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# Quiet Time Series

## The Acts of the Apostles

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## Day 1: Why Acts?

### Acts 1:1-2

*“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”*

Luke, the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, carefully compiled what today is the authoritative history of how the first disciples lived after Jesus returned to heaven. The Book of Acts remains the only historical book in the Scripture that chronologically documents the events of the early church (*see inserts, “Location and Date”*). Acts provides the historical background for the remaining books of the New Testament, helping us to understand why Paul, Peter, James, and John wrote their letters (*see inserts, “Paul’s Letters”*). Most of all, Acts presents the new paradigm – God living and moving in the disciples’ lives powerfully through a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads the church, transforms peoples’ lives, and directs disciples to live out the teachings of Jesus.

#### Location and Date: Acts

*Most scholars date the writing of Acts before the great persecution of 64 AD and the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in 67 AD. The disciples assembled in Jerusalem but later spread throughout Judea and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

### **Why study the Acts of the Apostles as we prepare our hearts to learn about the mission?**

1. **Luke: Physician (Col 4:10-14) and Historian (Luke 1:1-4).** As a physician, Luke was highly educated and he authored two of the most powerful books in the Bible. As a world-class historian, Luke puts Jesus in historical context, elaborating even more in the Book of Acts on the impact of the gospel throughout the entire known world. He recognized that Jesus brought both physical and spiritual healing. In the Book of Acts, Luke clearly illustrates the power of the Holy Spirit to not only heal people physically, but to give people salvation, joy, and purpose – transforming people’s lives through spiritual healing. As we serve others, pray that we also see the great need for physical and spiritual healing and that we let the Holy Spirit use us to minister to each other and those around us.
2. **The Gospel’s Universal, Transforming Message.** Being a Gentile (non-Jew) uniquely qualifies Luke to explain how this band of *“unschooled, ordinary men”* (4:13<sup>1</sup>) transformed the lives of Jews and Gentiles alike as they spread the gospel from *“Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (1:8). Luke carefully explains the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles, illustrating the universality of God’s message for women (Lydia, Priscilla, Tabitha, etc.), heretics (Samaritans 8:4), celebrities (Simon the Sorcerer 8:12), politicians (Dionysius of the Areopagus 17:34, Sosthenes 18:17 & 1 Cor. 1:1), poor, rich, outcasts, and “sinners” (not the religious!). The message of the gospel is universal – for all people, in all nations, and throughout all times. In the Book of Acts, the disciples preach a universal language that communicates to any culture, in any country, at any time in history – the gospel language of preaching good news, healing the sick, and serving the poor.
3. **Cultural Adaptation in the Spirit.** Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke identifies when he was with Paul on his travels by using the pronoun “we” instead of “they” (16:10-17, 20:5-21; 27:1-18:16). After the disciples received the Holy Spirit in baptism (2:38), the Holy Spirit directed them whom to anoint (13:1-4), whom to preach to (Ethiopian 8:26, Cornelius 10:1ff, Lydia 16:14, etc.), where to go (Philip 8:39, Paul to Jerusalem 20:22), and even where not to go (Bithynia 16:7). Wherever we go, we are introduced to new customs, sites, smells, sounds, and experiences. Just as Paul adapted his message to the locals (20:22ff), we will be much more effective at communicating across cultures if we understand more about the beliefs,

<sup>1</sup> All references are from the Book of Acts unless otherwise labeled.

background, language, and religion of the people we serve. Ultimately, our confidence comes from the Holy Spirit since Jesus promised that we would be given what we need to say through the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11).

4. **The Holy Spirit is the Power to Serve.** Jesus demonstrated the *“power of an indestructible life”* (Heb. 7:16). He called all of His disciples to *“let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Mt 5:16). Paul reminded the disciples of Jesus’ words, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (20:35). The Holy Spirit gave the disciples a spirit of *“power, love, and self-discipline”* (2 Tim 1:7) that emboldened them to confidently share not only the gospel, but their lives as well (1 Thes. 2:8) to *“declare the whole will of God”* (20:27). We have the same Holy Spirit, the same example of Jesus, and the same calling to *“go and do likewise”* (Luke 10:37). The Holy Spirit is the Power to Serve.
5. **Personal Relationship with the Holy Spirit.** The gospels introduce a personal relationship with Jesus and with our Father in heaven. Jesus promised He would be with them always to the very end of the age. How does that work now that Jesus and the Father are in heaven? God gives us His Spirit, adopting us as His sons, that we may live as Jesus’ hands, feet, ears, and mouth to bring this world good news. Our personal relationship with God is a personal relationship with His Spirit! Let’s get to know God’s Holy Spirit better as we study the Book of Acts!

***What is your prayer for your heart in preparation your study of the Book of Acts?***

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***What does it mean to you to have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit?***

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***What specific goals would you like to set for this quiet time series (e.g., understanding God’s mission, recapturing the missionary spirit of the disciples, finding a more personal mission for you)?***

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## Day 2: He's Alive!

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all end their gospels with Jesus resurrection and the "Great Commission." Luke's account of the resurrection shows Jesus' humanity – He even encouraged them to touch his scars (Luke 24:39). Read the last few verses of Luke before we get into Acts:

**Luke 24:45-53** *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*

Read Acts 1 and consider these devotional thoughts:

**Alive To Us.** People saw Jesus crucified. Then, "he presented himself to them and gave convincing proofs that he was alive" (1:3). Jesus convinced people who watched Him die that He was in fact ALIVE. What a concept! First God appeared in the flesh, proving that God is ALIVE and that He cared about us. Then Jesus died and comes back, proving to them that He resurrected from the dead!

*How has Jesus convinced you that He is alive in your own life?*

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**Relationship With The Spirit.** Acts records the final days where Jesus physically lived with these disciples (later, He appears to Paul!). How precious that time must have been to them. What did He talk about? "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (1:4) and he spoke about the gift His Father promised... the Holy Spirit (1:5). For 3 years, Jesus walked with them – God ALIVE in the flesh walked with them! He taught them about this "gift" that one day they would receive through baptism (John 3:5); the very Spirit that would teach them what to say when they were in trouble (Matt 10:17-20); who would actually be like Living Water living inside them (John 7:37-39); who would speak directly to the Father as an advocate (John 14:15-18); who would be their teacher (John 14:24-27); and who would live through them to glorify God (John 16:12-16).

*How can you grow in your personal relationship with the Holy Spirit?*

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**Can You Wait?** Jesus told them to wait for the gift. They wanted Jesus to restore the (physical) Kingdom of Israel – NOW! Jesus told them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (1:7). But it's so hard to wait!

*Can you think of times you have had to wait (spiritually) for God to move? Did the Lord deliver? How?*

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**The Ends of the Earth.** Acts 1:8 is often referred to as the outline of the Book of Acts: “*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” As we seek to understand the mission that God has given us as individuals and the church, we must remember that it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability and power to share Jesus’s love to the ends of the earth!

**Connect to the Holy Spirit in Prayer.** Jesus promised that He would not leave them as orphans. They would miss Him, but they would have one greater – the Holy Spirit – as their counselor. Jesus leaving them must have been hard, but the disciples were CONSTANTLY PRAYING. They never stopped talking to Jesus!

*What could more time in prayer do for you?*

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### Day 3: God’s First Fruits

*Read Acts 2 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Harvest of Souls.** Pentecost means the “fiftieth day.” The Jews gathered for the Pentecost festival, called the “Feast of Weeks,” or the “Feast of Fruits” (Exodus 23:16, 34:22, Numbers 28:26, Deuteronomy 16:9). During this festival the Jews dedicated the first fruits of the harvest to God. Later this became a celebration of God giving Moses the law on Mount Sinai. Here in the Book of Acts, we find Jews from all over Israel gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate. God chose the perfect time for all the Jews from “*every nation under heaven*” (2:5) to hear the good news of the New Covenant and bring the “first fruits” – a bountiful harvest of souls harvested to become the newly-born church of Christ.

**Location and Date: Acts 2**

*AD 30: Most scholars date the coming of the Holy Spirit to initiate the church to AD 30, about 50 days after the crucifixion. Jews from all over the world (2:9) converged on Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.*

**Put Yourself There.** God demonstrated the power of this event through a special appearance of the Holy Spirit: “*all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in each others tongues as the Spirit enabled them*” (2:4). Imagine being one of the disciples that day. One moment you are praying with your brothers and sisters, and the next moment, you see supernatural “*tongues of fire*” landing on you and the other disciples. You feel compelled by the Spirit to come down out of the upper room and start speaking to the crowd. But instead of your native language, out comes a language you have never studied. Your mind is blown. You are carried away in the energy of the moment. People all around are filled with awe. This unique event helped the people recognize and declare the wonders of God.

*Describe a time in your life where you truly felt God moving in a miraculous way.*

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**Prophecies are Promises.** Peter, the reformed coward, restored in his relationship with Jesus (John 21), now stood boldly, preaching the first ever gospel sermon. With supernatural boldness and insight, he addressed the Jews and explains in detail the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies and promises:

- God’s promise to pour out His Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28-32)
- God’s promise to not abandon Jesus in the grave and His body would not see decay (Psalm 16:8-11)

- God's promise to exalt Jesus, pour out His Holy Spirit, make His enemies a footstool, and elevate Jesus as Messiah (Psalm 110:1)

*God's Word is filled with promises. What promises mean the most to you spiritually?*

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**It's Personal.** Peter's sermon climaxed with a bold proclamation: *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."* When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* Peter preached the promises and made each promise personal for them.

*How do the prophecies about Jesus and the personal responsibility for crucifying Jesus cut you to your heart?*

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**God's Gift.** Even though we know our guilt, we know the story doesn't end there. God's heart for His people was not just to see them take responsibility, but also for them to receive a gift.

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off- for all whom the Lord our God will call." (36-39)*

*Thinking about what we have been learning about the Holy Spirit. What is so amazing about this gift?*

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**Be Warned.** Peter warned them, *"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."* Has anything changed today? We live in a society that feeds off of selfishness and the continual lust for "more." Materialism grips our hearts in ways we cannot even see until we realize that we are neglecting people to get more "things." The Holy Spirit – this gift – *"gives us the mind of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:16)*. However, unless we offer our *"bodies as a living sacrifice,"* refusing to *"conform to the pattern of this world,"* and be *"transformed by the renewing"* of our minds, we will not even know what *"God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2)*.

*The warning Peter gave 2,000 years ago still applies today. Are you willing to warn people about this generation? YES / NO (circle one)*

Acts 2 finishes with a beautiful image of the fellowship of the believers: *"They devoted themselves... they had everything in common... and the Lord added to their number daily" (2:42-47)*.

*During the coming weeks, how can you devote yourself to the body of Christ more? What would it look for you to have everything in common at church, in your ministry, or in your family?*

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## Day 4: The Spirit of Refreshment

Read Acts 3 and consider these devotional thoughts:

In the previous chapter Peter opened the gates of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit introduced Himself with power and now began to live inside thousands of disciples with more and more getting baptized everyday. All the disciples immersed themselves in fellowship and worship. This initial picture of the Kingdom of God provided a powerful example that the Holy Spirit was now ready to multiply to the ends of the earth through the disciples. The Holy Spirit acted purposefully. His miraculous power drew crowds, opening the door for the disciples to preach the good news. This enabled God to demonstrate His ultimate purpose: the power of lives transformed by the gospel saving those in need. This same power is available to us every time we proclaim the Word of God to lost souls today.

Acts 3 opens with Peter and John in Jerusalem, going to the temple to pray. A lame beggar asked them for money, but Peter knew the man needed something more incredible. *“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong (3:6-7).*

**Tap the Power.** Maybe you can relate to Peter and John when they shared that they didn’t have any money! When you feel like you don’t have anything to give, what can you do? We may not be able to heal, but we can tap into the same power that healed this lame beggar through prayer. Consider the insights on the power of prayer from James 5:15-18:

*And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

Though you may feel like you don’t have much to give, remember the giver! If you are tapping into the Spirit living in you, you have the power to give – through your time, your heart, and your PRAYERS!

*How can you tap into the power of the Holy Spirit more in your life?*

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**Chain Reaction.** Change is powerful. Once this man was healed, no one could stop him. He was “walking and jumping, and praising God.” People saw him and praised God. His change showed others that God healed him and filled him with joy. Peter gave all the credit to God and spoke of how it was all possible through Jesus: *“Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (3:12).* Later we read, *“But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand” (4:4).*

*One change in this man’s life led to a chain reaction. How can this happen today?*

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**Refreshment from God.** When we do great things for God, how easy is it for us to think that it is because of our strength? Peter gave all of the glory to God. He turned to the onlookers and challenged them, *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord”* (3:19). The message is simple: Put God in charge (repent), give Him the glory, and you too will experience His refreshment. Drink the refreshment of the Spirit! We know this feeling. When we give things over to God, we change and we feel God moving again in our lives – it breathes life into us and then we can help refresh others!

*What is an area that God can bring refreshment in your life? What sin can you confess and repent of so God can bring that refreshment? How can you give more glory to God with the ways He wants to use you?*

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## **Day 5: Prayer for Boldness**

*Read Acts 4 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Acts 4:16-17** *“What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”*

**Jealousy.** Acts 2 says that they *“enjoyed the favor of all the people.”* We have all lived long enough to know that life has its mountains and its valleys. Jesus, who never sinned, faced the wrath of the religious authorities. Why? Jealousy. They probably thought to themselves, ‘What if the people see that these men are truly from God, then they will start following them, and it will threaten us?’ They were *“greatly disturbed”* (4:2), so they called Peter and John in to question them. Most of us would be terrified being questioned by the authorities.

*What discourages you? How can we imitate the heart of Peter and John and not let these things keep us from doing God’s work?*

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**An Act of Kindness.** Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, asked them why they were trying to stop them from performing “an act of kindness” done in the name of Jesus. He proclaimed, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved”* (12). They wanted to stop them, but they could not refute his words. There’s something very pure-hearted about doing what is right. As we serve in the name of Jesus, our light is shining and people can’t refute a gospel that meets peoples’ needs!

**Courage from Jesus.** These educated authorities recognized something different about the disciples: *“when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus”* (13). The uneducated disciples displayed courage and everyone wanted to know where all this came from. There was only one answer: these men had been with Jesus.

*It is time for us to be with Jesus. As you read this devotional series, are you spending time with the Bible or are you spending time with Jesus? Take a moment to re-orient and pray: **Jesus, I am here to be with you. Fill me with your courage as I surrender my life to the Holy Spirit and to live for you.***

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**Raging Enemies.** Every story includes an adversary. In the Book of Acts, Luke did not mention Satan frequently, but we can certainly recognize the enemy at work. As Peter and the disciples started their Jesus-preaching ministry, Satan stirred up persecution, as expected. The Sadducees plotted how to stop these men from influencing so many people and tried to detain Peter and John, ordering them to stop speaking. Sounds discouraging. What was their response? They joined the other disciples in what many call the “Prayer for Boldness”! Instead of praying to change the authorities, they prayed to change their hearts – they prayed, *“Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”*

**Encourage Defeats Discourage.** We all get discouraged. Maybe you shared your faith and no one responded. Maybe you’ve been told to stop sharing your faith. Maybe circumstances in your life seem to make you ineffective at living out what you believe God wants you to do. Maybe Satan has indeed won a few victories. Is this your response in prayer? “We’ll shout louder than the devil, Lord make us all bold!” Our prayers must be passionate, honest, desperate, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

*God wants to change OUR hearts first. Then we can help change the world. How can you live this out today?*

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**Great Unity.** The disciples’ prayers shook the place (31-35)! They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke boldly! The believers came together, united in their love for God, sharing everything they had. The encouragement and unity that the disciples experienced in the body of believers strengthened them and gave them the ability to do more than they ever thought they could! God worked to bring unity to this uneducated rag-tag assembly of Jews from throughout the world. How? Through their love (in action) for one another.

*God loves when we are unified and put each other’s needs before our own needs. How can you implement this attitude at church and in your own personal life?*

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## Day 6: Spiritual Motivation

*Read Acts 5 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Appearance.** Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of their land for the Lord! What a great thing, right? However, Peter revealed the true heart behind their gift – after they saw many disciples including Barnabas sell property (4:32-37), they wanted to look like they were being just as sacrificial. God does not look at us and merely want us to give Him lots of money and time (all of it already belongs to Him anyways!), but rather He wants us to give wholeheartedly out of our joy and with sacrificial hearts. Ananias and Sapphira lost their focus on God and became concerned about their appearance before men. This caused them to lie and ultimately pay the price of losing their lives.

*How easy is it for us to do things so that on the outside it looks like we have it all together? How can you get your heart of joy back for God (or continue to have joy when serving God)?*

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**Location and Date: Acts 5**

*AD 34: The church was still centered in Jerusalem. Around this time, Paul also moved to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel.*

**Perseverance.** The apostles continued to preach and perform miracles. *“Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.”* The authorities threw the apostles in jail but the Holy Spirit freed them. What did they do after being jailed and warned to stop preaching? They returned to preach publicly! Nothing was going to stop the apostles from doing God’s work. They were spiritually motivated by *“the new life”* that they had been given. They boldly declared, *“We must obey God rather than human beings!”* They weren’t thinking of their comfort or safety, but were filled with courage and joy from the new life that God had given them through Jesus Christ.

*What challenges can your new life help you persevere through?*

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## Day 7: Get Ready to Serve

*Read Acts 6 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Conflict Within.** Just as the apostles overcame persecution, they returned to find conflict between fellow disciples. Every group must deal with conflict, whether at church, in the workplace, at home, or even on a service team. We shouldn’t be surprised when we find ourselves in the midst of conflict in the church. The leaders wanted to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word, but they needed help!

*What conflicts you are facing right now? How are you dealing with them?*

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**Location and Date: Acts 6-9**

*AD 35-38: Caligula was appointed Roman Emperor; Pontius Pilate died; and, Saul witnessed the stoning of Stephen, organized extensive persecution, and headed to Damascus where he met a surprise visitor...*

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**Spiritual Servants.** The disciples found seven men *“full of faith and the Holy Spirit”* and prayed over them. The disciples relied on God in prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit to take care of their ministry. The results? *“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (6).*

*Do you consider yourself ready to serve – “full of faith and the Holy Spirit”? How can you get more ready?*

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**Ready for Persecution.** Luke introduced Stephen as a man *“full of God’s grace and power.”* What a great way to be introduced! He was doing God’s will when opposition arose. When members of the Synagogue began to dispute with him, Stephen relied on the Spirit who gave him the words to speak. Opposition continued as people lied about him (12-14).

*Even when we are doing work for God we will face opposition, possibly from “religious” people. How can we stand firm during these times?*

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## Day 8: Somebody's Watching

*Read Acts 7 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Resistance.** The Sanhedrin confronted Stephen. In response, Stephen bravely challenged the Sanhedrin, reciting the Old Testament storyline culminating with God delivering the promised Messiah. He explained the Jewish history, showing all the ways that God moved through Israel's history, and yet how time after time the Jews resisted God! Stephen knew the Word of God – he applied the Old Testament to his life and theirs.

*What can you do to improve your knowledge of the Word of God to be able to refute or respond when confronted or persecuted?*

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**You Better Check Yourself.** Before we get self-righteous about the Jews' reaction, let's reflect on our own hearts. Jesus called his disciples to 100% commitment to God's will all the time, in every circumstance, and no matter what the cost. When we compromise our commitment, give half-heartedly, or ignore the call to discipleship, we resist the Spirit's call.

*How do you find yourself resisting the Holy Spirit?*

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**Fighting Back.** Stephen boldly addressed the religious leaders, proving to them from Scripture that following God was not about "keeping the Law" or following the rules, but rather loving God, listening to His Spirit, and obeying Him out of a humble love! Stephen stirred the hearts of the people, but they continued to be hardened and filled with rage. He finished his message with a strong rebuke of the Jews:

*"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it." (51-53)*

Stephen challenged the hearts of these men, confronting them rather than shrinking back.

*How do you react when your faith is attacked?*

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**Somebody's Watching.** As the emotions climaxed, they decided to stone Stephen. Stephen trusted God, accepting their wrath, and even forgiving the persecutors saying, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (60). As all of this happened, Saul was watching.

*Who is watching you and seeing your faith? List some people who are watching...*

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## **Day 9: Becoming Missionaries**

*Read Acts 8 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

*Saul just went wild, devastating the church, entering house after house after house, dragging men and women off to jail. Forced to leave home base, the followers of Jesus all became missionaries. Wherever they were scattered, they preached the Message about Jesus. (Acts 8:3-5, MSG)*

**Missionaries.** After Stephen's stoning, the persecution heated up. Saul took the lead, believing God called him to destroy the Jesus movement. God scattered the apostles throughout Judea and Samaria, turning them into the first Christian "missionaries."

*Why do you think it took the apostles so long to leave Jerusalem and begin to reach "all nations"?*

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**Heart Check.** Crowds gathered, anticipating amazing miracles from the apostles. Phillip met Simon the Sorcerer, a local con artist who used "magic" to win people over. After Phillip converted Simon, Simon wanted to possess the same power the apostles had – to pass on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to their followers. He even offered the apostles money for that power! Simon needed a heart check. It is not clear from the story if Simon's repentance was genuine, but we can relate with his struggles. At one time or another, we have all been guilty of desiring attention, being selfishly ambitious, or seeking recognition.

*What are some areas that we might have ulterior motives in? How can we check our hearts to make sure we are right before God? What are some specific areas you can expose to defeat Satan's attack?*

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Let's face the fact that we are not objective when we try to evaluate our own motives. We all need people in our lives to point out things in our own hearts that we can't see.

*Do you have people that are close to you that can help you in this way? Yes / No (circle one)*

*What immediate steps can you take to improve in this area?*

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**A True Seeker.** The Holy Spirit led Phillip to an Ethiopian man who was reading the Scriptures without understanding. Phillip revealed the meaning, the good news that Jesus fulfilled the prophet Isaiah's words! The Ethiopian saw what he needed to do and was baptized immediately! Just like that, the Spirit took Phillip away and this man was left on his own to be a disciple. How Crazy!

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*If you have been baptized, how fresh and powerful is the gospel in your life?*

*If you have not been baptized, why do you think the Ethiopian man was so urgent? What do these prophecies explain to you about Jesus? How would you answer the question, “**What can stand in the way of my being baptized?**”*

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## **Day 10: The Miracle of a Changed Life**

*Read Acts 9 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Does God have Your Attention?** In Acts 9, Luke illustrated Saul’s pre-Christian life – his passion, radical persecution, and (misguided) zeal for God. God needed to redirect Saul to reveal that he was actually fighting against God. God knocked him down and blinded him to get his attention.

*Why did God need to blind Saul to get his attention?*

*How can we be like Saul, needing to redirect our attention?*

### **Location and Date: Acts 9**

*AD 35: After Saul’s conversion, he spent 3 years in Arabia (9:23, Gal 1:17), 2 weeks in Jerusalem with the apostles (9:26-29, Gal 1:18-19), and several years in his home town, Tarsus (9:30).*

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**The Return of Christ?** Stop for a second and consider this: Jesus himself came back to earth for the sole purpose of leading Saul to the truth. God selected Saul to do amazing things for Him and for His church, despite obvious weaknesses in his character. The disciples were terrified to see Saul, the anti-Christian terrorist from Syria. God had to convince them that Saul was a chosen instrument and only then did Ananias have the courage to preach to him. Saul’s conversion story may be the most radical in the Book of Acts, but we must remember that every conversion is a miracle.

*What were you like before your conversion? What are some of the miracles God did to save you?*

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**No Hesitation.** Saul “*at once*” began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God! His total transformation shocked everyone, especially the disciples! The Jews were so shocked that they plotted to kill him! But nothing stopped Saul. His righteous fear of God and the Holy Spirit worked through him powerfully. It was at this time that Saul returned to his hometown, Tarsus. From other Scripture references, scholars conclude that Saul spent three years in Arabia from 35-38 AD (Acts 9:23, Gal 1:17) followed by five years in Tarsus (Southern Turkey) from AD 38-43. “*Then the church enjoyed a time of peace.*”

*What causes you to hesitate in living out your faith?*

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**All Types of Miracles.** Luke's storyline then returned to Peter. He entered Lydda, healing Aeneas so that the whole (small) town "turned to the Lord." Tabitha, a sister from the church in Joppa, was known for "doing good and serving the poor." Suddenly, she fell ill and died. The disciples pleaded for Peter to come and Peter miraculously healed her. The result? Many in Joppa converted to Christianity.

**History is His Story.** Sometimes we expect physical miracles. The most powerful miracles may actually be spiritual. God receives glory when the Persecutor becomes the Proclaimer (Saul), when God uses disciples to heal (Aeneas), and when God performs a miracle in the life of a disciple known for her good deeds (Tabitha). The goal is always for God to receive the glory. God is the hero in every Biblical story. History is His story.

*Pray for physical and spiritual miracles to reveal Jesus to the people around you.*

## Day 11: A Gospel for All

*Read Acts 10 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Preconceptions.** The Lord appeared to Cornelius, commending him for his good work towards the poor! Contrary to what Cornelius might have considered, God told him to send to Joppa for an uneducated Jewish fisherman to reveal God's will to him. Meanwhile, the Lord appeared to Peter to convince Peter that he must overcome his prejudice toward non-Jews (Gentiles) and enter the home of Cornelius. The unlikely encounter of a Galilean fisherman with a Roman Centurion became one of the pivotal events in history. For the first time in the history of the Jews, God clearly and definitively opened the door for Gentile conversions.

Preconceptions can be the most effective obstacle Satan uses to prevent us from understanding God's will in our lives. We may view the church as an organization rather than a community and fail to invest in relationships with God's children. We may confine our role in God's mission to evangelistic outreach and miss the call to be Jesus' hands, feet, ears, mouth, and heart in our relationships with all His people, including the poor. Like the apostles, we may wait for God to scatter us rather than taking Jesus at His words when He called us to "go and make disciples." We may prejudge people that we know and fail to build a relationship that enables us to share God's love with them.

*How do you see your preconceptions limiting your view of how God can use you to change the world?*

### Location and Date: Acts 10-11

*AD 40-41: In the Judean town of Caesarea, the Holy Spirit ushered the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God and Peter traveled to Jerusalem to explain this to the Jewish disciples.*

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**God Loves Gentiles, Too.** Peter entered Cornelius' house and began to realize the overwhelming implication: God's plan not only offered salvation to the Jews, but God also called the Gentiles to enter the Kingdom of God: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." This amazing realization frightened Peter, but he quickly overcame his prejudice and preached the same gospel message to Cornelius that he preached to the Jews.

For those of us who come from a non-Jewish (Gentile) background, it is difficult to imagine how hard this was for Peter and the rest of the Jewish disciples. Let's flip the equation and imagine if God were to tell you right now that you need to meet with a non-believer who was going to tell you the truth about Jesus. How would you react? In reality, our preconceptions limit our ability to learn, even from others of a Christian background. Anchored by the Scriptures, trusting in God, and praying in the Spirit, we should be able to learn from anyone.

*How does that challenge your heart?*

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## **Day 12: The Mission Expands**

*Read Acts 11 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**People Wondered.** God miraculously appeared to Peter to help him overcome his prejudice. Now Peter had to share his experience with the other disciples throughout Judea. Would they believe that Gentiles could now receive the Word of God?

Peter relayed to the Jews the Gentile conversion story of Cornelius – how God communicated to both Cornelius and Peter through dreams, how the Holy Spirit “came on” all those who heard the message just like the 120 disciples at Pentecost, and how Cornelius accepted the message and was baptized. The conclusion: God’s plan was for the Gentiles to be saved as well.

*How can we be guilty of doubting that God’s Word is for everyone?*

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**“Come On.”** The Holy Spirit “came on” all who heard His message and they were baptized in the name of Jesus! Don’t be confused. This phrase the Holy Spirit “came on” them is not the same as conversion. It indicates an external movement of God, through the Holy Spirit, on people. Consider these verses:

- *Numbers 24:2 When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came on him...*
- *Judges 3:10 The Spirit of the Lord came on (Othniel), so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war.*
- *Judges 6:34 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon...*
- *Judges 11:29 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah...*
- *1 Samuel 16:23 Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.*
- *1 Chronicles 12:18 Then the Spirit came on Amasai, chief of the Thirty, and he said: “We are yours, David!”*
- *2 Chronicles 15:1 The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded.*
- *2 Chronicles 20:14 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah...*
- *2 Chronicles 24:20 Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest.*
- *Ezekiel 11:5 The Spirit of the Lord came on me, and he told me to say: “This is what the Lord says...”*
- *Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.*
- *Acts 11:15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.*
- *Acts 19:6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.*

*What is the difference between when the Holy Spirit “came on” people vs. receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit which then lives inside us? (Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:26-4:7, 1 Cor. 12:13, Romans 8:11)*

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**Mission: Antioch.** The persecution scattered the disciples so the gospel reached the Samaritans and the Gentiles. The Gentile church was growing and the church in Jerusalem became curious, so they sent Barnabas to check out what was happening among the Gentiles in Antioch. Barnabas witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit: the grace of God changed lives and more and more people were brought to the Lord.

Antioch became the center of missionary operations under the leadership of Saul and Barnabas. Critics disparaged the disciples by calling them “Christians,” which most scholars believe was a derogatory term! Miracles happened in Jesus’s name through the Holy Spirit, including Agabus predicting the famine in Judea. Barnabas and Saul took supplies to Judea to help alleviate the impact of the coming famine (11:30).

*Can you recall a time when you experienced God working powerfully in your life and the lives of people around you? Share with someone else about it today and encourage their faith.*

**Location and Date: Acts 11**

*AD 42-43: The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to visit the predominately Gentile Antioch Church. Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to get Saul. Disciples were starting to be called “Christians.”*

## **Day 13: Out of Jail Free**

*Read Acts 12 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Answered Prayer.** King Herod persecuted the Christians – arresting them, killing them, and opposing them at every opportunity. Herod arrested Peter during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. But the church prayed for him. God answered their prayer by sending an angel to break Peter out of jail. However, when Peter knocked on the door of the house where the disciples were praying, no one believed that God actually answered the prayer, so they left Peter outside while they argued that it could not be him! They underestimated the power of God in their prayers.

*Are you bold in prayer? Do you believe that God will answer your prayers? What restrictions do you believe God puts on your prayers?*

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**Location and Date: Acts 12**

*AD 44: Herod Agrippa (king AD 37-44) initiated a persecution – killing James (one of the 12) and arresting Peter. God persecuted Herod, who was struck down and eaten by worms.*

**God Opposes the Opposition.** Embarrassed by Peter’s miraculous escape from prison, Herod killed the guards. Herod held a ceremony, where men loved his speech and his royal presence, proclaiming him a god. God didn’t appreciate that Herod accepted praise as a deity, so God struck him down and he was eaten by worms. With Herod out of the way, the disciples continued spreading the Word of God.

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*Is there any obstacle that you need God to overcome for you so that you can live effectively as a disciple?*

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**Hammer Time.** Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem (11:30,12:25), this time bringing with them John Mark. Mark (“Hammer” in Greek), also the author of the Gospel of Mark, was very young, perhaps only a teen at this time. He was Barnabas’ cousin (Col 4:10) and later accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (13:5).

*If you are a teen, like John Mark, do you see yourself as a missionary in your school? If you are not a teen, take the time this week to encourage a teen disciple for their courage to follow Jesus at such a young age.*

## Day 14: Sent By The Spirit

*Read Acts 13 and consider these devotional thoughts*

**Tracking the Holy Spirit.** Luke attributed the spread of the gospel to the Holy Spirit, mentioning the Holy Spirit 42 times in Acts. That includes the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1 (4 references), the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 (4 references), the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the Samaritans into the church in Acts 8 (4 references), the Holy Spirit coming on the Gentiles in Acts 10-11 (7 references), and the sending of the first missionaries in Chapter 13 (4 references).

**Location and Date: Acts 13:4 – 14:28**

***AD 46-48: 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey***

*The church in Antioch (Syria) sent Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus (a Mediterranean island), Perga (the southern coast of Turkey), Pisidian Antioch, Iconum, Lystra, and Derbe (interior of Turkey), then back to Syria.*

*What role do you see the Holy Spirit playing in your life?*

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**1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey.** The church in Antioch had strong leadership that included prophets and teachers. The Holy Spirit called out Barnabas and Saul for a mission, so the leaders placed their hands on them and sent them off with prayer and fasting. John Mark accompanied them as a “helper.”

**Saul Becomes Paul.** In Cyprus, they encountered Bar-Jesus, a Jewish sorcerer also called “Elymas.” When Elymas opposed them, Saul rebuked and blinded him, saying through the Holy Spirit, “*You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything right!*” Not only did this help bring the proconsul to faith, but also from that time on Saul (meaning “asked for from God”) began to be called by his Roman name, Paul (meaning “humble”). Could it be that people began to recognize Paul’s courage and effectiveness? From this point on in the Book of Acts, Luke no longer refers to the preachers as Barnabas and Saul, but rather as Paul and Barnabas.

*Describe a time in your faith when you stepped out in courage:*

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**Paul's Letters: Galatians**

**Written AD 51-52 from Corinth or  
AD 48-49 or 53 from Syrian Antioch**

*One of Paul's earliest letters was written to address the "jealous Jews" known as Judaizers for trying to convert the Christians back to Judaism. Paul cared for this young church and rebuked this false teaching.*

**Into Asia.** Paul and Barnabas travelled to the interior cities in Asia Minor (Phrygia and Galatia, modern day Turkey). They established a new pattern – they preached first to the synagogues as they brought the Word of God to a new city. The leaders of the synagogue opened the door and asked them to speak. Without hesitation, Paul tied the Old Testament story to the gospel, explaining how Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled prophecy. The Jews loved the message and invited them to come back and speak the next Sabbath day. With nearly the whole city gathered, the Jews became jealous and argued with Paul and Barnabas. Another pattern was established: the Jews incited persecution, while many Gentiles believed the message.

*Review Paul's sermon in Acts 14. What books did he quote from? Could you share the gospel starting with the Old Testament and describe how God fulfilled his promise of delivering salvation through his Messiah?*

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## **Day 15: Ups and Downs**

*Read Acts 14 and consider these devotional thoughts*

**Accolades and Adversity.** Paul and Barnabas continued the first missionary journey, traveling to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Following their pattern, they preached in the Iconium synagogue, where many Jews and Greeks came to faith in Jesus. Once again, Jews stirred up trouble, plotting to stone them.

*Are you surprised when there is an attack on our mission? How could you handle adversity better?*

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**Gods or Heretics.** When Paul and Barnabas entered Lystra, they immediately healed a lame man. In utter amazement, the crowds worshipped Barnabas as the Greek God Zeus and Paul as Hermes (Chief Speaker), offering sacrifices to them. Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes, rebuked the idol worship, and preached the gospel! When Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium caught up with Paul and Barnabas, they turned the crowd against them, stoning Paul and leaving him outside the city, thinking he was dead. Could this be the time Paul was called up into the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2)? Paul bravely returned to the city. His quick recovery may have been a miracle.

*How easily do we let our emotions follow the crowds' reaction to us (when people like us, when our circumstances are favorable, we are happy; when people reject us and things turn bad, we get depressed)? How do you think Paul was able to cope with the ups and downs of the ministry?*

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Ever wonder how Paul and Barnabas were able to plant churches in new cities so quickly? Over a period of weeks, they preached, drew persecution, and fled. Later they returned to *“strengthen and encourage the disciples to remain true to the faith.”* During this second visit to the city, they appointed elders (recent converts?) in each young church. They obviously faced very challenging situations Paul relayed with the words: *“we must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”* By the time they returned to Antioch in Syria, they had much to share with the disciples about all that God accomplished through them on that first missionary journey! The only possible conclusion we can come to is that the Holy Spirit worked powerfully!

*Take some time today to encourage another disciple with some ways that the Holy Spirit is working in you.*

## **Day 16: Challenges to Unity**

*Read Acts 15 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Humility to Communicate.** Paul and Barnabas encountered some people in Antioch teaching the believers that *“unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved.”* This led to sharp disputes and debate that threatened the unity of the believers. Rather than trying to deal with it on their own, the church leaders sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to humbly communicate with the apostles on the issue. Just 17 years into this young movement’s existence, the greatest conflict of the century threatened to divide the church.

*The last time you found yourself in conflict with other disciples, how did you handle it? How could you have improved communication?*

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**The Power of the Ear.** In Jerusalem, Peter shared his testimony from Cornelius’ conversion. Peter argued, *“why do you try to test God by putting on the neck of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?”* Basically, Peter contended that the law was too heavy a burden even for the Jews to handle, and there was no reason to expect Gentile believers to obey the entire Jewish law. As Paul and Barnabas shared the wonders that God performed among the Gentiles, the assembly listened attentively. It is easy to underestimate the power of listening. As one preacher noted, *“God gave us two ears and only one mouth.”* Active, empathetic, and humble listening may be the greatest weapon disciples have to combat disunity and to build God’s Kingdom in complete harmony.

*How could you improve your listening skills? Who can you spend time listening to today?*

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**Compromise.** James, Jesus’ brother and prominent Jerusalem church leader, developed a way forward. He proposed several important compromises to unify the Jews and the Gentiles. While they did not impose circumcision on the disciples, the leaders encouraged them to abstain from several Gentile weaknesses that repulsed the Jews – eating food polluted by idolatry, eating blood of strangled animals, and abstaining from sexual immorality. These decisions were captured in a letter to communicate consistently to the churches. The leaders selected Judas Barsabbas and Silas to personally deliver the letter. By avoiding a legalistic approach to the Scriptures, they ensured unity based on communication and compromise. As James said, *“we should not make it difficult for Gentiles who are trying to turn to God” (19).*

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*How flexible are you in accepting other people and working with them, despite things in their life that you disagree with?*

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After an inspiring chapter on unity – through communication, listening, and compromise – Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over Barnabas’ cousin, Mark. They agreed to go in different directions, though it appears they worked out any lingering issues and remained unified (1 Cor. 9:6; 2 Tim 4:11). Barnabas and Mark returned to Cyprus to encourage those disciples while Paul and Silas ventured out on the second missionary journey through Galatia and into Europe.

**Location and Date: Acts 15:39-18:22**

***AD 49-52: 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey***

***Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled to Phrygia and Galatia (Turkey); then to Macedonia (Greece) including Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth; through Ephesus (Asia Minor or Western Turkey); and back to Syria.***

*Is there anyone you need to work out a conflict with? How can you do that ASAP?*

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**Paul’s Letters: 1-2 Timothy, Titus**

**Written AD 63-65 from Macedonia**

**2 Timothy: AD 67/68 from Rome**

*Paul’s endearing instructions to the younger ministers contain some of the most specific instructions for running a church. 2 Timothy contains Paul’s final instructions as he “finished the race.”*

## **Day 17: Opportunity Knocks**

*Read Acts 16 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Timothy the Teenager.** Paul took the inland route through his hometown (Tarsus) back to the disciples in Derbe, where he found a teenager named Timothy. Paul must have been impressed by his faith as he called Timothy to leave his family and travel with him on this second missionary journey. Timothy took the opportunity, even though Paul requested that he be circumcised!

*Why do you think God used so many teenagers of faith in the Bible? What do you notice about Timothy’s willingness to go where God called him to go?*

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**The Gospel Reaches Europe.** This second missionary journey turned out to be much longer than the first. Paul now traveled with “his companions” (at least Silas and Timothy) through Phrygia and Galatia (Turkey) but the Holy Spirit somehow stopped them from going further into Asia (Western Turkey). Instead, Paul received a vision to “*come to Macedonia and help.*” Paul travelled through the area now called Istanbul and Troas, located 10 miles from the ancient city of Troy. From Troas, Paul sailed to Macedonia (Greece) and landed in Philippi, marking the first entry of the missionaries into Europe. From the letter to the Philippians, it is clear that this was one of the most bonding church plantings Paul experienced.

*Have you ever been frustrated when God closed an opportunity that you thought would have been good? Looking back, can you see how God used it? What does this tell you about trusting God in the future?*

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**Paul's Letters: Philippians & Colossians**

**Written AD 60/61 from Rome**

*Paul's "letter of joy" (Philippians) described the love and encouragement he shared with the disciples in Philippi.*

*Colossians addressed humanistic teaching and provided extensive instruction for living the Christian life.*

**Turn of Events.** Their visit started out peaceful enough, meeting an aspiring businesswoman named Lydia who persuaded Paul to convert her! But when they went to pray, they met a slave woman possessed by an evil spirit, whose owners used her powers to gain money. When Paul confronted the evil spirit, the owners realized they lost their source of income and had Paul and Silas flogged and thrown into prison! In the midst of these horrific circumstances, Paul and Silas sang hymns through the hours of the night in a dark and damp prison. God must have heard them, because he sent an earthquake that freed them! The jailer, fearing that the prisoners escaped, almost took his life; but instead listened to Paul who preached the gospel to him and helped him to be saved!

*How do you react when circumstances turn on you? Do you trust that God will work things out?*

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**Paul's Letters: 1-2 Thessalonians**

**Written AD 51/52 from Corinth**

*Paul wrote this newly-formed church at the end of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey. He described the amazing depth of his relationships after only three weeks in the city. Paul praised their maturity and perseverance while instructing them on the return of Christ.*

**Day 18: Evangelizing Greece**

*Read Acts 17 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Upside Down.** Paul and his companions traveled until they found a city with a Jewish synagogue – Thessalonica. In three short weeks, Paul preached boldly in the synagogue and converted many Jews and Gentiles, starting the beloved church in Thessalonica who would receive two letters from Paul. True to the pattern found in this part of Acts, jealous Jews protested, saying, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (17:6, RSV).

*What type of reaction should we expect when we are asking people to turn their world upside down to follow Jesus? Are you surprised that more people don't react that way to disciples today?*

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**Noble Bereans.** Driven from Thessalonica, Paul and Silas escaped to the neighboring town of Berea. Guess what they did? They preached in the synagogue, commending the Bereans for their noble character because they listened to Paul, examined the Scriptures, and didn't try to kill him! Jealous Jews eventually followed them into Berea. The believers helped Paul escape to Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind with the Bereans.

*We love to challenge people to be "noble Bereans" and study the scriptures for themselves. How is that going for you? Would you consider yourself noble? What can you do to be more noble?*

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**Knowing the Unknown.** Left alone in the intellectual capital of the civilized world (Athens), Paul ventured up to the Acropolis, where the city council (Aeropagus) met. Paul engaged some of the leading minds of his day in a religious discussion to turn them from blindly worshipping an unknown God to worship the knowable God who revealed himself through Jesus. Demonstrating a willingness to speak their language on their terms, he quoted their writings rather than the Old Testament, persuading them to seek a God who *"arranges the times and places we live so that we can seek him and find him."* Dionysius, a member of the ruling Council, and many other people became disciples.

*How would you share your faith with people unfamiliar with the Bible? What characteristics of God do you think would be most appealing to them and help them understand God's gift in Jesus?*

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## Day 19: Real Life Struggles

Read Acts **18** and consider these devotional thoughts:

**From Wisdom to Pleasure.** Athens and Corinth couldn't be two more extreme opposites. The Athenians worshipped Athena, the goddess of wisdom, seeking to build an enlightened, educated Greek culture to civilize the entire world. Corinth was a sailor town where men slept with prostitutes before worshipping Aphrodite, the goddess of pleasure.

*How do you see your culture in comparison to Athens and Corinth? What gods do people worship in your city? How hard is it for you to keep your heart from being drawn to these idols?*

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**Location and Date: Acts 18:23 – 21:17**

***AD 53-57: 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey***

***Paul and his companions traveled to Phrygia, Galatia, and Ephesus (Asia or Turkey); then to Macedonia (Greece) including Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth; then back through Miletus (Southern Turkey) and Phoenicia, landing in Jerusalem.***

**Working Evangelist.** Paul earned his living making tents in Corinth along with Priscilla and Aquila. Rarely do we think of evangelists like Paul being self-supporting. Paul prided himself in not requiring financial support from the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:1-14) even though he deserved it!

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Do you believe there should be a difference between the commitment of full-time staff and unpaid disciples? Does your life reflect that belief?

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**Paul's Letters: 1-2 Corinthians**

**Written AD 55 from Ephesus/Greece**

*Paul addressed various specific problems in 1 Cor including answering many of their questions. Paul encouraged them in 2 Cor to accept his apostleship and reject false teachers.*

**Unlikely Converts.** While facing many rejections in this pagan city, God encouraged Paul: *“Do not be afraid, keep on speaking; do not be silent... for I have many people in this city” (9-10)*. Paul preached for a year and a half in Corinth, seeing the synagogue leader, Crispus, and many others turn to God. Eventually, the Jews persuaded the local authorities to judge Paul, but the uprising disintegrated when the Jews turned on their own synagogue leader. That synagogue leader, Sosthenes, may be the same Sosthenes who helped Paul later pen the letter to the church in Corinth (1 Cor 1:1)!

As Paul started his third missionary journey (AD 53-57) traveling through Phrygia and Galatia (central Turkey), Aquila and Priscila met a dynamic evangelist named Apollos in Ephesus. Apollos preached powerfully about Jesus, but his message was incomplete as he must have studied under John the Baptist and not known of Jesus' baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Priscila and Aquila *“explained to him the way of God more adequately” (26)*.

*Tentmakers traveling through Corinth and Ephesus faced temptations, fear, persecution, and even false teachings. How do you relate to their real-life struggles?*

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**Paul's Letters: Ephesians**

**Written AD 60 from Rome**

*Paul described the glory of the church using the example and struggles of the Ephesians to illustrate the unity of the Jews and the Gentiles. Read Jesus' letter to the Ephesians (Revelation 2) to understand their later struggles.*

**Day 20: The Glorious Church**

*Read Acts 19 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Holy Spirit.** Paul made his way through Asia (Western Turkey) to the leading city of Ephesus. There he met more disciples who, like Apollos, had an incomplete understanding of Jesus Baptism and the role of the Holy Spirit. Paul baptized them and placed his hands on them, passing the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit on them, including speaking in tongues (languages).

*How can you be more effective in helping people who have a genuine love for God, but have an incomplete understanding of His plan of salvation?*

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**The Greatest Gift.** Remember from Acts 11 (Day 12) that the Holy Spirit “came on” many people in the Old and New Testaments. This external work of the Holy Spirit demonstrated God’s work in their lives. Did you know that speaking in tongues (also translated as “languages”) is only mentioned in two books of the New Testament, Acts and 1 Corinthians? Many people over-emphasize this gift, which Paul corrected in 1 Corinthians by focusing the disciples on the greatest spiritual gift, love (1 Cor. 13). However, as disciples we also don’t want to be guilty of restricting the work of the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Holy Spirit was with the disciples in Acts in a parallel way to how Jesus was with the disciples in the Gospels. Paul frequently admonished the disciples to stay in step with the Spirit, to live by the Spirit, and to be filled with the Spirit.

*How can you be more complete in your understanding of the Spirit and “stay in step with the Spirit”?*

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**Miracles Abound.** Paul spent three years evangelizing the entire region of Asia through lectures at the local universities. This may have included many of the churches listed in Revelation 2-3 as the “seven churches of Asia.” Miracles were so common that even handkerchiefs that touched Paul were used to heal the sick and drive out evil spirits. When imposters tried to mimic Paul’s miracles, they were “*overpowered by the evil spirits and ran out of the house naked and bleeding*” (16). People repented of their idolatry, burning \$1M worth of scrolls and causing a significant downturn in the sale of metal idols. Demetrius the metalworker stirred up a riot to drive the disciples out of Ephesus (and improve idol-sales), claiming he was standing up for Artemis, goddess of the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the world!

*What are some “idols” in your home that you can destroy today?*

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## **Day 21: On Our Knees**

*Read Acts 20 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Falling in Troas.** Paul continued the third Missionary Journey, encouraging churches throughout Greece and returning to Troas, next to Troy. Although Luke condensed the sermons in the Book of Acts, Paul must have preached a long one in Troas. Poor Eutychus fell asleep as Paul’s lesson reached midnight, then fell from the third floor to the ground, and died. Paul resurrected the boy and finished talking until the morning. After an 8+ hour sermon the people were fired up and “comforted.”

*Have you ever complained about how long church goes? Why do you think these disciples had such a different attitude about worshipping together than we often do today? How can we be more like them?*

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**A Fond Farewell.** Paul loved the Ephesian elders. His message to them is worth reading out loud.

*Find a solitary spot to read out loud or read Acts 20:18-38 together with someone.*

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*What was the role of the Holy Spirit in Paul's description of his ministry?*

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*What moves you the most about his message?*

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*Close out today's quiet time on your knees. Pray through Paul's message and seek the Holy Spirit's help in gaining Paul's heart for God and for people.*

***Location and Date: Acts 21***  
*AD 57: Paul completed the 3<sup>rd</sup>*  
*Missionary Journey (AD 57)*  
*and headed to Jerusalem.*

## **Day 22: Unity Through Relationships**

*Read Acts 21 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Bonds Stronger than Death.** Luke described Paul's journey to Jerusalem with gripping words. After praying with the Ephesian elders in Miletus, they *"tore themselves away from them,"* reflecting the strength of their relationship. Paul and Luke prayed with the disciples in Syria (Tyre), greeted brothers in Ptolemais, and stayed in the home of Philip "the evangelist" in Caesarea. The Caesarean disciples heard the warning from the prophet Agabus and pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul's response of *"why are you weeping and breaking my heart"* further illustrates the depth of the relationships he built.

*How are spiritual relationships this deep formed so quickly?*

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**The Cost of Unity.** Paul shared with the disciples about all of the Gentiles God converted to Christ and, in turn, the disciples in Jerusalem shared about God's work among the Jews. To demonstrate his unity with the Jews, Paul purified himself, even though he didn't need to. Paul not only offered the purification sacrifice (eight pigeons and four lambs – Numbers 6:2-12) but also paid that expense for his companions. They shaved their heads and Paul made every concession he could to appease the Jews without compromising as a Christian, participating in a seven-day purification ceremony he didn't have to participate in.

*What types of sacrifices would be difficult for you to make to stay unified with disciples who have different opinions from you (i.e., opinion matters such as dress, dating, music, politics, etc.)?*

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**All that Sacrifice for Nothing.** On the seventh day of this purification, some Jews from Asia seized Paul in the Temple and falsely accused him, inciting a riot and beating Paul incessantly. Even though Paul had worked so hard to build unity with the Jews, the non-Christian Jews prevailed in assaulting him. Amidst the chaos, the Romans interceded to carry Paul out of the crowd, bound in chains. When Paul spoke in Greek to the commander, he was able to at least calm the crowd enough to preach a sermon.

*Are you willing to strive for unity for the sake of Christ even if it doesn't seem to work? What are your limits that you need to push through?*

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## **Day 23: God-Given Uniqueness**

*Read Acts 22 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Paul's Uniqueness.** After Paul cleared up the misconception that he was an Egyptian rebel, he had an amazing opportunity to address his accusers. Paul's unique background (trained as a Pharisee under Gamaliel) and his ability to speak multiple languages (Greek, Aramaic, etc.) enabled him to relate to people and to share the gospel.

Sometimes it feels like our uniqueness can make us weird or create hardships that estrange us from others; but God uses your special characteristics to prepare you for your mission.

*What unique talents, experiences, or abilities has God given you that help you relate to others?*

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**Paul's Story.** Paul took the opportunity to share his story. He related to the Jews as a Jew. He used storytelling to draw people in – as we know today, people are wired to listen to stories. Paul shared the details, the emotions, the surprise, and the enlightenment of his conversion.

*You have a story. Take some time and write down the details, the emotions, the surprises of your conversion, and what you learned through it all (do this separately from this quiet time packet so that you can easily reference it).*

**God's Rescue.** The Jewish crowd reacted with a furor to Paul's statement that he was called to preach to the Gentiles. He pricked them at their deepest prejudicial point – they hated the Gentiles. The commander ordered Paul to be taken out and flogged. This time, God spared him. How? By the uniqueness of his birth – he was born a Roman citizen, a rare gift to a native Jew! We never know how God will rescue us or how he will use our unique citizenship, language skills, or experiences.

*How has God uniquely rescued you and uniquely equipped you to serve?*

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## Day 24: Conscience, Confrontation, and Trouble

Read Acts 23 and consider these devotional thoughts:

**A Clear Conscience.** Paul stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin (ruling council of about 70 Jewish elders) and declared, *“I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”* A good conscience doesn’t make you innocent (1 Cor. 4:4), but striving to live by our conscience and then opening up about our struggles does keep us in fellowship with Jesus and the disciples (1 John 1:5-10).

***Location and Date: Acts 23 AD 57-59: Paul is transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where he will face two governors (Felix – Acts 24 and Festus – Acts 25) and the King (Herod Agrippa – Acts 26), before beginning his journey to Rome.***

*Is anything bothering your conscience? Pray and decide who you can share your struggles with today.*

**A Willingness to Confront.** Paul confronted the High Priest who ordered Paul struck. After apologizing for overstepping his bounds, Paul craftily engaged the two political divisions of the council (Sadducees and Pharisees) in a philosophical debate, taking the attention off of his case! The ensuing uproar escalated to the point the Romans had to intervene to take Paul away. The Lord stood by Paul’s side and comforted him with the reassurance that he will get his opportunity to testify in Rome.

*What makes it hard for you to confront sin when you see it? How can you grow in this?*

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**God Uses Trouble.** God encouraged Paul, *“As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”* Paul’s mission was clear – God called him to be His witness to the most prominent Jewish and Roman leaders. That must have been an inspiring moment, hearing the voice of God. But Paul was about to hear the voice of man and see the attack of the enemy. His nephew warned him about a plot to kill him, which enabled Paul to escape. God escorted Paul with a Roman guard, a letter to the Governor, and the protection of the Spirit.

*Have you ever had a time when you felt the mountaintop experience of hearing God’s voice or His will in your life? How long did it take you lose that clarity when you were attacked? Try to remember and record (i.e., in a journal) that clear will of God so that you can withstand Satan’s attacks and continue in His mission.*

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## Day 25: Cult Accusations

Read Acts 24 and consider these devotional thoughts:

**Troublemaker, Ringleader, Cult Figure.** The authorities assembled, governor and his legal team, to charge Paul. As happens in most public forums, the politicians spun their arguments to make Paul look extreme, using charged terms such as “troublemaker,” “ringleader,” and “seditious sect” (v.6, Msg). The world loves to destroy the reputation of the disciples, as they did to Jesus, who said, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18).* Jesus went so far as to say, *“Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you” (Luke 6:26).* Words such as “sect” or “cult” originally had neutral connotations, but over the years the

terms have become laden with negative overtones meant to disparage and discourage anyone who would choose to associate with that group.

*Have you ever been troubled that people slander true disciples? Have you been attacked with bizarre accusations? If not, does that concern you since Jesus promised persecution to His followers?*

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**Convenience Never Comes.** Paul stirred the governor's curiosity. Felix and his wife, Drusilla, spent some time listening to Paul. Paul refused to water down the message, discoursing on "*righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come*" (25). Fear gripped Felix and he sent Paul away saying, "*when I find it convenient, I will send for you.*" The convenient time never came for Felix to change... two years later a new governor took over.

*This is a great scripture to share with any friends who put off a decision to change. How can we apply this to ourselves when we hear God's Word challenging us to change but we decide to work on the issue later?*

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## **Day 26: True and Reasonable**

*Read Acts 25-26 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**God's Providence.** The new governor, Festus, listened to the charges from the Jews and held court to hear Paul's defense. Though the Jews plotted to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem and murder him on the way, Paul appealed to Caesar. Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar, meaning to escalate from a lower court to a higher court all the way to Rome. Paul's unique status as a Roman citizen afforded him many protections that God used to keep Paul out of danger. God promised that Paul would testify in Rome, and God kept His promise!

*In the midst of these accusations, how did God's providence protect Paul? What do you believe about God's providence in your life?*

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**Get Agrippa.** As soon as King Herod Agrippa came into town (Caesarea), Festus briefed him on Paul's situation. Agrippa welcomed the opportunity to interview Paul (not knowing what he was asking) and asked Paul to defend himself. Paul used the opportunity to share his conversion from Judaism (Luke tells Paul's conversion story in Acts 9, 22, and 26).

*What do you learn from how Paul shared his conversion story (26:4-23)?*

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**Appeal to Reason.** Paul reached the end of his story and defended himself saying, “*What I am saying is true and reasonable*” (25). Paul demonstrated his ability to put forth a logical argument about his faith that stood up to the scrutiny of the great minds of his day (and even now after 2,000 years!). Peter challenged all disciples to have the same ability in 1 Peter 3:15-16:

*“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

*In what areas do you need to get questions answered so that you feel confident to explain what you believe in a logical manner?*

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## **Day 27: All Roads Led to Rome**

*Read Acts 27 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Pax Romana.** The "Roman Peace," a miraculous extended time of peace from about 30 BC through about the third century, enabled the rapid spread of the gospel across the Roman Empire. Consider the timing of Jesus' coming – a common language (Greek), a single Empire allowing unfettered travel to Roman citizens, improved roads (most built from Rome to other cities), and relative safety under the Roman rule.

### **Location and Date: Acts 27-28**

*AD 59: Paul the prisoner set sail from Caesarea to Rome at an inopportune time, leading to a lengthy, troubled journey that includes despair at sea and a shipwreck on Malta. He finally landed in Italy almost a year later. Travel in Paul's day included many dangers and perils!*

*How does God's providence in Rome inspire you that God may be creating a similar Pax America today?*

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**From Danger to Disaster.** Paul warned the crew that the voyage would be “*disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also*” (10). These adventures happened after Paul wrote about similar perils in 2 Corinthians 6:23-28 (written in AD 55).

*“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”*

*What strikes you the most about Paul's description of his challenges? How does it help you have perspective about living out your faith today?*

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**Told You So.** As things became more and more desperate, Paul (the prisoner) exerted more leadership, saying to the entire crew, *"you should have taken my advice."* God sent an angel to reinforce Paul's confidence, repeating God's reassurance: *"Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you"* (24). God likes to remind us, just as He reminded Paul many times that He has called us and that we can trust Him:

*9:15-16 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man [Paul] is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

*18:9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."*

*23:11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

*Why does God keep repeating himself to Paul? How do you find that reassuring in your own life?*

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**No One Lost.** The ship carried 276 passengers, but just as God promised, not a single person was lost as *"everyone reached land safely"* (44). Despite the dangers, the stubbornness of the (non-Christian) crew, and even the unwillingness to listen to God's warnings, God accomplished His plan in His time. In this case, *All Roads Led to Rome*, because God decided that no matter what direction the ship took, he would guide it to where he wanted it to be.

*How does that reassure you that God can bring about His plan in His time in your life?*

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## **Day 28: The Never-Ending Story**

*Read Acts 28 and consider these devotional thoughts:*

**Nothings Can Stop Paul.** It was now 60 AD. Paul and the 276 passengers abandoned ship during the wreck and washed up on an island called Malta. Finally, they lit a fire and sat down to eat. Then a poisonous viper bit Paul and he died!

Okay, Paul didn't die. But he should have. Vipers are poisonous. God carried Paul thus far, and as Paul, drawing from his experiences and trust in God, would later write in Philippians 1:6:

*"Confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

What does it take to get you to think, "things aren't going to work out"? How confident are you that God will complete His good work in you?

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**Paul's Letters: Romans**

**Written AD 57 from Corinth**

*Paul wrote this gospel treatise several years prior to visiting Rome. Considered one of the most comprehensive explanations of the Christian life, Romans serves as one of the richest sources of Christian doctrine.*

**Rome at Last.** God promised Paul an audience with Caesar and God persevered to complete that work! After a three-month detour in Malta (they could have saved a lot of trouble by listening to Paul and taking the three-month detour in Crete!), they sailed up the coast of Italy, landing at Puteoli so they could travel inland to Rome. Luke ended Acts on a triumphant note. God placed Paul in Rome so that, under house arrest, he "proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" God used Paul to bring His message to the world's most powerful city at the time selected by God to have the most impact.

Do you believe that God brought you to this city at this time to bring His message to the leaders and people? What are you going to do about it?

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**The story line in the Book of Acts continues through disciples in every century as God writes "His Story," the "history" of His church!**

**You and your fellow disciples of Jesus are the modern day heroes of this ongoing story!**

**Write out the next chapter of the Book of Acts: the story of our modern day church with you as a part of it!**

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