

The WAY Fellowship Church

2024 Church wide

Fasting & Prayer

14 Days, 21 Days, 30 Days, 40 Days and 50 Days

January 8th, 2024 Kick Off

6:30AM Daily Prayerline Monday-Sunday

605-475-3235 / Code 496632#

“A YEAR OF PURPOSE” Ephesians 2:10

2024

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A YEAR OF PURPOSE

Live **with** Purpose, Live **on** Purpose, Live **for** Purpose

“ For we are God’s
handiwork, created in Christ Jesus
to do good works, which God
prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

Guidelines for Daniel Fast

PREPARING SPIRITUALLY

Confess your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4). Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you (Romans 12:1-2).

PREPARING PHYSICALLY

If you have health concerns, consult your doctor before beginning a fast and explain what you plan to do. This is especially important if you take prescription medications or have a chronic ailment. Some people should never fast without professional supervision.

WHAT TO EXPECT

When you fast, your body detoxifies, eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars. And naturally, you will have hunger pains. Limit your activity, and exercise moderately. Take time to rest. Fasting brings about miraculous results. You are following Jesus' example when you fast. Spend time listening to praise and worship. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God's face.

FOODS WE MAY EAT

Whole Grains: Oats, Barley

Legumes: Dried Beans, Pinto Beans, Split Peas, Lentils, Black Eyed Peas.

Fruits: Apples, Apricots, Bananas, Blackberries, Blueberries, Boysenberries, Cantaloupe, Cherries, Cranberries, Oats, Figs, Grapefruit, Grapes, Guava, Honeydew, Melon, Kiwi, Lemons, Limes, mangoes, Nectarines, Papayas, Peaches, Pears, pineapples, Plums, prunes, raisins, Raspberries, Strawberries, Tangelos, Tangerines, Watermelon.

Vegetables: Artichokes, Asparagus, Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Chili, Peppers, Corn, cucumbers, Eggplant, Garlic, Gingerroot, Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Mushrooms, Mustard Greens, Okra, Onions, Parsley, Potatoes, Radishes, Rutabagas, Scallions, Spinach, Sprouts, Squashes, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes, Turnips, Watercress, Yams, Zucchini.

Seeds, Nuts Sprouts Fish: Not Fried

Liquids: Spring Water, Distilled water, 100% All-Natural Fruit Juices, 100% All Natural Vegetable Juices.

FOODS TO AVOID

Meat White Rice Fried Foods Carbonated Beverages Foods Containing Preservatives or Additives Refined Sugar Sugar substitutes White Flour and All Products Using It Margarine, Shortening, High Fat Products.

14, 21, 40 & 50
Day
Devotional
Study of
the Book of ACTS

Prepared by: Dr. Danny Campbell
Senior Pastor, the Tabernacle of Danville, Virginia

How to Use this Book:

God's Word is Awesome! The Lord promises that if we will diligently study the Bible He will use it to increase our faith. Romans 10:17 says: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The first thing you need to do to make this study be everything it can be for you is to **commit yourself to becoming a student of God's Word.** You're going to need to find at least 30 minutes each day to study and to prayer! Don't cop out and say you can't do that! How much time do you spend on your smartphone each day? How much time watching TV? How much time on your computer? How much time gaming? You can find 30 minutes for God!

Next you need to begin each session in prayer, asking God's Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth! Then read the passage for the day, preferably in the New King James Version of the Bible. Then follow the study guide for that day, which will guide you through this devotional book.

You may also want to take a 3x5 Index Card and write the memory verse on it. Use it throughout the day to help you learn key Bible verses. I can guarantee you you'll never be sorry in the future for Bible verses stored in your mind!

Then end each time in prayer also, using the things you've learned that day as a launching pad into praying for all the things going on in your life.

God bless you as you study God's Word!!!

Day 1- Read Acts 1:1-11 Memorize 1:8

Theophil-who? Theophilus! It means God-lover! Have you ever heard the words theology and Philadelphia? Theology means the study of God, Theos in the Greek language. And you have probably heard Philadelphia called the city of ‘brotherly’ love, er, love. So Theophilus means God-lover. While that may be a specific person, it probably is a generic address to all the God-lovers, including you and me, who wanted to know about “all that Jesus did and taught,” and now want to know what happened in and through the early church!

Note: If you read Luke 1:1-3, you find Luke addressing Theophilus! So “Luke” is the “former account” he speaks of in Acts 1:1!

Before we move on, are you a Theophilus, a God-lover? Pray now that God will use this study to make you fall more and more in love with Jesus!

Now fill in the remainder of Acts 1, verse 3:

Being seen by them _____ days and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the _____ of God.

Did you know that between the Resurrection (rising from the dead) of Jesus Christ and the Ascension (going back to Heaven) of Jesus Christ He spent 40 days teaching the disciples about the Kingdom? Now you do! My guess is that He took the Old Testament scriptures and reminded them of His own teaching and how His life, death, and resurrection fulfilled scripture. Why do I think this? Because the truths about His life, death for sinners, and resurrection (so that we too may have life) became the central message every time someone preached in the Book of Acts. File that away.

Now about the Kingdom of God. Bible interpreters have argued about exactly what Jesus meant when he spoke about the Kingdom. Throughout the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke we see Jesus using the phrases “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven.” Let’s give it a little thought. Fill in the blank of Matthew 4:17 here:

“ _____, for the kingdom of heaven is at _____.”

What’s it basically saying? “Change your ways, people, God’s here now!”

In Matthew 13 Jesus tells us some stories of the Kingdom to help us understand more:

Story:	Meaning:
Parable of Sower	Only those who understand and apply Christ’s rule are fruitful
Wheat and Tares	Christ’s people will be in His future kingdom- others are cut off
Mustard Seed	Christ’s rule starts small, but permeates everything
Treasure	Christ’s rule is worth giving up everything you value

In Short, when Jesus talks about the Kingdom, He is talking about what His leadership looks like in the lives of those who submit to Him, both now and into the

future. And even those who die rejecting Him will refer to Him as Lord from their place of punishment (see Philippians 2:9-11).

Now fill in the blanks of Verse 8:

“But you shall receive _____ when the _____ has come upon you; and you shall be _____ to Me in _____, and in all _____ and _____, and to the ends of the _____.

There is so much to say about these words! Let’s back up to verses 4-7 to make sense of this power-packed verse! Draw a line from the verse number to the truth it is teaches:

- Verse 4 a. Your focus is not to be on political rule but on spiritual impact
- Verse 5 b. But Jesus, when are you going to zap Israel’s enemies? Isn’t that why we’re all really here?
- Verse 6 c. Don’t go out in your own strength but wait for the promised Holy Spirit that Jesus spoke of in John 14-17
- Verse 7 d. In a few days I (Jesus) will be back by my Father’s side, the work of salvation complete. Then true believers will have the Spirit of God living inside them!

Answers: Verse 4=c Verse 5=d Verse 6=b Verse 7=a

Aren’t people fickle? After all His time teaching them, after they observed His life, death, and resurrection, they still wanted to rely on their own strength and be part of a great political empire. Jesus responds by telling them to wait on God’s power, and then be not wallopers but witnesses. That’s our problem also- we often in righteous zeal want to wallop in our own strength instead of witness in His. We forget how wicked and stubborn we were when God saved us. We too need to repent, to “change our ways because God’s here now.” **If you have been a walloper repent now, and ask for God to turn you into a witness!**

We also need to mention that Jesus leaves us a pattern for our worldwide witnessing efforts.

What is your Jerusalem? (That’s where they lived)_____

What is your Judea? (That’s their country)_____

What is your Samaria? (Those near you different than you)_____

Do you have a personal plan to win these people in these places and the rest of world? If not, began praying now for God to give you a vision to be a worldwide witness! The rest of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit did this through the early disciples.

Cool Fact: I Thessalonians 1:8 and Romans 1:8 show 2 New Testament churches fulfilling Acts 1:8!

In verse 11 we see what are probably two angels talking to the disciples, who are still looking up after Jesus splits the sky. Their message? “What are you waiting for? *Do what he said!* Then he’ll come back and get you!” Friend, pray to God now and commit that you will be not only a God-lover, but a God-sharer!

“And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14

Day 2-

Read Acts 1:12-26

Memorize 1:25

Names for boys: Peter, James, John. Andrew, Phillip, Thomas. Bart, Matthew, Simon. All have stood the test of time as names that parents wanted for their children. But not Judas. Even the fact that one of the disciples named Judas (the son of James) was a godly man didn't change the fact that the other Judas, Judas Iscariot, had betrayed the Lord Jesus. For thirty lousy pieces of silver. The man who had kept the money for Jesus (and doubtless had access to more than 30 pieces of silver) betrayed Jesus, and forever will be the standard bearer for all those who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, but whose hearts are far from him. Don't let it happen to you. Your name will be worthless.

Today's passage is the one in which the disciples follow the scriptures and replace Judas with another disciple. The Old Testament text used was Psalm 109:8- "Let another take his place." Write down verse 4 from Psalm 109 here:

Wow! What an accurate picture of Judas' betrayal, written by David hundreds of years before Judas' evil deed. Note the contrast between David the man of God (who represents Jesus and his disciples) and David's enemy (who represents Judas and those who betray the Lord). Draw an arrow from the descriptions to the man:

	<<<Love
	Accusations>>>
Man of God	Prayer Betrayer Evil
	Good
	Hate

Now note verse 14, which shows the first disciples modeling unity through prayer, not accusations! The results of prayer are a desire to see scripture obeyed!

Pray now that your life will model, like the early disciples, a desire for prayer and obedience to God's Word. I have found it incredibly hard to be upset with the brothers and sisters in Christ I pray with.

Some have tried to say that the account given of Judas' death in Matthew 27:3-10 (which has Judas hanging himself) doesn't square with the account given in verse 18. Write here how you think the accounts can be reconciled: _____

Easy: He hanged himself, and because of his bad deed, no one buried him. His body rotted, and his insides fell out. Sins wages.

Interestingly, the disciples chose two men who had witnessed everything along with them to be possible successors. They prayed and then chose lots to pick the man, trusting God's will to be done!

At this point it is helpful to say a word about the Book of Acts as a narrative and what that means for interpretation. Acts 1:24-26 does not mean that God's way to choose leaders is to draw lots. That is the way it happened in Jerusalem at that time, and may be a way people choose to pick leaders today.

But narrative literature describes what happened. Other kinds of literature in the scripture tell exactly how to do something. That kind of prescriptive literature (which prescribes how to do something) should be given more weight in interpretation than narrative literature (which describes how something was done).

For instance, in the Old Testament there was a foolish man who was so excited about what God had done that he said he would offer the first thing he saw when he returned home as a sacrifice. The first thing he saw was his daughter. The man acted rashly, and should not have fulfilled that vow. We learn from that as narrative scripture what not to do, and of course it is not prescriptive for us to join him in his folly. There are other times in narrative literature where the example is a more positive example that should be followed, although elements of it might not be the prescribed way to do it. Our current passage is an example.

So what is the lesson we DON'T learn from Acts 1:24-26:

- A. A group of believers should choose from among godly leaders
- B. A group of believers should pray about who they choose for leaders
- C. A group of believers should always draw lots when selecting leaders

Obviously the answer is C. We should choose from among godly leaders, and pray about our decision. Drawing lots is optional! Today as you pray ask God to give you understanding as you read the scripture, and pray that you will "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Also pray for a good name, one that is respected because of your walk with God! Live by faith so it will become a reality!

Day 3-

Read Acts 2:1-21

Memorize 2:6

Our passage for the day begins with reference to that word Pentecost that has so influenced the Jewish and Christian world. And yes, that's where the word *Pentecostal* comes from. This is the day that Jesus was referring to in Acts 1, verses 4, 5, and 8. But the Day of Pentecost goes back even further. It was one of the major feasts, or festivals the Jewish people observed every year! You can read Leviticus 23 if you want to see the festivals that the Old Testament records. Other festivals, like Hanukkah, came after Old Testament times.

Amazingly, every Old Testament festival also was a picture of how God the Father was going to work through God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit. For instance, Jesus died at the time of the Passover, and was called the Passover Lamb. The day after Passover started the feast of Unleavened Bread, which reminds us that Jesus' body did not decay in the grave. The third day from Passover the Jews celebrated Firstfruits, and the Bible calls the risen Jesus the firstfruits of those who would also rise from the grave!

50 days later the Jews always celebrated Pentecost. Pentecost was a festival of joy and origination! And that's precisely what happened at this day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was given and the church age began! Let's review by matching the feast day with the fulfillment: Write the correct letter next to the number below:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Passover | A. Holy Spirit given in joy; church age begins |
| ___ 2. Unleavened Bread | B. Risen Jesus first of many more to rise |
| ___ 3. Firstfruits | C. God passes over our sins thanks to Christ's sacrifice |
| ___ 4. Pentecost | D. Christ's body does not decay |

Answers: 1 = C 2 = D3 = B 4 = A

Now hold on to your socks-because I'm about to blow them off of you! Do you know what the next feast was for Israel? It was the feast of trumpets! So what, you say! Well, write I Thessalonians 4:16-17 here:

Did you catch that?! The next thing to happen will be Jesus coming back for Christians at the sound of a trumpet blast! Isn't that awesome?! Take a moment and thank God for how awesome His Word is from Genesis to Acts to Revelation! Also thank Him for the incredible truths that are fulfilled in the feasts of the Lord!

Now, you may ask what we're supposed to do in between the Day of Pentecost and the day that Trumpet blows. Well, exactly what happens here in Acts chapter 2! Let's explore!

We only read a few verses until we see that right along with the Holy Spirit filling believers is that they spoke in other tongues. Jesus had told the disciples that upon receiving the Holy Spirit they would be witnesses (see Acts 1:8).

Many people have tried to make speaking in tongues the issue from this text. We will address this further after we've read the other passages on speaking in tongues.

But we should note here that clearly the emphasis of our passage is the power of the Holy Spirit and how he used believers to witness! With that in mind, circle the letter of the following statements that are obviously true from simply reading this text:

1. a. People heard their own language spoken by others who didn't know it
 OR
 b. People heard an unintelligible language, a heavenly sort of prayer language
 See Verse 6

2. a. People spoke in tongues to edify those who had already believed
 OR
 b. People spoke in tongues to witness of God in specific languages
 See Verse 11

3. a. The theme of the text is that Joel's prophesy was fulfilled by the gospel now
 being shared openly and freely with great boldness from the Spirit of God
 OR
 b. The theme of the text is that Joel's prophesy was fulfilled by any dream,
 any vision, any miracle that anyone now has, regardless of the subject See
 Verse 21

Answers: 1=a 2=b 3=a

As we close today's study, we see something remarkable. It is Peter, the very disciple who had denied Christ 3 times, who now, filled with the Holy Spirit, is speaking with boldness to the assembled crowd! His point by quoting Joel is that God is the one behind everything happening; He is the one giving this kind of power to ordinary people, some mere fishermen, others former harlots and tax collectors! And then he says that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

In essence, Peter is saying, He saved us, He can save you too! Let Him! Call on His name! If you have never trusted Christ, call on Him now! Be saved! And if you have already called on His name in salvation, then thank Him for saving you!

Day 4-

Read Acts 2:22-41

Memorize 2:38

In today's verses Peter the former fishermen is still speaking with boldness from God as a born again fisher of men! As we go through the rest of the Book of Acts we should pay special attention to what these first Christians said when they preached and spoke about God's plan, who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us, and the offer of the gospel of salvation to sinners. With those things in mind, write after each verse number the truth it contains about Jesus:

V.22 _____

V.23 _____

V.24 _____

V.25 _____

V.27 _____

V.28 _____

V.30 _____

V.31 _____

V.32 _____

V.33 _____

V.36 _____

Over and over the theme is that the same Jesus they thought they had done away with by killing was alive and was manifesting the power they now saw. In every generation men have tried to say that God is dead, that Jesus is irrelevant, and yet, with apologies to Time magazine, every century has Jesus as the Man of the century, influencing more people than anyone on earth. When the people in Jerusalem that day heard this, they were cut to the heart! Our responsibility is to share the gospel every chance we get, and when we see people cut to the heart by the Holy Spirit, and asking "what shall we do," we need to share what Peter does in verse 38. Write verse 38 here:

Before we leave this verse, we should make a few comments about baptism. It is taught by some that the physical act of baptism saves a person. Elsewhere some in Paul's day taught new converts that if they did not get circumcised they were not really saved. Paul demolishes that argument in the books of Romans and Galatians. Paul's arguments against the physical act of circumcision being necessary for salvation pretty well correspond as an answer to those that believe the physical act of baptism is necessary for salvation.

Most of the time the problem comes from not understanding that there is a spiritual baptism that happens at the moment a person is saved. Then people are physically baptized as an act of open, public identification with Jesus in response to his command that obedient disciples be baptized. This same Peter clears this up for us in I Peter 3:21. Write it here:

It's not the water that washes away our sins, but the changed life that Christ has brought through washing us with His blood. That's why there are scores of other verses that say that the key to salvation is repenting (turning from sinful practices) and believing by faith in Christ, letting Him be the new Boss of your life. The beautiful picture that physically getting baptized is of our conversion is further illustrated by Paul talking about the spiritual baptism we received in Christ (see Romans chapter 6).

In this whole discussion let's not forget verse 41. After the call to repent is issued, after the call to get the spiritual baptism that is characterized by receiving the Holy Spirit is issued, after the call to be saved is issued, those who are in this way born again *gladly*, let's say it again, *gladly*, verse 41 says, *gladly* received his word *and were baptized* physically.

People who gladly receive the Lord today will also want to be baptized and so identify with Christ and be added to a local church today like they were so many years ago.

Tomorrow's discussion will talk a little more about the kind of church new converts will benefit most from being added to!

For now do business with God. Have you gladly received the word spiritually? Then it is time for you to physically show your identification with Christ by being baptized and joining a church. Thank God for turning men like Peter into bold champions for Christ.

Day 5-**Read Acts 2:42-47****Memorize 2:42**

You will not read much Church Growth literature today without this passage of scripture being referenced. It is a great place to start when considering what our churches should be like. Let's fill in the blanks to these verses from the New King James Version:

And they continued _____ in the apostles' _____ and _____, in the breaking of bread and in _____. Then _____ came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the _____. Now all who _____ were together, and had all things in _____, and sold their possessions and goods, and _____ them among all, as anyone had _____. So _____ daily with one _____ in the _____, and breaking bread from _____ to _____, they ate their food with _____ and _____ of heart, _____ God and having _____ with all the _____. And the _____ to the _____ daily those who were being saved.

Now as we take a closer look to these things that characterized the first church, let's make some comments about particulars!

Continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship...Note that the basis for their fellowship was a steadfast commitment to the authoritative teaching of doctrine by the apostles. Elsewhere it is made clear that the Bible is the authority for our fellowship and life as believers (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Fellowship is often misunderstood to mean any gathering of believers. "Come to the Volleyball fellowship," we're told. The truth is that we have to be walking in the light of God's instructions to have true fellowship with one another (see I John 1:5-7). If three people are gathered, and only 2 are committed to doing what's Biblical, the third will not feel Acts 2 type fellowship.

And in prayers...Many adults and youth in churches today absolutely refuse to pray with other believers, to be heard praying out loud. In the first church, when believers gathered together, they prayed together! We must also!

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles... Some theologians today argue that miracles ceased when the last apostle died...others argue that if you have enough faith you will see miracles constantly in your life. There is room for disagreement here.

I believe that God still works miracles and uses people to do it, but that He always should get the glory and that He only should get the glory, causing us, like the early church to fear (stand in awe of) Him. I believe very little good comes from seeking the gift more than the giver, and that much harm is done on Sunday mornings by people trying to manufacture miracles to awe their congregations.

God says that the faithful speaking of his Word will work more than our lame efforts to wow each other in the church (see, for instance, I Corinthians 14:19). I also don't think God receives much glory from TV Evangelists in \$1000 suits who live in mansions putting on "heal-a-thons" in Arenas around the globe. But what do I know! I do know that we must love each other fervently, even when we disagree on some of these issues!

...sold their possessions...and divided them among all, as anyone had need... Most people don't think they're getting into this when they get saved and join a church! Members in the first church saw needs in their midst and sacrificed to meet those needs. This does not mean they sold their homes and all lived together. It does mean they viewed their money and things as God's, and instead of pampering themselves with unneeded "extras," lived humbly so they could minister to others through giving.

The modern example might be a teenager who cuts down on the number of clothes they buy to give to help others. Or a family selling their boat and giving the money to help someone in their church in some way- like perhaps helping a youth go to a Christian college! It could mean downsizing houses and dressing more simply to be able to give.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple... the temple was not their church, it was the center of religious and political life for Israel. In part of it the new believers met, and there they were seen openly by those around them! Theirs was a public faith! I'm sure some of the reaction was something like this – "Justin, what are you doing with those followers of the Nazarene?" "Well, Silas, Jesus whom they preached is alive and has changed my life! Let me tell you about Him!"

Breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart... For the first church going to a building was not church- indeed, they had no building of their own. So they simply and joyfully got together in each other's homes all the time and built up each other's faith!

Now we have nice buildings, but we should not forget to meet informally with other believers in our homes and in their homes, gladly sharing what God is doing in our lives. For youth this could be intentionally having friends over to hang out and informally lift up the name of Jesus!

...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Notice that as they praised God and shared with each other and continued in doctrine and prayers, God gave them favor with Non-Christians and God added new converts daily. Note that this is the first time the word church is used in the Book of Acts; what an example to follow!

Now we do everything short of paying people to come to our churches, and when they do come few “continue” in the Lord’s ways. Pray for yourself and your church, and if you are a youth for your youth group, that as you lead in your church getting back to these Acts chapter 2 truths, the Lord will bless by people coming to know Christ and being added to your church.

Day 6-

Read Acts 3:1-26

Memorize 3:19

Towards the end of Acts chapter 2 we had read that many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Our chapter begins with an example of such a miracle being done. Just as Jesus had healed a paralytic in Mark chapter 2 saying “arise...and walk, now Peter heals a lame man by saying, “in the name of Jesus, “rise up and walk.” The disciple had done what the Master had done! And the amazement that this created led to another crowd gathering and Peter being able to preach another great sermon that saw more people come to Christ.

There are 3 schools of thought about miracles today.

One says that miracles were done just during the immediate years after Jesus by his early disciples so that the gospel would spread rapidly, but with the death of the first Jesus generation miraculous gifts ceased. Miracles may still happen, this group would say, but there is no such thing as modern day miracle workers. Those who teach this are known as cessationist, because they believe miracles ceased when the New Testament was completed. This includes some of the best teachers and preachers in the world.

Others believe that just as the miraculous gifts occurred in the book of Acts, they occur today and we should expect them to occur often like they appear to in the Book of Acts. Many don't feel as though they have been to church unless they hear speaking in tongues and an offer to pray for healing is extended to the congregation. Pentecostals and Charismatics fall into this category, and some of the most impressive evangelistic numbers in the church today worldwide come from such groups.

The third category, which includes me, takes a middle ground approach. I do not feel comfortable calling myself a cessationist. But I am also troubled by what in my view is the over-emphasis on miracles among so many of my Pentecostal brothers and sisters.

Against being a cessationist, I see I Corinthians 12 informing me that God the Holy Spirit does gift some people, but not all, with gifts of healing, miracle-working, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

Against an over-emphasis on miracles, I also have I Corinthians 14 informing me that 5 words that can be understood in corporate worship are better than 10,000 words that can't be understood. That seriously limits the value in worship services of placing the value on the phenomenal.

Nowhere in the epistles that follow the Book of Acts is a disciple like you and I ever commanded to bring forth a sign, wonder, or miracle.

We are commanded to pray, praise, make disciples, love one another, give, and serve, but never to bring forth a miracle. In my view the answer between being a cessationist and

over-emphasizing the role of miracles today is I Corinthians 13, where love is the disciples' guiding principle.

Let's look at some other passages that help us out here. Next to the number of the verse on the left, write the letter of the statement that goes with the verse:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Matthew 10:1, 5, 8 | A. Some get gifts of healing and other miracles |
| 2. Acts 6:8, 8:6 | B. Christ will say He did not know some wonder workers |
| 3. I Cor. 12:9-10, 28-30C. | Satan's lawless one will work signs and lying wonders |
| 4. Matthew 7:22 | D. Disciples to work miracles on their short trip |
| 5. 2 Cor. 12:12 | E. Early deacons Stephen & Philip worked miracles |
| 6. Matthew 24:24 | F. The signs of a an apostle were worked among you |
| 7. 2 Thess. 2:9 | G. False Christs will show great signs and wonders |

1=D 2=E 3=A 4=B 5=F 6=G 7=C

Moving on, we see in verses 12-13 that Peter is careful to give God the glory for the great miracle that has happened in their midst. Don't look at us, he says, we did not do this in our power. He then goes on to tell them who they should look at: Jesus! There's the winning formula, friend. Get people's eyes off of you and your gifts and talents as soon, as possible, and turn their eyes upon Jesus!

As you read through Peter's sermon in verses 13-26, circle the main point he makes:

1. Jesus is the Promised One of the Old Testament scriptures
2. Our sins nailed Jesus to that cross but they couldn't keep Him there
3. God will forgive us if we'll repent of our sins and be converted by trusting Jesus
4. All of the above

Your answer should be D, all of the above.

As you pray today, thank Jesus again for saving you from your sins. Commit to giving God all the glory whatever your spiritual gift may be. And commit yourself to loving your brothers and sisters in Christ who see things a little differently than you do! The saints of old said it well:

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity”

Day 7-

Read Acts 4:1-22

Memorize 4:12

Our passage today is pretty straightforward in showing the boldness that had come to the disciples after Christ's resurrection and the day of Pentecost when they had been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. What makes it so joyous to read is when we think back to how scattered and frightened these same disciples were after Christ had been arrested. It is possible that Peter actually now gets to defend his faith in the very place he had denied Christ only a couple of months before! Oh the change that had come!

The religious leaders had thought that crucifying Jesus would end the Jesus movement. But the numbers of Christians just kept growing. According to verse 4, what was the number of just men that had believed? _____

When you add in women and children, the number of disciples may have now grown from only 120 in Acts 1:15 to over 20,000 people! How could they stop the Jesus freaks now?

There is a saying about some athletes: "You can't stop them, you can only hope to contain them!" Well, that's what the religious leaders came up with next. Crucifying Jesus hadn't worked. And there were too many believers now. Maybe they thought, "We can't stop them, but maybe we can slow them down some!" So they brought Peter and John in to harass them.

Jesus had told them in advance there would be moments like this! Look up Matthew 10:17-20. Write verses 19 and 20 here:

It gives me goosebumps that God in His sovereignty has allowed Peter to return to where he had blown it and now stand like a rock for Jesus! Remember, Jesus had seen him as Simon the fisherman and given him the nickname Peter, which means rock. He had wilted like a flower during Jesus' arrest. Now, with just as much danger before him, but now filled with the Spirit of God, he stands like a rock! Oh, the grace of God that doesn't give up on people like Peter, and people like you and I!

Again we learn from Peter the main things we are to emphasize- Christ's death in the place of sinners and his resurrection to show His power over death. Verse 12 is so important for you to memorize. Fill in the blanks of it here:

Nor is there _____ in any other, for there is no other _____ under Heaven given among men by which we must be _____.

No salvation in Buddha's name.

No salvation in Confucius' name.

No salvation in Mohammed's name.

No salvation in Krishna's name.

Jesus is the only name written under Heaven by which sinners may be saved!

In verse 13 we find that the religious leaders marveled at the boldness of Peter and John. They regarded them as ignorant fishermen, and yet they spoke as if they were from another world. Look at the end of verse 13 and write the reason why these simple fishermen had been made wise:

They had been with Jesus! 2,000 years later, Jesus is still confounding the learned of this world by making the foolish wise beyond any academic training they can receive! The bumper sticker is true- wise men still seek Him!

All that was left to do for the religious leaders was to threaten them! Verse 18 says they commanded Peter and John not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus!

Fat chance of that being honored by a couple of Spirit-filled fishermen turned fishers of men!

As you pray today, ask God to fill you with His Spirit, so that you too can stand up to the pressure of Jesus haters and say with Peter and John, "I can't stop speaking about the things I have seen and heard!"

Day 8-

Read Acts 4:23-37

Memorize 4:32

There is simply no substitute in the church of the living God for united prayer and praise. In so many churches today almost no significant time of corporate prayer takes place. There is much fanfare and brouhaha about programs that we are involved in, but the average American Christian is scared to death to pray out loud with other believers. As my former pastor used to say, *“and we wonder why there’s no power!”*

Our passage today yet again shows us that to be like the first Christians is to prioritize prayer with other believers.

Verse 24 says that they raised their voices together in “one accord.”

I love this definition of the word Homothumadon adapted from Smith and Thayer’s Bible Dictionary:

A unique Greek word, used 10 of its 12 New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. Homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to "rush along" and "in unison". The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church.

What this definition makes clear is that our unity in Christ is not based on just being in the same room together, or that we both profess to know Jesus. Our unity is based on the fact that you and I are rushing along after the same objective: To glorify God and to put Christ first in our lives. This is exactly what John is getting at later on when he writes I John 1:7. Look it up and write it here:

Verse 28 gives great insight into the question of Jesus’ death for sinners. Even though Herod and Pilate and various Jews and Gentiles had acted together to deliver Jesus to death, the apostles realized that nothing had happened that wasn’t part of God’s plan. Don’t spend too much time dealing with “who killed Jesus.” Over the centuries some professing Christians have been involved in needless persecution of Jewish people, uttering the foolish remark that “you Jews killed Jesus.” That is terrible. The scripture makes clear that Jesus voluntarily died for the sins of the world as part of God’s pre-ordained plan.

The question is not who, but why! Why was God’s plan for Jesus to die? 2 Corinthians 5:21 says it well. Look it up and fill in the blanks:

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be _____, that we might become the _____ in Him.”

Now look at verse 29. In the midst of the threats the early church experienced, was their prayer:

- A. That they would be preserved from danger
 - B. That they would speak gospel truth boldly
- OR

The answer is B.

How does God respond when his children rush along together in desire to serve Him boldly?

Verse 31 tells us: God answers in power, filling those believers with His Spirit and making them bold speakers of God’s truth. Oh, I hope this is what you want for your own life and for your church! Do you regularly meet together with other believers to pray and praise like this? If not, you are missing New Testament Christianity.

The beautiful things we saw in chapter 2:42-47 are again seen here in verses 32-37. We have covered them already. But there is one other thing to see here.

When God’s people are practicing Biblical Christianity, God does an amazing thing. Right there in their midst he honors their faithfulness by birthing the next generation of ministers right there in their spiritual incubator! Don’t you want that for your church?!

In verses 36-37, we hear about a man named Joseph from the island of Cyprus. His obedience to God was so inspiring to the apostles that they didn’t call him by his real name. They gave him a nickname! Do you know what it was? Barnabas! It means “Son of Encouragement.” In our day we would say, “Mr. Encouragement.” As we go through the book of Acts, remember that Barnabas was his nickname, based on the encouragement his growing faith was to the apostles.

As we close today, let me ask you a question. If the leaders of your church were to give you a nickname today based on your interaction with them, what would it be? Would it be “Mr. Encouragement?” I hope it wouldn’t be “the skunk.” When a church is growing like it should, Barnabas’ begin emerging in the life of the church. They have been encouraged by the leaders, and in turn they encourage the leaders! As you pray today, ask God to make you an encouragement to your church family!

Day 9-

Read Acts 5:1-17

Memorize 5:3-4

One very foolish thing that scoffers say about the Bible goes something like this: “I just don’t think the God presented in the Old Testament is the same as the God presented in the New Testament.” Usually if asked to explain what they mean they will say, “well, the God of the Old Testament seems to be a God of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is a God of love.” What these people are usually showing is that they haven’t read either the Old Testament or the New Testament very closely. Jesus Himself spoke more about Hell than He did about Heaven.

Both Old and New Testaments make clear that 2 truths exist at the same time:

1. God will judge sin.
2. God is merciful to repentant sinners.

Look up Exodus 34 and read verses 5-9. Write verse 6 here:

When God wanted to proclaim His name to Moses, he spoke first of traits like mercy and grace and goodness. But what kind of God does He say he is in verse 14 of Exodus 34?

God is both a loving God and a jealous God. His jealousy is perfect because He knows that nothing on earth that we choose over Him will be better for us than choosing Him.

When someone in Old Testament Israel claimed to know God but their actions betrayed God, it brought on his wrath. As we see in our passage today, the same was true when Ananias and Sapphira claimed to know God but their actions betrayed God. It brought God’s wrath down upon them.

We demonstrated earlier that Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

One thing he does exceptionally well is to compare and contrast people. Chapter 4 ended with Barnabas’ faith being displayed by his obedience. Now chapter 5 begins with Ananias and Sapphira showing their unbelief by their disobedience. The point is incredibly relevant for today- part of our worship of God is total honesty with God and integrity in our dealings with our church. We are not to be flippant when we go to God’s

house but instead have a healthy respect and “fear” of God. Nowhere is this taught better than Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. Fill in the missing blanks from that scripture here:

“Walk _____ when you go to the house of God; and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of _____, for they do not know that they do _____. Do not be _____ with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything _____ before God. For God is in Heaven and you are on earth; therefore, let your words be few.”

I asked you to memorize verses 3-4. In verse 3 Peter says that Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit. Who does he say in verse 4 that Ananias had lied to?

You should have said ‘God.’

The reason I had you memorize these verses together is that they make the clear point that Peter proclaimed that the Holy Spirit is God. This is one of those places you should turn to when someone doubts whether or not the Bible claims that the Holy Spirit is God.

Does it seem incredible that God would physically judge someone in church for such disobedience?

You better learn from the Scriptures! God is still a jealous God! Later the Apostle Paul writes that some in the congregation at Corinth had actually gotten sick and some died because of taking the Lord’s Supper in a flippant manner (see I Corinthians 11:26-30). Don’t play games with God, Christian!

That sure is the message that they got in Acts 5! Write verse 11 here:

In times of complacency Christians compare themselves with each other and the world around them and don’t see their sins as so bad.

But when revival comes to Christians they stop comparing themselves with each other and instead realize that compared to a Holy and Righteous God their lives fall way short of God’s glory. And a healthy fear emerges that leads to humility and confession of sin and a desire to see God the Holy Spirit clean the sin right out of our lives.

The reason I state this is that when the “fear” of God is produced such as we see in verse 11, inevitably the more pure witness that results in believers lives will turn into the results we see in verse 14. As the believers in Acts 5 became disciples like Barnabas, and less like Ananias and Sapphira, God continued to add believers to their assembly and work wonders in their midst.

As you pray today, are there any areas that you are lying to the Holy Spirit about like Ananias and Sapphira did? Oh friend, confess your sin now and receive Christ's forgiveness. Ask Jesus to teach you the "fear of God."

Day 10-

Read Acts 5:17-42

Memorize 5:39

By the time we come to this passage the High Priest (along with the Sadducees) was beside himself with indignation.

Turn to Matthew 22:23, and fill in the blank what key doctrine the Sadducees rejected:

_____.

Now re-read Acts 4:1-2. The major religious parties within Judaism in the days of Jesus and the apostles were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The common person was more likely to be influenced by the Pharisees, but the Sadducees probably had more seats on the Sanhedrin.

As you have already discovered, the Sadducees denied that there would be life after the grave. But now there were thousands of these Christians running around and preaching that that just as Jesus was raised from the dead people who trusted Jesus could also live forever. So in Acts 4 they had harassed Peter and John to try and dissuade them from preaching Jesus. It hadn't worked- more people now believed than ever!

So now the Sadducees laid hands on the apostles and threw them into prison. "We warned them," they thought. "Let's shut them up now by throwing them in prison." Once again, it didn't work! An angel opened their prison door, and told them to go back into the temple and preach.

Among other things going on here, take a moment to chuckle at God's sense of humor! The verses that follow record that the leaders sent to the prison to bring the men out, only to find out that they were not only not there, they were preaching in their backyard! It's hilarious!

But the leaders didn't think it was very funny! So they bring the apostles before them again, and ask why they insist on spreading the doctrine of Jesus when they had been told they could not. Peter's answer is as relevant today in the secular halls of America and Europe as it is in some oppressive states in Asia and the Middle East. Write verse 29 here:

Brother or sister in Christ, it's been 2,000 years now, but the world is no more excited about people sharing the truth about Jesus today. Preach Christ anyway! Speak the truth in love!

We should not leave verses 29-32 without noticing a mini sermon by Peter. Every chance they got, they spoke to Non-Christians about Christ's resurrection, and forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who repent and obey.

Right there and then, the leaders wanted to kill the apostles as Jesus had been killed. But a wise Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and spoke. What he says can be viewed as one of the most eloquent appeals for religious liberty in the entire Bible.

One of the reasons I am proud to be a Baptist Christian is that Baptists historically have resisted efforts to wed church and state, preferring to use words to convert people instead of weapons.

Tragically, many times in the last 2,000 years Christians, finding themselves in the seat of power, used that power to oppress others. I like what Gamaliel says – “Let them alone. If of men, this Christianity will ultimately fail. If of God, nothing we can do will stop it.”

Oh how I wish that all countries in the world would end their religious oppression immediately, and let everyone share with their neighbor what they believe to be the truth. No crusades. No jihads.

Gamaliel's comments kept the apostles from dying that day, but alas, they still were beaten and told not to share the gospel before they were released. Fat chance!

From verses 41-42, which answer best illustrates the apostle's response as they left:

- A. Immediately went out and got a lawyer to bring a lawsuit against the council
- B. Immediately called CNN and FOX news to broadcast their allegations against the council
- C. Immediately wrote a support letter asking donors for extra funds to combat the enemy
- D. Rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer for Jesus and kept on teaching and preaching Jesus

The answer, of course, is D. Would it be today? As you pray today, ask God to give you the apostle's perspective about suffering mistreatment for the name. You can make it through what God has in store for you, and you can do it rejoicing!

Day 11-

Read Acts 6:1-7

Memorize 6:4

The church in Jerusalem was growing like wildfire!

The last count of people had come in Acts 4:4. How many men were counted there?

When we add in women and children, there is every reason to believe that the church by now may have included well over 20,000 people.

With this kind of growth inevitably came people with more needs to be met than leaders to meet the needs. Our passage today shows the apostles acting brilliantly to address the church's growing needs.

The church was still so young in Jerusalem that almost all of the believers there were Jews by background. But 2 distinct groups comprised these Jewish Christians. Hebrews were those native to Palestine that mostly spoke Aramaic and Hebrew and were steeped in Jewish culture. Hellenists were those from other parts of the world who mostly spoke Greek and were less familiar with Hebrew and Aramaic. Beyond the language differences they had been exposed to cultures radically different than Palestine.

The church up to this point had experienced remarkable unity despite these differences. Now the church was going to get its first test in dealing with the inevitable problems that will arise when sinful human beings gather together.

Apparently, one of the ministries the apostles had taken on was a daily distribution of food to widows. Those from a Hellenist background thought their widows weren't being treated as well as the widows from a Hebrew background. All of the apostles, as natives of Palestine, were from a Hebrew background. Whether they liked it or not, there were appearance issues to deal with.

To their credit the apostles handle this matter with great wisdom. They didn't act defensively. They didn't act alone. They obviously had a solution they had prayed and worked through in their own minds. But they didn't dictate it to the people. They presented it to the people. The people appreciated their leadership and agreed to what was proposed. What a great working model for a church being led by its leaders into decisions that benefit the whole body!

In verse 2 the apostles show that they were aware of what their priorities were to be.
Write it here:

The word we get deacon from shows up in verse 2 in the Greek language. The apostles knew that they should not leave the Word of God and “deacon” tables. Verse 4 adds in that they will keep sticking to prayer and to “deaconing” the Word.

Oh that more pastors would keep this in mind today. Churches need to zealously guard their Pastors time to study the Word of God. The early church did this by raising up “deacons” to lead out in meeting the physical needs while the apostles (later elders) met the congregations spiritual needs.

In verse 3 the apostles give the qualifications for this first set of deacons.

Fill in the blanks related to the kind of men they are to be from verse 3:

Men of good _____

Full of the _____ and _____

Later the apostle Paul would add a more detailed list of requirements in I Timothy chapter 3. Interestingly, the only difference between a deacon and an elder would be that elders were “apt to teach.” In all other ways the church was to expect the same kind of character from its deacons that it expected from its pastor/ elders.

One very cool aspect of this whole matter is that all of the deacons selected and approved by Hebrew apostles were from a Hellenist background (judging by their Greek sounding names). The church had more than addressed the complaints of the Hellenist community in their midst. They had looked beyond cultural differences to include not just a token Hellenist on the deacon body, but to make the entire deacon body at the time from the Hellenists! What a display of unity!

Verse 6 shows the first ordination ceremony for deacons in the New Testament. In a solemn ceremony, these men were prayed over by the apostles. Churches do well to follow this example today! Later, in I Timothy 3:13, Paul talks of the benefits of serving well as a deacon. Write that verse here:

Verse 7 closes our passage by showing what transpired because of the apostle’s good leadership on this matter. The numbers of people coming to know Christ continued to multiply. That’s what happens when ministry is shared throughout the congregation. As you pray today, ask God to use you to help your church keep growing because of your service in “just the right spot.”

Day 12-

Read Acts 6:8-7:19

Memorize 7:5

You know your church is on fire for Jesus when the deacons become evangelists!

Immediately after having the apostles lay hands on him in prayer and becoming a deacon, Stephen begins himself to do “great wonders” among the people. He became a bold witness for Christ, and as had happened with the apostles, his speaking the truth began to make others extremely angry.

A group known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to stir up people against Stephen the deacon. What exactly was this Synagogue of Freedmen, you ask? Well, let’s do a little detective work and see if you can figure it out from the information supplied in chapter 6 verse 9. Next to the statement on the left write the letter of the best description of that truth that appears on the right.

_____ 1. Synagogue

A. Former slaves who had been set free

_____ 2. Free men

B. Jews from other parts of the Empire who spoke Greek

_____ 3. Hellenist Jews

C. Place where people gathered to study and defend Old Testament teachings

1 = C 2 = A3=B

Note that all of that information was discernable through carefully thinking about the verse and through what we have read already in Acts. Part of being a good Bible student is thinking like a detective!

These well-meaning men in the synagogue of the Freedmen were stymied by the wisdom given to Stephen by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, just as God had raised up the Hebrew apostles to speak to the Hebrew priests, now God had raised up the Hellenist deacons to speak to the Hellenist dominated Synagogue of the Freedmen. Stephen was one of them, and he was speaking with a power they did not understand. They couldn’t stop his well-reasoned arguments, so they decided to just stop him. Just as the Lord Jesus and the apostles had been seized and questioned, now the first deacon was to be as well.

As Stephen looks at his accusers in verse 15, his face looked like the face of an angel.

Only a close relationship with God can make that happen! Look up and read Exodus 34:29. The Freedmen accuse Stephen of speaking against Moses (v.11). And yet, as Stephen is about to preach, his face shines like Moses did! WOW!

Now all of chapter 7 except verse 1 is Stephen’s message. It is one of those special chapters that pretty much sums up the main things in the Old Testament. It deserves our attention for not just today, but the next 2 days as well. Remember though, this incredible speech is made not by one of the church’s apostles, but by one of its first deacons! Well look at the first 19 verses here.

The main point of Stephen's message is going to be that belief in Jesus is not contrary to the message of the Old Testament (as the Freedmen had asserted), but that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's message throughout the Old Testament!

These first 19 verses can be divided into 2 categories:

V. 2-8 From the time of Abraham to the time of the Patriarchs in the Promised Land V.

8-19 The time of the Patriarchs in bondage in Egypt until the time of Moses

Throughout this chapter we see the activity of God leading to Jesus' emergence as the great I AM.

Fill in the blanks from the verses describing God's activity:

V. 2-3 The God of glory _____ to our father Abraham...*"come to a land that I will show you."*

V. 4 He _____ him to this land in which you now dwell.

V. 6 But God _____ in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land.

V. 7 *"And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will _____,"* said God, *"and after that they shall come out and serve me in this place."*

V. 8 Then He gave him the _____ of circumcision.

V. 9-10 But God was with him and _____ him out of all his troubles.

V. 17 But when the time of the _____ drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.

Stephen wanted the people to remember God's activity...In the past He had appeared, He had moved them, He had spoken to them, He had judged their enemies, He had made covenant with them, He had delivered them, He had kept His promise to them.

As you pray today, thank God for His precious activity in your life as well!

Day 13-

Read Acts 7:20-43

Memorize 7:37

Today's passage is the middle of Stephen the deacon's great evangelistic message before the ruling council and a gathered mob, stirred on by a group known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen.

The entire message is a brilliant summary of God's dealings with the Jewish Nation in the Old Testament era.

Yesterday the passage broke down into these categories:

V. 2-8 From Abraham to the time of the Patriarchs in the Promised Land

V. 8-19 The time of the Patriarchs in bondage in Egypt until the time of Moses

In today's passage Stephen reminds his hearers of how God raised up Moses, and how Moses spoke of another that God would raise up!

Write Verse 37 here:

What Stephen is saying in that verse is as penetrating as any conclusion any trained preacher could bring.

Stephen has reminded them of how God kept the promise He had made to Abraham about his descendants eventually being freed from bondage and going into the Promised Land (verses 5-7).

Hundreds of years after that promise God kept his word by raising up Moses. Moses led the Jews to exit (or exodus) Egypt and move toward the Promised Land.

Stephen reminds them in verse 37 about another promise God had made through Moses- a prophet would arise like Moses that the people would hear. He is speaking of course of the Messiah. Tomorrow we will see Stephen bring them to the truth that Jesus is that Messiah (or Christ, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah).

Friend, I have now read through the Old Testament many times. Let me make this observation as it relates to where Stephen is going. The Old Testament is a treasure of instruction, but it is an incomplete book. Throughout the Old Testament we are told of a day coming when the Messiah will appear. The end of the Old Testament could easily have the words "TO BE CONTINUED!"

In Genesis 3:15 we are told that the seed of a woman will bruise Satan's head, and all Satan will be able to do is to bruise His heel.

In Genesis 49:10 we are told He will come from the tribe of Judah, and to Him obedience will be due from the people, and that He will wash his garments in wine, in the blood of grapes.

Moses spoke of Him in Deut. 18:15 as the Prophet God would raise up as a type of second Moses.

Micah 5:2 told us that He would be born in Bethlehem though His goings forth are from everlasting.

Isaiah 7:14 told us He would be born of a virgin, and the only way to describe Him would be "God with us."

Isaiah 9:6 told us He would be the Mighty God, equivalent to the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 53:10 told us that the Lord would crush Him to make His soul an offering for our sin. Though He would die, the same verse says His days will be prolonged!

WOW!

There are so many more passages we could cite, but for our purposes it is enough to say that the Old Testament closed with nothing that comes close to fulfilling these verses.

Hundreds of years passed.

Now Stephen is proclaiming the truth of who Jesus was and is, the great I AM that Moses met at the burning bush.

Jesus had said in John 8:24, "Unless you believe that I Am, you will die in your sins."

Tomorrow we will see Stephen the preaching deacon drive this point home when he finishes his message.

Today as you pray, thank the Father for sending Jesus the Messiah to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament.

If you have never done so before, confess that you are a sinner, turn to Jesus in faith, asking Him to forgive your sins and become your Savior and Lord.

BONUS: If you just can't get enough of today's study: On the next page match the letter on the right next to the verse on the left that states the truth we discover about Moses in the verse:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| _____ Verse 21 | A. Moses had 2 sons in Midian |
| _____ Verse 22 | B. God revealed His plan to return Moses to Egypt to deliver Israel |
| _____ Verse 23 | C. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses when he was age 80 |
| _____ Verse 24 | D. Pharaoh's daughter took Moses in |
| _____ Verse 29a* | E. Moses was a murderer |
| _____ Verse 29b* | F. At age 40 Moses developed a burden for his people's suffering |
| _____ Verse 30 | G. Moses was a fugitive |
| _____ Verse 34 | H. Moses was an Egyptian Scholar |

* a or b after a verse is used to tell you that what you are looking for is in the first part of the verse (a), or the last part (b)

Answers: Verse 21 = D Verse 22 = H Verse 23 = F Verse 24 = E Verse 29a = G
 Verse 29b = A Verse 30 = C Verse 34 = B

Day 14-

Read Acts 7:44-8:4

Memorize 7:51

As a child I used to love to pick Dandelions and blow them until all that was left was the weed itself. As an adult homeowner now, I think differently about blowing dandelions! I now know that when you blow a dandelion, dozens of little seeds blow through the air, resting on the ground to become more dandelions virtually overnight. Pretty soon the entire yard is filled with dandelions! If you want only grass in your yard, the worst thing you can do is blow a dandelion.

Today's passage is the last part of Stephen the deacon's message before the ruling council and an assembled mob. At the end of it they seize Stephen and snuff out his life.

The result?

As a blown dandelion fills the air with dozens of reproducing dandelions, Stephen's death and the resulting persecution actually wound up accelerating the Church's fulfilling of Christ's Great Commission!

So far Stephen's message could be outlined like this:

- V. 2-8 From Abraham to the time of the Patriarchs in the Promised Land
- V. 8-19 The time of the Patriarchs in bondage in Egypt until the time of Moses
- V. 20-43 How God raised up Moses, and reminder that Moses spoke of another Prophet that God would raise up!

In this last section of his message, Stephen gets right to his point: the people have sinned greatly by replacing faith and obedience with a Temple based pride that leaves God out. Over the centuries, God had sent prophets to tell them this and prophesy of the coming of the Messiah. Almost without exception these prophets had encountered persecution and opposition by the people. Now God has sent the promised Messiah, His very own Son, and He has been betrayed and murdered.

Verse 54 and following shows the response of the crowd. They seized Stephen and dragged him out of the city. They took off their coats like men rolling up their sleeves for a fight, and put them at the feet of one of their primary instigators, a man named Saul. And then they picked up rocks and hurled them at Stephen's body until it became lifeless. Later some good brothers retrieved the body and gave him a decent burial.

Back in the 1950's 5 missionaries were spared to death by the Auca Indians as they tried to make initial contacts with them for the purpose of leading them to Jesus. LIFE Magazine covered the story with an incredulous caption that read, "Why This Waste?"

Friend, none of us desires to die a brutal death, but every time a Christian gets killed (or martyred) for their faith it is never a waste in God's economy. Sometimes it is evident within days, other times it takes weeks, months, years, even decades to see how God used the martyrdom of His precious saints. But the death of a martyr ALWAYS advances the Kingdom of Christ.

That was true for the 5 Missionaries who died at the hands of the Auca Indians. Some of their wives, including Elisabeth Elliott, took the gospel to the Aucas, and nearly the entire tribe was converted. The church among the Aucas has elders in it now who personally had been involved in the murders.

That was also true for Stephen, the churches very first martyr. In the chapters to come we will see that young Instigator named Saul converted and become the great missionary Paul, who among other things wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. We also see that the ensuing persecution after Stephen's death led to many Christians who had been very comfortable in their church in Jerusalem being thrust out into all parts of the Roman Empire. As they went they shared their faith, and it wasn't long before there were many more churches than there had been before!

How does Heaven view the death of a martyr? Verses 55-56 show us. Elsewhere Jesus is pictured seated at the Father's right hand (See either Ephesians 1:20 or Hebrews 8:1). In verses 55-56 He is seen not seated but standing. Why?

There are 2 possible explanations, and both are exciting to think about! Jesus may have been standing to lead the angels in a standing ovation for the faithful Stephen! Or he may have been standing to reach His arms out to Stephen, ready to receive His child who was about to come home!

As you pray today, ask God to help you be faithful no matter what comes. For some reading this, that may very well mean a martyr's death. But less than one minute after your body is destroyed, you will be with King Jesus!

Day 15-

Read Acts 8:4-25

Memorize 8:8

Revival has come when the churches Deacons' go out of their way to preach the good news to those who are different than most of the churches members!

You will recall that Phillip was one of the 7 Hellenists (Jews who spoke Greek only, not Hebrew) chosen to be a Deacon in Acts chapter 6. His fellow Deacon Stephen is killed as he preaches in the passage right before this one. Verse 4 tells us that those who were scattered after persecution broke out went everywhere preaching the word. Apparently Phillip wound up North of Jerusalem (Down in altitude) in the city of Samaria.

And there he preached! Do you have goosebumps yet? Do you realize what this meant? Jesus' prophecy of the expanse of the gospel was making it's next big step forward! Remember Acts 1:8? Jesus had said they would be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth! Goosebump time! Here we are at Samaria, and it is not an apostle or a pastor/elder who preaches there first, but a layman, the deacon named Phillip. Game on for the Great Commission!

Now let's test your knowledge about the city of Samaria. Write True or False in the space next to the statement, then check your answers below.

1. Samaria is the third most mentioned city in the Bible _____
2. Samaria was the capitol of the Northern Kingdom of Israel _____
3. Samaria had been a pagan city before Israel occupied it _____
4. Samaria fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. _____
5. Most Southern Kingdom Jews were bigoted towards Samaritans _____

1=True, only Jerusalem and Babylon are mentioned more

2=True, After the nation was divided-Jerusalem was capitol of the Southern Kingdom 3=False, King Omri built it in 880B.C. to be the capitol

4=False, Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722B.C.; the South fell to the Babylonians

5=True, as well known through the story of Jesus winning the woman at the well there

After taking that quiz, hopefully you have a greater appreciation of how groundbreaking Phillip's preaching the gospel to the Samaritans was.

ALL of the believers knew the heart of Jesus on this matter! Phillip did something about it! Revival will come to me and you when we start doing something about the radical message of reconciliation that has been given to us in the gospel! Phillip wasn't just crossing the line, he was erasing it! **GLORY TO GOD!**

How did God respond? By giving Phillip the ability to clearly speak the gospel, and many were saved and baptized. God also worked miracles of healing and exorcism through Phillip, as he had done with the apostles.

When word of this reached Jerusalem, the apostles sent Peter and John to check it out and help Phillip get the believers there off to a good start. Isn't it neat to see Pastors and Deacons working together outside the church walls to help believers grow! A lot of junk happens in today's churches because Pastors and Deacons are arguing inside the walls about mundane matters rather than being together out in the field winning, discipling, and equipping people.

Now when there is a move of God like the one that happened there at Samaria, and many are dramatically saved, there are often others attracted simply because something exciting appears to be happening. There are often some who profess Christ, follow through with baptism, and yet are either ignorant of basic truths or in reality still lost. Baptism is just getting wet if a person has not really been converted.

And so we read about Simon the Magician, who "believed" and was baptized. Verse 13 says he was amazed at the miraculous power he saw flowing through Phillip. When Peter and John came they were able to lay hands on people and the Holy Spirit came upon them. Simon the Magician in his ignorance and to be frank, his idolatry, tried to buy the "power" with money. Read verses 20-23 again for Peter's response.

We would do well in the church today to imitate Peter here, making sure the potential convert and the new convert know not only what the gospel is, but also what it isn't! Hopefully Simon the Magician did repent! And hopefully thousands in the church today will repent of behaving as if God is a genie in a bottle, who must bless us if we get the "name it and claim it" formula just right.

One more thing needs to be looked at today.

Read again verses 14-17. If these verses were taken in isolation of what the Apostles Letters (Romans to Revelation) teach, we might misunderstand the flow of salvation to look like this:

- A person believes in Jesus and is baptized.
- But something is missing.
- They are incomplete until someone lays hands on them and prays, and only then do they receive the Holy Spirit.
- Many who teach this would add that Speaking in Tongues is the evidence that the person now has received the whole gospel.

If you were to take these verses and a few other passages in Acts you could come to this conclusion and teach it to others. But you would be making a serious error. You would be basing your doctrine on a narrative passage of scripture when there are passages in the Apostles Letters that follow that clearly teach that a true believer receives the Holy Spirit at salvation. Remember: narrative passages must be interpreted in light of clear doctrinal teaching passages, not vice versa. We must continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, just like the first church did (Acts 2:42).

Fill in the missing blanks to Ephesians 1:13-14 here:

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were _____ with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the _____ of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

So the doctrinal epistles teach that at true salvation a person receives the Holy Spirit as part of the salvation deal!

So what's going on in our narrative passage for today, Pastor Danny? I'm glad you asked!

In Acts 1:8, Jesus had told his disciples they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they would be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Then at the day of Pentecost the Spirit came upon the apostles there, they preached with power, and the church was born. An entirely Jewish church made up of those who had previously accepted Jerusalem as THE place to worship. Now Samaritan Jews who had previously had their own mountain to worship at were coming to Christ. In a few chapters even Gentiles are going to be accepted by God. Several times in the book of Acts, including our passage, there is a mini Pentecost event through the hands of the apostles that confirm that in Christ Jesus it is no longer us versus them, our place to worship versus your place to worship.

You understand, of course, that had this not happened as Acts 1:8 was being fulfilled, that PRIDE could have overtaken even the apostles and many would have claimed that those who had experienced Pentecost in Jerusalem were more special than THOSE Samaritan Jews or THOSE Gentiles.

The verses below confirm that I am on the right track, as we see the reaction the Jewish believers had when Gentiles were converted:

And those of the circumcision who believed were ASTONISHED, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Acts 10:45-46

As you pray today, ask God to help you be like Phillip, erasing the lines people have created!

Day 16-

Read Acts 8:26-40

Memorize 8:35

This is a delightful little passage!

Phillip the deacon has just seen God move in a mighty way in Samaria as he shared Jesus there. We learned about that in yesterday's passage. Phillip didn't share Jesus because he had to- he shared because he wanted to!

Today's passage shows us that there is a snowball-rolling-downhill effect in personal evangelism. The more we share Jesus, the more confident we become in sharing Jesus. God looks down from Heaven and sees that we are one of the ones He can count on, and He lines up circumstances to give us new opportunities to share His love with others.

Verses 26-27 are very significant. Philip is asked by an angel, a messenger of God, to go away from the populated area he was just in and go out to the desert.

I don't know about you, but my response to God probably would have been, "Why? What in the world for?"

But Phillip's response was perfect obedience. Write the first five words of verse 27 here:

Folks, there is power when a man or woman of God is BOTH willing to share the gospel AND willing to go to out of the way places to share at God's command!

My sister and her husband are in out of the way Papua New Guinea because of their desire to see the good news impact people in out of the way places! May their tribe increase!

God had a divine appointment for Phillip on that desert road! An important Ethiopian man, the Treasurer for Queen Candace, was on his way to Jerusalem to worship. The fact that he was a Eunuch means that he had been emasculated. If you don't know what that means I'll have to let you look it up in the dictionary! Eunuch's generally attended to the needs of the King's women.

The fact that he was on his way to worship in Jerusalem indicates that he was either Jewish or a God-fearer. The God-fearers were Gentiles who were allowed to sit in designated areas in Jewish synagogues and who had come to love God but had not adopted the Jewish Civil Law regulations, particularly circumcision.

Read verses 28-31 again! I wonder what the Ethiopian was thinking as Phillip ran up beside the chariot that was no doubt led by fast horses! What a sight it must have been! Phillip overtaking the chariot on foot! I bet he was glad the African man offered him a place to sit!

It is obvious that God had prepared the heart of the Eunuch through the Word of God to hear Philip share Jesus! Verse 31 should grip us- We need to study God's Word so we can explain it to people whom the Spirit of God is dealing with!

Well, because he had been obedient, Phillip now was given the opportunity to share Jesus with the man!

The man's heart was so stirred, he was ready to be baptized as a believer!

Note that he didn't ask Phillip to take the canteen and sprinkle him with some water, or pour it over his head. Verse 36 tells us that when he came to some water, he realized they could go down in it and Phillip could baptize him!

The Ethiopian asked this question, "What hinders me from being baptized?"

Write Verse 37, Phillip's response, here:

Now let me meddle for a second! Have you been baptized as a believer? If you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart, and have received Him as your Savior and Lord, NOTHING hinders you from being baptized! Talk to a Pastor about it as soon as possible!

After Phillip won the man to Jesus, he was off to the next assignment that the Spirit had for him. Tradition tells us the Ethiopian man went back to Ethiopia and planted one of the first churches in Africa! God can truly use divine appointments in your life also- if you let Him! If you don't, watch for Spirit filled evangelists running by you on the highway to get to the places you should be going!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the simple obedience that was modeled by the godly layman Phillip!

Day 17-

Read Acts 9:1-31

Memorize 9:15-16

Buckle your seat belts if you haven't already! In the last couple of chapters we have seen the Acts 1:8 speedometer picking up speed. With the conversion of Paul in this chapter, we are now about to get on the Great Commission Autobahn!

Interestingly, Chapter 9 begins and ends with Paul involved in an attempted murder! At the beginning of the chapter, he is the persecutor; at the end of the chapter, he is the persecuted!

Let's go ahead and call him Saul, for that's the name he goes by for a few more chapters (Saul was his Jewish name, whereas Paul was his Roman name). You may remember that he was the one who had held the coats as the mob stoned Stephen to death at the end of chapter 7. That happened back in Jerusalem, and shortly afterwards persecution led to these Christian Jews being dispersed all over the Roman Empire.

As they went these Christians were talking about Jesus everywhere and others were being saved, as we saw in chapter 8 in Samaria. It is obvious that reports of all these new Christians had not just gotten back to the church in Jerusalem, but to Saul's 'persecution headquarters' in Jerusalem as well. Verse 2 lets us know he had sought and received permission from the high priest in Jerusalem to purge Jewish synagogues in other cities of these Christian Jews.

Paul's zeal in this matter was intense, seen both in the murderous threats he was making in verse 1 and by the sheer distance it is from Jerusalem to Damascus. Check it out on the maps in the back of your Bible. Damascus is way north of Jerusalem!

Read again verses 3-9.

There is much that could be said about this encounter between Jesus and Saul. But I just want to ask you one question about this encounter to make you think:

When Jesus appeared to Saul and told him what to do, could Saul have said no to the Lord?

Obviously hypothetical questions are by their very nature unfair to ask. But thinking about that one has been of great benefit to me when I ponder it! Just like Saul, I pretty much had other plans for my life than what I am now, even calling myself an Atheist. Then out of the blue Jesus Christ saved me! Looking back, all of a sudden I was saved, following Jesus and promoting the very faith I had mocked days earlier! Reflecting on Saul's salvation, and my own, I have written this statement:

“Grace is not something you grasp; it's something that grasps you! And when it grasps you, it does not let go!”

Well, just like we saw God unite the Ethiopian man and Phillip in the last chapter, here we see that God was simultaneously working to unite a disciple He had in Damascus named Ananias with Paul. Another divine moment was unfolding!

WARNING: A Christian's prayer time can lead to dangerous assignments!

Skim verses 10-19 again!

I love Ananias' little argument with God while he was praying! "God, don't you know Saul is a dangerous man? They call him the Terminator...Oh, of course you know, you are God...Lord, when I said I would do anything for you I kind of had in mind being an usher on the Lord's Day...Oh, you really want me to go to Judas' house and pray for him...I'm a little uncomfortable going to a guys house named Judas, Lord...oh, okay, Lord, I submit...I knew I should have gone as a chaperone to the youth camp down by the sea of Galilee...Wait, that's probably a tougher assignment than this one!"

And so Saul gets saved and baptized! I wonder how many Saul's the church misses out on today because we are reluctant to be like Ananias.

In Galatians 1:18 we learn that Saul spent 3 years in Damascus growing in the Lord and boldly witnessing.

What a great sense of humor God has! The high priest agreed with Saul's plan to stifle the faith at the synagogue in Damascus, but when Saul gets there he is sharing Jesus, and the irony of it did not go unnoticed to those there (v. 20)!

Pretty soon Saul's life was in danger, and the disciples helped smuggle him out and sent him to Jerusalem. Although 3 years had passed, verse 26 indicates that the Christians there were very skeptical over Saul's conversion. They must have thought it was a trick to arrest some of them. Their concerns were legitimate: in verse 31 we see that Saul's conversion effectively ended that wave of persecution that he had been largely responsible for!

What did God do to help Saul get accepted? Just as he had hooked Saul up with Ananias in Damascus, God led Mr. Encouragement, Barnabas, to hear Saul's story and assure the leaders that Saul's faith was too legit to quit!

As a Pastor I can't tell you how important people like this good Judas and Ananias and Barnabas are in God's overall plans being fulfilled! Behind every Billy Graham there are a host of names who helped win and disciple and encourage them. Great is their reward in Heaven! As you pray today, ask God to make you sensitive to what he is doing in the lives of others!

WARNING: Don't think of the life of a witness as glamorous. God had wonderfully saved Saul and turned him into a powerful witness. But as verse 16 says, Saul's life would be one of much suffering. Don't sign up if you are after this life's rewards! God may bless you with accolades and material comforts, but he also may bless you with circumstances that will keep you humble and encountering much hardship. The ultimate rewards come in the next life, not this one!

Day 18-

Read Acts 9:32-43

Memorize 9:36

This passage packs a lot of information into a few verses!

Circle the best answer in the following multiple choice question...

What can be drawn from this passage?

1. Peter has now matured into the “rock” that Christ said he would be
2. God can and does marvelously heal people
3. There is something special about a godly woman
4. All of the above

I think the best answer is number 4, all of the above! As this passage opens, the gospel has now been actively spreading all over the place. Peter doesn't just stay in his comfortable study back in Jerusalem, but is going out to where the action is! From verse 32 we gather that he is on kind of an “apostolic encouragement tour.”

In Lydda Peter heals a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and bedridden the previous 8 years. WOW! I wish I could do that! And if I could I would! Actually, *Jesus* healed Aeneas *through* Peter! Theologians argue over whether anyone has the gift of healing nowadays or whether it was just for the apostles during the New Testament days to confirm that they had been with Jesus.

What should not be in doubt is that people still get healed. We have all heard testimonies of people who were told by doctors they would not walk again but the doctors were wrong. We have heard stories of people who were supposed to die because of cancer, and yet another check discovered no cancer!

I offer the following three points about healing:

1. If you can heal somebody, do it! I would!
2. Never forget that it is God who is responsible for any true healings that happen, not any individual. God deals harshly with those who give themselves the glory due Him. Moses was an awesome man of God, but was not allowed to go into the Promised Land because of such a sin (see Numbers 20:9-13, where Moses lets the people believe that he gave them water).
3. Realize that God is Sovereign over when healing happens and when it doesn't. Sometimes wicked people get healed and godly people die. People who pray and have faith get healed sometimes, and people who pray and have faith don't get healed sometimes. God's ways are not our ways and we don't get to know why He allows things to happen the way He does!

Let me underscore that last point! It is spiritual terrorism to suggest to another person that their loved one was not healed because they didn't have enough faith or because they didn't pray enough.

Moving on from Lydda and Sharon, Peter came to Joppa. There he has a chance to raise Tabitha, or Dorcas, from the dead (I think I would go by Tabitha also- sorry to all of you named Dorcas!). It is so cool to think of someone being raised from the dead that if we're not careful we can overlook what a fantastic disciple Tabitha was.

From verse 36 write the things that Tabitha was known for in Joppa:

So many women and men are known for being gossips and full of anger. Praise the Lord for disciples like Tabitha who were known for loving deeds!

Can't you just picture the scene from verse 39? Peter is there among the weeping disciples, and they are pointing out to him that she made most of the clothes they were wearing! That is such a powerful image.

And then, talk about your miracles! Peter raises Tabitha from the dead! That's awesome!

The common thread throughout the two miracles is that when word got out, many believed in Jesus and were saved! Hallelujah!

As you pray today, ask God to make you a person full of good works like Tabitha. Also ask God to give you a heart for people like Peter had. And friend, whatever gifts God has given you, whether healing, service, evangelism, or whatever else, use those gifts for Christ's glory, not your own, and to advance His Kingdom, not to line your own pockets!

Day 19- Read Acts 10: 1-23 Memorize 10:15

Today's passage reminds us that the word disciple means learner. Here we see Peter struggle to apply the truth that under the New Covenant God was now setting aside the dietary code called for in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. God's plan was now for Jewish believers like Peter to set aside non-essential issues like diet so that they could share with the Gentiles the only issue that now mattered: salvation for sinners in the matchless name of Jesus!

I think it's neat that the last chapter closed with Simon Peter staying with Simon the Tanner. This chapter opens and "Simon and Simon" are still together! Isn't it wonderful that the same apostle who had preached and 3,000 were saved at Pentecost wasn't staying with preacher buddies but with a working man? Oh that that were more true of preachers today! In our passage for today Peter is going to meet a new friend, Cornelius, a soldier who was in charge of over 100 troops in the Roman Army's Italian regiment!

To discover more about Cornelius write verse 2 here:

Verse 4 tells us that God had taken notice of Cornelius's prayers and gifts. Cornelius was one of the "God-fearers." God-fearers were Gentiles who had fallen in love with the God of the Hebrew Bible but had not converted to Judaism through circumcision and observance of Israel's Civil Laws (such as its dietary code). As Micah 6:8 had called for, they did justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God. They just didn't want to give up their cultures and adopt Jewish customs.

And God was impressed with Cornelius! He looked down from Heaven, and sent an angel to begin the process that would lead to Cornelius meeting Jesus! Before we go on, say a prayer asking God to smile over your prayers and gifts offered to Him in humble adoration- the way He did with Cornelius!

Skim verses 9-16 again! As Cornelius' trusted servants made their way to Joppa to see Simon and Simon, Peter was with Christ in the school of prayer. On the top of the Tanner's house, a watershed moment happened in the history of the Christian church. I don't know if there is a historical marker at that house in Joppa today, but I can tell you what happened at that place is more important than all of the cathedrals in Europe combined.

That day Peter the Jewish believer was told that it was now okay to eat things like ham that had been forbidden under the Old Covenant's Civil Law. God's

pronouncement in verse 15 was clear: “What God has cleansed you must not call common?”

According to v. 16, how many times did God have to repeat the vision to Peter? ____

That makes me smile! I don't know about you, but sometimes God has to repeat things several times to me also before I get it! Thank God that He is patient with His children. This isn't the first time God repeated something to Peter three times! Remember at the end of John chapter 21? Three times Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” And three times Peter answered yes. All 3 times Jesus responded by asking Peter to “feed my sheep.” Tomorrow we will see Peter feed Cornelius and other Gentile sheep the gospel!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the same heart Peter had to obey His Lord even when He didn't understand. May you too be one who “feeds God's sheep,” whatever the cultural differences you may have!

Day 20-

Read Acts 10:24-48

Memorize 10:28

Today's passage is a watershed moment for the church of Jesus Christ. God brings together Jews and Gentiles around the person of Jesus Christ!

According to verse 10, what are some of the things Peter as a Jew had to give up to meet with Cornelius the Gentile?

Peter had to overcome so many differences! Jews didn't eat with Gentiles, period. Jews ate different things than Gentiles, period. Jews despised Roman soldiers as occupiers of their nation, Period!

End of sentence, right? Not to God!

Certainly the Old Testament Law had spelled out a distinct dietary code, but it had also encouraged Israelites to be diligent to help the foreigners in their midst. In the Old Testament book of Jonah, God even ordered Jonah to preach to the Gentile city of Nineveh! Jonah chapter four tells us that Jonah was upset about the task, because he knew that if those Gentiles from Nineveh heard God's message and repented, God would have mercy on them.

Against that backdrop we see why this is one of Peter's finest hours! For his part, Cornelius is so overcome by the vision that he has had that he falls down and worships Peter when he meets him! What a sight that must have been! Peter comes in to the house, apprehensive at meeting up with a non-Jew, and all of a sudden one is groveling at his feet!

Eventually the scene turns to Peter getting to preach to Cornelius and his Gentile friends. He has been sent by Jesus to help these Gentile "God-fearers" learn the "rest of the story" about Jesus. What is neat is that Peter opens by telling them something he has learned!

What does verse 35 say that Peter has learned?

Peter has learned that God shows no partiality! Maybe some of our teaching would be more effective if we were like Peter, feeling vulnerable enough to share what we have learned before we ask someone else to learn what we are teaching!

Peter's sermon is similar to the one he preached in Acts chapter two. He speaks about Jesus' life and ministry, His death on the tree, and the miracle of His resurrection. Then in verse 43 he says that whoever believes in Him will receive the remission of sins.

Remission is just a fancy word for forgiveness! Whoever believes in Jesus, Jew or Gentile, has their sins forgiven! Now that's good news!

The response was immediate! The Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends!

We're told that those of the circumcision were astonished when they saw the Holy Spirit come upon these Gentiles! When it says they were of the circumcision it means they were Jewish believers. Verse 46 tells us that the new Gentile believers spoke in tongues. Tongues had been present right *before* a whole bunch of Jews got saved in Acts chapter two, tongues are now present right *after* these gentiles got saved.

The Jewish believers were astonished that the Holy Spirit would come upon non-Jews as He had on Jews. In verse 47 Peter dares his Jewish believing friends to recognize that they have seen God work powerfully in their midst. And right there on the spot Peter commands these new disciples to be baptized. Evidently they were, and a new day had dawned for the church.

Write Galatians 3:28 here:

As you pray today, thank God that he has made the gospel available to all without prejudice!

Before we finish for the day, we should address a question that may have come into your mind. Does this passage mean that when people truly become Christians they speak in tongues?

Some do teach that, but I believe they are in error. A very simple principle of Bible study is that narrative passages like this one (that describe what happened at a point in time) are to be understood in light of didactic passages. A didactic passage is a teaching passage that clearly explains what we are to believe about a doctrine.

An example of not forming doctrines from narrative passages is Jephthah's vow in Judges chapter 11. There Jephthah foolishly declares that when he gets home he will sacrifice the first thing he sees come out of his doors. He got home and the first thing he saw come out of his doors was his daughter. He foolishly sacrifices her. Obviously we are not to do what Jephthah did, even though the passage starts by saying "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." Later King Saul's soldiers talk him out of keeping a foolish vow that would have had him sacrifice his son Jonathan.

The question we have to ask about speaking in tongues is this: "Is there a didactic or teaching passage in the scriptures that tells us what to make of speaking in tongues?"

The answer is yes: I Corinthians chapters 12 through 14 give comprehensive instructions to the church about speaking in tongues.

For our purposes today let me just refer to I Corinthians 12:4-11, which clearly teaches that speaking in tongues is one gift given to some in the body of Christ as the Spirit wills, not a gift given to all who receive Christ.

Friend, the remarkable thing that we should take away from today's passage is that God the Holy Spirit will take up residence within a believer! That is the testimony of BOTH narrative AND didactic scripture:

**"Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."
-Ephesians 1:13**

Day 21-

Read Acts 11:1-18

Memorize 11:17

I love the example that Peter sets for us in this chapter.

Peter and his ancestors had followed a strict dietary code for over 1400 years that God had imposed on them. Yet now God was telling Peter that the completed work of Jesus Christ now made the dietary code of the old covenant obsolete. In verse 9 God says directly to Peter that Peter must not call common or unclean what God has cleansed. What would Peter do in response to hearing God's Word?

This is a critical passage for us because we all over time develop our own traditions in our lives and churches and denominations. Than one day as we carefully read God's Word we come to understand that one of our traditions is suspect based on what God says to us in the Bible. What will we do in response to hearing God's Word?

Peter decided to obey God, and we must also!

I love how Peter responds to his critics by patiently recounting for them the amazing work that God had done among the Gentiles. Write verse 17 here:

Ask God now to give you the same heart he gave Peter. In this instance, Peter knew it was folly to try and stand against God for the sake of obsolete rules. But make no mistake about it, many church people love their obsolete rules. In this instance the church responded well, and realized that God was at work. Unfortunately, sometimes obeying God's Word will lead to the scorn of your church friends. That's okay- just make sure it really is a Biblical truth you are adopting!

During the reformation they had a phrase that will help you. Your goal, like theirs, should be a life "ever reforming according to the Word of God."

Fill in the Blank: What does verse 18 say is a gift of God? _____

- A. Perspective
- B. Faith
- C. Repentance
- D. None of the above

In Ephesians 2:8 we read that faith is a gift of God. In verse 18 we read that the Jewish believers marveled that God had granted these Gentiles repentance unto life. You should have answered c.

Properly understood, both repentance and faith are gifts of God. They are also what we call for as we preach to others: that they should turn from sin and self-rule (to repent is to turn) and believe in Jesus who alone can give eternal life.

There is a point to the Bible describing repentance and faith as gifts of God. Since ultimately God gives them, they will both be seen in the lives of true believers. Where they are absent, there is reason to doubt whether that person is truly a Christian.

Listen to this Biblical truth: you can't be forgiven of sin you haven't repented of. Many people claim to be Christians who blatantly and unashamedly practice deeds the Bible states are sin. By definition they have not repented.

A person who has repented has made a once and for all decision to agree that what God calls sin in the Bible is sin, period. I am not saying they don't struggle with sin; all believers do struggle with sin and fall annoyingly short of the glory of God until we die and go to Heaven. But we have settled repentance- what God says about a matter is what we say about a matter, period!

Having received this gift of repentance we also receive the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. All of a sudden we realize that He is who He said He was, and that He did what the Bible said He did on our behalf- and we receive Him into our lives and become children of God!

As you pray today, if repentance and faith are both settled matters for you, thank God that He has given you these twin gifts!

Day 22- Read Acts 11:19-30 Memorize 11:23

Do you remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8?

He said that His disciples, after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, would be witnesses. Then he mentioned four places that they would be witnesses to.

The first place was Jerusalem, that's the city they were in.

The second place was Judea, that was the rest of the "country" they were in.

The third place was Samaria. You may remember that Israel was divided after a civil war into North and South. Samaria was what was left of the North after it had been conquered by Assyria. Many of the people were mixed descendants, half Jewish, half Assyrians-now called Samaritans. To go to this area involved overcoming racial prejudices.

In the blank below, write the fourth place they were to go to:

(Look at Acts 1:8 again if you need to)

It is neat when you look in the Bible and see Jesus' words being fulfilled!

Acts chapters 1-7 show the church clearly blossoming and then encountering persecution in Jerusalem.

Acts chapters 8-11 show the gospel taking hold throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (see 8:1). Chapter 8 showed the witnessing exploits of the new Deacon Phillip. He won so many in Samaria that the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to help (8:14). Peter and John went on to preach in other Samaritan villages (8:25).

Phillip then received a word from the angel of the Lord to go down the desert road toward Gaza, a city in Judea. On the way he was able to win an Ethiopian official to the Lord. Afterwards, he preached in other Judean cities, going all the way from Azotus to Caesarea. You may want to identify those cities and the next ones I mention on the maps in the back of your Bible.

Paul's conversion is spoken of in chapter 9, a teaser of his involvement to come in the gospel expanding to "the ends of the earth." Chapter 9 ends with Peter doing great ministry in the cities of Lydda and Joppa. Up until that point, the gospel had mostly gone to those who were from some type of Jewish background.

Peter's witness to Cornelius the Centurion in chapters 10 and 11 serve as both an end of one section and a beginning of another.

Cornelius lived in Caesarea, illustrating how the gospel in chapters 8 and following had begun saturating Judea and Samaria. The fact that Cornelius was a Gentile prepares us for the next section of the book of Acts, starting in today's passage.

When the gospel gains a foothold in Antioch, well north of the cities already mentioned, the gospel was on its way to the “ends of the earth.”

Verse 21 tells us that when the gospel was preached to the Gentiles in Antioch, a great number believed and turned to the Lord. As we have seen already, it was the habit of the Jerusalem church to send out an apostle to help new churches get going right. We have already seen the personal struggle Peter had in reaching out to Cornelius and his Gentile friends. The man they sent would have to be a special man, able to get beyond cultural differences.

Enter Barnabas! The same one who had helped Saul be accepted by the apostles in Acts 9:27 was now called upon to see what in the world God was doing in Antioch. Write verse 23 here:

I hope when we see God working in the lives of new Christians we get as excited as Barnabas did here! Do you remember that Barnabas was a nickname? It meant “Mr. Encouragement!” In Acts 4:36 we learned that his real name was Joseph, a Jewish believer from the island of Cyprus. I love the description of Barnabas in verse 24 as a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit. May the same be said about us!

One of the great things about the book of Acts is that it shows real people under construction! In verses 25-26 we see Barnabas go and get Saul (Paul) and use the opportunity God gave him to teach the new Christians as an opportunity to also train Paul.

Instead of doing ministry alone more of us should do ministry together with someone who shows promise. Here's how you and I can follow Barnabas' example during that wonderful year he and Paul ministered together at Antioch:

The Barnabas School of Training:

1. I teach, my disciple is with me observing
2. We both teach, the disciple taking on more responsibility over time
3. The disciple teaches alone, I provide positive feedback
4. The disciple teaches without me there, I debrief afterwards (Mark 6:30-31)
5. The disciple teaches while a new disciple observes them!

It is no surprise that later Paul's life illustrated vibrant relationships with others (see 2 Timothy 2:2). He had learned from the master! And it was here the disciples were first called Christians. That's a way of saying, "little Christs." When we disciple and train other Christians, the faith grows strong and others see Jesus in our lives!

Verse 28 speaks of a famine that is about to hit Jerusalem. These new Christians at Antioch decided they should give to help provide relief for struggling Christians in Jerusalem.

Answer the following question.

According to verse 29, what did each believer give? _____

- A. Ten Percent of his income
- B. 1000 shekels each
- C. A pledge to give 50 shekels a week for 3 years
- D. As much as he could according to his ability to do so

Obviously the answer is d. They saw a need and everyone gave what they could to meet the need. This was the church at its finest!

Do you catch the irony here? Usually in our day the mother church gives to help the daughter church. Here we have the church plant raising money to help the more established Jerusalem church survive.

Support church planting, folks! You may be making an investment that will one day save your own church!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the same kind of heart he gave these early Christians. If your experience is far from this kind of Christianity, ask God to change that in your life- if you dare!

Day 23-

Read Acts 12:1-25

Memorize 12:24

This is a remarkable little chapter tucked into the book of Acts!

It is a powerful statement to would be persecutors of the church:

- For every James you kill, God will raise up another James!
- Every time you imprison a Peter, God will call forth a John Mark!
- Every time you try to squash the Word of God, it will multiply!
- If you try and take the glory that goes alone to God, you might get worms!

Let's start by thinking about the two James in this chapter.

According to verse 2, whose brother was the James that Herod killed? _____

This is big information. If you recall, Jesus often spent extra time discipling three men: Peter, James, and John (see Matthew 17:1). James and John were brothers, the sons of the fishermen Zebedee (see Matthew 4:21). Jesus had nicknamed them the Sons of Thunder (see Mark 3:17). James was one of the 12 apostles. Can you imagine the sorrow this murder must have had on his brother John and the entire church at Jerusalem?

Before we go into Peter's address, look at verse 17. Here we see another James. This James seems to have become a key leader in the church in Jerusalem. Look at Acts 15:13 and Acts 21:18 now. Write Acts 21:18 below:

In the Book of Acts we see a transition taking place from the Apostles functioning as the first group of plural elders or overseers, to others functioning as the elders. In Acts 6 it is the Apostles providing "elder" leadership to the church. In Acts 15 it is the Apostles and elders together overseeing the Jerusalem Council. By Acts chapter 20 the Apostle Paul is seen coming before just the Elders of the church in Jerusalem. And who is the first among these elders? Probably the same James we see in verse 17!

Matthew 13:55 tells us that one of Jesus' brothers was named James! It is very likely that this is the James who becomes the leader among leaders in Jerusalem, the very James mentioned in Acts 12:17. It also makes him the primary candidate to be the writer of the book of James! Many say that the book of James has striking similarities to Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). It's kind of neat to think about the talks that went on between brothers in the home of Mary and Joseph! At one time James had not believed in his half-brother Jesus (John 7:5), but now he did! Herod had killed one James, only to see another rise to leadership in the early church!

Verse 2 in Acts 12 tells us Herod saw that the death of James pleased the Jewish leaders of the day- a sad commentary. Please, whatever your religious faith, don't be pleased at the persecution of anyone. It is very, very sad that over the centuries Christians have sometimes been guilty of becoming persecutors, or of being pleased when another religion was being persecuted. It just shouldn't be so among us.

Verse 5 tells us what the churches response should be to persecution: Constant prayer. There are many ways to become informed of Christians and others being persecuted, such as the Voice of the Martyrs. I urge you to become a prayer warrior for those experiencing imprisonment because of their faith.

Despite Herod's concerted efforts to keep Peter locked up, an angel of the Lord got Peter out and brought him to an astonished group of praying Christians! Be on the lookout church- God may have the answer to your prayers appear right before your eyes! Those gathered probably thought Peter was as doomed as the apostle James- but God had other plans!

Herod thought he was on the way to eliminating the church when he imprisoned Peter. Instead, God was calling forth another to share the gospel. For at the home the Christians were praying in, a young man named John Mark was present. And despite one big setback in a few chapters, Mark became a very fruitful witness for the Lord, as evidenced by the fact that he wrote the Gospel of Mark!

Look up and fill in the blank below from Galatians 6:7-

“Do not be deceived, God is not _____; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

It is hard for us to figure out why God allows the wicked to prosper. But don't be mistaken friend, God is not mocked. The person who takes God on will have one of two things happen to them:

Eventually they will either be saved and promote the faith they once tried to destroy (like Paul), or they will be judged by God for cosmic treason against the Ruler of the universe.

Herod started the chapter by killing James. This caused James no eternal harm- he was immediately in the presence of God and the angels. But the chapter ends with Herod being consumed by worms- God will not share His glory with any human ruler. We could wish a shorter time for the Hitler's of this world to wreak havoc- but do not be deceived- the Herod's and Hitler's of the world always reap what they have sown.

Herod is no more- but 2,000 years later the Word of God continues to grow and multiply! Today as you pray, commit to sharing that Word with others just as both James' did!

Day 24-

Read Acts 13:1-13

Memorize 13:2

In our day we often make the mistake of emphasizing the wrong starting place for the impact we are to have for the Lord.

When we want to reach the world for Christ, we do some of the things below:

- Defer to more established churches, thinking ours is just too small
- Form an evangelism or missions committee
- Do a demographic study of the lost we want to reach
- Take evangelistic training, a lot of evangelistic training
- Determine a marketing plan using radio and television ads
- Come up with a big name evangelist to bring people to us to hear the gospel
- Send our money somewhere for others to do it

All those and more are things that we commonly do when we feel guilty over not reaching more people for Christ. And some of them can be helpful as PART of an unfolding strategy. But we can also get discouraged because we think we don't have enough resources to do something significant for Christ.

If you have ever felt like that there is great encouragement in our verses for today. Because today we see that the size of a church and the amount of it's resources has nothing to do with whether a church bears significant fruit for the kingdom. What does matter is that a churches leaders and its members pray together and are personally on mission with God.

The church in Antioch was nowhere near as large as the Mega church in Jerusalem had been. It had either several dozen or several hundred people around, but nowhere near the several thousand that had been in Jerusalem before the persecution. It was still a relatively recent church plant, just getting established. Antioch wasn't even in the Promised Land, but in modern day Syria. Surely Jesus' prophecy in Acts 1:8 that the gospel would go to the ends of the earth would be spear-headed by a church in the Promised Land, wouldn't it?

NOPE! The newer, smaller church in Antioch became the launching point for the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. As the next chapters unfold, we will see Barnabas and Paul and their companions boldly take the gospel to places without churches. And it all started as the leaders of Antioch were praying together!

You may recall that Barnabas and Saul had taken an offering from those generous Antioch Christians to the now struggling church in Jerusalem back in Acts 11:29-30. Acts 12:25 shows that Barnabas and Saul had now returned to Antioch from that short-term mission trip. Perhaps while they were in Jerusalem they had talked over with the Elders a desire to take the gospel further than Antioch. It's intriguing to think about, but we just don't know. But our verse 1 shows Barnabas and Saul together with the other "overseers" in prayer.

Verse 2 tells us they were doing what to the Lord? _____

Have you ever thought of your intense prayers as ministry to the Lord? Maybe if you and I did, we would fast more for even greater focus. One of your ministries in life is your prayer life- don't take it lightly!

As the leaders in Antioch prayed, they heard God the Holy Spirit call out Barnabas and Saul to the missionary task. A call to an individual does not come in a vacuum- it is testified to by others in the body of Christ. Local churches like the one in Antioch have a key role in affirming those they sense are called to the ministry. By this point, both Barnabas and Saul have proved themselves faithful in Antioch (see chapter 11:19-30).

Interestingly, the Lord was not calling some youth of the church to the mission field, but two of its best teachers! We should expect the same kind of things to be happening today!

Having laid hands on them after more fasting and prayer, the team went out. Maybe we should also expect more teams to be called from within our churches today!

The first place they went was the island of Cyprus, to the city of Salamis. Can you think of any reason Barnabas and Saul may have gone there? Write it below:

Here's a hint for you: look at Acts 4:36-37. More than likely, there was a burden to share the gospel among family, friends, and countrymen. This same desire burns in the hearts of all us, doesn't it! What an opportunity God was giving Barnabas.

There is one last point to make today. Sometimes when we are witnessing we need to say things more directly than Americans have become accustomed to saying them. None of us likes to come across as rude or pushy. But sometimes the Lord wants us to be bold and challenge people directly. I believe the Holy Spirit will prod us to know when such a time has come. In that moment, friend, you must obey and be bold. Skim verses 8-12 again. Because of Paul's boldness before the false prophet, the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, will be in Heaven.

The spiritual confrontation no doubt shook up young John Mark, for verse 13 tells us he deserted Paul and Barnabas at the next stop. That itself will be part of the unfolding story to come.

As you pray today, repent of any thinking that you can't play a vital role in the spread of the gospel. If your prayer life will turn into "ministry" to the Lord, and if you are willing to be part of the answer to those prayers, God will use you mightily!

Note: Sandy Creek Baptist Church was planted in tiny Sandy Creek, NC in 1755. Within 17 years they had planted 42 more churches. The "Antioch" spirit displayed in Sandy Creek and other places became the backbone for my own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention. I see it alive and well now in such great denominations as the Presbyterian Church of America and Calvary Chapels!

Day 25-

Read Acts 13:14-52

Memorize 13:48

As we begin today's study, you may want to check the back of your Bible to see if it has a map about Paul's missionary journeys. Many Bibles do contain such a map, and it makes it easier to follow Paul's progress as the book of Acts unfolds.

Yesterday we saw that Paul and Barnabas had been to a couple of places on the island of Cyprus. We only hear for sure of one convert there, a proconsul in Paphos named Sergius Paulus. After Paphos Paul and Barnabas sailed over to the mainland and came to Perga. It was there that John Mark left them. From Perga, they came inland to another city named Antioch in Pisidia. The rest of chapter 13 deals with events in this Antioch.

In this section, it becomes increasingly clear to us that Paul had a strategy in every place he visited. Based on verses 14-15, where was the first place Paul liked to go in a city if there was one? _____

Hint: Look at verse 5 also if you need to.

Paul was a Jewish Christian, and Jews gathered around the Roman Empire in synagogues. To qualify as a synagogue in a city, there had to be at least 10 households led by Jewish men. It sounds strange to us today that at Salamis and Antioch Pisidia and other places they would let Christians preach in their Jewish synagogues. But Paul had all the proper Jewish credentials, and these were places outside of Israel, Jewish outposts struggling to preserve Jewish identity hundreds of miles from Jerusalem.

After the reading of the scriptures, it was not uncommon to ask the Jewish men present if they had anything to share. As we have described earlier, there were also many Gentiles in attendance who had come to believe in God but had not become Jews. They were called God-fearers. This became a perfect opportunity for Paul to preach to both groups at once, and proclaim that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. In verse 16 that's exactly what he does!

The message is beautiful in its relevance to the crowd Paul is preaching to. Later we will get to see how Paul preached to a crowd of Gentiles in Athens ignorant of the Old Testament. But to this group of people Paul preaches that Jesus has the credentials to be their long awaited Messiah. In verse 23 he refers to the promised son of David. As he preaches about Jesus he testifies to the amazing fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. And then he explains the profound relevance that Jesus has for each of them, Jew and Gentile alike. Write verses 38-39 here:

Now the response in Antioch is very encouraging. We only know of one man for sure that was saved back in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus. Can you tell I like to keep typing his name! Serg wasn't even saved in Salamis where we know Paul had preached in a synagogue (verse 5).

There's a lesson in that, friend- our job is to share the good news. Some will respond and others won't. We have a nasty habit of only sharing when we feel pretty good that the message will be received by our hearer. But the fact is that we will not lead to Jesus 100 % of the people we DON'T share with. God may bring them to salvation some other way, but it won't be any thanks to us. Paul was faithful to share and leave the results to God. We must also!

Verses 42-43 show good reason to believe that there were both many Gentiles and many Jews interested in knowing Jesus. The next Sabbath nearly the whole city showed up to hear the gospel. That's the good news. The bad news is that sharing the gospel had led to opposition for Paul and Barnabas. Friend, it happened to Jesus, it happened to Peter, and it happened to Paul. If you become one who shares the message faithfully, you will encounter trouble. Do it anyway!

You can look at the statement in verse 48 many ways. It says that "as many as had been appointed unto eternal life believed." Obviously this is one of those verses that Calvinists use to speak about predestination and election and other awfully hard to understand words.

But the neatest thing about that statement is that it is very encouraging to us when we share the gospel. It helps us understand that our job is to be faithful to share and leave the results with God. That keeps me going! It also keeps me humble- God is the one who makes true salvation happen and He is the only one who gets the glory for it. NOT the evangelist. Knowing that also helps us not to be manipulative and pressure someone into praying a prayer they don't really understand or mean.

Later in Corinth, when Paul is discouraged, a similar statement to this from the Lord brings him great encouragement. As you pray today, thank God that He has appointed you to eternal life!

Day 26-

Read Acts 14:1-28

Memorize 14:17

Today's passage still has us looking at Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Along the way they were witnessing and preaching and gathering converts together into churches. As they went along they encountered a lot of opposition, so much so that Barnabas' cousin John Mark had already quit and returned home (13:13).

I laugh when I read verses two and three! Their initial response to persecution was not to flee but to STAY longer and speak boldly in the Lord! Paul knew God was doing something there in Iconium among the young converts, and he wanted to stay long enough to make sure the church got planted right!

Friend, too many times we leave when we ought to stay for a while! As we will see in a moment, the time would come for Paul and Barnabas to move on. But they were not going to abandon the new believers prematurely. Sometimes success in the Christian life comes from staying when we feel like leaving, saying yes to God when we feel like saying no!

In verses 5-6 we see that there did come a time when Paul and Barnabas escaped Iconium with their lives, just ahead of being stoned to death. Later in the chapter we will see that some of those same men from Iconium were involved in nearly stoning Paul to death. It often is hazardous taking the gospel to where it has not been before! Satan will stir people up and try to silence the ones sharing the truth.

**In the space below, write why it is ironic that Paul was nearly stoned to death:
(If you need a hint, turn to Acts 7:58-8:4)**

From Iconium they wound up in Lystra, where Paul healed a crippled man. There is always a danger when miracles happen that people will focus on the miracle worker rather than the God who really worked the miracle. That's exactly what happened in Lystra.

As worshippers of the Greek gods, the people immediately assumed that Barnabas and Paul must be Zeus and Hermes come down to earth. There was a legend in Lystra that sometimes the two would appear together on earth. The people thought it was finally happening in their day.

Even Paul's beautiful words in verses 15-17 could not restrain them.

Verse 17 is worth remembering- write it here:

Theologians speak of two kinds of revelation, general and special. Everyone on earth has been exposed to general revelation- the world God has created and upholds through regular seasons, etc... You can see how Satan has tried to fool people by having them reject creation, but the Bible says that it is so clear there is a Creator that no one on earth will be able to claim God has not witnessed to them. Romans 1:18-23 tells us that general revelation makes every person on earth without excuse for not knowing God.

There are some remarkable stories around the world of people with no Bible knowledge coming to believe there must be a Creator, and as they sought to know Him they came across missionaries or some other way of receiving the special revelation of Biblical truth. If you would like to read further on this, get a little book called "Eternity in their hearts" by Don Richardson.

In verse 19 we read of Paul's being stoned by a mob. The mob actually thought he had died. I believe he did, and had an out of body experience for a while. I believe he is referring to it in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Take a moment and read those verses. I think Paul got to see what Heaven is like!

You may wonder what Paul meant by referring to the "third" Heaven. A close reading of the Bible shows it describing three things as "Heaven." The first heaven is our atmosphere. The second is space, where the stars are in the "heavens." The third Heaven is Paradise, where God lives and where saints dwell while they wait for their new bodies (I Corinthians 15) and the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21-22). Pretty cool to think about, hunh?!

Verse 22 tells us that on their way home from this first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas went back to the churches they had planted and strengthened them. That must have meant so much to those churches. Undoubtedly the rumor had reached Iconium that Paul was dead. NOT! There came a day when he and Barnabas walked right back into that city, and met with the Christians! That is so cool to imagine!

On those trips they also appointed teams of leaders called elders in each church. They had seen it modeled in Jerusalem and been part of the team leadership in Antioch. Now there would also be a plurality of pastor/ elders in these new churches. We do well when we also minister in teams to each other and a lost world! As you pray today, thank the Lord for the resilience of these first Christians- and commit to that same kind of perseverance in your own life!

Day 27-

Read Acts 15:1-31

Memorize 15:10

When I read today's passage I always go from being very mad to very glad!

I get so upset when I read verse one and think about how much it is like today. Glorious things were happening in Antioch and other places as lots of Gentiles were trusting Jesus and becoming born again Christians. Remember that a Gentile was a person who was not Jewish, and when they came to know Jesus many of them had very limited knowledge of all the requirements that Jewish people had to observe.

Paul and Barnabas and the other apostles had clearly been preaching that Gentiles who came to know Christ **did not** have to also become Jews and obey the Mosaic Law. Later Paul would write these words about the law:

“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” -Galatians 3:24-25

That wasn't good enough for the men who came to Antioch in verse one. These “legalists” insisted that unless the new Gentile Christians got circumcised like the Mosaic Law called for, they couldn't be saved. Read verse 24. There it is made clear these men were not sent by the leaders of the church but were acting on their own when they spoke these words to the new Christians at Antioch.

I can't say strongly enough how it burns me up when this happens in the church today. A new Christian is excited about their faith, and then somebody comes to them and confuses them by saying something like:

- *You're not really saved unless you can speak in tongues*
- *You're not really saved if you don't use the King James Version*
- *You're not really saved until you follow the Old Testament dietary codes*
- *You're not really saved unless you do what our denomination says to do*

I am so glad that the leaders of the early church came together here in Acts 15 and clearly denounced such legalistic attitudes.

I love Peter's words in verses 10-11. Write them here:

Did you catch Peter's point in verse 11? He makes clear there that it is not the Gentile Christians trusting in Christ alone who need to worry about whether or not they are saved! To the legalist trusting in Christ PLUS circumcision for salvation Peter says that they can be saved if they'll become like the Gentile Christian- trusting Christ alone!

Verse 13 tells us that James then spoke.

Circle which James this probably is below (Skim chapter 12 if you need help):

James the apostle, John's brother OR James the elder, probably Jesus' half brother

You should have circled the second James. The apostle James was killed in 12:2. The other James is identified as a leader in 12:17.

Verse four tells us that when Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem they were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders. It is clear that the apostles and elders were leading the meeting.

What's neat about this is that we see in Jerusalem a transition in leadership happening. The apostles had led the church to make a very important decision in Acts chapter six. It becomes apparent now that in so doing they were functioning as a model for how a team of elders could lead future churches. You may recall from Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas had appointed elders (plural) in each church (singular). God would call all the apostles on to other ministry assignments throughout the Roman Empire, so it was necessary that Jerusalem itself would put elders into place.

In Acts 15 we see the elders (presumably led by James the brother of Jesus) working together with the apostles, leading this critical meeting. In verse 22 it says that the whole church was in agreement with them. What a testimony to us today about how to work together in a godly spirit to guard correct doctrine and lead the church. Later in Acts 21:18 and following, we see Paul back in Jerusalem, submitting himself to a directive from James and the other elders. In that passage, there is no mention of the other apostles being involved!

As you pray today, thank God that salvation is by faith in Christ alone, not in works we do! And thank God for the men he has raised up to protect and lead your church.

Day 28-

Read Acts 15:30-41

Memorize 15:37

I wish there was no such thing as conflict in life and ministry!

But the fact is that conflict probably happens as much in church relationships as it does in other relationships. There was a time when I was a young Christian that I naively believed I wouldn't see gut wrenching conflict. But after experiencing a very hurtful conflict between myself and other sincere ministers, I came to understand that we won't live conflict free until we get to Heaven.

After my own conflict, I searched the New Testament letters to churches and I found that in almost every one of them, the writers had to address believers who were in conflict with one another. The overarching concern in the New Testament was not to try to eliminate conflict, but for people to try and resolve conflict in a God-honoring way. We will talk a little more about that in a moment, but first let's look at the conflict between Paul and Barnabas.

Read verses 36-38 again. After some wonderful team ministry in Antioch, it was time for another mission trip to plant churches. On their first trip together, Paul and Barnabas and their team had seen some amazing things happen. But in 13:13 we read that John had quit during the trip and gone back to Jerusalem. As they got ready for this second trip, Barnabas wanted to give his cousin John a second chance. Paul insisted they couldn't trust John because he was a quitter.

Which one of these godly men was right?

Well, in a way, both were.

Which man was more concerned about the integrity of the mission? _____

Which man was more concerned about a potential missionary? _____

Now both those things are important! Sometimes the nature of a task in Christian ministry by its very nature rules some people out. Churches and mission boards often face the hard task of not allowing someone to minister because after prayer and study they feel the person is not qualified. I suspect that most of the time they are right; then again, as humans we can get it wrong, and we often do! Gladys Aylward was told she didn't have what it takes to be a missionary. WRONG! She went on to have a wonderful ministry in China!

Well, after a "sharp contention" Paul and Barnabas just had to agree to disagree. And instead of one team going out on mission for God now two were. The good news was that now two teams were going out two different ways, led by two great Christians, potentially doubling the impact. Sometimes God uses conflict to double the amount of ministry happening.

Maybe more should be said there, but let's move on. I believe Paul later regretted this very much. We don't ever read of Paul and Barnabas being together again, but we do read that Paul came to have a VERY different opinion of John Mark.

Look up and write down the following two verses:

Colossians 4:10 _____

2 Timothy 4:11 _____

I especially find it compelling that in the second verse Paul says that Mark is useful to him. I bet you that during the fight with Barnabas he had blurted out "Mark is useless." Now he is making amends. And there is no doubt how useful Mark became to the church. In I Peter 5:13 Peter calls Mark his "son." Mark went on to write the gospel of Mark. Many scholars think that as Mark wrote he drew on much he had seen first-hand, and much he had learned from Peter. All of this reminds us to not give up on people because they have failed before- you never know what they might become!

Paul went on to write this in Romans 12:18-

"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, try to be at peace with all men."

The key to resolving conflict is to move toward each other, forgiving the past and desiring relationship with one another. That's what Paul modeled with John Mark. And I couldn't respect him more for it.

But what of Barnabas and Paul?

How come we have no record of them getting back together? The fact is we don't have any record of Barnabas alive after this at all. The other references to him in the letters that follow the book of Acts are references to an earlier time.* I believe Barnabas died before Paul could make it right. Friend, if it is at all possible, be at peace with the people you have had conflict with before one of you dies. As you pray today, commit to doing your part to reconcile any fractured relationships in your life before it's too late.

*Almost all of the New Testament letters from Romans to Jude were written during the time covered in the Book of Acts.

Day 29-

Read Acts 16:1-11

Memorize 16:9

The Secret of victory in the Christian life is saying ‘yes’ to God the Holy Spirit, one decision at a time. In today’s passage the apostle Paul and his team model being open to the leading of God, and choosing what God wants you to do when His plan is different from your desires. C.S. Lewis once said, “there are only two kinds of people in the end; those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God will say, ‘alright, then, have it your way.’”

The passage opens with Paul and his team going back to Lystra. Paul and Barnabas had been in Lystra back in Acts 14:6. In I Timothy and II Timothy, letters Paul wrote later to Timothy, Paul identifies Timothy as his true son and his beloved son in the faith. Paul may have personally led Timothy to saving faith in Jesus! Even if he didn’t, it is obvious that Paul had become a spiritual father to Timothy.

Look at I Timothy 1:5 and answer the following two questions:

How was Eunice related to Timothy? _____

How was Lois related to Timothy? _____

Before we go on, let me speak to the Christian men reading this.

All around you these days in your church are young men from single mom homes and others whose mom is a Christian but whose dad is not. Many of them have the potential to do great things for Jesus as they grow. But they need a godly man to come alongside of them and help them grow in the Lord.

In too many churches almost all of the children’s and youth classes are taught by women. Thank God for those women! But man of God, you are needed to come alongside and teach young men how to be Christian men, and to help them get a vision for a lifetime of serving Christ.

That’s what Paul did for Timothy! Man of God, who is your Timothy?

You may find verse 5 a little surprising. In the last chapter it had been made clear that Gentile believers did not have to be circumcised to be saved. Why then did Paul get Timothy circumcised before Timothy joined the mission team for the sake of Jews in the region?

The answer is incredibly relevant for those who are interested in serving Christ today. Hopefully that is all of us! These days too many of us have the attitude, “if so and so won’t accept me the way I am, that’s *their* problem.” But that’s not the way Paul thought. Paul was willing to be sensitive to people from different backgrounds for the sake of gaining a hearing to spread the good news.

Look up and write down I Corinthians 9:22-23 below:

In Acts 16:3 Timothy did not have to get circumcised to be saved, but since his mother was from a Jewish background, Paul knew that if Timothy was not circumcised he would never be allowed to address a Jewish synagogue. That would limit Timothy in who he would be able to lead to Christ. So for the sake of the gospel Timothy was circumcised. Later it is made equally clear that Paul's Gentile protégé Titus was never circumcised (Galatians 2:3). As a non-Jew, he was not expected to conform to any Jewish custom for any reason!

Danny, can you give me an example of what going the 'extra mile' like Paul did might look like in today's church. Why yes, I can! Sometimes I have spoken at churches and Christian schools that only use the King James Version. When I do, I use the King James Version of the Bible, something I rarely do at other times. Fellowshiping with my brothers and sisters there and speaking God's truth to students is far more important to me than whatever inconvenience it is to me to use a version I am less familiar with.

It's a simple matter of respect. And it would be nice to see more of it in the body of Christ! The results in Paul's day are stated in verse 5: the churches were both healthy and growing!

As we move on, we see in verses 6-10 that our plans are not always God's plans. There are times when God makes clear to us in any number of ways that the things that we want to do are not His plan right now. When that happens, we must follow Paul's example and let God redirect us! As we will see next time, Paul's sensitivity in "hearing the Macedonian call" led to incredible ministry in the key Macedonian city of Philippi.

As you pray today, ask God to give you the kind of respect and sensitivity that the apostle Paul showed to God and people. Don't despair that you have blown it in the past- remember that Paul had blown it in the last chapter with his friend Barnabas over John Mark. One of the ways to make up for blowing it in the past is to get it right the next time- Paul did!

Day 30-

Read Acts 16:11-40

Memorize 16:25

What a magnificent passage this is!

Thanks to Luke’s gift of recording events, we get to relive the birth of the church in Philippi! As we read these verses, we see a wonderful confirmation that Paul had done the right thing by going where God the Holy Spirit wanted him to go rather than where he wanted to go (as we read in verses 6-10)!

You may remember that Paul’s habit was to go first to a Jewish synagogue in a city on the Sabbath and see if he could preach there. In verse 13 we see him instead at a prayer meeting ‘down by the riverside.’ This tells us a lot.

For a city to have a synagogue there had to be at least ten Jewish men and their families. The fact that on the Sabbath Paul was at an informal prayer meeting instead of a synagogue tells us that there probably wasn’t a very strong Jewish presence in Philippi.

Jewish synagogues had become places where Gentiles could come and hear a lot about God. In other cities we have seen this lead to a built-in crowd ready to hear the gospel. Not in Philippi! Most of Philippi had almost no idea who God was. Paul and his team had their work cut out for them! Or perhaps it’s more correct to say God had his work cut out for Himself! And nothing is too difficult for the Lord!

Write down at least three things verse 14 tells us about Lydia:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I love how God raises up people like Lydia to advance Christ’s Kingdom! Lydia had probably attended the synagogue in Thyatira and heard about God, becoming one of the “God-fearers” that went to synagogue.

We don’t know if Lydia had moved to Philippi for personal reasons or to sell more clothes through her business. But we do know that God had more important reasons for her to be in Philippi: her own salvation and so the church in Philippi would have a place to meet (see verse 40)! Maybe God moved you for the same reason!

After Lydia and her family got saved and baptized, Paul and his team stayed with them a while. In verses 16-21 we see Paul and Silas get into trouble for casting a demon out of a troubled girl.

When people get saved and get cleansed from sin, it often has an economic impact!

I love it when so called ‘gentlemen’s clubs lose their strippers and the bars lose their best customers because those they have taken advantage of have gotten saved! As you share the gospel and help people break free from that which has enslaved them, don’t expect everyone around them to be happy about it. Those who have been “cashing in” on their sin will not be happy!

Instead of accolades Paul and Silas got a severe beating and an imprisonment. Imagine being Paul or Silas in the prison that night. Most of us would have been groaning because of the pain of the beatings, or mad at God for allowing something bad to happen to us after we had done something in His name. Not Paul and Silas.

Write verse 25 here:

Instead of focusing on the details you have already read in the verses that followed, let me go straight to the point:

Whether or not we get to share the gospel with people in a meaningful way often comes down to whether our response to circumstances shows that there really is something about our faith worth having.

Paul and Silas would have been entitled to complain about their ill treatment and how their punishment did not fit their crime. Just like every other prisoner there! In fact, verses 37-38 tell us that Paul hadn’t even used the legal leverage he had as a Roman citizen yet. Instead of that, we find Paul and Silas singing praises to God. And all of the other prisoners were listening to them! Their faith was so compelling that none of the prisoners ran away when God miraculously opened the prison doors- Now *that’s a miracle!*

Because Paul and Silas reacted differently to circumstances than people without God usually do, they were able to lead the prison-keeper and his family to Jesus (and probably a good number of prisoners as well)!

As you pray today, commit to allowing God to use even the things we view as hassles as potential “God moments!”

Day 31-

Read Acts 17:1-14

Memorize 17:11

One of the ways you know something is very important in the Bible is when you see it repeated! One of the ways you know something is very important in the Bible is when you see it is repeated! I repeated that twice so you'll know that one of the ways you know something is important in the Bible is when you see it repeated!

By now we are deep enough in the book of Acts that we see some common occurrences repeated, and by seeing what's repeated we are getting a firmer grasp of Paul's missionary methods and his message.

Answer the following multiple choice question from verses 1-3:

When Paul went into Thessalonica he did which of the following: _____

- A. Went first to see if he could speak in the Jewish synagogue
- B. When he preached he preached directly from the Scriptures
- C. From the Scriptures he emphasized Christ's suffering, death and resurrection
- D. All of the Above

You should have answered D, all of the above

As we have seen in other places, Paul obviously had a strategy he followed and a message he stuck to! We are smart if we learn from this.

Paul routinely went to a city that was important in its region hoping to see many saved and to start a church for the new believers. If there was an opportunity to speak in a synagogue, he would courageously speak there until they kicked him out! He would then gather those who had believed in a willing person's house and pour himself into them as long as he could to get them well established. He would then go on to the next place, never failing to pray for them, write them letters, and as often as he could returning to encourage the church.

Depending on what God has called us to do, our strategy will be different than Paul's.

But like Paul we should have a strategy fueled by prayer, and do our planning based on Biblical reflection. Every once in a while, well-meaning Christians will minimize the need for good planning, saying we should just rely on the Holy Spirit instead. What Paul did was create a plan under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and then yield to the Holy Spirit when it was clear the Holy Spirit had another direction in mind.

Now one thing that should be the same for us as it was for Paul was the message.

Like Paul we must preach from the Bible and emphasize who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for sinners! The message never changes, even though our methods sometimes do!

Before we leave Thessalonica, we should celebrate the contributions of Jason.

Perhaps God would have you open your home like Jason for the sake of a Bible study that would help others meet Jesus and grow in their faith. Or maybe you could host a night where you have friends over to play cards and intentionally share your testimony and give everyone a gospel tract. Another thing you could do is host a backyard Bible club at your house over the summer months for a week. Curriculum is easily available to teach, play games, and do crafts and recreation for the purpose of introducing boys and girls to Jesus.

Verse 5 makes clear that those who believed in Jesus gathered at Jason's house after they could no longer hear Paul in the synagogue. It may inconvenience your schedule to open your home for the gospel, and you may encounter some criticism, but probably not as much as Jason and his friends did in verses 6-9! Jason paid dearly for the simple act of identifying his house with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But you must realize that for every Paul that God gives to grow a church, there must be people like Jason willing for their home to be a lighthouse. Is God calling you to be a Jason?

The next stop on the gospel train was Berea! Write verse eleven here:

Every once in a while you will hear a preacher or a teacher ask you to be a Berean. They are doing that based on this verse. When the Bereans heard Paul and Silas preach from the Bible, they searched the Bible to see if what they were saying was really in the Bible. What a great attitude for us to have today as well. Never just take the words you hear a preacher say as true without making sure they are the words God has spoken in the Bible.

There would be a lot less crazy things preached if more of God's people were like the Bereans! So I too encourage you to be a Berean, searching God's Word diligently! And if you are in a church or Bible study and what they say regularly contradicts the truth of God's Word and/or they belittle you for sticking with what the Bible says, get out of there fast! Find a church where they really believe and preach the Bible!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the heart of a Berean! And if God is leading you to be a Jason, begin prayerfully planning a way you could open your home to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Day 32-

Read Acts 17:15-34

Memorize 17:24

Today we see one more reason that Paul was such a good missionary.

Even though Paul had a regular strategy that he followed, he was flexible enough to adjust and adapt when circumstances called for him to take a different approach.

Missionaries often tell those adjusting to working in a different culture that they must be flexible or “fluid” as they work with people that think very differently than the missionary does. Many times on a short term mission trip circumstances change rapidly and if a person is too rigid they will be very disappointed. They forget that when one door is closed God is often opening another door of opportunity!

Today we will get insights from Paul on how to adjust and share the timeless gospel with those who have a completely pagan background.

Paul had come out of a very religious Jewish background. The second commandment clearly said that it was sinful to make and worship idols. In verse 16 we see that as Paul looked around Athens, idols were everywhere. And Paul’s heart was sick when he thought of how the people were worshipping lifeless idols instead of the living God.

In verses 17 we see that Paul stuck with his strategy at first in Athens. He preached in the synagogue to the Jews and the Gentile God-fearers there, no doubt showing from the Old Testament that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise again.

But Paul also noticed that Athens had a “coffee house” kind of atmosphere, and there was a public openness to talking about new ideas.

Where does verse 17 say that Paul also was reasoning daily? _____

Verse 18 tells us that in that public marketplace both Epicureans and Stoic philosophers heard Paul speaking.

When you run across things like this in the Bible, you should look them up in a dictionary or a Bible dictionary to get the background information you need.

Epicureans advocated pursuing pleasure. I believe they were the ones who said, “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die.” When people say today, “he who dies with the most toys wins” they are thinking like the Epicureans.

Nelson’s Bible Dictionary says this about Stoics: “a Greek school of philosophy which taught that human beings should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submissive to natural law, calmly accepting all things as the result of a divine will.”

Even though these two groups approached life in a completely opposite way, they agreed on one thing in verse 18: as Paul preached in his regular way they had no idea what he

was talking about! But they also agreed that even though they had no idea what he was saying, it was new to them, and new was fun to hear about! So they brought Paul to the Areopagus to speak before lots of philosophers. The Areopagus is still a famous place to visit in Athens, Greece today! Paul was standing where Plato and others had stood to passionately advocate ideas (see verse 21)!

Now we need to make one thing clear: Christians are not to change the gospel to gain a hearing from those who don't understand it. Compare verses 18 and 31.

What does Paul get to in each of his sermons as he preaches?

The R_____ of Jesus Christ.

But one thing does change in his build up to sharing the Bible's truth about Jesus. Paul begins his address at the Acropolis different than he would in the Jewish synagogue. He begins by addressing things they already believe to be true and using those things to build a bridge to the real truth which is found in the Bible.

Write verse 23 here:

Notice that Paul has taken the time to be a student of the culture he is trying to reach. This is critical for two kinds of Christian workers: Missionaries and Youth Workers! Since every youth generation is so different than the generation before, those who want to reach youth have to study youth culture the way a missionary studies a foreign culture. And then they can use what they know to be a bridge to sharing the timeless truth of the Bible. That's exactly what Paul does here.

Now some mistakenly believe that in trying to bridge the gap between cultures we should never share too much Bible truth. But that's not what Paul did!

Having won their attention he speaks quite clearly about several key truths in the Bible (Read again 24-31):

Paul presents God as the Creator of all, just like Genesis 1 does!

Paul presents the folly of trying to hold the Creator of all in a Temple. Solomon had said the same thing when the Jewish Temple was dedicated in 2 Chronicles!

Paul presents the folly of idolatry, just like the Law and the Prophets had.

Paul presents that God has providentially placed all people where they are and cares for them, as is stated in Deuteronomy 32:8 and demonstrated in the book of Jonah.

Paul presents God as accessible to men, and even quotes another of their writers who agree with the scriptural truth that “in Him we live and move and have our being.”

And then Paul tells them there is a day of judgment coming and they must repent of their sins they have committed in ignorance and turn to Jesus.

He tops it off by citing the Resurrection of Jesus as the proof of what he has asserted.

Paul had brilliantly preached to them a message saturated in Biblical truth that also showed he understood the cultural “glasses” they were seeing the truth through. That’s all we can do folks, and let the power of the Holy Spirit do the rest!

As happens today, their responses to the message were varied. Some mocked, some wanted to hear more, and praise God, several became believers!

As you pray today, ask God to help you understand the culture that you are sharing in, and the best way to be true to the Bible as you share the timeless message of Jesus and his Resurrection power to save!

Day 33-

Read Acts 18:1-17

Memorize 18:9-10

Today's passage shows the hard working Paul and his team take the gospel into Corinth. Like Athens, Corinth was a city filled with idolatrous passages. You may want to look at the maps in the back of your Bible and see how close Corinth was to Athens!

I love how God can use our travels to begin new Christian friendships. In Corinth Paul met a couple that would prove to be wonderful co-workers in advancing Christ's Kingdom. They had been victims of anti-Semitism under emperor Claudius in Rome. But what he had meant for evil God used for good in introducing them to Paul. Verse two tells us their names. Write them in the blank below:

A _____ & P _____

I love when the Bible gives you information you didn't previously have! From verse 3 we learn what Paul's occupation was. He was a maker of tents, and so were Aquila and Priscilla. No doubt they met trying to sell a few in the marketplace. In addition to the other things we know and love about Paul, we need to add that he was a witness in the workplace. It's entirely possible that Paul led them to Christ! You can do it in your workplace too, friend: make the most of every opportunity!

Do you understand that this means that Paul was willing to work and make money so he could support himself while he planted churches? In I Timothy 5:17-18 Paul extols the idea of supporting preachers financially, and in several places he thanks people for helping him along the way. But Paul didn't wait for support before he obeyed the call of God on His life. And a number of his opportunities to lead people to Jesus probably came as he worked.

You may have heard someone called a tentmaker. It comes from this passage, and indicates a person who is "bi-vocational." They earn a good amount of their money through a job the Lord has given them, and on top of that devote huge chunks of time to being an evangelist and/or a pastor. When you know someone doing this, do everything you can to pray for them, help them financially, and encourage them as they fulfill their call. They are probably tired all the time!

Verses 4-8 show Paul going through his normal strategy! He preached about Jesus in the synagogue until they kicked him out. Many people got saved and baptized! A man named Justus allowed Paul to hold meetings in his house. This time the house happened to be right next to the synagogue! And it's ruler, Crispus, got saved!

As usual, all the ruckus got Paul and the church in a lot of trouble. At some point, Paul got discouraged. Even though there were people getting saved, there was also hurtful opposition. And don't forget how weary Paul must have been from his rough travels and constant work making tents and then pastoring a church plant. It appears that Paul was close to giving up. I've been there. I can't tell you how encouraging the Lord's words to Paul in verses 9-10 have been to me over the years.

Write verses 9-10 here:

The Lord encourages Paul to keep going and keep speaking because He was with him. To me that is the greatest promise in the Bible, that the Lord is with His people no matter what! As you read the Bible, you'll see God often say that to his kids (check out Matthew 28:20 and Joshua 1:5 for two examples). I can't tell you how much it means to me that "I never walk alone" as I minister.

The other word of encouragement that is cool is when God says to Paul "for I have many people in this city." It excites me to know that as I share the hope of Jesus in my city, people God has been planning to save since even before the world began will be saved! It's our job to faithfully proclaim the good news, and then watch as God makes new life happen in front of our eyes! I have seen men trust Christ I honestly thought never would! These two great verses have on more than one occasion picked me up and kept me going!

In verse 17 we hear about a man named Sosthenes getting a beating. He was either Crispus' co-ruler of the synagogue before Crispus got saved or his successor. Well, we have good reason to believe that he was one of the ones God was talking about in the promise in verse 10, "I have many people in this city." Why do I say that? Later Paul writes a letter back to the church in Corinth. In I Corinthians 1:1 the name of the man who co-wrote the letter with Paul is given. Look up that verse and write his name below:

I had goosebumps typing this up- I bet you got it when you saw his name! Aren't you glad Paul kept going? You keep going to, friend! Jesus is with you, and His people are still out there for you to find!

Day 34-

Read Acts 18:18-28

Memorize 18:26

Today's passage gives great insight into why the gospel spread so rapidly in the first few decades and centuries after Jesus went back to Heaven. In the last chapter we saw that Paul had met Aquila and Priscilla at his workplace in the market and probably won them to Jesus. After that he probably poured into them the basics that all believers should know and practice.

You may remember that at His great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus had said His disciples were to go into all the world...making disciples...baptizing them...and teaching them to observe all that He had commanded. Once a person accepts Jesus, the work hasn't ended, it is just beginning!

Today we see that Priscilla and Aquila traveled with Paul to Ephesus and then stayed there when he moved on. And what Paul had done for them, they did for a man named Apollos! This is how the gospel spread like wildfire in the early church, each family was personally committed to making disciples; they didn't leave it for the "professionals."

You may have seen this before, but the gospel will not just be taught more deeply this way, it will ultimately affect more people this way. Let's just look at 20 years of ministry. In the left column we will see the stats add up for an evangelist that leads 10,000 people a year to Jesus. They support his ministry but are otherwise untrained. On the right we will show the stats add up for a person who pours the faith into one person a year, and has each disciple made pour the faith into one person over the next year.

<u>Year:</u>	<u>Evangelist's Results:</u>	<u>Discipler's Results:</u>
1	10,000	1
2	20,000	2
3	30,000	4
4	40,000	8
5	50,000	16
6	60,000	32
7	70,000	64
8	80,000	128
9	90,000	256
10	100,000	512
11	110,000	1024
12	120,000	2048
13	130,000	4096
14	140,000	8192
15	150,000	16,384
16	160,000	32,768
17	170,000	65,536
18	180,000	131,072
19	190,000	262,144
20	200,000	524,288

Isn't that amazing?! Not only will more be reached over the long haul when individuals personally pour into others, the disciples made will be much better trained!

Now unfortunately somewhere down the line someone breaks the chain and doesn't make disciples of others, so we also need evangelists to reach a bushel full at one time and teachers to train them. But it is a shame that even in evangelistic churches it often takes over 50 members to reach just one in a year. Don't let the chain break with you! Ask God to give you one new disciple each year that you can pour into!

Also note that in many churches there are people like Apollos who have great potential but just don't get it yet! Apollos only knew of the baptism of John the Baptist. That means he was proclaiming "repent for the Kingdom of God is coming" not realizing that in Jesus the Kingdom of God had already come!

Thank God for the ministry Aquila and Priscilla had as a couple. Look over verses 24-27 again. I love how together they pulled Apollos aside and explained to him what he didn't know! Folks, don't just complain about what all these new people in your church don't know, lovingly pull them aside and teach them! Have them over for a meal and talk about our glorious faith! Priscilla and Aquila took the time to reach out to Apollos, and he became one of the greatest preachers in the Bible! Maybe one of tomorrow's preachers is in your church, and you are supposed to be for him what Aquila and Priscilla was for Apollos. As you pray today, ask God to give you one person this year you can reach for Jesus!

Bonus Material:

You may wonder what is happening with Paul's haircut in verse 18. Sometimes when a Jewish man would make a vow, he would not cut his hair until he felt the vow was fulfilled. That means that at times the apostle Paul may have looked like a wild man! I wonder how long it got! This tempers somewhat I Corinthians 11:14, where Paul wrote that it is dishonoring for a man to have long hair, presumably because he would then be confused with being a woman. For those that use verses like that to prescribe buzz cuts for men, remember that at times Paul himself had his hair get a little longer *because* he loved God!

Day 35-

Read Acts 19:1-10

Memorize 19:8

This is the last of the three passages in the book of Acts that records people speaking in tongues. Now we can take a closer look at the three passages and compare what the book of Acts describes about speaking in tongues. We will also look at the one teaching portion of the Bible that deals with tongues, I Corinthians chapters 11-14. Below I have written a brief description of what happens in each of the three passages in Acts.

First Passage, Acts 2:1-11

The disciples (all Jewish) were praying on the Day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit filled them. They began speaking languages they did not know, but clearly they were actual languages. As Jewish people who had come for the feast heard the various languages spoken where they had come from, they were drawn together. In one language Peter proclaimed the gospel and 3,000 people were saved. It is recorded that they were baptized that day. It does not tell us whether any of the 3,000 converts spoke in tongues.

Second Passage, Acts 10:34-48

While Peter is preaching to God-fearing but as yet unsaved Gentiles at Cornelius' house, the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard. The text states that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on these Gentiles, evidenced by the fact that they were now speaking in tongues. Peter points out that they should baptize these new believers, who have received the Holy Spirit just as "we have." The fact that these Gentile believers had experienced a second "Pentecost" clearly removed from the Jewish believers any claim that they had any kind of superior status to the Gentile believers.

Third Passage, Acts 19:1-7

In Ephesus Paul found 12 "disciples" and asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they had believed. It becomes apparent that they only knew what John the Baptist had preached, and needed to be taught first about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul urges them to believe in Jesus, which they do. Then they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul prayed for them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

Other Passages to consider: Acts 4:31; Acts 9:17-19; Acts 13:9-12; Acts 13:51-52 Each of these passages describes people being filled with the Spirit. None of the passages state that they spoke in tongues. They may very well have, but the text does not tell us they did.

From the evidence in the Book of Acts it would be hard to definitively say what role, if any, speaking in tongues is supposed to have in the life of a Christian 2,000 years after Jesus Christ.

You may remember that throughout this study I have been encouraging you to learn some basic Bible study methods. A very basic one is that when we encounter things in narrative literature like the Book of Acts we need to interpret them based on clear doctrinal teaching elsewhere.

And so we ask: is there a place where the apostles taught what to believe and practice related to speaking in tongues? The answer is yes.

In I Corinthians chapters 12-14 the apostle Paul teaches the church of all ages about speaking in tongues, clarifying for us what we can't apprehend from Acts.

To reject what he says there is to reject the inspired Word of God.

To choose to ignore I Corinthians 12-14 and propagate doctrine based only on the occurrences in Acts is to sin against Paul's admonition in 2 Timothy 2:15 to "rightly divide the Word of Truth."

So let me encourage you to search I Cor. 12-14 for the full teaching on tongues. Here are some things that are clear there:

1. Speaking in tongues is a gift the Holy Spirit may give some, but not all Christians (See I Corinthians 12:4-11)
2. Therefore it is incorrect to teach that speaking in tongues is the evidence of conversion or a second work whereby the believer is "baptized" in the Spirit, and that those who lack the ability to speak in tongues are inferior Christians
3. Love for God and others is the main issue, not speaking in tongues (See I Cor. 13)
4. A mere five words spoken to edify God's gathered people are better than 10,000 words spoken in tongues (See I Cor. 14:19)
5. If tongues happens among God's gathered people they must go one at a time, not at the same time, there should be no more than three, and there must be an interpreter. What is said is subject to Biblical analysis and censure. (See I Cor. 14:26-33).

Some of my best friends in the ministry believe that the gift of tongues ceased at the end of the apostolic era. My personal view is that someone may receive the gift of tongues to share the gospel in a language they don't know, and others may have a type of heavenly prayer language they receive spiritual encouragement from.

I do not see a role for speaking in tongues in worship services, based on I Corinthians 14:19. I lead my church to say no to that kind of public expression that takes away from the clear preaching of God's revealed truth. If another church disagrees with that approach, that is fine, I would only hope that they actively practice the truths taught in point number five above, and whatever else their leaders glean from I Corinthians 12-14.

Moving on...

Back in Acts 19, we see Paul up to his usual strategy in verses 8-12. He spoke as long as he could in the synagogue at Ephesus, emphasizing the Kingdom of God, just like Jesus did in His teaching.

Then when that “door” closed, he taught in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

Tyrannus was probably a Greek convert who simply made the building he owned available to Paul. What a generous act! During those two years meeting in the schoolhouse Ephesus became a spiritual “beachhead” of sorts, and a base for all in Asia to hear the Word of the Lord.

Christian, don’t ever believe that you have to have a beautiful church building to reach and teach people. Just do whatever you can to reach and teach people!

As you pray today, ask God to give you a heart to emphasize the things God clearly asks us to in His Word, especially LOVE for God and people! Don’t get caught up in peripheral issues like speaking in tongues or what kind of building you meet in. Just LIVE the faith!

Day 36-

Read Acts 19:11-20

Memorize 19:20

To me there is no doubt that God still miraculously heals people today in response to prayer!

I've seen too many cases where doctors have thrown up their hands and said, "We have no medical reason for why you are better!"

With some reservation I would also affirm that some people seem to have a gift for seeing God heal in response to their prayers. When C.S. Lewis' beloved wife, Joy Gresham, had cancer for the first time, he called on an Anglican bishop that had a reputation as a healer. The doctors had given the Lewis' a bleak outlook for survival. The man came and prayed over her. The doctors were astonished to find that the cancer was gone, and she went home! A few years later another cancer came along and Joy went to be with Jesus.

The reservation I have over affirming that someone would have the gift of healing is that I believe that most of the times we hear of famous healers we are hearing of hucksters who prey on impressionable saints. Sadly, that has been documented far too many times.

So on the one hand I have already told you I don't agree fully with the "cessation" view that states all miraculous gifts ceased at the end of the apostolic era (close of the New Testament).

But we should all affirm this: the miracles God worked through the apostles had as their primary purpose the validation of their calling before those who needed to accept their message.

I think we see that born out in this passage: fill in the blank below from verse 11:

Now God worked _____ miracles by the hands of Paul.

What was going on was not the usual! It was something special, because Paul's God was special and because God's gospel message that the apostles preached was special.

Verse 13 tells us that some hucksters in that day focused on the miracles instead of the message. They were not Christians and simply tried to mimic what they had seen Paul do. They tried to cast out a demon.

The demon's answer in verse 15 is both funny and instructive. The demon knew who Jesus and Paul were, but not the sons of Sceva! What the demon is really referring to is the issue of authority. In Matthew 28:18 we see that all authority has been given to Jesus. Other passages tell us that believers have the right and privilege to use that authority in spiritual conflict (see Matthew 18:18). It's like when someone is given the "Power of attorney" in our day. They have the legal right to represent the other person's interests.

**Woe to the person who tries to engage the spiritual world for personal gain!
Verse 16 is not funny; it shows what can happen when someone dabbles with
demons without being a committed disciple, one who does not have that
delegated authority!**

I love how God uses opportunities like this to bring revival. Verse 17 tells us that word about the incident spread, and there was an appropriate fear because of the power of God. This gave Paul and his traveling band many more opportunities to share about Jesus!

My friend Mark Heffner, a missionary in Taiwan, has told me of several times when spiritual warfare like this has led to him having opportunities to share the gospel. One time a demon-possessed man tried to have his big snake bite Mark. Mark said something like, “in the name of Jesus, no.” The snake actually turned and bit his owner! Word of this spread, and people wanted to know about the Greater Power that Mark has access to!

Write verse 18 here:

I love it when people tell their story! There is nothing like hearing a Christian tell how God delivered them from their sins! I hope you are the kind of person who talks to others about the change Jesus has made in your life!

Now write what verse 19 says the believers did in response to their new faith:

Friend, when you become a Christian there are some things about your old life that just need to go immediately. One preacher talks about the dramatic impression made on him when he was a child and his dad got saved. The dad walked into the house and said, “from now on this is the Lord’s house.”

Then he went into the kitchen and poured all his alcohol down the sink, saying, “There won’t be any more booze in the Lord’s house.” Then his dad walked into the bedroom and got the pornography from under his bed, and said, “There won’t be any more of this smut in the Lord’s house.” As time passed, the boy saw that his dad was truly a new man. And later he got saved and God called him to be a preacher. You may have heard him on the radio – his name is Tony Evans!

**As you pray today, ask God to give you insight into the things in your life
that should be thrown into the fire. Then act!**

Day 37-

Read Acts 19:21-20:1

Memorize 19:30

The Apostle Paul set an incredible example of doing ministry as a team. Earlier in the book of Acts we saw that Barnabas had taken Paul with him to Antioch to minister as a team there. Wherever we look in the Book of Acts and in the letters that Paul wrote, we see him ministering with other believers. Indeed, one of the times he appears to be frustrated is when he does not have a team of brothers around him (See 2 Tim. 4:9-12).

From verses 22 and 29 write below the name of four people who served with Paul:

T _____

E _____

G _____

A _____

In verse 21 we see that Paul was preparing to leave Ephesus and go through Macedonia on his way to Jerusalem and then Rome. He sent the trusted Timothy and Erastus ahead of him, but he stayed in Asia longer. Interestingly, verse 29 tells us that two of those who stayed with Paul in Ephesus were actually Macedonians. In Bible study it is good to stop and think about the verses for a few minutes. In the space below, write why you think it is of interest that the two who stayed with Paul were Macedonians:



If I read it right, Paul sent the two guys who were NOT from Macedonia there, but kept the guys that WERE from Macedonia with him.

Today there is a lot of emphasis on equipping native missionaries to reach their own countries. I think that is an awesome and very effective approach! But any approach to ministry should always be a balanced approach to ministry! Some that are equipping native Christians to work in their own country are now discounting the need for foreign missionaries to go to other countries.

I for one think that is a mistake. Sometimes God uses natives to reach their friends; other times, for whatever reason, people respond better to a foreigner bringing them the gospel.

With Paul, it doesn't seem to be either natives or foreigners, but both natives and foreigners! Friend, meditate on such things when you are reading a passage like this one!

If you have a map in the back of your Bible, turn to it now!

Perhaps the key factor in Timothy, a man from Lystra (Acts 16:1) going to Macedonia was his maturity. He might have been the best advance man for Paul's team.

If you are wondering, Erastus was from Corinth, and had probably been converted when he was the Treasurer of that city (Rom. 16:23). Maybe he had connections that helped!

Acts 27:2 tells us that Aristarchus was from Thessalonica. You may remember that Paul had been persecuted in Thessalonica. Maybe Paul wanted to allow a little more time to pass before Aristarchus went back in that hostile environment.

There were probably several different men named Gaius in the New Testament. Since this one is said to be a Macedonian, he is probably a different man than other mentions of Gaius, a fairly common name at the time.

Friend, if you have a concordance or use an online concordance such as the one at blueletterbible.org, you can look up names and words and try to deepen your own Bible study, doing what I just did above for you! I know you can do it!

The rest of chapter nineteen is pretty straightforward. When a whole lot of people in an area get saved at the same time, it shows up in the local economy! When people began worshipping the one true God in their day, they stopped buying idols to put in their houses.

When people in our day begin worshipping God, they stop buying idols like R rated movies* and pornography. Alcohol sales go way down! It has economic impact as people re order their lives with Biblical priorities! And when that happens, people that used to make their money by encouraging sin get upset with the messengers. Servants of Jesus have been facing this kind of persecution for 2,000 years.

Poor old Aristarchus! Having faced intense persecution in his Macedonian hometown of Thessalonica, now he's getting seized in Ephesus.

Write 2 Timothy 3:12 here:

As you pray today, tell Jesus that you will serve him no matter what the response!

*with the exception of The Passion!

Day 38-

Read Acts 20:1-16

Memorize 20:1

I believe Paul was a very expressive man.

Verse one tells us that Paul embraced his fellow disciples before leaving for Macedonia.

If you are not familiar with I Corinthians 13, go there now and read it. It is the great chapter on love. God had so changed Paul's heart that the man who used to hate Christians and seek their demise now loved them deeply and richly. Paul had become a man capable of giving and receiving much true love.

In chapter 19 I failed to point out to you a precious little point. In 19:22 it refers to the ministry Paul received from others. When we think of Paul, we often think of him being the one doing the ministering. But Paul was human like the rest of us, and surrounded himself with people that he ministered to, and ministered with, and was ministered to by. What a lesson for us to follow Paul's model in both giving and receiving ministry.

Look up and write down I Timothy 1:5 here:

In church leadership it's easy to get caught up in all that has to happen to keep programs clicking along. But our purpose is to advance love in people's hearts for God and one another!

We see in the last chapter and this one how effective Paul's strategy for church planting and growth had become. He sends people ahead to where he is going. He leaves people behind where he has been. In each place he looks for faithful people with leadership potential. Along the way he not only teaches but models and includes others in all the ministry that he does.

How many disciples in training appear in verse four alone? _____

By now we have clearly made the point that New Testament ministry is TEAM ministry! Do not be a lone ranger doing things alone! Jesus gave us the parable of the Good Samaritan urging us to help strangers. But He always sent his disciples out in at least two's. So did Paul. Doing ministry alone is not in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament!

Moving on, we come to one of the funniest events in the Book of Acts! If you thought your preacher preached to long, verse seven tells us that Paul preached until midnight. This was too much for a young man named Eutychus, who fell asleep in the window sill

and then fell three stories to his death! Fortunately for him, an Apostle was around! God miraculously brought the lad back to life through Paul!

Something happens often in the early church that is recorded in both verse seven and verse 11. Write below what occurs in both verses:

The early Christians often joined each other for meals. Both verse seven and verse 11 show Paul and his team breaking bread with various believers. This is something we must do more of. In their day they were often in homes. We can have meals together in big churches also, but I think to capture how powerful this fellowship was for the early believers we need to be inviting a few fellow believers at a time to our homes and sharing with each other in love.

There certainly is a lot of movement in this chapter! Look over the places Paul gets to:

Ephesus

Macedonia

Greece

Back through Macedonia

Philippi of Asia

Troas

Assos

Mitylene

Opposite Chios

Samos

Trogyllium

Miletus (where we pick up tomorrow)

I don't know about you, but when I travel a lot I get tired and grouchy. Remember that Paul was able to minister to and disciple others even though he was frequently exhausted. As you struggle to do all the thing you have to do, remember that with the help of the Holy Spirit you can make a difference even when you are tired.

As you pray today, ask God to help you love other believers and minister alongside of them!

Day 39-

Read Acts 20:17-38

Memorize 20:28

Today we see again that each church is also to be led by a team of leaders!

Jesus ministered with a team of disciples. Paul ministered with a team of disciples. The Apostles functioned as the first leadership team in Jerusalem (Acts 6:2). Over time they brought on others called elders who would eventually replace them as the team of leaders in Jerusalem. In Acts 15:6 the apostles and elders lead the church together. In Chapter 21 we will see Paul submit to the instructions of the Jerusalem elders, without an apostle present. By this time they have gone on to other mission fields God had for them!

Do you see the plan in the New Testament? Christians were to have a sense of being involved in team ministry even while they were led by a team of leaders!

When Barnabas and Paul planted the first churches outside of Jerusalem, they also looked to replicate the team approach to leadership. They served together on a team of leaders in Antioch (Acts 13:1-2). Acts 14:23 tells us that when they revisited all of the churches they planted on their first missionary trip, they appointed elders (plural) in each city (singular). This was standard operating procedure. Today we see Paul wanting to meet one last time with the elders of Ephesus, a church planted on his second missionary journey.

Three words appear to be used interchangeably in this passage and in the New Testament to refer to these church leaders. One is found in verse 17 and the other two are in verse 38. Write them below:

Of the three words, the word Elder is the one used the most in the New Testament. It refers to the spiritual maturity we expect from our leaders. The Greek word for Elder is where we get our English word Presbyterian from.

The word overseer is the second most common term, and is the same as the word translated bishop in I Timothy 3:1. It makes clear that God intends these leaders to oversee the work of that particular church, to be “keepers of the vision.” The Greek word for Bishop is where we get our English word Episcopalian from.

The word Shepherd or Pastor is the third major word for the church leader. In Ephesians 4 the word Teacher is added to Pastor. The leader is to be a Pastor Teacher, teaching by lifestyle and by instruction, helping the “sheep” achieve their full potential.

Since many of us use the word Pastor the most, sometimes I like to go through the passages that speak of the shepherd and substitute the word Pastor. For instance...

“The Lord is my Pastor, I shall not want” -Psalm 23:1

“I am the Good Pastor. The good pastor lays down his life for the sheep.” -John 10:11

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Pastor the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly...and when the Chief Pastor appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” I Peter 5:1-4

Back in Acts 20, we see Paul reminding the Ephesian elders of the three years he had spent pastoring among them. If the various words for elders show what his task will be, this passage shares with us what his heart for people must be.

Look at verses 19, 31, and 36. Write below the common element that was true of Paul in all three verses:

According to verse 27 the job of an elder, like Paul’s, is to declare to people the whole counsel of God. That means telling them the good news of salvation, as well as calls to put away sinful ways as Christ is prioritized! According to verses 29-30 “savage wolves” arise in the life of churches who can mess everything up that Christians have worked so hard to develop: love for the Truth and love for each other.

One of the tasks of elders is to protect the “sheep” from the “wolves.” Doing that well involves what Paul talks about in the three verses I asked you to look at above. It means serving the Lord with humility, because with leadership comes TRIALS and TEARS. Count on it! An indispensable trait for leadership is the ability to cry! I think a man who doesn’t shed tears will make a poor leader.

This passage is very personal to me. Too many churches do not have a plurality of leaders like the New Testament calls for. Imagine having to face the trials and tears of pastoral leadership ALONE. I have been there, and it nearly killed me. Fortunately, our church has multiple pastors who share the work of the ministry.

As you pray today, if you have been doing ministry alone, ask God to surround you with other people with whom you can minister as a team, just like they did in the early church!

Day 40-

Read Acts 21:1-16

Memorize 21:13

Yesterday we saw Paul say a tearful goodbye to the elders of Ephesus at a place called Miletus. If you have maps in the back of your Bible, you may want to look there now and identify Ephesus. If you can find that, just below it is Miletus. You may have a map that shows the movement during Paul's missionary journeys. The events of this chapter show Paul sailing along the coastline and coming to Jerusalem, ending what Bible scholars call his third missionary journey.

Back in Acts 19:21 we read that Paul had "purposed in the Spirit" to go to both Jerusalem and then Rome. That is appropriate for this key apostle, isn't it? Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish world; Rome was the center of the Gentile world. Paul certainly made a major impression on both Jews and Gentiles!

Sometimes all that keeps a minister going is his certainty that he has heard from the living God. God the Holy Spirit had told Paul to first go to Jerusalem, and he was going to fulfill God's call regardless of the trials it would bring. In our chapter today we see that it was an evident fact to the disciples Paul met along the way that persecution and suffering awaited him in Jerusalem. In verse 10 we see a prophet named Agabus make clear what awaited Paul, something that led the disciples to plead with Paul not to go in verse 12.

Paul's response is in verse 13. Write it here:

Don't get the idea that Paul was too hard-headed to listen to advisors. Later in the chapter when Paul gets to Jerusalem the text makes clear that Paul submitted himself to what the Elders there told him to do!

There are at least 3 things WE can learn from Paul by him going to Jerusalem:

First, when God clearly calls us to an assignment, we need to obey Him, not man.

Second, we need to remember that Heaven is our eternal home, not earth. Our goal is not to avoid uncomfortable situations here, but to make the gates of Hell tremble as we advance Christ's Kingdom. When we die, we will be better off, because to live is Christ, and to die is gain! (Matthew 16:18-19; Philippians 1:21-24)

Third, everywhere Paul had been he suffered! Avoiding suffering in Jerusalem would only mean suffering elsewhere! Remember that he had been beaten and left for dead

more than once! (Acts 14:19; 2 Corinthians 11:24-27). We must remember that ALL who to desire to live godly in Christ Jesus WILL suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

That's really the main message for us today, but we also get an affirmation of women serving the Lord in multiple roles.

Verse eight tells us that Paul and his companions stayed with Philip the evangelist and his family in Caesarea. The verse makes clear that he was one of the seven. That means this is the Philip we met in Acts 6, one of the first deacons. He was the one who led the Ethiopian man to Jesus and baptized him in Acts chapter eight!

How it must have pleased Philip the daddy to see his four daughters fall in love with Jesus and want to tell others about God's Truth! Verse nine tells us two things about these women of God: they were virgins, and they prophesied. That tells me that they lived the faith, and they shared the faith! What an awesome example for all of us!

As you pray today, consider what God has called you to do. Are you shying away because it may mean earthly discomfort for you? If so, repent and be like Paul, focused on fulfilling God's plan for your life whatever the earthly consequences.

Day 41-

Read Acts 21:17-36

Memorize 21:19

Paul finally makes it to Jerusalem! Isn't it neat to read that the "brethren" received him gladly! Paul had been away for some time with his coworkers loving people, sharing the gospel, planting churches, and encountering much opposition. How good it must have been for this Jewish Christian to once more come to Jerusalem and be received warmly by those who loved the Lord and appreciated his missionary efforts! I hope when missionaries and Christian workers come through your church you love all over them in the name of Jesus!

In verse 18 we read that Paul and his team went in to report to James and the elders. There is a lot of information tucked in this little verse. In Acts 6 we saw the Apostles function as a team of leaders in Jerusalem and lead the church into a decision it made. In Acts 15 we are told that the apostles and elders of Jerusalem came together to consider an important matter, with James speaking last. James the apostle had died back in chapter 12, so the James in Acts 15 is probably James the brother of Jesus. He became the Lead Pastor/Elder in Jerusalem and wrote the book of James. This is the same James here in Chapter 21. Paul comes and submits himself to Pastor James and the elders.

Do you understand what has happened? The transition in Jerusalem has become complete. Just as churches throughout the Roman Empire were now led by teams of leaders known as elders, the Jerusalem church is now completely led by its own team of elders, and James led them. By now the remaining apostles were mostly elsewhere evangelizing and planting churches! The importance of a local churches leaders is seen in verse 26, where Paul clearly submits to what they ask him to do while he is in Jerusalem.

I love verses 19-20! Paul went into great detail sharing his testimony about what God had done through his efforts. Folks, it takes two parties for a testimony to have its full power! Like Paul, you need to be sharing in detail what God is doing in your life with others. But like the elders, you need to be an appreciative listener to how God has worked in and through others! Verse 20 tells us that the elders glorified the Lord when they heard how God had worked through Paul!

Verses 21-26 really show how concerned early church leaders were to do everything they could not to be a stumbling block to others. The elders knew the assembly of Jewish leaders would meet and accuse Paul of no longer caring about conforming to Jewish rules. They asked Paul to participate with four of their men in a Jewish purification ceremony to demonstrate that he still valued his Jewish heritage. They knew this could help calm a tense situation.

I love how in verse 25 the elders make clear they are not asking Paul to make the Gentile believers observe Jewish traditions! That matter had been clearly settled in Acts chapter 15. I love Paul's humility in submitting to the request of the elders! I might have been tempted to assert the freedom I have in Christ, and how I am no longer under the law!

But Paul understood that by showing sensitivity here he would help the church in Jerusalem with their task of reaching the community they ministered to. There are so many applications for us today! For instance, sometimes I speak at a Christian school run by an Independent Baptist church. I personally disagree with those who say the only Bible translation that should be used is the King James Version. I use other versions often, and rarely use the King James. But when I speak in those chapel services, out of respect for their convictions, I use the King James Version. Paul was modeling for us that in minor issues our faith is very flexible and adaptable to different customs!

Unfortunately, Paul got in trouble anyway! Verses 27-29 show that Jews from Asia accused Paul of doing the very thing he had been careful not to do! I hate when that happens! But I can tell you as a leader of a church, it happens all the time! You get accused of messing up in an area you have worked overtime trying to address! And then because of confidentiality, you can't give people all the facts they need to know to be better informed! And even when you can, sometimes people think you're just being all the more defensive! It stinks! But it goes with positions of leadership in ministry! Be sure you're really called to the ministry or such things will make you throw in the towel!

At least for most of us the trouble doesn't include beatings! In verses 30-31 we see that an angry Jewish mob is giving Paul another beating. Do you remember what God told Ananias awaited Paul in Acts 9:16? Turn and read that verse if you have forgotten!

Now turn to 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 and fill in the missing numbers and other blanks below to see how much Paul suffered for gospel expansion:

Are they ministers of Christ? – I speak as a fool- I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews _____ times I received _____ stripes minus _____. _____ times I was beaten with rods; _____ I was stoned, _____ times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in _____ and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness- besides the other things, what comes upon me _____: my deep concern for all the churches.

Well, our passage ends with Paul being arrested by the Roman soldiers for his own protection from the Jewish mob!

Friend, do you want to do great things for God? I sure do! As you pray today, remember how much Jesus and Paul and others suffered to make the faith known in Satan's domains. Understand that if you do great things for God, suffering will be part of the rest of your life on earth.

Day 42-

Read Acts 21:37-22:24

Memorize 22:16

If the Book of Acts is any indication, the apostle Paul loved to share his testimony!

Several times in the book he shares how Jesus had changed his life! This time he does it in front of an angry crowd in Jerusalem.

One of the things I appreciate as I read through this passage is the way God had used everything in Paul's background to give him opportunities to share his faith. God will do that with you also, friend. He will take things both positive and negative and use those parts of your story to help you reach out to all kinds of different people.

For instance, the pain I experienced in a dysfunctional home has given me lots of opportunities to share with people from dysfunctional homes. And the joy I experienced playing and later coaching soccer has given me opportunities to share with lots of people, especially when I travel overseas! More recently, my wife's successful battle with cancer gave both of us a special love for those going through cancer and their family members.

Read 21:3 to 22:2 again, and write below 3 things God used from Paul's background:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Possible answers: Paul's ability to speak Greek (21:37), Paul's Roman citizenship (21:39), Paul's knowledge of his rights under Roman law (21:39), Paul's ability to speak Hebrew (21:40, 22:2), Paul's Jewish heritage (22:1)

Paul's testimony that follows is a great guide for us as we share our testimony!

Testimonies include three elements:

1. What my life was like before I was a Christian

(Here you should underscore how you came to know your need of Christ)

2. How I became a Christian!

(Here you underscore the people and events God used)

3. What God is doing in my life now!

(Here you underscore that you're not perfect, but God is active in your life)

Paul did the first part in 22:3-5. Then in 22:6-21 he did the second part. He was probably on his way to the third part when they heard him mention God's call on Paul's life to go to the Gentiles, and they decided to rip Paul into little pieces. It was blasphemy in their eyes to hear the Christian message that the God of the Jews was now to be accessible to all peoples.

But let's focus on Paul's obedience for a moment! Paul shared everything he could in the situation he found himself in, and we should also! I can almost guarantee you that someone in the crowd that day will be in Heaven because Paul shared! Paul's own testimony later includes words he heard Stephen speak the day Paul was present at his death. As you pray today, commit to sharing your testimony often like Paul did! Let's end today with a form that will help you write down your own testimony! Fill it in.

Simply Sharing My Testimony:

**1. What my life was like before salvation:
(Emphasize: How I came to know my need of Christ)**

**2. How I became a Christian:
(Emphasize: People God used, circumstances, etc)**

**3. What God's doing in my life now:
(Emphasize: I'm not perfect but Jesus is at work!)**

Day 43-

Read Acts 22:25-23:11

Memorize 23:11

This passage today reminds me of Jesus admonition to His disciples in Matthew 10:16. Look up that verse and write it here:

Paul does a great job balancing the tension of Jesus' words in this passage!

On the one hand, we see him at the end of chapter 22 wisely using his rights as a Roman citizen to avoid yet another beating. We know that on many occasion Paul had withstood terrible beatings. But Paul did not view it as unspiritual to use his rights to avoid more persecution. When as citizens we enjoy certain rights it is not wrong to inquire about whether our rights are being violated. As a Baptist Christian I am thankful for the role Baptists played in securing the First Amendment's protections to all American citizens.

On the other hand, when Paul realized in 23:5 that he had spoken a sharp word to the High Priest, he quickly apologized and then quoted the Bible verse that says, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." Paul responded gracefully despite the fact that the High Priest had struck him and violated his rights as a Roman citizen. Paul did a good job modeling "wise as a serpent, innocent as a dove."

Never one to shy away from getting people to think, Paul then perceived that the ruling council he stood before was mixed between Jews who were Pharisees and Jews who were Sadducees.

According to verse 8, what things did the Sadducees reject:

Sadducees then were like liberal "Christians" today who deny the clear teaching of the Bible in favor of skepticism about miracles and life after death. They deny Christ's resurrection and reduce the gospel to following Jesus' positive example. But in I Corinthians chapter 15 Paul says that if Christ was not truly raised from the dead then Christians are just wasting their time!

I believe Paul's purpose in his statement about the resurrection in verse 6 was not to get the crowd to fight and save his own skin. He did know that the fight would result, but I believe he was hoping his statement would make his fellow Pharisees take a closer look at how Jesus was the very one they said they were waiting for, the Messiah. Paul knew

that if they looked closer they would see in Christ's resurrection the way for themselves to be raised to life after death. I believe some of the ones who heard Paul that day will be in Heaven! Maybe his words even caused a Sadducee to wise up. After all, anyone who denies the resurrection will be SAD-YOU-SEE!

I imagine by this time Paul was beginning to feel a little discouraged. At the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus promised he would be with His disciples. And here He is, encouraging a weary Paul! Write Acts 23:11 here:

As you pray today, thank Jesus that He is with you, even in life's unpleasant moments!

Day 44- Read Acts 23:12-35

WHEW! And we think we face some tough things!

I'm not sure what is more disturbing to me: the fact that verse 13 says that 40 Jewish men had resolved not to eat again until they kill Paul, or the fact that verses 14-15 reveal the High Priest and elders of the people went along with it rather than try to stop it. All of this shows how much of a threat they viewed Paul to be.

Remember Acts 9:16? God had said that Paul would suffer many things for the name of Christ. Ironically, he probably suffered much of this persecution at the hands of those who he had at one time assisted in persecuting other Christians! Remember that we were told earlier that when he was Saul he used to go to the High Priest seeking permission to go and persecute Christians (see 9:1-2)!

Verse 16 really has me intrigued! I wish we knew more about Paul's nephew and what position he was in that allowed him to overhear the diabolical plot! I think one of the things we'll get to do in Heaven is hear each other's stories about life on earth. I'm looking forward to finding Paul's cousin and hearing the rest of the story!

But one thing we do know is that God is in control, even when we're sweating it here on earth! We can have great confidence that God will enable us to get out of many tight jams and do His will. Then when it's our time to go, does it really matter how our life here ends? Lottie Moon, the great Baptist missionary to China, who herself faced many acts of persecution and was wondrously spared, used to say something to the effect of, "I am invincible until God's time comes." What a great confidence to have!

Well, you read the rest of the chapter already: when the plot is discovered Claudius Lysias transfers Paul to the custody of the area's Roman governor, Felix. Paul and Felix must have made a real odd couple, eh? Sorry, couldn't resist! And so Paul wound up in Herod's Praetorium, a safe place of confinement in the Governor's residence. We don't ever find out whether the forty men who had vowed not to eat starved to death, or not, but it sure would be interesting to find out!

As you pray today, thank God for how He allows our lives to unfold. Sometimes God's people do experience horrible deaths, as Jesus Himself did. Other times there are miracles of deliverance like this one. But Christians know that this world is not all there is, that indeed real life doesn't begin until this life ends. Paul later summed up what should be our attitude amidst this life's uncertainties:

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." -Philippians 1:21

Day 45-

Read Acts 24:1-27

Memorize 24:25

By now you have figured out that this last section of the book of Acts is not like the chapters in the middle! Chapters 13 to 20 told us about Paul's three missionary journeys where he planted over a dozen churches and checked on their progress often. But chapters 21 to 28 feature the account of Paul being arrested in Jerusalem and transferred from one Roman court to another until he winds up imprisoned in Rome.

The sad thing is that we don't get to hear more about exciting new church plants!

The great thing is that we get to see Paul several times share his testimony and witness in court room type settings. He becomes a model for believers of speaking the truth gracefully under difficult conditions. Over these last 2,000 years, there have been many times believers have been put on the hot seat like Jesus Himself and apostles like Paul and Peter. Thankfully we have their example to follow!

Look up and write down I Peter 3:15 here:

That's exactly what we see Paul do in Acts chapter 24!

Verse one makes me smile! Paul was obviously so formidable that the religious leaders brought in a ringer! His name was Tertullus, and he probably could have held his own among the famous lawyers of our day! In verses 2-8 he hurls every accusation he can think of at Paul!

But as good as he was, Paul was better! Of course Paul also had two things Tertullus didn't- a promise from Jesus and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit! Check out what Jesus had said back in Matthew 10:18-20:

"You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." -Matthew 10:18-20

Isn't that awesome! Friend, make sure as you read through the Bible you take note of the promises of God! It is a good idea to write verses that touch you on 3 x 5 cards and carry them around with you, and put them on your mirror to read while you're shaving! It will help you in your moment of need!

Verse 22 makes clear that Felix sent the religious leaders away that day without resolving the case. Verse 27 tells us that Paul was under this house arrest for the next two years as

Felix wanted to maintain favor with the religious leaders. Verse 26 is perhaps most interesting. It tells us that Felix probably would have let Paul out if Paul or the disciples had paid him off. What integrity Paul had not to do that!

Verse 26 also tells us that Felix was so intrigued by Paul's words, that he would often send for him and hear him testify and preach. Who knows how many people were impacted during this time? Paul probably also continued his letter writing ministry during this time. It's amazing how many wonderful writings Christians' have produced while in jail! One of my favorites is *Pilgrim's Progress*, written in the 1600's by John Bunyan while in a jail in Bedford, England!

According to verse 25, what are the three things Paul tried to talk to Felix about?

This sound very similar to what Jesus said in the book of John.

Look up John 16:7-11 now and fill in the missing blanks below:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your _____ that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you. And when he has come, He will _____ the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: **Of sin**, because they do not _____ in Me; **Of righteousness**, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; **Of judgment**, because the ruler of this world is _____.

Answers: advantage convict believe judged

Even though Paul was on trial before judge Felix he kept reminding Felix that one day Felix would stand before the Ultimate Judge! And Felix needed a perfect righteousness he knew he didn't have to be ready for that judgment day. And that's exactly where Jesus Christ comes in.

Not only does a person who receives Christ get forgiven of their sin, they receive Christ's perfect righteousness. It's like receiving an all access pass that allows you to enter where others cannot! That's why the only unforgivable sin is not receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. If you don't believe in Jesus, you don't get credentialed for Heaven!

As you pray today, thank God that He has acted in Jesus Christ to save sinners that were bound for Hell. If the Spirit has convicted you that you have not trusted in Christ alone for salvation, pray to Jesus now and ask Him to have mercy on you as a hell-bound sinner.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." -2 Cor. 5:21

Day 46- Read Acts 25:1-27

In this 50 day devotional I have been trying to give you a doctrinal and devotional introduction to the book of Acts.

You grow doctrinally when you understand more of what the Bible teaches on a topic. You grow devotionally when you lovingly apply doctrine to your daily life. Your biggest benefit will have come from reading the passage and obeying the Holy Spirit as He lays truths on your heart that you needed to apply to your life.

Today's chapter is another link in Paul's chain of courtroom appearances between Jerusalem and Rome. Because Israel was a country occupied by Rome and subject to its laws, Jewish religious leaders had to obtain permission from Roman authorities whenever they thought someone deserved the death penalty. And they definitely thought Paul deserved the death penalty!

As for the Roman Governors, they had multiple problems to deal with. On the one hand, they needed to make sure the *Pax Romana*, or Roman peace, was fulfilled and that the rights of citizens like Paul were not violated. On the other hand, they were living in areas far from Rome and among people that did not like being occupied.

They faced it from both directions! They were trying to keep the people they ruled from rioting, and trying to make sure the leaders above them didn't have to get involved in their problems. That would probably keep them from higher political appointments!

And so our hero Paul had already spent two years in prison and nothing had happened. Is it any wonder then, that when Festus took over Felix's post, that Paul was looking to get on with the process?

When Paul says in verse 11, "I appeal to Caesar," he knows that another trial before the Jews would just lead to the same standoff they had two years before, and possibly more time sitting in prison! Appealing to Caesar meant going to Rome to appeal before the bigwig himself, Caesar Augustus. And that would mean getting the opportunity to witness to the most powerful man in the world at that time!

There was only one problem for Festus in sending Paul on to Rome. He really didn't know of any *Roman* law that Paul should be charged with! Verse 27 is hilarious to me when Festus says, "It seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

Enter King Agrippa and his wife Bernice. Agrippa was king in a small part of Northern Palestine. According to Acts 26:3, he was an expert on Jewish customs and practices. Other resources tell us he had been given the right of appointing the Jewish High Priest. It's possible that he had appointed Ananias, the very high priest who had struck Paul in 23:2. This will get real good in the next chapter as Paul and Agrippa interact!

But as we close today, we should point out something very interesting. Three times in this chapter, in verse 6, 10, and 17, we hear about Rome's judgment seat. In our mind's eye we picture a person on trial, standing before a judge, hoping for mercy. I have been in a courtroom as an observer a few times. It's a serious and sober time. There is no question who is in charge: the judge is!

With that in mind, look up and write down Romans 14:10 here:

Also write down 2 Corinthians 5:10 here:

Twice in his writings Paul speaks of when each of us will stand before the only Judge who really matters! That means even more when we realize that Paul had stood before earthly judges who held his life in their hands. When we realize this, we understand that what that Judge thinks is far more important than what our earthly judges think of us. As you pray today, ask God to help you put what God thinks ahead of what other humans think of you! Only then will you have the ability to speak like Paul did before his earthly judges!

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.” -Jesus in Matthew 10:28

Get A-grip-pa! Sorry, I couldn't resist!

I wonder if you had the same experience I had when reading this chapter. I was nearly moved to tears as I read. I felt the Holy Spirit driving home to me what a powerful moment it must have been as Paul shared his testimony with Agrippa and the others gathered that day. There is passion in every word Paul speaks, and as he moves toward his conclusion, you can feel the love that he has for people and desire he has for Agrippa to know Jesus like he does!

In verse 18, Paul shares 6 things that Jesus told him happened when a person places their faith in Jesus! Write those 6 things here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Answers: Eyes opened, go from darkness to light, from under Satan's power to God's, Forgiveness of sins, an inheritance, sanctified

I especially find helpful that Paul says that people are sanctified by "faith" in Jesus. We have seen that the Bible teaches that a person is saved by placing their faith in Jesus! But here we also see that faith is the key to being sanctified. Something that is sanctified is made holy; it is set apart for special use.

Too many well-meaning but mistaken preachers talk of being sanctified as something we can do in our own strength, a kind of gift that we bring to the God who has saved us. But here and other places we find the apostles teaching that just as we were saved by God's grace through our faith, it is also by faith that we are sanctified! We don't do good deeds to earn God's salvation, we do good deed because we have been saved! Our sanctification is a result of our faith, just as our salvation was!

Lest anyone take this too far and thinks they can have no concern that they do good deeds, Paul in verse 20 shares with Agrippa what his message always included:

People should "repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."

I love Paul, don't you?! It's cool what Paul does next! He knows Agrippa is knowledgeable about the Jewish scriptures. So he reminds him that Moses had spoken of

the coming Messiah in places like Deut. 18:15. And Paul shared how passages like Isaiah 53 had spoken of the Messiah dying in the place of sinners. And Paul shared how passages like Psalm 16:10 had spoken of the Messiah not staying dead! And Paul shared how passages like Isaiah 42:6 had foretold the day Israel's Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles!

Oh, I don't know about you, but hearing Paul preach makes me want to get saved all over again! But it's amazing how different people react to the good news!

In verse 24 the Gentile Festus thinks Paul is crazy! But Paul knew his words were becoming a stumbling block to Agrippa, words so true to him that he had to deal with them! It reminds me of what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 1:23-24,

“We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are being called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

I love verse 27! Paul doesn't give a rip about the fact that he's the one on trial- he speaks directly to Agrippa about his need of Jesus Christ! He pointedly asks him if he believes! Brothers and sisters in Christ, there are times we should be this direct with others!

It's obvious that Agrippa was taken aback by Paul's directness, and tries to brush it off by saying in verse 28, “Paul, you almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

It really makes you wonder: how many people in Hell one day will be ones who were merely “almost persuaded.”

Oh, I hope Agrippa repented and that we see him in Heaven one day!

As you pray today, think of someone you know that needs Jesus. Now pray for them, that they will repent, turn to God, and go on to do works which befit repentance.

Day 48-

Read Acts 27:1-44

Memorize 27:25

I wish I knew more about sailing, because I have been told how much more interesting this chapter is when you know a little about sailing! Isn't it great how interesting the Bible is in so many different ways?

This account is probably the most detailed account of sailing in the Mediterranean Sea 2,000 years ago!

If your Bible has maps at the back, you may want to look at them now! You may have a map that has a title such as "Paul's fourth journey" or "Paul's trip to Rome." If you do, take a look at how far it is from Caesarea (the port near Jerusalem) to Rome and imagine yourself having to take that journey by ship! The difficulties faced would be immense.

Let's take a minute and retrace the places Paul sails to in chapter 27:

Place:	Time at Sea From there:	Verses:
Caesarea	1 day	2-3
Sidon	???	4-5
Myra	Many days	6-7
Cnidus	???	8
Fair Havens	14 days tossed on the Adriatic Sea	9-44
Malta	Shipwrecked!	28:1

Now Paul was not a sailor, but he was a very wise man! One interesting thing about this chapter is that it gives us a chance to see the difference between the advice of a man of God that is not always 100 % true, and the Word of God, which is always 100 % true! What do I mean by that? Well, let me 'splain!

Verse 9 tells us that the sailing was now dangerous, because the 'Fast' was now over. No doubt that refers to the Jewish Day of Atonement, which takes place around late September or early October (converting the Jewish calendar to ours). Sailing was more dangerous on the Mediterranean Sea from the middle of September until middle November, and then nobody sailed until February.

In verse 10 Paul gives them advice trying to get the men to wait until winter is over to move on. He thinks going on will mean much loss of cargo, the ship itself, and many lives. But the majority of the travelers, including the owner and the helmsman advised going on. And so they did!

Sure enough, Paul was right! Well, he was *mostly* right! By the end of the chapter, they cargo and the ship had been lost. But nobody had lost their life! As a man giving advice, Paul could be wrong just like you or I could be wrong.

Everything that a human being advises us should be analyzed by the filter of God's Word!

This is a very important point. The Roman Catholic Church's official doctrine is that when the Pope speaks about a matter from his chair, what he says becomes church teaching. But when a Pope teaches something that is not Biblical, which often happens, his words should be rejected in favor of God's Word! Today's chapter shows Paul receiving a word from God that contradicted his own hunch that he had in verse 10 that lives would be lost if they proceeded.

Now stay with me here! In verse 20 we are told that the men sailing with Paul had given up hope that they would be saved. Perhaps they reasoned that Paul had been right about everything else, maybe he was right about many dying also.

But verse 21 tells us that Paul was fasting. He was seeking God, and God sent him an angel to give Paul the Word of God. Paul can't resist telling them they should have listened to him (what preacher can!). But then in verse 22-24 Paul tells them that God has assured him that NOT ONE of them will die.

Do you appreciate what's going on here? In verse 10 Paul had a subjective feeling that they were headed for disaster and people would die. But in verse 24 he receives a Word from God that NOT ONE PERSON will die! Verse 25 makes clear that Paul chooses to believe God's Word over his own feelings! We must also!

Write verse 25 below:

Now Paul did not just believe God's Word: he acted on it! Verses 33 and 34 show Paul breaking bread and eating it. Perhaps this was the end of his own fast. Verses 35 and 36 show that the rest of the people only then resumed eating after fourteen days without food. Think of that: 276 people on that ship drew their encouragement to go on from Paul's faith! I bet you will see many of them again in Heaven!

What an example for us today! As you pray today, ask God for the ability to always humble yourself before God and choose what He says in the Bible over what you personally think and feel!

Day 49- Read Acts 28:1-16

Fortunately for Paul and the ship's travelers the natives on Malta were friendly!

Luke records in verse two that the natives showed us "unusual kindness." I can't help but smile as I think about how the Book of Acts is coming to a close. In Acts 1:8 Jesus had said that under the power of the Holy Spirit the disciples would take the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth!

The Book of Acts begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. Here we see the gospel connecting with a tribe of natives on an island it took God sending a storm to get them to! What a foretaste of Matthew 28:18-20 being fulfilled: the gospel to all people groups of the earth! Surely Jesus was smiling from the right hand of the Father!

Verses 3-5 tell of Paul being bitten by a poisonous snake and yet surviving!

When we think of this story, what is the best conclusion (circle one):

1. We should incorporate snake handling into our worship services
2. We should only allow those who have just been bitten by a snake and survived to vote in church business meetings
3. We can throw all caution to the wind when we are on a mission from God because we are guaranteed nothing can cause us harm
4. God's people can do what God has called us to do, and He'll give us the strength to face whatever comes (and sometimes his miraculous protection will be fully evident to us)

Number four is the correct answer (although number two is strangely appealing to me!)

I can't help but emphasize again how neat it is that little Malta got to experience the ministry of the Apostle Paul. We must begin to view the diversions God sends our way as opportunities to touch the lives of others. The 276 aboard the ship may not have listened to Paul had they not been through a storm together with him and survived. Paul never would have got to heal Publius' dad and probably share the gospel on Malta if the heavy winds of the Euroclyden (Acts 27:14) had not blown.

We will only know in Heaven who got reached because someone on that ship or that island got saved because of the storm. It's conceivable that someone reading this devotional was introduced to Jesus by someone who was introduced to Jesus by someone who was introduced to Jesus going all the way back to a shipwreck on Malta! When the Euroclyden blows in your life, trust God that there is a higher plan than you can conceive of!

Well, back to the map for just a moment!

After three months in Malta, Paul landed at Syracuse on the island of Sicily. From there they sailed and landed on the tip of Italy at Rhegium. I think I would have walked from there!

Ever on the lookout for fellowship, Paul spent seven days with brothers at Puteoli before making it up to a short distance from Rome at Three Inns. Interestingly, we're told in verse 15 that some brothers came from Rome to escort Paul there.

If we ever doubt that even gospel laborers like Paul draw strength from other believers, verse 15 makes clear that Paul drew courage to face what awaited in Rome from his brothers in Christ.

What a great note to end Day 49 on! As you pray today, ask God to show you a Christian friend going through a Euroclyden that you can encourage! Sail On!

Day 50- Read Acts 28:16-31

WHEW! We made it to Day 50! And Paul made it to Rome!

And even though he is imprisoned there, we find him doing the three things he loved most: preaching, teaching, and fellowshiping with other believers!

Verse 23 shows him speaking to the Jews living in Rome about Jesus from the Old Testament, just like he had done hundreds of times before. Perhaps he wrote many more letters to Christians and churches from here. The book ends letting us know that for at least two years Paul was imprisoned but had the freedom to share with others.

And in the ending we find both frustration and fascination.

We are frustrated because we aren't told here what becomes of Paul's case or of Paul himself. Tradition tells us that he was released, planted several more churches, and was later re-arrested in Rome. Emperor Nero then had Paul beheaded. Through Paul's thirteen New Testament letters we do hear of many people that had become Christians because of his various imprisonments. We can presume that Paul was faithful up until the end of his life. But it's frustrating not knowing more. It's also frustrating because by Acts 28 we haven't heard much about the other apostles like Peter for some time.

And that's also what makes the ending so fascinating! The whole tenor of the Book of Acts cries out for another chapter, so we can hear further Acts of the Holy Spirit through disciples around the world! And that may be exactly why Luke abruptly ends his account.

We are living in the days of Acts chapter 29! As we obey God and courageously share with others, the gospel is still going to new places like Antioch, Philippi, and Malta. In Acts chapter two 3,000 were saved in one day. We are told now that 3,000 people get saved around the world every hour through new Acts of the Holy Spirit!

And so I only know one way to end this devotional. Look forward with me at a scene in Heaven, where we are told there will be at least one person from every people group on earth there praising Jesus:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” -Revelation 7:9-10

As you pray today, take a moment to praise God for your own salvation. And then pray and commit to being an Acts 29 person for the rest of this life!