As a result, the crowd brought Jason before the local government and accused Paul of “causing trouble all over the world.” Of course, Paul had only been traveling in a small portion of the Roman Empire. Nonetheless, the Jews perceived that “these people proclaiming that Jesus is Christ is upsetting our whole world.”

Questions

1. Why did Paul go to Thessalonica?
2. What was Paul’s teaching strategy while in the synagogue at Thessalonica?
3. Why were the unbelieving Jews so vehemently opposed to Paul in Thessalonica?

Application

Most Jews in Thessalonica rejected Paul’s teaching about Jesus. They didn’t reject him because of an unclear or surface-level explanation of the gospel, they rejected him because of jealousy that the Gentiles were now offered salvation. Had the Thessalonian Jews been able to suppress their jealousy and press into scriptural truth, then perhaps they would have accepted Paul’s teaching and believed in Christ. How often do we allow sinful or misguided emotions to cloud our judgment and cause us to ignore truth? We must worship God with our emotions and, at the same time, honor him with our minds as we seek to discover truth based upon the Word.

Devotional 2

Berea: Eager Examination of the Truth

Acts 17:10-15

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

Paul was bold, but he wasn't stubborn. Due to the dangers in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas left for a town about forty miles west called Berea, one of the most populated areas in all of Macedonia. Unlike the Thessalonians, the Bereans heard what Paul was teaching and responded in a healthy way by weighing his words against the Scriptures. They valued God's Word and examined it closely, using it against all other things. In this way, they received Paul's teaching. Despite this positive reception, Paul was forced to leave yet again after the Thessalonians discovered his presence in Berea.

Questions

1. Why were the Bereans referred to as "more noble" than those in Thessalonica?
2. How did Paul and Silas respond to the opposition?
3. Why do you think people would travel from other towns just to cause trouble for Paul and Silas?

Application

Many professing believers and followers of Christ are easily swayed by preachers and teachers who say what we naturally want and desire to hear. The Bereans did not share this flighty characteristic. Rather, their foundation for faith and practice was in the Scriptures. We need to be "noble-minded" like those in Berea. What if all aspects of our life were directly impacted by scriptural teaching? How would we lead in our church, families, business, etc.? Our lives would be marked by the words of God because what the Bible says is what God says. Like the Bereans, we need to be eager to examine the Scriptures and weigh everything we hear and see against the Word of God.

Notes

Notes

EXODUS NORTHLAKE

Erinn Honeycutt

David Keen grew up in Richmond Hill, Georgia, with a mother who sought the Lord the best way she knew how and pointed David towards Christ. Although his biological father was not a Christian at the time (he has since given his life to Christ), God provided David with many others who discipled him. Through his love of sports, David learned much about leadership, discipline, teamwork, and commitment—valuable skills that would serve him well in his future as a church planter.

David felt an unmistakable call to preach the gospel when he was only 15. Even though he had only known the Lord for a year or so at that time, he knew the news was too good not to give his life to proclaiming it. He became a youth pastor at 20 years old. Not long after, through his friendship with Brian Lowe, he became part of the launch team at Exodus Church. The goal from the very beginning was for David's family to get launched out of Exodus as soon as the time was right.

David explains that God is the one who stirred his heart to church planting, equipped him to preach, and has given him a desire to witness to others: “There is nothing greater than to know the real, true love of our Creator,” says David. “I am drawn to Jesus because he has graciously drawn me to himself. I love him because he first loved me. He has invited me and sent me to join him in his mission to make disciples of all nations.”

David emphasizes that “pastor” actually falls pretty far down the list of his God-ordained priorities. First and foremost, he is a son of God. His second priority is to his wife Jordan, then as a father to his children, and then finally to his church. “I am not qualified to lead as a pastor if these priorities are not in order and being tended to,” says David.

As a church planter, David feels God’s blessing anytime someone gets baptized, and when the Lord leads new people to his congregation. Culturally, the Northlake area of Charlotte is a very diverse mix of people, and the biggest challenge facing this church plant is for the congregation to reflect the area around it.

Launching a new church plant has given David many opportunities to learn to trust the Lord. Exodus Northlake first met in a theater, which required equipment to be carried in, set up, and taken down weekly. One Sunday, while David was out of town to preach at his grandmother’s funeral, he got a call at 6:30 a.m., notifying him that their trailer and all the equipment inside had been stolen. Everything was gone. An interesting few weeks followed as they sought to reclaim and replace the missing things, but, David said, God was faithful to provide. As Exodus Northlake continues to grow, he and the church look forward to seeing how God will continue to provide.

ACTS 17:16-34

Plant: Athens

Debbie Miller

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 17:15-17

Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

Jeremiah 20:9

If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, ruler of the heavens and the earth, you are mighty to save and the world needs you. It is evident in the many idols that are found throughout the world that people recognize their need for a God who will care for them. As Athens was full of idols, so are our hearts. Forgive us for searching for you in the wrong places. Cleanse us of our idols. Open our spiritual eyes to your lovingkindness and bring us to repentance. Give us hearts like those of Paul and Jeremiah that burn with a zeal to share you. Speak through us as you did your prophets to show a dying world the salvation that only you can provide. Let our lives reflect the gospel. Thank you that it is not your will that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance and salvation.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 17:18-21

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”— because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought

him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Colossians 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, teach us to number our days, for life is but a vapor. Your eternal plan is the redemption and sanctification of your people that you might be glorified in your creation. Direct our steps that we might share the truth and wisdom of your word. By your Holy Spirit, prepare the hearts of those who hear so they will not see your plan as foolishness but as your wisdom and lovingkindness. Thank you for the opportunities that you will give us to introduce you to our community. You told us that the fields are white with harvest. Lord, send laborers to reap a mighty harvest for your kingdom. We give you the glory for the repentance you bring. In Jesus’ name, for there is no other name by which man might be saved.

Day 3***Reading******Acts 17:22-27***

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship

as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him."

John 4:22

"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."

Isaiah 42:5

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.

Prayer

As creator of the universe and mighty God, you rule and reign. You provide in your wisdom for your creation. You create and sustain life. As sovereign God, intimately involved with individuals, you have determined who our family would be, where we would live, what our gifts and talents would be, and all to your glory. As loving Father, you call your children to yourself, give forgiveness and mercy, and even cause your Spirit to reside in us and to comfort and teach us all things. How awesome are you, God! How worthy of praise and honor and glory! You have no need of us, yet you desire to share yourself with us. Help us not to be deceived by religiosity and to truly love your leading to obedient submission to your boundaries for our lives. Let us see through your eyes where you are working and who needs your salvation.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 17:28-31

"For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

1 Corinthians 8:4b-6

We know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Romans 2:4-8

Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Prayer

Father, you made man in your own image and we have responded many times by thinking of you in our image. Your ways are higher than our ways and your thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Your image cannot be made in wood or stone because you are spirit and you have life. You are not limited by the deficiencies of mankind with our emotions and sinful nature guiding our behavior. You are infinitely wise, infinitely capable, and sovereign over all your creation and therefore owner of all and just in all your ways. Lord, soften the hearts of our family and friends who do not know you before it is too late. Use our lives and our words to take the blessing of the gospel to them. Build your church and make her love you with the everlasting love that you give her.

Day 5***Reading******Acts 17:32-34***

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the

wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Isaiah 55:11

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Prayer

Father, thank you for those who hear and believe, even for those who say they will hear more later. Forgive us when we give up so easily when someone says, "not now." Thank you that you were patient and steadfast with us and help us to not grow weary in doing good. Help us to remember that it is our job to plant or to water, and it is your job to bring in the harvest.

Devotional 1

Evangelizing Athens

Acts 17:22-31

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Questions

1. How did Paul relate to the people of Athens?
2. Do you notice anything different about Paul's message to Athens as compared to other cities where he shared the gospel?
3. Can you think of some examples of how to begin sharing Jesus with people in your community?

Application

God's desire is for people of every tribe and tongue to know his saving grace. A missionary needs to know something about the people with whom he is sharing Jesus. The Holy Spirit will show you how to relate to them so they will understand the gospel. We are commanded to go and tell.

Devotional 2*Everyone needs the gospel**Acts 17:30-34*

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The Greeks were known for their exploration of philosophy. Luke told us they spent their time in nothing but the telling or hearing of something new. Most Greeks thought that anything that was of the spirit was good and anything that was flesh was bad. They believed in immortality of their spirit or soul. They believed there was no value in the flesh that is our body and so resurrecting the body and reusing it was not in line with their thinking.

Questions

1. What are the elements of the gospel that Paul used in Athens?
2. What is meant by "the times of ignorance God overlooked"?
3. How is Paul's message different from the philosophers who are looking for something new? (see verses 30-31)

Application

There were different reactions to Paul's message as in all of the other towns Paul preached. Some believed, some said they would hear more later, and some rejected the message. Paul knew his work was for God's glory and he preached because he knew that was what Jesus wanted him to do, no matter the result. We, too, face dif-

ferent reactions when we tell others about God and his love for us. Regardless of the reaction we get, we must continue to express God's love by telling his story.

Notes

Notes

Notes

ACTS 18:1-17

Plant: Corinth

Andrew Clawson

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 18:1-4

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Proverbs 13:4

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

Prayer

Father, you have given us the gift of work. And by this gift, you have built your church with blood, sweat, and tears. I would not be here if it were not for the faithful hard work of my brothers and sisters before me. Thank you for them. As for me, only your love can motivate this stale heart of mine. Only your love can rejuvenate the joy that is characteristic of holy service. And I give myself to you now. Teach me to love you more, that I might serve you more in everything I do. And let me remember that I do not work to earn your favor, but I work because I have your favor in Jesus. Thank you for letting me participate in your glorious plan. Amen.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 18:5-8

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And

when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Romans 11:25-32

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
“and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”

As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Prayer

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are your judgments and how inscrutable are your ways! Your grace extends beyond one nation and reaches the entire world. You have declared to your Son, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6) Father, make your church a light for the nations. Empower us to share your salvation to the ends of the earth. Amen.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 18:9-11

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Deuteronomy 31:6

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

Prayer

Why are we silent? Why do we cower? We want people to like us, even at the expense of their eternal doom. We have no excuse, oh Lord. Forgive us. I know that guilt is a terrible motivator. Instead, let the truth of our righteousness in Jesus excite us into unrestrainable obedience! You have many in this city who are yours and you have given us the joy of lifting up the concealing veil. Conquer our fears with your securing love and make us worthy of our courageous calling in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Day 4***Reading******John 10:14-16***

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

Isaiah 43:6-7

"I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold, bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Prayer

Jesus, you are the great adopter, the great gatherer of broken hearts and we, the church, are your inheritance. You have determined that you should receive everyone who belongs to you, for you have purchased us by your infinitely precious blood. You said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28)

Lord, there are many in this city who belong to you, but don't know it yet. And we know you will obtain them by your sovereign love. Let us join in the search. Use us to help awaken our spiritually unborn brothers and sisters to newness of life in Christ.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 18:12-17

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

Numbers 23:19

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Prayer

You promised Paul that no one would harm him in that city. And you made good on your word as you always do. Sosthenes was beaten in front of an apathetic proconsul for his mere association with Paul. It was miraculous that Paul was not beaten. You have promised your church a miracle. You said, “The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you and my covenant of peace shall not be removed...” Your word is sure. Teach us to know and trust your promises.

Devotional 1

Working Hard in Corinth

Acts 18:1-4

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul has been traveling all over Greece and Asia Minor spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. He had just come from Athens, a huge city full of philosophers and idols. And now he arrives in Corinth, another very large and influential city. He

settles down in a tentmaking business with two Jews, Aquila and Priscilla, in order that he might financially support himself. He wanted to avoid having the appearance of peddling the gospel (2 Cor. 2:17). In addition to this, Paul would go to the synagogue, which is the equivalent of a Jewish church, and he would try to convince the Jews and Gentiles that the Scriptures point to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Why did Paul go to the synagogue?
2. What are some reasons Paul went into a tentmaking business?
3. Do you think that Paul has a strategy about what cities he goes to?

Application

Paul tried to avoid having an appearance of evil in his ministry at Corinth. What are some ways you can avoid appearing ungrateful and ungodly in your workplace, school, or home?

Devotional 2

“From now on I will go to the Gentiles!”

Acts 18:5-8

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Paul labored to convince the stubborn Jews that Jesus was the Christ, but they opposed and reviled him. And Paul, seeing that God's time was valuable, decided to no longer cast the pearls of the gospel to the swine of unbelief. Thus Paul declares to the unreasonable mob that he was going to preach to the Gentiles. Afterwards, it pleased the Lord to use Paul to preach the message of the gospel to fellow Corinthian Gentiles, and they believe and are baptized.

Questions

1. Who didn't listen to Paul, but spoke badly to him?
2. Why do you think Paul said, “I am innocent”?
3. Do you think that Paul did the right thing in leaving the unbelieving Jews?

Application

Paul believed that it was his duty to share the gospel, even to people he knew would give him grief and trouble. Do you believe that you share in this same duty? If so, what are some ways you can point your enemies to Jesus?

Notes

Notes

ACTS 18:24-ACTS 19

Re-Plant: Ephesus

Bubba Hines

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 18:24-28

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

Prayer

Mighty Teacher, thank you for teaching us, for patiently revealing knowledge of the paths of righteousness to us! We are thankful that you sanctify us and lead us, from immaturity to maturity. Please make us suitable for the work you call us to, that we might not be jealous of each other's labor and ability, but work tirelessly planting and watering, speaking boldly as we disciple those who through grace already believe, share the gospel with those who do not yet believe, and refute those who argue against the gospel, ever showing by the Scriptures that the Christ is Jesus.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 19:1–10

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

James 1:2–8

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Prayer

Lord of Logic, Righteous Reasoner, Patient Persuader, Wonderful Wisdom, Steadfast Saviour, Perfect Prince, Generous God! May we be more like you in all these things. Create in us a bold life that reasons with and persuades others about the kingdom of God. Grant that when we meet stubborn and continued unbelief, we might count it all joy, and meet the trial face on, that they might see that our faith produces steadfastness, sanctifying our lives. Lord, please grant us ever-increasing wisdom; make us into your image.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 19:11–20

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

James 5:13–16

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 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

Heavenly Healer, thank you for healing us! Thank you for miraculously granting our blind eyes sight, awakening our deaf ears to sound, transplanting new, living hearts into us, and breathing life into our lips that we might find a cheerful song of praise on them. Grant that we would comprehend how fearfully and wonderfully healed we are indeed, and that in our comprehension of this, the greatest miracle in our life, we might joyfully continue in faith and prayer such that the word of the Lord continues to increase and prevail mightily!

Day 4

Reading

Acts 19:21–30

Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him.

Isaiah 44:10–11

Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.

Prayer

Alpha and Omega, Emperor of Eternity, thank you for delivering us from our petty passions from which we fashioned and worshipped our personalized idols in ignorance. Grant that we might be continually about the business of destroying the idols in our lives and killing sin such that the world might take notice like they did in Paul’s day. Lord, let us stand firm as the culture crowds around us in confusion, rushing to and fro. Hold us steady, in the knowledge of your sovereign deliverance, that we might not be put to shame, but may have mercy on those who doubt, saving others by snatching them out of the fire; showing mercy with fear (Jude 22–23).

Day 5

Reading

Acts 19:31-41

And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Romans 13:1-4

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Prayer

Great Governor, help us to remember that you are sovereign over the governing authorities, that we might properly submit ourselves to you through them. Thank you for this picture of you putting to shame the gathered idolaters through the mouth of an unbelieving civil servant. Help our frail minds remember that there is no authority except that which you ordain and institute, that we will not be found resisting what you have appointed, but might enjoy your approval through your servant. Thank you for saving us from your wrath.

Devotional 1*Righteous Reasoning Results in Maturity**Acts 18:24-19:20*

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them

and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Right reasoning results in maturity, and the same is true in righteousness. We see here how Apollos (a mighty teacher) grows in understanding the gospel, how twelve other disciples do the same, and ultimately how this growth impacts an entire geographic region. For two years, we see the gospel spread and a church re-planted through a graciously bold reasoning and persuading. Daily, Paul reasoned with the disciples, and the result was maturity in Christ and God working extraordinary miracles in the land.

Questions

1. How did the passage portray the Ephesian congregation pursuing Christ?
2. Why is there such an emphasis on the body gathered, learning, reasoning, and refuting? (see also 2 Timothy 3:14-17)
3. How does this passage help us understand our faith and mission? (see also Matthew 28:16-20)

Application

New converts (like the disciples) and more mature believers (like Apollos) are shown maturing in knowledge of the gospel. There is never a point where you no longer need to grow up in the gospel! How are you motivated by this wonderful truth? What are you doing in your own life to grow up in the gospel?

..... **Devotional 2**

Maturity in Christ Changes People and Culture

Acts 19:21-41

Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius

and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

We saw that as the individual people of God grew in maturity, the congregation grew in size, such that the entire region (Demetrius says "in almost all of Asia") was impacted. People were confessing and repenting from sin to such a degree that it was impacting the economics of the region that relied on selling sinful artifacts. We also see a sovereign God, working through the civil government, to protect the church and its leaders.

Questions

1. What happened that caused the businessmen and craftsmen to riot?
2. How did God deliver his church in this passage?
3. What is the first love of the Church in Ephesus? (see also Revelation 2:1-7)

Application

The Ephesians were so overwhelmed by the joy that comes from understanding that they were once dead in trespasses and sins and had been saved to a new life in Christ that they exhibited the fruit of that joy (Ephesians 2:1-5)! Are you overwhelmed by joy the same way? Have you been saved to a new life in Christ? How do you exhibit the fruit of that joy? How does that impact the culture around you?

Notes

Notes

CHURCH AT THE TRIAD

Carrie Siftar

Have you ever wondered if being in vocational ministry would make walking with the Lord a little easier? For someone who gets paid to read the Bible and meets daily with others to talk about Jesus, surely growth requires less effort. However, Pastor Stephen Wagoner reminds us that being surrounded with ministry doesn't necessarily promise greater faith. "I grew up a preacher's kid in a growing church plant," says Wagoner. "I grew up extremely religious. It was an independent Baptist church, so I received Jesus early and often. I had been baptized four times by the age of 16. It wasn't until my freshman year of college that I began following Jesus, finally giving up on earning my way to heaven and trusting Jesus for my redemption."

God broke into Wagoner's life and quickly commissioned him to the church planting field. "The very second that Christ saved me sitting on my bunk bed in my dorm room, I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life telling everyone about Jesus. I didn't know what I would do, or how I would do it, but I did know that I wanted to be used by God to spread his name.

"I was working the night shift at a disgusting motel during my second year of college when God began to address my heart toward planting churches. I was listening online to a couple of new leaders who were beginning to release their audio messages through the internet: Mark Driscoll, John Piper, Tim Keller, and Matt Chandler. God used these men to introduce me to a world of ministry I had never seen before."

"Over months of prayer and listening, God directed my wife and me to seek help from a new church planting network to get some questions answered. During the next three years, I had the opportunity to learn from many internship opportunities and then we moved to Greensboro to begin forming a core team to plant a church."

Although a general guideline can be assumed, there is no perfect 10-step plan to planting a successful church. Wagoner explains: "Church planting was attractive to me for a number of reasons. It seemed like something that was open to 'learning as you go' type of expectations."

Not only did Wagoner grow up the child of a church-planting preacher, he also received three different undergraduate degrees from Southeastern Baptist Theological—Biblical Studies, History of Ideas, and of course, Church Planting. It may seem that Wagoner checked all the right boxes to become a professional church planter, but he would insist otherwise. "I still to this day don't feel uniquely suited to church planting. I do believe that God's plan for me was accompanied with him gifting me for this calling. I am stubborn, and I believe that you have to be a bit stubborn to plant a church. Church planting takes resilience and confidence."

It can be assumed that most church plants will encounter some unexpected obstacles, especially in the early stages. Wagoner is no stranger to these hurdles. "During the first months of our first plant we met at an old brewery. Every Sunday morning they would begin making beer. The smells that were in that building were awful and so overwhelming that people would get sick and throw up. The second location we had our gatherings in was infested with mice. It was all fine, until they

started to show up in the toddler nursery.

"We have had multiple people visit our small groups and invite all of the people in attendance to the 'real church' that they were members of. One day, I even had a guy come up to me after the message to tell me that God sent him there to take my job. He was going to be the lead pastor from then on."

Aside from these interesting incidents, Wagoner and his team of leaders have witnessed some truly miraculous ones as well. "I have seen God take people who were far from him and watched as they started to follow Jesus and then began to disciple others to follow Jesus as well. One of the first people who became a Christian at the first church plant is now an elder leading that church."

One of the key priorities for Wagoner's current ministry is investing in the people around him. "I spend most of my time and energy helping people identify and pursue the unique callings and gifting on their lives," Wagoner comments. "I believe that God uniquely designed each of his children for purpose, fulfillment and impact. Everyone brings a wonderful gift to the church. Everyone knowing how they have been uniquely gifted, and everyone knowing how to use this gift for the glory of God, is a major area of priority."

Today, Stephen Wagoner is one of the elders at Church in the Triad near Greensboro, North Carolina. "The biggest challenge that we face in our current church plant is maintaining a high level of contentment. We all want, bigger, faster, and healthier for our church. We want to see thousands coming to Jesus every day, we want to multiply as a church and we want to be a deep church with deep relationships. We often forget that God is ruling over every success of our body; we find ourselves always wanting more and not remaining content with God's current season. Learning to be okay and to be thankful for seasons when it's slow—that's our biggest challenge."

Wagoner's words ring true not only for the church planter, but for every believer in their walk with Christ. There is no perfect checklist for success and even the most ideal qualities won't guarantee it. Investing in the people God puts around us should be one of our biggest priorities. Although we may feel that innate desire for bigger and faster, contentment with where we are in God's current season grants lasting gratefulness to our hearts.

ACTS 20

Macedonia: Eutychus and Elders

Will Stranathan

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 20:1-16

After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Prayer

Father in heaven, you are sovereign over all things. No event on earth is outside of your reach. You're even in control of travel arrangements. As we plan, help us to not miss the opportunities that we have exactly where we are, and to see every interaction as a divine appointment. As we go, help us to encourage our brothers

and sisters in Christ. By your Spirit, remind us to meet together to pray, to read your Word, and to remember. Compel us to do these things by the constant reminder that the grave had no power over your Son.

Day 2

Reading

John 13:1-17

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Prayer

Jesus, we confess that we have unclean hearts and that we are born far from you. We've deliberately disobeyed you. We need to be washed by you. Thank you for doing this work for us on the cross that we could not possibly do on our own. Thank you for having a servant heart, yet doing for us beggars what only a master could do for us. Help us to be so compelled by that work you did for us that we might glorify you well by serving one another. Help us to love one another in deed and in word.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 20:17-27

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

Prayer

Gracious Lord, thank you for our pastors. Thank you for your compelling gospel message that is communicated through them. We pray that you would continue to strengthen them, encourage them, and deepen their faith in you. Help them to not shrink from teaching anything that is profitable. Holy Spirit, continue to work in them to teach of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Help them to have such great faith as to count their life of no value if only they may finish their course and the calling that you gave to them, Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of the Father.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 20:28-31

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for

three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears."

John 17:20-26

"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. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Prayer

Righteous Father, the world is full of those who do not know you. Help us to open our mouths to tell a lost and fallen world about a staggering love in which your perfect Son would live a sinless life, die a sinner's death he did not deserve to pay a price we could not pay, and would rise again to demonstrate his power over death. Unite our pastors in that gospel, making them of one mind. Help them to be mindful of one another, admonishing and correcting one another when necessary, and always encouraging one another to good works to your church for your glory. Help them to love one another well, with great joy, to serve with other like-minded brothers. Help us to listen well to them, to assist them to accomplish your purposes in the world. Help our pastors to be mindful of us, and to correct us when we're wrong; use them to draw us more toward you for your glory and our gladness.

Day 5***Reading******Acts 20:32-38***

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they em-

braced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Prayer

Gracious Father, you are good to provide for us what we need. Help our elders to be utterly dependent on your infinite grace to sustain them, encourage them, and empower them to glorify you by leading your people. Strengthen the work of their hands to minister to your church. Cause us to help the weak as we remember Jesus' words that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Thank you for stretching and maximizing the time of our lay pastors who are able to work in the world and in the church. Thank you, as you did by feeding thousands with a few morsels of food, for extending the energy of all our pastors to continue to tend to themselves and their families as they serve your church and proclaim your glorious gospel.

Devotional 1

The Best Laid Plans

Acts 20:1-16

After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we

went to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Throughout his missionary journeys, Paul visited many, many cities. As he went, he made plans for where he was going, and planned his ultimate destinations for these journeys and when he hoped to be there. When Paul leaves Ephesus, his plan is to make it to Jerusalem at the day of Pentecost. As he goes, though, his specific plans are often interrupted or changed as he goes, but he never stops preaching or teaching as he goes.

Questions

1. Where did Paul go in the time covered by these verses? Where did he go when plans changed?
2. As Paul travels, what does Paul do in the locations that he goes to?
3. Do the changes in Paul's itinerary change what he does? How does the Spirit continue to work through Paul in all of these locations?

Application

Often, we make plans to go to a particular place for a vacation or to visit particular people. Sometimes, circumstances will change how we need to go to get there. Or if we're working toward a particular goal, circumstances will change the steps that we go through to accomplish that goal. As we go, though, we should seek to glorify God throughout all of those circumstances. What big plans have you had that got changed during the progress? What can you do with those changed plans to glorify God?

Devotional 2

Encouraging the Elders

Acts 20:17-38

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among

whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

As Paul hoped to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost, he stayed in Miletus and called the elders from the church at Ephesus so that he could encourage them and give them final instructions. This must have been a bittersweet time for Paul because he didn't know what was going to happen to him, but he was sure that afflictions awaited him. He reminds the elders of how he has lived his life, as an example, and then gives instruction to the elders on how they should continue the ministry.

Questions

1. What does Paul say that he has done as he has ministered? What instruction does Paul give to the elders from Ephesus as they continue their ministry?
2. How does Paul explain the work of the Father, of Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit in his ministry and his instructions to the elders?
3. How do we see our pastors following these instructions? How can we specifically pray for them?

Application

While the church is God's, he uses people to do his work in the world. Elders or pastors are a critical part of leading a local church. We should pray for them all the time that they would look after their own well-being, lead their families well, and that they would lead God's church well. We should give thanks for them, and be submissive to them as they work to do God's work in the world.

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ACTS 21-23

Jerusalem

Rebecca Adams

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 21:1-26

And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake

Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

Mark 8:34-35

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for your gospel and for Paul and all the men and women who have honored your command to go into the world teaching it in order that generation after generation may hear and believe. Forgive us when we doubt and fear, God, and give us unwavering bold faith and hearts that long to know you and abide in you. Father, open our hearts to listen to your voice and follow your will even when those around us may not understand the things you would have us do. Surround us with fellow believers who will encourage us to step out in joyful obedience! Thank you for being a God of patience and mercy!

Day 2

Reading

Acts 21:27 - 22:21

When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once

took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:

"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

"As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

"When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of

Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

Luke 11:49-50

"Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation."

Prayer

Thank you for claiming Paul as your own and sending him to the Gentiles as your witness. Please make us aware of all the opportunities you give us daily to share our own testimonies with those around us. Set our hearts on fire and fill us with your Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and words so that you may always be glorified. May we always remember that you have already won the war and regardless of who is against us, you are always for us! We praise you for your gift of salvation and for your promises to give us a hope and future with you!

Day 3

Reading

Acts 22:22-29

Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

Matthew 10:17-19

“Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.”

Prayer

Lord, thank you for allowing us to enter into your work with you, for taking broken vessels and enemies like we were, for sanctifying us and using us to preach the gospel. Please give us humility, wisdom, and courage as we seek to represent you well to all. Let us take comfort in knowing that our citizenship lies in heaven with you! While we remain here a little while, give us a passion to teach others of you, and use us so that others may believe and come to know your most precious Son.

Day 4*Reading**Acts 22:30-23:11*

But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.” And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?” And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage,

for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

Isaiah 54:17

“No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord
and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.”

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. May we desire to read your word and listen to your voice so that our thoughts are filled with things above. Create in us pure hearts and clean consciences. We are so weak and are surrounded by a number of messages, many of which seem good on the surface, but are foundationally against everything that we know to be true about you. Give us discernment to make the right choices so that we may act in good conscience. We ask for your forgiveness when we fail to choose wisely, and we thank you and rejoice knowing that you do indeed forgive those of us who call you Father.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 23:12-35

When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”

Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.” So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, “Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you.” The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?” And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent.” So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, “Tell no one that you have informed me of these things.”

Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." And he wrote a letter to this effect:

"Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him."

So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

Psalm 2:1-3

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
"Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."

Prayer

God, you are so good to us and faithful to keep your promises! Thank you for the assurance that your will shall always prevail, that no man or circumstance can stand in the way of your plans. What a beautiful promise! We ask that you would give us peace and strength during our own trials, and we thank you for the promise that you will take care of us and have already purposed each of our steps. May we glorify you in all we do and say. We ask that you use us to bring glory to your name, even in our darkest and most challenging situations, so that others will see something different and appealing about what we have and will seek a relationship with you. We thank you for the gift of Christ and long for the day when we will experience communion with you in heaven.

Devotional 1*Responding in Obedience****Acts 21:10-14***

While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

When the believers heard that Paul was going to face difficulty in Jerusalem, they pleaded with him not to go. Sometimes believers mean well and have only good intentions when trying to protect other believers from danger. However, we should be obedient to what God tells us to do even when well-meaning people may try to protect us. God had clearly told Paul what to do, and he could not allow the sympathy and concern of others to keep him from obeying God. The Holy Spirit would enable Paul to face any situation. When we surrender our lives to God, it can be a bit scary. Maybe he will call us to do something we don't want to do, something that will be hard. But we must remember that God is our loving Father. He knows all and is most wise and will not withhold any good thing from us (see Psalm 84:11) nor will he leave nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Questions

1. Why did the other believers try to discourage Paul from going to Jerusalem?
2. How did Paul respond to them, and why did he respond in this manner?
3. Read Romans 12:1-2. Describe how these passages relate.

Application

Think of a time in your life when God asked you to do something difficult. How did you respond? How did those around you respond? Consider how you might encourage someone who has been called by God to do something difficult.

Devotional 2*In Good Conscience****Acts 22:30-23:5***

But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him

before them. And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.” And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

Paul began his testimony before the council by looking intently at them and then made his opening statement about living with a good conscience before God. We don’t know what Paul intended to say after this. Maybe he would have gone on to show them how even though he had been sincere in persecuting the Christians that he had been in the wrong. But Paul didn’t get the chance to speak further because Ananias ordered him to be struck.

Questions

1. How did Paul address the council?
2. Why did Paul tell Ananias that God would strike him?
3. Jesus faced a similar confrontation in John 18:19-23. Compare these two passages.

Application

Paul speaks often in his letters about acting in good conscience. (See 2 Corinthians 1:12 and 1 Timothy 1:5.) What should guide our conscience? How do we ensure that our conscience is being guided by the Holy Spirit?

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ACTS 24-25

Paul Before Kings, Part 1

Justin Whitener and Valerie Stranathan

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 24:1-9

And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

Luke 23:2

And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.”

Prayer

Father, thank you for providing us with testimony of bold men in the faith who have stood in the face of kings and persecution to proclaim your gospel. Lord, give us the boldness to stand for the gospel in the face of people in our lives. Let us face slander and false testimony with resolve and hope for your will. Help us to hold fast to your truth and stand firm in the faith.

Day 2

Reading

Acts 24:10-21

And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation,

I cheerfully make my defense. You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia — they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

Luke 21:12-19

“But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Prayer

Lord, you tell your disciples that we will be “brought before kings and governors” for your name’s sake. You tell us not to fear, “for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.” Thank you for the example of Paul’s testimony before the governor, the way he spoke truth with grace and respect. When we face those who seek to discredit or malign our faith, give us peace in knowing that you are in control, give us calm words that will be well received, words that are “seasoned with salt” so they find favor with those who listen.

Day 3

Reading

Acts 24:22-27

But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Psalm 9:7-8

But the Lord sits enthroned forever;
he has established his throne for justice,
and he judges the world with righteousness;
he judges the peoples with uprightness.

Galatians 2:16

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Acts 20:24

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

Prayer

We often complain, Lord, that life feels unjust, that our efforts go unrecognized while another is rewarded, that we find ourselves in situations that we don't deserve or we didn't ask for. Paul spent years in prison without ever facing an accuser or being charged with a crime. Help us to be like Paul, to count our lives as less important than the ministry to which we've been called, to tell others about the gospel. Help us to hold your glory as our highest purpose.

Day 4

Reading

Acts 25:1-12

Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem — because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”

After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. Paul argued in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

Psalm 2:1-3

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”

Prayer

Lord, you remind us over and over again of your sovereignty over our circumstances. You remind us that we are safe in your protection, even when it doesn’t feel like it and it doesn’t look like it. I am reminded that often my idea of “safe” isn’t the same as yours. I see many missionaries who have gone to dangerous areas. Just yesterday I watched workers inspect and pack gifts going to “dark countries” where the possession of a forbidden object could be punished by death. Yet, even there, your children are held in safety under your wings. Help us to see your hand of protection

when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Help us to fear no evil even when others seek to destroy Christianity by destroying its followers, for you tell us that they plot in vain. Thank you, God, for being ever-present and ever-involved.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 25:13-27

Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself."

"Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

1 Kings 12:6-11

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" And they said to him, "If you will be

a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.” But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. And he said to them, “What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, ‘Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?’” And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, “Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,’ thus shall you say to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’”

Prayer

Dear Lord, there are so many times in our lives where we seek guidance. We ask our friends for advice, we look online, we read self-help books, we make lists of pros and cons, and worry over things ad nauseum. And there is no shortage of others who are willing to hand out their advice to us! But in Job 12:13 you say, “With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding.” Instead of turning to our friends or the internet, God, help us to turn toward you. Help us to seek out wise and godly counselors, men and women who are steeped in your word so they can point us in the direction you would have us turn.

Devotional 1

Thanks for the compliment!

Acts 24:1-9

And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

Those opposed to Paul have made oaths to not eat or drink until they could kill Paul. Ananias and his posse of dishonest men hire a weak lawyer to plead their case for them. Tertullus attempts to flatter Felix by praising him for untrue things. Then he calls Paul a “plague”!

Questions

1. What did the Jews accuse Paul of doing?
2. What do you think of when you hear the word “plague”?
3. Do we seek the acceptance of worldly people or abide in Christ?

Application

Tertullus intended to accuse Paul of evil by calling him a “plague,” but Paul could actually take this as a compliment. Basically, Tertullus was saying that Paul’s love for Jesus was infectious; that everyone he met was changed by the gospel. Does the gospel permeate through you to “infect” others where you live, work, or play? Do you believe that your talents, gifting, and position in life allow you to be infectious for the gospel? If not, what needs to change?

Devotional 2*Knowledge vs. Knowing**Acts 24:22-27*

But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Felix decided to keep Paul in custody, but allows him to be visited by his friends. Felix may have kept Paul in prison in the hopes he would receive a bribe. Even so, Paul saw his two years there as an opportunity to preach the gospel.

Questions

1. What is “the Way?”
2. Why doesn’t Paul just give Felix a bribe so he can be released from custody?
3. How do we share the gospel with those who are knowledgeable about Christ, but do not know him?

Application

Paul views being in custody as an opportunity to share the gospel with the highest ranking officials. Paul continues to be on mission, sharing with them about

ACTS DEVOTIONAL GUIDE - VOLUME 2

righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. How are you using your situation in life right now to share the gospel with others? How do we, in our culture, share the gospel with those who already have knowledge of theology and moralism? Are you living a life of knowledge about Jesus or of knowing Jesus?

Notes

Notes

EAST ASIA

Leah Ammons

Acts is the story of the Church, its beginning and growth, the picture of church planting. We see: Going, Being Witnesses and Proclaiming the Gospel, Making Disciples, and Planting Churches, in order that Jesus' command be fulfilled. One of our own, Brittany, is part of a team working to build kingdom communities in East Asia—history teacher by day, discipler and friend in her free time.

Planting churches in East Asia is not an easy thing to do. In this region, laws prohibiting evangelizing and meeting as believers are strictly enforced; the government closely monitors “foreigners.” Imagine discipling local believers who feel called to plant a house church, a community of believers with whom you will likely not get to meet.

Going

Post-college, Brittany was offered an opportunity to go on mission to East Asia. After her year there, she returned home, eager to see her family and prayerfully seek God's long-term plans for her. After a year and half back home, she needed clarity and direction, so, she went back to East Asia for a few weeks to visit, walk the city, and pray. As she was walking through the city, asking God for “writing on the wall” to direct her, she was struck with the realization that she loved it—the people and the place. These were her people. Since February 2015, Brittany calls East Asia her home.

Being Witnesses and Proclaiming the Gospel

Because the team resides in a region that prohibits Christianity, Brittany seeks creative ways to share the gospel with those she teaches, works with, and encounters. She and most of her team are teachers at one of several universities in their city. Despite government monitors in her classroom, Brittany enjoys teaching, and finds ways to make her lessons “get to the gospel.”

The team's interaction with faculty and students sets them apart from other “foreigners.” In classes and with colleagues, the team's strong work ethic, respect of the native culture, and care for students have gained them unique favor and respect from the university's staff. Brittany is thankful that God has given her “a job I love to do, and a people that I love.”

Making Disciples

Making disciples consists of meeting, training, equipping and walking through life with new believers. Brittany's experiences growing up have made small group discipleship a natural fit for her. She meets with a small group of college girls and focuses on walking with them as they discover what it means to be a single young lady and a believer in a culture of nonbelievers.

Discipleship is “long-haul” kind of work, and Brittany encounters many challenges. Not knowing the language is a major hurdle, and trying to learn the biblical terms in the native language is difficult. East Asia is a different culture and requires

flexibility. Fellowship time with other believers looks different and takes some adjusting. She misses worship time the most—singing, and sitting and listening to a teacher. “I have to think about seeing God’s faithfulness over time. I love to see how God is working and being a part of it.”

Planting Churches

Although the population in their “college town” is several million, the team works with a rotating population of students, so it’s hard to see sustainable growth in their city. Students who have been discipled tend to get jobs, move away after graduation, and find house churches in their new cities. In spite of this, the last four years have seen the number of known believers in this region grow from around 12 to over 200.

Jennifer and Chris became believers about two years ago as a result of interaction with Brittany’s team. Since then, their lives have continued to change radically. They were married about a year ago, became pregnant a few months after that, decided to remain in the area, and said they feel called to lead a house church there.

Chris and Jennifer’s brand-new little family is a big answer to much prayer—the team’s prayers for a church plant in their city, and Brittany’s own personal prayer for a friend. She wanted someone to confide in, and fervently prayed that God would simply give her a friend. God gave her Jennifer. Brittany and Jennifer became fast friends when Brittany returned to East Asia this year. As a fairly new believer, mother, and wife of a new pastor of a brand-new house church, Jennifer has been given a dear friend and help in Brittany as well. Brittany frequently meets with Jennifer to walk with her as she gains understanding of the God of the Bible, and helps show her what the body of Christ looks like.

In a closed East Asian country, with vigilant government enforcement, house church locations, members, and meeting times must be kept secret. For their own safety and that of the native believers, Brittany’s team cannot risk attending a house church with those they disciple. For their team, discipleship is key, and remains the means by which they help plant and partner with churches in their region.

ACTS 26

Paul Before Kings, Part 2

Joy La Prade

Readings and Prayers

Day 1

Reading

Acts 26:1-3

So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.”

Acts 9:15-16

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.”

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Prayer

Our Savior, we confess we have spent our days in anxious toil, seeking to build kingdoms of our own righteous deeds. Strip away the filthy rags of our self-confidence. Let us cease striving and take shelter in the name of Christ. As we receive your name, Jesus, we also receive the weight of the cross. Yet you have promised to bear it with us. Transform these light and momentary afflictions. Let us see them as reasons to rejoice, because you are present in them. With you, we know fullness of joy, and the burden is light. Your name, Christ, is our shield and defense, our hope of glory!

Day 2

Reading

Acts 26:4-11

“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

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.”

Acts 3:13-15; 17-18

“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 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.”

Prayer

Father, I confess I have denied the Holy and Righteous One. I have killed the Author of Life. You have entered into my kingdom—this comfort, power, control, and approval I have worked so hard to acquire—and have exposed its false security. You have revealed my sin, weakness, and failure, and for that I have sought to silence you and your Word. Have mercy on me, Lord. Your kingdom does not come through power. It is to your glory to give it to the poor and the weak—those who mourn, who hunger and thirst. This is how you received your kingdom, Jesus. Hide our life with yours, that we may be found in you!

Day 3

Reading

Acts 26:12-18

"In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'"

Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Romans 3:21-25a

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Prayer

Father, what grace you have lavished upon us! You who dwell in unapproachable light have revealed yourself to us in your Word. Your gospel starts first as a word of condemnation, revealing the emptiness of all our works. Oh Lord, let us not fight against the goads of our failures, which are truly your kindness meant to lead us to repentance. Unless you reveal yourself to us, Jesus, we will see you as a threat to our success, or even one who owes us wages for our work. Humble us in your presence. Open our eyes and let us behold Light!

Day 4

Reading

Acts 26:19-23

“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

Psalm 126:1-3

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
The Lord has done great things for us;
we are glad.

Mark 10:46-52

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent, but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Prayer

Jesus, what grace you have poured out upon us! We were lost in death and darkness. You have brought us to life and revealed your glory. By your mercy, grant us clear vision of our salvation, awe and amazement at your work. We have been delivered from the raging flood. We are the lame given strength to walk, the blind given sight, the beggar invited in and seated at the feast.

Let us see your work and rejoice. Keep us dependent, aware of our weakness and unworthiness, so that our hearts overflow in bold and joyful praise!

Day 5

Reading

Acts 26:24-32

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am — except for these chains.” Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

2 Corinthians 4:3-5, 16-18

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake ... So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

John 7:37-38

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.’”

Prayer

Great King, let us behold you in your Word. You are accomplishing your will to unite all things in Christ, and you have drawn us into this great and glorious work. We wretched, filthy beggars have been washed clean and welcomed into your presence. We are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Speak your invitation through us, welcoming all who thirst to drink of the living water. Make us ministers of reconciliation, pleading with others: Be reconciled, be seated at the feast with your father the king; delight your soul with his riches. Let us not look to what is transient, but to what is unseen and eternal. Reveal your kingdom, Lord!

Devotional 1*Fortunate to Suffer**Acts 26:1-11*

So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

"I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

It has been more than two years since the Jews tried to kill Paul in the temple in Jerusalem. He has been in custody of the Roman government ever since that time, awaiting trial. They brought him to the city of Caesarea, 60 miles away, to keep him safe from the Jews. In this time, he has been able to proclaim Christ to the Roman tribune in Jerusalem, the Jewish council of Pharisees and Sadducees, and to two Roman governors over Caesarea: Felix and Festus. Now Paul has appealed to Caesar, but before he goes to Rome, the Jewish king Agrippa has come to listen to his case.

Questions

1. Why is Paul giving this speech?
2. Paul has been stuck in the Roman judicial system for more than two years. Why does he begin his speech by saying he is “fortunate” to address King Agrippa? (Read Acts 9:15-16)
3. Paul describes how he had persecuted others for the name of Jesus. Now he is glad to be the one suffering persecution. What has caused this change?

Application

Just as Jesus promised, Paul has been in prison and suffering for the name of Christ. But Paul tells Agrippa he is glad to be there. Can you think of some circumstances where you might choose to do something that is hard or painful? (ex. training for a marathon, football practice, standing in line all night to buy a brand-new iPhone, or see the first showing of a new movie) Would you describe what you do as “suffering”? Why or why not?

(Prayer suggestion: Ask God to help you see Christ as he is—more valuable than anything else—perhaps using words from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.)

Devotional 2*New Sight in Christ**Acts 26:12-23*

“In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

As he speaks before King Agrippa, Paul explains why the Jews have accused him of crimes and tried to kill him. Paul tells the king that he was once a persecutor of Christians, but something has changed.

Questions

1. What story does Paul tell King Agrippa in this passage?
2. What does Paul now “see” about Jesus that the Jews do not?
3. Paul says he and the Jews share the same hope. Why did it make the Jews so angry to be told that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for?

Application

Can you think of a time you made a big mistake, like breaking something expensive or causing a big spill? What feelings did you have? Did you tell your parents about it right away and ask for help, or did you try to hide it or clean it up yourself? Why? How did Saul the Pharisee respond when he first heard the gospel? Why? What does the gospel encourage us to do with our failure? How is failure a good thing?

Notes

Notes

ACTS 27-28

Rome

Leslie Wilson

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 27:1-12

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea. Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

Psalm 67:1-3

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

Prayer

Father, though I may not know the fear of a dangerous sea voyage, fear does not escape me. I am so very thankful that in your loving kindness you did not see fit to give us a spirit of fear, but one of power and love and self-control. Ignite in me a heart that desires your saving power to go to all nations so that all the peoples may praise you. Fix my eyes on the promises of your Word so that when the waters rise and the seas of life billow, my heart is quiet in an unwavering trust of an unchanging God.

Day 2***Reading******Acts 27:13-32***

Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island." When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

Psalm 55:16-17; 22

But I call to God,
and the Lord will save me.
Evening and morning and at noon
I utter my complaint and moan,
and he hears my voice ...
Cast your burden on the Lord,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Prayer

Father, what a joy it is to reflect on the sovereignty of your mighty hand in my life. Though you do not always prevent storms or other troubles, you are more than able to see me through them. Though you do not always deliver in ways I hope, I am convinced that you are good, wise beyond measure, and compassionate towards your people. Lord, grant me the grace to be always in prayer, casting my burdens before you, trusting that you will sustain. Keep me continually alert to ways I can honor you in all circumstances. Let me never lose sight of the truth that my hardship may be the very vehicle of grace you use to open doors so that the gospel would reach the ears of those yet to be saved.

Day 3*Reading**Acts 27:33-44*

As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea. Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and

the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Job 42:2

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

Isaiah 46:9-10

"For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

Prayer

Almighty Father, the one who spoke the universe into existence, you are also a God supremely concerned with the least of these. I am astounded by your perfect strength and your perfect gentleness. I confess that I often seek to take control of my own life. Like a foolish sheep straying from the care of its shepherd, I am all too quick to stray. I thank you that despite my sin or the perilous circumstances of this life, no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Maybe I am all too quick to stray because I lose sight of your plan for the nations, thinking my plan is somehow more important. Lord, let it not be so. Give me your heart to share the boundless love of Christ, the love that compelled the centurion to save Paul, the love that upholds the universe by the word of your power, the love that breathes life into hearts of stone. Give me kingdom perspective, Lord, that by your grace, my life can be spent to honor your name.

Day 4***Reading******Acts 28:1-16***

After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when

they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

Psalm 5:12

For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield.

Psalm 118:17

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.

Prayer

Father, thank you for your unwavering sureness. That short phrase, "And so we came to Rome," revealed the exultant climax to the perilous saga. Six words proclaiming you are indeed trustworthy and true. We are here to recount your deeds to a needy world and to our needy souls each and every day. I thank you that with great hope I know death has lost its sting and I shall live with you eternally, recounting your wondrous deeds. Please give me eyes to see the favor you use as a shield for me, that I too may take courage as Paul did, Lord, that I may glory in your name.

Day 5

Reading

Acts 28:17-31

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar — though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against." When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Prayer

Father, what a blessing you gave Paul. You used his pride and his own sin (Philippians 3:4-6) to saturate his mind with your holy word. Paul, redeemed by the blood of Christ, spoke from a deep knowledge of the Old Testament illuminated through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was enough to convince even the elders of the synagogues that Jesus was the Messiah. Oh God, transform my heart to desire you and your word as the most supreme of treasures. That when I am to make a defense for my hope in Christ, my words would drip with the sweetness of your own, that my heart would overflow with living water.

..... Devotional 1

He makes all things work together for our good.

Acts 27:39-28:16

Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land. After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

God had protected Paul and provided for him throughout the hard journey from Jerusalem to Rome. While trying to bring the ship ashore, an unseen reef caused catastrophic damage to the ship forcing everyone on board to swim to shore.

The entire crew survived the crash and spent time on the island of Malta awaiting another ship to finish their journey. On Malta, Paul had the opportunity to heal the sick and preach the gospel. The people of Malta gave Paul all the food he needed to make the journey to Rome as a way to honor him for all he did on the island. After arriving in Rome, God continued to provide for Paul in giving him a group of Christians to encourage him greatly. Most astonishingly, Paul was not sent to prison. He was put under house arrest, which meant that he could live in a house with a guard and have visitors.

Questions

1. What were some of the ways God provided for Paul in the midst of hardship?
2. How did God use the hard things that happened to Paul for good?
3. What are some specific ways that God has worked tough things together for good in your life?

Application

When we are in the middle of a hard time it is easy to look at the situation and get scared, upset, or angry. Paul was going through hard times that seemed to be continually getting worse. Like Paul, we can train ourselves to look for ways God is working in our lives all the time. One way to do this is to look back on when something was difficult and ask God to help you see how he worked it together for good. When you want to be really good at baseball, you spend time practicing your throwing, accuracy, speed, and batting. When you want to master the piano, you spend hours memorizing and rehearsing melodies. In the same way, the more we reflect on God's goodness to us, the more we are able to see his goodness. We are going to be in hard times—that's life. Let us use that time to be trained in righteousness. Spend time as a family reflecting on God's goodness to you in both the good times and the bad.

Devotional 2

Will you be his witness?

Acts 28:17-31

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar — though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we

know that everywhere it is spoken against." When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

After resting briefly for three days, Paul was eager to share the gospel. Paul was perfectly equipped by God to challenge the religious leaders in their understanding of the scriptures. He longed for the leaders to believe the truth about Jesus. Instead of complaining about all the hardship he had endured, Paul was more interested in talking about Jesus. Just like in Jerusalem, not all the Jews believed. Paul rebuked them for their unbelief and vowed to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul spent the next two years under house arrest. God made a way for the gospel to spread through Paul, who was willing to be bold with all who came his way.

Questions

1. How long did Paul spend with the religious leaders trying to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah?
2. How was house arrest better than being in prison? What was the good that came out of Paul being under house arrest? (Read Philippians 1:12-14)
3. What do you need to learn, memorize, or practice to be equipped to share the gospel with anyone you meet?

Application

Only God can use something like imprisonment and make it a way to share the gospel with so many people. We shouldn't be surprised. This is the same God who took the death of his very own Son and used it to redeem all of those who would turn to him in trust and faith. If you have been set apart and made holy through the blood of Christ, it is for a purpose. That purpose is to be a witness to his goodness. What practical steps can you take to be equipped to share the good news this week and every week? This could involve: practicing your testimony of how God transformed your life so you may share the gospel through it (see Paul's testimony in Acts 26:4-23 and Philippians 3:3-16), making a list of everyone you know that needs to hear the gospel and praying for opportunities to speak with them, or even searching your heart and God's word to see if you have indeed trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Notes

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Notes

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 *Acts Devotional, Volume 2.*

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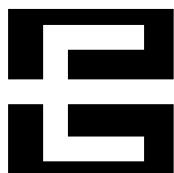
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This devotional guide is our gift to you. We pray that it is a blessing to you and your family, that it increases your knowledge of God and brings you into a closer relationship with Christ.



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