

MeadowBrook Church | August–September 2020

lifeGROUP

Life together for the Kingdom of God



ACTS



MeadowBrook CHURCH

MeadowBrook seeks to CONNECT people to Christ and His church, GROW them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to SERVE through missions, ministry, and worship, all to GLORIFY God.

Christ Centered | Community Driven | Kingdom Focused

ACTS

Our study of the book of Acts is coming to a close, but the work of Jesus Christ through his Spirit-empowered church is far from over!

The narrative picks up as Paul's third missionary journey winds down as he journeys toward Jerusalem. Filled and led by the Spirit, Paul lives a life of faith, testifies to hope of the gospel, and rests in the sovereignty of his heavenly Father and his Lord, Jesus Christ, who reigns over all earthly kingdoms.

Reflecting back on the book of Acts, we see that the gospel went forth through Peter. The gospel went forth through Paul. And as Acts ends, it ends on a triumphant note—both Jews and Gentiles will listen to the gospel—but it also ends on a question: ***Will the gospel go forth through you?***



Hunter Hindsman
Life Group Minister

Special thanks to Taylor Hindsman, Gary Pettis, Devin Williams, Heather Clough, Kristi Nichols, and Chip Tucker for contributing to this curriculum in either their writing or editing.

If you are interested in writing or editing in the future, email hunter@mbchurch.com today.

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Growing Sound Doctrine

Acts 18:24-19:10 | August 02, 2020

Perspective changes everything. Have you ever found out that something you thought about about a person or situation was wrong and it completely changed your perspective?

Read Acts 18:24-19:10 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

The narrative continues with Aquila and Priscilla ministering to a lesser known but nonetheless remarkable man of God in the New Testament: Apollos of Alexandria. Apollos knew the Bible, was eloquent in his presentation, and even taught accurately concerning Christ, yet he was still missing pieces of the puzzle. He needed the way of God to be explained to him more accurately. The extent of Apollos' knowledge prior to this experience was the baptism of John, the forerunner of Christ (cf. Mt. 3:11). John MacArthur explains, "Apollos accepted John's message, even acknowledging that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's Messiah. He did not however, understand such basic truths as the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the church as God's new witness people." He was an Old Covenant believer becoming a New Covenant believer.

Equipped

Are you equipped to reason and persuade others about the Kingdom of God?

Consider reading *More than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell for a good introduction to some defenses of the faith.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Romans 12:1-8

1 Peter 4:10-11

Proverbs 3:5-8

For someone already filled with zeal for the Lord and the Holy Scriptures, we can imagine the glory that filled Apollos' soul as he discovered the truths that Priscilla and Aquila shared with him. As a result of Aquila and Priscilla's bold, yet gentle ministry, Apollos became a mighty preacher of God's Word and had a major impact in the lives of others. Paul has a similar encounter with some disciples of John in Ephesus. Like Apollos, they quickly embrace the full teaching of God and launch themselves into effective ministry.

Apollos and these disciples model the willingness to shape one's life around sound doctrine. They did not let their preconceived notions determine their beliefs, but committed themselves to sound doctrine. They resisted, swatting away helpers from the Lord rather seeing them as gifts from the Lord to equip them for the work of ministry.

Sound doctrine matters.

Doctrine is what we believe about God and his work in this world. Good doctrine is firmly rooted in the entire counsel of God's Word. The difference between good and bad doctrine has eternal significance. Take this verse for example:

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ESV)

From this one verse, many doctrinal questions come up that could be the difference between eternal life or eternal condemnation.

- Who was Christ? Was he fully God and fully man? Is he co-equal, co-eternal with God the Father?
- What does it mean that he died for our sins? Was it in our place bearing the punishment for our sins as a substitute, or was it something else?
- What are the Scriptures? Are they inerrant, infallible, and sufficient?
- What does it mean that Jesus was raised? Was it a bodily resurrection, or some sort of spiritual resurrection?

The Christian life is obviously more than believing the right facts about God, but it certainly not less than being sound in doctrine. Our theology—belief structure about God and his works—determines our practices. Good theology yields a deep love for God expressed in obedience. Bad theology yields misplaced affections and misguided applications leading to sin. Make a point to become a good theologian committed to sound doctrine, sharing the truth with gentleness and love with others. (The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 is a good place to see condensed statements based on Scripture about the basic beliefs of our faith.)

Pause and Discuss

How do we build up sound doctrine and protect ourselves from believing false teaching?

We must humble ourselves and be willing to admit when we are wrong and conform our lives and beliefs to the Scriptures—not the other way around.

In our highly subjective culture, it is easy to let our emotions, personal life experience, and presuppositions shape the way we view the Scriptures. We are vocal opponents of the sins we do not struggle with, but explain away clear Scriptural teachings that confront us in our sin. We could have a pre-conceived notion concerning the nature of God. When scripture paints a different view, we allow our pre-supposed, idolatrous view shape the way we interpret the Bible. No one has perfect knowledge of the Scriptures or of God. We are all insufficient. We need the Spirit to teach us—both through our personal time in his Word and through the corporate teaching of God's Word by others gifted and empowered by the Spirit. When the Spirit highlights error in our lives and practices—and he certainly will—we need to humble ourselves, admit our wrong, and eagerly embrace the truth.

How easy is it for us to allow our emotions to drive our interpretation of the Bible rather than the Scripture itself?

How do you need to change your approach to the Bible?

God gifts the church with preachers, teachers, and evangelists to strengthen and teach the church by the Spirit.

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:11-14 ESV)

God used the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla (teachers?) to strengthen and equip Apollos (a preacher, perhaps a prophet?), who then strengthened and encouraged others. Paul (an apostle) was used by God to raise up twelve disciples in Ephesus (evangelists perhaps?) who went throughout Asia proclaiming the Kingdom of Christ. Spend some time discussing this narrative in light of Ephesians 4.

Do you view ministry as the work of the few or of all the saints?

Are you allowing yourself to be strengthened and equipped by the shepherds, teachers, and evangelists at MeadowBrook?

What ministry or service in the Kingdom has the Lord prepared for you? Are you being obedient to live out your calling?

Are you using your gifts to minister at MeadowBrook?

Visit mbchurch.com to view all the ministry opportunities or talk with your Life Group leader or with Mike (mike@mbchurch.com) or Hunter (hunter@mbchurch.com) to plug into ministry at MeadowBrook.

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4-8 ESV)

Ministry At Work

Apollos' faith was a public matter—as is the faith of all followers of Jesus. We do not hide the light we have been given under a basket.

Do people at your workplace know about your faith in Jesus, or have you sought to keep that a “private matter” separate from work?

RESPOND

Father,

We thank You, God for the boldness of the preachers and teachers You have given us. Help us to receive the exhortations and insights that come from you and your Word. Guide us by your Spirit as we seek to minister in your Kingdom, and empower us with boldness, truth, and love. Amen.

Change

Acts 19:11-41 | August 09, 2020

Other than God, what has brought about the most change in your life? Tell a story of how you've changed in the last year.

Read Acts 19:11-41 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

"You'll never change. You'll always be a _____."

Whether we've heard these words from someone we love or from our own inner monologue, these words sting. They highlight our failures and, more than that, our incapability to effectively deal with our deepest character flaws. But these words don't take into account the power of God.

Jesus can transform you.

His power is superior to the idols, which promise change and fulfillment but leave you empty and in your failures. If you engage him through faith, you will be changed—conformed into the image of Christ and set free from the world. Acts 19:11-41 tells the story of how God's power affects a person and, through them, entire societies.

The power of God cannot be manufactured or manipulated.

Four Filters for Praying in Jesus' Name – John Piper

1. *For Jesus' fame, not yours.*
2. *On account of Jesus' worth, not yours.*
3. *On the basis of Jesus' infinite payment on the Cross. We do not approach him apart from the gospel.*
4. *According to Jesus' sovereign wisdom. Not my will, but yours be done*

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Luke 19:1-10

1 John 2:15-17

Micah 6:6-8

God was revealing himself in a special way through Paul in Ephesus. Even Luke refers to the miracles as out of the ordinary even for miracles, which are already intrinsically extraordinary. Ephesus was known for its fascination with magic and the occult. God was making a statement. The Holy Spirit was at work, and the name of Jesus was being extolled. Paul was simply "a mediator of God's power." This is made even more clear by a band of Jewish exorcists.

Known in the ancient world for their "extensive ceremonies and spoken formulas," Jewish exorcists would seek to free people from demonic oppression. Based on how the people responded to Jesus, they were not that effective (ESV Study Bible). Seven of them, sons of Sceva, observe the success Paul is having and want to replicate the results. They thought the power was in the formulaic utterance of "in the name of Jesus." The sons of Sceva took parts of Christianity and blended it with the magical practices of Ephesus. The result was a disaster.

It is unlikely that any one of us will attempt the same thing these Jewish exorcists tried to do, but at the root of their actions was an attempt to manufacture and manipulate the power of God. Now, that is something we might do.

Today, however, one might live a moral life to try and secure temporary comfort and blessings from God. Another might declare blessings or healing over their lives “in Jesus’ name,” using the phrase like an incantation rather than to conform their prayers to the will and character of Christ. The end result is the same: embarrassment and disillusionment—to the point where some reject the true Christ of the Bible because the false Christ they manufactured in their heads did nothing.

God’s power will not be manipulated. The Spirit of God is not an “it,” he is the third person of the Triune God. We know him. We do not harness him.

Pause and Discuss

How do we seek to manipulate God?

The Gospel transforms sinners who transform societies.

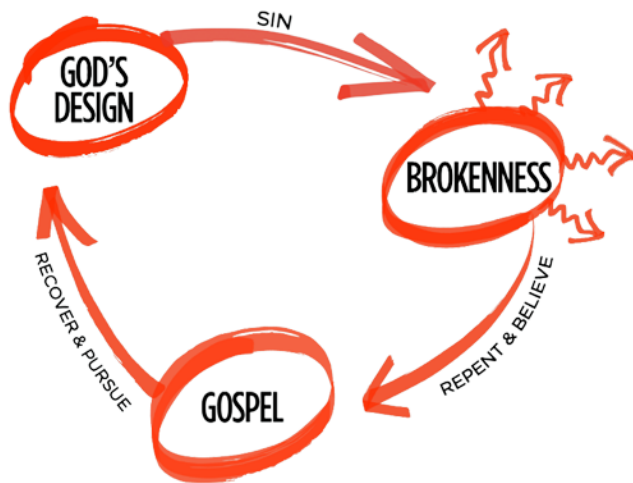
News spread regarding the ordeal with the sons of Sceva, serving as a marker for many of the disciples in Ephesus. They saw their old magic practices for what they were—evil and worthless. Already disciples of Jesus through faith, these believers experienced a leap in their sanctification. God was transforming them. He was purifying them from their old ways and bringing them into greater expressions of the new life they had in Christ. As a result, they divulged their magic practices. This is important in the ancient context because “one of the keys to magic is the secrecy and mystery behind the spells. Once made public, the spell is perceived to be impotent.” Then they voluntarily burned the books in the sight of all, parting from their old way of life. The value of these in today’s money is approximately \$6 million. They were totally committed. Jesus was worth the financial loss. *Is he worth it to you?*

“The government of a people is a reflection of the God or gods they serve.” – David Platt

The economic impact of this movement of God was not over. As Paul is shifting his focus from Ephesus to Jerusalem and then Rome, an idol-maker perceived the financial ruin he was facing if this movement called “The Way” was not stopped. “The entire scene powerfully presents the impact of the new faith when fully embraced. For believers, lives are transformed. Societal structures are challenged through those changed lives, not by force on others, but by their own personal lifestyle changes” (Bock).

In a day of outrage and calls for big picture social change, we can lose sight of both the problem and the solution. Anger, political maneuvering, and force do not fix broken systems. Broken systems are a result of broken communities filled with broken individuals. Sin is the problem. A transformed society comes from transformed individuals set free from the power of sin, and only Jesus can do that. The Church embracing a posture of evangelism and discipleship then becomes the means through which Christ works.

Election years always come with promises of transformation and a reshaping of America. In the end, winning “the most important election of a lifetime” does not change people. The gospel does. If you want to see change that conforms our community and nation closer to the will of God, then do the slow, patient work of evangelism and discipleship.



Pause and Discuss

Why do we shy away from evangelism and discipleship as the means of transformation and are inclined to see politics as the solution?

Who do you need to tell about Jesus?

Friendship with the world resists the transformation of God.

Demetrius stirs up the crowds and a riot ensues. Demetrius, seemingly motivated by his profit margin, describes the threat as “economic, cultural/patriotic, and religious.” In Demetrius’ view, the people are losing money. Ephesus is losing its cultural significance and way of life, and the religious traditions of the people are under attack. His friendship with the world resists the transformation of God. Friendship with the world always does.

Today, we might be tempted in the same way. Our economic, cultural, and man-made religious practices may be keeping us from living out the transformed life and applying the gospel to our surroundings. We may prefer “the way things are” to the way the Bible prescribes. We may prefer earthly kingdoms to the kingdom of Christ. The gospel moves us to break with our old friendship with the world and embrace God. Ironically, and as Luke argues in this section through the narrative, friendship with the world is worse for a society. Friendship with God is the best thing for this world. For friendship with God brings the peace with God, others, self, and creation.

Reflect

1. *Where do you perceive a friendship with the world in your life?*
2. *How is this friendship causing you to resist the transformation of God?*

RESPOND

A: Praise God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit for both their might and grace toward you.

C: Confess any attitude in you that seeks to manipulate God due to your love for this world.

T: Give thanks to God for the Spirit who indwells you who are in Christ.

S: Pray for our nation that she would be transformed by the gospel.

Summation of Acts 20:1-16

Midweek Reflection

“In sum, this unit gives us a sense of Paul the pastor. Here he seeks to instruct his people as he departs. One of the highest priorities for Paul in ministry is that his people will be equipped theologically and spiritually to persevere after he is gone.” -- Darrell Bock

Pastor simply means shepherd. There are many occasions where we shepherd others. Parents lead their kids. Husbands lead their wives. Life Group leaders lead their Life Groups. How are you shepherding?

Are you encouraging those entrusted to you?

Are delivering to them the Word of the Lord?

Are binding up the wounds you are empowered to bind, even if it isn't miraculous?

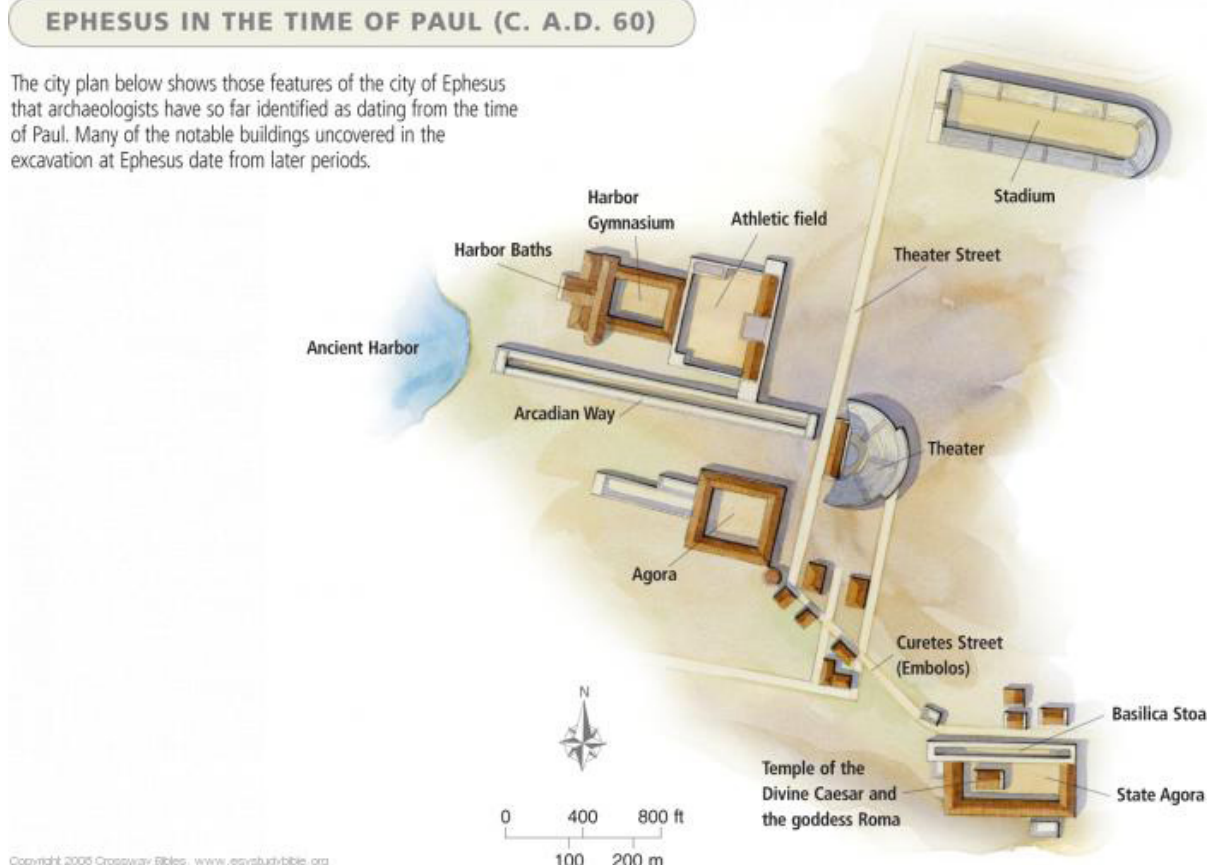
Take a moment and list those God has entrusted you to lead and write out a brief prayer for them.

Ephesus in the time of Paul

from ESV Study Bible (Crossway)

EPHESUS IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)

The city plan below shows those features of the city of Ephesus that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. Many of the notable buildings uncovered in the excavation at Ephesus date from later periods.



Given to The Gospel

Acts 20:17-38 | August 16, 2020

What is a hobby or interest in your life that you gave yourself to in a good way? What were the results?

Read Acts 20:17-38 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Paul committed his life to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he paid the price. He suffered trials in his flesh, from the world, and the devil who tried constantly to hinder the ministry of the Word in the church. Paul knew the sufficient grace of God, and that the Holy Spirit was working mightily in his life. He trusted in the one who would not and could not fail him.

The freedom of complete trust in God is an abandonment of earthly trust, which cannot aid in growing a heavenly kingdom. Our allegiance to Jesus and the gospel ministry is, and must always be, total reliance on God to work out all things. We trust Him to work out the good, the bad, the trials, the struggles, and the temptations for God's glory, our good, and the advancement of His church. In the midst of this dependence on Him, the gospel is declared in our lives, conversations, and legacies. Praise be to God!

"In a Christian community everything depends upon whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable. A community which allows unemployed (disengaged) members to exist within it will perish because of them...

Every Christian community must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together*

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Ephesians 2:1-10

Ephesians 4:1-32

Hebrews 11:1-12:3

Live among the brothers in plain sight and look out for each other.

Paul lived by the grace of God before the Ephesians. He lived among them in everyday life. Paul did not merely give them one day a week, but lived openly among the Ephesians for three years. His example? He lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, enduring all struggles and remaining faithful to Jesus and the gospel. Now he was leaving.

The Ephesians, with their history of idolatry and the impending threat of false teachers, needed the assurance the grace of God was sufficient. Paul exhibited this, but would the Ephesians? Paul hoped they would. He spent this last address encouraging the elders of church at Ephesus, and then commended them to God and to each other.

Paul was no longer paying attention daily to the flock in Ephesus; these elders were now entrusted with this task. They needed the encouragement they were used to receiving from Paul to come from each other.

As Christians, it's important to be known by our fellow believers. This includes our weak spots.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!" Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

We are not to live as if we had arrived at perfection, but in plain sight as we press toward Jesus in everyday living. Paul wasn't perfect; we shouldn't expect to be either. In the fellowship of the local church, we face the unknown and failure together, helping each other maintain trust in the One who will keep us to the end. We exist together in the world but not of it. One of the great challenges we face today is living in sincere and biblical relationship with God and one another. The world, the flesh, and Satan would have us isolated and self-sufficient, but that is not God's way. We need each other—both in our pursuit of holiness and our commitment to our hope in the gospel.

Pause and Discuss

*What would this community look like here at MeadowBrook?
How have we slipped into individualism?*

Open your mouth!

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul explained that the Holy Spirit distributed gifts to the church for the equipping of the saints (see also Romans 12:1-8). Not all have the same gifts, but all believers have the Holy Spirit. He uniquely enables each of us to be a witness of the gospel to the lost and a source of encouragement to the saints. In this, we glorify God as we help others walk in faith and grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Only God knows the impact disciples of Jesus can have on each other as they encourage one another by his Word. When we live out the God's Word and proclaim it openly, others are built up by precious promises given by our Lord. This is our work in the Lord for the sake of those around us in the church. However, we are called to speak to unbelievers also, planting gospel seeds in their lives. As much as possible, we give no offence through vain conversation, but extend patient love to the lost as we testify of Christ's resurrection.

With both audiences in mind, we join Christ in his work to build the church and his followers up in the faith, all the while praying God would rescue those entangled in sin and blinded by the devil. So, speak life into those God puts around you.

11 Ministry Principles from Acts 20 Randy Gunter

1. Our life is our ministry. There is no clocking in and out.
2. We live in tension with the world. We are foreigners.
3. We are constant communicators of truth both publicly and privately. We need both.
4. Do not forget the gospel and the importance of both repentance and faith.
5. Obey even when you do not know how everything will work out.
6. Let the calling of God be more valuable to you than your own life.
7. Communicate the gospel and the whole counsel of God's Word to all.
8. Pay attention to your own spiritual health.
9. This is not your church. You are easily replaced. The church is God's.
10. There is opposition from the outside and the inside. The enemy picks off the weak and the ones on the fringe.
11. MeadowBrook will be successful based on God and his Word, not me.

The powers of life and death reside in our words—or our lack of words. If we are not careful, the cares of this life will hinder what God would have us communicate to those around us. If we focus on those worries, it not only weakens our faith, but it also places stumbling blocks in front of others as our communication loses the element of the hope we have in Christ. Take time this week to meditate on the Word of God and speak about it with those around you.

Pause and Discuss

What am I communicating with my life?

What am I communicating with my words?

Am I silent where I need to be vocal?

Am I vocal where I need to be silent?

Leave a gospel legacy that outlives you.

Paul developed a loving concern for the well-being of the Ephesians. They had many ongoing spiritual battles in front of them. False teachers sought to destroy them. The sinful culture served as nagging distraction from the way of God and an ever-present reminder of their past as well as current struggles. Paul worked hard so that these churchgoers would have a solid foundation, an example to follow, and structures in place for ongoing growth and discipleship. He was leaving a gospel legacy.

I am encouraged by thinking about those Christians who, though now gone, still give me strength through their legacy of faithfulness. I hope to leave a similar gospel legacy that elevates Christ like the great men and women of the Bible described in Hebrews 11. We do this, not by being conscious of how we will be remembered, but by living each day for the glory of Christ, praying diligently, and investing the truth of the Gospel into lives of those around us. This isn't easy. It requires time, sacrifice, and hard work. Are you willing to put in the effort?

RESPOND

Where are you wanting to leave a gospel legacy? _____

If you died today, would you be satisfied with the legacy you left? _____

If not, what needs to change?

Courage and Unity

Acts 21:1-36 | August 23, 2020

What drives you to do what you do in your life and to make the choices you make?

Read Acts 21:1-36 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Embrace the will of the Lord with obedient courage.

“What course am I to take?”

“Toward danger; but not too rashly, nor too straight,” Gandalf replied to Frodo.

Frodo had been given a task that was unavoidable. He had to move wisely. Danger was certain, yet he could not stay. The mission called him forward.

Paul found himself in this situation. God had given Paul insight to the next step in his mission, and he was constrained by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem toward danger (c.f. Acts 20:22).

Imprisonment was certain, yet Paul pressed forward in obedient courage. As Frodo’s friends didn’t quite understand why he had to leave the comfort of his home, the Shire, Paul’s companions didn’t quite understand why he had to go to Jerusalem.

As Luke provides us with Paul’s travel log, we see a couple instances of prophetic utterances. The Spirit gave insight to a handful of others about what awaited Paul. How are we to understand them? A few things help us:

Look at the Greek: The Emotional Difficulty of Multiplication

“And when he had parted from them”

The Greek term used (*apospasthentas*) describes an emotional tearing away (Bock, 636). It’s the same term used to describe Jesus’ withdrawal to pray in the garden of Gethsemane. Paul’s departure from Ephesus was difficult. Multiplication always is, however it’s worth it. The gospel went forth, and the kingdom of God flourished in multiple locations as a result.

Is it time for your group to pay the emotional price of multiplication for the sake of gospel advancement?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Ephesians 4:1-3

Joshua 1:1-9

Romans 14:1-23

1. Luke described Paul’s path to Jerusalem as being resolved in and constrained by the Spirit (19:21; 20:22).

2. Agabus, established as a true prophet (Acts 11:28), gives a direct prophecy from the Spirit, unlike what we see in v. 4 where the prophecy is implied. Agabus’ prophecy contained no prohibition, merely a prediction.

3. Lastly, the group resolves together that this is the will of the Lord. This proves true because the imprisonment multiplies Paul’s witness and starts the narrative that runs through the end of Acts.

Thus, as Darrell Bock puts it, “the Spirit seems to have revealed what Paul would face, and the warning comes out of the resultant worry about Paul’s well-being.”

So, what can we learn?

First, we see how God was preparing both Paul and his companions. He was always resolved to go to Jerusalem. Now his team was as well. In the face of struggle in obedience to the will of God, we need the fellowship of fellow believers more than ever. Whether its facing physical danger or enduring in a struggling marriage or longing for a lost child or friend to come to Christ, whatever it is, we need others with us in the battle. They help us walk with courage.

Secondly, the easy path is not always the right path. Paul was not obstinate. He had fled danger before and most likely would do it again in the future. But, Paul knew the will of God and embraced courage in the face of the unavoidable. He moved toward danger, but as the rest of the narrative shows, he did so not too rashly, nor too straight. In a world that idolizes comfort, we need to be a people who embrace courage as we march the difficult, and at times, dangerous path of obedience to the will of God.

Look at the Greek: Agabus and the Causative Active

“The Causative Active is when a verb in the active voice describes a situation where “the subject is not directly involved in the action, but may be said to be the ultimate source or cause of it (intended or not)... The prophecy by Agabus was fulfilled in Acts 21:33 (where a Roman tribune arrested Paul and ordered him to be bound) and in the remainder of the book (where Paul is successively brought to Rome). Paul was not, strictly speaking, bound by the Jews, but by the Romans because a riot was breaking out in the temple over Paul. And he was not, strictly speaking, handed over by the Jews to the Romans, but was in fact arrested and later protected by the Romans because of a Jewish plot to kill him. What are we to say of this prophecy? Only that because of the Jews’ actions Paul was bound and handed over to the Gentiles. They were the unwitting cause, but the cause nonetheless.” – Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 411-412.

Pause and Discuss

Where are you seeking the easy path instead of the will of God?

Do not abuse your freedom in Christ. Pursue unity in the church.

After Paul arrives in Jerusalem, he meets with James and other leaders of the church. At this meeting, Paul recounts what God had done in the Gentile nations. In all likelihood, Paul presents the offering he had gathered for the Jerusalem church from Gentiles, displaying solidarity between the two groups (cf. Acts 24:17, Rom. 15:25, see also Stott, 340 and Bock, 646). The church then glorifies God for the work he was doing among the Gentiles. The council’s decision described in Acts 15 was bearing fruit. However, James speaks to Paul about an issue that has been brought up. John Stott sums up the issue well:

“What exactly was James’ concern? First, it was not about the way of salvation (James and Paul were agreed that this was through Christ, not through the law), but about the way of discipleship. Secondly, it was not about what Paul taught Gentile converts (he did teach them that circumcision was unnecessary, and James and the Jerusalem Council had said the same thing), but about what he was teaching the ‘Jews who are among the Gentiles.’ Thirdly, it was not about the moral law (Paul and James were agreed that God’s people must live a holy life according to God’s commandments), but about Jewish customs. In a word, should Jewish believers continue to observe Jewish cultural practices? The rumor was that Paul was teaching them not to.”

"The solution to which [Paul and James] came was not a compromise, in the sense of sacrificing a doctrinal or moral principle, but a concession in the area of practice."
- John Stott

It's hard for us to understand the issues and emotions at stake, but this had the opportunity to be very divisive in the early church. Paul could have insisted on his freedom not to follow such customs because of the gospel, but out of respect for his brothers he chose to follow these customs. Clearly, Paul was one to stand his ground against the Judaizers, but this was not an issue worth fighting over. Paul did not let his gospel freedom destroy the unity of the church over a nonessential.

Much of what divides the church today are nonessential issues. Politics, sports, alcohol, song choice, worship style, opinions on the latest crisis, etc. Social media has only enflamed the issue. Paul understood, as many today do not, that when the church divides, the entire body of Christ suffers and the gospel is misrepresented to the world. Division harms the mission. Paul risked his life for the gospel. He was not about to let a cultural issue hinder the mission. As a church, we need to keep the main thing the main thing—the gospel of Jesus Christ—and we need to not let anything we POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA or speak to one another get in the way.

Pause and Discuss

*What has the tendency to pull you into the fray of cultural division?
How can you pursue unity instead?*

No matter how hard you try, the world still hates Jesus.

Ironically, the whole city is stirred into a riot over Paul. He had been labeled an enemy to the Jews while he was in the Temple in his pursuit of unity with his Jewish brothers in Christ. This goes to show us that no matter what we do the gospel will still offend the world. That is not an excuse to be unnecessarily offensive. That's ridiculous. The gospel is offensive enough.

"A truly emancipated spirit is not in bondage to its own emancipation."
- F.F. Bruce

If we seek to present a Christian message and lifestyle the world will embrace, the result will not be Christian. We must remain faithful to the truths of the gospel, reflect the character of Christ to the world, and expect rejection.

In the end, the world still chooses Barabbas.

Pause and Discuss

In what ways are you adding unnecessary offense to the gospel?

In what ways are you elevating friendship with the world over the gospel?

Are you prepared to be rejected by the world?

Respond

Father,

Help us to live with courage and pursue unity in the church. Amen

God's Good and Unchanging Purposes

Acts 21:37-23:35 | August 30, 2020

What was something your parents did that you did not see the purpose at first, but now you do?

Read Acts 21:37-23:35 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

When things go bad, it's hard to understand God's purpose. His purpose for us in the trial is the same as in the good times: he desires us to be witnesses to Jesus Christ and his glory. In this purpose, God stands by his people, providentially caring for them through his sovereign work. So, when all else fails we can take courage, for God himself is standing with us, strengthening us, and satisfying us with the greater joy of knowing him.

God is unchanging and desires for all people to know him through Jesus Christ.

Having already rescued Paul from the mob in the Temple, the tribune questions Paul. After making sure he is not the fugitive insurrectionist, he gives him opportunity to defend himself before his people. Paul's defense is simple and can be briefly outlined as such:

1. He identifies himself with his audience, speaking to them in their language and reminding them that he used to be them.
2. He transitions to his conversion and gospel presentation. Paul specifically tailored his gospel proclamation to his audience (Stott, 347), and can be broken down as follows:
 - The gospel of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the will of God. The gospel contradicts neither one. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are one and the same. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in the Messiah. God has never saved his people on account of their works.
 - Paul identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the Righteous One or Messiah. Jesus alone, being fully God and fully man, could bring about God's salvation for his people.
 - Indirectly, Paul testifies of Jesus' resurrection from the dead in recounting his experience and use of the phrase "witness." Because of the vision, Paul is now an eyewitness to the fact Jesus indeed rose from the dead.
 - Forgiveness and cleansing of sin is given to those who call on the name of Christ in surrendered faith, symbolized by one's obedience in being baptized by immersion.
3. Lastly, he establishes his mission to the Gentiles is from God, not himself.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

2 Peter 3:1-13

Matthew 10:16-25

Psalms 27

At his last point, he lost his audience. The message of forgiveness was tolerated, but its implications sparked outrage. Because of their idolatrous traditionalism and tribalism, the Jewish people rejected their Messiah, and the God of their fathers yet again.

The Cancer of Tribalism

Tribalism, or finding more solidarity with groups of people on earth rather than in your citizenship in the kingdom of God, is a cancer. It destroys faith and hinders the gospel moving forward. Whether it be political parties, geographical regions, nations, or race, finding more solidarity with non-Christians in your earthly tribe than Christians from a different tribe (even if they are wrong and needing to grow in the faith), you are tolerating a cancer to your faith.

It is important to note the Jews of Paul's day were not faithful to the Old Testament nor the God of their fathers. God did not change. They did. God has always been concerned with the nations knowing him through faith. God is concerned about that today as well. His purpose for us is the same as his purpose for Paul. He desires us to be a witness for Jesus Christ, telling people of his resurrection from the dead and the forgiveness of sins that is offered in him.

Later in the lesson, we will take a look at the example Paul gave us, but for now, know this: God desires the lost to be saved, and he has chosen in his divine wisdom to proclaim his message of salvation

through individuals who have been made alive and empowered by the Spirit of God. God's will for your life is to be a witness. Using whatever gifts God has given you by his Spirit, use them to make the name of Jesus known. No one is off the hook. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called to be his witness in both your words and your character. And if you are not his witness, you are probably not his disciple.

Pause and Discuss

Where and how is God wanting to use you to make the gospel of Jesus known?

Zeal Misdirected

Sincerity counts for nothing if one sincerely believes falsehoods. The Jews sincerely believed Paul was wrong and were zealous to defend their traditions. They were wrong. Their zeal was misdirected, and therefore it was dangerous.

Are you sincerely believing something that is actually false? Is your zeal misdirected?

God stands by his people.

Paul's two defense speeches fit into a larger narrative that reveals God's providential care to Paul brought about his sovereign reign over earthly authorities. Darrell Bock, in his commentary sums up this narrative well:

"This passage is rooted in God's providence, which moves to protect God's children, although the means are not always known as they are here. God works behind-the-scenes here. Stephen's martyrdom shows that providence also does not always mean physical rescue as here with Paul. Paul is assured that he will reach Rome. It is ironic that Roman justice will bring him there as a prisoner so that Paul will arrive safely and immediately be speaking to the highest levels of Roman society. It is unlikely that if Paul had journeyed as part of a missionary outreach to Rome on his own, such a high-level audience would be possible. It is one of the mysteries of God and his providence that many times we cannot see why things are happening as they are. Yet God is surely at work in ways we could not have planned for ourselves."

Two things should encourage us: First, in the ancient world, no one was more powerful than Rome... but God was. He worked through the police/military force of the most powerful empire of the day to bring his messenger safely from Jerusalem to Rome, where members of Caesar's own household would believe in the gospel. God surely is sovereign over the situations and powers at work in our lives.

Secondly, God's providential care was not that spiritual and was in fact quite turbulent in the moment. Even when it does not feel like it, God is standing by his people. It may seem turbulent to us, but it is not to God. His purpose sits above the chaos we experience. We can trust him.

How have you seen God's providence in your life?

How do you need to trust in his providential care right now?

Resting and Working in God's Sovereignty

by Abby Garrett, MeadowBrook College Student

Paul understood the only reason Ananias had any authority was because God gave it to him. From our view, it seemed like Paul had every right to lash out at Ananias, but he still apologized. He knew who was really in charge. God's perfect plan does not have room for our criticism.

Sometimes leaders are not the most likeable people, but they deserve our respect (1 Peter 2).

Do we believe that God is in control of every situation, even when we do not like it?

Paul had been persecuted for almost everything he did, but he never stopped sharing Christ. He knew God's message was far more important than his comfort, pride, and lifestyle. He knew his suffering was all for God's glory.

Live by Faith: Be Men and Women of Valor

In this section, Luke clearly puts Paul forth as an exemplary model of Christian valor for us to follow (Stott, 357). What can we learn from Paul?

- 1. Keep the faith of old.** Paul used to be just like his audience. In fact, he was more zealous. Yet when Paul discovered he had departed from the faith of old and was misguided in his zeal, he threw it all away to follow Jesus. Whatever gain he had, he counted as loss and persevered in the faith no matter the cost.
- 2. Evangelize the lost.** Three lessons can be learned from Paul's approach to evangelism:
 - *Work hard to identify with your audience.* The Christian message does not come from a position of superiority, but from empathy. Paul worked hard to identify himself with his audience.
 - *Use your testimony.* Your story matters and can be used to meet someone where they are and bring them on a journey that introduces them to Jesus Christ.
 - *Share the gospel.* This is key. We call a lot of things evangelism, but until we express the good news of Jesus Christ, we have not evangelized the lost. Invitations to church and sharing your testimony are good things in service to evangelism, but they are not evangelism. Be sure and share the good news!
- 3. Be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.** Even as he willingly moved toward danger, Paul was shrewd and made use of earthly means to further the cause of Christ. At the same time, he was innocent. He did not fall into the trap of believing that the end justifies the means. We too, are called to both shrewdness and righteousness. Neither foolishness nor conniving display the valor of Christ.
- 4. Take courage.** "Paul's source of courage was his serene confidence in the truth" (Stott 357). We can be confident in God's word and face the dangers of this world with the courage of Christ.

Faith, Hope, Transformation

Acts 24:1-25:12 | September 06, 2020

Have you ever remodeled your house? What was the project like? What kept you going? Was the finished project worth it?

Read Acts 24:1-25:12 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Faith in the whole counsel of God's Word yields hope and a transformed life.

Paul was not just familiar with the law and prophets, he diligently studied them. His in-depth study led to a great knowledge of the Word that worked with his love for Christ to result in a radically transformed life. His life was marked by boldness. His declarations of the gospel were deeply rooted in his supreme desire to glorify God and the abiding hope he possessed (2 Cor 12:8-10; Rom 1:16; 2 Thess. 1:11-12).

1. Paul's hope was in the resurrection.

In vv. 14-21 Paul clarifies what he believes and the reality of why he is on trial. It was not because he was stirring up discord in the Temple and the various towns he visited. It was because he was preaching Jesus as the resurrected Messiah.

Knowledge about God does not necessarily equate to transformation.

In Acts 24:22, we read that Felix had a "rather accurate knowledge of the Way", yet we read in this chapter how his heart was still given to the pleasures of this world – namely power and money.

May the Lord use our expanding knowledge of him to deepen our love for him. The gift of God's Word was meant to transform our heart, soul and mind. Ask the Lord to have "the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19).

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

John 5:25-29

John 6:28-40

Philippians 4

Paul's hope in God is found in the justifying work of Christ on his behalf to be experienced in full at Christ's return. Paul knew there would be a day where all who have died will be resurrected, some unto glory and others unto eternal judgement. Jesus taught this same truth:

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live... all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement. (excerpt from Jn 5:25-29, ESV)

Those who have done good—those who have trusted in Christ for their salvation—will hear, *Well done, good and faithful servant*. These believe Christ's righteousness saves them, not their own. They know the best of their good deeds are like filthy rags before the Lord (Isa. 64:6). Thankfully, the work God requires is not our deeds but to have transforming faith in Christ Jesus who fulfilled his standard of righteousness (see Jn. 6:28-40).

In Romans 6, Paul expanded on this:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:5-6, ESV)

We experience the joys of the resurrection as we choose to deny our old ways of living – denying sin – and acting in the freedom given to us in Christ. Our future hope of being gloriously and physically resurrected affects how we live, make decisions, and interact with others today.

2. God's Word transforms our living.

Paul's hope in future glory enabled him to withstand and even be sanctified in trials. This hope led him to conclude:

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13).

Paul could have only come to this conclusion through his time with the Lord. How can we expect to know God if we do not read the very Word in which he has revealed himself? How can we expect the Holy Spirit to strengthen us in this way if we are not actively reading and memorizing the Scripture he inspired?

Pause and Discuss

How has the Word been transforming you recently?

How has God's Word been an anchor to you throughout the different trials of your life?

Choose faithfulness over freedom.

Notice Paul's response to his imprisonment: he did not complain or grow angry toward Felix or God. He was not focused on earthly comforts, nor was he bitter about his false imprisonment. He did not even take Felix up on the opportunity to bribe his way into freedom. Rather, Paul trusted the Lord's sovereignty, that God had allowed—ordained even—this injustice for a far greater purpose. He knew God's character is not one of flippancy or disregard, but one of purpose and care. Paul chose to remain faithful to his Lord.

Paul gives a stark distinction between those who live for the world and those whose citizenship is in heaven. When we recognize as believers that our comfort does not come from this world but from heaven, we will be able to use the injustices of this broken world for holy and eternal purposes. Did not our Lord use the greatest injustice of the cross (the perfect and innocent one accused, charged and killed as a criminal) to redeem his people from the bondage of sin? May we be faithful to live for God's glory and not the temporary freedoms of today.

The Fear of the Lost

Notice Felix's reaction to Paul talking about the coming judgement when Christ returns in Acts 24:24-25. It was alarm and fear, resulting in him dismissing Paul and not wanting to think on it further. He preferred the "comfort" of not thinking about it over the comfort found in Christ.

As we are sharing the gospel with friends, family, and strangers, may we not be surprised by this kind of response, but pray ahead of time that the Lord might open their eyes to the wonder and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. Do not give up, but speak the truth of the gospel message of Christ at any chance to those who are alarmed and uncomfortable talking about the judgement to come.

Reflect and Apply

As Christians we are to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8), for we are a part of God's redemptive plan of mankind. However, we know this world is not our home.

- *Do you trust God has you exactly where he wants you?*
- *How does our response to injustice done to us or others reflect on Christ to the world?*
- *How can you choose faithfulness over freedom this week?*

God is sovereign, providing wisdom for his people to usher in his will.

Knowing of past murderous plots from the Jews, Paul refuses to be transferred back to Jerusalem. Knowing he was to go to Rome, Paul responded with the wisdom of God that seems to be folly to man and appealed to Caesar. He would go to Rome as a prisoner.

Trust in God. Trust that his plan is good and right. Ask God for wisdom as you make day-to-day decisions. James says,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (James 1:2-7, ESV)

RESPOND

In what ways do you need the wisdom of God?

Write a brief prayer praising God for his faithfulness in the past, and asking him to settle you in the hope you have for the future.

Do we pander or do we proclaim?

Tertullus' opening statement was a grotesque display of flattery that sickens the stomach like too much chocolate. Tertullus pandered. Paul, on the other hand, was polite yet quick to speak truth regardless of how it would affect his standing. How often do we pander to the world, instead of being confident in our standing with God?

May we not seek the approval of man, but live in the approval of God in Christ. This is where true confidence and steadfastness resides – in the truth and freedom in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A New Hope

Acts 25:13-26:32 | September 13, 2020

What gives you hope?

Read Acts 25:13-26:32 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

“Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.” – G.K. Chesterton

Darkness engulfs the world we live in. Hatred, lies, injustice, failure, pain, and death swirl around us, twisting the knife in the dark. But the gospel of Jesus Christ is the light for us “when all other lights go out” (Tolkien). For in his good news, we find hope.

Paul’s final defense speech is the climactic speech of the book of Acts. In his longest and most stylized speech, we see the fullest account of Paul’s interactions with Jesus on the road to Damascus, the bedrock of Pauline theology, and a clear expression of the hope of the gospel. Weeks could be spent unpacking the deep truths contained in this one speech. But what Paul intended to rise to the surface was the hope found in the offer of Christ. In fact, it was his testimony to this hope that put him in this situation.

Although Paul was in a dark time, his confidence in the hope of Christ moved him to the point where he, the prisoner, sought that everyone would be like him, minus the chains. His hope grounded him in dark times. Are you in dark times? Do you know that same hope?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the hope of mankind for through faith in its message...

- **We are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.**

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (Colossians 1:13 ESV)

Once we were living in the darkness of sin, ignorant to the true wisdom of God and oppressed by the accuser. Now, our hearts have been enlightened, and our allegiance has shifted. We see the truth. We no longer follow after the father of lies, who promises fulfillment but delivers despair. We follow God, the Father of lights. We follow the good king, Jesus, who shepherds his people in righteousness and peace. We live in the light in the protection of a good and mighty king.

So, when Satan attacks with his lies, we can beat them down with the truth of God’s Word and confidently hope in the power of Christ who protects and dwells in us through his Holy Spirit.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Psalms 51

Isaiah 65:17-66:2

- **We are forgiven of our sins against God.**

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (Ephesians 1:7 ESV)

As Jesus was nailed to the tree, it was our sin that drove the nail. In the worst act of injustice in all of history, we, through our sin, took part in the rejection and killing of the Son of God. Yet, this moment of the greatest darkness was the moment of the greatest light, for the Son of God took our punishment in our place that we might be forgiven, justified, and reconciled to God. Jesus forgives us.

When we fail, we find hope in that we, who were as scarlet because of sin, are now as white as snow.

- **We find belonging as God's people, partially on earth through the local church and fully in the new heavens and new earth.**

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (Ephesians 2:19 ESV)

Hell will be a lonely place. There will be no community, only isolation in darkness. However, in Christ we become a people unto God. God adopts us as sons. He is our God, and we his people.

The gospel gives us hope because it gives us community that goes deeper than the earthly tribes of politics and race. We belong to one another because we belong to God, thus we can encourage one another, exhort one another, and even disagree with one another, confident that we will not be left isolated and alone. We have a place among those who are sanctified by their faith in Christ. ***We belong.***

Paul, The Evangelist

Evangelism can be described as the work of being used by God to open the eyes of the blind. It's work because we are active in it. We must share the gospel. At the same time, we recognize we do not have the power to give sight to the blind. Only God can do that. Paul exhibited what it meant to be an evangelist, and we would do well to learn from his example.

1. Do not waver in your message. (25:19)
2. Take advantage of every opportunity to share the gospel. Evangelism never happens by accident. It may not be planned, but it always requires the intentional decision to proclaim the gospel.
3. Make use of your personal testimony of coming to Christ.
4. Point backwards to the cross & resurrection of Jesus and forward to the hope of our own resurrection. The gospel is good news about the past and the future.
5. Seek to persuade. Evangelism is the combined work of the Spirit and the messenger. Lackadaisically sharing the gospel dishonors both the message and Jesus Christ.
6. Call the person to a decision. The gospel is not fully shared until we call people to respond in faith.
7. Genuinely love and desire the best for those with whom you are sharing the gospel.
8. Leave the results up to God.

Before Kings and Rulers

"It was a dramatic moment when the holy and humble apostle of Jesus Christ stood before the representative of the worldly, ambitious, morally corrupt family of the Herods, who for generation after generation set themselves in opposition to truth in righteousness... But Paul was not in the least intimidated." —John Stott

- Herod the Great—sought to kill the infant Jesus.
- Herod Antipas—Killed John the Baptist
- Herod Agrippa I—Killed James, the son of Zebedee and the disciple of Jesus
- Herod Agrippa II—Paul's audience in this story.

- **We experience genuine life change.**

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

One of the great sorrows of this world is people desiring change find themselves stuck doing things they don't want to do. Jesus Christ offers genuine life change. Saving faith always leads to people performing deeds demonstrate their repentance. Saving faith always transforms.

Though we never arrive at perfection, the hope of the gospel is that one day, through the glorification brought about by the Spirit of God, we will arrive. Until then, however, we experience increasing freedom from the power of sin in our life through the process of daily repentance and working in faith.

- **We will be raised from the dead unto eternal life after the struggles of this world.**

Broken Systems

The fact that Paul was being judged by Herod is ridiculous. As Darell Bock put it, "the world is turned upside down." Human systems are never perfect. The Roman system was a good system—it protected Paul from death! Our hope is not in systems, however, but in the perfect Judge. When injustice occurs, we serve the God who sees. Even if justice is not carried out on this earth, we can be confident that *"God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."* (Ecclesiastes 12:14)

As we fight injustice in this world, despite the fact we will never be able to fully eradicate injustice, we can rest confidently in this truth.

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:16-18 ESV)

In the resurrection, everything sad will become untrue (Tolkien). Every injustice righted. Every tear wiped away. Every heartache healed. We will have and know perfect peace. Now, we know suffering, but our suffering is not meaningless. It's preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Truly, in Christ, when all other lights go out, we have the light that is brighter than all other lights put together. We have Jesus Christ. He is ours. We are his.

Reflect and Respond

Have you come to a point of genuine surrendered faith in Jesus Christ? If not, will you today?

Have you lost sight of the hope you have in Jesus Christ?

Where in your life do you need to embrace the hope of the gospel?

Write out a prayer unto the Lord:

Overboard!

Acts 27:1-28:16 | September 20, 2020

Which movie or TV Show has the claim for the best shipwreck story?

Read Acts 27:1-28:16 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

God vindicates the righteous and their message.

After Paul's climactic message in the book of Acts, Luke goes into great detail describing Paul's journey from Caesarea to Rome. To understand why Luke goes into such length and detail during this section, it is important to know that Luke is not merely communicating history. He is including specific details and narratives to communicate a theological message to his audience, which is predominantly Gentile. Darrell Bock notes in his commentary that "Luke makes use of a common motif (common story structure) in this section of Acts, the long sea voyage. One needs to only think of Homer's epic the Odyssey to know how popular such accounts were. To survive a test at sea was to be portrayed as righteous."

Nautical Terms w/ Randy Elrod

- **weigh anchor** - bringing up the anchor as final step before sailing.
- **lee** - sheltered side of an island.
- **jettison** - cast overboard.
- **cargo** - materials on board for trade.
- **ship's tackle** - the gear, ropes, extra sails on the ship.
- **tempest** - storm.
- **took a sounding** - checked the depth.
- **bow** - front of ship
- **stern** - back of ship
- **ship's boat/skiff** - lifeboat
- **rudder** - used to steer the boat from the back of ship, goes in water.
- **foresail** - front sail used for steering.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Romans 5:1-5

Proverbs 3

2 Corinthians 1

In Luke's effort to reach Gentiles with the gospel, he tells the true story of how God delivered Paul from the perils faced on the open sea and vindicated him as righteous and his message as true. God vindicated Paul, and the gospel he proclaimed, through his wisdom and deliverance.

While it may not occur in the same way for us today, God will vindicate us and the gospel message through the wisdom he gives to us in Christ Jesus and the final deliverance of the resurrection. As we seek to live out our faith, our works and wisdom vindicate the message we proclaim as true in the lives of others. While some will hate us anyway, others will grow to respect us, listen to our message of the gospel, and respond in saving faith. And in the end, at the resurrection of the dead, we will be confirmed as righteous by the blood of Christ and vindicated before all who despised us and our message. One way or another, God vindicates the righteous. When others oppose us for our faith or slander our character, we can rest in this vindication and leave vengeance to the Lord. ***How does the vindication of the Lord encourage us as we share the gospel and live with the Wisdom of God?***

God providentially cares for his people according to his will and his timing.

Within Luke's narrative, we see how God sovereignly protects and provides for Paul according to his word—and it does not look like one would think it would! God cares for us in all situations, but we might not see that during the trials of life. However, God's providence is not bested by the bad things in our life. God is sovereign over the trials as well, and is working all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

So, how can we learn from this narrative? How are we to respond in the trial and trust in the providential care of God?

1. Place your confidence in the Word of God.

God had already spoken to Paul that he would be brought to Rome in Acts 23:11, and he confirmed that again to him vv. 24-26. Paul was not placing his trust in some false sense of prosperity, but in the perfect word of God.

Today, we don't have the same Word of God that tells outcomes to specific situations in our lives, but we can still be confident in the final outcome of trials, no matter their end on this earth. Here are a couple passages to commit to memory that can give confidence in the day of trial:

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5 ESV)

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 ESV)

2. Abandon the wisdom of man.

The wisdom of man cost Julius and the pilot of the ship. Paul's first warning was disregarded on the basis of less than ideal circumstances and majority opinion. If they would have listened to Paul, the ship would have been saved, the profit of the cargo retained, and many hungry, dark nights avoided.

We often are tempted to do the same. We respond to situations that are less than ideal with the wisdom of man and end up in worse situations. Sometimes God desires for us to stay in the harbor that isn't best suited for winter to protect us from worse trials. The wisdom of man says escape any discomfort, yet the pursuit of comfort and ease is a deceptive pursuit that does not deliver in the end.

The Fickle Opinion of Man

"So fickle is the crowd that in Lystra Paul was first worshipped, then stoned, while on Malta he was first called a murderer, then a god." – John Stott

Trying to be relevant to the world is a foolish pursuit. We need to engage them where they are of course, but the relevance with the world and faithfulness to the gospel are exclusive pursuits. The world hates Jesus and his message. No matter how "relevant" we try to be, if we are pursuing the approval of man's opinion, it will never be enough, unless we compromise the gospel message.

How often do we get caught up in the opinions of the crowd, which are fickle and ever-changing?

Reflect and Discuss: Where in your life do you need to abandon the wisdom of man?

3. Lose the ship.

In vv. 24-26, Paul shares the good news. No one will die, but the ship must be lost. In our trials, sometimes God providential care means running the ship aground. This life is a vapor and nothing we have today is promised to be here tomorrow. All things are the Lord's—our jobs, our livelihoods, our plans, even our loved ones. Trusting in God's providence means holding all things with open hands. The Lord gives and takes away, and he knows best.

4. Pray for day.

Sometimes the night is simply too difficult to bear, and we, like the sailors, are praying for day to come. No trial, no matter how painful, lasts forever. God can and will comfort us—this may even mean he calls us home. If not, however, things may still never be the same again, but the Lord can and will bring you through the night. Sometimes we simply need to pray for light to come, the sun to rise on our darkness, and comfort to meet our affliction. The good news is the Bible declares that God is the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction (see 2 Corinthians 1).

5. Find strength in God's provision in the midst of the trial.

In Paul's final intervention of encouragement, God strengthened all 276 on board through a simple meal and prayer. The trials of life have a way of drawing our eyes to focus only on the negatives so that we miss the simple provisions God offers to us as a means of strength. God is at work in the midst of the trial. Ask the Lord for eyes to see it.

Application: This is a good reminder to us as well who knows someone in the trial. Never underestimate how God can use a simple note, phone call, or meal to strengthen a brother or sister in the midst of hardships.

6. Multiply God's care to others.

After God brings Paul through the shipwreck to Malta, he protects Paul again from the bite of the poisonous viper. Paul does not get caught in the fickle opinion of man but extends the same mercy and care God showed him to the local population. God used him to heal many on the island, and though not recorded, we can be certain that Paul also availed the opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the natives of Malta.

God comforts us in the midst of the trial so that we might be used to comfort others who are in the midst of the trial as well.

REFLECT & RESPOND

What trials have you gone through? (Reflect)

How has God created and gifted you? (List)

How can you then be used to uniquely comfort others? (List and then Pray)

Living in the World as an Integrated Christian

"Here then are aspects of Paul's character which endear him to us as an integrated Christian, who combined spirituality with sanity, and faith with works. He believed that God would keep his promises and had the courage to say grace in the presence of a crowd of hard-bitten pagans. But his trust and godliness did not stop him seeing either that the ship should not take risks with the onset of winter, or that the sailors must not be allowed to escape, or that the hungry crew and passengers had to eat to survive, or that he needed to gather wood to keep the beach fire burning. What a man! He was a man of God and of action, a man of the Spirit and common sense." – John Stott

They Will Listen

Acts 28:17-31 | September 27, 2020

If you knew someone would listen to your proposal at work or your request at home and respond, how would that affect you?

Read Acts 28:17-31 and then highlight what stands out to you, explain what the author is saying in context, and then apply it to your life.

Luke closes the book of Acts with a message of triumph. Paul made it to Rome. Though Paul was in chains, the gospel was not. This is what the book of Acts is about. It was never about Peter or Paul. Acts is about the work Jesus continued to do through his Church indwelt by his Spirit. The witness of Christ had spread throughout Jerusalem, filled all of Judea and Samaria, and had now arrived, by God's direction and sovereign protection, to the capital of the ends of the earth. The gospel triumphed. The book ends with Paul proclaiming the gospel "with all boldness and without hindrance," inviting the church to continue in the work of Peter and Paul by preaching the gospel to Jew and Gentile.

Today, as the church, we carry on this ministry of Christ in proclaiming the good news in the power of the Spirit to all who will listen. It is our mission. Like God did with Paul, he will work through us to awaken the dead to life and usher them into his eternal Kingdom. So, how do we fulfill our mission?

Proclaim the kingdom of God.

The gospel message is not merely a recounting of past events. Of course, the good news of Jesus Christ details past events—his virgin birth, his perfect life, his substitutionary death in our place, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension. However, the effect of these past events continues in the present and far into the future. We preach the kingdom of God.

This is also how Jesus began his message while on earth:

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15, ESV)

The good news of God is not simply deliverance from the oppression of sin and Satan, but also the transference into the kingdom of God where we live under the rule of King Jesus.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

R: Respond to the Text

Additional Passages:

Isaiah 52:7-10

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

The Ending of Acts

"Luke chose to end his book here because his point was the arrival of the word to the highest levels of Rome. The book's ending is open-ended with respect to the future of the Jewish nation because the church is still preaching the Word to whoever will hear it." -- Darrell Bock.

The kingdom of God gives us direction for how to live today and hope for what we will experience in the future. Today, we live in the power of the Spirit, reflecting the character of Christ and his kingdom. Simply put, we live differently than the world (see the Sermon on the Mount). At the same time, we know we only experience the kingdom in part. The best is yet to come. One day soon, Jesus will return and march with all his saints into Jerusalem to reign for a thousand years with perfect justice and righteousness. Then, at the end of the thousand years, Satan will muster one last rebellion. Christ will defeat all his enemies once and for all. Then, he will recreate the heavens and the earth anew and reign forever with his saints from New Jerusalem. There we will know perfect peace and righteousness. There we will find rest.

The kingdom of God is the good news of being brought under the rule of God both today as sojourners in a strange land and tomorrow as citizens in our home country. So today, we live differently marked by righteousness and filled with hope.

Tell them about Jesus.

but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, (1 Corinthians 1:23 ESV)

The kingdom of God only makes sense in light of its king. Jesus is the focal point of our message. Our message is not a better life, or marriage, or path to self-control. Our message is Jesus.

We preach Christ.

- **Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.**

God repeated this truth time and time again throughout the book of Acts. It's important. There is simply no excuse for ignorance of the Old Testament. It's impossible to understand the richness of the gospel and fullness of the promises of God apart from the Old Testament. It tells God's story of redemption, and it all points to Jesus. He fulfills God's law, and fulfills God's prophecies. Jesus is the seed of the woman who will destroy Satan. He is the son of Abraham through whom all families will be blessed. He is the prophet greater than Moses who established a better law and better covenant. He is the son of David who reigns. He is our Great High Priest who bore the burden of our sin. He is Jesus, the one who saves.

- **Jesus is Lord.**

Jesus is not a tribal God. He is Lord of all—both Jew and Gentile. He is the creator of the heavens and the earth who sovereignly reigns over all his creation and every authority under the heavens. Not even Caesar himself possessed greater authority. All who would come to him as Savior must also come to him as Lord. He reigns. He directs. Not us. He is Lord.

- **Jesus is Christ.**

Christ is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, Messiah. It means "Anointed One." In the Old Testament, three offices were set apart by anointing: prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus, who was anointed by the Spirit himself in his baptism, fulfills all three offices perfectly to "address humanity in all its need" (Leland Ryken). Read what John Wesley taught about the threefold office of Christ:

"We are by nature at a distance from God, alienated from him, and incapable of a free access to him. Hence we want a mediator, an intercessor, in a word, a Christ, in his priestly office. This regards our state with respect to God. And with respect to ourselves, we find a total darkness, blindness, ignorance of God, and the things of God. Now here we want Christ in his prophetic office, to enlighten our minds, and teach us the whole will of God. We find also within us a strange misrule of appetites and passions. For these we want Christ in his royal character, to reign in our hearts, and subdue all things to himself."

"People, what does [this section] say to us? Where are we to preach? Wherever we are. How are we to preach? Lovingly, biblically, doctrinally. When are we to preach? Promptly, tirelessly, incessantly, and with boldness. To whom are we to preach? Jew or Gentile; anybody. What are we to preach? Jesus Christ. What are the results of this effort? The results are exciting. Verse 24, some did not believe, but some did believe." -- John MacArthur

Leland Ryken summarizes it well when he says, “the prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministries of Jesus Christ satisfy humanity’s deep need for guidance, care, and protection.”

How does understanding the threefold office of Christ help you personalize the gospel message to those who you are telling about Jesus?

Rest in the work of God.

Sharing the gospel can be a daunting task—but it does not have to be! If Acts has taught you anything, I hope you have seen God’s sovereignty in the success and movement of the gospel to the ends of the earth. He will accomplish his purposes to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. And since God has purposed to work through his church, we get to simply join him in that effort, resting confidently in his work, because...

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God

“The results of preaching depend, not on the wishes and intentions of men, but on the will of God Almighty. This consideration does not mean that we should be indifferent as to whether we see fruit from our witness to Christ or not; if fruit is not appearing, we should seek God’s face about it to find out why. But this consideration does mean that we ought not to define evangelism in terms of achieved results... the way to tell whether in fact you are evangelizing is not to ask whether conversions are known to have resulted from your witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making known the gospel message.” – J.I. Packer

• Only God can open the eyes of the blind.

It’s not our job to convert. We preach the gospel. The Spirit opens the eyes of the blind and changes hearts. We are simply messengers planting seeds. This also means that prayer must be the main engine of our evangelism. We must be people who plead for the souls of men before our Heavenly Father. We must pray for the lost.

• God ensures that some will listen.

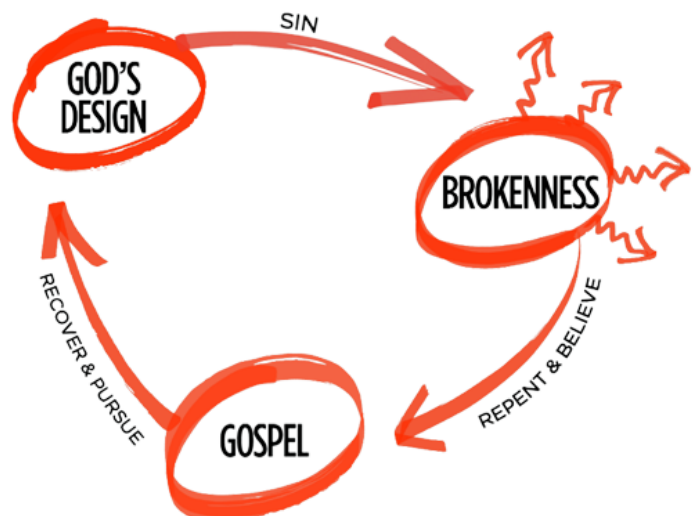
We can be confident that some will listen. God has been moving toward the lost from before the foundation of the earth. Not everyone will respond in faith, but some will—perhaps some we least expect.

Our job is not to determine who responds, but to evangelize and disciple those who do listen to our message. We cannot assume someone will listen based on external appearances. God saves without merit on our part, and he does not see as we see. Those we might count out before we even speak may be the ones God has ordained to hear and believe the gospel.

So, preach the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance and leave the results up to God.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Act 1:8 ESV)

Who is God calling you to evangelize?





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