

ACTS

PART 2

A CHURCH THAT
CHANGED THE WORLD



CROSSROADS
BIBLE STUDY

LOCKEROOM PODCAST

By Crossroads Bible Church



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WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to *Acts: A Church that Changed the World, Part 2*.

If you journeyed with us through the first half of Acts, you witnessed the Great Commission take root, the Holy Spirit arrive in power, and the church being born as the very bride of Christ.

As we enter the second half of the story, what began as a small, local movement among Jewish believers is about to surge across the known world. The Gospel will break every barrier: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, a radical, upside-down community will form that will become a living outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Our early brothers and sisters will be in relentless pursuit of their world with the Gospel. They will not slow down. They will press forward with courage, conviction, and costly obedience. Opposition will come and yet they will not stop until they carry the name of Jesus to the ends of the Earth.

And now it's our turn. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the baton is in our hands.

So let's step into their story once more. Let's learn from their faith, follow their lead, and become the Church our world so desperately needs.



St. Agnes in Agone, Piazza Navona, Rome

The Curriculum Team

ACTS

LOGISTICS PROCESS



Use this 'Logistics Process' as a guide to structure your week during your Bible Study. Adjust it to fit your schedule, making it your own. This approach allows you to engage with the passage in a variety of ways, helping you fully absorb and act on God's Word.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This study is designed for one interaction with the text each day over five days.

We strongly encourage you to establish a daily rhythm. It's tempting to cram everything in at the end of the week just to meet a deadline, but that approach shortchanges what God might want to do in your life. Engaging daily with His Word creates space to truly absorb and respond to what He's revealing.

The goal of this study is for you to enter a deeper and more transformative relationship with Jesus and that cannot be rushed.

Scripture:

Reading is provided in Day 2 homework. All passages throughout the study are in NIV unless otherwise noted.

Study Prompt, Word Focus, and Deeper Dive:

Throughout the study, you'll find extra information and resources in the margins:

- ♦ *Study Prompt*: passages to engage for extended study.
- ♦ *Word Focus*: helpful word translations and definitions.
- ♦ *Deeper Dive*: context or more robust explanations related to the study.

Sacred Pause:

At the end of each week, this is a moment to reflect and identify your "one thing" to carry forward.

Notes:

At the end of each study week, you'll find space for sermon notes..

Communal Questions:

Throughout the study, questions marked with asterisks (**) are great prompts for discussion in community.



Statue of Paul commemorating his shipwreck on Malta.

ACTS 16

WEEK 1

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of
Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

1 Peter 2:9

Welcome to Part 2 of our Acts study! As we closed out Acts chapter 15, we were reminded of our calling and our standing as believers: we are God's treasured possession, set apart to partner with the One who regards us as chosen and highly valued. God also calls us His royal priesthood; chosen to be His only appointed representatives in the world.

In a world where it appears evil has the upper hand and sin is rampant, where those with "status" set the moral compass, this can feel like a weighty assignment. However, I trust your time in Acts 1-15 has brought encouragement to you as we've seen God use ordinary, uneducated men, led by the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel and further His Kingdom.

Let's continue our study of Acts – where we find Paul launching his second missionary journey.

Read Acts 16. Pause and reflect, then **read it again.** *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

I have grown to love this day and hope you have as well! This is the day we get to become curious and engage with the text, experiencing the truth of God's Word, guiding us in our faith and actions. Psalm 119:103 describes His words as "*sweeter than honey to my mouth*" and Psalm 119:105 as "*a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*" As we spend time in His Word, we come to know Him. As we become familiar with His ways, we better understand how to hear His voice and join Him in His work around us.

Today, before you begin to engage with Acts 16, take time to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal things you may not have noticed before and guide you in knowledge and truth. Ask Him to remove any distraction from your time with Him.

1. Go through Acts 16 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Spend time **taking note** of the ways God leads and encourages Paul and his companions as they strengthen the Church and spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.
4. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 16

¹ Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek.

² The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.

³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

⁴ As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them.

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

SECTION TITLES

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. **27** The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul shouted, "Don't harm

SECTION TITLES

yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

ACTS 16 SUMMARY

DAY 3: GOD'S SOVEREIGN GUIDANCE

We are about to have a front row seat to Paul's second missionary journey in Acts 15:36-18:22. We continue to see Paul's passion and commitment to strengthening the churches and spreading the Gospel. We see a man whose life has been transformed, a man whose breeding, training and personal encounter with Jesus have made him perfectly suited for the job (Philippians 3:4-7).

If we were in his shoes, we might feel like we were quite capable of accomplishing all that God had put on our heart. We might even get caught up in the idea of us doing things for God. Instead, what we find in this passage, is God's deep involvement in guiding Paul and his companions. In response, Paul is obedient.

Let's take a look at God's plan as it unfolds.

Read Acts 15:36-16:10.

Who had Paul been traveling with and why did they part ways?

Who does Paul decide to travel with next?

Bonus question: Who does the 'we' include in **verse 10**?

Paul and Barnabas have had a parting of ways, but God's work continues through both of them. God provides Silas, Timothy, and eventually Luke, to accompany Paul as they travel from town to town, delivering the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

Read Acts 16:1-3.

Let's do a quick study of Timothy.

What was the opinion of the believers at Lystra and Iconium about Timothy?

His mother was a _____ believer and his father was a _____ .

Timothy was a committed disciple of Jesus and highly respected by the believers. Because his mother was Jewish, he was considered Jewish by birth, yet his Greek father had chosen not to have him circumcised. This left Timothy in a complicated place. He didn't fully fit within either community, Jewish or Gentile.

Paul chose to circumcise him not for salvation, but for mission. The decision wasn't contrary to the ruling of the Jerusalem Council, which affirmed that circumcision was not required for salvation. Rather, it allowed Timothy to fully identify with the faith of his mother and grandmother, and to remove any barrier that might hinder ministry among the Jews. In this way, Timothy became "all in", embracing the heritage that shaped him and becoming more freely able to serve the people he was called to reach.

Read Acts 16:6-10.

Where is Paul successfully traveling? _____

Where is he prevented from traveling? _____

Who is preventing him? _____

Add the cities from this passage to the map below and draw Paul's route following the regions and cities he passed through. Place an X over regions he was prevented from entering.



******When you are actively pursuing and deeply invested in what you believe God has put on your heart, but find yourself running into road blocks, how are you prone to respond?

- ☐ I might give up, assuming I didn't hear the call correctly.
- ☐ I push forward and force my way, believing I heard correctly.
- ☐ I do nothing while I wait for a clear direction.
- ☐ I pray and keep doing the last thing God told me, waiting and willing to pivot according to His direction.

In my younger years, I was definitely prone to push forward and look for ways to accomplish what I believed God was telling me, on my terms. This often meant getting ahead of God and others in my quest to get things done. As I mature and have the benefit of hindsight, I still continue to hold to what I have heard God put on my heart, but I have learned to be patient until *He* brings it to pass.

We can't see all that God is doing behind the scenes and all the details of what He intends to accomplish. We need to trust Him with the how and when. Instead of pushing forward and becoming impatient with others, we can look at roadblocks as a time to continue in our work, pray and wait until He gives further direction.

When Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from traveling to Asia and Bithynia, he did not stop preaching. He trusted the call God gave him and continued in the work.

How did Paul receive his next direction in **verse 9**?

How did he respond in **verse 10**?

Paul got ready at *once* to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called them to preach the Gospel there. God is guiding Paul's steps. Paul knew his call because he knew his Shepherd's voice. Because of this, he was able to immediately obey and follow.

**Are you hearing God's voice? Are you holding loosely to your plans and letting God guide your steps? Share why, or why not.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:8-9

DAY 4: GOD'S SAVING GRACE

From the beginning of time, God has sovereignly orchestrated His redemption plan and His promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 that *"through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."* Paul's second missionary journey, estimated to have occurred AD 49-52, isn't just a travelogue. *It's the moment God's promise to Abraham begins to echo into Europe*, showing that the Gospel transcends boundaries of geography, class, and culture.

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

Can you hear the echo of God's promise? Is that what Paul was hearing? Have you ever considered whether something could be too small for God? God is saying, "Don't limit me!" In Isaiah, He's saying, "It's way too small a thing for me to just save Israel, I will also make you a light for the Gentiles."

Can you think of another moment when the disciples were thinking small, but Jesus was thinking big, reminding them that His Gospel would reach the "ends of the earth"?

Write Acts 1:8.

Let's take a look at the God's transforming power among three different people from different stratas of society:

LYDIA: Read Acts 16:11-15.

Where do Paul and his companions meet Lydia?

What is Lydia's occupation?

Who opened Lydia's heart to Paul's message?

Who else was baptized along with her?

A SLAVE GIRL: Read Acts 16:16-23.

Where do Paul and his companions meet the slave girl?

What is her occupation?

What was she proclaiming in **verse 17**?

How did Paul respond and what happened to her?

What was the result of Paul's action (to both himself and Silas) in **verses 19-23**?

THE JAILER: Read Acts 16:23-34.

What responsibility was the jailer given and what did he do with his orders in **verses 23-24**?

What event did God orchestrate and what happened as a result?

What was the jailer's reaction and why?

What did Paul shout to the jailer?

How did the jailer respond and what actions did he take?

DEEPER DIVE

The Pythia at Delphi was Apollo's famed oracle—a priestess who delivered trance-like prophecies believed to come from the god. In the ancient world, an "oracle" referred both to the prophetic figure and the sacred site, and Delphi was the most renowned. Her authority was linked to the Python spirit, the serpent Apollo was said to have slain beneath the temple.

In Acts 16:16–18, Paul meets a slave girl possessed by a "spirit of Python," echoing this same Delphic tradition. Like the Pythia, she offered supernatural insight, yet Paul exposed her power as a demonic counterfeit. He taught that pagan gods were in fact demons masquerading as deities (1 Corinthians 10:20).

The disciples moved through a world steeped in oracles, myths, and imitation spiritual power. This scene in Philippi highlights the contrast between Apollo and Christ: Apollo was celebrated as a bringer of light after defeating the serpent Python, but his "light" was deceptive. Jesus, by His death and resurrection, conquers the true serpent, Satan, and brings genuine healing and salvation (John 3:14). The encounter reveals the deeper clash between Satan's counterfeit authority and the victorious power of Christ.

Who else was baptized along with him?

Praise God! Just as God's Spirit guided Paul in his journey, the same Spirit opened the hearts of Lydia and the jailer, and delivered the slave girl from the oppression of an evil spirit. His saving grace also included the households of Lydia and the jailer!

The term "household" runs throughout Scripture as both a social unit and a spiritual picture. Beginning with Abraham, it is the place where God's purposes are lived out and passed on. Faith has always been a household commitment, not just a personal one.

As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

What God says in Isaiah 49:6 is still true today. He doesn't want to be limited! He has chosen us to carry His blessing to our households, extended family, neighborhoods, community, work places and beyond. The same grace and the same Holy Spirit that saved Lydia, the jailer, and their households is alive and active today.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Is there someone in your household, immediate or extended, that is in need of the gift of God's saving grace? List all those that come to mind in the space below and pray that by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, they too, would come into God's household.

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

Revelation 7:9

DAY 5: GOD IS WORTHY OF OUR PRAISE

Read Acts 16:19-25.

Remember the slave girl whose life was transformed? Her owners were so angry for losing out on the money they made off of her fortune-telling, that they dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace to face the authorities. Paul and Silas were falsely accused and the crowd joined in on attacking them. They were stripped, beaten with rods, severely flogged and thrown into prison. The jailer put them in an inner cell and secured their feet in stocks.

Write out **verse 25**.

In their intense affliction, Paul and Silas were *praying and singing hymns* to God! They were persecuted as a result of following God's call, and still they continued to honor Him. God provided and set them free with an earthquake. Their witness in suffering and an act of God led to the jailer and his household being saved.

*Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law.
At midnight I will rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.*

Psalms 119:61-62

******Though most of us haven't experienced this level of persecution, how do others see you handle adversity? Are you more likely to doubt where God has led you, or maybe believe that He is unaware of your circumstances? Or like Paul and Silas, can you praise Him in the storm?

This was not Paul's first encounter with persecution, and it won't be his last. We first met him in Acts 7:58 standing by and enthusiastically approving the stoning of Stephen. In Acts 9:1, Saul (Paul) is still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. After Saul's conversion, the Lord instructs Ananias in a vision to go to Saul and restore his sight. Ananias answers the Lord with his concerns about Saul and is reluctant to go to him. I'm sure you can understand why!

Read Acts 9:15-16.

What does the Lord say to Ananias?

God placed a call on Paul's life to proclaim His name to the Gentiles. It would not be without hardship.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 and list all that Paul endured.

Paul endured considerably more than most of us ever will, yet he tells the Corinthians that through God's mercy he was given this ministry and he does not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:1).

STUDY PROMPT

Are you in a season of suffering or persecution? You are in good company! Take some time to be encouraged by the perspective found in the following verses:

Matthew 5:10-11
Romans 5:3-5
Galatians 2:20
2 Corinthians 12:9
1 Peter 4:12-13

Fill in the blanks for 2 Corinthians 4:8-12 (NASB).

"We were afflicted in every way, but _____; perplexed, but _____; persecuted, but _____; struck down, but _____; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

Paul's devotion as a disciple of Jesus Christ, no matter the cost, is compelling.

Contemplate the following:

- ♦ Do I truly love Jesus with my whole heart, soul, mind and strength? No matter what comes my way?
- ♦ Am I abiding in Jesus and do I know His voice?
- ♦ Am I able to trust Him and hold plans loosely, making changes as God leads?
- ♦ Am I patient in times of waiting?

Spend some time writing out a prayer asking the Lord to reveal areas where you can grow to be more like Him.

Just like Paul, we do not get to see the whole picture. God does not give us step by step instructions of His plans and purposes. He simply invites, “Come, follow me.” What we do next shows who we believe Him to be. When we realize the depth of our sin and the amazing grace He offers, **how can we help but worship?** When we are changed by His immeasurable love and mercy, **how can we help but share?**

When we believe God is sovereign, we can trust that He is working out all things, no matter the circumstances (Romans 8:28). God promises to never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). *Will you follow the Shepherd today?*

Paul’s example of trusting and praising God despite his circumstances throughout Scripture is inspiring and never ceases to point us to glorifying Jesus with our whole being. Let’s join Paul in giving glory to God.

Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus

Helen H. Lemmel, 1922

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There’s light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!*

Refrain:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

*Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
O’er us sin no more hath dominion—
For more than conqu’rors we are!*

*His Word shall not fail you—He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!*

ACTS 16

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 16

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 17

WEEK 2

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Welcome to Acts 17. Over the next few days, we'll move through three very different cities, each with its own challenges and ways of thinking. Each city will invite us to notice how God's Word interacts with the people and their world, and how God calls His people to respond.

Our prayer for this study is simple: *that you fall in love with His Word*. That as you open your Bible, our loving Father would reveal Himself to you, shaping your heart and teaching you more about who He is and what His Word is about. Let today be one of those days.

Maybe you feel excited and ready to dive in! Maybe you feel worn out, behind on time, or exhausted. Regardless of where you are, He wants to meet with you. Take a moment to prepare your heart for an encounter with the Living God. Pause and speak this prayer out loud to Him:

*Abba Father,
Thank you for your Word, for the gift of Scripture that reveals who you are. I ask that you would meet me here as I read today. Open my eyes to see truth, open my ears to hear your voice, and open my heart to receive what you want to teach me. Let your Spirit guide me, teach me, and encourage me today.
Amen*

Read Acts 17 – then read it again. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

Psalm 119:130

Let's continue to unfold His Word! Today, as you step into the passage, I invite you to read with a heart that's ready to notice the details.

Pay close attention to the audience in each scene. The way Scripture describes them isn't filler, it's intentional. Notice how they're portrayed, what they do, how they respond. Take time to compare and contrast these different audiences. What sets them apart from one another? What do they reveal about the posture of a heart that is open versus one that is closed? And finally, what do their responses stir up in you?

1. Go through Acts 17 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Highlight** each city Paul travels to. Feel free to use a different color for each city. As a part of your section titles, take note of how each city responded in the margin.
4. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 17

¹ When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹

SECTION TITLES

SECTION TITLES

²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.

³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

ACTS 17 SUMMARY

DAY 3: THESSALONICA

As we continue on in Paul's second missionary journey, we step into a new city, but a familiar culture. Let's remind ourselves of the scene we're in.

Read Acts 17:1-9.

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, a port city on an important trade route. Add Thessalonica and draw Paul's journey from Philippi on the map below.



Thessalonica wasn't technically a Roman colony, but it was under Roman authority and closely tied to Caesar. The city enjoyed certain freedoms but remained loyal to Roman law, honored Caesar, and participated in the religious and cultural systems that sustained civic life. Temples, sacrifices, and festivals weren't just religious activities, but were intertwined with the economy, social status, and the very identity of the citizens.

The Jewish leaders and their systems were not much different. They were also deeply connected to their own religious and cultural system. Their authority was not only spiritual, it was also political, social, and economic. The synagogue shaped education, community rhythms, and identity, and the leaders who oversaw it carried influence that reached into nearly every area of Jewish life.

Sound familiar?

Into this world stepped Paul, preaching *Jesus* as Lord. Declaring Jesus as Messiah and King challenged everything Thessalonica depended on for security, prosperity, and identity.

For the Jewish leaders, this meant their entire system of authority was at risk. If Jesus truly was the Messiah, then loyalty must shift away from their traditions, their interpretations of the Law, and their central role as guardians of the synagogue. Their influence over community rhythms would shrink as allegiance moved to Christ instead of them.

For the wider city, Paul's message threatened the whole Roman way of life: civic pride, festivals, sacrifices, and loyalty to Caesar. If people stopped worshiping the gods or honoring Caesar as lord, it could mean fewer sacrifices in the temples, less trade flowing through festivals, and an unraveling of the civic identity that bound Thessalonica together. Allegiance to Jesus meant Caesar lost allegiance, and the social ladder built on Roman piety no longer held.

In addition, deep in their DNA was the belief that the gods could grow angry. If the entire city was not fully devoted to them, honoring their shrines and offering sacrifices to satisfy their whims, disaster could strike. Famine, plague, invasion, or other tragedies were often explained as the gods' punishment for neglect.

Because of all this, the residents in this town experience immediate threat as they meet Paul and his crew. In fact, they already knew who they were.

In **verse 6**, how do the "jealous Jews" describe Paul?

Reiterate in your own words why Paul's message felt threatening to both the Jewish leaders and the wider city?

In our world today, the Gospel still challenges modern political beliefs. Every political system, whether democratic, authoritarian, capitalist, socialist, or anything in between tends to elevate human power, national identity, or economic success as the ultimate goal. The Gospel declares instead that *Jesus is Lord*—not a state, not a party, and not an ideology.

Where cultural systems promise security, prosperity, or justice, the Gospel reminds us that only the Kingdom of God can ultimately deliver those things in full. This doesn't make Christians apolitical, but it does mean we approach our culture with humility, prophetic critique, and loyalty first to Christ's Kingdom.

Where culture calls us to divide by tribe, nation, or party, the Gospel insists that in Christ there is one new humanity.

******What are some modern day cultural beliefs or practices that oppose the Gospel?

How have you seen people react negatively when the Gospel confronts cultural norms?

Why can it be scary or uncomfortable to take a stand for Jesus in today's culture?

Jesus didn't promise that following Him would make you popular or your life would be easy. In fact, He promised us the opposite.

Read Matthew 10:22. Summarize it below.

Now, **read John 15:18-20.**

Who was hated first? _____

Who was persecuted first? _____

Whose kingdom do you belong to? _____

Preaching Jesus as King isn't always easy, but it is an opportunity to follow after our Rabbi. What we believe is not popular in this world because we are not of this world. And yet, that's the beauty of it. *Jesus has already walked this road ahead of us.* He was hated before us, persecuted before us, and still He remained faithful to the Father. When we face pushback or opposition for the sake of the Gospel, we aren't alone; *we are standing in the footsteps of Christ Himself.*

This world is not our forever home. We are citizens of heaven, passing through this place for a time, carrying the light of Christ into a world that often doesn't understand it. When we know this, rejection and opposition shouldn't surprise us; it's evidence that we belong *somewhere else, to someone else.*

****Pause and reflect on your heart. In what ways do you feel drawn toward the world instead of toward Jesus? Where do you feel pressure from outside influences to follow the world's ways?**

How does remembering that you are not of this world, but belong to Him and to a forever home in heaven, change the way you respond to the pull to belong to this world? How does it change the way you respond to external pressures?

Close your eyes and invite God into this reflection. Ask Him to reveal areas of your heart where you are holding on too tightly to the world's approval. Feel free to jot down some thoughts below, letting Him guide you through it. Let this be a moment of honest reflection, surrender, and listening to His voice.

DAY 4: BEREA

After Thessalonica, Paul traveled to Berea. Add Berea to the map below and draw a line showing Paul's journey from Thessalonica.



Yesterday, we looked at the story from the perspective of Paul and preaching the Gospel. We considered how we can live out his countercultural boldness in our own lives. Today, as we step into Berea, we will step into the shoes of the audience.

Picture it. By this point, Paul wasn't just some traveling rabbi; he was a well-known, wake-creating preacher whose words left cities buzzing. People had heard of the healings, the riots, the debates, the powerful speeches. This man had a platform, and I imagine the Bereans were on the edge of their seats, ready to hear what he was about to say. Would they go along with him just like the other cities had? Would they dismiss him outright due to his past troublemaking?

Let's remind ourselves of what happens.

Read Acts 17:10–15.

How did the Bereans receive Paul's word?

What did they do after receiving Paul's word, and how often?

Why do you think Luke calls them “noble” for this?

This is a very small piece of chapter 17, but God is calling us into something so profound here – a model for response to new messages in Jesus’ name. *Testing truth with open hearts.*

When you encounter a new message (one that you are unfamiliar with) about God’s Word or Christ himself, what is your typical response:

- ☐ I accept it without question.
- ☐ I tend to dismiss it quickly without giving it much thought.
- ☐ I keep an open heart and consider a new understanding of truth.

Protecting the orthodox message of the Gospel was at the core of their practice. **Orthopraxy** (right practice) matters deeply—but it can only grow out of **orthodoxy** (right belief). The Bereans show us that *right living flows from right believing, and right believing comes from testing every voice against God’s unchanging Word.*

God’s people have always been warned against following every voice that claims authority.

We live in a world bombarded with voices, even Christian voices. Instagram sermons, Christian podcasts, books, conferences, etc. Some of the voices are faithful and point us to Jesus, while some are persuasive but distorted. If we aren’t careful, we can slowly drift into believing a half-truth that pulls us away from intimacy with Christ.

How can wrestling with or testing what you hear lead to a deeper relationship with God? Write about it on the next page.

WORD FOCUS

'Orthodoxy'

Orthodoxy (orthos = “right” or “correct,” doxa = “belief” or “opinion”) means right belief. It is holding fast to sound doctrine and understanding God correctly.

'Orthopraxy'

Orthopraxy (orthos = “right,” praxis = “action” or “practice”) means right practice. It emphasizes faithful living, ethical conduct, and proper actions.

Right orthodoxy naturally leads to orthopraxy. When our beliefs are sound, they shape how we live and our faithful actions overflow into genuine worship and praise.

When we dig into His Word, we are meeting God Himself. The Word is a mirror, revealing both who He is and who we are in light of Him. Intimacy with God isn't just about spending time with Him or following a set of religious practices, it's about knowing Him, responding to Him, and letting His truth shape our hearts and minds. When we test what we hear against Scripture, *we are choosing relationship over convenience.*

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

In **verse 12**, what happens after the Bereans examine Scripture?

Read Psalm 119:105 and write it out below.

When they dug into His Word, they met God Himself. Scripture was a “lamp unto their feet,” and He led them to the ultimate truth.

What’s so “noble” about the Bereans is that they didn’t just take Paul’s teaching at face value, but they also didn’t shut it down just because it challenged what they thought they knew. This is the flip side of the coin.

An open heart in this sense isn't passive. It's not simply waiting to hear only what confirms your existing beliefs. It's an active posture of humility and curiosity. It's being willing to let God use others, whether it's teachers, friends, or mentors, to shape your understanding.

Who in your life challenges you in ways that help you grow closer to God?

Are there ideas or teachings you've been tempted to dismiss too quickly because they make you uncomfortable?

We are not left to figure it out on our own. The Holy Spirit has been given to us, leading us into all truth (John 16:13), sharpening our discernment and softening our hearts.

Let's follow this simple method the Bereans show us. As we listen, test, and grow, remember: discernment and openness are not opposites. Together, they form the posture of a Spirit-led disciple. With the Spirit as our guide, we can both guard the truth of the Gospel and remain humble enough to keep growing in it. Keep following Him, and He will lead you through the voices.

Above all, we must know His voice and follow it, the voice of the Good Shepherd. All contrary voices will mislead or destroy, but His alone cuts through the noise, calling us to life, to truth, to Himself.

DAY 5: ATHENS

As we close Acts 17, the scene shifts to Athens. Add Athens and draw Paul's journey from Berea on the map below.



Read Acts 17:16. Why was Paul deeply distressed?

He spoke both in the synagogue and in the marketplace, and even stood before the most prestigious council of thinkers at the **Areopagus**.

His opportunities were full, yet the results were small. Some sneered at the resurrection, while others were curious but unmoved.

This is unusual. In Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus, Paul left behind a community of believers. But in Athens, the Gospel seemed to land with a thud. No lasting church is recorded.

WORD FOCUS

'Areopagus'

The Areopagus in Athens is a stone outcrop northwest of the Acropolis where people gathered for discussion and legal matters. You can still visit it today!

Not only is it a physical place but it is also a Council. The Areopagus Council is one of the oldest courts in Athens. It dealt with major crimes, moral issues, and philosophical disputes.



How do you think Paul felt leaving Athens with so little visible fruit?

Have you ever shared your faith, invited someone to church, or stood for Jesus, only to be met with silence, rejection, or indifference? What was that like?

Next week, as we step into Acts 18, we will see Paul enter Corinth. He confesses his feelings post-Athens in his letter to them.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and summarize how he says he felt below:

This kind of exhaustion is something many of us can relate to. Sometimes it's not physical hardship that wears us down, but the emotional weight of seeing little fruit, the discouragement of being mocked, or for me, the indifference from people I love. The Old Testament actually speaks to this kind of pressure.

Read Daniel 7:23-25 (NASB).

The “wearing down of the saints” doesn’t just mean physical harm, but also emotional and spiritual exhaustion. In Athens, Paul was up against opposition that wore him down mentally.

Have you ever felt “worn down” in your faith due to discouragement, apathy, or the cold reception of others? Describe that season and your response.

******Why do you think God sometimes allows us to face seasons where the Gospel doesn’t seem to work the way we expect?

******How does this affect your relationship with God?

STUDY PROMPT

We often think of Satan’s attacks as direct hits, but sometimes they are quiet and subtle. He uses exhaustion to drag at your soul, highlights disappointments, and whispers discouragement, making you feel alone. But you are not alone. God sees your struggle, and He is with you. If you find yourself in this place, take a moment to meditate on the following verses. Let the Word of God be your source of strength.

Psalm 42:11
Psalm 73:26
Isaiah 40:29-31
Lamentation 3:22-23
Matthew 6:28-30
Matthew 11:28-30

“Darkness comes. In the middle of it, the future looks blank. The temptation to quit is huge. Don’t. You are in good company... You will argue with yourself that there is no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you can conceive. Wait. Pray without ceasing. Hope.”

John Piper

Successful service to Christ isn't measured by the number of lives changed, but by faithfulness to obey what God has called you to do.

Paul's time in Athens reminds us that our job isn't to measure fruit, *it's to be faithful*. The Gospel doesn't always land the way we hope. Those moments can leave us feeling tired, even doubtful. Even Paul – the greatest evangelist who walked the face of the earth – experienced deep discouragement. God sows the seeds we plant, and He never leaves us to carry the weight alone.

Where in your life right now might God be calling you to stay faithful even if you don't see results yet?

Paul experienced different scenarios, different responses and different results as the Gospel rippled through different cities in Acts 17:

In Thessalonica, it challenged Caesar himself.

In Berea, it was received with open hearts yet discerning minds.

In Athens, it confronted idols and philosophies but bore little fruit.

Some places eagerly embraced the message; others rejected or mocked it. The outcomes varied but Paul's faithfulness never did.

The call is simple: *stay faithful, stay obedient, and trust God for the fruit*.

As we close out this week, take some time to slowly read **Psalms 62:1-8**. As you read, let it become a conversation with God. Pray through it.

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from Him.
Truly He is my rock and my salvation;
He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?
Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.*

*Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from Him.
Truly He is my rock and my salvation;
He is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
My salvation and my honor depend on God;
He is my mighty rock, my refuge.
Trust in Him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge.*

Psalm 62:1-8

ACTS 17

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 17

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 18

WEEK 3

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Another week. Another city. At this point in Acts, Paul's travels may feel chaotic and exhausting. Maybe your own life feels the same. When I first read Acts 18, I had to slow down and re-read it three times before I could even begin to take it in. I had to pause, take a deep breath, and remember what I hold in my hands: God's Word.

As Americans, access to God's Word is painfully easy. In my home alone, we have several children's Bibles and I personally have three or four different versions, including one with space for note taking. I don't even want to count the number of Bibles, commentaries, and additional books about God's Word that my former-seminary-student-husband has accumulated.

The study book in your hands isn't the Bible itself, but it has God's Word in it all the same. Take that in. We have access to His Word that is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, serving as a guide to all of life, providing us with truth and wisdom.

So whether you step in today feeling exhausted or chaotic or anything else, reflect on the Word of God you hold in your hands. Revere it, and let the weight of what that means wash over you.

Now you can **read Acts 18**. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

Thank God for His Word that is *"profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NASB)

To conclude your day **read Acts 18 again**.

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The whole of Acts is structured around the commission given in Acts 1:8: "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." In Acts 1-7, we see the Gospel in Jerusalem. Then in Acts 8-12, it spreads through Judea and Samaria. Our section this week in Acts 18 falls within the larger section of Acts 13-28, where the Gospel moves toward the ends of the earth through Paul's missionary journeys. At this point, Paul is on his second journey, and this chapter focuses on his time in Corinth.

We need to name the spoiler here: Paul's time in Corinth lays the groundwork for the two letters he later writes to this church. But let's not jump ahead just yet. Before those letters come into view, Acts 18 has its own rich story to tell. So let's set aside what we may already know from Corinthians and remain with Paul in this moment.

1. Go through Acts 18 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 18

¹ After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²

There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. ⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.

SECTION TITLES

27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. **28** For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

ACTS 18 SUMMARY

DAY 3: LIGHT OVERCOMING THE DARKNESS

Throughout Acts 18, the weight of darkness in the city is evident. Paul has entered a place where morals are dark and hearts are even darker. The city was infamous for sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, and indulgence. There is even a verb that was well known in the Roman Empire, *korinthiazomai* ("to Corinthianize"), meaning to live immorally.

Today, we'll get our boots on the ground in A.D. 50 Corinth and explore the challenges and moral darkness the early church encountered.

LOCATION & GOVERNMENT

Corinth was a major city in Achaia, Greece, sitting on the Isthmus, the narrow land bridge connecting northern and southern Greece. It controlled trade routes between the Aegean (east) and Ionian (west) seas. Ships often portaged across the Isthmus instead of sailing the dangerous route around the Peloponnesus.



This made Corinth wealthy, cosmopolitan, and influential. Add Corinth and draw Paul's journey from Athens on the map above.

Two sea ports were present here in Corinth as well, based on the strategic location of the city: Lechaion (west) on the Corinthian Gulf, and Cenchreae (east) on the Saronic Gulf. These bustling ports brought merchants, sailors, and travelers from across the empire. This explains the city's mix of cultures, languages, and religions.

Read Acts 18:12-17.

Who does it say Gallio was? _____

Use whatever tools you need to get a comprehensive understanding of 'proconsul'. Write your own definition of 'proconsul'.

Under whose authority and which law was Corinth governed?

Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, governed by a proconsul. The **bema** (judgment seat) still stands in Corinth – where Paul would have appeared before Gallio. Daily life was shaped by Roman law, honor-shame culture, and public trials.

RELIGIOUS CLIMATE

The original Greek city of Corinth was destroyed in 146 BC by Rome. Julius Caesar refounded it in 44 BC as a Roman colony. By Paul's time (circa AD 50s), it was thriving again, full of Roman veterans, freedmen, Greeks, and Jews. With its strategic location, busy ports, and diverse population, Corinth was religiously highly pluralistic, with temples dedicated to Aphrodite, Apollo, Isis, Poseidon, and the imperial cult.

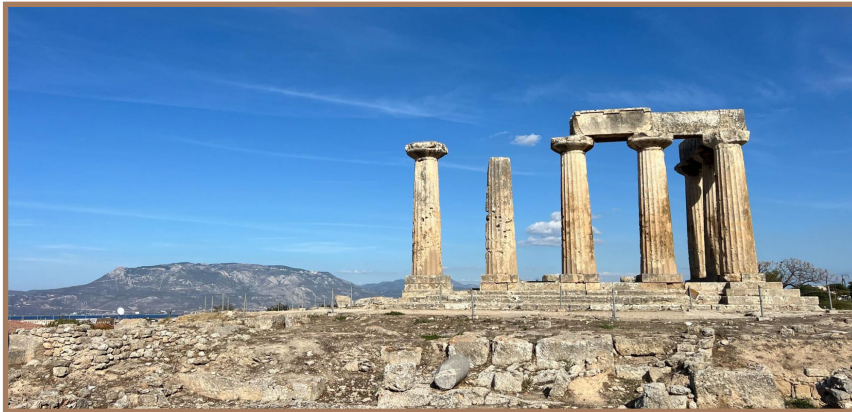
WORD FOCUS

'Bema'

The bema or judgement seat was a stone platform found in the center of Roman civic life, often located in the forum (political section of the city) or agora (central shopping area). From this elevated seat, officials conducted trials, addressed the public, and exercised judicial authority.



This is the climate Paul is walking into. (Temple of Apollo below)



Read Acts 18:4-8.

Who is Paul's audience in Corinth in **verse 4**? _____

What does **verse 8** tell us? _____

How do the Jews respond to Paul's message? _____

What did Paul do as a result of the Jews' response? _____

SOCIAL & MORAL CHALLENGES

When Paul later writes to the church in Corinth, they are still struggling with the same things they did when he was physically present with them in Acts 18.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 and 6:9-20.

What does this reveal about the social and moral environment in Corinth?

Summarize the **Location & Government, Religious Climate, and Social & Moral Challenges** in Corinth on the next page.

How might these variables have influenced the early church?

Corinth was a bustling, wealthy, immoral, and competitive Roman trade hub, full of opportunity but also great moral and spiritual challenges. Understanding this helps us see why Paul's ministry there was both so difficult and so significant.

A major collision of cultures, values, and beliefs was taking place when Paul arrived. In God's eyes, Corinth was dark and chaotic, full of idolaters and strife. If anywhere needed the Gospel, it was here. God knew that, so He sent Paul right into the heart of this dark and challenging city.

After learning the challenges this city posed to Christianity, what similarities do you see in our world today?

******Based on your answer above, what makes it hard for you to live out your faith?

God intentionally stepped into Corinth's darkness, redeeming it and establishing His church there. How does this reality influence how you see the world around you?

******How might God be calling you to be a light in the darkness you see around you today? Think of one practical action you could take this week.

At times, it must have felt impossible to fight the darkness, believing it could continue claiming victory over the people of Corinth. But God called Paul to this city, one of the darkest places of that time, knowing just a small light would bring big movement in the hearts of those still living in darkness. Just like Paul, we are called to be a light wherever we go, bringing God’s love and redemption story to those around us living in darkness.

Watch God do what He does best—reclaim the darkness.

Conclude your day in prayer. Lift up our world, your city, and your social circles. Pour out your fears, concerns, and challenges to the God who was, who is, and who is to come—the same God who stood with His people then is the very God who is with you now. Ask Him to strengthen your courage to stand firm in His Word, even when the world around you pulls you toward darkness. Close boldly by asking God to use you as a light in the darkness, shining His truth and love wherever you go.

For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV)

DAY 4: PERSECUTION, PROTECTION, AND PERSEVERANCE

Yesterday, we got a boots-on-the-ground look at what Paul and the early church faced in the city of Corinth. Today we focus further on Paul and the ongoing battle that marked his ministry.

We have journeyed with Paul for a long time. He has one of the most transformative stories we read about in the Bible. Once he was changed at a heart level, his life was dramatically different. We see him going from city to city proclaiming Christ! But his mission came at a cost.

Read the following texts and write what Paul is facing in each one.

Acts 9:23-24, 29: _____

Acts 13:50: _____

Acts 14:2-7: _____

Acts 14:19: _____

Acts 16:22-24: _____

Acts 17:4-5: _____

About 15 years pass between Paul's conversion in Acts 9 and his arrival to Corinth in Acts 18. In that time, Paul faced repeated, relentless, and tremendous persecutions, often stirred up by religious leaders or hostile crowds, though sometimes he also faced discouragement and conflict within the church itself.

Read Acts 18:6.

What does Paul say? _____

What do you think he's feeling? _____

A Jewish New Testament Commentator said:

*"Your blood on your own heads (compare Matthew 27:25) for my part I am clean."
In Ezekiel 3:16-19 God tells the prophet that he will be blameworthy if he fails to warn the wicked person to leave his wicked ways, but if he does warn him he will be guiltless. Paul is in effect applying the passage to himself saying "I have done what I could to bring you the message of salvation; you choose to reject it at your peril, but I have discharged my responsibility. I would not leave you if you were responsive, but you leave me no other choice. The Gospel is for you especially but it will also save them (Romans 1:16)."*

I hear weariness in Paul's words. After years of pushback, beatings, rejection, and persecution, it seems Paul may be at the end of himself, worn down and discouraged. While few of us today face the kind of persecution Paul endured, many of us can relate to the feeling of being worn down or discouraged in our faith.

Describe a time in your past where you felt weary or defeated.

God always sees us. When we're defeated and feel like we just can't carry on any more, He is with us. **In Paul's weariness, God didn't leave him in defeat.** He spoke directly to Paul with a fresh word of encouragement.

Fill in the blanks from **Acts 18:9-10**:

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be _____; keep on _____, do not be _____. For _____, and no one is going to _____, because I have many people in this city."

After all the beatings and opposition Paul had already endured, God speaks to his fear with a promise of protection.

It's important to acknowledge how God meets us, often just when we need it. Pause and consider every way God's character shines through for Paul in these verses. What stands out to you about God's character?

STUDY PROMPT

God says "do not be afraid" repeatedly throughout Scripture. Read through the following verses and commit one to memory.

Genesis 15:1
Joshua 1:9
Isaiah 43:2
Luke 1:30
John 14:27

How did Paul respond in **verse 11**?

Refer back to your time of weariness or defeat. How did God meet you?

What do you **remember** God teaching you through that time?

Paul endured suffering because he trusted God's eternal faithfulness. How does **remembering** God's future promises build hope in our struggles?

זָכַר (Zakar) : *to mark, so as to be recognized; to remember*

Paul's future words from **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** carry more weight after walking the road of suffering and persecution. I envision him writing his second letter to the Corinthians reflecting back on his weariness when he first stepped into their city, and remembering the opposition he faced, the darkness around him, and constant persecution. In the end, he was willing to continue surrendering his life because his true hope was eternal.

STUDY PROMPT

'Zakar'

The Hebrew word for remember is zakar (זָכַר / זָכַר). It carries a much deeper meaning than simply recalling facts. To zakar is not just to think back, but to bring something into active focus—holding it in mind, meditating on it, and allowing that memory to shape present action.

For example, when God commands His people to remember the Sabbath, He is not asking them merely to call it to mind, but to embody it. He is asking them to live in a way that honors and enacts its meaning. In the same way, when Scripture says that God “remembered” Noah, it does not suggest that God had forgotten him, but that He acted decisively on Noah's behalf, sending the wind to dry the floodwaters.

At its root, zakar can be thought of as “re-mem-bering”, to put something back together and bring it into living reality once again. The past event is not locked away in history but through remembrance it is made present, active, and powerful now.

This sense of remembrance is almost untranslatable into English, yet it is foundational to how God reveals Himself in Scripture. For God's people, to remember is to participate, to immerse one's self in God's faithfulness in such a way that what He has done in the past becomes the guiding power of the present moment.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

God is compassionate. He is a good Father. While God doesn't often remove pain and suffering, in Corinth He did. He gave Paul a reprieve—physical protection that flowed from His intimate care for a weary son. Could it be that He saw what no one else could—the hidden wrestlings of Paul's heart? These wrestlings were met by the unseen God, who knows exactly what we need, when we need it, and how often we need it.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

Paul's hope, forged in suffering, rested not in relief from this life but in the eternal glory to come and in the faithful Father who sustained him along the way.

End your day by picking one of the verses above and putting it into memory. If it helps, use the lines below to rewrite it (more than once if you have to!). You might put it on a notecard and place it in a highly trafficked spot in your home. However you want to write it in your mind, just be sure to put in the effort, knowing His Word never returns void.

DAY 5: FELLOWSHIP FOR THE FAITH

This week we've explored light over darkness and perseverance through persecution. Today, we'll close out the week by focusing on a vital part of the early church: fellowship—the relationships and partnerships that strengthened believers in their mission.

κοινωνία (koinónia) :
fellowship, communion, participation, sharing

After leaving Athens and arriving in Corinth, Paul meets a couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

Read Acts 18:1-3.

What do we know of Aquila's religious heritage? _____

Where did they come from and why? _____

What were their occupations? _____

It's unclear whether Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers, were Christians before or after they met Paul. We do know they were recently expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius. Paul also worked as a tentmaker, which was most likely what joined them together and Paul's way of voluntarily supporting his ministry.

For the next 18 months, Paul stayed and worked with them, reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and seeking to persuade both Jews and Greeks. He spends more time here than he spent in most other cities.

Read Acts 18:18-19.

Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila sail to Syria and arrive in Ephesus. There, Paul leaves without his friends and ends up in Antioch. After 18 months together, the friends have gone their separate ways—for now. Priscilla and Aquila continue their mission in Ephesus, soon meeting a new friend and believer.

DEEPER DIVE

'Nazarite Vow'

The second part of Acts 18:18 notes that Paul had his “hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken.” This vow was most likely the Nazirite vow. Described in Numbers 6:1–21, the Nazirite vow was a bold, voluntary commitment to set oneself apart for God. It served as a radical reminder, especially within a challenging cultural environment, of one’s true identity. By abstaining from wine, refraining from cutting their hair, and avoiding contact with the dead, a Nazirite bore visible signs that continually spoke to their own heart: You belong to God. This vow was neither quiet nor subtle; it was a clear and public declaration of identity and devotion. In the difficult cultural context of Corinth, Paul appears to have taken this voluntary vow as an intentional reminder of his identity in Christ.

Read Acts 18:22-26.

Where is Apollos from and what is his religious heritage?

Describe him.

What is Aquila and Priscilla’s response to Apollo in verse **26b**?

Paul was not the only one who could speak to Jews. We are introduced to Apollos, an Alexandrian Jewish convert to Christ who also showed “he was mighty in the Scriptures.” Apollos combined his conversion to Christ with his passion and eloquence.

Paul and Apollos, both in their backgrounds and in their current understanding of Christ as Messiah, represent **2 Timothy 3:14-16**.

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and became convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:14-16 (NASB)

Aquila and Priscilla also had a part in aiding the arsenal of Apollos. In verse 26 it says, "But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."

Apollos only knew of the baptism of John (Matthew 3:1-12) so even though he accurately taught the facts about Jesus, he had not experienced the full significance of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

Describe Aquila and Priscilla's character. _____

Describe Apollos' character. _____

This verse shows faithfulness on the part of Priscilla and Aquila to stay true to correct teaching and it shows humility on the part of Apollos to receive correction.

Evaluate your own heart. How deep is your knowledge of God's Word and His ways? How quickly are you able to receive loving correction from your brothers and sisters in Christ? Write your thoughts below.

******In this season, what step might God be inviting you to take into deeper knowledge of His Word or a fuller experience of His salvation and Spirit? Write one tangible way you can live that out.

Read Acts 18:27-28 (ESV) and fill in the blank.

And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived,

for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Apollos' encouragement for the brethren and his skill in apologetics shone brighter as a result of collaboration between Priscilla and Aquila, when they had "reasoned" with him. All throughout this chapter, we have seen the Gospel blatantly rejected or readily received. Aquila and Priscilla's faithfulness combined with Apollos' humility set the stage for the early church to continue to expand.

How does Aquila and Priscilla's faithful discipleship of Apollos and his humble reception compel you? Check all that apply.

- ☐ I am emboldened to faithfully share Christ with others.
- ☐ I am humbly freed to proclaim the Gospel.
- ☐ I am challenged to be more intentional with believers around me.
- ☐ I am convicted of my pride and occasional unwillingness to receive Godly correction.
- ☐ I am encouraged to humbly receive discipleship from others.
- ☐ I am thankful for those who have faithfully poured into my walk with Christ.

This isn't the last we hear of Aquila and Priscilla.

Read Romans 16:3-4.

Apollos becomes a powerful preacher in Achaia, vigorously refuting Jews in public debate and proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. But this also isn't the last time we hear from him.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:4-6, 22.

From Paul to Aquila and Priscilla to Apollos. This is discipleship. This is fellowship—*koinónia*. This is the Gospel.

Just as Paul poured into Aquila and Priscilla, and they poured into Apollos, God calls each of us to both receive and give. The story didn't end with them. It continues with us. The same chain of discipleship and fellowship that fueled the early church is what God uses to spread the Gospel today.

Take a moment to reflect on your own chain of discipleship and who has made an impact on your walk with the Lord. This doesn't have to come from a personal one-on-one experience. An author, a speaker, or someone whose walk you've admired can also serve as disciplers.

There is power in writing. Write their names below. If it's an option to you, consider sending them a text, making a call, or even sending a note in the mail, with a few words to thank them for their impact and encourage them on their own journey.

To close out this week, spend some time in prayer, giving thanks for those who have guided you in your walk with the Lord.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:3-6

ACTS 18

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 18

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 19

WEEK 4

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

As you begin your time with the Lord this week, pause and consider your posture and approach not only to Acts 19 but to the entire Word of God. As your fingers turn the pages, take a moment to grasp the astonishing truth that the God of the universe bent incredibly low. He left His powerful throne room, took on lowly human cells, walked among His broken and chaotic creation, and spoke our native tongue. All of this was to introduce us to Himself, to give us a book that tells the epic story of His immeasurable love for us and to invite us into His mission to repair the world.

Let that truth settle in your heart. The God who spoke galaxies into being now speaks to you. Let your response be one of awe, gratitude, and worship. Begin by reflecting on the simple words of *I Exalt Thee*, acknowledging His place in the universe and praising God for who He is. If you feel led, sing them. If singing isn't your preference, simply speak the words aloud to Him, letting your heart join in worship.

*For Thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth.
Thou art exalted far above all gods.
I exalt Thee, I exalt Thee, oh Lord.*

Allow your heart's posture to respond with *I Love You Lord*:

*I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice
To worship You, O my soul, rejoice!
Take joy, my King, in what You hear
May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear.*

That first Spirit-filled church, the one that changed the world, did not have our New Testament. They had the Old Testament Scriptures, the good news of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit, and *each other*. Together, they had glimpsed the resurrection power and authority that Jesus *possessed* from on high. When God called them to advance His Kingdom, they responded wholeheartedly, saying, "We are at your service." Today, can you approach God's throne room and His call with the same heart? With everything you are and everything you have, can you respond to His great love by saying, "I love you Lord. I am at your service. Here am I"?

Read Acts 19 and then conclude by **reading Acts 19 a second time**, allowing the Word and your worship to shape your heart for the week ahead.

(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

On Day 1, we examined our heart's posture and response to who God is and the book He gave us. We engaged in a thoughtful, worshipful, and reflective reading of Acts 19. Today, we step into active engagement.

There is a Hebrew word that is often translated as "meditation" that captures this idea in a powerful way: **haga**. It is the word used in Psalm 1:2: *"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates (haga) day and night."*

When we hear "meditation," we might think of the reflective, meditative approach we practiced yesterday. But *haga* paints a very different, yet equally appropriate, approach to Scripture. **Haga** literally means to devour. Picture a lion as it sits over its prey, ripping it apart and ingesting all the sustenance it can. In the same way, approach God's Word with intensity and hunger. Tear into it, chew on it, and absorb it fully so that it nourishes your mind, saturates your heart, and transforms your life. This is not a passive reading. It is active, fierce, and consuming.

In that spirit, meticulously and deliberately go through Acts 19. Look for what stands out to you: shifts in the story, repeated words or ideas, or moments that God allows to carry weight or meaning in your heart.

1. Go through Acts 19 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 19

¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

³ So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

SECTION TITLES

⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. ⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

¹³ Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁷ When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰ In this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

²¹ After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²² He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance

[illegible]

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” **29** Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. **30** Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. **31** Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Fellow Ephesians, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? **36** Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. **37** You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. **38** If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. **39** If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. **40** As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” **41** After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

ACTS 19 SUMMARY

DAY 3: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION - PLACE MATTERS

Begin today by looking up the following passages and filling out the table below:

PASSAGE	CITY VISITED	SETTING/AUDIENCE
Acts 14:1	Iconium	Synagogue - Jews + Greeks
Acts 14:20-21		
Acts 16:12-13		
Acts 17:1		
Acts 17:10-11		
Acts 17:15-17		
Acts 18:1-4		
Acts 19:1+8		

Read the following verses: **Acts 13:1-3, Acts 13:4, Acts 16:6-7 and Acts 20:22-23.**

Who is guiding the movement of the Gospel throughout the world?

Was the movement of the Gospel intentional, and what types of places and audiences generally seem to be targeted?

Earlier in our study of Acts 1, we examined the places where Jesus said He would send the disciples. We considered that Jerusalem would be familiar, Judea would

have potentially been intimidating, Samaria would have been shocking, and the ends of the Earth would have been completely out of the question for them.

Looking at the table you created above, we see this pattern unfolding: the Gospel begins in Jerusalem, spreads to Judea, reaches Samaria, and now, through Paul's missionary journeys, extends to the dubious ends of the Earth. Every city Paul enters is strategically and intentionally chosen by God.

Paul was sent into the major cities of the ancient world, centers of power, culture, and influence, yet bound by the grip of pagan religion. Among them, Ephesus stood out as the most prominent, and Paul spent more time there than in any other city on his journeys. The following geopolitical and cultural background of Ephesus will help us understand the setting of Acts 19:

- ♦ At the time of Paul, Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia which gave it political and administrative advantages. This city had special tax status, influence, and access to resources which made it very attractive to merchants, residents, and visitors.
- ♦ Estimates suggest Ephesus' population ranged from 200,000 to 250,000 people. This made it one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, second only to Rome and Alexandria.
- ♦ Ephesus' location on the Aegean coast made it a major commercial and trade hub linking the interior of Asia Minor with the Mediterranean Sea. Its harbor was bustling with commerce, trade, and travelers from across the ancient world.

None of the major cities of the ancient world would have offered safety or ease for this young group of ragtag believers and Ephesus was no exception. It would have been much easier for this Gospel movement to stay in Galilee or to even continue teaching in the familiar temple in Jerusalem.

Yet, in spite of the risks and discomfort, the early apostles displayed an unstoppable sense of urgency and passion to take the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. By targeting the cities, the Holy Spirit was sending them into the very heart of chaos, into the realm of the principalities and powers. These were places where culture, commerce, and ideology collided. Influence was concentrated, and strongholds were entrenched. The apostles were being positioned for maximum impact and called to confront concentrated pockets of darkness with the light of Christ. And so, the Spirit propelled them forward.

Read Acts 17:26 from Paul's speech in Athens. What does this verse say about where you live and how long you are going to live there?

****Do you believe that God has strategically placed you to confront darkness with His light?**

- ☐ I have never thought about the fact that God strategically places me or anyone else in order to advance His Kingdom, but I am willing to engage this idea.
- ☐ I'm highly attuned to my context and audience, and that awareness often leaves me feeling shy, intimidated, and uncertain about sharing my faith, fearing what others might think of me.
- ☐ I believe God has placed me in certain contexts, but I am pretty passive. I've never really intentionally asked Him for openings or a chance to share my faith.
- ☐ I am aware of God's strategic placement in my life and am actively seeking His guidance and actively looking to engage my surroundings at every opportunity for His Kingdom.

****What are the "cosmopolitan centers" of your life? The hubs of influence, activity, or conversation around you? These could be literal places (your workplace, school, a neighborhood) or relational spaces (a group of friends, social media, a team). Which of these seems uncomfortable, intimidating, risky or unapproachable for you? Why do you think they feel that way? What has held you back from engaging these spaces for the Kingdom? Explain your answers below:**

****As you depend on the Spirit for direction and courage, what is one concrete way you could step into an uncomfortable or intimidating environment this week with the hope of advancing the Kingdom of Heaven?**

When Jesus walked the earth, He raised up disciples and, when the time came, shot them out like arrows into the world to bring His message to a desperate people. This mimics the very first move of the Gospel. In that same way, God the Father shot Jesus Himself out of the comfort of heaven, right into the teeth of chaos, into the realm of the principalities and powers in order to boldly proclaim His good news.

Carefully read **Philippians 2:6-11**. This might be a familiar passage but take some time to read thoughtfully. Answer the following questions:

Was Jesus completely equal with God? _____

What does this passage say is the form He took? _____

What posture did He choose to take toward the Father? _____

What action resulted? _____

Where is He now? _____

Let's take another glimpse into the throne room from the viewpoint of Isaiah.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8.

Linger on **verses 1-4**. Describe what Isaiah saw in your own words.

What spiritual posture did Isaiah take before the LORD?

What was Isaiah's response to God's question in **verse 8**?

Here I Am. Send Me. There is no hesitation, no bargaining, no retreat. Isaiah is willing. He embraces a sense of urgency and is eager to be shot out of that throne room, and sent on a heavenly mission.

This same Spirit-led courage, willingness, passion, and urgency is seen in Paul and the early apostles. Like Isaiah, *they did not wait for comfort or safety*. They were sent into the heart of the world's largest centers of culture and chaos to confront darkness with the light of Christ.

God calls us, His people, in the same way to step into obedience with courage. Sometimes that call takes us into places that are uncomfortable, intimidating, or even risky. But when we echo Isaiah's words, *"Here I am. Send me!"*, we align ourselves with God's strategic plan. The Spirit positions us where we are most needed, where our obedience can have maximum impact, and where His Kingdom advances.

End today by writing your own “Here I am. Send me.” prayer. Bring before God the “cosmopolitan centers” of your world, the places, people, and situations that feel intimidating, uncomfortable, or chaotic. Surrender those spaces to His rule and Lordship. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom, discernment, and guidance as you consider your role in His strategic plan. Pray for courage to follow the example of your Rabbi, Jesus, and step straight into the uncomfortable places, bringing His love to the lost and proclaiming His victory over sin and death.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DAY 4: DEEP OR WIDE – A STRATEGIC SHIFT

Read Acts 19:1-10.

Up to this point in Acts, Paul's ministry has been marked by breadth. Essentially, he has been an itinerant speaker and traveling church planter. His ministry is characterized by rapid movement, expansion into new regions, and reaching new audiences, resulting in swift Gospel expansion. However, when Paul reaches Ephesus, his strategy and focus shift.

What group does it say that Paul encounters in **verse 1**?

How many does it say there are in **verse 7**?

Read Luke 6:12-16. How many disciples did Jesus have?

In **verse 9**, Paul's ministry center moves from the synagogue to the Hall of Tyrannus. Who goes *with* Paul as he moves to the Hall of Tyrannus?

Read Acts 4:13. What marked the disciples?

How often was Paul teaching in the Hall of Tyrannus (**verse 9**)?

DEEPER DIVE

'Road Through the Interior'

When the book of Acts mentions Paul taking "the road through the interior", it refers to his journey across the central plateau of Asia Minor.

Ancient travelers in that region had several options: they could sail along the coast, follow the coastal road by land, or take the more difficult interior routes, which passed through rugged terrain.

Rather than traveling by boat or sticking to the easier coastal route, Paul chose to go through the interior regions, including Phrygia and Galatia. This provided access to inland communities in need of the Gospel and allowed him to revisit the churches he had planted. He could strengthen the believers, and continue to seek the Spirit's guidance for the next stage of his mission.

Read Luke 19:47 and Luke 21:37-38. How often did Jesus teach?

According to **Acts 19:10**, who heard the Gospel as it went out from Ephesus?

Consider this: the verse states that the Gospel spread throughout all of Asia Minor from Ephesus. Not because Paul had continued his pattern of traveling city to city, but because he was raising disciples and shooting them out from this central hub into the entire surrounding region.

For the first time in his ministry, we see Paul gathering a group of disciples, and the text specifically notes that there were twelve of them. From the context of Acts 18-20, we know that Paul stayed in Ephesus for about three years, the same length of time as Jesus' ministry on earth. During this time, much like Jerusalem, Ephesus became a central hub and launching point for the Gospel as Paul taught daily and invested deeply in his twelve disciples.

In Ephesus, we see a major ministry shift in Paul. His mission moves from breadth to depth. Instead of quickly moving from place to place, Paul remains, forming disciples and building a foundation that will continue to impact the world long after he leaves.

There is something valuable for us in this. So often we move quickly from one task, relationship, or responsibility to the next. We are always checking boxes, chasing productivity, and responding to the next urgent thing. Paul's ministry shift in Ephesus challenges that pace. He stayed in one place, invested deeply in disciples, and devoted years to teaching, forming, and empowering others. His focus was not on how much ground he could cover, but on how deeply the Gospel could take root in the lives of people and in a city.

Evaluate your own pace of impact for the Kingdom. Does the pace of your life reflect an impact of breadth or depth? Explain.

Think about relationships, responsibilities, and the other ordained spaces of your life. Does rushing prevent you from going deeper? How? Could God be calling you to slow down?

******Going deeper often requires simplifying, prioritizing, or cutting things that don't produce lasting fruit. What is one activity, commitment, or distraction you might need to remove from your schedule to create space for more meaningful impact?

Two of Paul's key disciples were Timothy and Epaphras. They both played pivotal roles in spreading the Gospel throughout Asia Minor.

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-4 and answer the following questions:

What does Paul call Timothy? _____

What does he entrust/urge him to do? _____

What task does Paul give to Timothy (and Erastus) in **Acts 19:22**?

Read Colossians 1:1-14 and answer the following questions:

Who is this letter from, and who is it to? _____

From whom did the people hear about the Gospel (**verse. 7**)?

Read Colossians 4:18. Where is Paul sending this letter from?

Read Colossians 4:2-17 and list all of the disciples that Paul mentions:

What three cities and their churches is Epaphras working hard for (**verse 13**, remember to add who the letter is written to!)?

Timothy assisted Paul in Ephesus and other regions, providing oversight, encouragement, and teaching to local churches. Epaphras, a faithful minister trained by Paul, carried the Gospel to Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, praying fervently and discipling believers so that the faith would grow and mature. Together, these disciples helped establish a thriving network of churches across Asia Minor.

Just as Jesus multiplied His ministry through His disciples, Paul was doing the same. Once he slowed down in Ephesus, he prioritized pouring into others so that the Gospel could spread exponentially and endure beyond his own reach and lifetime.

Read Acts 19:10. Once again, from Ephesus, how widely did the Gospel spread?

Discipleship has always been God's chosen strategy for advancing His Kingdom. It's not built on programs or platforms, but on people. It is life-on-life, one life intentionally investing in another. Paul poured into his disciples in Ephesus and the Gospel spread throughout all of Asia.

Jesus invited and invested in twelve disciples. Paul slowed down and deeply invested in twelve disciples. God is most certainly inviting you to do the same. I once read this about discipleship relationships:

DEEPER DIVE

Paul's journey through the interior of Asia Minor brought him into the Lycus River Valley, a fertile region roughly 12 x 13 x 4 miles. This tri-city area included Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Colossae was the focus of Paul's letter to the Colossians, Laodicea is addressed in the seven letters of Revelation, and Hierapolis is mentioned only in Colossians. All three cities were under the pastoral care of Epaphras (Colossians 4:12-13), who worked to nurture the churches Paul had helped establish.



*Not every moment will feel “inspirational”.
Some will feel awkward, slow, or brutally honest.*

*But discipleship isn’t about putting on a show.
It’s about walking with people in real time.*

*Letting them ask hard questions.
Letting them see you repent.
Letting them hear the truth, even when it stings.*

- Chris Kuti

Discipleship is time consuming, not always easy, and certainly can be messy. Often we feel like we have to be perfect before we jump in. But remember, you do not have to be perfect. You just have to humbly follow, trust, and love Jesus. If you do not consider yourself a discipler yet, take a few moments to *pray and ask God to help you begin your discipleship journey by bringing one or two people to your mind to consider discipling*. Write the names that come to mind below:

Prayer is a powerful way to begin discipling someone. It is an act of spiritual investment as you partner with God in the work He is doing in another person’s life. When you pray for someone’s faith, growth, and protection, you are joining God in their formation. At the same time, prayer shapes you as a discipler. It draws you closer to the heart of God and reminds you of your dependence on the Holy Spirit for wisdom and discernment. Close today by praying for the people God has placed on your heart to disciple. You do not need to rush into action; simply start with prayer. Let’s see what the LORD has for you!

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

DAY 5: SHOTS FIRED – STRONGHOLDS SHAKEN

The stage for this week's chapter is Ephesus. While we've already explored its geopolitical importance, there are additional details about this capital city that will help us better understand the rest of Acts 19. Beyond its political importance, Ephesus was also a major religious and cultural center.

MAGIC, OCCULT, AND CULTURAL PRACTICES:

- ♦ Ephesus was renowned for its association with magic, sorcery, and occult practices, which were deeply ingrained into daily life and commerce.
- ♦ Magic, charms, and divination were common in both personal and public life, reflecting the city's deeply mystical and superstitious culture.
- ♦ Estimates suggest Ephesus' population ranged from 200,000 to 250,000 people. This made it one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, second only to Rome and Alexandria.
- ♦ Ephesus' location on the Aegean coast made it a major commercial and trade hub linking the interior of Asia Minor with the Mediterranean Sea. Its harbor was bustling with commerce, trade, and travelers from across the ancient world.

The term Ephesia Grammata ('Εφεσια γράμματα), often translated as "Ephesian letters", refers to a certain combination of ancient magical letters believed to have protective and curative powers. Originating in Ephesus, this formula consisted of six specific words and was widely used throughout the ancient world as a kind of chant, talisman, or good-luck charm.

RELIGION OF ARTEMIS:

- ♦ Ephesus held the official status of "Neo Korus" for the worship of Artemis. Neo Korus meant that, just as the Vatican is the center of Catholicism today, Ephesus was the central hub for the worship of Artemis. This specific honor, to be the official warden of the religion of Artemis, was awarded to Ephesus by the emperor himself. Being the world headquarters for the worship of this popular goddess brought prestige, political influence, and economic benefits to the city, because festivals, pilgrimages, and temple commerce attracted visitors from across the then known world.
- ♦ Ephesus was home to the magnificent Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
- ♦ The temple and its cult dominated civic life, making Artemis worship central to Ephesus' identity, economy, and culture.



Reconstruction of the temple of Artemis, Ephesus, 1st Century AD

Having this context in mind, **read Acts 19:11-20.**

Who is God doing extraordinary miracles through **(verse 11)?**

What two things were people cured of in **verse 12?**

By what name were the sons of Sceva casting out demons in **verse 13?**

What does the evil spirit ask the sons of Sceva in **verse 15?**

In a city steeped in magic and dominated by evil spirits, Acts 19 reminds us that no power or authority exists apart from the power of Jesus Christ. Even the evil spirits recognize Jesus' authority and fear His servant Paul. The spiritual forces of darkness are on high alert as the Kingdom of Heaven begins to break through, bringing shalom into chaos. As the Gospel pushes into the heart of darkness, exposing the principalities and powers and bringing them into the light, physical bodies are being healed, and spirits are being set free.

What are the two results of this conflict **(verse 17)**?

When the veil between the natural and supernatural is lifted, what's revealed can be both shocking and sobering. The people of Ephesus had witnessed the Kingdom of Heaven breaking in, bringing healing and freedom as the Spirit worked miracles through Paul. In contrast, they had also seen the violence and oppression of the Kingdom of darkness. Having long engaged in dark magic and opened themselves to evil, the Ephesians finally saw that realm for what it truly was. In that moment of exposure, the light of Christ became irresistibly beautiful.

What is the people's response to the reality that even the darkness knows the name of Jesus and his servant Paul **(verses 18-20)**?

Revival erupts as people turn from magic, and the Word of the Lord spreads with unstoppable power. The authority of darkness is exposed and challenged. Its days are numbered.

Read Acts 9:2, Acts 19:9, and Acts 22:4.

What is the name of the early church? _____

Read Acts 19:21-41.

What or who is causing a disturbance in **Acts 19:26**? _____

What does Demetrius say is Paul's message in **verse 26**?

What is Demetrius afraid of for Artemis in **verse 27**?

What does Paul want to do in **verse 30**, and who is holding him back?

Who else asks Paul not to enter the theater? _____

Why do you think people were trying to keep Paul from the theater **(verse 31)**?

How long were the people shouting in **verse 34**? _____

What were they shouting **(verse 34)**? _____

This is a serious disturbance! A full-scale riot has erupted in Ephesus because of Paul's message. Paul is eager to address the crowd, but those around him recognize that the situation is volatile and his very life is hanging in the balance. The Gospel of Christ and the words of His servant, Paul, are challenging deeply entrenched cultural, economic, and religious systems, threatening the power of local authorities and those who profit from the worship of Artemis. What began as spiritual teaching has ignited a city-wide uproar. The message of the Gospel in Ephesus is shutting down the magic industry and putting Artemis out of business.

Just as Jesus cast out demons and broke the hold of darkness wherever He went, Paul's ministry in Ephesus was marked by extraordinary miracles and intense spiritual conflict. The Gospel was dismantling strongholds. Demetrius' fears were becoming a reality. Goddesses were robbed of their thrones, idol makers went bankrupt, and evil spirits lost their influence. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "Aslan is on the move!"

So, the question for the modern church is this: What gods, spirits, and principalities are we putting out of business today? What strongholds are being dismantled as the Gospel is preached and lived out in our communities? And if this is not happening, why not?

Let's start with ourselves. What are the cultural, social, or economic systems around you that subtly or overtly oppose the Gospel?

In what ways could your personal obedience or boldness provoke discomfort or resistance in these areas?

****Reflecting on Acts 19, what does it mean for you to live in a way that puts darkness out of business? How does that shape your prayers, decisions, and daily life?**

Are there areas in your own life, in your family or in your community where spiritual compromise has been tolerated? What would it look like to confront those areas in a loving yet firm way?

"The chief danger of the church is not that it will be persecuted or hated by the world, but that it will become comfortable and self-satisfied, losing the power and awe that comes from a holy God."

John Piper

Church, the moment we look like the world, think like the world, and value the world, we lose all capacity to change it. The spiritual forces are real, and the opposition is strong. Acts 19 shows us that the Gospel confronts darkness, challenges culture, and transforms lives. Like Paul in Ephesus, God calls us to step into uncomfortable spaces, confront strongholds, and bring His light where it is most needed. The question is: Will we trust Him and move boldly, knowing that the Kingdom advances by the power of the Spirit into places desperate for a Savior? Much is at stake. *By the power of the Spirit, let's go and be that church to change the world.*

We started this week by meditating on lyrics. Let's end this week the same way. So much of our idea of worship revolves around singing and music. However, most of us do not go through our day singing to the LORD. This form of worship is largely reserved for our churches or our homes. Read the following lyrics that have been slightly adjusted and make a commitment in your heart to boldly proclaim Him from this point forward:

*All my life You have been faithful.
And all my life You have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able
I will **speak** of the goodness of God.*

On the map below, add Ephesus and Miletus, then draw a line from Corinth to Ephesus and continue to Miletus, the setting of Acts 20.



ACTS 19

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 19

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 20

WEEK 5

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

If Acts were a movie, the end of Acts 20 could be the final scene. It has all the great elements of a cinematic ending. After spending significant time with his brothers in Ephesus, Paul sings a swan song. With melancholy and purpose he gives us maybe one of the saddest scenes in the whole of Scripture. I won't give it all away—I'll just say, goodbyes are sometimes bitter and sometimes sweet. There's a time to stay, and then there's a time to go.

As soon as Paul's sight was restored, so was his purpose. He was changed forever on that road to Damascus. Through all his missionary journeys, Paul realized he was in the race of his life. Each stop on the road was just a leg of the race, and the Spirit and God's Word were all he had to light the way. The fulfillment of the Gospel is the prize at the end. As the story gets increasingly urgent, and as we dig into God's Word ourselves this week, I hope we feel that urgency, too. I hope we feel the urgency of the Gospel. The weight of it. The cost of it.

Paul did.

In previous weeks, we have asked you to read God's Word and let it marinate; let it sink in. This week, I want you to feel the urgency and weight of it, because it's actually quite heavy in this chapter. It should mean something to us that the early church was urgent about getting God's Word into the world. Feel it all as you read this week.

Now **read Acts 20**.

Thank you God that your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Psalm 119:105

May you light our paths as we read your Word today.

Read Acts 20 again to conclude your day. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Let's start our day with some self-reflection: Does the Gospel move me? Does it make me want to move? Is it "the thing" my life orbits around?

This is one of those chapters that carries weight, because it reveals the *heart* of the Gospel and the *urgency* of the mission we've been given. Paul speaks here as a man who knows his time is short, who has counted the cost, and who refuses to waste a single breath on anything less than Jesus.

As we read, try to imagine that urgency again as we did yesterday, not as pressure, but as purpose. The Gospel is not a casual thing. It is the power of God to save. It should *matter* to us. It should be *all* that matters to us. It's life and death. It's eternal. And Paul reminds us that to hold this message is to carry something holy and weighty, something worth every tear, every mile, every sacrifice.

With this in mind, step into active engagement.

1. Go through Acts 20 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 20

¹ When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. ² He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, ³ where he stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. ⁴ He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. ⁵ These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. ⁶ But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

SECTION TITLES

²² “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

SECTION TITLES

²⁵ “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the Kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

³² “Now I commit you to God and to the Word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

³⁶ When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

ACTS 20 SUMMARY

DAY 3: RUN THE RACE MARKED OUT FOR YOU

Let's review for a minute. How was Paul perceived by the people of Ephesus? (**Acts 19:28-29**)

Why do you think he stayed there for so long (**verses 10-12**)?

Acts 20:1 tells us he left Ephesus. Why do you think he left?

This is Paul's third and final missionary journey. Unlike the first two (Acts 13–19), this journey shifts focus: instead of moving outward to new regions, Paul is retracing his steps, heading back toward Jerusalem. Interestingly, it is Jesus' commission from Acts 1:9 (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth), but backwards! Paul is coming from the ends of the earth back to Jerusalem. He will eventually get to Jerusalem, but for now let's look closer at what happens right before he heads there.

When Paul and his companions arrived in Troas in **Acts 20:7-12**, what happened?

Read 1 Kings 17:21-22 and 2 Kings 4:34-35. In these stories, what similarities do you see from Paul's time in Troas?

Now **read John 11:38-44.**

What happens at the end of **Acts 20:12** and how did they feel?

They were greatly comforted. I am too. I am comforted by the fact that Jesus did it first. That we have the ultimate example of how to run our race. Paul understood this and so should we. Is this something that gives you comfort?

Last week we talked about how Paul's life was echoing the life of Jesus. These stories from the Old and New Testaments are showing the connection between God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and then eventually His church. Paul's story isn't new: the Gospel is woven into the entirety of God's beautiful story.

We are starting to see markers in Paul's journey that are familiar to his Savior's life. Paul was living amongst the people and preaching in their synagogues and then moving on to public space to bring the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus. He was threatening their way of life. Ephesus was the center of Artemis worship and there was big money in the worship of her. Things are heating up wherever Paul goes, *because the Gospel threatens comfort and paradigms.*

Paul's opposers didn't know how to refute Paul's message or the miracles he was performing along the way so they wanted to shut it down. Sometimes when things can't be explained, persecution is the next move. The Ephesians believed the gods kept them safe and temple worship was a money maker as far as their economy. The radical claim that Jesus was God over everything and that these other gods meant nothing and had no power, stirred the hornet's nest. Every time Paul spoke the Gospel, he put himself at risk; he followed his Savior's footsteps towards persecution, saving souls along the way.

What do we learn about Paul's ministry style from **Acts 20:18-21**? Three practices stick out here. Fill in the blanks on the next page.

- ♦ I _____ the Lord with great humility.
- ♦ I have not hesitated to _____ anything that would be helpful to you.
- ♦ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in _____ and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

How does Paul describe his future **(Acts 20:22-23)**?

What does this reveal about his view of suffering **(verse 24)**?

We know who wins. Not only did Jesus win by losing, but He showed us how to run our races: by losing. Losing what? Our lives. That's right folks, that's what we have to be willing to lose for the Gospel. It is urgent for us in the same way it was for Paul. When you have been truly transformed by the Gospel, this makes sense.

Where was Paul's destination at this time **(Acts 20:16a)**? _____

When did he want to get there **(verse 16b)**? _____

Paul was going back to where it all started. Where the Holy Spirit had first ignited the church and its movement throughout the world.

Does Paul's direction towards a hostile Jerusalem remind you of anyone else that walked into that same hostile city?

Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem with rejoicing but it would soon turn dark as the religious leaders became hostile and plotted to kill him. **(Mark 11:18)**

And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the Gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 20:22-24 (NASB)

In “*every city*” they went to, and in Acts 20 they went to many, Paul was informed of his awaiting fate in Jerusalem. Paul acknowledges here that these messages were from the Holy Spirit. So he *knew* affliction and chains were in store for him; yet the only thing important to him was finishing his own course and the mission he received from Christ. **I want to be that courageous and focused** on what Jesus is *telling me* to do; that even the knowledge of coming affliction would not keep me from it.

I sometimes think about how my approach to something changes depending on whether I know the outcome or not. Like childbirth, the first time, I didn’t really know what I was getting into. The second and third times? I knew what was coming, and it was even harder to face!

Paul’s response in Acts 20:24 is amazing. He moves forward with courage *knowing* the affliction that awaits him.

Following in the footsteps of Paul and Jesus, knowing affliction awaits, is hard! Maybe think of an example in your own life. How did knowing what was coming, tempt you to shrink back? How could **Philippians 1:21-26** help you stand with courage?

I long for Paul’s conviction and courage. He follows here in the footsteps of his Rabbi, who had set His face like flint to Jerusalem, knowing what awaited Him.

Paul is following in the footsteps of Jesus: walking into persecution, establishing churches as Christ established His Church, strengthening leaders as Jesus had poured into His disciples, and preparing those leaders for ministry even without his presence just as Jesus did. And like Paul would later reflect in 2 Timothy 4:7, he is running the race set before him, fighting the good fight, finishing the course, and keeping the faith, while staying fully focused on the eternal prize.

Consider the footsteps you're following. Jesus paved the way for Paul and for us, with bold sacrificial love. Paul stepped forward with courage, even in the face of hardship.

Where do you see your own race today?

What is God asking you to face with courage, even when the outcome is uncertain, or hardship is inevitable? Take a few moments to reflect and lay it before the Lord; your fears, uncertainties, hardships, and hopes. Does it give you comfort to know your Savior went before you and so did the early church? Thank God for these footsteps of Jesus and Paul to follow. Thank Him for the example of running faithfully despite the cost.

Conclude today by writing a prayer of response. Consider some or all of the questions above. Ask God to give you clarity when it comes to who to follow and where to go.

DAY 4: RUNNING IN PLACE

In any race, there are pit stops—places we need to recover and let our bodies rest. Paul had some significant pit stops. God was working in the racing but he was also working in the staying. As you will see at the end of Acts 20, there are times when we have to make our tearful exits. But the tears mean the relationships we made during the “staying” were meaningful and significant. They weren’t for nothing. The community along the way was an active outcome of faithful presence and perseverance in one place. The staying in close proximity bred discipleship relationships.

Let’s revisit Acts 20:18-21.

Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of how he “lived among them the whole time.” What does this teach us about the importance of staying and being present in discipleship?

****In verse 19**, Paul describes serving “with humility and tears and with trials.” How does this picture challenge common ideas about what a “successful” life of following Christ looks like?

Have you had a season in life or ministry that came with tears and trials? Describe that time:

What has “staying” looked like in your own life? Share a time you “stayed” and what your relationships looked like while you “stayed”.

Where, in your own life, might God be calling you to stay faithfully, even if it’s difficult?

The most powerful instance of "staying" is Jesus on the cross. He just stayed there. He did not have to. He could have called 10,000 angels to come to His rescue. But He didn't. He stayed. What a powerful thought that He stayed for you and for me. His successful ministry required tears, humiliation and desperate moments of agony, but that is how much He loves us.

Read Hebrews 12:2.

We can become like Him.

How does Jesus staying faithful on the cross, in a single place, reveal God’s character and reflect His mission?

This reminds me of one of our goals when we began writing this study. It was just to be with Jesus. Sometimes we have to just BE. We have to be in relationships, be present, be still, be quiet, be mindful, be ready. Just stay. Just be. That is sometimes the direction we get from the Lord, even if we are looking for a “what’s next”. He sometimes tells us to wait. Remember Acts 1:4-5?

On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 1:4-5

We have talked in this study a lot about waiting. However, sometimes, the “waiting” or the “staying” isn’t just sitting around doing nothing. It’s the idea of running in place—cultivating relationships right where you are. It’s doing what the Lord asks of you in your everyday life, with the people He puts in front of you.

I am struck by the moment Paul brings the man back to life in verse 10. He threw himself on the man and wrapped his arms around Him. Ministry often requires this type of closeness. In my individualistic mindset, when someone is experiencing something difficult, it is easy for me to pray for them from afar, offer encouragement, or give advice without actually entering into their pain. However, when Eutychus fell, Paul did not wait for someone else to step in. He assumed his responsibility and pressed in close, bringing comfort and faith in a moment of crisis.

God often shows His power through our willingness to be close. We must be willing to embody compassion, to sit in the mess, and hold onto someone who feels lifeless, praying for God’s resurrection power to move. Paul’s closeness became the channel for God’s miracle. *Relationship* over *convenience* and *compassion* over *comfort*.

What might be some reasons you stay at a distance when people around you are hurting?

- ☐ I do not know what to do or say.
- ☐ I do not want to get stuck in something that is going to take too much time.
- ☐ I think there is someone who will be better at stepping in.
- ☐ I experience others’ struggles deeply so it would be draining.

What does true closeness require you to sacrifice?

Can you think of someone who came close to you in a hard season?

How did that impact you?

Is there someone in your life right now that you need to take a step towards in closeness and compassion? Who is it and what step is the Spirit leading you to take?

What emotions are present in the farewell scene (**Acts 20:36-38**)? What does this tell us about Paul's relationships?

Instead of being a “waiting and doing nothing” season, we see how fruitful it was for Paul and those around him to stay, draw close and just be together. This closing scene shows the deep intimacy between brothers and sisters in Christ, grieving over their last moments together. Yesterday, we talked about Paul's courage—but how much courage did he gain from his close friends? How supported, uplifted, and encouraged was he, knowing what lay ahead?

The next time God calls you to run in place, or to wait, or to stay; ask Him to show you where you can draw close to others. Praise Him for knowing when a pit stop is necessary, for the growth it produces, and for the faithful companions He places along the way. Let these moments remind you that even running in place, your race is being shaped for His glory.

DAY 5: GO! RUN FOR THE PRIZE.

Read Acts 20:22-27.

When my husband and I were dating, we lived in separate states, and being young and in love this would make for some pretty dramatic goodbyes. We felt like we might die waiting to see each other again and sometimes didn't know when that would be. (Sigh, to be young again.) Life is weird this way. We know sometimes God is calling us out to something unknown. We move on to the next thing, but at times, that comes with a cost. Saying goodbyes to people, cities, and homes we love.

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian leaders models a life of surrender beautifully. His parting words show the weight of shepherding; guarding, teaching, and caring for people as if they were his own family. A faithful life in Christ means pouring yourself out for others, and trusting God to finish what He started as we follow Him to another open door.

The Spirit invites me to love people so deeply that goodbyes are painful, and yet to still trust God with them when He calls me onward.

Why does saying goodbye in the body of Christ feel so painful? Can that pain actually be a sign of faithful love?

How is God calling you to live with open hands in your relationships? How can you give freely of yourself even if it doesn't turn out how you'd hoped?

We see all of this through Acts 20; a call to closeness even knowing that we may have to let go someday.

What is harder for you? Drawing close or letting go?

If both are hard for you, could it be that drawing close feels risky because letting go hurts? How might Paul's example reshape the way you view both?

Paul is "sold out" for Jesus, willing to travel from town to town, often enduring hardship to share the good news of the Gospel. His heart is compassionate, desiring that all are given an opportunity to experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life with his Savior. Paul considers his life worth nothing as he seeks to finish the race and complete the task the Lord gave him (Acts 20:24). Paul presents the Gospel and exhorts the believers to be "shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood." (Acts 20:28). Paul sets an example, encourages and commissions others to finish the work (Acts 20:32-28).

I think the fulcrum of Acts 20 is this line: “finish my course”. *There is no sacrifice that is too big of Him to ask because He gave me everything.* My life has no value other than this: what is precious to me is Jesus and to “finish my course”.

Reflect on this: Are you running for the prize? Are you running for the Gospel?

- ☐ Yes, I live intentionally each day for the sake of Christ and His mission.
- ☐ Sometimes, but I get distracted by personal goals or worldly concerns.
- ☐ Not really, I focus mostly on comfort, routine, or personal success.
- ☐ I’m unsure and still figuring out what it means to run for the Gospel.

Saul had to be knocked down and blinded before he finally recognized who he should be running toward and running for. His race didn’t begin well and maybe yours hasn’t started well either, or maybe you haven’t always known which direction to go. What matters most isn’t how we start, but how we finish the race.

My friend was telling me at the beginning of this study she was struggling with the concept of “being” Eden, bringing God’s Kingdom on earth when she is still reeling from and struggling with her own brokenness. She said “I couldn’t answer the question about bringing His Kingdom here now because I don’t feel like Eden is here in my life, so how do I bring it to the world?”

Be aware of your own weaknesses, stuff will come at you! You will feel this way at times too. But give yourself grace. Jesus gives that to you freely.

This same friend is someone who is doing more for God’s Kingdom than most people I know. She cares for her neighbors and is a mentor to a young single mom. She is bringing Eden to earth...but at times I see her being attacked spiritually. When you are actually spreading the Gospel, be on guard because there will be things around every corner; or like Paul there may be times you may have to avoid some places or there may also be times to go right into them boldly.

In light of Paul’s farewell to the elders in **Acts 20:17-38**, let’s read some other significant farewells.

Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8 and Joshua 23:1-8.

Finally, **read John 13:12-17 and John 14:25-31.**

Paul’s farewell speech mirrors Moses’ and Joshua’s farewell speeches, in which a leader gives a final charge to his people; warning, instructing, and passing on leadership.

Paul's farewell also mirrors Christ's final moments with His disciples, preparing them for a future without His physical presence, warning them, and encouraging them to remain faithful. (If you have some time, it would be valuable to read all of **John 13-17** for more of Jesus' final moments with the disciples.)

Jesus' words invite us to pause and examine our own race and what the ending could look like. **Reread Acts 20:24.**

Do you consider your life worth nothing to you? Or is your race towards the Gospel worth more to you than anything?

Where might God be asking you to *go*, whether across the street or across the world, for the sake of the Gospel?

What fears or comforts might you need to surrender in order to go where the Spirit leads?

These are not easy questions to answer. I assume some of them were as hard for you as they were for me. Remember that in every race, there are bumps along the way, but Paul is reminding the believers not to give up. And I will say the same thing to you, don't give up! Keep going! You got this! Even when it's hard, even when it's scary, even when it's sweet. Keep running for the prize.

Let's look at Paul's final moments with the Ephesian elders one more time:

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

Acts 20:36-38

As we reflect on Paul and the early church, I would like to imagine they are cheering us on in our race. I mean it says they are in the Hebrews! They are in that "great cloud of witnesses."

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2

End today with a list of your own "cloud of witnesses". Thank God for the people He put in your path, on your race, that have encouraged you. Perhaps you will never see some of their faces on earth again.

Who is in your "cloud of witnesses"?

As you reflect on their names, imagine the moment when your race is done, when you have breathed your last, and you start to hear a faint cheer from heaven that gets louder and louder as the finish line comes into view. Imagine them lining the course as you approach the end. When you have nothing left to give, their voices give you enough strength to make it to the ribbon, where the Pioneer and Perfecter of your faith waits for you.

ACTS 20

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 20

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 21:1-32

WEEK 6

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Another week to explore the Word of God together! You've come this far which means you are not slouches concerning Scripture, any more than the Bereans were.

Before we read our passage, let's take a minute to think on this phenomenon of studying the Word of God together. In the book of Acts, we are reading words penned by eyewitnesses of a time when God came to Earth. Paul, one of those eyewitnesses, says in Romans 15:4, *"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

The only Scripture they had at that time was what we know as the Old Testament. The beautiful irony is not lost on us: those wet-ink words Paul wrote regarding the Old Testament are now dry-ink words that have become the New Testament. Today, believers receive a double blessing: we receive perseverance and encouragement from both the Old and the New Testaments...resulting in hope.

Thank you, Lord, for the treasure of the Old, and the treasure of the New!

Read Acts 21:1-32 (NASB). Sip some coffee or tea. Then **read it once more.**

(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

This week in Acts 21:1-32, we will walk alongside Paul and his companions as they make their way to Jerusalem. On the way, Paul will hear the same message that started up in Acts 20, when Paul first chose to go to Jerusalem—a message that has grown stronger through repetition, and has gained an ominous tone the closer Paul gets. As this chapter goes on, we'll learn why.

We'll also observe the humility, courage, discernment, and unity of the early church, despite differing perspectives; we'll refresh ourselves on what it means to count the cost; and we'll watch Paul model a walk of obedience that will revive vision for our own.

Andrew Abernethy wrote a book called *Savoring Scripture; A Six-Step Guide to Studying the Bible*. Based on his methodology for Bible study, the curriculum team puts together these lessons on the book of Acts.

When I began to study the Bible with the method of reading a passage for “First Impression”, and then breaking it down into sections for “Active Engagement” (what Abernethy calls “Flow”) I confess I didn’t want to do what felt like legwork; all I wanted was to go straight for the deep dive! But this method has shown me the value of set-up and structure: it is the very *framework* for the deep dive. Think of it as the diving board. If you dive off the edge of a pool, you won’t get far from the edge. Launch out from a diving board, however, and you’ll go farther and deeper. A bit of legwork is worth it!

Thanks Andrew! High five! Jimmy John’s on us, next time you’re in town.

1. Go through Acts 21:1-32 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you’ve made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES	ACTS 21:1-32
<hr/>	<p>¹ After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ² We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³ After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. ⁶ After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.</p>
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<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	<p>⁷ We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸ Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.</p>
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SECTION TITLES

²⁶ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

²⁷ When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

ACTS 21:1-32 SUMMARY

DAY 3: GLORIFYING GOD, AND COUNTING THE COST

We've familiarized ourselves with Acts 21:1-32, and by doing so, we've constructed the diving board. Now we're ready for that deeper dive.

Read Acts 21:1-14.

Paul gets the message from every city he hits that suffering is in store for him at his object destination, Jerusalem. Every city! Many places, many messages! **On the map below, add Jerusalem and the islands Paul visited on his sea voyage. Then draw a line tracing his route from Miletus to Jerusalem, including all city and island stops.**



Let's look at another person to whom God prophesies about his future.

Read John 21:15-18.

Now, write out John 21:19.

DEEPER DIVE

'Nero'

Nero became emperor at just 16 years old in A.D. 54. Adopted by Emperor Claudius, he even married Claudius's daughter, Octavia.

At first, guided by his mother, he showed promise and ruled reasonably well.

But by A.D. 59, he spiraled into tyranny, marked by cruelty, reckless extravagance, and even the murder of his own mother.

After the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64, he blamed Christians for the disaster and unleashed brutal persecution, throwing believers to wild animals in the arena and burning them as human torches.

Peter not only gets marching orders about shepherding God's people, he finds out that suffering is in store for him, too. He will live three more decades, anticipating the death that Jesus alluded to. The book of Acts was written around 50 AD, when the Roman Empire was under **Nero's** rule. Church tradition records that Peter suffered martyrdom under **Nero** between 64 and 68 AD. At Peter's request, he was crucified upside down.

Why do you think Peter requested this?

Long before his death, Peter knew what it meant to suffer for Christ. Read what he penned about suffering in **1 Peter 4:12-15**.

Now write out 1 Peter 4:16.

Here is something Peter held tight to: his death would glorify God, as Jesus promised it would, and any suffering he endured in the name of Jesus until then would also glorify God.

Paul also understood this. He knew his suffering, imprisonment, chains, and beatings would ultimately glorify God. Did that factor into counting the cost to follow the One who knocked him off his donkey? Did it give him dogged boldness to keep pressing

on for Jerusalem, *knowing* what was ahead? That God would be glorified in whatever befell him?

Obedience to God's divine plan doesn't always mean comfort or safety. Sometimes following God leads to hardship rather than away from it. Praise God that His plan is bigger than our comfort.

God be glorified.

As my grandson would say, "What does that even *mean*?"

Let's look at two things. First, what it means that Peter's death would glorify God. Second, what **glorify** means.

Sometimes I need to look a word in the eye to refresh meaning.

Peter and Paul knew that the hardship they would endure as Christ followers would cause God to be viewed by many as more splendid or excellent; that God would be made greater in the eyes of the people around them.

We are always being watched: by family, neighbors, co-workers, friends, strangers. What if, by how we live our lives when we encounter suffering, there is produced in those watching us a far better, far more accurate idea of who God really is? What if, by what they see in us, God's name, which may have been grubby or tarnished to them before, is now wiped clean, and polished, and new? What if it is glorified, because of you?

Name one area of your life where others might be "watching" how you respond.

Describe a time when someone else's faithfulness through hardship impacted your view of God.

WORD FOCUS

'Glorify'

1. to treat as more splendid or excellent than would normally be considered.

2. To honor, extol, or worship.

Read Galatians 1:22-24 (NASB).

I've always found that last verse to be deeply poignant. *They were glorifying God because of me.* I don't think those words were penned without tears. The marvel Paul must have felt! From *persecutor* of the Church to *part* of the Church! What God had done in Paul, all because Paul had given God his yes, resulted in others seeing God as more splendid or excellent than they had before. God was glorified because of Paul.

How do we live in such a way that God will be glorified?

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:25 (NASB)

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Jude 1:24-25 (NASB)

COUNT THE COST

Whoa, wait. There's a cost to following Jesus? What cost? Didn't Jesus pay the cost?

He sure did. He paid the cost of our redemption, our restoration to God. Yet there is another cost to be paid, and that, from our own pocket.

Read Matthew 16:24.

List the three things Jesus tells His disciples:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Read and write out Acts 21:13.

That little phrase, “I am ready” is powerful. Paul was ready. Are we?

Lord! Make me ready to obey even when it costs me. Lord! Make me ready to surrender my plans when yours look different. Lord! Make me ready to live with courage, not fear, and trust that you will be with me no matter what comes.

Paul knew what was coming. He was ready *because* he had counted the cost of following Jesus. He lived his life with hands ready at any moment to reach into his pocket and pay the cost at every turn.

What do we have in *our* pockets?

When Jesus calls His followers to “count the cost”, what does that mean in your life personally?

How can you prepare yourself to pay the cost?

In the early '90s, this bumper sticker could be seen around West Michigan: Good = God. Bad = Devil.

******Why are we so sure that suffering comes from the enemy or being outside of God's will? Why do we, when we discern something to be difficult, assume this is not God's plan? Write some thoughts here:

Read Philippians 1:29.

May the Lord open our hearts to know that to suffer anything for Jesus is a privilege.

Oh, Lord Jesus! May your name be regarded as more splendid and excellent because we walked through this life. Be glorified in us and through us. Amen.

*In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified;
In my life, Lord, be glorified today.
In my song, Lord, be glorified, be glorified;
In my song, Lord, be glorified today.
In Your church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified;
In Your church, Lord, be glorified today.*

Bob Kilpatrick

DAY 4: THE GREAT FALLBACK

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

1 John 5:14-15 (NASB)

What a powerful passage! God "hears us in whatever we ask"? And if we know that, then we'll have what we ask of Him? How come we don't pray a heck of a lot more then?

It may have to do with what comes before it: “If we ask anything *according to His will...*” Sometimes we don’t know what to ask. Sometimes we are confident that we are praying according to God’s will, other times we don’t have a *clue* how to pray. We generally know what *we* want, and have strong opinions of how we think God should answer. But we wonder if we are praying according to *His* will: the lynchpin upon which prayers are answered. We often feel like we must figure out what that will is before we can pray properly.

Have I got some fabulous news for you. It’s worth a happy dance.

Today we will talk about something in our faith walk that is just too good to be true. It is a prayer that we can pray any time we wish, and *no matter what*, we know we’ve prayed rightly.

Read Matthew 6:10. Write it out below.

Your will be done. These four words are tattooable. They are the great fallback when we just don’t know what to pray; when we feel overwhelmed, when we can’t see what’s ahead. They can unburden shoulders. Adjust eyesight. Lift hearts.

And they can preserve unity.

Paul gets the message in every city he goes to that bad things are ahead for him in Jerusalem. He was warned repeatedly. Boiled down, it came to: “Paul, don’t go.”

Have you done this, by the way? Have you ever warned someone about something, and they took a different track than the one you advised? When you were sure that this message to them came from the Lord? *Oh, how tempting it is to assume that others are not walking in the Spirit if they do not heed our advice.*

It might even be tempting to *judge* other believers when they don’t listen to us. Instead, what if we did as they did in Acts 21? What if we walk, not in pride toward those who have not taken our godly advice, but in humility, and trust, and love?

Read Acts 21:5.

What’s this? They’re kneeling on the beach and praying together, including the families? An amazing act of unity, despite differing opinions on Paul’s course? No one took their ball and bat and went home. No one said, “You don’t see it my way? Fine. Clearly you’re not hearing from God. I’m outta here.” Instead, they knelt, they prayed, *they sought God together in the middle of differing opinions.* If this doesn’t capture the heart of God for His Church, I’m not sure what does.

Read Acts 21:13-14.

What are the two ways Paul's companions responded?

Paul's companions stopped arguing with him. They not only stopped arguing, but it's as if they poured onto Paul's head and heart an incomparable blessing with their verbal conclusion: "The will of the Lord be done." Unity was thus preserved and conferred. It was as if they said, "Look, Paul. We don't agree with you going to Jerusalem. God is telling us you're heading into suffering. But we respect what you're saying from your heart. We don't know what to *do* with it, but we love you, and we love God most of all. So...in the middle of this uncertainty, we say, the will of the Lord be done. That way we put you and your future in God's hands where we know there is no better place to be."

Take some time to sit with these questions:

- ♦ Do I have this type of community? Why or why not?
- ♦ Am I this type of community member?
- ♦ Do I lean into creating this type of community for others?
- ♦ Do I accept this gift of community from others?

The love of the believers for Paul did not diminish. Their belief in his calling did not diminish. They couldn't see how this was going to work out, they loved Paul, and didn't want things to go south for him; but they believed in Paul and trusted in God *more than they valued being right*.

Heart check: What do I offer to my community? Do I put a higher value on being right than trusting God's will?

COURAGE AND DISCERNMENT

Paul's example in Acts 21 is a challenge to embrace *both* courage and discernment.

We all pretty much have a handle on what courage is. Here's a favorite quote from Winston Churchill: "Courage is rightly considered the foremost of the virtues, for upon it, all others depend."

But what is discernment?

Look up a definition and write it here:

Wise counsel from other believers is invaluable. It helps us to weigh our choices and see perspectives we might miss. This is the gift of community!

Yet sometimes, as Paul shows, obedience to God's call must take precedence over heartfelt advice or our own fears. I wonder if at times, Paul was tempted to take their advice and not go to Jerusalem. That seems like the easier choice. Ultimately Paul follows only Jesus and listens to His voice above all else. His courage and discernment went hand in hand as he walked in the Spirit.

True faith listens carefully, prays earnestly, and then steps forward with confidence, trusting that God's will is perfect, even when it leads us into uncertainty, difficulty, or sacrifice.

Jesus understands what it is to wrestle with our own will and that of others. Our *ultimate* example of "the Lord's will be done" came from Jesus. God the Son trusted God the Father when God the Son didn't want to do what God the Father had in mind. *The battle for our souls was finished on Calvary, but it was won in Gethsemane.*

Read Luke 22:41-42.

Jesus knew what was ahead of Him. In His humanity He recoiled from the suffering. Yet though it overwhelmed Him, he put "take this cup from me" between *two* prayers of submission: "Father, *if you are willing*, take this cup from me; *yet not my will, but yours be done.*"

Paul knew what was ahead of him. His friends were not wrong. It is likely that Paul took the warnings seriously, and though he did not allow his path to shift, he took the time before arriving in Jerusalem to strengthen himself for what was ahead.

******What are some ways that you think Paul strengthened himself? What are some things you think he told himself?

Paul was a lifelong student of Scripture. He surely would have called to mind many passages to bolster courage. He probably meditated on them, sang them, prayed them, spoke them to his companions, and spoke them to his own heart. Think on some verses you would have looked up, had you been in his sandals, and record three of them here.

1.

2.

3.

Let's end today with one of the Songs of Ascent that may have been on Paul's lips, on that long ago, historic path to Jerusalem.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edges of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever.

Psalm 133 (NASB)

DAY 5: FIXED ON THE END GAME

Acts 21 marks a major shift. Before, Paul's mission is evangelistic and apostolic, planting churches and preaching to Jews and Gentiles across the Roman Empire. After, his purpose shifts from church planting to testifying under arrest, showing that God's call continues even through chains. His mission becomes **apologetic** and pastoral as he defends the faith in trials and writes epistles from prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon).

Paul's skill as an apologist might be best seen in his letter to the Galatians. We've already seen him in action a few chapters back, with his address to the Athenians. Wherever Paul is at, and in whatever circumstance, he is ready to proclaim, teach, and defend the Gospel. Soon after arriving in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested and put into chains. A new circumstance, just what many had prophesied.

Before his arrest, he first visits James and the elders.

Read Acts 21:17-26.

Isn't it interesting? A few verses back, Paul listens to the counsel and warnings of his fellow believers, but doesn't take their advised course of action; here, he does. He listens to James and the others when they encourage him to blend in with the Jewish community. In verse 24, they instruct him to purify himself.

WORD FOCUS

'Apologetics'

Biblical apologetics is the reasoned, evidence-based defense of the Christian faith. It explains, argues for and supports the core truths of Christianity and the reliability of Scripture. Its goal is to strengthen believers, persuade unbelievers, and clearly communicate the Gospel. The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek apologia, meaning a "defense" or "reasoned reply."

The MacArthur Study Bible Commentary:
*“Purify himself—having just returned from an extended stay in Gentile lands, Paul was considered ceremonially unclean. He therefore needed to undergo ritual purification before participating (as their sponsor) in the ceremony marking the end of the four men’s vows. Pay their expenses—[he would do so] for the temple ceremony in which the four would shave their heads, and the sacrifices associated with the **Nazarite vow**. Paying those expenses for another was considered an act of piety, and by so doing, Paul would give further proof that he had not forsaken his Jewish heritage.”*

The NLT Illustrated Study Bible: *“The Jerusalem church leaders urged Paul to strengthen his credibility by demonstrating that he was not teaching Jews to turn their backs on the laws of Moses.”*

The advice Paul heard from the leaders sat right with him. His agreement with their thinking would show up later in what he taught.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:20-23.

Sit with that passage for a moment. Now write your own commentary on it.

DEEPER DIVE

'The Nazarite Vow'

This is the second time in the latter half of Acts that we see Paul taking a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1–21). Paul continues to observe this Old Testament practice, demonstrating that his fully formed faith in Christ is not opposed to the Old Testament. Although no one was ever required to take the Nazirite vow, it was available to anyone who desired a season of intentional distinction. The vow was not performed for God, but rather undertaken by the individual as a practical means of reminding themselves to abstain from things that could diminish their distinctiveness. In this way, it is similar to a believer today choosing to fast from something in order to remove distractions and deepen their walk with Christ.

Read Acts 21:27-32.

And there it is. Paul now encounters the fulfillment of the prophecies given to him in every city before he reached Jerusalem. In verse 32, he is being beaten. A peek at next week's lead verse says that Paul is bound with two chains. I wonder if he stepped into this with a mix of, "Yep, they told me so" and "Okay, Jesus! I'm ready!" *Paul shows us that obedience to Jesus isn't about clinging to comfort: it's about clinging to Christ.*

God's faithfulness isn't proven by keeping us out of hardship but by being unshakably with us in the middle of it.

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the Word of God without fear.

Philippians 1:12-14 (NASB)

According to this passage, what things happened because of Paul's circumstances?

FIXED

You know what? Paul endured those things because he had his eyes fixed, *fixed*, mind you, on the future. Paul lived and believed the things he wrote. His eyes were fixed on Jesus. His eyes were on the End Game.

Fixed :

1. *Securely placed or fastened; stationary.*
2. *Predetermined and not subject to or able to be changed.*

This past year, my family and friends said goodbye to my mother, and to a dear friend. Both were physically suffering. Both passed from this world to the next with their eyes on Jesus. Those were two of the hardest losses we've endured. We're still enduring. We will, until heaven. Pain presses hard at times. It gets bearable when *I fix my mind* on where they are. It gets bearable when *I fix my mind* on their joy and their comfort. It gets bearable when I fix on this, that I know I will see them again, I know I'll get to spend eternity never saying another goodbye to them. To anyone.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

I Corinthians 15:58 (NASB)

*Every little thing's gonna be alright
Tears of joy is all I'll cry
Every little thing's gonna be alright
On the other side of exile.*

David Crowder

END GAME

Fiction writers have different methods for writing books. One favored way is to know the end of the story before writing it. That way the entire novel is written with the end in mind, helping the writer to shape choices when the *middle* of the story is unclear. A clear view of the ending helps the writer to press through the mess and muddle of endless plot choices. At the end of *The Return of the King*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, Sam pauses in the middle of the despair and confusion of getting to Mordor. He looks up, looks around, sees the mountain, and declares, "We're going *that* way."

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

What three things does this passage tell us to do?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Read Hebrews 4:14-16.

What three things does this passage tell us to do?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, fellow believer! Let us hold fast our confession! Let us entrust our souls to Him, stay in constant communication with Him, stroll with Him in everyday fellowship, and race for Him when trouble comes our way.

We wrap up this week with Paul and the early church in profound gratitude for the examples they set of unity, humility, courage, and discernment. We also feel profoundly sober when we stack our modern Christian walks against theirs. If unity, humility, courage, and discernment were the hallmarks of the early church that changed the world, then the opposite could hold true. Individualism, pride, comfort, and folly will be the marks of a church that will struggle to make any lasting impact. It is a sobering thought.

****Reflect:** How do you think your own walk stacks up against the first century church?

Lord, help us to turn away from our distorted patterns and ideas of what church should be. Help us to recognize and embrace the model you have set before us. Help us to value unity to the degree that we pray for it and make way for it. And when the cost of following You seems high, help us to fix our eyes on two things: that our pain is not in vain, and that you have an incredible future waiting for us, on the other side of this exile. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

ACTS 21:1-32

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 21:1-32

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 21:33-23:35

WEEK 7

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you will answer me. “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!”

Then Job answered the Lord: “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more.”

Job 38:1-5a, 40:3-5

Have we forgotten how big Jesus is? Have we placed Him neatly on a shelf, in an ornate frame, a spectator of our daily lives?

Let us not forget *who we approach*. He is not a mere mortal, He is Creator and Savior. We do not come before His throne lightly. We do not open His Word casually.

Human wisdom cannot comprehend His Truth, but humble hearts can receive it.

Throughout writing this week the Lord continued to place a vivid picture in my mind from the animated retelling of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. There is a scene when the character Christian is carrying his burdens on his back trudging on towards the celestial city but then he sees the cross ahead of him, at the top of an unimaginable hill. He begins to run towards it. This is how we should approach the Author, our Author and His words, by running. Eager for what He has for us. The beautiful celtic version of *Be Thou My Vision* begins to crescendo as Christian reaches the top of Salvation Hill and he is released from all of his burdens. The scene moves me to tears every single time. I will be including verses from this stunning hymn throughout our week to encourage us to remain in a place of worship and awe, but, for today, let’s start with verse one.

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought by day and by night;
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
Be Thou My Vision (verse 1)*

Remove your shoes, dear brothers and sisters, for the ground you approach is *holy*.

Lay aside your pride, your knowledge, your worries, your fears. Come barefoot in spirit, humble and hungry.

Ask the Lord of all creation to open your eyes and ears to what He longs to teach you this week.

*Lord, we pray for holy curiosity. We pray the text will stir our hearts and our minds. Give us time and space to string pearls, to notice details long familiar and details newly revealed. Let us wrestle with Your Word, refusing to let go until you have blessed us.
Amen.*

Open His Word and **read Acts 21:33-Acts 23.** (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Yesterday, we removed our shoes in reverence. Today we step back into the story, walking the road with Paul not just to understand it, but with the Spirit's guidance and wisdom, to experience it.

*Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father, I Thy dear child;
Thou in me dwelling, with Thee reconciled.
Be Thou My Vision (verse 2)*

Acts 21:33 through Acts 23 is a hefty stretch of Scripture and as I was reading it, I couldn't help but think of a classic Disney exchange:

Belle: *Well, it's my favorite. Far off places, daring sword fights, magic spells, a prince in disguise.*

Bookseller: *If you like it all that much, it's yours.*

Belle: *But sir...*

Bookseller: *I insist.*

Belle: *Well, thank you. Thank you very much.*

In our text this week alone there are riots, imprisonment, threatened floggings, trials, Truth, insults, courage and testimonies.

The Bible is like this. It's exciting, contagious even! It draws us in, placing us on the edge of our seats. And God gleefully says to us, "If you like it all that much, it's yours!" His response is not to force us to engage with Him, it is an invitation! This beautiful

book is ours for the taking; its wisdom is ours to grasp and treasure. *Thank you Lord, thank you very much.*

Today, we'll read through our passage again, this time with *fresh eyes!* Eyes to see what world-transforming stories might leap from its pages. Once again, ask God to *be your wisdom, to be your true Word.* Tell Him you don't want to miss a single iota.

Paul is on a journey and God is inviting us to join Him.

1. Go through Acts 21:33-Acts 23 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. **Jot down in the margin** at least one moment that stirs your heart or surprises you. What quality of God do you see revealed in that moment?
3. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
4. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

ACTS 21:33-40

³³ The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. ³⁸ "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

³⁹ Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

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⁴⁰ After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

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¹ "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

² When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶ "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

⁸ "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

" 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are

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persecuting,' he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

" 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴ "Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

¹⁷ "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Quick!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.'

¹⁹ "'Lord,' I replied, 'these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr[a] Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

²¹ "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out

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why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

²⁷ The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

²⁸ Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

²⁹ Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

³⁰ The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

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¹ Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." ² At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

⁴ Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"

⁵ Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.' "

⁶ Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." ⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

⁹ There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" ¹⁰ The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

¹² The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³ More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have taken a solemn

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oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

¹⁶ But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸ So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

¹⁹ The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

²⁰ He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹ Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.”

²² The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

²³ Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen[b] to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”

²⁵ He wrote a letter as follows:

²⁶ Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸ I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹ I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰ When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

³¹ So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. ³² The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. ³³ When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ³⁴ The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

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ACTS 23 SUMMARY

DAY 3: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Are you beginning to notice a pattern with our early church leaders? Prison seems to be a new home base for them. This week is no different—Paul is arrested again! But upon his arrest we see the Holy Spirit courage our apostles prayed for, in Acts 4:23-31, being carried out in Paul. He doesn't reach for a sword to battle back his persecutors, instead, he boldly asks the Roman Commander if he can speak to the crowd who wants him dead.

*Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tow'r;
Raise Thou me Heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.
Be Thou My Vision (verse 3)*

Fill in the blanks below from **2 Corinthians 10:3-6**.

For though we live in the _____, we do not wage war as the
_____ does. The _____ we fight with are not the _____
of the _____. On the contrary, they have _____ power to
_____ strongholds. We _____ arguments and every pretension
that sets itself up _____ the knowledge of _____, and we take
_____ every thought to make it _____ to _____. And we will
be ready to _____ every act of _____, once _____
obedience is _____.

Before we dig into what Paul says to this volatile crowd, let's remind ourselves where he came from, where he is and why it matters.

Last week we found Paul back in Jerusalem, moving in reverse of Jesus' original commissioning in Acts 1:8. Jesus said the Gospel would move from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Paul, however, has traveled from the ends of the earth back to Jerusalem. He is being drawn back into Jerusalem, only to be sent out again on his final journey to Rome. But this sending will be unlike anything we've seen before.

Read Acts 21:37-22:5 and let's find out what happens.

What language does the commander ask if Paul can speak **(verse 37)?**

How does Paul describe himself **(verse 39)?**

In what language did Paul speak to the people **(verse 40)**?

What was the response of the crowd **(verse 2)**?

The crowd that was furious moments ago is now silent. Why? Let's look at who Paul was before this point. This will help us understand why Paul was the right person for this moment. God had been preparing him long before Acts 21.

When speaking to the crowds in **Acts 22:3-5**, how does Paul introduce himself?

Let's break this down:

- ♦ **Studied under Gamaliel:** Gamaliel was one of the most respected rabbis of the time. This means Paul wasn't just Jewish, he was formally trained in Scripture, tradition, and legal interpretation at the highest level.
- ♦ **Trained in the Law:** Paul didn't just know the law; he lived it. He could debate it, defend it, and use it.
- ♦ **Zealous:** Paul wasn't passively religious. He says, "I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death...arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison." Paul had already done everything these people were trying to do:
 1. He **hunted** Christians.
 2. He **imprisoned** Christians.
 3. He was there and **took pleasure** in the stoning of Stephen. (Acts 7:58-8:1)

This is not a neutral man God is using, this is a man whose past is defined by religious zeal, legal training, and deep conviction.

God didn't erase that history. He redeemed it.

Now add the other side of Paul's identity: not just Jewish and educated, but also Roman.

Define citizen:

Roman citizens enjoyed privileges that others did not:

- ◇ They could not be beaten or flogged without trial.
- ◇ They had the right to appeal to Caesar.
- ◇ Their property and life were legally protected under Roman law.
- ◇ They carried a status that demanded respect, even from soldiers and governors.

Roman citizenship wasn't just a social advantage, *it was a tool for the Gospel*. It gave Paul access to travel freely and protected across the empire. It also allowed him to appeal his case to Caesar, which brought him to Rome. The way God ordained Paul's Roman citizenship symbolized the broader reach of the Gospel. It was not limited to Jews, but open to all, even those within the Roman system.

Why does this matter? Paul used everything God had orchestrated and woven into his life, both past and present.

- ◇ Paul speaks Greek to the Roman commander.
- ◇ Then he switches to Hebrew (or Aramaic) to speak to the Jewish crowd.

DEEPER DIVE

'Roman Citizenship'

Paths to Citizenship:

- ◇ Birth: inherited through citizen fathers (Paul, Acts of the Apostles 22:28).
- ◇ Manumission: freed slaves could sometimes receive it.
- ◇ Imperial Grant/Reward: given for service or favor.
- ◇ Purchase: some paid large sums (like the commander in Acts 22:28).

Legal Protection:

- ◇ Exemption from degrading punishment without trial.
- ◇ Right to a formal trial and appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11).
- ◇ Protection from arbitrary arrest (Acts 22:25–29).
- ◇ Due process guaranteed under Roman law.

Social Privilege:

- ◇ Greater respect and legal standing.
- ◇ Right to own property, make contracts, and legally marry.
- ◇ Freedom of travel and often tax advantages.
- ◇ Most of the empire lacked these privileges.

- ♦ He identifies himself as a Jew **and** a Roman citizen.
- ♦ He quotes Scripture like a trained Pharisee.
- ♦ He stands in his legal rights as a Roman citizen, avoids flogging and begins his journey to Rome.

So what happens when someone is both a Jewish Pharisee and Roman citizen?

You get Paul, a man whose past, present and future has been written and redeemed.

None of his pedigree or experiences were used for self-importance or self-promotion. No one else thus far in the early church has had this combination. Paul's background is not accidental. His language, education, heritage, and citizenship give him access to both worlds, Jewish and Roman.

God didn't just save Paul.

God didn't just call Paul.

God prepared Paul. *For such a time as this...*

For such a time as this: a common phrase that is often used as a call to action. Both Paul and Esther's lives remind us that God's hand is at work behind the scenes, weaving every detail for His Kingdom.

*When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. **And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?**"*

Esther 4:12-14

How about you? Just like Paul, not a single detail of your life was accidental or overlooked when God wrote your calling into being.

Where were you born? _____

How might God use that to advance His Kingdom?

What language(s) do you speak? _____

How might God use that to advance His Kingdom?

What is your nationality, your heritage? _____

How might God use that to advance His Kingdom?

What was your course of study? What is your vocation? _____

How might God use that to advance His Kingdom?

What are you passionate about? _____

How might God use that to advance His Kingdom?

What in the world today breaks your heart? _____

Spend some time writing what God has brought to your mind in your answers above and all the ways He might advance His Kingdom through *your* story!

Let me just speak this over you... “For such a time as this...”

These characteristics of who you are, your likes, dislikes, address, and language, were handpicked, ordained even. When these are surrendered to God’s will, people listen. And when they are used for His purposes, His glory shines all the brighter.

Close the day in prayer:

- ♦ **Adore** Him and praise Him, the One who created you uniquely for His purpose.
- ♦ **Confess** where fear, sloth, or defiance may have robbed you of using your gifts and talents to honor Him.
- ♦ **Thank** Him for His forgiveness, His sacrifice, and His infinite wisdom: knowing that you have been born for such a time as this!
- ♦ And finally, **Ask** Him for another day to dig in, with boldness, courage, and joy, to try again.

DAY 4: PROTECTED ON EVERY SIDE

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

2 Corinthians 4:8-11

Paul is being moved from one life-threatening situation to another. Yet at every turn, God is quietly and powerfully moving behind the scenes through Roman law, Jewish identity, military force, and divine promise.

Read Acts 21:30-31, 35. What was the goal of the crowd? Were they successful?

God used the authority of the Roman Empire to place Paul under military protection.

******Where have you seen God's hand protecting or guiding you in ways you didn't expect, through people or institutions you didn't expect?

Read Acts 22:22-28. What was the goal of the crowd? Were they successful?

God uses something as ordinary as Paul's birthplace and position to keep him alive.

Where have you seen God use your story, your background, experiences, or skills to protect or position you for His purposes?

Read Acts 23:1-5. What happened to Paul? _____

Even in the hot seat of religious hostility, God doesn't allow the situation to go unchecked.

Paul responds to injustice with both boldness (calling it out) and humility (correcting himself when he realizes who the high priest is). How might your own response look different or similar in these moments? Check all that apply.

- ☐ I tend to act quickly and defensively.
- ☐ I withdraw or stay silent.
- ☐ I stand firm, but can lack humility.
- ☐ I try to be respectful, but I wrestle internally with anger or hurt.
- ☐ I respond prayerfully and with humility.

Read Acts 23:10. What was the fear of the commander?

God uses even the fears of others to accomplish His protection.

God can work through people who may not believe in Him. Where have you seen His hand move through unexpected allies?

Read Acts 23:12. What was the plan? _____

Their secret plot would be overheard by Paul's nephew (Acts 23:16), exposing it and prompting an armed escort of 470 soldiers (Acts 23:23–24).

****Where have you seen God's hand shielding or redirecting your path when things could have gone very differently?**

Remember the story of Saul's conversion? Blinded and led by the hand to a place where he waited for the Lord to send him instructions? The Lord sent Ananias to pronounce a holy yet daunting calling over Paul.

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Acts 9:15-16

Plot after plot of evil is being unleashed against God's chosen instrument. When we look at Paul's life, we have to ask ourselves: is this life of trial and hardship the one we pictured when we said yes to Jesus?

****If the passages we just went through, that recounted the persecutions of Paul, were the only description of what it means to follow Jesus, would you still say yes?**

Honestly, that would be a difficult yes. Thankfully, that's not the whole story.

****Following Jesus is costly but it is not hopeless. What helps you say “yes” to God even when the cost feels high?**

Write out Acts 23:11.

The Lord Himself speaks directly to Paul, reminding him that the mission will not end in Jerusalem. God not only protects Paul through human means, He also gives Paul divine assurance that His plan will prevail.

God doesn’t always remove us from hardship, but He surrounds us with His protection through people, places, and promises. Paul is living proof that suffering and God’s holy protection and care can coexist.

God has promises sprinkled all throughout Scripture, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. They are promises that we can hold fast to when trials come and when protection is given.

*Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art.
Be Thou My Vision (verse 4)*

Here are some of God’s promises you can hold onto as you say yes to a life filled with ups (joy, clarity, and blessing) and downs (suffering, uncertainty, and pain).

PROTECTION: HIS WORDS NEVER FAIL	TRIALS: WHEN HOPE FEELS DISTANT
Deuteronomy 31:8	Joshua 1:9
Psalms 138:8	Psalms 34:15
Isaiah 40:31	Psalms 46:1-2
Zephaniah 3:17	Romans 8:28
James 1:17	Philippians 1:6

Highlight a verse or two that speaks most deeply to you in your current season. How might clinging to this promise reshape the way you walk through what you're facing right now?

As you wrap up the day, ask God to open a door for you to encourage someone with this promise, letting your story be the way they see His goodness.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

DAY 5: REDEMPTION REWROTE YOUR NAME

We saw Jesus walk His disciples through history, from the Old Testament to the present. (Luke 24:13-35)

We saw Peter and John walk the Sanhedrin through history, from the Old Testament to the present. (Acts 3)

We saw Stephen walk the Sanhedrin through history, from the Old Testament to the present. (Acts 7)

It can be intimidating to watch our spiritual forefathers trace the story of the world with, seemingly, flawless courage and accuracy. Each of them told the story of redemption through their own lens, all pointing to the same Savior. Now, Paul takes his turn, reminding us we don't always need to reach all the way back to the beginning of time for the hammer to fall.

We're invited to look closely at how our stories join the same redemptive line.

But first, read **Acts 22:3-21** and give a brief synopsis of Paul's life.

Paul deviated slightly from the teaching path of the apostles; instead of recounting all of history, he simply returned to the beginning of *his* story.

If you are *in* Christ, **you have a story**. You may not have the history of the world memorized, but you do have your story memorized. *When we are exposed, redeemed, and restored by Jesus, it's not something we quickly forget.*

If someone were to ask about your story, if you were the one standing in front of a rioting crowd, where would you begin? Before or after your repentance? Before or after your transformation?

Paul's life was decaying on the vine, the very vine he thought he was so deeply connected to and still he lays it all bare. Paul tells where he came from, who he studied under, but then he willingly dives into the shin-high cow pies of his past, proclaiming in front of his judge and jury: YES, I AM GUILTY! Not the usual path taken when we are standing in the courtroom.

Can you imagine?

Part One: Where Your Story Began.

"Hi, my name is Ashlea. I'm a Christian, born and bred in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I studied under... wait, who am I kidding? I didn't study, whoops moving on. Raised in an amazing Christian home, fell in love while enrolled (not studying) in college, marriage then babies."

Part Two: The Ick.

"I lied, flirted, hid, blasphemed, fabricated, and sought the praise of man above God. Sin on full display."

Part Three: Redemption.

"I met Jesus. He called my name, and I ran out of that grave."

Thank goodness our stories and Paul's story doesn't stay in the thick of sin and shame.

There *is* a time to trace Scripture from creation to the present, doing your homework, digging in, wrestling, but there is also a time to simply share *your* story. The story of how *you* met Jesus. The story of where *Jesus* met you. The story of where you were when grace collided with your sin and redemption rewrote your name.

Following Paul's footsteps, write a brief synopsis of your story:

Part One: Where Your Story Began

Part Two: The Ick

Part Three: Redemption

If your story were the only glimpse of God someone ever saw, would it make them want to know Him?

When the Lord opens the doors for us to share who He is, what He has done, and where He is leading...are people getting a vivid picture? Are they getting a full picture of the holy God we encountered in Acts 5, alongside the gracious God who sent His only Son to die the horrific death for our insurmountable sin?

Lord, thank you that my story is held in your hands and woven into your redemption plan. Give me courage to share every part of it, the good, the bad, and the ugly, so others can see your grace more clearly!

When Paul recounts his walk he doesn't hesitate around the hard parts, he moves straight through them. He sees joy and pain as intertwined, both bringing about God's redemptive story in his life.

When we share our story, it should be the same. We tell the good and the bad under the light yoke of freedom! We know who wins. We share our stories from *victory*, not defeat.

*High King of Heaven, my victory won,
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'ns Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.
Be Thou My Vision (verse 5)*

Pick two or more of the following verses to write out. Record them here, and then place them somewhere in your home, your car or even your cubicle. These truths anchor our confidence: reminders that our freedom is secured, our story redeemed, and our identity rewritten.

Romans 8:1-2

2 Corinthians 3:17

Galatians 5:1

Colossians 1:13-14

Paul's story was enough.

Paul's story was enough because it wasn't actually about him at all.

It was all about Jesus.

Our story is enough.

Our story is enough because it isn't actually about us at all.

It is all about Jesus.

******How does remembering your story is really about Jesus change the way you share it with others?

What part of your story most clearly shows God's grace? How might He use that to encourage someone else?

Paul's arrest becomes his assignment, his suffering becomes his sermon, and his testimony becomes the vessel of God's glory and Kingdom expansion.

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Revelation 12:11

So much courage is given by the Spirit. So much courage is prayed for by the early church in Acts. So much courage is shown in the telling of testimonies on the threat of death.

This is the pattern of the Gospel: God turns the world's hatred into assignments and callings for His people to courageously go out. He turns the world's persecution, "the blood of the martyrs" into "the seed of the church" (Tertullian). And finally, God turns the testimony of those hated and persecuted believers into the unquenchable wild fire spreading from head to heart, Jew to Gentile, nation to nation.

Proving what Paul's former teacher, Gamaliel, prophetically spoke to the Sanhedrin:

*Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. **But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.***

Acts 5:38-39

This is what we were made for! We were made to be the hands and feet of Jesus *not shrinking from death* (Hebrews 10:35-38), but proclaiming boldly everything we have seen and heard all because Redemption not only *rewrote* our names, but has also called us by name.

To close our week I want you to sit with Isaiah 43, filled with all the promises and the vastness of our Jesus.

But now, this is what the Lord says—He who created you, Jacob, He who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of their gods foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, “It is true.” “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am He. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”

Isaiah 43:1-13

ACTS 21:33-23:35

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 21:33-22:24

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 22:25-23:35

SERMON NOTES

PHILIPPIANS

WEEK 8

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Last week we ended with Acts 23. Paul's citizenship helps him escape the punishment of flogging, but the threat of persecution does not end there. Paul's presence will still cause much consternation as his message confronts the world. Ultimately the climax of Paul's story will take place in Rome. At the very end of Acts he will be bound in chains and held under house arrest for two years.

From a worldly perspective, it would seem like the Gospel's boldest herald has been silenced, cut off, restrained. But because of Paul's Roman citizenship, even his imprisonment could not stop the work of the Gospel. He was still able to write letters to fellow believers, encouraging them from afar, even while in chains.

The book of Acts is a narrative that tells the story of the apostles, the early church, and the spread of the Gospel through faithful men like Paul. While his life unfolds in Acts, Paul is simultaneously writing letters to the early Christian churches. These letters give us another perspective, addressing the challenges the early church faced, instructing believers in how to live faithfully, and encouraging the growing movement God was igniting.

At the time Paul wrote Philippians, Emperor Nero was throwing Christians to the lions for sport. Following Jesus could cost you everything: your safety, your freedom, even your life. In this fear and chaos, Paul desperately wants the believers to know their joy is fulfilled in Christ, not their present circumstances. To the Philippians, he pens the following:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

This week we are pausing our journey through Acts to step into one of Paul's prison letters, the book of Philippians. Over the next five days, we will explore the joy, faith, and encouragement he shared while under house arrest.

In seasons of fear, pressure, and uncertainty, God has always given His people what they need to endure. In the wilderness He gave manna: mercies for the morning, sustenance for the day. In the early church He gave His Word through the apostles, strengthening believers moment by moment. Philippians was one of those gifts—daily bread for a suffering people.

With Nero at the helm, imagine the fear and uncertainty these early Christians faced every day. Step into their sandals. Now imagine receiving a letter like this from Paul...

Read Philippians 1-4.

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PHILIPPIANS 1

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi,
together with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all
my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because
of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until
now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good
work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of
Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you,
since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains
or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share
in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for
all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound
more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so
that you may be able to discern what is best and may be
pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the
fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—
to the glory and praise of God.

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,
that what has happened to me has actually served to
advance the Gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear
throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone
else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my
chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become
confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim
the Gospel without fear.

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and
rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out
of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of

SECTION TITLES

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the Gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

PHILIPPIANS 2

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each

SECTION TITLES

of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always
obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more
in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with
fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to
will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing,
¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure,
“children of God without fault in a warped and crooked
generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars
in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And
then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did
not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured
out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service
coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of
you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you
soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news
about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show
genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks
out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²
But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because
as a son with his father he has served with me in the
work of the Gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him
as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am

confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

PHILIPPIANS 3

¹ Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in[i] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

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[illegible]

SECTION TITLES

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

PHILIPPIANS 4

¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

SECTION TITLES

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DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION - PHILIPPIANS 1

The Acts study has been an invitation to read Scripture with confidence, clarity, and curiosity. This week in Philippians, we continue that same journey but with a twist. We will actively engage each chapter of Philippians one day at a time with a few reflection questions at the end of each day. We hope you enjoy this break from routine that is meant to engage your heart in a new way.

At first, this might seem uncomfortable. Some of us will embrace this freedom and some of us will miss the structure. But this is your opportunity to step into your own personal Holy of Holies with your Savior. Take advantage of sitting with Him. It is ok to ask questions and be curious. It is also ok to not have all of the answers. It is ok to wrestle. His story gives us full permission—be like Jacob, be like the Bereans.

Let's start with Philippians 1.

1. Go through Philippians 1 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another.
Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

PHILIPPIANS 1 SUMMARY

4. **Let's take our active reading a step further** by using colors to highlight key insights. Feel free to do all four or just pick a couple:

- ♦ **Blue:** Underline anything you learn about God, His character or how He works.
- ♦ **Orange:** Underline anything God asks of His followers.
- ♦ **Red:** Underline anything you feel God is calling you to pray about and/or pursue in your life.
- ♦ **Green:** Underline the promises of God.

If you slowed down to linger on one verse, which would it be? Write it out. Consider memorizing it.

What in this chapter is surprising or confusing? What raises questions for you? Embrace your holy curiosity; wrestle well.

What does this chapter reveal about who God is and what is important to Him? Consider His character, heart, and ways – who He is, what He loves, and what He does.

What promises do you see in this chapter? Is there one you need to hang on to? Is there one God is speaking directly over you?

Based on what you underlined in red, how is God asking you to grow? What is He asking you to pursue or pray about? Consider repentance.

There is a phrase that runs throughout the story of God: *"Eyes to see and ears to hear."* As Jesus said in Matthew 13:16-17, *"But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

As you close out your day, let your time in Philippians 1 be about seeing. What has God given you eyes to notice today? What has He revealed about His character, His faithfulness, or His work in your life? Where has He stirred your heart or drawn your attention? See clearly, gratefully receive it as manna today and again tomorrow, and let your soul respond. Pause, reflect, and rest in what He has shown you.

DAY 3: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION - PHILIPPIANS 2

Now you've got one day of active engagement and freestyling under your belt. Sharp turns are never easy for the soul. They take practice. Practice again today.

1. Go through Philippians 2 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another.
Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.

3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

PHILIPPIANS 2 SUMMARY

4. **Let's take our active reading a step further** by using colors to highlight key insights. Feel free to do all four or just pick a couple:

- ♦ **Blue:** Underline anything you learn about God, His character or how He works.
- ♦ **Orange:** Underline anything God asks of His followers.
- ♦ **Red:** Underline anything you feel God is calling you to pray about and/or pursue in your life.
- ♦ **Green:** Underline the promises of God.

If you slowed down to linger on one verse, which one was it? Write it out. Consider memorizing it.

What in this chapter is surprising or confusing? What raises questions for you?
Embrace your holy curiosity; wrestle well.

What does this chapter reveal about who God is and what is important to Him?
Consider His character, heart, and ways – who He is, what He loves, and what He
does.

What promises do you see in this chapter? Is there one you need to hang on to? Is
there one God is speaking directly over you?

Based on what you underlined in red, how is God asking you to grow? What is He
asking you to pursue or pray about? Consider repentance.

As you've spent time lingering in Philippians 2, you may have noticed how much this
chapter calls us to continual posture, continual humility, continual obedience, and
continual looking to Christ. Philippians doesn't describe a one-time act but a *daily*
way of life. And Scripture often uses the image of daily bread to help us understand
our ongoing need for God.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need...The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed...However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell...The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

Exodus 16:16a,17-18,20a,35

"They ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan", until they reached the *Promised Land*. The Lord had graciously given instructions to the Israelites: take enough for today. Their *need* returned every single day. They had to put in the work to collect manna daily, except on the Sabbath, when they were sustained by God's provision from the day before.

In the same way, we cannot live on God's Word once a week. And truly, we can't even live on it only once daily. Christ is the Bread of Life (John 6:35), our sustenance. We don't eat physical food only once a day; we require nourishment throughout the day. So why would we need Jesus and His Word any less?

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:4 (NASB)

We will need His nourishment moment by moment, every day, until we reach the *Promised Land*.

Philippians 2 invites us into this same rhythm, *holding firmly to the Word of Life (Phil. 2:16.)*: returning to Christ again and again, receiving His humility, His strength, His mind, and His life as our daily bread.

As you end your day, let Philippians 2 continue to sharpen your sight. What has God shown you about Himself or His work in you? Receive it as today's manna, enough for today, and new again tomorrow.

DAY 4: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION - PHILIPPIANS 3

Welcome to day 4 and Philippians 3. Press on!

1. Go through Philippians 3 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another.
Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

PHILIPPIANS 3 SUMMARY

4. **Let's take our active reading a step further** by using colors to highlight key insights. Feel free to do all four or just pick a couple:
 - ♦ **Blue:** Underline anything you learn about God, His character or how He works.
 - ♦ **Orange:** Underline anything God asks of His followers.
 - ♦ **Red:** Underline anything you feel God is calling you to pray about and/or pursue in your life.
 - ♦ **Green:** Underline the promises of God.

If you slowed down to linger on one verse, which one was it? Write it out. Consider memorizing it.

What in this chapter is surprising or confusing? What raises questions for you? Embrace your holy curiosity; wrestle well.

What does this chapter reveal about who God is and what is important to Him? Consider His character, heart, and ways – who He is, what He loves, and what He does.

What promises do you see in this chapter? Is there one you need to hang on to? Is there one God is speaking directly over you?

Based on what you underlined in red, how is God asking you to grow? What is He asking you to pursue or pray about? Consider repentance.

In Philippians 3, you've seen Paul's call to press on, to leave behind what hinders and to reach forward for what truly matters: **Christ**. This isn't a one-time decision; it's a *daily* pursuit, a faithfully mundane journey forward toward the prize God has prepared.

Like the Israelites gathering manna, we are given what we need for each step along the way. God doesn't hand us the whole journey at once; just as He didn't hand the Israelites the entire route to Canaan, He simply and graciously gives us enough for today. Each moment of pressing on, each choice to let go, each act of obedience is nourishment for the road ahead, preparing us for what's next.

As you close your time in Philippians 3, ask: *What is God calling you to leave behind so you can press forward? What step toward Christ can you take today?*

Receive it as today's manna, fuel for this day's journey, sustaining you as you move steadily toward the prize.

DAY 5: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION - PHILIPPIANS 4

Soon we will be back in the familiar territory of the book of Acts. Savor the last words of Paul to the people of Philippi.

1. Go through Philippians 4 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another.
Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

PHILIPPIANS 4 SUMMARY

4. **Let's take our active reading a step further** by using colors to highlight key insights. Feel free to do all four or just pick a couple:

- ♦ **Blue:** Underline anything you learn about God, His character or how He works.
- ♦ **Orange:** Underline anything God asks of His followers.
- ♦ **Red:** Underline anything you feel God is calling you to pray about and/or pursue in your life.
- ♦ **Green:** Underline the promises of God.

If you slowed down to linger on one verse, which one was it? Write it out. Consider memorizing it.

What in this chapter is surprising or confusing? What raises questions for you?
Embrace your holy curiosity; wrestle well.

What does this chapter reveal about who God is and what is important to Him?
Consider His character, heart, and ways – who He is, what He loves, and what He
does.

What promises do you see in this chapter? Is there one you need to hang on to? Is
there one God is speaking directly over you?

Based on what you underlined in red, how is God asking you to grow? What is He
asking you to pursue or pray about? Consider repentance.

Philippians has been and will continue to be God's Word to us, our *manna*, our food from heaven. This week as we've taken a pause from Acts, we have invited you to slowly digest Philippians as exactly that: *nourishment* sent by God.

When it comes to physical food, it's recommended to chew each bite 20–30 times depending on its texture: harder foods require more chewing, softer foods less. The goal is simple, break it down so your body can take it in. The same is true of God's Word. As the body of Christ, we have been chewing, savoring, and digesting Scripture together through our Bible study, the sermon series, and the podcast. We are taking our time with the tougher passages and gladly receiving the softer ones.

This is the pattern God has always used to feed His people:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 8:3

As we finish these five days in Philippians, may we continue to return to this heavenly food, trusting that God will keep nourishing us—bite by bite—into the likeness of Christ, and equipping us for the continuation of our journey through Acts.

PHILIPPIANS

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 24 & 25 WEEK 9

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

On trial! *Insert Law & Order musical theme* (you know the one). There has been much build-up to this case. The countless moves it took to position Paul for this moment reveal a master-level strategy that only the One True King could design.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Isaiah 55:8-11

God is always positioning us for His greater plan. It seems that Paul knew this and drew his steadfastness from Scripture such as this passage in Isaiah. As we study these two chapters, may we be encouraged to remain faithful in our own seasons of trial, *confident* that God's timing is perfect and His truth always prevails.

Before you begin reading, take a moment. Don't just open the Bible like you're cracking open an old case file, instead open it like you are entering a courtroom where the Judge is also your Defender. The Judge is your Father and the Judge is also your Redeemer. We do not approach His Word to gather evidence or win arguments. We open His Word to listen, learn, and be transformed. Therefore, we do not want to treat His Word casually. Slow down. Read each sentence as if you may be called to the stand. Let your curiosity lead, not criticism. Invite wonder, expect conviction.

Remember, His Word is not on trial. Instead, you are lovingly being examined by it.

Our confidence, like Paul's, is not built on our own defense, but on our Defender.

Read Acts 24 and 25, and then read them again.

(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The Word of God is alive, active and constantly proving itself true.

Take Acts 23:11, for example, when the Lord told Paul: *“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”*

I think we can all agree, after having read through these chapters, that is exactly what happens next. The Lord made His plan clear to Paul, and He carried it through in *His* perfect timing. How amazing is that? How truly blessed we are to witness God’s promises unfolding as we read Paul’s powerful testimony. Let’s also be encouraged by the truth of the rest of Isaiah 55:

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.

Isaiah 55:12-13

Friends, the Lord knows what was, what is, and what is to come. He has a plan for you and for me. Our brother in Christ, Paul, lived out this assurance and we have the joy of studying his faith journey. Let’s do just that.

1. Go through Acts 24 and 25 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another.
Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you’ve made.
3. **Create a summary of Acts 24 and 25** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 24

¹ Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. ² When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a

SECTION TITLES

²² Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." ²³ He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

²⁴ Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." ²⁶ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷ When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

ACTS 24 SUMMARY

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 25

¹ Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, ² where the chief priests and the Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. ³ They requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. ⁴ Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. ⁵ Let some of your leaders come with me, and if the man has

done anything wrong, they can press charges against him there."

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, Festus went down to Caesarea. The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him.

⁷ When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar."

9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

10 Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well.

11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

13 A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. **14** Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. **15** When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

16 “I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. **17** When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. **18** When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. **19** Instead, they

SECTION TITLES

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SECTION TITLES

had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. ²⁰ I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. ²¹ But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."

²² Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself."

He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

²³ The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴ Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. ²⁷ For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him."

ACTS 25 SUMMARY

DAY 3: FAITH ON TRIAL

Have you ever been misunderstood or falsely accused, even when you were trying to do the right thing?

Paul knew that feeling well. In Acts 24, he stands in a Roman courtroom, not because he broke the law, but because of his faithfulness and obedience to Christ. His life and message disrupted the powerful, religious, and the self-satisfied alike.

Even while confined in chains, Paul's testimony is a picture of what life looks like when faith stands trial—and wins, grounded in the truth of Christ.

Recall a time where you or someone dear to you were falsely accused or misunderstood. How did you respond? What did that moment reveal about your trust in God?

Read Acts 24:1-27.

Let's set the stage: It's around AD 57-59. Emperor Nero rules Rome, an empire that prized power and prestige yet was corroded by greed and injustice. In Caesarea Maritima, the glittering coastal capital of Judea built by Herod the Great, Paul stands before Governor Antonius Felix, a man infamous for cruelty and corruption. Beside him sits Drusilla, his Jewish wife and daughter of Herod Agrippa I.

Read verses 10-16 again.

Paul's defense is calm, clear, and truthful. He does not shudder at false accusations or lash out in anger. This isn't Paul's first rodeo and won't be his last. His conscience remains clear before God and man. His words remind us that integrity is not proven in peace; it is proven under pressure.

What does Paul's composure and integrity teach us about responding to slander or misunderstanding without losing faith or dignity? How might the situation that you wrote about in the last question look different if viewed through a Spirit-led lens?

Read verses 17-21.

Isn't it amazing how Paul is able to defend himself truthfully, without compromise or bitterness? The Lord knows my initial response isn't always that gracious. However, it should be. Paul shows us what it means to live through, and *only through*, the Holy Spirit.

Write out Galatians 5:25.

We are encouraged as believers to live a life guided by the Holy Spirit, aligning our actions and thoughts with the Spirit's will rather than our own desires or selfish motives. I can only fathom what Paul's flesh was screaming in these moments. I feel angry for him! But still, he chose to live by the Spirit and respond accordingly. What a gift for us to witness through Paul's testimony that when we keep in step with the Spirit, even unjust trials become opportunities for testimony. I pray that our hearts will walk more closely with the Spirit every day, so that we will also have the opportunity for our testimony to be used.

Read Acts 24:22-27.

Felix was familiar with "The Way", yet he lived nothing like it. He represented the moral decay of Roman society. Here in Caesarea, Paul's integrity collides with Felix's immorality. Truth meets corruption head-on.

Paul doesn't water down his message for political gain. He preaches *righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment*, words that pierce Felix's conscience.

When Paul identifies as a "follower of The Way," he's saying his faith isn't just a belief system, it's a way of life.

Consider yesterday: What is one way you lived your daily life so distinctly that others recognized Christ through you?

Now, consider tomorrow: What is one area where you could grow to live even more distinctly as a follower of Christ? Where is there an opportunity in your daily life to invite Jesus in?

Focusing on **verses 24-27** we can see the contrast of Paul's calm confidence with Felix's fear and corruption. We see two very different heart responses to truth. Maybe you even pointed it out with or without realizing it in your section titles on day two. Felix trembles at Paul's message but refuses to change. Trembling is not transformation.

Let's explore why.

Look up and write down the definitions of these two words:

Conviction: _____

Repentance: _____

What are the differences between conviction and repentance?

Which one do you think more aligns with Felix's response? Why?

How does Paul's calm confidence contrast Felix's fear and corruption?

What does that teach us about trusting God when facing unjust systems?

******If you closely examine your own heart and life, are there any places where you might be sensing conviction but still resisting true repentance and change?

Paul's faithfulness wasn't defined by his freedom—it was refined by his limitations.

He wasn't free, but he was fruitful.

We often assume God works best when everything goes right, but for Paul, it happened when everything seemed to be going wrong. He had limitations completely out of his control.

Could it be that your current limitations are the exact circumstances God intends to use for His glory?

Write out Isaiah 54:16-17.

"No weapon formed against you will prevail"

Isaiah 54:17a

As we close out our day, take some time to pause and reflect.

What might God be forming in you during your own season of waiting, when justice or clarity feels delayed?

Lord, give me Paul's courage to live as a follower of the Way: steady, truthful, and faithful even when life feels unfair. Teach me to trust your timing when answers don't come quickly. Let my faith be my witness, even in waiting. Amen.

DAY 4: POLITICS AND PROVIDENCE

Political corruption. Power games. Manipulation.

Acts 25 feels like it could have been ripped from today's headlines, and yet, God works through it all. Paul's story reminds us that even when the system seems stacked against us, *the sovereignty of God remains unshaken*.

Read Acts 25:1-12.

After two long years of imprisonment under Felix, Paul's case is handed over to Porcius Festus, the new Roman governor. Festus inherits a political nightmare—unrest among the Jews, fragile peace in Judea, and an unresolved case involving Paul.

The Jewish leaders immediately pressure Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem, secretly plotting to ambush and kill him on the way. But Festus, trying to balance justice with diplomacy, hesitates. Paul, sensing danger, makes a bold move:

"I appeal to Caesar!"

This single statement changes everything. Paul's appeal to Caesar means more imprisonment and greater risk, but it also means God's mission moves forward. The Gospel is headed for the heart of the Roman Empire. What looked like political chaos was actually divine choreography.

How does Paul's response show the balance between trusting God's sovereignty and using human wisdom?

When have you faced a situation where practical wisdom and supernatural faith had to work hand in hand?

When Paul appealed to Caesar, he invoked his right to have his case heard by the emperor himself. He knew his privileges as a Roman citizen and used them with purpose: a decision that would fulfill God's promise to Paul that he would testify in Rome (Acts 23:11).

Paul's legal knowledge and spiritual discernment worked together. His wisdom was guided by his faith. The wisdom he followed didn't lead him to comfort or even freedom, but to his calling.

How might your privileges (education, freedom, voice, influence) be leveraged for God's mission rather than personal comfort?

In what ways might God be calling you to courageously step forward, not to escape hardship, but to embrace His will through it?

It can feel heavy to think about walking willingly into difficulty. It does for me. What a weighty calling, right?

BUT GOD. BUT JESUS. BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT.

If we just sat in the weight of our hardships, we would totally miss out on the gifts of the triune God we serve! The One who bears it with us, comforts us in it, and strengthens us through it. Remember, when Jesus went through His mighty suffering, He did it *for* us. And now, we *get* to share in His sufferings. We *get* to carry that weight for Him and for His glory!

Refer to **Romans 5:3-5 (NASB)** and fill in the blanks:

“And not only this, but we also celebrate in our _____, knowing that tribulation brings about _____; and perseverance, proven _____; and proven character, _____; and hope does not disappoint, because the _____ of _____ has been poured out within our hearts through the _____ who was given to us.”

This Scripture describes Jesus in His suffering, Paul in his suffering, and us in our suffering, when we abide in the Holy Spirit as they did.

Do you see any of these fruitful provisions—perseverance, character, hope—being produced in Paul so far in Acts 24 and 25? What about Felix? Festus?

Let’s look closer. Use the verses below to identify three characteristics of “fruits” for each man:

FELIX: Acts 24:22-27

FESTUS: Acts 25: 4-6, 9, 12

PAUL: Acts 24: 10-21 and Acts 25: 8, 10-11

What differences do you notice between these leaders' motivations and Paul's?
Which kind of "fruit" do you want to see growing in your own life?

While these two rulers debated politics and lived to please themselves and provoked fear with empty power and *Paul proclaimed resurrection power in Jesus Christ and lived without fear.*

In the world's eyes, they had rulers like Felix and Festus to worship and please.

In the world's eyes, Paul was just a prisoner; a prisoner causing them a hefty amount of issues and inconveniences.

In the Lord's eyes, however, these rulers were powerless and he was using them (unbeknownst to them!) to set the stage for the Gospel to reach another circle of influence.

In the Lord's eyes, Paul was His ambassador, and He rejoiced to give him a future in His Kingdom. His success and reward was far beyond what these two "leaders" would ever experience.

How do these examples of Felix, Festus and Paul challenge the way you define success in leaders or even in yourself?

******How do you tend to measure success? Explain.

Paul's story challenges us to see divine purpose in the political process. The Gospel does not depend on human fairness, smooth leadership, or ideal timing—it transcends it! Every trial, every transfer, every legal hearing was moving Paul one step closer to Rome, and one step deeper into the center of God's will.

We are going to look at a familiar passage of Scripture and let's consider the bigger picture. **Read and write down Jeremiah 29:11-14 below.** Let's not just stop at verse 11, as most of us have memorized. God's people were removed from the comfort of the Promised Land and put into the foreign city of Babylon. He did not leave them there alone, though. The promise of Jeremiah 29 is that He is always with them, even in their exile in Babylon.

"I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Jeremiah 29:14b

When your plans feel stuck or delayed, remember: God's providence is still in motion.

He wastes nothing, not even bureaucracy.

End today by reflecting on any inner struggle you may feel toward a leader in your life. This could be: president, governor, boss, small group leader, parent, etc. This isn't meant to stir frustration but to invite honest reflection, just as Paul wrestled with authority while remaining faithful to God's call. Using his example, write out a prayer shaped by Romans 3:3-5—one that resists the enemy's pull toward resentment or distrust and instead rests in the truth that God reigns over every leader, every circumstance, and every outcome. He will deliver us.

DAY 5: WITNESS BEFORE KINGS

Where do we find Paul now?

After his appeal to Caesar, Governor Festus finds himself uncertain how to present Paul's case to the emperor. When King Agrippa II and Bernice visit Caesarea, Festus seizes the opportunity to seek their counsel about this perplexing prisoner.

So, again I ask, where do we find Paul?

At a fascinating intersection of political power, religious controversy, and divine purpose.

At the hinge between legal appeals and his bold Gospel witness before Agrippa. At the threshold where God opens palace doors for the Gospel to be proclaimed before kings and governors.

Read Acts 25:13-27.

The stage is now set for one of the most remarkable moments in Scripture.

Paul, the prisoner, stands before Festus, King Agrippa II, and Bernice—a scene of Roman splendor and political power.

Yet in God's eyes, the man wearing chains is the one with *true* authority.

Go back and **read Acts 9:15-16.**

God's promise is unfolding: Paul will bear His name before kings.

King Agrippa II, the great-grandson of Herod the Great, was known for political savvy and moral compromise. His sister Bernice accompanied him and their relationship scandalized the region. Together, they represent worldly power, privilege, and pride.

In Acts 25:18-19, what does Festus hint at admitting?

The man is confused. Even Festus recognizes that this isn't about politics; it's about resurrection.

Mic drop moment? Maybe! Was Festus more interested in Jesus than we realized?

Is there someone like Paul within your life who provokes similar curiosity about Jesus? What is it about them, the way they present their life? The way they speak?

Is it possible that God was working on the hearts of Festus, King Agrippa II, and even Bernice? Absolutely! Even with Paul sidelined and imprisoned, God was still working and moving in the halls of power, stirring the hearts of people, *even* imperfect leaders and rulers. He was preparing them to hear His message.

******What does it reveal about God's character that He would use an unjust trial and unjust people to spread the Gospel?

Where have you seen Him do the same in your own story?

Looking at Acts 24 and 25 as a whole, who and what is it all really about? Sure we are reading about these leaders and rulers, but they are just pawns in the greater story.

This is Paul’s testimony; his testimony that he is gladly presenting to kings. *His testimony is God’s triumph.*

Read and write out Revelation 12:11.

Paul was quite literally living out this verse. He was living out his testimony and sharing it unapologetically.

What was his testimony? The blood of the lamb. The resurrected Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit being poured out through him. Everyone present had the opportunity to learn truth about the Lord. We see the attributes of God in every action and word that Paul lives out.

Let’s dive into this more deeply. Using the chart below, comb through Acts 24 and 25, using Scripture and the testimony of Paul to reveal the attributes of our Lord.

GOD’S ATTRIBUTE		SHOWN IN ACTS 24-25	WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT GOD
Faithfulness		Paul’s promise to reach Rome still stands	God never forgets His word
Sovereignty			
Justice			
Patience			
Presence			
Providence			

****Which of these attributes speaks most personally to you right now?**

How might remembering this truth strengthen your trust in seasons of confusing circumstances, waiting, or uncertainty?

What a mighty, loving, strong, and just God we serve! This is the very same God that Paul served. I imagine that as Paul reflected on his circumstances, likely many times, he became deeply aware of the lack of godliness and true justice around him. Yet he never lost sight of who his God was. He knew that the justice of the God he served was far greater and more powerful than any human forms of justice or injustice he witnessed on earth.

So he continued on in his witness before the worldly kings, knowing his witness was truly for *The One True King*.

******How can we cultivate Paul's eternal perspective: seeing every setting, no matter how intimidating, as an opportunity for witness?

What might it look like for you to speak truth to power—humbly, courageously, and with hope?

Every circumstance of your life even the difficult, the delayed, or the confusing, can become a platform for the Gospel.

What if your current “chains”, the job you don’t love, the illness you can’t shake, the delay you didn’t choose, are actually part of God’s plan to place you exactly where your witness will shine most brightly?

*God's people are never out of position.
Even in confinement, the Gospel runs free.
Even in chaos, His Kingdom advances.*

Paul's story reminds us that God doesn't waste your witness. He may not always deliver you from trials, but He will always sustain you through them.

I would love to end our time encouraging you with some of the lyrics to a favorite song of mine. It includes quotes from Psalm 23, Isaiah 54, and Jeremiah 29.

*The Lord is my shepherd
And He is everything I need
So, I will not worry
I will not fear the enemy
He said that He loves me
He said that He's with me even though
I walk through the valley
Of shadow and death and still I know
He has good plans
He has good plans for me
So, I will take heart in deserts and gardens
He has good plans
He has good plans for me
If I know my Father
I know my Father has good plans
No weapon formed against me will prosper*

GOOD PLANS

By Red Rocks Worship



Scan the QR Code
to listen.

ACTS 24 & 25

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 24 & 25

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 26

WEEK 10

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

What a journey we've been on with Paul!

We've followed him across (almost) every part of the known world in his time. We've watched him go from sinner to saved, from persecutor to persecuted, and from opposing the Gospel to becoming its boldest messenger—proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ wherever he went.

We have seen him stay on mission despite warnings, arrests, political maneuvering and lies. Both as a free man and in chains. Despite hardship, closed doors, beatings, persecution, accusations, and trials, his determination and commitment to God's call are nothing short of inspiring.

Through it all, Paul has remained faithful. Calmly and courageously, he shared his defense and, in the process, shared the hope of the Gospel with everyone from fellow Jews, Gentiles, crowds, commanders, the Sanhedrin, governors, and now a king.

Paul's deep gratitude for the gift of salvation compels him to share no matter the cost.

Before you begin reading today, take a moment to thank God for all He has done for you. Thank Him for the grace that saved you, for the people who helped lead you to Him, and for the unique story He's writing in your life.

If you haven't yet committed your life to Christ, our prayer is that your eyes would be opened to the living Jesus – the same Lord who met Paul on the road to Damascus and forever changed his life.

Read Acts 26.

Pause and ask God to reveal something new, something you've not noticed before in Paul's story. **Then, read it once more with a listening heart.**

(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Last week we saw Paul appeal to Caesar after presenting his case to Festus. Before setting sail for Rome, God gives him the opportunity to have an audience with King Agrippa II and Bernice, as well as other dignitaries.

In these final chapters of Acts, we've followed Paul through a long season of imprisonment. Though falsely accused and bound in chains, Paul remains unwavering before Felix, Festus and now King Agrippa II. He patiently and courageously states his case, not to defend himself, but to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel.

Having taken time to read with a listening heart yesterday, begin your time today by reflecting on what felt fresh to you as you summarize this chapter.

1. Go through Acts 26 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 26

¹ Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of

SECTION TITLES

prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

²⁹ Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

³⁰ The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. ³¹ After they left the room, they began saying to one another, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.” ³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

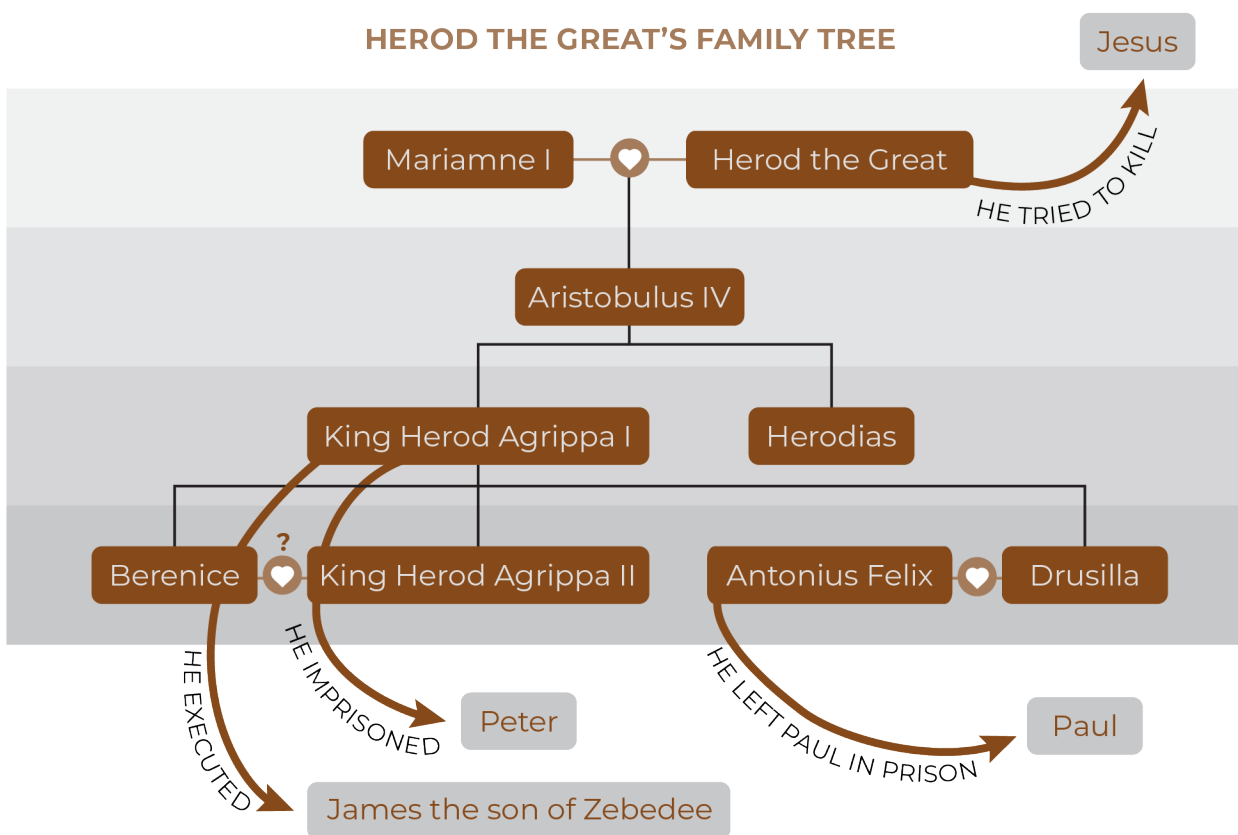
ACTS 26 SUMMARY

DAY 3: DYNASTY OF DYSFUNCTION

We've heard and read the names King Herod and King Herod Agrippa a few times now. Sometimes reading through Scripture can get complicated when names are repeated through generations and the story skips around.

Let's do a history recap to better understand who *this* Agrippa is and how he would have known what was conspiring among the Jews since Jesus' death and resurrection (Acts 26:3, 26). You might remember some of this from last week, but if you're like me, a visual can help cement things in.

Using the illustration below, answer the following questions:



Who is Agrippa II's father? _____

◇ Who did Agrippa I execute? _____

◇ Who did Agrippa I imprison? _____

Who is Agrippa II's great-grandfather? _____

◇ Who did he try to kill? _____

Who is Agrippa II's brother-in-law? _____

♦ Who did he leave in prison? _____

Who are Agrippa II's sisters? _____

♦ Who are their spouses? _____

Agrippa II was the last of the Herodian dynasty. His great-grandfather, Herod the Great, tried to kill Jesus as a baby (Matthew 2). His father, Herod Agrippa I, executed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12). His brother-in-law, Felix, kept Paul imprisoned.

Agrippa II came from a family marked by power, privilege, and corruption. The Herodian dynasty was deeply entangled with Roman politics, often prioritizing influence and image over truth and faithfulness. While they made notable contributions to Jewish life—especially through architectural projects like the renovation of the second Temple in Jerusalem—their reign was also characterized by moral compromise and political ambition.

Paul is now face to face with King Agrippa II and has a very important message for him.

Despite the known lineage of Agrippa and the actions of his extended family, how does Paul begin his defense in **Acts 26:2-3 (ESV)**?

Read the following verses and record why Paul may have felt fortunate to have an audience before King Agrippa.

Acts 9:15 What is Paul's call?

Acts 25:23 Who is his audience?

Acts 26:12-18 What does he have the opportunity to share?

Acts 26:22 Who is helping him as he testifies?

Acts 26:23 What message is he bringing?

Paul was God's chosen instrument to proclaim His name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. In Acts 26 he is given an audience with King Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus—as well as high ranking officials and prominent men of the city.

Paul says he considers himself fortunate because he has the privilege of sharing his personal encounter with Jesus. He is preaching to everyone, including political elites, the need for repentance and faith in Jesus.

Paul is also confirming only what the prophets had said: *“that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to His own people and to the Gentiles.”* (Acts 26:23)

Knowing that King Agrippa has a fairly extensive knowledge of Jewish beliefs and Scripture and a reputation of being a pious Jew, Paul boldly appeals to him. He hopes that King Agrippa's understanding of the Old Testament prophecies would lead him to recognize that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah.

******Have you ever had the privilege of boldly proclaiming the Gospel to someone in authority over you (boss, teacher, parent, coach, etc.)? If so, how did you feel before, during and after it? If not, how do you envision you would have felt standing in Paul's shoes?

Sometimes we can feel foolish or afraid when sharing our faith and telling what Jesus has done in our lives. We might wonder:

- ♦ What if they ridicule me?
- ♦ What if I can't answer their questions?
- ♦ What if I lose a friendship or even my job?
- ♦ What if they think I'm out of my mind?
- ♦ What if I'm simply dismissed?

This is the *greatest message* we will ever share! Let's ask God to give us boldness and courage, *trusting Him to take care of any real or perceived consequences*. The same God who stood by Paul also stands by us.

Write out **Romans 1:16-17** as a reminder of Paul's eagerness and conviction to continually preach the Gospel.

DAY 4: FROM CROWDS TO KINGS

Agrippa was familiar with Jewish customs and was likely intrigued with Paul's situation. He may even have been genuinely curious about Paul's message. Regardless of his motives, this was a divine appointment. God set up this opportunity for Paul to testify about Jesus before a powerful leader. Agrippa's willingness to listen shows that the Gospel can reach even the most unexpected audiences.

The book of Acts records two additional passages sharing Paul's conversion story. Let's take a look at all three accounts to better understand Paul's "strategy" or emphasis in sharing his testimony with different audiences.

We first read of Paul's conversion in **Acts 9:1-19** and again in **Acts 22:1-16**. Here, in **Acts 26:1-23**, we see Paul's most detailed explanation of the Gospel.

Each of these passages in Acts describe Paul's intense persecution of Christians, his journey to Damascus under official authority, the blinding encounter with the risen Christ, and the complete life change as a result of his encounter.

If we look a bit closer, we see that each account appears in a distinct setting with a slightly different emphasis depending on the audience and purpose.

Read each of the three passages carefully and fill in the blanks below with the passage reference(s) that match the following descriptions (there may be more than one per blank):

Primarily written as historical context: _____

Audience of a hostile Jewish crowd: _____

Audience of Roman dignitaries: _____

God's redemptive power: _____

Paul's credentials stated: _____

Credentials of others stated to vouch for Paul's character/story: _____

Message for Jews as well as all nations: _____

God's divine involvement: _____

Acts 9 is the first account of Saul's conversion story. It is recorded as an historical account right after Stephen is martyred. Saul is blinded and brought to Damascus where Ananias lays hands on him and his sight is restored. This narrative reveals the redemptive power of God.

In Acts 22, Paul addresses a hostile Jewish crowd in Jerusalem. Paul emphasizes his Jewish credentials and zeal for the law and the divine calling he received. He shares how Ananias, a devout observer of the Law, played a key role in his conversion. He hopes to connect with those who also held the Law in high esteem.

In Acts 26, Paul is defending himself before King Agrippa and Roman dignitaries. He highlights his persecution of the believers, and how Christ's revelation to him fulfilled ancient prophecies. This version stresses Paul's commission to reach Gentiles and shows that the message Jesus gave him had implications far beyond the Jewish community, offering new life to all nations.

Paul's defense, *his story*, was tailored to each audience, reflecting their backgrounds and interests. He consistently defended his faith while adapting his message to resonate with each group.

Read Acts 26:24. What is Festus' response to Paul's defense?

Read Acts 26:25. What was Paul's reply?

Read Acts 26:26-27. Why might Paul feel compelled to directly ask Agrippa if he knows of and believes in the prophets?

Read Acts 26:28. What is Agrippa's response to Paul's direct question?

Read Acts 26:29. What was Paul's reply?

Paul's response to King Agrippa in Acts 26:29 captures the heart of his mission: He only wants *everyone* to trust Christ, no matter how short or long it takes.

Do you have the same heart as Paul—to share the Gospel with everyone—no matter how short or long it takes them to receive it?

Paul did not try to prove, persuade or convince anyone into believing in Jesus. He simply told the truth of who he had been before his encounter with Jesus, how he met Jesus and who he had become because of Jesus.

Paul was unashamed of the Gospel. He was bold yet respectful, direct yet humble. Though Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice ultimately walked away, Paul had fulfilled his calling: to proclaim the truth and leave the results to God.

******Have you ever felt that undeniable pounding in your heart—the Holy Spirit prompting you to speak up and share your story? How did you respond to that prompting? What happened as a result?

Like Paul, we also need to be obedient to our call, knowing that it is God who changes hearts. We, too, will encounter varied reactions when sharing our faith. Some will listen, some will mock, and some will walk away. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

We are also called to remain steadfast, trusting that every act of obedience matters and that God can use even the smallest conversation to draw someone closer to Himself.

Is there someone in your life that you feel prompted to share your story with? Take a moment to pray that God would draw them to Himself. Ask for opportunities to share the hope of Jesus and be in tune to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Remember, it is God who draws hearts to Himself!

Write out and reflect on John 6:44.

DAY 5: GOD'S STORY. OUR WITNESS.

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace. Yet, in His mercy and purpose, God has chosen to use His people as His instruments to proclaim His grace to others. *We are not the saviors—we are the messengers.*

God's redemptive plan began with Abraham in Genesis:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Genesis 12:2-3

This promise of blessing continues throughout Scripture from the Old Testament to the New Testament, as God reveals His heart for all nations to know Him.

Read and record.

Psalms 67:2

Isaiah 49:6b

Matthew 28:19-20

Acts 1:8

The commission of God's people, then and now, remains the same.

To fully appreciate the weight of Jesus' Great Commission, we must understand where it came from. It echoes the Old Testament, fulfills Jesus' ministry, and unfolds in the early Church (especially in the book of Acts)!

Paul makes the *purpose* and power of presenting the Gospel clear in Acts 26, using both the words of Jesus as well as his own.

...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.

Acts 26:18 (NASB)

So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

Acts 26:22-23 (NASB)

Throughout the book of Acts we have seen Paul faithfully plant the seed of truth and trust God for the fruit. Paul's witness in Acts 26 shows us what a surrendered life looks like: one that trusts God completely and loves others deeply.

If someone asked *you* to give a reason for the hope that you have, would you be prepared to answer? Using Paul's example, let's be prepared to obey, share boldly and trust God with the outcome.

Remember, we share our personal stories, as Paul did before Agrippa, not as polished presentations but as living testimonies of God's transforming power.

****Turn back in your homework to 'your story', the one you recorded in Week 7, Day 5 (Acts 21:33-23:35). Pray through what you wrote and share it below as if you were telling someone how God has transformed your life.**

Take some time to share what you wrote above with a couple trusted friends or family members. Let's normalize sharing our stories and making Jesus famous!

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15

Finish this week writing a prayer of thanksgiving and surrender. Consider our Savior:

*He loves you.
He is coming for you.
He is relentless.
He is for you.*

Whether you know it or not, God is pursuing you and longs for you to embrace Him as your Savior. Thank Him for the life change, peace, and hope that have come through repentance and following Him as LORD.

Ask Him to open your eyes to see the places and people He wants you to share the priceless gift of your story with to further His Kingdom. Ask Him to give you wisdom, gentleness, and boldness to share in each situation and to each person He puts in your path.

ACTS 26

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 26

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 27

WEEK 11

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Acts study family, we are approaching the finish line, but God isn't done yet.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

Every morning we wake up under the covering of fresh mercy. God's love hasn't run out, and His faithfulness hasn't faded. Each new day (and week!) is proof that He's still at work—shaping us, teaching us, and drawing us closer to Himself. Even as we enter the second-to-last week of this study, God is not done yet. He still has more to teach, more to reveal, and more ways to invite us to live intentionally for Him. Let us not open the Word today out of a space of obligation, but out of gratitude for this mercy.

As you step into this week, expect God to meet you in your study and reflection. The same God who spoke to you on week one has something to say today.

Read Acts 27. Pause and reflect, then **read it again.**

(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Today we get to step into the story itself and actively engage with it! Acts 27 is full of details, a window into how God works through ordinary and extraordinary circumstances to accomplish His plan. As you read, don't rush.

Take time to notice what Luke observes, what Paul says, and how the people around him respond. Let the Word of God speak to you as it enters your heart. Engage with it like you would a conversation with someone you care about: listening, noticing, and reflecting.

What stands out to you?

What surprises you?

What does this show you about who God is?

This is your chance to hear God's voice in the narrative and consider how He might be asking you to trust Him in your own journey, prior to anything this study has to say in days 3 through 5. Open your heart, slow down, and let the story come alive.

1. Go through Acts 27 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.
4. **Add Malta to the map below, then draw Paul's journey from Jerusalem, including all island and city stops along the way.**



ACTS 27

SECTION
TITLES

¹ When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. ² We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

³ The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. ⁴ From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. ⁵ When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. ⁸ We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

⁹ Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, ¹⁰ “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” ¹¹ But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. ¹² Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

¹³ When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, ¹⁷ so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the

SECTION TITLES

sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹ After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²² But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³ Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴ and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' ²⁵ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶ Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

²⁷ On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸ They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. ²⁹ Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. ³⁰ In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. ³¹ Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

³³ Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. ³⁴ Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." ³⁵ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.

³⁶ They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ Altogether there were 276 of us on

board. ³⁸ When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

³⁹ When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.

⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.

⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 27 SUMMARY

DAY 3: STEADY IN THE STORM

Over the next few days, we'll journey with Paul through a moment in Acts that feels like a scene from a movie, a literal and spiritual storm. Luke leaves out no detail as he gives us a play-by-play of the two week voyage westward from Caesarea to Malta. Not only that, but he was actually eye-witness to the events that took place. This is one of only three times we see Luke use first person as he writes Acts. Luke was *with* Paul!

To refresh your memory, Paul has been arrested in Jerusalem, and falsely accused by Jewish leaders (again). As a Roman citizen, he is exercising his right to appeal to Caesar, the Roman emperor. This means he needs to be transported to Rome to stand trial, which is why we find him on this ship. Beyond an appeal to Caesar, this journey is also a fulfillment of the promise Paul received from Jesus in Acts 23.

Read Acts 23:11 and write the promise made to Paul below.

That single promise changes how we read this entire story. *Paul isn't just being transported as a prisoner, he's being carried by God's plan. The storm ahead will not undo what God has already spoken, because Paul's direction was already set.* He didn't know the route or the obstacles, but he knew the destination: Rome. Because the Lord Himself had spoken it, Paul could trust that no trial, chain, or crashing wave would keep God's Word from being fulfilled.

******Have you ever been sure that God was leading you somewhere, but the path to get there felt completely out of control? Explain.

This chaotic journey reminds me of a similar story hundreds of years earlier. Genesis 37-41 tells the story of Joseph, a man who knew God's promise, but had to endure circumstances completely out of his control before seeing fulfillment.

Read Genesis 37:5-11.

What did God promise Joseph through his dreams?

How did Joseph's brothers respond to his dreams?

Read Genesis 37:18-36.

Joseph's story continues with betrayal by his own family. He's sold into slavery and taken to Egypt. Things seem to spiral further from God's promise with every event.

What about Joseph's situation seems impossible or unfair?

Read Genesis 39:2 and 21.

Where was God, even when Joseph's circumstances were out of control?

Finally, Joseph's story reaches fulfillment in Genesis 41:37-46. After 13 years, God elevates him to a position of authority in Egypt where he is able to save nations from famine.

God does not immediately bring Joseph to a position of authority; Joseph experiences the opposite. He is betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned. Each of these trials would have made him feel forgotten, yet God was faithfully at work behind the scenes. Because God always fulfills His promises, Joseph could trust that God's plan would come to fruition.

Does this change the way you think about your own season of waiting?

Just as Joseph received a promise, Paul received a promise from God to preach in Rome. However, the path to fulfillment was anything but smooth. As the storm raged, every moment could have convinced Paul that reaching their destination was impossible. The winds whip violently from every direction, the ship is battered and at risk of breaking apart, all their cargo is thrown overboard, and for days they sail without any guidance from the sun or stars. They could have ended up anywhere. When all hope was lost, Paul steadily encouraged the men with the anchor of truth God had given him the night before.

Read and write Acts 27:24b-25 below:

God promised survival for everyone on the ship, but He didn't promise calm seas. Paul points them to the certainty of God's Word. His confidence is not in human skill, the ship, or the waves, but in the promise of God.

Paul and Joseph each received promises from God, and each had their faith in what He promised tested on the path to fulfillment.

...for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Romans 11:29 (NASB)

The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.

Psalm 138:8 (ESV)

God is faithful. God is sovereign. God keeps His promises.

When the steps in your journey look different than what you pictured, do you struggle to believe that God is who He says He is?

How does Paul's confidence in God's Word reshape the way you see your own storm?

******When have you let your circumstances define your destination rather than the promises of Christ?

Remembering these stories should shape how we face our own storms. Rather than responding with fear or doubt, we are called to stay anchored in the promises God has given us. When we stay anchored, we can encourage and steady those around us who are also navigating storms.

Scripture hidden in our hearts is never wasted. What anchor truth from Scripture do you want to hold onto this week?

Write your anchor verse on the next page and spend some time committing it to memory.

DAY 4: STAYING ON THE SHIP

As we jump into today's study, refresh your memory by **reading Acts 27:18-32**.

By the time we get to verse 30, the crew has been fighting the storm for two full weeks. Luke tells us that “all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.” The situation is beyond human control, the sailors have no sense of direction.

Ancient sailors depended on the sun and stars to guide their way as they navigated their ships. But now, the sky is completely black. For days they drift blindly westward, tossed by relentless waves with no idea where they are or where they're going. I can imagine that hunger, exhaustion, and fear settle in. This is the breaking point.

Can you think of a time in your life that was like this, when you lost your bearings and couldn't see a way forward? Maybe you were doing everything you could to stay headed in the right direction, but the situation was completely out of your control.

Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of this kind of storm in your life. Write down one season or situation that comes to mind.

How did you respond when you couldn't “see the stars” or felt out of control?

In these moments of darkness, survival instincts start to take over. We grasp for whatever feels safe, for any way out we can find.

The sailors on Paul's ship had reached this point, and that's when some of them decided they couldn't take it anymore.

Read verse 30. What did the sailors try to do?

From a human point of view, the lifeboat was their best chance.

Write what Paul tells them in **verse 31**:

Let's pause there for a second. Why would staying on a broken, storm-tossed ship make any sense? Why not run toward the thing that seems more safe? The lifeboat looks like a way to get out of their situation, *but could it actually be the very thing that keeps them from being saved?*

Sometimes, God's deliverance doesn't come through escape, but through endurance.

There are moments He asks us to remain right in the middle of the chaos, because that's where He's at work.

****Think about your own "lifeboat". When you feel out of control, where do you run?**

Has that "lifeboat" saved you in your circumstances? How have they made you feel? Have they given you control?

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself,
unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*

John 15:4 (NASB)
(my Anchor verse.)

Paul told the sailors that the only way they could be saved is by staying with the ship. Jesus gives us this invitation when we feel out of control: *abide* in me.

When the waves rise, we're called to remain in Him. God doesn't promise to calm the seas, but He promises His presence will stay constant through the storm. *The safest place to be is wherever He is.*

What does "staying with the ship" look like for you right now?

In all the chaos, God's hand was guiding them. Historian F.F. Bruce points out just how incredible it was that they survived: "If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long."

In other words, if they hadn't landed at Malta, the ship would have been forced to continue across open waters for hundreds of miles with no protection or safe harbor. Malta is a very small island with a lot



of water surrounding it—they could have easily passed it by. The fact that the wind blew them exactly to this spot is evidence of the value of staying on the ship in the midst of chaos. That small island became the unexpected safe landing, a tangible reminder that God can bring His people safely through storms that seem impossible to survive.

“Staying with the ship” is more than just a clever saying, it’s a practice lived out in real life. It’s a trust that God’s presence and promises are greater than the storm around us, even when uncertainty screams for us to run. We see this same kind of faith play out centuries later in a man named Horatio Spafford.

Horatio Spafford wrote one of the most enduring declarations of faith in the face of tragedy. In 1873, he was sailing across the Atlantic to reunite with his wife in Europe. Weeks earlier, their four daughters had drowned in a tragic accident when their ship collided with another vessel. Only his wife, Anna, survived.

As Spafford crossed the Atlantic to join his grieving wife, the ship’s captain pointed out the approximate place where his daughters had perished. In that moment, Spafford wrote words that declared a faith and peace not dependent on circumstances:

It Is Well with My Soul

Horatio Spafford, 1873

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Even in the midst of heartbreak, Spafford’s faith anchored him. Paul’s peace on the storm-tossed ship came from trusting God’s promise and sovereignty in the midst of the storm. He chose to stay on the ship, knowing God was delivering him to the place he was meant to be. And He did just that.

On the next page, take a few moments to write out your own declaration to God. You can use this as a starting point, but let your heart speak freely:

1. Acknowledge the storm and/or your fear.
2. Declare your trust in God’s presence and sovereignty.
3. Commit to staying and abiding in Christ even when you are out of control.
4. Speak words of faith over your situation, knowing God can bring you safely through the chaos.

Scripture hidden in your heart is never wasted. Write your anchor verse again below.

Sometimes we imagine the only way God shows His power is by calming the storm, but in Acts 27, we have learned that this is far from the truth. He works *through* the storm. Every crashing wave and broken board become a part of His redemptive story on Earth.

As the chapter draws to a close, we see Paul step into a moment that goes completely against the norm. Remember, Paul is the prisoner on this ship, yet in the middle of his chaos, he becomes the one who leads everyone else into peace. Let's step back into the scene.

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Fourteen days into chaos, Paul gave thanks. He broke bread, thanked God, and shared it with those around him. In a world spinning out of control, Paul chose gratitude. This act became an anchor; not just for himself, but for everyone watching him.

In **verses 33-36**, what stands out about Paul's attitude?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:25.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians before the events of Acts 27, so this wasn't his first shipwreck. Not his second. Not even his third. Paul knew what it felt like to be thrown around by the waves, to lose all control, and to come out of what should have destroyed him. What if those past shipwrecks were actually preparation for this moment? What if every storm carried a purpose that shaped Paul for the one he was facing now?

Could it be that the peace Paul carried in this storm was more than faith in God's promises. What if his confidence also came from God's past faithfulness?

The deeper we go in our faith, the more we learn that hardship is where His power becomes the most visible. The question is not *if* we will face a storm, but *when*. We should expect storms to come and go as God shapes us into people who reflect His steadfast love in a world that's constantly shifting.

******How have the storms in your past changed the way you walk through hard seasons now?

Every storm we survive deepens our capacity to carry Christ's peace into future chaos. Like Paul, we become living evidence that God's presence is steady even when everything else falls apart. *Our storms become our testimony*. They become the evidence that God's Kingdom breaks through anything—even our wreckage.

Is there someone in your life who has walked with you through a storm they themselves had experienced? How did their endurance and faith give hope or show you God's presence?

When we face hard seasons, we are being trained to be anchors for others. Our endurance, our faith, and our ability to cling to God's promises becomes a lifeline for someone else in the middle of their storm. The peace we carry in the middle of chaos becomes a guiding light for others around us.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Who around you might be encouraged by the strength God has grown in you through your storms?

Is God calling you to actively step into shepherding them in their season of chaos? What would that look like?

Every challenge you face can serve as a rehearsal for Kingdom work. Your "shipwrecks" may become the very experiences that help you guide others safely to shore. In this way, even our seasons of chaos are woven into God's larger redemptive story. God uses our trials to prepare us, to shape us, and to multiply our impact. These moments of struggle are part of His Kingdom work, refining you into someone who can carry His peace into whatever comes next, again and again.

Sometimes, it's only when we step back and look at the bigger picture that we realize our storms were part of the path God was preparing for us all along. Can you see your past or present storm from a Kingdom perspective? If not, take some time to reflect on these things.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and write it below.

As we close out this week, offer God a prayer of gratitude. Paul gave thanks, amidst the chaos of the storm and imprisonment, in front of all 276 passengers on the ship. Let us thank God for His faithfulness, for the refining work He accomplishes in our storms, and for the ways He has equipped us to carry His peace to others.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

ACTS 27

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 27

SERMON NOTES

ACTS 28

WEEK 12

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Wow. Our last week of homework in the book of Acts! Anyone feel as I do? A bit forlorn as we wrap up months of walking side by side with people we've gotten to know? Someday we'll study Acts again; yet for now, these people were part of our lives for a time. And yes, in the eternal scope of things, they *will* be part of our lives. We will meet Saul who became Paul. Simon who became Peter. Ananias. (Maybe both of them; now *there's* a discussion topic!) Barnabas. Silas. Dorcas, who is probably hanging out with Lazarus in some Resurrection Club. We'll meet Cornelius the centurion. Philip and his prophetess daughters, and perhaps King Agrippa! Maybe Paul did persuade him.

Until then, I cannot deny the sense that I'll miss these guys and their stories as we close this study. After all, for twenty-eight chapters, from "Hey Theophilus" to "proclaiming the Kingdom of God", we have worn out our sandals walking with *the founding members* of Christ's church. We waited with them at Pentecost. We watched a lame man walk. We listened to Peter preach one heck of a message. Had our eyes blinded for three straight days and then reopened to a new heart, and a new life.

We traveled all over the place. Got into arguments with kin. We were accused, ridiculed, and dragged to prison more than once. We saw what happens when we are prayed for, and when we raise the roof in praise. We learned to be content in whatever circumstance we found ourselves, trusting that God has a plan for whatever befalls us, trusting that He uses everything. Our blindness. Our pain. Our faith, however weak or strong.

This coming week in Acts 28, we will find ourselves shipwrecked, accused as murderers, and hailed as gods. By the time we read the last verse of the book, we will have come to better understand the cost of following Jesus. We will better understand the fellowship of other believers and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And we will better understand God's story through the proclaiming of His Kingdom.

One day, we'll return to study the book of Acts. When that day comes, we'll open the book with fond remembrance—of old familiar characters, of the things that happened, and of what we saw through their eyes.

Lord, thanks for a guy named Luke, who faithfully wrote the book of Acts. Thanks for the things we learned. Thanks for what we will carry with us.

Read Acts 28.

Take a moment to give thanks for this amazing journey in the Word of God.

Then **read it once more.** (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

We start Acts right after the death of Jesus, and we end Acts right before Paul's.

At the end of an itinerant life of preaching and teaching, Paul is under house arrest. He is imprisoned for two years, circa AD 60-62. Conditions are not so bad, as he wasn't behind proverbial bars; he rented his own place to stay, where friends visited and ministered to him. According to scholars, most of Rome's residents lived in apartments, and Paul may have stayed in one of these. Rome tracked its cases carefully, so if no accusers arrived, Paul eventually would be released. This is what happened. After two years of waiting, he is freed and travels about freely.

In AD 64, amid Nero's fierce persecution of Christians, Paul is imprisoned again. This time the conditions are not nice and house-arrest-ish. Conditions are much harsher. Early church historians record that he was imprisoned at **Mamertine Prison** in Rome, a place tourists visit today. This is likely where he penned his last letter, the second book of Timothy. According to scholars, the fact that he may have written it during this second Roman imprisonment may explain his request for a cloak and scrolls in the last chapter of 2 Timothy.

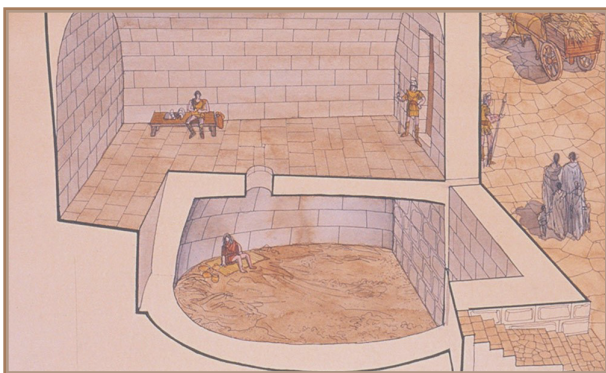
Paul was executed circa AD 64 or shortly thereafter by Nero, considered to be the most evil Roman Emperor in history. Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he did not suffer; he was swiftly beheaded, unlike Peter who was crucified upside down, or James, who, as recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus, was clubbed to death.

DEEPER DIVE

'Mamertine Prison'

The Mamertine Prison, located near the Roman Forum, was one of ancient Rome's most feared holding cells. Originally a cistern dating back to the 7th century BC, it wasn't a long-term penitentiary but a temporary detention pit for enemies of the state, rebels, and prisoners awaiting trial or execution. Dark, cramped, and airless, it was accessed only through an opening in the ceiling.

Early Christian tradition holds that the apostles Peter and Paul were held here before their executions under Emperor Nero. Whether this is historically certain or not, the Mamertine's reputation fits the harsh conditions the apostles describe: chains, cold, isolation, and suffering. Today, the site stands as a sobering reminder of the cost of early Christian witness in the heart of imperial Rome.



Prisoners were lowered through a hole in the roof into the basement cell of the Mamertine Prison.



Interior of the cell of Mamertine.

These historical details help us see the cost of Paul's faithfulness, and the steadfastness of the God who carried him through every trial and every triumph right until the end.

One last time for the book of Acts, let's engage the text.

1. Go through Acts 28 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. **Put a / where a section begins and ends.**
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this passage is about.

ACTS 28

¹ Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and

SECTION TITLES

SECTION TITLES

seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days.

⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

¹¹ After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹² We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. ¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

²¹ They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said

SECTION TITLES

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. **31** He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

ACTS 28 SUMMARY

DAY 3: MALTA AND ROME

Malta looks like a fascinating place to visit, historically and visually. Gorgeous pics make it bucket list material. It's a little island about sixty miles south of Sicily, which is a big island at the foot of Italy. According to Dave Branon's *Lands of the Bible Then and Now*, "The bay that some say was where Paul and the others were shipwrecked is today called Saint Paul's Bay. Ninety percent of Maltese citizens are considered Christians, with a large part of them being Roman Catholic."

Ninety percent is crazy amazing! Could this be in large part because hundreds of years ago, Paul was led on a Kingdom journey that included shipwreck?

As it turns out, Paul wasn't the only famous person to be shipwrecked on Malta. From *Lands of the Bible*: "Interestingly, the historian **Josephus** was also shipwrecked on Malta two years before Paul's ship was destroyed there."

When Paul is shipwrecked on Malta, he does not sit back and wait to be served.

Read Acts 28:1-6. Summarize what happens.

They figured Paul was guilty of something to have incurred that snake bite. Maybe murder! This judgmental attitude brings to mind something Jesus said.

Read Luke 13:1-5.

When Paul exhibited no sign of harm, fickle human nature again judged Paul: "Then he must be a god!" Interestingly, Luke does not record that Paul got into

DEEPER DIVE

'Josephus'

Flavius Josephus (c. 37–100 AD) was a Jewish historian and Pharisee who lived through the Jewish-Roman War (66–73 AD). Originally a commander in Galilee, he surrendered to the Romans and became a Roman citizen under the Flavian emperors.

From a historical perspective, Josephus is considered a primary source which means that what he recorded he lived through or witnessed with his own eyes.

Josephus wrote detailed histories of the Jewish people, including *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, providing valuable context for the world of the Bible. His works give insight into first-century Jewish life, politics, and the early spread of Christianity, making him a crucial historical source for understanding the New Testament and the broader biblical era.

an argument with them. Luke shows that Paul merely stuck to his own business: *serving*.

Read Acts 28:7-10. What happened?

You know what Paul was doing? He was being Paul, a servant of the Most High God, no matter where he was or how he got there. Paul knew that God wanted him in Rome; that made his Malta circumstances *God's* business.

******How open are you to God interrupting your plans in order to love someone right in front of you today? Describe a time when you were not open, and a time when you were.

You might remember from our study in Philippians a few weeks ago that in the not-too-distant future, Paul will write this from prison: "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." (Philippians 4:11) Surely, in part, he learned this contentment while spending three months on Malta. *Pauses like these are not wasted delays but God's staging grounds.*

Every interruption on the way to Rome became an opportunity to testify and to serve.

Read James 1:2-3.

It wasn't Paul's endurance that was tested on Malta; it was his faith that God had everything in hand. Even with another season of waiting, he stayed busy with God's work.

How comfortable are you in seasons of waiting? Do you see waiting as wasted time, or as God's preparation ground? Explain.

Rome, at last. Read Acts 28:11-16.

Add Rome and draw Paul's journey from Malta on the map below.



Read Acts 28:17-29.

Wouldn't we have loved to have been a fruit fly on a wine glass, listening to one of Gamaliel's star students converse with Jewish leaders as Paul did in verse 23? "...he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the Kingdom of God, and trying

to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.”

****Is there any Scripture you would gladly sit with “from morning until evening”? What would it be, and why?**

Are you like me? When you see Paul in action like that, toe to toe with opposition, do you sometimes become aware of lack in yourself? That lack can make us feel inadequate for sharing the Gospel as we imagine modern-day scenarios that involve agnostics and atheists and others opposed to the Gospel. *Our well of biblical knowledge may seem to be a damp rag compared to the depth of Paul's.*

Imagined intimidation can silence us.

If we keep on with thoughts like that, we become Satan's ally in hindering the Gospel.

Now when they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Acts 4:13 (NASB)

Raise your hand if you didn't go to Bible college. Raise your hand if you were not educated under Gamaliel. I'd say that's most of us. Take joy, then, in Acts 4:13. Confidence sprang not from education or training, but from *a relationship with Jesus.*

Let's back it up for broader context. **Read Acts 4:8-12.**

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...” The people marveled because Peter spoke as if he was educated and trained. They marveled because they knew he wasn't! *The Holy Spirit made all the difference.*

Reckon God can do the same with you and me? Reckon Peter's God is our God, too?

Here's a thought: Peter and his pals may have started out uneducated and untrained, but they didn't stay that way. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, through their own diligence and the diligence of others, they added to their own wells more for the Holy Spirit to draw upon.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handing accurately the Word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

Remember Apollos? The big-time preacher whose humility was also big-time?

Read Acts 18:24-26.

Apollos had as much confidence as Peter. Yet Priscilla and Aquila took this eloquent man aside to explain the way of God more accurately. Apollos learned from what they had to say. He adjusted his doctrine a bit.

We'll all adjust our doctrines a bit as we continue in the faith. Spending time in the Word of God will do that, as well as listening to good teachers and having a heart that is open to the Spirit, who will guide us into all the truth.

The body of Christ has long enjoyed the gifts and talents of such apologists as Paul, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. In modern times, we have C.S. Lewis, Tim Keller, and Lee Strobel, just to name a few. Thank God for the scholars! If you see such apologists in marketplace arenas today, bless them and pray for them. Pray that God uses their skill to bring understanding to chaos. They have a job to do, in their arena for the Kingdom of God, and our prayers help them do it.

We have a job to do, too, in our own arenas for the Kingdom of God. It doesn't matter if we can preach, teach, or defend the faith with the tongues of angels. It doesn't matter if we can't. Do we have Jesus? Then we have all we need. The power of the Gospel is in the preaching of it.

Take a moment to be *with* Jesus. Tell Him about the places where you feel inadequate or unsure. Ask Him to show you what would change if you truly believed that having Him was enough. Tell Him where you need confidence, where you need clarity, and where you need courage. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill those spaces with His strength instead of your striving.

DAY 4: UNHINDERED

Read Acts 28:30-31.

Acts begins with Jesus ascending to heaven. It ends with the Holy Spirit's work through Paul, who finished his journey in this small simple way: under house arrest, meeting with and telling anyone who would come to his house the good news of Jesus.

Yet even in that small, simple ending, God was not finished with Paul. What looked like limitation became the setting for another kind of ministry altogether, one that would ripple far beyond the walls of his rented home.

Paul wrote the four "prison epistles" from Rome during his house arrest: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These letters are named for the time of his imprisonment, likely between AD 60-62, and were addressed to specific churches or individuals.

For an itinerant scholar, now surrounded by pen and ink and scrolls to write upon, and no interruptions except good ones—people to speak the Kingdom of God with, and to teach about Jesus—perhaps at times Paul may have considered himself to be in a happy place. He was finally quit of sore feet and shipwrecks and snake bites. He had Luke with him, and maybe others. And he had the infilling of the Holy Spirit as this scholar put quill to parchment.

Record a favorite passage from each one of the prison Epistles. It's not necessary to write out the passage, just note the places they are found.

Ephesians: _____

Philippians: _____

Colossians: _____

Philemon: _____

I am sure the neighborhood wondered just what sort of prisoner this man was.

Sometimes they heard snatches of prayers from his apartment. Sometimes they heard laughter and singing. Undoubtedly, as opportunities came, Paul spent his time building relationships with those around him in that two-year time. Undoubtedly, he loved his neighbor as himself, even in chains.

He likely had an influence on some curious neighbors who may have dropped in with a loaf of honeycake just so they could linger and catch a bit of what he said to those visitors always dropping by. He likely had an influence upon the guards assigned to him, and inquired regularly after their wellbeing, and that of family members and friends, as he thought of others more than himself.

And all the while during this time, the Gospel did what it does, unhindered.

NLT Illustrated Study Bible: “Despite being under house arrest, Paul boldly proclaimed the Kingdom’s message. *And no one tried to stop him.* Greek: *Akoloutos*: without hindrance. This single word in Greek is the last word of the book of Acts and one of the keys to its meaning: God’s word cannot be chained, even when its messengers are.”

God’s word cannot be chained, even when its messengers are.

What an awesome time of fruitfulness these two years were! From Paul’s rented quarters in Rome went out letters that were labors of love. Maybe some pages were a bit smudged or had a water splotch or two. The precious cargo was carefully tucked into leather srips or handbags or inside pockets. They were carried by believers, who, having read the letters themselves, couldn’t wait to get them to others who desperately needed their direction, correction, and encouragement.

The letters were copied and circulated, recopied, and copied again. And what began in form as a bit smudged and maybe water splotched, came down to us collected into one volume, where it is tucked into our book basket or on our nightstand or desk. Maybe some of those pages today are dogeared, underlined, coffee-splotched. We modern day believers desperately need their direction, correction, and encouragement.

What was Paul thinking as he wrote those letters? Maybe he called up Habakkuk 2:1-2 from his deep well, and found applicability to his situation: *I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me...then the Lord answered me and said, “Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets that the one who reads it may run.”*

Maybe his mind traveled forward a few pages in that book and stopped here:

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19.

With the Word of God as his support and strength, with the keen memory of Jesus who knocked him off his donkey, and with the Spirit of God to comfort and guide, Paul penned these words *while in chains*:

Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

If you take the word “always” back to the original Greek, it means...always.

Paul also wrote this: **Read Ephesians 2:8-10.**

What about us? Are we His workmanship, wherever and however we find ourselves? Are there good works for us to walk in despite loss of freedom, despite illness, despite discouragement, or inconvenience, or doubt? And while we’re engaged in those good works, will we rejoice?

Which of these is true for you right now?

- ☐ I believe I am His workmanship, even where I am today.
- ☐ I’m struggling to see purpose in my current circumstances.
- ☐ I trust God has good works for me, but I’m not sure what they are.
- ☐ I want to walk in those good works but joy feels hard right now.
- ☐ All of the above describe me in some way.

Arguably one of the best works that Paul himself walked in was writing those very words in prison conditions.

There are people around us who may feel stuck or defeated (sometimes ourselves included!), who need to know that God’s purpose still stands even in hard places. We can share this message through conversation and encouragement; we can share Paul’s story and how it mirrors our own struggles. We can show steadfastness, hope, and boldness in our own challenges as a living testimony that God’s mission continues “without hindrance”.

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.

Philippians 1:12-13 (NASB)

******What does faithfulness look like in your current limitations? If you stopped waiting for “better conditions”, what would you do in obedience today?

Read Romans 8:28.

According to this verse, what do we know?

According to this verse, whose purpose is it about? _____

According to this verse, how many things will God cause to work out for our good because we love Him?

How many things? _____

One more time: how many things? _____

If you take the word “all” back to the original Greek, it means...all.

Take a moment and write down a few things you have to trust God to work out for good:

God sure worked out Paul's two-year imprisonment for good. He worked it out for the good of the Jews and Gentiles and believers who dropped in. He worked it out for the good of Roman neighbors. For the Roman soldiers on guard duty. For us. For Paul himself, who kept doing what he was doing, one day at a time, rejoicing all the way.

Acts 28 shows us that the Gospel advances *without hindrance* through ordinary obedience, courageous witness, and God's unstoppable purpose.

Some have seeds in their hands. Some, watering cans. Whatever you have, God will use the vessel that is *you* to do the planting and watering.

DAY 5: ACTS: A CHURCH THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Eliot

Here we are. Today we close the last page on the book of Acts, and on our study.

The Book of Acts in a nutshell:

Acts 1: *Jesus goes up.*
Acts 2: *The Spirit comes down.*
Acts 3-28: *The people go out.*

Read Acts 1:1. Write it out.

Read Acts 28:31. Write it out in the CSB or NIV.

What does it mean to proclaim the Kingdom of God? Look up the word "proclaim" and jot the definition here:

Here's a dandy summation from scholars for what it means to proclaim the Kingdom of God: "To 'proclaim the Kingdom of God' means to declare and to live out the news that God is ruler over all, calling people to acknowledge his reign in their lives and to live in alignment with his justice and righteousness. This proclamation is a central theme in Christianity, involving *both verbal declaration and compassionate action* that demonstrates the Kingdom's presence through acts of healing, peace, and transformation".

Acts 28:31 is our blueprint for how to live as believers today: to proclaim God's Kingdom in our daily lives through word and deed, and to teach others about Jesus.

Here are reflections from someone who has gone through this study of Acts:

"He is transforming me from fear to faith, from self-preservation to surrender. He's calling me from discouragement and distraction to a deeper dependence on His mission. He's teaching me that fruitfulness doesn't depend on comfort or control but that it comes from obedience and trust in His timing."

Take a few moments and page back through this study book. Look at the things you underlined. Remember discussions you may have had with others over passages and ideas. Remember when you were challenged. Remember when you were encouraged.

Write a few of your own reflections on the book of Acts:

The same studier of Acts said this:

"The Holy Spirit is inviting me to trust God's purpose even when the journey doesn't go as planned. Like Paul, I'm being called to stay faithful in "shipwreck seasons" and to use every trial as a platform for testimony. The Spirit is prompting me to speak the truth boldly but with compassion, even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient."

Here is a refresher for the definition of "change":

1. Make someone or something different; alter or modify.
2. Replace (something) with something else, especially something of the same kind that is newer or better; substitute one thing for (another).

******How have you been changed, reading the Book of Acts? How do you want to be changed? What is the Holy Spirit inviting you to do?

Acts is the Acts of God.

- Rod Van Solkema

Life is the fine art of getting over ourselves.

Ask Peter who healed the lame man.

Ask Peter who raised Dorcas from the dead.

Ask Paul who gave him the brilliant inspiration to say to the Ephesians, "I know your Unknown God. Let me tell you about Him." (Acts 17:23-31)

Who will advance the Kingdom of God? *God will, through us.*

Who will teach others about Jesus? *God will, through us.*

Where, then, is the onus of the work? Where is the burden, the responsibility? It's on God, brothers and sisters. Isn't that the best news you've heard all day? Even the work He started in *you* is on *Him* to finish.

Read Philippians 1:6.

Preach the Gospel to yourself every day.

- Nathan English

If we preach the Gospel to ourselves, we're more likely to preach to others.

Read the last verse of Acts again, out loud.

If we proclaim the Kingdom of God to ourselves, we're more likely to proclaim it to others.

If we teach *ourselves* about Jesus, we're more likely to teach others.

You may have heard it said, "He's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good."
Maybe it's time to get so heavenly minded that we are earthly good.

Read John 15:4-5. Write it out.

Our single goal is to abide in Jesus. Then we will bear fruit for the Kingdom of God, like our brothers and sisters in the Book of Acts. They've done their part. What's next for us? What's next for the church of God, with Acts 28:31 in our pockets?

Simply this: Acts 29.

ACTS 28

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 28

SERMON NOTES

CLOSING

One of the church's greatest gifts throughout the ages has been liturgy. Liturgy, simply defined, is the shared rhythms and practices that shape how we worship together. It is the way we respond to God as a community, often through set prayers, readings, blessings, and moments of commissioning.

We see Jesus model this in Acts 1, when He blesses and commissions His disciples, sending them out to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. That same commission still rests on us today. It is our hope that this study will put steel in your spine to courageously accept this radical mission from our Lord.

As a reminder of your role in the gospel story, we want to commission you and your community with a blessing. If you are with others, engage through call and response. If you are alone, read it aloud. There is power in both speaking and hearing words of blessing.

LEADER:

May the God who called the Church, His bride, into being, fill us with boldness, unity, and joy.

ALL:

We are the body of Christ, empowered and sent.

LEADER:

May the Spirit who empowered the apostles also empower us to proclaim truth, live in love, and advance the Kingdom of Heaven wherever we go.

ALL:

May we go in the strength of the Spirit, not our own.

LEADER:

And may the name of Jesus be lifted high in our hearts, our homes, our city, and our world.

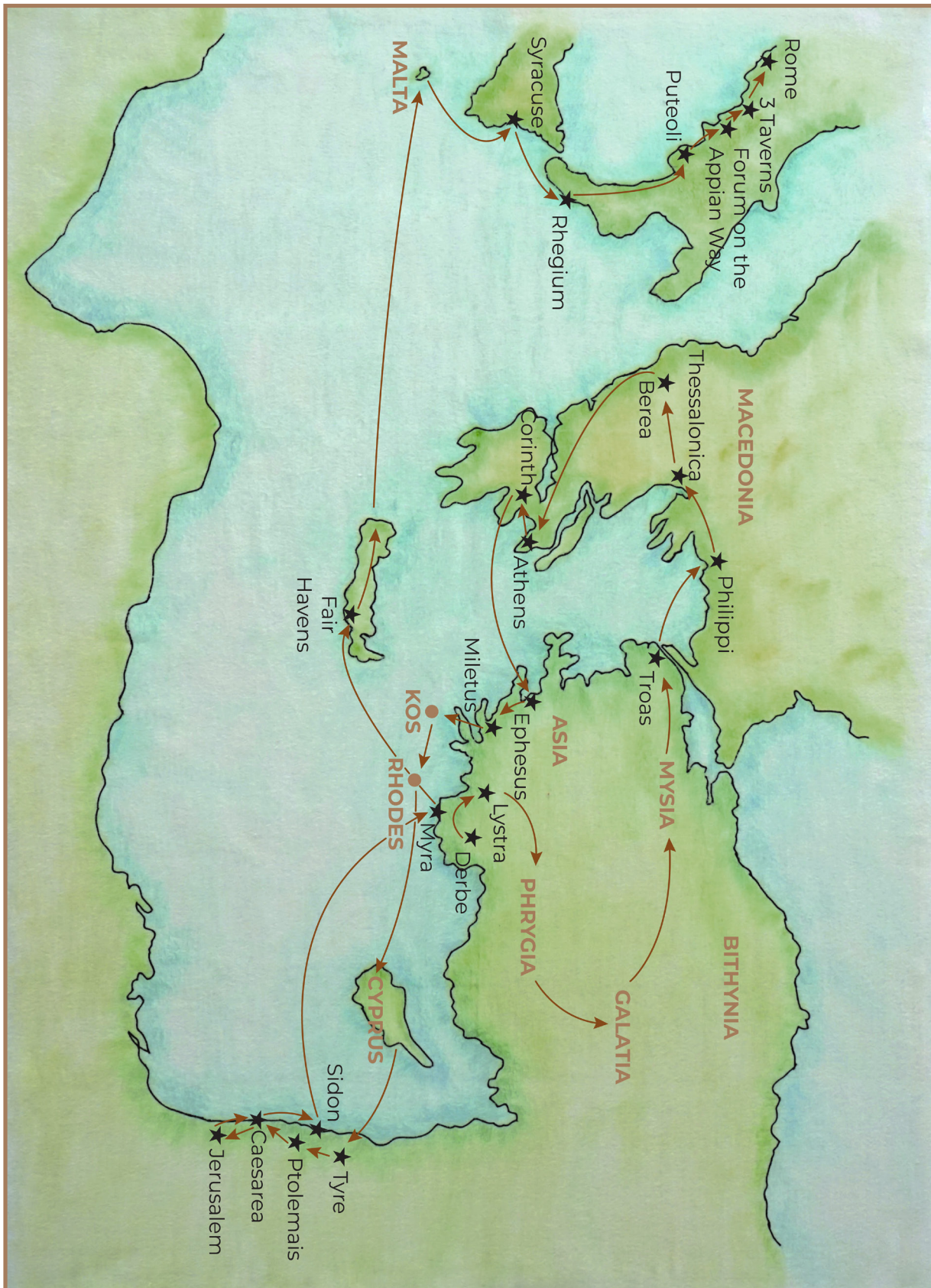
ALL:

To Him be glory, now and forever.
Amen.



St. Peter's Basilica, Rome

PAUL'S SECOND AND THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEYS



CROSSROADS
BIBLE CHURCH