

*50-Day
Devotional
Study of the
Book of
ACTS*

(Days 26-50)

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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 the phone each day? How much time watching TV? How much time on the InterNet? 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 wonderful book.

You will 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 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 some 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 the apostles all 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 non apostle) 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 off 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 speak at a Christian School in our area that is operated by an Independent Baptist Church. When I do, I use the King James Version of the Bible, something I never 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 unfamiliar 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" lead 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 is 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!

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 ‘gentlemens’ 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.

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 inspired by prayer 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 as its 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 is 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 of an evangelist add up that leads 10,000 people a year to Jesus who go on to support his ministry but are otherwise untrained. On the right we will show the stats of 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! I hope my sons aren't reading this!

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 happening with what God commands concerning tongues in the one teaching portion of the Bible they are dealt with, 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 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 later the cancer returned 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 Paul's gospel message 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).

But 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!

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 anymore 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 Timothy 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 bible.crosswalk.com, 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 that 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! Let's 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 and love other 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 took a closer look at what the New Testament calls for and decided to get back to the Bible. We took it slow and after a multi-year process adopted Biblical eldership in a congregational context. It's no longer lonely at the top!

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 in ministry from today's passage.

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!

Friend, I believe I Timothy 2:12 prohibits a woman from being a Pastor/ Elder in a local church. But I am dismayed at how many Christians think that means a woman shouldn't share and lead in other ways. True, I Corinthians 14 says a woman should not speak in the church. But the context is clearly dealing with the issue of speaking in tongues AND not submitting to the leader's authority.

When the elders of the church invite women in the church to share with the fellowship, they should do so with honor. In Romans 16:1, Paul actually sends Phoebe to the church at Rome and tells them to do what she says! Paul even identified her as a servant, or deacon at the church in Cenchrea. Could it be that she was Philip's daughter? We'll never know, but we do know that God uses women in key Kingdom assignments, just as he does men!

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 that James was probably this James. Here in Acts 21 we read of Paul coming in to 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. By now the remaining apostles were mostly elsewhere evangelizing and planting churches! The importance of a local churches elders 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!

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!

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 in America.

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 hellbound 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 laid truths on your heart that needed application 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

Day 47- Read Acts 26:1-32

Memorize 26:18

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 Jesus 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 think 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. My point here is not to criticize the Roman Catholic Church or the Pope, but to point out that 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!

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. I wonder how many Inns there were to stay in there? Three perhaps? 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 fellowship 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 what becomes of Paul's case or of Paul himself. Tradition tells us that Emperor Nero 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 will be 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!

