



DAYSPRING
WESLEYAN CHURCH
REACH | GROW | WORSHIP | SERVE

A STUDY ON ACTS

SPIRIT-DRIVEN ACTS OF THE CHURCH

Powerful and Fearless to the Ends of the Earth

Dr. Wynand de Wet

(aka Pastor Wayne)

ACTS
always
encourages me
challenges me
to
live closer to the Lord
connect better with the Family of God
reach the lost
with extreme urgency
with no fear
preach, teach, share, care
boldly
without hindrance
without regret
always acutely aware
of the
POWER
of the
HOLY SPIRIT

Writing this workbook brought me such joy

I pray it serves the Church well

I pray it becomes a useful tool to reach the lost

Pastor Wayne

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With permission captured and authored by Annalie Janse van Rensburg

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Introduction

WELCOME!

We're thrilled you're joining us for a deep dive into Acts! Our prayer is that these next 4 weeks will enrich your understanding of God's Word.

We're excited to announce that our journey will culminate in a Global Missions Celebration! Join us on the 5th Sunday evening for a special international dinner, featuring familiar and exotic foods, followed by inspiring presentations of global ministries. Enjoy a delicious meal and hear powerful testimonies of God's work in His harvest worldwide. In preparation, explore 6 remarkable missionary stories.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Here's how to make the most of this Acts-inspired month:

Make time. Dedicate time for daily devotionals, letting them spark a lasting spiritual habit that deepens your faith beyond this course.

Make it a priority. Commit to prioritizing this month—aim to engage in every daily devotion and all 4 Sunday gatherings. Life may interrupt, but strive to let God's Word saturate your life fully.

Be honest. The devotions and discussions invite reflection on your walk with God, your views of His ways, and your lifestyle. Honest answers will foster the greatest growth.

Participate and be patient. Open your heart and stretch yourself. Share insights with your spouse, children, or friends as God's Word challenges you. On Sunday evenings, don't just listen—share what the Spirit has placed on your heart; your voice matters. Be patient with others, creating a safe space where all can share comfortably, regardless of where they are in their faith journey, without judgment.

Expect great things. Anticipate being challenged, transformed, and renewed. Pray, read, reflect, and gather with your family and church, expecting God to move powerfully through Acts in these 4 weeks for His glory.

THE BIBLE

This course is anchored in God's Word, primarily using the New International Version (1984 edition, NIV84). Occasionally, alternative translations may clarify the original Biblical languages. Keep your Bible ready for each lesson. While digital Bibles are fine, a printed Bible is recommended for underlining, highlighting, or note-taking, enhancing your engagement as you pray and ponder the text.

THEME

The theme for our 4 weeks together is going to be...

Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church

Each week we will take a closer look at what this means:

Week 1 - Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church: Powerful Birth (Acts 1-5)

Week 2 - Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church: Fearless First Steps (Acts 6-15)

Week 3 - Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church: Unstoppable Mission - New Church Plants (Acts 16-20)

Week 4 - Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church: Powerful Growth (Acts 21-28)

Week 5 - Optional -

We invite you to join our Global Missions Week, culminating in a Global Missions Dinner and celebration on the final Sunday evening, rejoicing in God's work across the world.

COURSE SETUP

This course features *6 daily devotions, Monday through Saturday*, ending each week with a dynamic Sunday Acts gathering!

Sunday mornings will feature a sermon from Acts, while *Sunday evenings* begin with a meal at 5 pm, followed by three 10-minute messages and three 15-minute group discussions, framed by an introduction and summary, from 6 pm to 7:30 pm.

Faithful engagement with the devotions will maximize impact. Don't feel overwhelmed—here are tips to dive in with peace and joy:

Designed for 25 minutes. Devotions are crafted to be meaningful and manageable, ideally becoming a lasting part of your walk with God. Expect around 15 minutes for reading, reflection, and questions, 5 minutes for prayer, and 5 minutes for optional journaling.

Do what you can. Something is better than nothing—no guilt needed! Each devotion allows flexibility: Answer all questions, select a few, or simply read and pray briefly. The goal is to engage at your level.

Do it when you can. Morning coffee, lunch breaks, or late nights—choose what works. The only bad time is “no time.” Commit to finding a moment that fits.

Do it with someone. Solo devotions are valuable, but sharing with a spouse, kids, or a friend can be enriching. Decide what suits you, or mix both approaches.

Use the blank page. Each day's devotion is on the left page of your workbook, with a blank page on the right. Use this space freely: Draw what God stirs in your heart, jot down notes, write questions to reflect on later or ask on Sunday. If you're a thinker, not a writer, that's perfectly fine too.

Have fun! Like enjoying a good meal, relaxing with TV, reading a favorite book, or cheering at your kids' sports, spending time in God's Word should be a joy. With the right mindset, this can bless you, your marriage, and your family—embrace it with delight!

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Overview

The Book of Acts, following the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is a remarkable New Testament narrative bridging the Gospels and Epistles. It reveals how Jesus' teachings ignited a global movement through the Holy Spirit's power, fulfilling His command to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth before His ascension (Acts 1:8).

Chapters 1–7 focus on the Spirit's work in Jerusalem, while chapter 8 launches an unstoppable mission across the ancient world, culminating in chapter 28 with the Message reaching even Caesar in Rome, the era's global capital!

Spanning roughly 30 years (30–60 AD), Acts traces the Gospel's journey from Jerusalem to Rome, covering Judea, Samaria, Asia Minor, and Greece.

Authored by Luke, a physician and close companion of Paul, Acts is a sequel to Luke's Gospel, likely written around 62–64 AD, possibly in Rome, for both Jewish and Gentile audiences.

Some Fun Facts

You will note from these fun facts that Acts has a spirited, action-packed nature, giving us a great picture of what happens when believers embrace and act through the power of the Holy Spirit! This inspires us even to this day to have an inspiring, dynamic faith and Spirit-driven life!

- Acts is quite long with **28 chapters** and a little over **1,000 verses**.
- Over **30 locations**, are named like Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Athens, Rome, Cyprus, Crete, and Malta (Acts 13:4, 27:7, 28:1).
- No **rivers** named, but a river near Philippi is implied for Lydia's baptism (Acts 16:13).
- Only the **Mount of Olives** is mentioned (Acts 1:12).
- Paul faced **five 39-lash floggings** (2 Corinthians 11:24) and a near-flogging in Jerusalem (Acts 22:25-29).

- Paul was **stoned** once in Lystra (Acts 14:19-20); Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:58-60).
- One **shipwreck** off Malta (Acts 27:39-41); Paul mentions three total (2 Corinthians 11:25).
- Paul was **jailed** in Philippi (Acts 16:23-24), Jerusalem (Acts 21:33), and Rome (Acts 28:16, 30).
- Over **20 miracles** are fairly clearly listed, including healings (Acts 3:1-8), exorcisms (Acts 16:18), raising Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12), and Pentecost tongues (Acts 2:1-4).
- **24 major speeches**, like Peter's at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and Paul's in Athens (Acts 17:22-31).
- Key conversions include **3,000 at Pentecost** (Acts 2:41), the **Ethiopian eunuch** (Acts 8:26-38), **Paul** (Acts 9:1-18), and **Cornelius** (Acts 10:44-48).
- Paul's journeys span around **10,000 miles** across Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.
- Paul uses **Greek** (Acts 21:37), **Aramaic** (Acts 21:40), and **Pentecost features multiple languages** (Acts 2:6-11).
- At least **10 conflicts**, like the Jerusalem riot (Acts 21:27-36) and Ephesus uproar (Acts 19:23-41).

The Book of Acts is about the Spirit-Driven Acts

of the

CHURCH

which includes

YOU

May you enjoy discovering how you are included in this

amazing journey of

GOD

...with His...

CHURCH

...with...

YOU

Week 1

SPIRIT-DRIVEN ACTS OF THE CHURCH

A Powerful Birth

Acts 1-5

Devotion - Monday

Powerful Birth: Powerful Spirit

Suggested self study: Acts 1:1-11

Focus passage: Acts 1:8-9

⁸ “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹ After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Luke, the author of Acts, emphasizes that Jesus not only rose from the dead (vv. 1-2), but also appeared to His followers for 40 days, proving He was truly alive (v. 3a). During this time, He taught them about the Kingdom of God (v. 3b) and instructed them to remain in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 4-5). We should know that God is on an amazing path with His church, without being consumed by a future that God has totally under His control (vv. 6-7). Instead, we must focus on the present task: Empowered by the Holy Spirit (v. 8a), we are called to sacrificially and intentionally share the Good News—starting in our own communities (Jerusalem), extending to nearby regions (Judea), and even further (Samaria), reaching to the ends of the earth (v. 8b). These were Jesus’ final words before ascending from the Mount of Olives (v. 9), underscoring their immense importance. The disciples were so struck by this moment that they stood gazing into the sky (v. 10), needing angels to remind them that Jesus will return (v. 11).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

The church didn’t begin timidly or weakly. It erupted into existence through the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit! Jesus promised that from the very start, this divine power would mark us as His people (“baptized with the Holy Spirit”) and equip us for the impossible: Sharing the Gospel across diverse regions and peoples simultaneously. This movement transcends all barriers, carrying Christ’s Message to every corner of the earth. The dynamic birth, fueled by the mighty Spirit, unleashes the transformative Message of our powerful Lord, to the glory of our Father in heaven!

Reflect on these questions

How is this passage shaping your perspective on the purpose and power of the church?

What role do you see yourself playing in this dynamic mission of spreading the Gospel—locally, regionally, and globally?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

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Devotion - Tuesday

Powerful Birth: Into a Family

Suggested self study: Acts 1:12-17

Focus passage: Acts 1:14-16a

¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. ¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said...

A Bible study in a nutshell

After Jesus' ascension, the disciples left the Mount of Olives and traveled about three-quarters of a mile (a Sabbath day's journey) to Jerusalem, gathering with the apostles in Bethany, a small village on the eastern slope (vv. 12-13). They met in a large room, where they prayed daily alongside other believers, including Jesus' mother Mary, His brothers, and other women (v. 14). During this time, Peter addressed 120 believers, proposing the replacement of Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, to fulfill Scripture (vv. 15-17). Notably, Jewish law required at least 120 men to form a recognized community with its own council, demonstrating that the believers quickly established a legitimate and substantial new community.

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Though Jesus began with twelve disciples, the Church grew swiftly! Even those who crucified Jesus had to recognize the Church's birth as a legitimate community under Jewish law. This was no small band of radicals but a vibrant community of believers united as brothers and sisters in Christ, bound by a shared purpose. From the outset, the early Church intentionally sought one another out, gathered together, and recognized their need for each other as one family under one Father.

Reflect on these questions

Are you actively connected to a community of believers?

What benefits have you experienced from being intentionally part of God's family?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Wednesday

Powerful Birth: Only in Jesus

Suggested self study: Acts 4:1-14

Focus passage: Acts 4:8-12

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified but Whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is ‘the Stone you builders rejected, which has become the Capstone.’ ¹² Salvation is found in no One else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

A Bible study in a nutshell

Peter and John boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus, even facing arrest for their faith (vv. 1-3). Yet, their Message led many to believe, growing the Jerusalem Church to 5,000 (v. 4). The next morning, influential Jewish leaders, unsettled by their actions, questioned the apostles’ authority to teach and perform miracles (vv. 5-7). Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter declared that their works were through Jesus, Who was crucified but now risen (vv. 8-10). He emphasized that, though rejected, Jesus is the Cornerstone of salvation, the only Name by which people can be saved (vv. 11-12; Ps. 118:22). The leaders were astonished by the courage of these unschooled, ordinary men, especially with the healed crippled man standing beside them—undeniable evidence of God’s power (vv. 13-14).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Unschooled, ordinary men achieving extraordinary results:

Courageously they shared their faith, even risking imprisonment!

5,000 people in the Jerusalem area became believers, and a crippled man walked again!

How? Through the power of the resurrected Jesus, our Cornerstone. Salvation comes only through His Name, birthing the Church into a powerful, unstoppable force.

Reflect on these questions

We often feel inadequate or unworthy to serve God. How does this passage reshape your view of your potential in Him?

Knowing salvation is found only in Jesus’ Name, how does this Truth influence your priorities in sharing the Gospel?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Thursday

Powerful Birth: Powerful Access

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 4:23-31

²⁸ They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the Name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.

A Bible study in a nutshell

The apostles' release led them to pray with believers, praising God who created all (vv. 23-24). They acknowledged that worldly leaders' schemes against Jesus only fulfill God's predetermined plan (vv. 25-28). This strengthened their faith to pray boldly that God would hear their threats and empower them to speak God's Word fearlessly, performing miracles in Jesus' Name" (vv. 29-30). God responded by shaking the place, filling them with the Holy Spirit, and emboldening their witness (v. 31).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

From the Church's *powerful birth*, the apostles knew prayer provided them *powerful access* to God, crucial for its growth.

They stood unshaken by corrupt leaders—political or religious—who opposed God but could never prevail. Their actions, never hidden from God, cannot thwart His plan. There can never be a surprise attack on God.

So, let no threats or decisions weaken your faith,

...steal your confidence...

silence, dilute or delay your testimony.

Prayer unleashes God's power and always triumphs! Keep praying, alone and with others, for it yields wondrous results.

Reflect on these questions

Have you experienced attacks from leaders (political, religious, or otherwise) on your faith in God? What lessons did you draw from those experiences?

How would you describe your prayer life?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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[illegible]

Devotion - Friday

Powerful Birth: Powerful Bond

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 4:32-37

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. ³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

A Bible study in a nutshell

The early church exemplified true unity in “heart and mind” (v. 32a). Believers shared their possessions freely, holding nothing back (v. 32b). The apostles fearlessly testified to the risen Lord (v. 33a), and God’s grace rested on all (v. 33b). Many sold what they owned to meet everyone’s needs (vv. 34-35). Joseph, known as Barnabas, “Son of Encouragement” (see also Acts 11:24, 9:27, 11:23), embodied this spirit by selling his field and giving the proceeds to the apostles for distribution (vv. 36-37).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

From its *powerful birth*, the Church fostered a *powerful bond* among believers—“one in heart and mind” (v. 32a), a unity we should always pursue. This bond emboldened fearless testimonies, as it’s easier to speak boldly when we’re not alone.

“Lord, loosen my grip on my possessions. Open my heart and hands to give freely.”

Verse 33b says, “...and much grace was upon them all.” Isn’t this grace what we all seek?

Reflect on these questions

What is your testimony like?

How generous is your giving?

Could your encouraging nature earn you the nickname “son/daughter of encouragement,” like Barnabas? What nickname might believers give you?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Saturday

Powerful Birth: Into Truth

Suggested self study: Acts 5:1-11

Focus passage: Acts 5:1-5

¹ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. ³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Ananias and Sapphira sold land but secretly kept part of the profit, unlike the generous Barnabas (vv. 1-2). Peter confronted Ananias, noting the land was his to do with as he wished (v. 4a), yet he chose to lie to the Holy Spirit and God (vv. 3-4b). This deceit led to Ananias' death, sparking fear of God among all (v. 5). Young men removed his body (v. 6). Hours later, Sapphira, unaware of her husband's fate, repeated the lie to Peter (vv. 7-8), resulting in her death (vv. 9-10). This deepened the fear of God within and beyond the church (v. 11).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a sobering, unsettling moment in Acts.

It underscores the importance of not just *believing* the Truth but *living* it, especially in commitments to God. He knows our hearts, so our decisions must be followed by faithful obedience.

We cannot deceive God or break our word without consequence.

A deep respect for God is vital—without it, we risk prioritizing selfish desires or appearances over our vows.

The Church's powerful birth was rooted in Truth—lies have no place in it.

Reflect on these questions

Have you made commitments to God that remain unfulfilled? What are they?

If it's not too late, isn't now the time to follow through with obedience? Trust that you won't regret it!

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Sunday Morning Service

Acts 2:1-13

Read through the text in preparation for today's service.

Take some notes of what the Lord is laying on your heart.

Pray for your pastor and the Message that will be brought to you.

[illegible]

Sunday Evening Gathering

Discussion 1: Acts 2:14-41

Powerful Birth: To a Global Audience

The first Pentecost gathering of the Church was a momentous event, marked by a diverse, global audience.

Acts 2:9-11 lists people from regions like Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete, and Arabia—both Jews and converts—united in hearing “the wonders of God” in their own languages.

This underscores the global scope of God’s purpose, as Peter delivered a Spirit-filled Message on this historic day.

Acts 2:14-21

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.”’

A short summary

As foretold by the prophet Joel (2:28-32), the Holy Spirit now empowers God’s people—they’re not drunk, it’s only morning! God promised that in the last days, before Jesus’ return, all people—children, youth, elderly, servants, men, and women (2:17-18)—will receive the Holy Spirit. Empowered, they’ll proclaim God’s wonders, warning the world of the coming end (2:19-20), with the promise that “everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” (2:21).

A short reflection

This passage makes it clear: All who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Child of God, your life is undeniably part of the Spirit-driven acts of the Church!

Your walk with the Lord is a powerful testimony.

Let's unite to share this extraordinary Message with the Spirit's boundless guidance!

Acts 2:22-36

²² "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a Man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This Man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him. ²⁵ David said about Him: "'I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷ because You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'" ²⁹ "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. ³³ Exalted to the right Hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right Hand ³⁵ until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" ³⁶ "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

A short summary

Jesus' triumph over death changes everything, proving He can save us! Peter proclaims Jesus' identity, His miracles (v. 22), His death at the hands of the wicked as part of God's plan (v. 23), and His resurrection (v. 24). Quoting Psalm 16:8-11, Peter recalls God's promise through David that He will never abandon us, even in death, due to the Lord's power (vv. 25-28). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy, as God vowed a descendant of David would rule forever (vv. 29-32). The Holy Spirit, now with us (v. 33), strengthens our assurance that Jesus, as David foretold in Psalm 110:1, is the Messiah, seated at God's right Hand—truly Lord and Christ (vv. 34-35). This Truth is undeniable (v. 36)!

Old Testament prophecies and the Holy Spirit confirm Jesus as the risen Messiah, able to save us. This Truth is the cornerstone of our faith—without it, our faith crumbles.

A short reflection

That Jesus conquered death proves He IS God, our Savior, and validates all we believe.

Though this Truth is often challenged, Peter's example shows us to boldly weave it into our testimonies when sharing the Gospel.

Acts 2:37-41

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his Message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

A short summary

How do we come to Jesus? Peter's Spirit-inspired Message pierced the hearts of his listeners (v. 37a), sparking their urgent question: "What shall we do?" (v. 37b). Peter offered clear guidance (vv. 38-39):

Repent: Confess your sins to God and turn away from them.

Be baptized: Baptism becomes the physical sign of the Truth that you have received God's forgiveness.

Receive the Holy Spirit: God's presence and power dwell in all His children.

Peter urged the crowd to flee the corrupt world that seeks their destruction and turn to God (v. 40). That day, about 3,000 embraced this Message of salvation and were baptized (v. 41).

A short reflection

May the Holy Spirit empower us to share this Message of hope so powerfully that it moves others to repent, be baptized, and live radiant, Spirit-driven lives.

This is how we can add countless souls to God's family today!

Table Discussion - Sharing the Best News Ever, with Everyone!

The Church was born with power through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. From its first day, the Gospel Message reached a diverse crowd from across the ancient world, each hearing it in their own language (Acts 2:5-11). Peter's Spirit-filled sermon in Jerusalem resonated with people from every nation present, proclaiming salvation through Jesus.

The Holy Spirit compels us to share this Message of salvation with those near and far, swiftly spreading the Good News through His power.

Today, the Holy Spirit empowers us to share this Good News both locally and globally.

Let's discuss practical ways to engage in this mission:

- 1. Local Impact:** Think about the people in your daily life—family, friends, coworkers, or neighbors. What specific actions are you taking to introduce them to the Gospel? For *example*, are you inviting them to church, sharing your testimony during conversations, or offering to pray with them? In your own home, do you engage with your spouse, children, or family members through devotional time, *such as* reading Scripture together, praying as a family, or discussing faith over meals? Share one practical step you've taken or plan to take to share Jesus with those closest to you.
- 2. Global Reach:** Consider the broader world—communities and nations beyond your immediate circle. How are you contributing to spreading the Gospel worldwide? *This could include* supporting missionaries, participating in short-term mission trips, or using social media to share the Message of salvation. Share one idea or action you're involved in (or could explore) to help spread the Good News globally.

Let's share specific ideas, experiences, or plans to inspire and encourage one another in this crucial mission!

Discussion 2: Acts 2:42-3:26

Powerful Birth: On Fire for the Lord

It's no surprise that the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in Acts 2:3 as "tongues of fire," for as we'll explore in this session, whenever the Holy Spirit fills a believer or group of believers, it ignites a passionate fire for the Lord!

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

A short summary

What an inspiring group of believers! They were devoted to teaching, fellowship, sharing communion, and praying faithfully (v. 42). Miracles abounded, and they held deep reverence for God (v. 43). Their love for God and one another united them like a family, meeting each other's needs sacrificially—even selling possessions to provide for one another (vv. 44-45). They gathered daily at the temple, shared meals with joy and sincere hearts (v. 46), and praised God continually. This transformational lifestyle won the respect of others in Jerusalem, leading many to accept Jesus as Savior—daily (v. 47)!

A short reflection

A personal relationship with Jesus is vital, but gathering and serving Him as a united body of believers is equally essential!

Acts 3:1-11

¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. ⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or

gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God,¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.¹¹ While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.

A short summary

At 3 p.m., Peter and John encountered a man, crippled from birth, at the temple’s Beautiful Gate as they went to pray (vv. 1-2). When he begged for money (v. 3), they fixed their eyes on him (v. 4), raising his hopes for help (v. 5). He received far more than expected: Peter, lacking money, commanded him in Jesus’ Name to rise and walk (v. 6). Instantly healed, the man leaped up, entered the temple praising God (vv. 7-8), and drew a crowd who joined in glorifying God, filled with awe (vv. 9-10). Amazed, they rushed to Peter and John at Solomon’s Colonnade to hear more (v. 11).

A short reflection

Being “on fire for the Lord” means more than serving your own faith community with divine zeal that amazes those around you, as we saw from Acts 2:42-27.

“On fire for the Lord” also means reaching out to that “astonished world” with remarkable acts of service, transforming their amazement into a burning passion for the Lord, as Peter explains next.

Acts 3:12-16

¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus. You handed Him over to be killed, and you disowned Him before Pilate, though he had decided to let Him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the Author of Life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the Name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ Name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

A short summary

Peter seized the moment of the crippled man’s healing not to draw attention to himself and John (v. 12), but to point the amazed crowd to the Truth: Though they rejected Jesus, the Son of God (vv. 13-14), and contributed to the death of the “Author of Life” (v. 15a), Jesus rose from the dead, and this miracle testified to His resurrection (v. 15b). It was solely through faith in Jesus’ Name that this man was healed—faith in Jesus makes the impossible possible (v. 16)!

A short reflection

Peter's powerful words invite reflection:

Jesus, the “Author of Life”: This striking description reveals the depth of who Jesus is. How does it reshape our view of Him?

“Faith in the Name of Jesus”: This Name holds the power to restore and strengthen. Have we let familiarity with Jesus' Name diminish its impact, leading to spiritually weak lives? What could change if we restored the Name of Jesus to its rightful place of power in our hearts and actions?

Acts 3:17-26

¹⁷ “Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send the Christ, Who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among His people.’ ²⁴ “Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ ²⁶ When God raised up His servant, He sent Him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

A short summary

We often act in ignorance, as Jerusalem's leaders did in Jesus' day (v. 17). Yet, God was not caught off guard—He planned it, fulfilling His purpose through Christ's suffering (v. 18). This gracious outcome opens our eyes to Jesus, calling us to repent and turn to God, so our sins may be forgiven and times of refreshing from the Lord can begin (vv. 19-20).

Jesus, now in heaven, waits for us to turn from our wicked ways (vv. 21, 26b). How tragic it would be to miss this life-changing connection with Him! Moses warned that those who reject Jesus will be cut off from God's people (vv. 22-23; Deut. 18:15-19), and all prophets since Samuel have proclaimed these truths about Jesus (v. 24). As heirs of God's covenant and prophets, how heartbreaking it would be to miss this promise (v. 25)—especially for our Jewish brothers, to whom the Risen Lord first appeared, despite their role in His death (v. 26a).

A short reflection

What specific sins or wicked patterns in your life do you need to bring to Jesus? Be honest with yourself. Are you weary, longing for the Lord's refreshing? You can experience it now—turn fully to God, surrender completely, and let a new, eternal season of renewal begin!

Table Discussion: On Fire, Joyful, Refreshed!

The powerful birth of the Church in Acts is undeniably inspiring! From the early believers' deep devotion to caring for one another and serving God faithfully (Acts 2:42-47) to their bold outreach, transforming lives like the crippled man's miraculous healing (Acts 3:1-11), their passion sets a high standard.

It would be tragic to miss the refreshing renewal that comes from inviting the Lord into our lives.

Yet, embracing it—available to all right now—can ignite joy and purpose!

Let's discuss practical ways to live this out:

- 1. Church Community:** Reflect on the early Church's commitment to teaching, fellowship, sharing meals, and prayer (Acts 2:42-47). In your Church family today, what similar practices are thriving? *For example*, are there active small groups, shared meals, prayer time, or acts of generosity? What might be missing that you wish your Church could embrace to deepen its sense of community and devotion?
- 2. Personal Joy:** Think about the beggar leaping for joy after his healing (Acts 3:8). Can you recall a specific moment when God's blessings—big or small—filled you with such joy that you couldn't help but celebrate? Share a practical example from your life and how it strengthened your faith.

Share your experiences and ideas to encourage lively discussion, inspiring one another to live on fire, joyful, and refreshed for the Lord!

Discussion 3: Acts 4:13-22; 5:12-16

Powerful Birth: Unschooled, Unparalleled

The Church's birth was undeniably powerful, not through worldly "powerful" people, but through those who were "unschooled" and "ordinary." This was intentional! It shows that anyone, no matter how ordinary or powerless, can play a vital role in growing God's Church in extraordinary ways. The power comes not from us but from the Holy Spirit!

Through the Spirit's empowerment, even common men and women can spark unparalleled Church growth, as seen in the following passages.

Acts 4:13-22

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this Name." ¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the Name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

A short summary

The religious leaders were astonished by Peter and John's boldness, knowing they were unschooled, ordinary men (v. 13). Their fearlessness in proclaiming Jesus, with the healed crippled man standing beside them, was undeniable proof of God's power at work (v. 14). After intense deliberation (vv. 15-17), the leaders ordered the apostles never to speak of Jesus again (v. 18). Peter and John, unwavering, declared, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (vv. 19-20). Left with no counterargument, the leaders could only issue further threats and release them, as the miracle—a man over 40 years old healed—sparked widespread praise to God (vv. 21-22).

A short reflection

It would be a grave error to overlook the role ordinary people can play in God's Kingdom just because they lack education, wealth, or influence. God transforms the ordinary into extraordinary, the weak into powerful, and elevates our limited abilities far beyond worldly measures.

Through the Holy Spirit, the unschooled become unparalleled!

Acts 5:12-16

¹² The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

A short summary

The apostles performed numerous, awe-inspiring miracles (v. 12). Though many admired them and other believers, some hesitated to join due to the religious leaders' hostility (v. 13). Still, countless men and women embraced faith (v. 14), bringing their sick to the streets, hoping even Peter's shadow might heal them as he passed (vv. 15-16).

A short reflection

These unparalleled results of Spirit-empowered believers are truly astonishing!

How can this not stir us to join God's movement through His Spirit in the Church?

What could hold us back—fear of negative reactions from others? How tragic would that be!

Let that not be our story, nor yours.

Instead, let your story be one of "unschooled, yet unparalleled," transformed by a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Table Discussion - Power from Outside, Giving Power to what's Inside

The stories in Acts 4 and 5 are electrifying, showing ordinary, unschooled believers like Peter and John, empowered by the Holy Spirit, acting with astonishing courage and boldness (Acts 4:13, 5:12-16). Whether educated or not, influential or unknown, you—child of God—are filled with the same Holy Spirit! To say it differently: What you had inside of you *before* you met Jesus could *never empower* you to be like the apostles, *but after accepting Jesus* as Lord and Savior, *His powerful Spirit comes from God, and gives power to what's inside you—transforming you forever!*

You're ready *now* to step out boldly for Christ, defend your faith, and share the Message of salvation, no matter the reaction. Don't fear opposition; instead, see it as a blessing and a reason to rejoice (Acts 5:41, *"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."*).

Let's dive into these passages from Acts and discuss how we can live with this Spirit-driven power today!

- 1. Stepping Out with Courage:** Are you actively stepping out for Christ in your daily life? *For example*, are you praying boldly for someone in need, or defending the Gospel in conversations? How can you practically overcome some fears (*e.g.*, rejection, ridicule, or judgment), *perhaps by* praying for boldness or finding support in your Church community?
- 2. Immersing in Acts:** Are you diving into the Book of Acts to fuel your faith? How can studying these stories of Spirit-driven boldness inspire you to act? Share one practical step you'll take this week to immerse yourself in Acts (*e.g.*, reading a chapter daily, discussing it with a friend, or journaling about its impact).

Let's share real-life examples, and make commitments to live boldly, powered by the Holy Spirit.

Week 2

SPIRIT-DRIVEN ACTS OF THE CHURCH

Fearless First Steps

Acts 6-15

Devotion - Monday

Fearless First Steps: With the Right Focus and Right Help

Suggested self study: Acts 6:1-7

Focus passage: Acts 6:1-4, 7

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word."... ⁷ So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

A Bible study in a nutshell

As the Jerusalem Church grew, embracing believers from diverse backgrounds, a crisis emerged: Greek-speaking widows felt neglected compared to Hebrew-speaking ones (v. 1). The twelve apostles gathered everyone and prioritized keeping the ministry of prayer and preaching God's Word central, rather than diverting to food distribution (v. 2). They proposed selecting seven trusted men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to handle this task (v. 3), allowing the apostles to focus on prayer and teaching (v. 4). The Church agreed, choosing Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, along with six others (v. 5). These men were prayed over and commissioned with the laying on of hands (v. 6). As a result, the Word of God spread powerfully, disciples multiplied rapidly, and even many priests came to faith (v. 7).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Right focus: The early Church kept prayer and God's Word at the core, fueling all other ministries. This focus is vital in both Church and home life to sustain spiritual vitality.

Right help: They chose wise, Spirit-filled, trustworthy individuals to address challenges, ensuring effective ministry.

With laser-sharp spiritual focus and Godly help, the early Church took fearless first steps, leading to God's abundant blessing—growth in faith and numbers.

Reflect on these questions

Would you say this is how your Church family addresses challenges? Why do you say so?

Is this how you face challenges in your home or personal life? Should anything change?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Fearless First Steps: A Dedicated Apostle to the Gentiles

Suggested self study: Acts 9:1-31

Focus passage: A selection from Acts 9:1-31

¹ Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples... ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a Voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" ⁵ "Who are You, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, Whom you are persecuting," He replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."...¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias...¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas..and ask for...Saul... ¹⁵ ...This man is My chosen instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles...¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name."...Saul...began to preach in the synagogues...²²...Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. ²³ ...the Jews conspired to kill him...²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem...they were all afraid of him...²⁷ But Barnabas...told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord...and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the Name of Jesus...³¹ Then the Church...was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Saul, (later known as Paul), zealously persecuted Christians until a blinding light stopped him on the road to Damascus, where Jesus confronted him, saying, "Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:1-4). Jesus directed him to Damascus (vv. 5-6). Blind and fasting for three days (vv. 8-9), Saul, God's "chosen instrument" to preach to Gentiles, kings, and Israel despite suffering, was visited by Ananias (vv. 10-16). Ananias prayed; Saul, filled with the Holy Spirit, regained sight, was baptized, and proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God (vv. 17-20). His bold preaching amazed many, but Jews plotted his death (vv. 22-23). Escaping to Jerusalem, Barnabas vouched for him, and Saul preached fearlessly until threats forced him to Tarsus (vv. 26-30). The Church, Spirit-empowered, grew in peace and numbers (v. 31).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

God can truly redirect anyone to follow His path! Saul, boldly pursuing the destruction of Christians after Jesus' resurrection, encountered the Risen Lord face-to-face. In an instant, his life's course changed—not just to serve his fellow Jews, but also the Gentiles. Saul's first steps as a believer were fearless, powerfully proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, defending the faith, and growing the Christian family with bold conviction.

Reflect on these questions

Reflect on your life's journey so far. Do you ever feel that God can't transform it? That's a lie—God can use you powerfully!

What bold and fearless steps of faith do you want to take next?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Wednesday

Fearless First Steps: Growth Despite Persecution

Suggested self study: Acts 12:1-25

Focus passage: A selection from Acts 12:1-25

¹ It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the Church, intending to persecute them. ² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³ When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover...¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent His angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches..."¹⁶ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ Peter...described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place...²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. ²⁴ But the Word of God continued to increase and spread.

A Bible study in a nutshell

King Herod persecuted believers, killing James and arresting Peter during Passover for a public trial (vv. 1-4). The Church prayed fervently, and God's angel freed Peter, leading him past guards to safety (vv. 5-10). At Mary's house, believers, initially skeptical, celebrated his escape (vv. 12-17). Herod, amid conflicts with Tyre and Sidon, was hailed as a god but struck down for not honoring God, dying in agony (vv. 19-23). Despite persecution, the Church grew as the Gospel spread, with Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark continuing their mission (vv. 24-25).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Acts demonstrates repeatedly the Church's resilience amid persecution. Believers endured fellow believers being murdered, imprisonment, and attacks from self-glorifying leaders. Yet, God was unwavering: Present in prison, answering prayers, judging the wicked, and ultimately growing His Church.

The fearless first steps of the early, persecuted believers fueled Spirit-driven expansion.

Reflect on these questions

Recall tough times your Church family faced or difficult moments in your walk with God.

Reflecting on these, did they weaken your faith or strengthen it?

How did God show His faithfulness to you and your Church family?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Thursday

Fearless First Steps: Going Global - Part 1

Suggested self study: Acts 13:1-12

Focus passage: Acts 13:2-7

² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the Work to which I have called them.” ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. ⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the Word of God.

A Bible study in a nutshell

The Antioch Church had diverse leaders: Barnabas, Simeon (Jewish name, also called Niger, the Latin for “dark-complexioned”), Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (Jewish for “comforter,” a friend of Herod Antipas), and Saul (v. 1). They were led by the Holy Spirit during prayer and fasting to send Barnabas and Saul on a mission (vv. 1-3). Guided by the Spirit, they went to Cyprus, preaching in Salamis’ synagogues with John’s assistance (vv. 4-5). In Paphos, they faced opposition from a false prophet, Bar-Jesus/Elymas, who tried to hinder the proconsul Sergius Paulus from hearing God’s Word (vv. 6-8). Filled with the Spirit, Saul, now called Paul, confronted Elymas, denouncing his deceit and striking him blind by God’s power (vv. 9-11). This miracle led Sergius Paulus to faith (v. 12).

A quick note: In Acts 13:9, Saul, his Jewish name, is first called Paul, his Greco-Roman name, reflecting his shift to ministry in Gentile contexts. Paul, known by his Greco-Roman “cognomen, Paulos”, never mentions his Jewish name in his letters.

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Driven by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Paul were sent out to Cyprus and beyond, their mission reflecting an outward focus to reach both Jews and Gentiles. Even Paul’s name underscored his call to serve beyond the Jewish nation. The first steps of the first believers were to fearlessly go with a goal of uniting all of us into Christ’s family. The proconsul’s desire to hear God’s Word reveals a hunger for Truth in the ancient world, a hunger still present today. To discern where, when, and how to share God’s Word, the early believers worshiped, fasted, and prayed, listening intently to the Spirit. Similarly, we hear God’s guidance by seeking Him in quiet, intentional moments, free from worldly distractions.

Reflect on these questions

What changes can you make to hear the Holy Spirit more clearly?

Who in your local or global community is hungry for God’s Word, and how is the Spirit leading you to share it with them?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

[illegible]

Fearless First Steps: Going Global - Part 2

Suggested self study: Acts 13:13-52

Focus passage: Acts 13:13-15, 32-33, 38-39, 44-49

¹³ From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.”...³² We tell you the Good News: What God promised our fathers ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus...³⁸ “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses...⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the Word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Paul and Barnabas went to Pisidian Antioch, a key town, invited to speak in the synagogue on the Sabbath (vv. 13-15). Paul shared how God delivered Israel from Egypt, provided judges, prophets, and kings, and sent Jesus, Who died and rose, offering salvation by faith, not the law of Moses (vv. 16-41). The next Sabbath, a larger crowd gathered, but jealousy among some Jews sparked opposition (vv. 42-45). Paul and Barnabas declared that since the Jews rejected the Message, they would share the Good News with the Gentiles, fulfilling Isaiah 49:6 to be “a light for the Gentiles” (vv. 46-47). Sadly, some Jews didn’t deem themselves worthy of eternal life. Yet, many Gentiles, overjoyed and honored, believed, appointed for eternal life, and the Word spread widely (vv. 48-49)! Facing persecution, Paul and Barnabas left for Iconium, leaving the disciples filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (vv. 50-52).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

The Good News of justification by faith in Jesus alone was first shared with the Jews, but some rejected it, prompting Paul’s heartbreaking words: “You do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life”.

Sadly so some will reject the Good News. However, let’s fearlessly shine as a light to all. You will find, many will be honored to receive this Message. Many are waiting to be filled with joy as they discover they’ve been...*appointed for eternal life!*

Reflect on these questions

The rejection of the Gospel doesn’t have to be your story! You’re invited to eternal life—say YES today! If you’ve already said yes, embrace this Truth: You’re appointed for eternal life!

Does the Good News still spark joy and honor in you? Why?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

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Devotion - Saturday

Fearless First Steps: Going Global - Part 3

Suggested self study: Acts 14:1-28

Focus passage: Acts 14:1, 3-7, 19-27

¹ At Iconium Paul and Barnabas...spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed...³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴ The people of the city were divided...⁵ There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews...to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the good news...¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. ²¹ They preached the Good News in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God," they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each Church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in Whom they had put their trust. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the Word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. ²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷ On arriving there, they...reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

A Bible study in a nutshell

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue, converting many Jews and Gentiles (v. 1). Despite Jewish resistance, they performed miracles (vv. 2-4). Facing a stoning plot, they fled to Lystra and Derbe, continuing their mission (vv. 5-7). In Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man, leading locals to mistake Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes, nearly sacrificing to them (vv. 8-13). They clarified they were human, preaching the true God (vv. 14-18). Jews from Iconium incited a mob to stone Paul, leaving him for dead, but believers found him alive, and he departed for Derbe (vv. 19-20). In Derbe, many believed, and they revisited Lystra and Iconium, strengthening disciples, appointing elders, and praying, noting that "we must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God" (vv. 21-23). Returning to Antioch, they reported the Gospel's spread, especially among Gentiles (vv. 25-28).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

The early Church's fearless first steps involved visiting many places, reaching countless listeners, sharing bold Messages, and witnessing miraculous moments.

NONSTOP. Despite division, rejection, and stoning, they pressed on fearlessly to share the Gospel.

Reflect on these questions

Paul and Barnabas encouraged believers, "We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God". How would you respond to this challenge? Are you ready for relentless, "NONSTOP" faith?

Why is it important for us to always remember that it is GOD Who opens the doors of faith to people?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

[illegible]

Sunday Morning Service

Acts 6:8-7:60

Read through the text in preparation for today's service.

Take some notes of what the Lord is laying on your heart.

Pray for your pastor and the Message that will be brought to you.

[illegible]

Sunday Evening Gathering

Discussion 1: Acts 8:1-25

Fearless First Steps: Persecution met with Growth

Acts ignites a fire in us! The early believers launched forward with fearless passion, unstoppable from the start, driven by the Holy Spirit's divine power. It's contagious—stirring us to leap in, fierce and unafraid, right now!

Acts 8 reveals fierce persecution from the start. Did it halt the believers? Absolutely not! The stronger the opposition, the more the Church flourished, proving this wasn't human effort or emotional hype, but the unstoppable Divine Power of the Holy Spirit!

This truth from Acts 8 still fuels the Church today.

Acts 8:1-8

¹ And Saul was there, giving approval to his [Stephen's] death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the Church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the Church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. ⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

A short summary

Stephen's faithfulness despite martyrdom sparked intense persecution in Jerusalem, scattering all but the apostles across Judea and Samaria (v. 1). As believers buried Stephen (v. 2), Saul (later known as Paul) ravaged the Church, dragging believers from homes to prison (v. 3).

Yet, the scattered believers fearlessly preached the Good News wherever they went (v. 4). Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria, performing miracles (vv. 5-7), filling the people with great joy (v. 8).

A short reflection

God allowed Stephen's fearless first steps to stop in martyrdom, stoned to death. A few short steps, yet powerful to the end! Both encouraging and challenging!

God gave believers no time to wallow in sorrow, as He also allowed fierce persecution, with Saul's systematic house-to-house attacks, scattering them across Judea and Samaria. While mourning Stephen, the believers boldly shared the Word everywhere they went, with God's favor evident in miracles and evil spirits fleeing from the Name of Jesus.

Stephen's first and last fearless steps, despite him being stoned, were filled with joy: Full of the Holy Spirit, he looked up, saw the glory of God and said, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right Hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

Stephen's bold witness ignited a fearless spark in his brothers and sisters, who, despite persecution, were bringing "great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8).

Acts 8:9-13

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

A short summary

In Samaria, a sorcerer named Simon captivated people, some even believing he was a god (vv. 9-11).

But Philip's proclamation of the Good News of God's Kingdom in Jesus' Name transformed everything: Many, including men, women, and even Simon, believed and were baptized (vv. 12-13).

A short reflection

We can easily be swayed by miracles and signs, fixating on them or the people performing them—both dangerous traps. Simon the sorcerer's life warns us: He relished performing magic for the praise of common and powerful alike, then embraced the Good News Philip preached, which was wonderful. Yet, he trailed Philip, not Jesus, constantly "astonished" by the "great signs and miracles he saw" (Acts 8:13).

Who should we fiercely follow? Jesus alone!

Should we marvel at signs or the Miracle Worker, Jesus?

Does Church growth amid persecution stem from miracles or from hearts deeply connected to our Lord?

Acts 8:14-24

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the Name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the Gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." ²⁴ Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

A short summary

Hearing that Samaritans accepted Jesus, the apostles sent Peter and John to them (v. 14). They prayed for the new believers, baptized only in Jesus' Name, to receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 15-16). As they laid hands on them, the Spirit was given (v. 17). Simon, seeing this, offered money for the ability to impart the Spirit (vv. 18-19). Peter rebuked him sharply, warning that his money and corrupt heart disqualified him from Jesus' ministry (vv. 20-21).

Peter urged Simon to repent and seek forgiveness immediately (v. 22) to be freed from the bitterness trapping him in sin (v. 23), likely alluding to Deuteronomy 29:18's warning of a "root" bearing "bitter poison" that ruins lives: "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; *make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.*" We must guard ourselves against idolatry, fame, money, power or afflictions becoming a "root" in our hearts, producing "bitter poison" that harms our relationship with God and His people.

Simon promptly requested prayer for forgiveness (v. 24)!

A short note

Receiving the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:38 links baptism in Jesus' Name to receiving the Holy Spirit, yet Acts 19:1–7 shows twelve men at Ephesus who hadn't been baptized in Jesus' Name. Laying on of hands is noted only in Acts 19:6 for receiving the Spirit, while Acts 10:44–48 shows the Spirit coming before water baptism. Thus, receiving the Holy Spirit isn't tied to specific actions like water baptism or apostolic laying on of hands, but to encountering the living, risen Lord, as seen in Acts 2:38 (no hands mentioned), Acts 9:17 (no apostles present), and the Ethiopian official's baptism by Philip, where it's assumed he received the Spirit to carry his faith into Africa alone (Acts 8:36–39).

A short reflection

The Church grew rapidly with power across regions and diverse groups, prompting the Jerusalem “mother Church” to send representatives to celebrate and witness this expansion. They baptized believers and taught them about the Holy Spirit Who comes to live in and work through believers.

Simon’s life warns us: Even as believers, we can be distracted. Though saved, he still craved the praise his magic once brought, a sinful “root” yielding “bitter poison” (cf. Deuteronomy 29:18). This drove him to seek fame among believers, offering money to impart the Holy Spirit, feeding his inner desire for recognition.

Being born into God’s family means starting as children—crawling, then walking, before running boldly. Simon needed mature believers like the apostles to show him his worth is in Christ, his strength from the Holy Spirit, and his glory in God—not worldly fame.

As God’s children, we have *all in Christ* and are called to *share Him with all*.

On the other hand: Uprooting sinful roots takes time, but with the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance from seasoned believers, it’s possible.

Acts 8:25

When they had testified and proclaimed the Word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

A short summary

Peter and John kept testifying and sharing the Good News in many Samaritan cities as they returned to Jerusalem (v. 25).

A short reflection

This is powerful:

Philip passionately preaches the Gospel everywhere.

Peter and John, inspired by the results, join to witness it.

Encouraged, they share the Good News on their return!

Isn’t this a great example of:

Local Missions sparking Global Missions,

and Global Missions fueling Local Missions?

Table Discussion - Growing Despite Pushback

The Church grew despite heavy, intentional and systematic persecution.

The Church grew despite being scattered—in fact this simply propelled growth!

The Church grew despite some, like Simon the sorcerer, peddling magic as worldly alternatives.

The Church grew despite deep-rooted temptations to slip back into old sinful ways, as Simon did even after accepting Christ.

How did they do this? Relentless reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, and encouragement from the fearless Spirit-driven actions of the family of believers.

It would be tragic to let fear or distractions dim our faith. Embracing the Spirit's power—available to all now—can ignite dynamic growth! Let's discuss practical ways to live this out:

1. **Pushback in Today's World:** What pushback do you see or experience as a believer today? (*e.g.*, cultural pressures to silence our faith, skepticism toward Christian values.)
2. **Resistance When Sharing Faith:** Have you faced resistance while sharing your faith? Share a moment and how it felt. (*e.g.*, feeling judged or dismissed when sharing Jesus.)
3. **Lingering Temptations After Faith:** What deep-rooted temptations challenge you even after faith? (*e.g.*, like Simon's desire for praise, struggles with pride or approval-seeking.)

Let's share specific ideas or plans to inspire and uplift each other to grow despite pushback!

Discussion 2: Acts 8:26-40; 10:1-48; 11:1-4, 15-18

Fearless First Steps: Global Reach

Right from the beginning of the early Church the Gospel spread quickly throughout all of the ancient world...also to Africa! Being born in Africa you can imagine how special this makes me feel. In fact it brings me close to the heart of our Jewish brothers and sisters—how excited they must have felt when they realized that Jesus, the Messiah, was born in their country! Salvation came to them first! Thus also the sadness in Paul's life that so many missed this, and the desire of his heart that they will still be saved, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." (Romans 10:1).

How do you feel that the Gospel has a "Global Reach", and that you are in a country where the Best News ever has also reached...you?!

Let us start with how the Good News reached the continent of Africa.

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." ³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a Sheep to the slaughter, and as a Lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. ³³ In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His Life was taken from the earth." ³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, Who is the prophet talking about, himself or Someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. ³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

A short summary

An angel directed Philip to a desolate road from Jerusalem to Gaza (v. 26). There, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official under Queen Candace, returning from worshiping in Jerusalem (v. 27). Reading Isaiah 53:7-8 in his chariot, the eunuch struggled to understand (vv. 28-31).

Philip joyfully explained that the passage pointed to Jesus, the Lamb slain for our sins (vv. 32-35). Thrilled, the eunuch spotted water and asked to be baptized. They stopped the chariot, and Philip baptized him (vv. 36-38).

As they emerged, the Holy Spirit whisked Philip away, leaving the eunuch overflowing with joy, his life transformed (v. 39).

Philip continued preaching the Gospel from Azotus to Caesarea, where he likely settled (v. 40).

A short reflection

God ensured the early Church knew the Gospel must start in Jerusalem, but quickly spread to all corners, including the continent of Africa. The Good News of Jesus was meant for all, propelled by the Holy Spirit's global push.

This mission remains unchanged today—we must zealously share it in our Churches and families, reaching the world.

*We should aim to reach our **families** with this Message of the Lamb, slain for our sins.*

*As **families** we should aim to reach the **world** with this Message of the Lamb, slain for our sins.*

Let us find those who still struggle to understand, patiently spend quality time with them till they understand, pray with them to find salvation in the Lord, baptize them, and then...

let the Spirit “whisk” us away to the next lost soul!

This Spirit-driven Mission in our lives and Churches sparks joyful hearts, as with the eunuch's radiant joy—true joy from a God-encounter.

Is this not what we all long for?

The Gospel's global reach continues in Acts 10 and beyond.

Acts 10:1-48

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!” ⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa. ⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³ Then a

voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." ¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. ¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." ²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" ²² The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. ²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." ²⁷ Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" ³⁰ Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." ³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. ³⁹ "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." ⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Acts 11:1-4, 15-18

¹ The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴ Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened...¹⁵ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” ¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

A short summary

In Acts 10 an angel appeared to Cornelius, a devout centurion of an Italian Regiment in Caesarea, instructing him to summon Simon Peter (vv. 1-6). Caesarea was a fairly new town built by Herod the Great, and had become the center of government for the Roman administration of Judea. Cornelius, an uncircumcised “pagan” according to the Jews, yet a generous and praying man, who found favor in God’s eyes, immediately sent men to Joppa (vv. 7-8).

Meanwhile God gave Peter a vision on a Joppa rooftop, where he went to pray enjoying the nice sea breeze that helped to cool one down: A sheet with “impure” animals descended, and a voice declared, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean”(vv. 9-15). This repeated three times and the sheet went back into heaven (v. 16).

As Peter pondered this troubling vision, Cornelius’ men arrived, and the Holy Spirit urged him to go with them (vv. 17-20). Peter welcomed them, and they traveled to Caesarea (vv. 21-23). Cornelius, thrilled, gathered family and friends (v. 24). He fell at Peter’s feet, but Peter said, “Stand up...I am only a man myself” (vv. 25-26). Peter shared with Cornelius and all gathered there that the Jews were not even supposed to meet with other people groups in their homes, but that God has opened his eyes and helped him to see that he cannot look anymore in this way at people—if God doesn’t see them as unclean, then neither should he (vv. 27-29)! Cornelius recounted his vision (vv. 30-33), and Peter preached about Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and salvation for all (vv. 34-43). The Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, who worshipped in tongues, astonishing the Jews (vv. 44-46). They were baptized, and Peter stayed a few days (vv. 47-48).

In Acts 11, news of God’s work among Gentiles spread like wildfire (v. 1). In Jerusalem, Peter was questioned for entering an uncircumcised man’s home, and then even having a meal with his family and friends (vv. 2-3).

Peter explained his vision, God’s words, and the Spirit’s outpouring, like on Pentecost day (vv. 4-15). Quoting Jesus, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (v. 16), Peter asked, “So if God gave them the same Gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (v. 17).

The believers rejoiced, saying, “...God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (v. 18)!

A short reflection

God calls us to dream big, stepping beyond our comfort zones to share the Gospel globally (Acts 1:8). Yet, He never leaves us to do this alone, empowering us through His Spirit to fulfill this mission for His glory!

Remarkably, God works from both sides: He stirs believers, as with Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-16), and prepares non-believers, like Cornelius, who was devout and ready before Peter arrived (Acts 10:2-6). This divine orchestration—God working in both believers and non-believers—secures the Gospel's global reach.

God also ensured the early Church debated His Spirit-driven global mission so we wouldn't have to! Knowing we might dodge this vital goal, He had Peter and the believers carefully consider the evidence—the Holy Spirit, God Himself, filling all who accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior—and unanimously affirm God's desire to reach everyone with the Gospel.

No debate remains—only radical obedience to join God's Spirit-driven mission to reach all!

Table Discussion: Nobody Puts it Together like God!

I love to say, “Nobody puts it together like God”.

God’s divine orchestration leaves us in awe! When we face challenges or pursue God-given dreams, we often feel stuck with no idea how to overcome or reach a successful outcome. Yet God always makes a way. His plans, like Peter’s vision and Cornelius’ readiness, unfold in ways that amaze us.

Here is one example from my life in ministry: Years ago, we bought land for a Church plant in Thailand, but funding stalled. Visiting the overgrown plot with a brother and his daughter, we prayed, trusting God. Upon return this man and his family offered to fund it. Why? About a decade earlier, they pledged to support land for a church building, but it never materialized. By funding the Thailand land, they fulfilled their vow for a new church building, thus freeing their U.S. property!

Only God could weave such a plan across continents and years, linking unconnected believers as His purpose unfolded!

Nobody puts it together like God!

Let’s discuss practical ways to embrace God’s orchestration:

1. **Peter and Cornelius’ Encounter:** What part of God’s divine setup in their meeting amazed you most? *Example:* The Spirit guiding both Peter and Cornelius simultaneously.
2. **Nobody Puts it Together like God:** Share a time in your life when God had put something together in a mind-blowing way. *Example:* A chance meeting or unexpected provision that only God could arrange.

Let’s share stories and ideas to inspire renewed faith in God’s perfect plans!

Discussion 3: Acts 15:1-32

Fearless First Steps: Pivotal Meetings

Some meetings are simply more important than others. Often meetings are to catch up so everyone stays on the same page, make some detailed arrangements for an upcoming event, or set some priorities moving forward. But then we have those meetings that literally change the course of your life, your marriage, family, or even the direction of your Church or set huge things in your country on a different course!

This last type of meeting is what is at stake here in Acts 15. This was a pivotal meeting that shifted the course of how Jewish and Gentile believers would view each other from this point on, and even more importantly, how they would look at salvation itself!

Let us revisit this meeting with great care.

Acts 15:1-21, 31-32

¹ Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." ⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the Message of the Gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." ¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God at first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ¹⁶ " 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear My Name, says the Lord, who does these things' ¹⁸ that have been known for ages. ¹⁹ "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

[A letter is then being drafted and delivered - Acts 15:22-30]

³¹ *The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.* ³² *Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.*

A short summary

Some Jews from Judea opposed the uncircumcised believers in Antioch, claiming circumcision was necessary for salvation (v. 1). Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed and traveled to Jerusalem with others to report God's work among the Gentiles (vv. 2-4). Certain believing Pharisees insisted Gentiles must be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses (vv. 5-6). During the discussion, Peter testified that God, Who knows all hearts, poured out His Holy Spirit on Gentiles as He did on Jews, showing no distinction and purifying their hearts by faith (vv. 7-9). He warned against testing God by imposing a burden even Jews couldn't bear (v. 10), affirming salvation comes through the grace of Jesus for all (v. 11). The assembly fell silent, hearing of God's miracles among the Gentiles (v. 12). James then spoke, citing Amos 9:11-12, which foretold God's inclusion of Gentiles in His restored Kingdom (vv. 13-18). He proposed a letter instructing Gentiles to abstain from idol-related food, sexual immorality, strangled meat, and blood (vv. 19-21). The group agreed, sending Judas and Silas with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter, which reflected the Holy Spirit's guidance (vv. 22-29). The Gentile believers rejoiced at this encouraging message (vv. 30-34).

A short reflection

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was critical: A misguided decision could have reshaped our faith, tying salvation to Jesus plus works and customs, rather than *grace alone through Jesus*.

A misstep might have forever divided circumcised and uncircumcised, Jewish and Gentile believers.

The enemy subtly pushes customs or works—celebrating specific holidays, performing “better” deeds, giving more, practicing certain disciplines, or having specific spiritual gifts—as requirements for “true” salvation. This trap can spiral into doubt: Am I doing enough? Is my list complete? Such burdens steal joy, hope, and passion, potentially leading to despair. Are certain practices, even good ones, becoming a yoke instead of fueling joyful service? Lay them down, embrace God's grace, and serve out of gratitude!

Pivotal meetings must hit the mark—their impact echoes beyond our lifetimes.

- Joshua urged Israel to choose God over idols, declaring, “...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15), shaping his family and nation for generations.
- The Acts 15 Council affirmed grace, setting the Church's path for ages (Acts 15:1-11).
- Now, it's your turn for a pivotal meeting with your spouse, family, and God. Debate the vital question: Who will you serve, and what should that relationship look like? Let Spirit-driven decisions pivot your life toward God's glory, impacting generations to come!

Table Discussion - Add-Ons

In Acts 15, the early Church faced a critical moment: Some insisted on adding customs and works to salvation, like circumcision or Jewish laws. James declared, “We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19), affirming salvation by grace alone.

Like ordering a simple coffee or burger in Africa versus navigating endless “add-ons” at an American restaurant—cream, flavors, bacon, loaded fries... While this might make life in America more colorful, adventurous, more tasty and the overall experience perhaps even more memorable, it does the exact opposite with our faith...

Add-ons to our faith complicates and burdens it. It drains joy, sap spiritual energy, and risk missing the mark with eternal consequences.

Let's keep the Gospel simple and true, inspired by the Holy Spirit!

1. **Personal Add-Ons to Faith:** What “add-ons” have you placed on your faith that might be weighing you down? *Examples:* Feeling you must pray a certain way, attend extra church services, avoid specific holidays or celebrate them in a specific way to be “truly” saved. Share a burden you could lay down to embrace grace alone.
2. **Church Add-Ons Hindering Others:** Are there practices in your Church that might make it harder for newcomers to connect with God? *Examples:* Insisting on specific worship styles, dress codes, or spiritual gifts as signs of true faith. How can your Church simplify to welcome all?

Let's share real-life examples, ideas, and commitments to keep our spiritual focus where it should be!

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Week 3

SPIRIT-DRIVEN ACTS OF THE CHURCH

Unstoppable Mission - New Church Plants

Acts 16-20

Devotion - Monday

Unstoppable Mission - Part 1

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 16:1-5

¹ He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ² The brothers 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.

A Bible study in a nutshell

In Lystra, Paul encountered Timothy, a young man with a Jewish believer mother and Greek father (v. 1). Impressed by Timothy's devotion to the Lord, Paul invited him to join his mission (vv. 2-3a). To ensure Timothy could speak in synagogues, Paul had him circumcised because of his Greek background (v. 3b). Together, they spread the Jerusalem Council's decision from town to town, strengthening the Churches, which flourished in faith and numbers (vv. 4-5).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

The Jerusalem Council's pivotal decision in Acts 15, affirming salvation by grace, continued to fuel Church planting and growth. Therefore this great decision had to be brought swiftly to all.

Another key factor for this early growth was the apostles' sacrificial commitment and spiritual discernment. Paul's request for Timothy to be circumcised wasn't about salvation, but a strategic choice to enter synagogues and share Jesus as the Messiah. This removed barriers, ensuring the Gospel reached Jews smoothly. The apostles understood true circumcision is of the heart (Romans 2:28-29), not the body. However non-believing Jews didn't understand this yet. So, by prioritizing spiritual goals over customs without compromising faith, they kept the mission unstoppable, changing eternal destinies.

Reflect on these questions

How can you adapt when doing Church planting or sharing your faith to ensure people hear the Gospel with minimal obstacles?

What are examples of things you could compromise to share your faith, and what must never be compromised?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Tuesday

Unstoppable Mission - Part 2

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 16:6-10

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.

A Bible study in a nutshell

It is incredible how close Paul and his co-workers stayed to the Lord. As they traveled the Holy Spirit truly directed their path. At some point they wanted to go further west to the Roman province of Asia, but the Spirit stopped them (v. 6)! Then, “when they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to” (v. 7)! So, they went on to Troas—how amazing that they traveled so in sync under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (v. 8)!

It is here in Troas that Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia who begged him to come and bring the Good News to them (v. 9), confirming to Paul that this was now the direction the Spirit wanted them to travel. Immediately they set sail and arrived in Philippi where we now find the birth of the first Church in Macedonia (v. 10).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

This is crucial: Our Mission is only “unstoppable” when it’s a capital “M” Mission—Spirit-driven and Spirit-guided. If we plant Churches or grow our Church families by following our own plans, they become small “m” missions, prone to slowing, stopping, or failing fast.

Only when fully led by the Holy Spirit does our Mission become...unstoppable!

This is how we plant Churches where God intends. The secret? Truly listening to His guidance, staying rooted in His Word, keeping spiritual eyes open for His visions—not our dreams—and following *immediately*, without hesitation or overthinking.

Reflect on these questions

How can you create space to truly hear and discern God’s direction for your life or mission?

Do you find it challenging to follow God’s call immediately, without questioning or debating? Why might you hesitate, and what changes could help you respond with bold, instant obedience?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Wednesday

Unstoppable Mission - Part 3

Suggested self study: Acts 16:11-18

Focus passage: Acts 16:13-18

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city [Philippi] gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's Message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. ¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

A Bible study in a nutshell

In Philippi, at a riverside prayer gathering, Paul and his team met some women, including Lydia, a Thyatira merchant of purple cloth and a worshiper of God (vv. 11-14a). Listening to Paul, Lydia embraced the Good News of Jesus, was baptized, and invited Paul's group to stay at her home (v. 15). On another day, they encountered a demon-possessed slave girl, used by her owners for profit through fortune-telling (v. 16). She trailed Paul, shouting that they were God's servants proclaiming salvation (v. 17). After days of this, Paul commanded in Jesus' Name, "Come out of her!" and the spirit left instantly (v. 18).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

An unstoppable Mission indeed: From men to women, ordinary folks to business owners, prayer gatherings to city streets—nothing and no one was untouched. The Good News spread everywhere!

The Holy Spirit kept moving: Lives transformed, families baptized, house Churches planted.

Even evil spirits, fleeing instantly in Jesus' Name, proclaimed the Truth of this Spirit-driven Mission!

Reflect on these questions

How can I share the Good News in my daily encounters, from casual to professional settings, to join this unstoppable Mission?

What step can I take this week to rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance, like Paul did, to boldly impact someone's life for Christ?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Thursday

Unstoppable Mission - Part 4

Suggested self study: Acts 16:19-40

Focus passage: A selection of verses from Acts 16:19-40

¹⁹ When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas... ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison...²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God..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 everybody'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 yourself! We are all here!" ²⁹ The jailer...fell trembling before Paul and Silas...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."...³³...the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized...³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men."...⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Enraged over lost profits, the slave girl's owners hauled Paul and Silas to authorities (v. 19). Flogged and jailed in a secure cell (vv. 20-24), they prayed and sang. God's earthquake opened doors and loosed chains (vv. 25-26). The jailer, thinking prisoners fled, nearly killed himself (v. 27). Paul reassured him all stayed (v. 28). Amazed, the jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" (vv. 29-30). They said, "Believe in Jesus" (v. 31). His household believed, was baptized, tended them, and rejoiced (vv. 32-34). At dawn, magistrates ordered their release (vv. 35-36). Paul protested their unlawful beating as Romans (v. 37). Officials escorted them out (vv. 38-39). They encouraged believers before departing (v. 40).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Once more: An unstoppable Mission!

Only a Spirit-driven Mission can sustain such resilience: Stripped, beaten, severely flogged with flesh torn, cast into grim ancient prisons—yet still praying and singing praises! Who does that? *No one—without the Spirit!*

After being freed, Paul and Silas didn't rest or seek comfort for themselves; they encouraged new believers at Lydia's house and pressed on to share the Gospel elsewhere. Facing brutal physical, emotional, and mental trials, they remained joyful, prayerful, and focused on *others*.

Only the Holy Spirit empowers such unstoppable faith to bring families to Christ and plant Churches against all odds.

Reflect on these questions

What can I do to become more resilient as I live out my faith?

How can I start to encourage others, even when I'm struggling, to keep the Mission unstoppable?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Devotion - Friday

Unstoppable Mission: Corinth

Suggested self study: Acts 18:1-17

Focus passage: Acts 18:1-11

¹ ...Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila...who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla...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... ⁵ When Silas and Timothy came...Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶ But when the Jews opposed Paul...he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "...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 ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians..believed and were baptized. ⁹ ...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 for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God.

A Bible study in a nutshell

In Corinth, Paul bonded with Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers exiled from Rome by Claudius' anti-Jewish edict (vv. 1-3). He worked with them, preaching in the synagogue on Sabbaths (v. 4). With Silas and Timothy's arrival, he focused on proclaiming Jesus as the Christ (v. 5). Spurned by Jews, he said, "Your blood be on your own heads! I'll go to the Gentiles" (v. 6), teaching at Titius Justus' home, a God-fearer (v. 7). Synagogue leader Crispus, his household, and many Corinthians believed and were baptized (v. 8). God encouraged Paul in a vision: "Don't be afraid; keep speaking...I am with you" (vv. 9-10). Paul stayed 18 months, teaching (v. 11). When Gallio became governor, Jews accused Paul (vv. 12-13), but he dismissed their disputes and expelled them, even when they brought Sosthenes (vv. 14-17).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

This passage offers powerful guidance for planting vibrant Churches:

- (1) *Faithfully go where doors are open*, as Paul did, preaching in synagogues every Sabbath.
- (2) When help arrives, like Silas and Timothy, *divide the work but keep the focus* on sharing the Gospel.
- (3) *When a door closes*, like the Jews' rejection, trust God worked anyway and *find the next open door*, as Paul did at Titius Justus' home, where many, including synagogue leader Crispus, believed.
- (4) Most importantly, *remember you're not alone—God called you and won't leave you*.
- (5) Stay fearless, even in tough times—God sees more than you do ("I have many people in this city")!

Reflect on these questions

Which of these Church planting steps resonated most with you, and why?

God always encourages at the perfect time. How has He uplifted you recently?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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[illegible]

Devotion - Saturday

Unstoppable Mission: Corinth and Beyond

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 18:18-28

¹⁸ Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the Church and then went down to Antioch. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the Way of God more adequately. ²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Priscilla and Aquila traveled with Paul from Corinth to Syria (v. 18a). In Cenchrea, Paul shaved his head, fulfilling a vow (v. 18b). In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila stayed, while Paul preached in the synagogue (v. 19). Urged to stay longer, he left for Caesarea, promising to return if God willed (vv. 20-21). From Caesarea, he visited Antioch, then Galatia and Phrygia, encouraging disciples (vv. 22-23). In Ephesus, Apollos, a knowledgeable Jew from Alexandria, spoke boldly about Jesus but knew only John's baptism (vv. 24-25). Priscilla and Aquila taught him the Gospel fully (v. 26). Apollos went to Achaia, where, with believers' support, he powerfully proved Jesus as the Christ, refuting Jews (vv. 27-28). God's plan unfolds perfectly!

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Church growth involves adapting, like Paul becoming "a Jew to the Jews," to win others to Christ without compromising core truths. Paul shaved his head, likely fulfilling a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1-21), a Jewish practice of consecration involving abstaining from wine, not cutting hair, and offering sacrifices at completion (which will follow later in Jerusalem), possibly thanking God for safety in Corinth. Balancing adaptability with unwavering truth is vital—too little, and people won't hear the Gospel; too much, and the Gospel loses its power.

Equally key is guiding passionate believers, like Apollos, to deeper understanding. God always places us perfectly to help others grow, orchestrating His plan flawlessly.

The Gospel Message, called "the Way of God" (v. 26), captures its beauty—don't you love that?

Reflect on these questions

Church growth is a relay race. Paul started or finished, but many others in Acts 18:18-28—Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Titius Justus, Crispus—ran it well. You are actually also on a relay team for the growth of the Church. How would you describe your role?

God perfectly timed help for Apollos to grasp the Gospel fully. When has God sent timely help for you? What's a recent example?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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Sunday Morning Service

Acts 11:19-30; 17:1-22

Read through the text in preparation for today's service.

Take some notes of what the Lord is laying on your heart.

Pray for your pastor and the Message that will be brought to you.

[illegible]

Sunday Evening Gathering

Discussion 1: Acts 19:1-22

Unstoppable Mission: Before the Endgame - Part 1

The early Church relentlessly pursued reaching the unreached, planting Churches, and nurturing believers with fierce intentionality, sacrificial dedication, and a sense of urgency. Nothing could stop them!

A key focus was ensuring clarity: Salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, not John's baptism or Jewish laws and customs. This faith brings complete forgiveness of sins, and the unmistakable presence of the Holy Spirit. Those baptized by John or gathering faithfully in synagogues, yet unaware of Jesus, needed this Truth.

Acts 19 vividly shows this Mission, launching Paul's final journey before he departs for Jerusalem and Rome.

Acts 19:1-9a

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. 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 into 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. ^{9a} But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them.

A short summary

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus and found disciples unaware of the Holy Spirit (vv. 1-2). He baptized them in Jesus' Name, laid hands on about twelve, and they received the Holy Spirit (vv. 3-7). Paul preached about God's Kingdom in the synagogue for three months until some rejected the Message and spoke maliciously against Jesus (vv. 8-9a).

So, Paul left.

A short reflection

We learn core church planting lessons from Acts 19:1-9:

- *Salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ*, not rituals, customs, or laws, no matter their source or tradition. Nothing can ever replace the invitation to put our faith in Jesus alone.
- *The Holy Spirit's presence must be central from the start*, not overshadowed by rituals (like laying on of hands) or specific gifts (like speaking in tongues). Keep your focus on the truth that God's presence dwells in you through the Holy Spirit! Let Him choose the gifts and ways He wishes to use us.
- Finally, when Paul faced rejection in the Ephesus' synagogue...*he left!* We pour everything into church planting with urgency and sacrifice, but if people persistently reject Jesus, we must move on, seeking fertile ground for the Gospel with the Spirit's guidance.

Three key lessons: Salvation through Jesus alone, the Spirit's indwelling presence, and a divine obligation to move on when the soil is unfruitful.

Acts 19:9b-22

^{9b} He [Paul] 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 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 I know about Paul, 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 their evil deeds. 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.

A short summary

Paul left the synagogue, taking the disciples, and taught daily at the school of Tyrannus for two years, reaching all Jews and Greeks in Asia with the Word of the Lord (vv. 9b-10).

God worked extraordinary miracles through Paul—handkerchiefs and aprons touched by him healed the sick and drove out evil spirits (vv. 11-12). How amazing!

Some Jews, like the seven sons of Sceva, tried misusing Jesus' Name to cast out demons, but the demons overpowered them, leaving them battered and naked (vv. 13-16). This shook Ephesus, sparking fear of the Lord (v. 17b). Many believed, confessed sins, abandoned sorcery, and publicly burned scrolls worth fifty thousand drachmas (Acts 19:17-19). The Word of the Lord spread like wildfire (v. 20).

Sensing his time was short, Paul planned to return to Jerusalem, then Rome, sending Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (vv. 21-22).

A short reflection

This passage reveals powerful Church growth principles from Paul's ministry:

- *Engage new believers through meaningful discussions:* Faithfully, frequently (Paul taught daily), and thoroughly (for two years).
- *Help believers to see the power of Jesus' Name,* bringing physical, emotional, and spiritual breakthroughs.
- *Only God's children can wield His Name against evil*—even demons recognize this. Powerful actions stem from a true relationship with our mighty God. There is no other Way.
- *The Name of Jesus commands reverence.* It is after all, *The Only Name* that truly matters. Before this Name evil flees, and evil deeds must be confessed, crushed, and abolished. This Name brings restoration, freedom from evil and sin, and light to darkness. No power, no other source, no amount of money in the world is worth hanging on to when you can have...Jesus!

Presenting the Gospel as “the Way” with urgency and consistency yields a mighty spiritual harvest.

The Word of the Lord will surely spread...like a wildfire!

Table Discussion: One Way—Commanding Clarity, Reverence and Powerful Growth

The early believers called Christianity “the Way,” recognizing Jesus as the One and Only Way to salvation through His death and resurrection.

Letting go of “your way”, and choosing “His Way” means surrendering all else, as the Lord who gave everything deserves our full respect and devotion.

With the Holy Spirit's presence, freely given through faith in Jesus, we can spark powerful spiritual growth in new places, among unbelievers, and for young believers needing strength.

Let's discuss practical ways to journey in this One Way:

1. **Sharing the Gospel Clearly:** How can you keep the Gospel—faith in Jesus alone—clear and simple in your conversations? *Examples:* Explaining salvation to a friend without adding religious “rules” or sharing a testimony centered on Christ’s grace.
2. **Recognizing God’s Power:** Where have you seen God’s powerful work, like overcoming evil or renewing lives, that you might have overlooked? *Examples:* Breaking free from addiction, choosing forgiveness, or seeing someone come to faith.
3. **Learning from the Holy Spirit:** What fresh insight about the Holy Spirit struck you in Acts 19? *Examples:* His role in empowering miracles, or guiding believers to Truth, or how do you receive the Holy Spirit.

Let's share specific ideas or plans to foster powerful personal and Church Growth!

[illegible]

Unstoppable Mission: Before the Endgame - Part 2

This passage mirrors Church planting in Thailand, where the idol industry flourishes, crafting and selling countless idols daily, with tens of thousands revered. Church planting brings some to Christ, slightly reducing idol trade profits. Yet, unlike the bold impact in Ephesus' idol business during Paul's ministry, Thailand's 1% Christian population hasn't matched that effect.

As we rejoice in the Way's growth in Asia Minor, we pray earnestly for a mighty wave of salvations in Thailand and beyond, to the ends of the earth!

Acts 19:23-40; 20:1-6

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." 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 rushed as one man into the theater. 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. ³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ³⁵ The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of Ephesus, 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 be quiet 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 today's events. 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 20, ¹ When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye 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 the Jews made a plot 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 Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

A short summary

Around this time, Demetrius, a silversmith crafting Artemis shrines, stirred trouble in Ephesus, inciting a riot against Paul and believers because their faith hurt his business (Acts 19:23-27). The crowd grew chaotic (Acts 19:28-34), but a city clerk calmed them, noting the believers hadn't robbed temples or blasphemed Artemis, urging legal action instead (Acts 19:35-40). The uproar ceased (Acts 20:1a), and Paul encouraged believers while traveling through Macedonia and Greece to Troas (Acts 20:1b-6).

A short reflection

We continue to learn important Church planting lessons from Acts:

- *We don't need to disparage others' beliefs or places of worship to exalt our God.* The Ephesian city clerk noted that believers hadn't robbed temples or blasphemed Artemis. Simply proclaiming the one true God allows the Holy Spirit to convict hearts that no other god or worship compares. God is GOD—His way alone is true, meaningful, and unstoppable, even by death.
- *Pastoral encouragement is as vital as evangelism.* Paul, after the Ephesian riot subsided, first gathered disciples to encourage them before continuing his journey to uplift others in Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20:1-2). Sharing the Gospel saves souls, but nurturing believers—new and seasoned—builds strong Churches. Evangelism and care are inseparable.

Let's focus on who God is, His love, and His grace. Embrace the "care-share-care" approach: Care for people, share the Good News, and care again to disciple them.

Acts 20:7-20

⁷ On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹ Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" ¹¹ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹² The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. ¹³ We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. ¹⁴ When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. ¹⁵ The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. ¹⁶ Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost. ¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ You know that I

have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

A short summary

In Troas, Paul preached until midnight on Sunday, causing young Eutychus to fall asleep, tumble from a third-floor window, and die (vv. 7-9). Paul hurried down, embraced him, and declared, “Don’t be alarmed... He’s alive!” (v. 10). Back upstairs, Paul broke bread, ate, and left at dawn (v. 11), with Eutychus’ miraculous revival boosting everyone’s faith (v. 12). Hastening to Jerusalem, Paul sailed from Miletus, summoning Ephesian elders to share how he served humbly, with tears and zeal, faithfully preaching the Gospel publicly and house to house (vv. 13-20).

A short reflection

Let us reflect on these Church planting lessons:

- *Give it your all!* Paul’s example teaches us to give everything in Church planting. Sometimes, that means less sleep and more sharing, seizing fleeting moments to share the Gospel or taking time when opportunities allow, always guided by the Spirit’s timing.
- *Raising strong leaders is vital.* Church planting is not only about winning souls or teaching new believers, but includes equipping faithful leaders. Paul’s tearful, humble, bold teaching to the Ephesian elders, despite Jewish plots, shows this.
- *Publicly and from house to house.* Church planting thrives through both public preaching and intimate house-to-house ministry. We must be equally intentional about both.

Be “all in”—whether sharing over coffee or speaking to crowds—while nurturing leaders for lasting impact.

Table Discussion: Care - Share - Care

Amy Carmichael, a missionary who served 55 years in India without furlough, dyed her fair skin with coffee to blend in, and rescued over 1,000 children from temple prostitution, inspires us deeply.

Her words, “You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving,” echo the truth: “People don’t care what you know until they know you care.”

Sharing the Gospel passionately—nurturing new believers and seizing moments for eternal impact—is vital. Yet, as Jesus’ ministry also showed, we must care deeply while we share.

Explore practical ways to live out this care-share-care approach, building radiant faith communities.

- 1. Care and Connect:** How can you show genuine care to build trust before sharing the Gospel? *Example:* Listening to a neighbor’s struggles or helping with a practical need. What small act of kindness can you offer this week to prepare and open hearts to Jesus?
- 2. Share:** How can you share the Good News in a way that reflects God’s love? *Example:* Inviting someone to a meal to discuss faith. What simple step can you take to share Jesus lovingly with someone in your life?
- 3. Connect and Care:** Once we got spiritually connected, let’s not forget to continue caring! How can you follow up with care after sharing the Gospel to support new believers? *Example:* Checking in with a friend who prayed to accept Christ or inviting them to a small group of believers. What ongoing support can you provide to help mature believers to grow in faith? *Example:* Inviting them to a deep-dive Bible study or to join you on a missions trip.

Share life stories and ideas to inspire a heartfelt caring, and Spirit-led Mission!

Discussion 3: Acts 20:21-38

Unstoppable Mission: Before the Endgame - Part 3

Wonder how many Church planting principles fit into 18 verses? Luke, the author of Acts, shows us—plenty!

As you read Acts 20:21-38, spot as many Church planting principles as you can before we highlight them.

Acts 20:21-38

²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. 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, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the Gospel of God’s grace. 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 all men. 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 he had said this, 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.

A short summary

Paul declared, “...in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me” (20:23), yet he pressed on, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the Gospel of God’s grace” (20:24)! Saying goodbye, knowing some would never see him again (20:25), Paul affirmed, “I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (20:26-27). This is powerful!

He urged the elders to stay true, reminding them the Spirit made them overseers (20:28a). “Be shepherds of the Church of God, which He bought with His own blood” (20:28b)—a profound responsibility!

Paul warned of false teachers distorting truth to mislead disciples (20:29-30), urging vigilance as he had shown for three years, often with tears (20:31). Paul entrusted them to God and His Word of grace for growth and eternal inheritance (20:32), living free of greed, working hard, and helping the weak, quoting Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (20:33-35).

Kneeling, they prayed, wept, embraced, and sadly parted as Paul boarded the ship to Jerusalem, beginning his mission’s endgame toward Rome, glorifying God to the ends of the earth (20:36-38).

A short reflection

Key Church planting principles from Acts 20:21-38:

- *Embrace suffering*: Church planting isn’t easy. The Holy Spirit warned Paul of hardships ahead, yet he prioritized Jesus’ task of spreading the Gospel over personal comfort. While we often pray to avoid suffering, sometimes embracing it is crucial for growing Christ’s Church.
- *Everyone should hear*: Planting a Church isn’t just about erecting a building—it’s only part of the mission! The true goal is unwavering dedication to ensure all hear the Good News. Paul set a high standard, declaring, “I am innocent of the blood of all men” (v. 26). Boldly, he shared the Gospel with all—Jews and Greeks—leaving no one with an excuse to choose death over eternal life.
- *Prepare for spiritual battle*: Planting Churches sets the Light against darkness, and Paul warns that darkness will fight back. Church leaders, appointed by the Holy Spirit as shepherds, must diligently protect their precious flock, bought by Jesus’ blood. The devil, like savage wolves, seeks to tear it apart. Paul’s three-year, tearful warnings to leaders night and day underscore the gravity of this duty.
- *Focus believers on God alone*: Paul went to great lengths to ensure new believers didn’t think his goal was their financial support. He refused their aid, working hard to sustain himself and even helping the weak, teaching that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35). Church planting focuses on leading people to Christ and guiding them to commit to God and His Word of grace (v. 32a), which builds strong Churches and secures an eternal inheritance (v. 32b).
- *How you view the end shapes how you finish the race*: Death isn’t the end—dying for Christ is a blessing. Paul’s focus on Christ, not fame or worldly ties, shaped his endgame. Church planters must persevere relentlessly, leading people to eternal life in Jesus, fostering devotion to Him alone.

What a powerful passage, filled with essential Church planting principles!

How many did you spot when you first read Acts 20:21-38?

Table Discussion - Powerful Church Planting Principles

Acts 20:21-38 reveals profound Church planting principles, such as:

Embracing suffering,
ensuring all hear the Gospel,
preparing for spiritual battles,
guiding believers to focus on God alone,
and viewing the end rightly.

Discussion questions:

1. **Powerful Church Planting:** Which Church planting principle from Acts 20 struck you most, and why? *Example:* Embracing suffering inspires perseverance in tough times.
2. **Spiritual Growth:** How can applying this principle in your life foster spiritual growth and benefit new believers? *Example:* Trusting God through trials models resilience for others.

Let's pray God uses these Biblical principles to empower us to plant powerful Churches until the end.

[illegible]

Week 4

SPIRIT-DRIVEN ACTS OF THE CHURCH

Powerful Growth

Acts 21-28

Devotion - Monday

Powerful Growth: Stay on the Spirit-Designated Path

Suggested self study: Acts 21:1-16

Focus passage: Acts 21:10-16

¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' " ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

A Bible study in a nutshell

With heavy hearts, Paul and the Ephesian elders parted, beginning his sea journey to Jerusalem (vv. 1-3a). In Tyre, waiting for the ship to unload, Paul spent seven days with believers (vv. 3b-4a). Some, led by the Spirit, urged him not to go to Jerusalem (v. 4b), but Paul and his team departed, joined by believers, including women and children, who prayed on the beach and said farewell (vv. 5-6). In Ptolemais, they stayed with believers (v. 7), then reached Caesarea, lodging with Philip, one of the seven deacons (earlier appointed to take care of the poor), now preaching Jesus there (v. 8). Philip's four unmarried daughters prophesied, revealing God's will (v. 9). Agabus, a prophet, bound his own hands and feet with Paul's belt, declaring, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles'" (vv. 10-11). The believers pleaded with Paul to stay, but he insisted he was ready to die for Jesus (vv. 12-13). They relented, saying, "The Lord's will be done" (v. 14). Paul then went to Jerusalem, staying at Mnason's house, a longtime disciple (vv. 15-16).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Paul's journey shows his relentless commitment to seize every opportunity to connect with believers or share the Gospel with the lost. Whether in Tyre, Ptolemais, or Caesarea, he encouraged faith or led souls to Christ.

We also learn from Paul: Believing friends, also filled with the Spirit, will care deeply and urge caution to protect you. Honor their love, but discern the Spirit's specific leading for you, undeterred by fear of suffering.

Powerful Church growth comes from staying on the Spirit's path, which, though challenging, yields the greatest spiritual harvest.

Reflect on these questions

How does this challenge you as you think about opportunities you have to share the Gospel?

How can you better discern the Holy Spirit's guidance amid others' concerns?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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[illegible]

Devotion - Tuesday

Powerful Growth: A Jew to Save the Jews

Suggested self study: Acts 21:17-36

Focus passage: Acts 21:17-24, 26

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law...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.

A Bible study in a nutshell

In Jerusalem, believers warmly greeted Paul (v. 17). He met James and leaders, reporting God's work among Gentiles (vv. 18-19). They praised God, noting many Jews believed yet adhered to the law (vv. 20-21a), but some wrongly claimed Paul dismissed the law and Jewish circumcision (v. 21b). To prove his respect, they asked Paul to join four men completing vows, funding their sacrifices and purifying himself post-travel (vv. 22-24). This respected Jewish customs, not required for Gentiles (v. 25). Paul agreed (v. 26). Near week's end, Asian Jews saw Paul in the temple, falsely accusing him of violating the law and bringing Greeks in, confusing him with Trophimus (vv. 27-29). The crowd dragged Paul out to kill him (v. 30). The Roman commander intervened, stopping the beating and arresting Paul (vv. 31-33). Amid the violent mob, unable to clarify the issue, soldiers carried Paul to the barracks (vv. 34-36).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Paul's mission embodies one word:

SACRIFICE.

His life was a living sacrifice, ensuring the Father's love reached sinners, mirroring Jesus' example (Romans 12:1).

To maximize the Jews' chance to hear the Gospel, Paul embraced Jewish customs, like purifying himself and supporting vow sacrifices, without compromising the truth. His actions show strategic sacrifice to open hearts to salvation!

Reflect on these questions

What sacrifice can you make this week to help someone hear about Jesus?

How can you show Christ to someone from a different background without compromising the Gospel?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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[illegible]

Powerful Growth: My Language Serving God

Suggested self study: Acts 21:37-22:21

Focus passage: Acts 21:37-22:2

[Acts 21] 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 desert 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.” ⁴⁰ Having received 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: [Acts 22] 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...

A Bible study in a nutshell

As soldiers brought Paul to the barracks, he asked the commander in Greek to address the crowd (21:37a). Surprised, the commander, mistaking Paul for an Egyptian rebel who led 4,000 into the desert, questioned him (21:37b-38). Paul clarified he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and sought to speak (21:39). The commander allowed it, silencing the crowd (21:40a). Speaking in Aramaic, Paul hushed the mob and shared his testimony (21:40b-22:2): Raised as a Jew, trained under Gamaliel, he zealously persecuted Christians (22:3-5). He recounted his Damascus road conversion, where Jesus appeared, redirecting him to witness to all (22:6-16). Paul admitted his past—imprisoning believers and approving Stephen’s martyrdom—but noted his concern that Jerusalem wouldn’t accept him (22:17-20). Jesus commanded, “Go, I will send you to the Gentiles” (22:21).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

God uses everything about us—our skills, experiences, and possessions—to reach the lost.

Paul strategically spoke Greek to the Roman commander, countering assumptions of being a man of rough character and uneducated, therefore securing a chance to address the crowd.

Switching next to Aramaic, the Jews’ mother tongue, he was able to silence the mob, aligning with their cultural identity. This deliberate choice enabled a clear, impactful testimony, maximizing his reach for the Gospel!

Reflect on these questions

How has God used your unique experiences or skills to share the Gospel with a non-believer?

What aspect of your life might God use in the future to reach someone for Christ?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

[illegible]

Powerful Growth: My Citizenship Serving God

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 22:22-29

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 Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out 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 big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. ²⁹ Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

A Bible study in a nutshell

When Paul mentioned preaching to Gentiles, the crowd shouted to kill him (vv. 22-23). The commander ordered Paul flogged and interrogated (v. 24). As they prepared to whip him, Paul asked the centurion whether it was legal to flog an un-convicted Roman citizen? (v. 25). After verifying Paul's citizenship, the commander, who had paid dearly for his own, was stunned (vv. 26-28a). Paul confirmed he was born a citizen (v. 28b), alarming the commander, who feared repercussions for nearly flogging him without a trial (v. 29).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Paul never boasted sinfully about his multilingual skills or dual citizenship, but he wisely used them for God's glory, recognizing his identity was by God's grace.

Despite enduring whippings, imprisonment, stoning, and shipwrecks, Paul, now weakened, invoked his Roman citizenship to avoid a flogging that could have killed him or sapped his strength. This preserved his ability to testify, travel to Rome, and proclaim the Gospel to Caesar.

Paul used who he was to serve God's Mission to the end.

Reflect on these questions

When have you faced a situation where you could strategically use your identity for God's glory?

What steps can you take to preserve your strength for God's Mission?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

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[illegible]

Devotion - Friday

Powerful Growth: I have Fulfilled my Duty to God

Suggested self study: Acts 22:30-23:5

Focus passage: Acts 22:30-23:1

[Acts 22] ³⁰ The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

[Acts 23] 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.”

A Bible study in a nutshell

To clarify the Sanhedrin’s accusations against Paul, the commander freed him to face the chief priests (22:30). Before the Sanhedrin, Paul boldly shared his faith, declaring, “I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day” (23:1)—a powerful testament near the end of his calling. The high priest, offended, ordered Paul struck on the mouth (23:2). Paul retorted, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You judge me by the law yet break it by striking me!” (23:3). Challenged for insulting the high priest (23:4), Paul apologized, unaware it was the high priest, citing Exodus 22:28, “Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people” (23:5).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Imagine your obituary reading: “Today we honor _____ [your name], who fulfilled their duty to God.”

What a legacy!

Paul’s bold claim before the Sanhedrin, “I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day”, reflects a life of intentional, faithful, relentless, sacrificial service.

Picture standing before God, saying, “Father, I’m heading Home, having faithfully fulfilled my duty to You.”

Reflect on these questions

What would a life of faithful, intentional service look like to end with such a statement to your Church family?

What adjustments could you make to align your life with this goal?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

[illegible]

Devotion - Saturday

Powerful Growth: Wise Tactics Serving God

Suggested self study & Focus passage: Acts 23:6-10

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, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in 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 acknowledge them all.) 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.

A Bible study in a nutshell

Knowing the Sanhedrin included Sadducees and Pharisees, Paul strategically highlighted Jesus’ resurrection (23:6a). As a Pharisee who believed in life after death, he claimed he was on trial for his hope in the resurrection (23:6b). This led Pharisees to speculate an angel spoke to Paul at Damascus, finding no fault in him (23:9). The Sadducees, denying resurrection, angels, or spirits, were enraged (23:7-8). The resulting uproar forced the commander to send troops to rescue Paul (23:10).

Pause and open your heart to what God desires to reveal to you through this passage

Paul masterfully used his knowledge of the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ beliefs to seize opportunities for sharing his faith.

Recognizing the spiritual battle described in Ephesians 6:12, Paul lived intentionally, like a skilled soldier employing strategic tactics. He didn’t drift through days passively but leveraged his identity—his strengths, experiences, language skills, and understanding of others’ beliefs—to navigate situations wisely.

By highlighting the resurrection, a point of contention between Pharisees and Sadducees, he shifted the focus to advance the Gospel.

This deliberate approach maximized his witness for God’s glory, winning daily spiritual battles.

Reflect on these questions

What can you learn about the beliefs of people around you to better share God’s love?

How can you grow in awareness of the spiritual battle around you and serve God with greater intentionality?

Pray & Journal - Take a moment to share your heart with God

NOTES

[illegible]

Sunday Morning Service

Acts 25:13-26:32

Read through the text in preparation for today's service.

Take some notes of what the Lord is laying on your heart.

Pray for your pastor and the Message that will be brought to you.

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.

Sunday Evening Gathering

Discussion 1: Acts 27:1-44

Powerful Growth: You will not Lose a Single Hair

The growth of the Church is propelled when people get to see God. How does that happen? Of course they could see God in the pages of His Word, and in the Life of Jesus: John 1:18 says it so well when Jesus speaks about His close relationship with the Father which is also the reason why He can reveal the Father accurately to us—in Jesus we see the Father, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, Who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.”

This means that people can also see God in the life of His children: 1 John 4:12 says, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

It seems though that these truths are compounded for Church growth when we start to deal with suffering. The moment things don’t go smoothly it is time for believers to shine. If we can stay strong during bad times, we can shine a spotlight on God! This is when non-believers and new believers see God more easily than during other times, and what does it do? It propels Church growth!

We find such an example here in Acts 27.

Acts 27:1-44

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 Fast. 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 thought they had obtained what they wanted; 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 When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the 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 the men 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 whose I am 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 fall 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. 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 pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

A short summary

Paul was finally handed over to the centurion Julius, and they boarded a ship to sail out to Italy (v. 1). Luke and Aristarchus, a Macedonian believer from Thessalonica joined Paul (v. 2). Sailing along the coast, they faced worsening weather and dangerous storms (vv. 3-7). Reaching Fair Havens with

difficulty, Paul warned that continuing past the Day of Atonement/“Yom Kippur” (fall) risked great loss (vv. 8-10). The centurion, persuaded by the captain, found Fair Havens unsuitable for winter and chose to sail for Phoenix, a Cretan harbor (vv. 11-12). A gentle south wind seemed promising (v. 13), but a hurricane-force wind soon pummeled the ship for days, crushing all hope (vv. 14-20). Paul reassured them that only the ship would be lost, sharing that an angel of the God he served told him, “Do not fear, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar, and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you” (27:21-26).

After fourteen days of being storm-tossed, Paul urged everyone to eat, assuring them, “Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head” (27:27-34). He took bread, gave thanks publicly, broke it, and ate (27:35). His act of hope inspired all, and after eating, they lightened the ship by dumping grain into the sea (27:36-38). Spotting land, they cut anchors but ran aground on a sandbar (27:39-41). The centurion spared Paul, ensuring all 276 souls survived, as God promised (27:42-44).

A short reflection

When believers stand firm under pressure, it’s a powerful witness! They hear God clearly, others see His work vividly, and this sparks dynamic Church growth. Despite Paul’s warnings, the captain sailed in dangerous conditions, leading to storms and a shipwreck. Yet, Paul’s unwavering faith allowed him to hear God’s faithful promise:

“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.”

Paul shared this with the fearful, likely non-believing soldiers and sailors, urging, “Keep up your courage... I have faith in God it will happen as He told me”. When panic persisted, he reassured,

“Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head”!

As God promised, all 276 survived the wreck, unharmed.

Paul’s faith in crisis let others see God’s faithfulness, fueling Church growth.

Table Discussion - Hearing and Seeing God

The phrase “We’re only human” acknowledges our flaws but misses the whole truth. As believers, indwelt by God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), we can remain peaceful amid chaos, as Corrie ten Boom did in Ravensbrück concentration camp, forgive like Stephen while dying (Acts 7:60), or worship like Paul and Silas in prison (Acts 16:25). Human yet temples of God, purchased by Jesus’ blood, we’re empowered to reflect His strength.

We can do better.

We can hear God.

We can see God.

We can help others to hear God.

We can help others to see God.

We can fuel powerful Church growth!

Discussion questions:

1. **Staying Strong:** What practical step can you take this week to stay strong in faith when under pressure, like Paul? *Example:* Praying daily that God will remind you who you actually are in Him.
2. **Seeing God:** How can you help someone see God through your actions, fostering Church growth? *Example:* Inviting a non-believer to a Church outreach event to witness God’s love in action.

Let’s share specific ideas or plans to see and hear God better, fueling powerful Church growth!

Discussion 2: Acts 28:1-15

Powerful Growth: Staying Committed

When faced with a single challenge, most of us can hold fast to our faith and stay committed.

When two or three challenges strike in quick succession, maintaining that commitment becomes much tougher.

When these challenges are life-threatening, continuing to serve others and witness for Christ feels nearly impossible.

Paul's example in Acts 28—enduring shipwreck, snakebite, and more—challenges us to persevere in faith and service despite overwhelming trials.

Acts 28:1-15

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, 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 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 for three days entertained us hospitably. 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 who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers 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 men Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

A short summary

After the shipwreck, they landed on Malta, where islanders showed remarkable kindness (vv. 1-2a). They built a fire against the cold rain (v. 2b). While gathering wood, a venomous snake bit Paul's hand (v. 3). The islanders, assuming he was a murderer judged by the gods for surviving the wreck, expected his death (v. 4). Yet, Paul shook off the snake into the fire and remained unharmed, prompting them to call him a god (vv. 5-6).

Publius, the chief official, hosted them warmly for three days, though his father lay ill with fever and dysentery (vv. 7-8a). Paul prayed, and the man was healed (v. 8b). This drew many islanders, who brought their sick, and God healed them through Paul (v. 9). When departing after three months, the grateful islanders supplied all their needs (v. 10).

In spring, they sailed on an Alexandrian ship to Rome (vv. 11-14). There, believers who had heard of Paul's arrival greeted him, moving him to thank God, fulfilling his longing to meet them (v. 15).

A short reflection

Imagine surviving a shipwreck, struggling after dumping food, landing cold and wet on an island, only to be bitten by a venomous snake at your first warm fire!

Honestly, would your reaction be holy?

Paul's commitment to God shines remarkably here. He shook off the snake with bold faith, ministered to the islanders, and healed their sick through God's power! Such unwavering devotion after relentless trials is astounding.

This radical, God-honoring response—unlike the world's—pierces hearts and inspires others to support believers generously.

This drives powerful Church growth.

It has to penetrate souls.

It has to reveal our unique faith.

It has to show God in us.

This is how we change the world.

This is how we grow the Church.

Unwavering commitment, no matter what.

Table Discussion - Peace and Commitment

Paul's extraordinary peace and commitment amid excruciating trials—shipwreck, snakebite, and more—are awe-inspiring.

How did he maintain both?

Peace and commitment feed each other. Peace sustains commitment through tragedies, and commitment to God strengthens peace.

When the ship faced destruction, Paul's peace in God held firm.

Bitten by a venomous snake, he remained unshaken, trusting God.

Paul's commitment to the Lord remains unshaken, as does his peace in Him.

His peace in the Lord holds firm, as does his commitment.

Together, this peace and commitment form a powerful witness, propelling dynamic Church growth!

Discussion questions:

1. **Going Through Trials:** For “fun”, imagine facing Paul's trials—shipwreck, snakebite, and all. How do you think you'd hold up?
2. **Peace & Commitment:** How does recognizing the blend of peace and commitment strengthen your faith?

Example 1: Staying calm during a family disagreement, trusting God's guidance, keeps me focused on His purpose.

Example 2: When facing job uncertainty, I prayed for peace and stayed committed serving alongside my Church family, which deepened my trust in God.

Discussion 3: Acts 28:16-31

Powerful Growth: To be Continued...

Isn't it thrilling yet frustrating when your favorite TV show ends with "To be continued..."?

Growing up in the days of live TV, you'd rely on reminders and rally family to catch the next episode a week later. You surely would not want to miss an episode that would follow a previous one!

That cliffhanger kept you hooked, eagerly anticipating, and feeling part of the story.

Acts 28:16-31 mirrors this, with Paul's fearless preaching in Rome under house arrest, pulling us into the Spirit-driven Church's ongoing story of powerful growth.

Acts 28:16-31

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 leaders of the Jews. 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 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not that I had any charge to bring 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 the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." ²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the Kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the Truth to your forefathers when He said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ " 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." ²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' ²⁸ "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" ³⁰ For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

A short summary

In Rome, Paul was permitted to live in a house under guard (v. 16). Within three days, he invited Jewish leaders, explaining he had done nothing against Jewish customs or ancestors (vv. 17-18).

Despite their objections, forcing his appeal to Caesar (v. 19a), Paul assured them he meant no trouble for his people, imprisoned only for his faith in the Messiah their ancestors awaited (vv. 19b-20). The Jewish leaders, unaware of any accusations from Judea, had no grievances against Paul but wanted to hear about the Jesus sect, criticized by many (vv. 21-22).

A large group came, and Paul spoke from morning to evening about God's Kingdom, urging belief in Jesus as foretold by Moses and the prophets (v. 23). Some believed, but others argued and left (vv. 24-25a).

Paul cited Isaiah 6:9-10, noting their hardened hearts—ears hearing yet not understanding, eyes seeing yet blind—preventing their return to God for healing (vv. 25b-27). He declared the Gospel would go to the receptive Gentiles (vv. 28-29).

For two years under house arrest, Paul welcomed all, “boldly and without hindrance” preaching God's Kingdom and teaching about Jesus Christ (vv. 30-31).

A short reflection

My dad always said, “Son, start strong and finish strong.” Don't delay at the beginning, and don't slack off before the end. Do it well, from start to finish.

That's Paul!

Nearing the end of his journey, after a perilous sea voyage and grueling trials in Jerusalem, Paul arrives in Rome. You'd expect him to rest, but within three days, he's inviting Jewish leaders, explaining his situation, and teaching about God's Kingdom from morning to evening!

There is no sign of any break.

There is no slowing down!

There is simply unwavering dedication to the end!

Some believed, others left hardened, yet Paul pressed on, preaching to those who would listen “boldly and without hindrance.”

And...well, that's it.

The End.

Table Discussion - The End...or To be Continued

The ending of Acts feels sudden (28:31):

“Boldly and without hindrance he preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

If this were a movie, you’d wonder: What happened to Paul? Was he freed or imprisoned? How did his life end?

Yet, Acts closes with “To be continued...”

It’s not solely about Paul or the apostles—it’s about the Holy Spirit’s work through them, birthing and growing the Church. We’re not meant to idolize them but to embrace the Spirit’s power, driving us to continue the story.

Titled “The Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church,” this study highlights what the Spirit did and what He calls us to do next.

How does this story continue?

We, the Church, are writing the final chapter!

When Jesus returns, it will be: The end.

When Jesus returns, it will be: The start of eternity with our God.

Discussion questions:

1. **Examples from the Apostles:** Which part of the apostles’ lives in Acts excites you most, and how can you apply it in your life? *Example:* Paul’s boldness in sharing the Gospel inspires me to speak about Jesus at work, even if it feels risky.
2. **The Final Chapter:** How does it feel to know you’re part of writing the Church’s final chapter with your life? *Example:* It motivates me to volunteer at Church, knowing my actions contribute to God’s ongoing story.
3. **Concluding Thoughts:** What about this Acts study did you enjoy?

Week 5

GLOBAL MISSIONS

Missionaries still
inspiring us,
as our lives pen the final chapter
of the
Spirit-Driven Acts of the Church

Powerful Missionary Testimonies

Kayla Dueler

Nelly Mtsweni

Marisa Fouchè

Unknown

Michele Potgieter

With permission captured and authored by

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

Monday

KAYLA DUELER

"The only qualification you need to be a missionary is to be in a relationship with Christ."

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

"Kayla Dueler, our beautiful and brilliant 16-year-old daughter, suddenly went to Heaven (8/8/18) from a non-reckless car accident. She left behind a legacy of artwork, photography, and wisdom through her journals." A post on Facebook.

I had the privilege of meeting with her parents in November 2023 and soon realized that Kayla was born (July 12, 2002) a prophet to the nations and she was raised, being aware of the calling on her life, as is the calling on our lives. Jeff and Julia, her parents wrote: "When Kayla was born, we dedicated her to the purposes of God. Our hopes and prayers for her have been fulfilled."

A post of Facebook dated May 12, 2016, reads: "Kayla is selling her handmade bracelets. She has a passion to help provide clean water for Africa." A way to reach the 'ends of the world.'

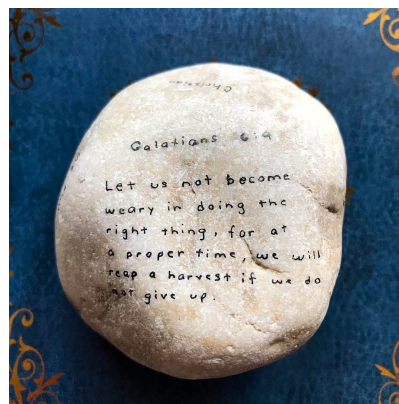
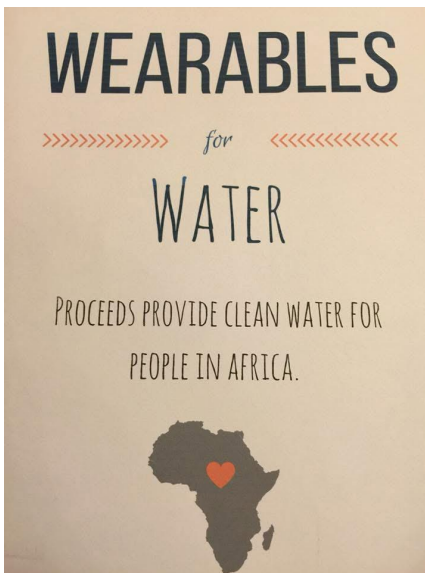
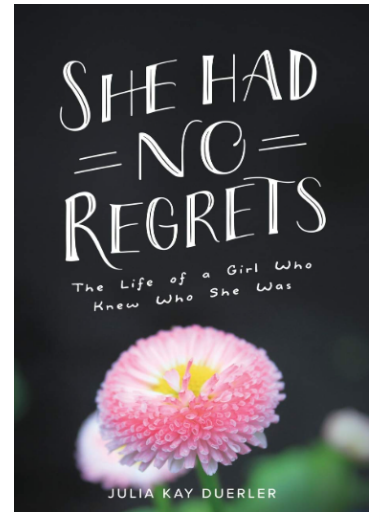
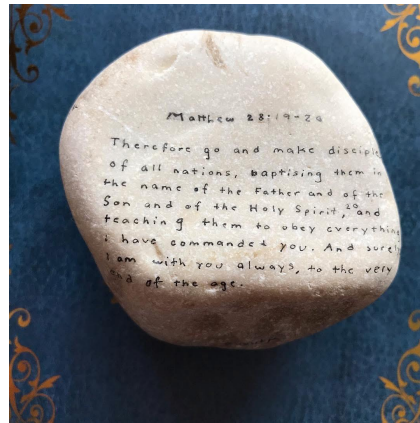
Her Jerusalem was her friends, and from a young age, she prayed so much for her friends by name. One of them was Ashley, and Kayla was always trying to find ways to draw her closer to Christ. In her journal was written, "INVITE Ashley". A year after Kayla's death, Ashley and her dad chose to be baptized after the Easter Service in 2019. This prayer was written in one of her journals, "Move in their hearts and use every painful experience, every heartbroken moment to mold them into the person you want them to be."

Kayla and her mom, Julia, went to Haiti with One Plus God in the summer of 2017. The last night in Haiti, they each chose a rock to write on. The 2 verses Kayla wanted to remember were Galatians 6:9 and Matthew 28:19-20. During this trip as Kayla was journaling (as she always was), she wrote the prophetic words after hearing it from Ps Wynand, "Not every body grows OLD."

Kayla's memorial service was much more than a celebration of her life; it was a celebration of Jesus' power to bring good out of bad. The "Jesus earthquake" she prayed for was happening as hundreds committed to be connectors, dozens stood up to recommit to following Christ, and 23 surrendered to Jesus and were baptized. "Jesus, Jesus, You make the darkness tremble..."

If you want to read more about Kayla and her mother, Julia's, journey, here is the link to the book Julia wrote: "She Had No Regrets" – <https://amzn.to/2ZONolc>.

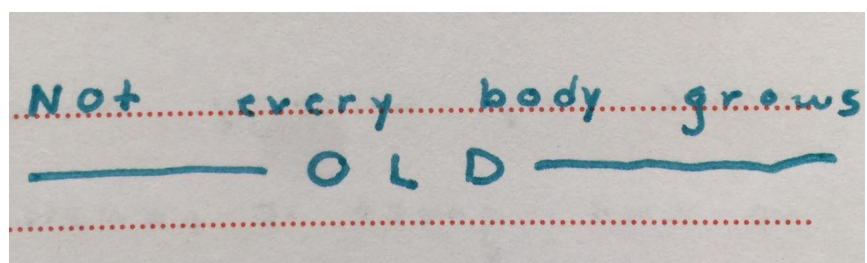
May Kayla's life bless yours.



alex.rmiller

Liked by she_had_no_regrets and others

alex.rmiller Lord, let this experience mold me into the person you want me to become, like Kayla prayed for. Kayla has not only led me back to old friends, she gave me new friends to empathize and grow with. The most important thing Kayla has done for me, as well as over 20 other people, is lead me closer to God. So much love and joy has entered my heart, knowing God will walk alongside me everyday, but carry me when I am not strong. Kayla, we will miss you more than you can imagine, but you will live on in our hearts forever. "He Will Be Our Peace" Micah 5:5



Tuesday

NELLY MTSWENI

*"A missionary is not called to be appreciated or respected,
they are called to do whatever God wants them to do."*

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

Ministry through Movement started in Pine Ridge, an Indian suburb of Witbank, South Africa. In 2000, a new area was being developed close to Pine Ridge. This development, called Klarinet, would provide housing for the people who were staying in squatter camps in and around Witbank as part of the government's Reconstruction and Development Program.

The tiny houses popped up like mushrooms, and as a church, we soon realized that we needed to reach out to the people who would be living there. The people who moved into Klarinet struggled a bit more to communicate in English. Nelly Mtsweni, who also spoke Zulu and Sepedi, was appointed as missionary for Klarinet. She was a dedicated follower of Christ and had a heart for the lost.

One of the great obstacles in the Black culture in South Africa is ancestral worship. Ancestral worship is rooted in the belief that ancestors can provide guidance, protection, and blessings. It is an essential part of spiritual life for many communities, fostering a sense of identity and continuity. Important ceremonies, such as initiation rites, weddings, and funerals, often incorporate ancestral worship. Because Nelly built relationships with the people whom she visited often, she was almost always invited to these important ceremonies, BUT she spoke out against these rituals and practices as they are viewed as idolatrous or contrary to Christian teachings.

Nelly's disapproval (regardless that she voiced this with love and understanding) brought the wrath of a lot of people upon her. People in the community who strongly believed in ancestral worship pressured other members of the community to be hostile towards Nelly or at least to treat her with disrespect. This did not deter Nelly from helping those same people when they were in need and proclaiming Jesus as the One who can set them free from these false beliefs which are based on fear. This made me realize that we as missionaries were not called to be respected or appreciated, but to continue to do good (1 Peter 4:19).

Nelly was born on June 6, 1968, and died May 31, 2009 (Pentecost Sunday – what a privilege!) and was laid to rest on her 41st birthday, June 6, 2009. Cause of death? Nelly Leah Mtsweni died of AIDS. She did not contract it by unprotected sexual contact or sharing needles. She contracted it when she encountered someone who was in dire need of medical assistance as he was choking in his own phlegm. With full awareness of the risk, she assisted him and came into contact with HIV-infected bodily fluids as there was no time to get proper protection.

She died a slow and horrible death but never complained, as she knew that was what God wanted. She said she was ready to meet her Savior and that person was not.



Wednesday

MARISA FOUCHÉ

*“The moment a missionary realizes that he/she (even subconsciously) refers to people as ‘us’ and ‘them’,
it is time to study the life of Jesus Christ in depth again.”*

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

I met Marisa Fouché in Witbank in 1994. She was still young but had a driver’s license. (In South Africa, a person needs to be 18 years or older to obtain a driver’s license.) Before this, she would saddle up her horse and visit the villages where the farm workers stayed to share the Good News with them and their children.

Marisa felt a calling on her life since she could remember and was obedient to this calling from a very young age. She is constantly guarding herself from referring to those who think differently than her as ‘them’. Her life reflects an inclusive faith that acknowledges that we are all sinners and that we all fall short of the glory of God, and we are all saved by the grace of God. This principle is not advocating or in any way embracing all teachings under one banner.

In a book called ‘Soupified – Twice Transformed into a Christ-Consciousness’ I read about an elderly gentleman who said the following to the author: “In a court of law, there are always four role-players. Our role as Christians is not to accuse – that role belongs to the Accuser, Satan. Nor is our role to defend – that role belongs to the One who intercedes before the Father – the Holy Spirit. Nor are we there to judge; that role belongs exclusively to the Father. We are called only to be witnesses.” Marisa used and still uses any means available, suitable, and possible to be a witness of the salvation in Jesus Christ to anybody and everybody she meets.

I recall one vivid moment from a track and field day we held at a rural school called Langkloof. To an outsider, these days would look chaotic, but there was order and LOVE in the chaos, and the children had fun. It is a scientific fact that children learn better when they are having fun, and Marisa used these fun-filled days and events to teach and demonstrate to the children about God’s provision, Jesus’ love, and the Holy Spirit’s fellowship.

During an 800m race, one girl was struggling greatly on her second lap. Marisa joined her on the track, running alongside and cheering her on until she triumphantly crossed the finish line. Marisa brought Hebrews 12:1-2 to life for this girl, and I am certain it had a divine influence on her life.

In obedience to Matthew 9:38, Marisa also prays for other missionaries to be called to the ripe harvest. She asked me in 1994 to help her with house visits in Pine Ridge, which was an Indian suburb of Witbank. I agreed, and through this, Marisa was my God-sent ‘prophet’ to call me into full-time ministry.



Thursday

UNKNOWN

“God’s sovereignty is of such magnitude that I can even trust Him with my mistakes.”

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

In 1995, I had the privilege to go on an outreach to Madagascar under the supervision of Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF). This organization is dedicated to reaching children with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At that time, Frik Janse van Rensburg was the head of CEF in Madagascar.

CEF employs various methods to carry out evangelism among children. One of their primary strategies is Good News Clubs. These are weekly after-school programs where children can hear Bible stories, participate in songs, and engage in activities that teach them about Christianity in a fun and interactive way.

The objective of the outreach was to establish a Good News Club in Morondava. Our outreach group would attract the children, as that is often a good way to gather a group of children together. The children are always very curious when travelers end up in their town.

We landed in Antananarivo and arrived 25 hours later in Morondava by bus (only 311 miles). Excited to establish a Good News Club!

The next morning after breakfast, we hit the streets, and from afar, we saw a large group of children sitting under a mango tree. A girl, not older than 12, was speaking to them. Our Madagascar leader approached them and listened to the girl. She came back, looking very surprised, and said: “This little girl is sharing the story of Jesus with the children. I will ask her about that when she is finished with the group.”

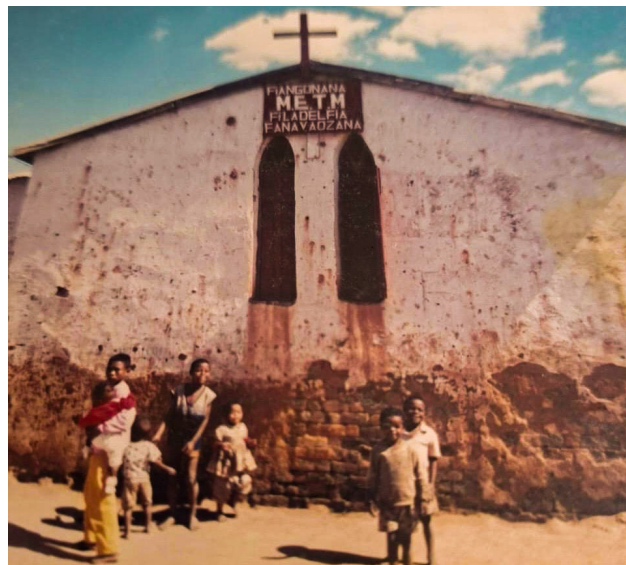
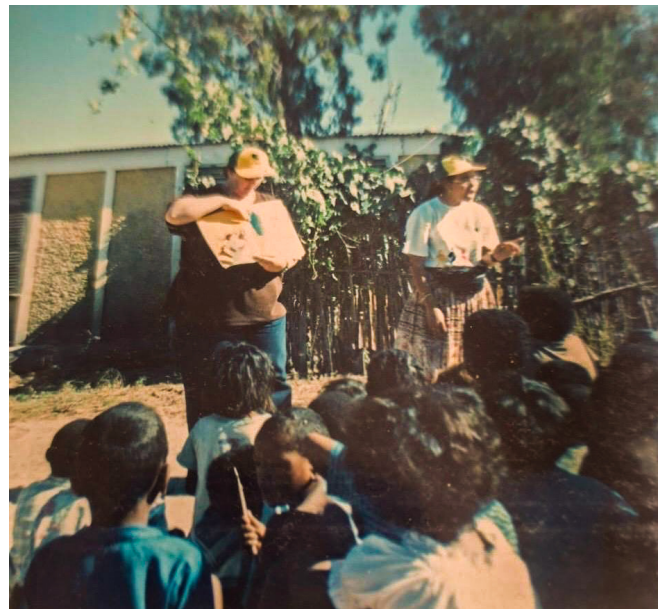
Our leader approached the little girl and asked her what she was doing. Very boldly, the unknown little girl told her that five years ago, when she was seven years old, a mission team passed through the town, and one of the team members shared the story of Jesus and His salvation with her and invited her to accept Jesus as her Savior. She said she wanted to and prayed that Jesus would forgive her sins and accept her as His child.

After giving her heart to Jesus, she decided that she would share this Jesus-story with the other children in Morondava and would also invite them to accept Him as their Savior. She would pray for them and with them. She faithfully did this every week, without a Bible. For five years, this unknown girl shared the Message of salvation through Jesus Christ with other children, helping them understand the Gospel and encouraging them to make personal decisions to follow Christ. Well, you will agree with me that this was a Good News Club in all its splendor.

Our Madagascar friends could simply take over and bless this little girl with a Bible and more stories and officially call it a Good News Club.

God’s sovereignty is of such magnitude that He can use the little (knowledge) we have to do great things for Him. He calls us to be faithful, to show up, and He will do the rest.

History is often written by the victors, but it is the quiet lives of the forgotten – the nameless souls buried in unmarked graves – who remind us that every life is a story worth telling, even if the world never hears their names.



Friday

FLIPPIE THERON

“Our goal as missionaries should never be anything else than having a deep unwavering relationship with God till the end—if we make our calling our goal, or to leave a legacy our goal, we are missing the point. First a follower of Christ and then a missionary—the order is essential.”

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

Flippie and I were close friends since 1994, when I became a full-time missionary, until her passing on April 11, 2025. Born on April 14, 1942, Philippus (Flippie) was named for a hoped-for boy. In 1960, she finished school in Ermelo, trained as a teacher in Pretoria, and taught at a mission station in northern South Africa. There, she met Lossie van Zyl, her first husband, who died in a car accident just two and a half months after their marriage near Bushbuckridge.

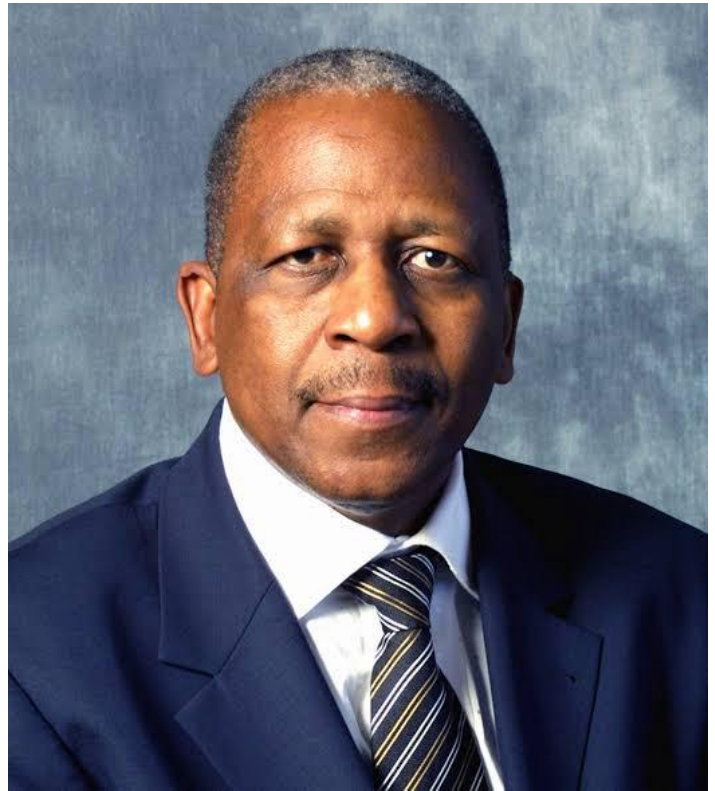
From childhood, Flippie sought a deep relationship with God, serving as a dedicated missionary, though she called herself “a child of the Most High God.” Proverbs 3:3-4 captures her essence: “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.” By actively striving to portray the loving character of God, she opened doors to share the Gospel and lead people to Christ.

She taught Matthew Phosa, a prominent South African attorney, politician, and anti-apartheid activist. He was the first premier of Mpumalanga and a member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress (ANC). Despite Afrikaans being seen as oppressive, Flippie’s love for the language inspired Matthew, who published an Afrikaans poetry book in 1996, “Deur die oog van ’n naald” (“Through the eye of a needle”). He said poetry has a way of breaking barriers and touching hearts. We will never know the full extent of Flippie’s influence in Matthew’s life, but as followers of Christ, we should never underestimate what we must give. Her influence shows the impact of living out Proverbs 3:3-4.

Devastated by Lossie’s death, Flippie later married Henk Theron, with whom she had three sons. At a remote mission station, her youngest, Hennie, fell gravely ill. As she ran to the mission hospital, two nurses, delayed by a hen crossing the road, spotted her and saved Hennie’s life. Flippie saw this as God’s miracle, trusting Him in chaos.

In 2000, Henk died in a car accident. Flippie continued ministering to children in Witbank’s rural schools, speaking fluent Zulu, her love making her footsteps beautiful (Isaiah 52:7). Her eldest son, Francois, died of blood cancer in 2019; Flippie was diagnosed with the same cancer two years ago. As her sons lived abroad, I cared for her, fulfilling God’s promise not to forsake her. She, in turn, supported me when I became a widow with a three-week-old newborn, even bequeathing me her house. She allowed God to use her hardships to teach her how to support people in similar situations; she used her hardships to spread the Gospel. Therefore, she never complained about any uphill battles in her life. She was always considerate and helpful toward fellow travelers.

In her final days, Flippie said, “I have so much to be grateful for, it feels unreasonable,” and “I can’t wait to look into my Master’s eyes.” Her last words to me were, “Don’t look back with regret, look forward with hope.” Her spirit grew stronger as her body weakened, living in the shadow of the Most High God. What a way to live! What a way to die! Possible only if you live in the shadow of the Most High God. Flippie, the child of the Most High God, could easily say with Paul, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).



Saturday

MICHELE POTGIETER

“Every follower of Christ is a missionary.

*It is non-negotiable; therefore, value every incident and relationship, pleasant or unpleasant,
as it equips us for our ultimate calling as missionaries.”*

Annalie Janse van Rensburg

One of three daughters, Michele was a middle child and average achiever, feeling she couldn't fully make her parents proud. Her beauty, however, shone in pageants, where she thrived under the lights, cameras, and pursuit of perfection. In 1994, as a Miss South Africa semifinalist, she shared a hotel room with a girl from another culture, who was in tears, fearing she'd disappoint her family if not chosen as a finalist. Michele realized they all sought approval. Comforting the girl, she prayed, and she heard God asking her if she wanted to pursue worldly fame or follow His path? Like Isaiah 6:8, she answered, “Here am I, Send me!” In her interview, she spoke only of God's goodness, unsurprised when not selected. A calling to mission work abroad stirred in her heart.

Months later, she met Ockert Potgieter, a successful lawyer also called to serve. They married on January 7, 1996, and moved to Reni, Ukraine, after their honeymoon. Adapting to Ukraine's lifestyle, climate, and culture was tough. Weeks after arriving, Michele suspected pregnancy. Over five months, they planted a Church and started a preschool. She returned to South Africa to give birth to their son, but back in Reni, they were attacked and threatened to leave. Ockert stood firm, committed to God's call.

For five years, fear drove Michele's decisions, testing her faith, but God reawakened her to His presence. They built a coffee shop, clinic, and a family of eight. During a vacation, a trusted friend betrayed them, spreading lies to their congregation. God reminded them to trust Him, not defend themselves.

After 25 years of ministry in Ukraine, they visited South Africa in 2021. Michele's father passed away, followed by Ockert's death from COVID-19 on October 11, 2021, leaving her heartbroken. Yet, she felt called to return to Ukraine. When war broke out in 2022, she stayed, aiding refugees and distributing food with Church leaders, offering hope.

In 2024, Michele visited her children in South Africa to support her daughter, Mari-Alena, diagnosed with Burkitt Lymphoma. Despite aggressive chemo, the mass grew. But Michele said: “When things don't work out the way we hoped, the Lord remains faithful and good.” Doctors in South Africa offered no hope, but an experimental CAR T-cell therapy in Israel was possible. Funds raised, Michele and Mari-Alena arrived at Sheba Medical Center. And then war broke out... Missiles shook the hospital, but Michele prayed for protection. In one day, the attacks stopped! Mari-Alena was discharged, and they returned to South Africa on June 29, 2025.

The story continues because God is in it—our history is His story.



Sunday Evening

GLOBAL MISSIONS CELEBRATION

DINNER WITH A TWIST

Enjoy a warm dinner featuring a mix of familiar favorites
and
unique international dishes for the curious eater

TABLE DISPLAYS

Browse engaging tabletop presentations
with photos and items from around the world

MISSIONS IN FOCUS

Wrap up the evening with inspiring stories, testimonies,
and prayers about God's work in global outreach

Conclusion

Gratitude

Dedication

Powerful...

that we are born into the Family of God

that we receive the Spirit of God

that we can have direct access to God

Fearless...

in the Spirit to go

in the Spirit to face persecution well

in the Spirit to act local and global

Unstoppable...

when facing resistance

when things get uncomfortable

when possible loss of life is staring me right in the face

To be continued...

with the Spirit

through His Church

to the end

into eternity

A mighty praise to my Lord
without Him, these pages would be empty

A heartfelt thank you to missionaries
those whose stories were included in this book,
captured and authored by my friend
and South African missionary pastor, Annalie Janse van Rensburg
Their Spirit-Driven actions set the pace for us to finish the final chapter of Acts

A deep thank you to my wife
Her unwavering encouragement lifts me

A profound thank you to my Christ-family
Dayspring Wesleyan Church has been vital to this book's journey

Dedicated to my Lord

**Dedicated to my family
(Somari, Eli and Shana, Nicolai and Ava)**