

The **ACTS**
OF THE APOSTLES

30 Day Devotional



SOUTHLAND CHURCH

The **ACTS**
OF THE APOSTLES

30 Day Devotional

foundations
daily devotional

DAY 1 **READ: Acts 1**

Luke begins the Book of Acts with a bit of review (v. 1-5). He refers to His former book (the Gospel of Luke) and then discusses Christ's post-resurrection appearances when Jesus spoke to the apostles. Luke emphasizes Christ's command to wait for the Holy Spirit's coming (v. 4-5). Jesus is promising that God will supply the church with all the resources it needs for fulfilling its missionary mandate. In verses 6-11, we get a preview of the book of Acts. Verse 8 clearly sets out what the church is to be doing until Jesus returns. Jesus tells His disciples of the resources, content and scope of their primary task. The essential resource is the Holy Spirit which will give them the supernatural ability to work miracles and preach effectively. This task is for the whole church! Jesus tells all believers to be His witness which means to speak from personal knowledge of the Lord. We see in the book of Acts that they followed His command to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Immediately after giving this command, Christ is taken up from the earth. The disciples are left standing in awe, looking upwards, when two angels gently rebuke them and promise that He will return in the same way (v. 11). As the disciples wait for the Holy Spirit, they gathered to pray together. Peter declares the necessity of finding a replacement for Judas (v. 20) since Judas had committed suicide (v. 18). Peter reminds the group of the requirements of this apostolic replacement (v. 21-22). The replacement had to be someone who had been with them from the time of Jesus baptism until His ascension. Two candidates were proposed (v. 23) and the apostles pray to fill the position. Notice how they left the decision up to God, just as the other disciples were chosen by God, Matthias was chosen by God.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Read over verse 8. The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve God and be His witnesses. Think about the areas of your life where you influence people. Some examples are family, work, school and church. In order to be effective for God's kingdom we need to ask for this empowering daily. All Christians have the Holy Spirit inside of them; this is a promised gift that we receive when we are saved. But this does not mean that every believer has the same measure of the Holy Spirit working in their lives. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to influence the people in these areas of your life for Christ.
2. The disciples allowed God to choose Matthias to replace Judas. This sets an example for all believers: we are to make decisions under God's guidance. Ask the Lord to show you a decision in your life that needs to be made. Then, spend some time listening in prayer, asking Him to show you the answer.
3. Prayer is vital if the Church is to fulfill God's mission. In Acts we see that the disciples were wholly dependent on prayer. Pray for the Canadian Church. Pray that God would teach us humility and show us that we need His guidance and empowering. Ask God to teach the Church how effective prayer is. Pray for pastors and leaders to grow in their personal prayer lives, that they might teach others how to pray.

DAY 2 **READ:** Acts 2

On the Day of Pentecost we find the disciples in prayer, awaiting the promised Holy Spirit. Suddenly, a wind came from Heaven filling the whole house. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the believers spoke in foreign languages. The blowing wind and the speaking in tongues attracted a crowd. Each person in this crowd heard the wonders of God in his or her own language (v. 11). What a great way to spread the gospel! The people were perplexed and wondered what this meant (v. 12). Peter addressed this as he gave his first of three speeches in the book of Acts. He quoted the prophet Joel (2:28-32), where God promised to pour out His Spirit on all people. In contrast to the selective and occasional outpouring of the Spirit on kings and prophets in the Old Testament, now the Spirit comes without regard to age, sex, social status or, as Acts indicates, ethnic origin. Peter then directed the crowd's attention to Christ's earthly ministry (v. 22). Peter argued that the resurrection was part of God's saving plan by introducing a quote from Psalm 16:8-11. Peter then moved from an argument to a proclamation – the Holy Spirit has been poured out (v. 33). He reminded his listeners that it is the Risen and Exalted Messiah who they had crucified (v. 36). As they had killed the Messiah, their only hope was salvation. They were cut to the heart (v. 37) and Peter invited them to turn from their sins and turn to Christ. He called them to be baptized (v. 38) and promised that they too could receive the Holy Spirit! Three thousand souls responded to his message and were baptized and added to the early church! Next we can see four things the early church did – learned together, cared for each other, fellowshiped with one another and worshipped together (v. 42). This resulted in the growth of the church (v. 47).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

- God created humans to be creatures of habit. Our fallen natures have twisted this, leading us to habitual sin. However, God's plan was for us to create good habits. One such habit is asking daily to be filled with His Holy Spirit. Ask God for this today. As you read through Acts allow the example of the early church to prompt you to pray for the Holy Spirit to move in your life. If you do this daily for the rest of the month you can form a godly habit!
- In verses 42-47 we see a picture of the early church. Ask the Lord to show you the importance of each one of these things in your walk with Him. Ask Him to show you something practical in each of the following areas:
 - God's Word
 - fellowship
 - prayer
 - taking care of each other's needs
- Pray for the Canadian Church. Ask God to fill us with a hunger for the Holy Spirit. Pray that God would correct our views of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a wishy-washy entity left for extreme charismatic groups, nor is He inactive today. Pray that believers in our country would see how ineffective we are without the Spirit's help. Pray that God would use Scripture to teach pastors about the Holy Spirit, that they might disciple their congregations in this area.

DAY 3 **READ:** Acts 3-4:4

As Peter and John went to the temple to worship and pray they encountered a man who had lost the use of his legs. This man had no way of earning income so he was forced to beg (v. 3). Peter responded that he didn't have any money, but what he did have was better than wealth! Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter gave the man the gift of health (v. 6). Immediately the man was healed and he not only walked but leaped, entering the temple with them, praising God. Many people saw and were amazed at what happened to him (v. 10). Peter took full advantage of the crowd that gathered as a result of the miracle and gave his second speech in the book of Acts. Notice how he gave all the credit to God for this miraculous healing (v. 16). He then urged the crowd to repent (v. 19) and turn from their sins so that a time of refreshing could come from the presence of God. Peter then described how Moses prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like himself whom the people would be responsible to hear and obey. If they didn't, they would forfeit their right to be part of the people of God (v. 23). Peter concluded by appealing to their Jewish heritage (v. 25). This sermon caused Peter and John to be arrested and put in jail (Acts 4:3), yet many who heard the message were saved. Once again we see the power of a transformed life, Peter's first sermon added 3,000 to the church (Acts 2:41) and his second sermon added 5,000 men (Acts 4:4)!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

- Peter didn't have money to give to the beggar. However, he offered what He did have – the Holy Spirit. Often we do not take risks because we feel we have nothing to offer. Ask God to show you where He wants you to take a risk. Ask Him to show you how He's prepared and equipped you to do this.
- God had a big purpose for the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar. He used it to set the stage for Peter's sermon, which would ultimately bring 5000 men to Christ. God could use Peter in this way because Peter gave all the credit to Jesus (v. 16). Ask the Lord to show you areas in your life where you have been taking credit for things that are from God. This could be material things like ministry successes, spiritual gifts, abilities or talents, accomplishments, etc. Repent of this and ask the Lord to give you greater insight into His work in your life. Pray that you would grow in humility and learn to give God the credit for everything in your life!
- Spend some time praying for your family today. Even as God gave Peter specific words to speak at the temple, He desires to give you specific ways to pray for each person in your family. Spend some time listening, then pray based on what God shows you.

DAY 4 **READ:** Acts 4:1-31

Acts 4 begins with the imprisonment of Peter and John (v. 1-2). They are brought before the high priest Annas and three other men of high priestly descent. These were some of the most powerful men in Israel. Yet Peter and John were not dismayed. Just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit showed them what to say (Luke 12:11-12). The Holy Spirit

empowered Peter to give another speech about Jesus (v. 8-12). We have now seen Peter giving a Spirit-inspired message three times in the book of Acts! There are two important background factors that allowed Peter to give this speech. First, He trusted wholeheartedly in Jesus. Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will defend us is conditional upon us entrusting ourselves to Him, as evidenced by our lack of worry (Luke 12:11, 1 Peter 2:21-24). Second, Peter and John were blameless (v. 21). If they had been found guilty of breaking the law, Peter's speech would have been disregarded. There is truly no law against bearing fruit in the name of Jesus (Galatians 6:23). After they are released from prison, Peter and John immediately share what happened with the other disciples (v. 23). Their testimony led the community of believers to worship Jesus (v. 24-31). The same principle is at work today: the purpose of our testimony is to lead people to worship Jesus.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. One reason why Peter's speech was so impactful was that the listeners recognized that he was uneducated (v. 13). God loves to use weak people to display His glory. When He does this nobody can deny that it is the Holy Spirit who is at work. Ask God how He wants to use your weakness for His glory.
2. Peter was able to receive the Holy Spirit's empowering because he did not defend himself. Peter believed that God's promises were true, so he waited for divine deliverance. While most Christians in North America have never been put on trial for our faith, we are still called to entrust ourselves to God. We must wait for Him to move in our defence. Ask yourself: Do I trust God with my reputation? With my job and financial stability? What would your life look like if you completely entrusted yourself to God?
3. Pray for the persecuted church. While it is difficult to obtain definitive numbers, we know that millions of Christians in dozens of countries are at risk because of their faith in Jesus. However, God is at work. The greatest revivals around the world are happening in these nations. Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide churches in creatively spreading the Gospel. Pray that God would reveal Himself more and more, resulting in increased trust in Him. Pray for provision of Bibles and other discipleship materials. Pray that believers imprisoned for their faith would experience deep inner peace and receive favour from prison officials. Pray for strength and provision for the families of imprisoned believers.

DAY 5

 **READ:** Acts 4:32-5:11

In Acts 4:32-5:11 we are given two pictures of life in the early church. First we are shown how the Body functioned overall. Acts 4:32-37 establishes a standard to which the Church should strive today. The early Church is not an unattainable model of perfection. Rather, they were imperfect people empowered by the Holy Spirit to love one another and expand God's kingdom on earth. We too are imperfect people who have access to the Holy Spirit. There is no reason why we cannot live similarly to the Church in the book of Acts. Acts 5:1-11 tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira. This provides a grave warning: even in the midst of a healthy, functioning Church, individuals are still tempted to sin. We cannot assume

that we will be saved merely because we associate with certain people or groups. We must strive for blamelessness. In order to do this we must allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts for hidden sin, leading us to repentance.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. How does Acts 4:32-35 describe the Church? In your journal, make a list of all of the noted characteristics and actions. How does this compare to the church today? Ask God which of these He would like you to grow in personally. Ask Him for one practical step you can take today to grow in this area.
2. Jesus does not expect perfection from us. Because of the Cross, He offers us forgiveness of sins. However, in order to receive forgiveness our hearts must desire to change. God's mercy is not an excuse to deliberately sin. Read Hebrews 10:19-29. Ask God to show you the condition of your heart. Do you genuinely desire to please Him by walking in holiness? Do you view the Cross as a "get out of jail free card" and use that as license to live however you want? Are you somewhere in the middle? Our greatest motivator to live righteously is knowing Jesus. Spend some time thanking Jesus for the gift of forgiveness. As you do this, pray for an increased desire to please Him with your life.
3. Many believers are bogged down by legalism. Mentioning the idea of living in holiness brings up the thought of weighty rules and demands. Pray that many in our region would experience freedom from the chains of legalism. Pray that God would reveal the truth about forgiveness and salvation. Ask God to teach them what it means to strive for blamelessness: it is not a task or a burden. Pray that God would reveal Himself to many in our region, leading them to intimacy with Him. Pray that, out of this deep intimacy, people would be motivated to please Him.

DAY 6

 **READ:** Acts 5:12-42

The second section in Acts 5 narrows the focus from the Church as a whole to the life of the apostles. The apostles were held in high regard by the community (v. 13). This is partly because of the miracles they performed in Jesus' name. We see here that people would even bring their sick loved ones into the streets in hopes that they might be touched by Peter's shadow and healed (v. 15). Crowds gathered seeking physical healing and freedom from demonic possession (v. 16). These miracles served to provide evidence of Jesus Christ (v. 14). After describing these miracles, Acts 5 tells us about the apostles' persecution. The religious leaders were jealous of the apostles, so the high priest and his associates arrested them (v. 17-18). But God was their ultimate judge. During the night He sent an angel to release the apostles, directing them to continue to preach the gospel (v. 19-20). Naturally, the high priest and his associates didn't like this, so they went to retrieve the apostles (v. 21-27). They ordered the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus. The apostles' response displayed stunning love and obedience for Jesus. All they said was, "We must obey God rather than men!" (v.29). God is sovereign. The apostles hadn't used clever words to defend themselves. Because of this trust, God used a Pharisee named Gamaliel to convince the religious leaders to let the apostles go (v. 33-40). This instance of persecution failed to

damper the apostles' zeal. They continued to preach Jesus daily, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name (v. 41-42)!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. God's ultimate goal is relationship. Look at your own life. Have the blessings you've received led you into deeper relationship with God or have they led you to reject God in favour of independence? Confess as necessary. Ask God to speak to you about His heart for blessing people.
2. The apostles REJOICED because they suffered for Jesus! Why do you think they rejoiced over suffering? Write down anything that comes to mind. Ask God to help you understand this truth. Pray that you would grow in your ability to rejoice in sufferings.
3. Pray for universities. They are known to discriminate against and condemn Christians, whether in a hidden, subtle way or overtly. Pray for boldness for Christian students, teachers and administrators. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower them to preach the Gospel. Pray that people hearing this message of Jesus would have soft, receptive hearts. Pray that Christians in universities would rejoice in suffering for Jesus' name.

DAY 7



READ: Acts 6

Acts 6 teaches us about conflict faced by the early church. First we are given an example of how the early church handled internal conflict (v. 1-7). A group of believers of Greek background complained because their widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food (v.1). The widows with Hebrew background were not being overlooked. This conflict revealed the delicate nature of this new, multicultural group. The Twelve had to respond in a way that reflected God's love and mercy, which is impartial to race, gender, age, etc. The Twelve did not point fingers or get involved with gossip or complaining. They merely acknowledged that this was a problem and found a solution (v. 3-4). They recognized that God grants different gifts and abilities to different people. Because the Twelve didn't try to do everything, but assigned jobs based on giftings, the message of Christ was able to continue spreading (v. 7). Next, we see an example the early church dealing with external conflict. Stephen, "a man full of God's grace and power", was advancing God's kingdom (v. 8). This led to opposition. Members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen tried to argue with him, but the wisdom of the Holy Spirit consistently won (v. 9-10). They spread rumours about Stephen and convinced the religious leaders to arrest him (v. 11-12). It is interesting to note that they had to produce false witnesses (v. 13) who twisted Stephen's message (v. 14). The Holy Spirit consistently protects the reputation of accused believers. We are even told that, during His accusations, Stephen was so full of the Holy Spirit that His face shone with the reflection of God's glory (v. 15). This echoes the transformations of Moses (Exodus 34:29-35).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. The Twelve displayed great wisdom in how they handled conflict in the Church. They neither passively ignored conflict, nor did they passionately explode. Ask God what He wants to teach you about how you handle conflict. Pray that, when you are faced with

conflict, He would remind you to seek His wisdom before that of the world.

2. People watching the accusation of Stephen were captivated because his face resembled an angel. Scripture often describes how intimacy with God makes people stand out from the world around them. What are some ways that Christians should look different from the rest of the world? Ask God how He wants to make you stand out from the world. Ask Him for one practical step you can take today that will make people notice that your life is set apart for Christ.
3. Pray for leaders. Our society has many leaders (e.g. in churches, business and homes) who have to decide how to handle difficult matters. Pray that God would reveal His wisdom to them through the Word and prayer. Pray that their minds would be renewed – that where they once believed worldly advice, they would now rely on God. Ask God to grant them peace in the midst of conflict. Pray that this peace would be an effective testimony to onlookers.

DAY 8



READ: Acts 7

Acts 7 continues the story of Stephen. The chapter opens with Stephen before the Sanhedrin, being called to give an account to the high priest (v. 1). Stephen recounts the history of Israel from Abraham through to Solomon, all along highlighting how God was in control (v. 2-50). This emphasis reveals how God's plan to fulfill His divine promises is always best. After setting context by recounting the story of God's redemption throughout the history of Israel, Stephen makes his final point. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption and the religious leaders have missed this (v. 51-53). He rebukes the religious leaders for their hard hearts. They had the benefit of knowing the Law and the Prophets. They of all people should have recognized the signs and followed Jesus. They claimed to be followers of Yahweh, but their hearts were not actually submitted to Him. Because of this, they missed the signs and crucified the Messiah. The religious leaders were furious at Stephen for this rebuke (v. 54). This further reveals the condition of their hearts. If they were open to God's Spirit, they could have repented and set everything right. Instead they continued to reject the truth. Stephen then received a vision of God's glory and the Son of Man (v. 56). This was too much for the religious leaders. They dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him, making Stephen the first Christian martyr (v. 57). Here we are introduced to another character: a young man named Saul who stood by approving of Stephen's stoning (v. 58, Acts 8:1). Stephen's last words reveal that, even in the midst of the most terrible situations, we can trust God to take care of us (v. 59) and we can forgive others (v. 60).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Look back prayerfully over Stephen's speech. What does it teach us about God's character? Spend some time praising God for who He is and what He has done.
2. In many ways, we are at risk for becoming like the religious leaders in this story. We have the benefit of knowing about God's redemption through the Bible. However, if we place our security in the knowledge of this redemption but don't actually submit our lives to it we will miss the mark. Ask yourself, "Am I changed by what I read in

the Bible? Do I underline things that seem important but not actually live these principles out?” Confess as necessary. Ask God how you can bring your life into greater submission to Him.

3. Pray for families in our church. Pray that parents would grow in their faith, living changed lives as a result of their relationship with Jesus Christ. Pray that children would pick up good habits from their parents. Pray that families would learn to seek God together, growing in love for Him and for each other. Pray that God would teach parents about training and disciplining their children and that He would teach children to submit to their parents.

DAY 9

 **READ:** Acts 8

The day Stephen was stoned, persecution broke out. The believers fled and were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (v.1). Saul, the young man introduced in the story of Stephen's stoning is further described here as a key instigator of persecution against Christians (v. 3). This persecution didn't put a damper on the work of the Holy Spirit. The believers used it as an opportunity to spread the gospel to different areas (v. 4). One example of such a believer is Philip, who went to a city in Samaria (v. 5). The people of the city, who had previously followed a sorcerer named Simon (v. 9-11), put their faith in Philip's message of Jesus (v. 12). Simon himself, once trapped in an occult lifestyle, was baptized (v. 13). Word about the conversions in Samaria reached Jerusalem and the apostles sent Peter and John to pray that they might receive the Holy Spirit (v. 14-17). Here we see the true nature of Simon's conversion. He tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money (v. 18-19). At first glance it appeared that Simon had truly repented and given His life to Jesus Christ. With further investigation it was evident that He merely wanted another source of power and fame for himself (v. 20-23). Simon's response leaves us wondering what the final condition of his heart was. While he asked the apostles to "pray to the Lord for [him]", we are not told that he truly repented of sin.

Next we see Philip following an angel's directions to go to Gaza (v. 26). The Holy Spirit prompted Philip to stop and talk with an Ethiopian eunuch (v. 29). Philip began with the passage the eunuch had been reading in the book of Isaiah and declared the message of Jesus Christ (v. 35). Once the eunuch was baptized, the Holy Spirit took Philip away, bringing him to Azotus to preach the gospel in the towns of Caesarea (v. 39-40). Tradition tells us that this eunuch brought his faith back to Ethiopia and shared with his countrymen about Jesus, planting the early roots of the Church in Northern Africa. It probably made no sense to Philip to leave Samaria, where a strong revival was happening. However, He obeyed the command of God. Because he acted on faith, he was blessed to partner with God in expanding the reach of the Gospel into a different continent.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). We see in the story of Simon the sorcerer that we cannot definitively judge the state of a person's heart by their external actions. Matthew 7:15-20 does tell us that we can determine the tree by its fruit. However, we are warned that actions that

would appear to be good indicators of salvation (prophecy, casting out demons, miracles) are not definitive signs (Matthew 7:21-23). While God allows us to have a good idea of where someone stands with Him, He is the final judge of each person's heart. Allow God to search your heart. Do you tend to believe you are always right when you determine the state of another person's heart? Do you swing to the other extreme where you believe that we can never know anything about where someone stands with God? Ask God to speak truth to you about this.

2. Philip was obedient, even when the commands seemed illogical. Ask God to show you how He wants you to love someone today (ask Him who and how). Pray for a spirit of obedience in your heart, that you may follow through on whatever He shows you.
3. Pray for evangelism in our country. Pray that believers would grow in faith and obedience. Pray that we would be receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pray that believers' hearts would be less self-focussed and more focussed on loving others and advancing God's kingdom in our country.

DAY 10

 **READ:** Acts 10

Acts 9 focuses on a minor character from the previous two chapters: Saul. One of the most pivotal moments in the book of Acts happens while Saul is travelling to Damascus to persecute believers (v. 2). Jesus revealed Himself to Saul. Meanwhile, the Lord also revealed Himself in a vision to a believer named Ananias (not the same Ananias found in Acts 5). He tells Ananias to go to Saul and heal his vision, which was lost in Saul's encounter with Jesus (v. 10-12). Ananias, knowing Saul's reputation as a persecutor, was hesitant (v. 13-14), but God calmed him by revealing the divine plan for Saul (v. 15-16). Ananias obeyed (v. 17). Saul was healed and baptized (v. 18) and immediately began to preach about Jesus (v. 19-22). The reactions to Saul's dramatic conversion were understandably mixed. Some wanted to kill him (v. 24). Some doubted the authenticity of his faith (v. 26). Some helped him (v. 25, 27, 30). Regardless of what people thought about Saul, his conversion bore immediate fruit, leading to a time of peace and encouragement for the church (v. 31). Acts 9 closes by re-telling two miracles brought by God through Peter: Aeneas, a paralytic, was healed and Dorcas, a godly disciple, was raised from the dead. News of these miracles spread, and many put their faith in Jesus (v. 35, 42).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. God designed Saul in a particular way. Before he knew Jesus, Saul used his zeal, leadership ability and intelligence to persecute the church. After his conversion, God used these very characteristics to advance the gospel. God designs each person with a unique set of characteristics and abilities. When we use these on our own accord they are often destructive. Ask God how He wants to use your unique design to advance His kingdom. What is His vision and plan for you? What are God's dreams for you?
2. Pray a prayer of commitment. Offer your specific gifts, strengths, personality, character and weaknesses to God. For example, if you are a skilled mechanic or a

compassionate listener, offer these to God for His use. Acknowledge that you have nothing that the Lord did not give to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to dedicate yourself completely to God's purposes.

3. Pray for our school system. Ask God to prompt students to use their interests and abilities for His glory. Pray for wisdom for teachers to know how to encourage students to develop their abilities without fostering pride. Pray for boldness in the faith of students, teachers and administrators. In an increasingly secular school system the risks for boldly living for Jesus are growing. Ask God to reveal that living in obedience to Him is worth it, even when faced with suffering. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work miracles in our schools that would lead many to Jesus.

DAY 11

 **READ:** Acts 10

Cornelius was a devout man who prayed to God regularly and gave generously (v. 1-2). One day an angel of God came to him in a vision, directing him to send for Peter (v. 3-8). While Cornelius' servants went to get Peter, Peter had his own vision from God. In this vision God commanded Peter to "not call anything impure that God has made clean" (v. 15). God then directed Peter to go with the visitors who were waiting at his door – Cornelius' men (v. 19). God had spoken to Cornelius, a Gentile, and Peter, a Jew, for a specific purpose. He wanted to signify that the rule forbidding Jews to interact with Gentiles was no longer in effect (v. 28). Followers of Jesus are equal, regardless of ethnicity. Peter declared this when he said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (v. 34-35). That day the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household and all who heard the message were baptized (v. 44-47).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. God desires that all of His followers would be united. This theme is repeated often in the book of Acts. Are there any groups of people that you hesitate to interact with? Some examples might be people of a different age, race, or socioeconomic background. Sometimes we hesitate to build relationships with people we deem more or less "mature" than ourselves. Confess to God where you've done this. Ask Him to show you His heart for people you've avoided.
2. We are not supposed to call anything impure with God has made clean (v. 15). Are there any religious restrictions you live under that aren't found in the Bible? Sometimes rules form boundaries that are good and healthy, protecting our hearts. Sometimes they breed a religious spirit in us that separates us from God. There are a few tests you can do to help determine whether your personal standards of conduct are good: What is the fruit this rule has produced in your life? Has it led to peace, life and a delight in pleasing God or has it led to guilt, death and a tiresome burden? Did this rule come from yourself or from God? Ask God what He wants to show you about your personal boundaries. Is there anything He wants to add or remove?
3. Often we call ourselves impure when God has already made us clean. Ask God to speak to you about how He sees you.

4. God directed Cornelius and Peter's prayers. He wants to do the same for us! Ask God how He wants you to intercede today and spend some time praying for whatever He shows you.

DAY 12

 **READ:** Acts 11

Peter's fellowship with Gentiles didn't go unnoticed (v. 1-3). The believers in Jerusalem met him with opposition. Peter, knowing that he had obeyed God, recounted the events. He told of how God had spoken to him and how the Gentiles in Cornelius' household had put their faith in Jesus. He spoke of the confirming sign from God: the Holy Spirit had fallen on the members of Cornelius' household just as it had fallen on the Jewish believers (v. 4-14). This signified that God was as pleased with Gentile believers as He was with Jewish ones (v. 15-17). The other believers' reaction here is astounding. They showed no pride or resistance to God. Rather than clinging to tradition, they rejoiced that the Gospel was now available to more people (v. 18). After the story of Peter's encounter with the Gentiles is resolved, the focus shifts. We are reminded that the Gospel was going forth in various places. Particular note is given to the believers in Antioch (v. 21). The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to encourage and train them (v. 22-24). Barnabas and Saul spent a year teaching and discipling the church at Antioch (v. 25-26). We are given two pieces of information that indicate that the church at Antioch was healthy. The Holy Spirit's approval is displayed by the fact that the Christians were prophesying accurately (v. 27-28). Further, the believers' character is displayed through their generosity and desire to use their resources to advance the kingdom (v. 29-30).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. The believers in Jerusalem were willing to accept the Word of God, even when it meant they would have to completely change their worldview. Are you willing to accept whatever God has to say, regardless of the cost? Willingness to listen and obey is a key sign that Jesus is functional Lord over your life. If there are any areas of your life that you are not willing to lay down if God were to so lead you, confess this to God. Ask for His help in submitting yourself wholeheartedly to Him.
2. The church at Antioch is noted for their generosity. If someone were to write your autobiography would they purposefully mention that you are generous? Ask God if there are any practical ways He wants you to submit your giving to His leadership.
3. Pray for pastors in our country. Godly leadership is key to having a functioning, healthy church. Pray that their devotional lives would flourish and that they would grow in knowledge and understanding of God. Pray that, as they get to know God intimately, they would be changed by His love. Pray that God would speak clearly to them about how to disciple their congregations.

DAY 13 **READ:** Acts 12

Acts 12 tells us of the church's history with King Herod. He persecuted the early church, arresting and killing some of them (v. 1-4). Peter was one of those arrested (v. 3, 5). The night before his trial, Peter was chained and heavily guarded (v. 6). That night he was visited by an angel who miraculously released him! He was able to walk right by the guards unnoticed. The gates to the city even opened themselves for him (v. 10). The entire time Peter thought he was merely seeing a vision (v. 9). It wasn't until he was long freed that he realized what actually happened (v. 11). Peter went to the believers to tell them what happened (v. 12). The next day Herod had the prison guards executed because they failed to give praise to God, so he was struck down and eaten by worms (v. 23). With yet another hindrance eliminated, the church continued to spread the word of God (v. 24).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Our God is truly miraculous! We worship the same God who miraculously intervened on behalf of His people in the Book of Acts and throughout history. He is worthy of our worship. Spend some time praising God. Praise God for specific things He has done, drawing on what you've learned of Him from the Bible and your personal experiences with Him. Worship God for His characteristics (e.g. He is faithful, powerful, loving, sovereign). Discipline yourself to spend a good amount of time in prayerful worship. If you get stuck, ask God to show you more reasons why He is worthy of worship and pray these things back to Him.
2. The storyline in Acts 12 could rival that of even the most fascinating stories in our world. And this story is true! The Bible is so rich. God designed it to captivate our attention and change our hearts. Spend some time thanking God for the gift of His Word. Ask Him to give you a deeper hunger to meet with Him in the Word.
3. Pray for someone you know who needs a miracle. Miracles may come in obvious forms like healings or they may come in less obvious forms like mended relationships, salvations and answers to longstanding prayers. One powerful tool God has given us in intercession is our imagination. Imagine what this situation would be like if a miracle happened. What does it look like? How do people feel? What do they think? As you imagine this, pray for the things you're imagining to be fulfilled.

DAY 14 **READ:** Acts 13

Note: If you have a study Bible it is helpful to look at the maps of Paul's journeys before reading each chapter. You can also find visual resources, such as maps, in our church library and online.

In chapter thirteen Acts takes a turning point and begins focusing on the missionary journeys of Saul. While they were working in Antioch, Saul and Barnabas were set apart by the Holy Spirit for missionary work (v. 1-3). First they went to Cyprus (v. 4). There the proconsul sent for Saul and Barnabas because he wanted to hear the words of the Lord (v. 7). However, they were opposed by an evil sorcerer named Elymas. Saul, henceforth in the

book of Acts known as Paul, rebuked the sorcerer by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 9-11). The proconsul was amazed and put his faith in Jesus (v. 12). Paul and Barnabas then moved to Pisidian Antioch (v. 14). On the Sabbath they went to the synagogue and Paul taught about how Jesus fulfilled God's promise to send Israel a Messianic king from David's line (v. 22-23). He told them that they had access to forgiveness of sins through Jesus (v. 38-39) and warned them against disregarding Jesus (v. 40-41). We see that, while many Jews showed an initial interest in Paul's message, they were jealous and slandered Paul when the rest of the city gathered to hear the word of the Lord (v. 44-45). Their hearts had not actually changed in response to the word of God. Paul rebuked them and revealed that if the Jews would not believe, he would take the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 46-47). God's word continued to spread, but the Jews incited persecution against Paul and Barnabas (v. 49-50).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. The prophecy Paul refers to in verse 41 is a sad one indeed. Even with full explanation of Jesus many people choose not to believe in Him. Are there any aspects of the Christian message that you have trouble wholeheartedly believing? Confess this to God and ask for His help. He honours even our attempts to follow Him, even when we feel weak.
2. The message of Christ is for everyone (v. 47). None of us is worthy of receiving salvation, but by His love Christ draws us near. Spend some time meditating on Christ's death and resurrection. What results and benefits has it created for believers? Spend time in thanksgiving for Christ's work, just as the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch did (v. 48).
3. Paul and Barnabas were able to overcome evil spirits by the power of God. They were no more powerful than any other person. Alone no person could overcome evil spirits. But, thanks be to God, by the blood of Jesus we are given access to the most holy places of God (Hebrews 10:19-22). When we submit ourselves to Jesus, we can turn to God who is more powerful than any being in the universe. He will deliver His people. Are there any areas where you, or someone you know, are under spiritual attack? Spend time praying for God's power and deliverance. Declare out loud the truth about who God is in this situation.

DAY 15 **READ:** Acts 14

Acts 14 continues the description of Paul's first missionary journey, accompanied by Barnabas. In Iconium Paul and Barnabas continued their practice of first going to preach the gospel in the Jewish synagogue (v. 1). The people of Iconium were divided (v. 4). While many believed in the message of Jesus, others stirred up dissension (v. 5). However, Paul and Barnabas were able to escape before their opponents carried out their plans to hurt them (v. 6). From Iconium, they moved to Lystra and Derbe to preach the good news (v. 6-7). There the Holy Spirit used Paul to heal a man who had been crippled from birth (v. 8-10). The crowds were stirred up and declared that Paul and Barnabas were actually Greek gods who had come in human form (v. 11-13). Paul immediately denied the crowd's claims and pushed them to put their faith in the Living God (v. 14-17). Even with Paul and

Barnabas adamantly opposing them, the crowds still tried to worship them as gods (v. 18). Some Jews from Antioch heard what was happening and convinced the crowd to stone Paul and leave him for dead (v. 19). This wasn't the end for Paul. He got up and left with Barnabas (v. 20). From Lystra they went to Derbe, and then returned to various towns to disciple believers and strengthen churches (v. 20-25). Paul and Barnabas ended their missionary journey in Antioch, where they reported on all that had happened and stayed a long time with the disciples (v. 26-28).

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Paul and Barnabas lived out their teaching that “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 22). This statement does not mean that overt persecution is a requirement for salvation. Paul is teaching here that we must be willing to undergo anything that comes our way without abandoning our faith in Jesus. Think over difficulties in your life. Have they brought you closer to God by allowing you to experience His strength and provision? Or have you allowed seeds of doubt and distrust from these situations lead you away from Him? Ask God what He wants to teach you about Himself through times of trial.
2. The Holy Spirit strengthened Paul and Barnabas to continue to their missionary journey even in the face of severe opposition. Often when believers set out to follow God's plans they experience resistance. Ask God what His plans for you in your current season are. Ask Him to show you how to persevere through His strength.
3. Spend some time praying for your family today. Think of the lessons you've learned in Acts and pray these over the individual members of your family. For example, you can pray that they would become people of great faith, boldness and perseverance.

DAY 16

 READ: Acts 15

After their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to seek out the answer to a major dispute (v. 2). One group of believers taught that you cannot be saved unless you are circumcised (v. 1). Another group disagreed. This issue was increasingly important as more and more Gentiles were coming to the faith (v. 3-4). In order to maintain unity, the church had to discern the will of God on this matter. While the assembly was debating, Paul rose to speak. He reminded them that God had shown His acceptance of Gentiles giving them the Holy Spirit (v. 8). He reminded them that throughout history people had tried wholeheartedly to fulfill the Law, and thereby make themselves pure before God. But even the greatest efforts had not made one person right before God (v. 10). If circumcision were made a requirement for salvation, they would only be continuing the system of the law. They would be denying that we are saved by the grace of Jesus, not by our good works (v. 11). Paul closed his argument by quoting Amos 9:11-12 (v. 16-17). According to this prophecy, Paul believed that they should not make it difficult for Gentiles to receive salvation (v. 19). The Council agreed to keep the lifestyle requirements for believers to a minimum and sent word to the churches (v. 23-30).

Acts 15 closes with an introduction to Paul's second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas disagreed over whether to take John Mark on the journey (v. 37-39). While we are not told

the specific reason why they disagreed, we are given the result. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus to share the gospel (v. 39). Paul chose Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia (v. 40-41). This set a wonderful model. Even strong disagreements do not have to hamper the progress of the gospel. Paul and Barnabas could have argued forever or thrown up their hands and quit. Instead they agreed to part ways and they were able to double their efforts, beginning two missionary journeys instead of one!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Verse 32 says that Judas and Silas used their gift of prophecy to encourage and strengthen the churches they visited. Ask God how you can encourage someone today.
2. Paul's missionary journeys consisted of both evangelizing new areas and discipling believers in places he had already visited. He did not merely make converts and drop them. Ask God if there is any work you have previously done that He would like you to take back up. This may be reconnecting with an old friend, going back to complete an unfinished task, etc.
3. Pray for unity in the Church. Pray that God would bring Christians to maturity so that even when they disagree, they would do so in a manner that advances the gospel. Pray that believers would prayerfully bring their theological disputes to leaders and be willing to accept the direction God provides. Pray that believers would value intimacy with God and advancing His kingdom over anything else in life.

DAY 17

 READ: Acts 16

Paul's second missionary journey began with a visit to Derbe and Lystra (v. 1). There Paul met Timothy and brought him along to help in the work of the gospel (v. 2-3). In their travels they shared the decisions reached at the Council in Jerusalem (v. 4-5, see also Acts 15). The Holy Spirit's hand was active in Paul's journeys. The Holy Spirit stopped Paul from going to Asia. When this happened, Paul was led to preach the gospel in Phrygia and Galatia (v. 6). Then the Holy Spirit stopped Paul from entering Bithynia. That night Paul had a vision where he was prompted to go to Macedonia (v. 8-10). Sometimes God prevents our plans from happening because He has something even better in mind for us. One of the Macedonian cities Paul visited was Philippi (v. 12). There a woman named Lydia, along with her household, gave her hear to the Lord and was baptized (v. 13-15). Acts 16 concludes with a well-known story. Paul and Silas were slandered and thrown into prison after healing a demon-possessed girl (v. 16-24). While in jail, Paul and Silas were praying and worshipping God (v. 25). Suddenly, an earthquake broke all of the prisoners' chains and opened the gates of the jail (v. 26)! Paul and Silas could have saved themselves and made a quick escape. Instead, they stayed and shared the message of Jesus' salvation with the guard (v. 27-32). That night the jailer and his household believed in Jesus (v. 34). The next morning Paul and Silas were released (v. 35-36). Here we learn that Paul was a Roman citizen (v. 37-38), a status that gave him certain legal rights and privileges not experienced by non-citizens. This piece of information will continue to come into play in the book of Acts, directly influencing the course of Paul's journeys.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Sometimes God stops our plans even when they seem good to us. It was a good thing for Paul to desire to preach the gospel in Asia and Bithynia. But God's plans were even better. Have you ever experienced a plan suddenly being stopped, only to find out that it would have prevented you from doing something even better? Ask God if He desires to re-route any of your current plans and replace them with something better.
2. Worship is extremely powerful! In Acts 16 we see that Paul and Silas' worship broke chains and set captives free. Spend some time today worshipping God. Declare who He is and thank Him for His goodness. If it helps, you can listen to worship music or pray words from Scripture (the Psalms are an excellent place to look for inspiration to worship).
3. Spend some time today praying for Four Winds. Pray for leaders to be empowered by God as they help people find freedom from bondage. Pray for Four Winds cell groups to grow in unity, leading people to maturity in their walks with God. Pray for provision for the outreach aspects of the ministry (housing and distribution center). Pray that these ministries would bless many people in need, leading them to spiritual and emotional wholeness.

DAY 18**READ:** Acts 17

In Acts 17 continues the story of Paul's second missionary journey, focussing on the reactions he received. First he went to Thessalonica (v. 1). There he continued his custom of visiting the local synagogue to explain that Jesus was the Christ (v. 2). He did this by reasoning with them through the Jewish Scriptures (v. 2-3). Some of the local Jews became jealous that people were joining Paul and Silas, so they started a mob (v. 5). Unable to find Paul and Silas, the mob accosted their host, Jason (v. 6-7). That night, the Thessalonian believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea (v. 10). Again, we see Paul teaching about Jesus in the synagogue (v. 10). The Bereans eagerly accepted the message of Christ and sought truth in the Scriptures (v. 11). However, the Jews from Thessalonica went to Berea and agitated crowds there too (v. 13). The Berean believers sent Paul away immediately, but Timothy and Silas remained (v. 14). Paul fled to Athens where He preached to the local Jews and Gentiles about Jesus (v. 16-17). The people of Athens could be compared to modern day intellectuals. They spent their time studying and discussing the latest ideas (v. 21). Paul boldly shared with them the truth about God. He declared that God was the answer to their searching and questions (v. 22-23). God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is above all religious expression (v. 24-25). He gave mankind life and ordained specific details about each person's life (v. 25-26). We are God's children (v. 28). He is calling all mankind to repent, cast away their idols, and turn to Him (v. 29-31). The Athenians responded as can be expected from a highly intellectual crowd. Some heard Paul's speech and accepted it as truth; some immediately rejected it; others wavered (v. 32-34). It is likely that among those who wavered there were some who were genuinely seeking truth and others who were looking for excuses not to believe. Paul, like most evangelists, experienced a wide variety of responses ranging from eager acceptance to persecution.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them [when in history each person would live] and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." (v. 26-27). God loves us and eagerly wants to have a relationship with each of us! Ask God how He has crafted your life circumstances so that you could find Him. Thank Him for what He shows you.
2. Athens was a city full of temples, false gods and idols (v. 16). Even though our culture doesn't typically worship idols of gold, wood or clay, we often invest our time, energy and money in many things before we give a thought to Jesus. Ask God to search your heart for idols. Repent of what He shows you and commit to making Him functional Lord of your life.
3. Pray for Tupendane Africana. Pray for continued grace for Apostle Alex Mitala as he mentors pastors around Uganda. Ask God to continue to clearly guide him and bless his family. Pray for continued provision for the thousands of orphans cared for by this ministry. Pray that many would grow up to be physically and emotionally healthy and serve God in their country. Ask God to show you any other ways you can pray for Tupendane today.

DAY 19**READ:** Acts 18

After Paul left Athens he went to Corinth, where he stayed for a year and a half under God's protection (v. 1, 11). There he met Priscilla and Aquila and stayed and worked with them (v. 2-3). Here, again, Paul spent much of his missionary efforts at the local synagogue (v. 4). Timothy and Silas joined Paul in Corinth, allowing him to dedicate himself exclusively to preaching the message of Jesus (v. 5). When he was met with opposition by the local Jews, Paul redirected his efforts exclusively toward the Corinthian Gentiles (v. 6). Eventually the local Jews brought Paul to court, but the case was dismissed because it didn't fall under the proconsul's jurisdiction (it was a religious, rather than a civil-legal matter) (v. 12-16). The next verse shows that the proconsul, Gallio, didn't actually care about Paul. Gallio failed to intervene when the synagogue ruler publicly beat Paul (v. 17). Paul then left Corinth, bringing Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus to participate in the local church (v. 18-19, 24-26). At some point, Paul had evidently taken a temporary Nazarite vow because here we see that he cut his hair before continuing (v. 18, see also Numbers 6:1-21). Paul then travelled to Antioch, where he stayed for a time (v. 23). This concluded his second missionary journey. Paul began his third missionary journey, travelling throughout Galatia and Phrygia, after this period in Antioch (v. 23).

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, built godly habits and strategies. One habitual strategy of his was preaching in synagogues. Ask God if there are any godly habits He wants you to build in your life? It may have to do with your walk with Him, relationships, work, outreach/ministry, etc.

2. Priscilla and Aquila gently corrected Apollos when he was preaching an incomplete message (v. 26). Ask God if there is anyone He wants you to gently correct. Ask for specific wisdom on how to do this with a balance of grace and truth.
3. Pray for marriages in our church. Ask God to strengthen each couple in their ability to love each other and love Jesus. Ask God to build strong, healthy marriages that provide a testimony about the grace of Jesus. Pray for healing and restoration where there has been hurt. Pray that many couples would be united in their efforts to build the kingdom of God. Ask God to give spouses His vision and dreams for their marriage.

DAY 20

 **READ:** Acts 19:1-22

After travelling through Galatia and Phrygia, Paul continued on to Ephesus (v. 1). When he arrived he met a group of believers who had an incomplete picture of the gospel. They knew about repentance, but didn't have a full understanding of Jesus or the Holy Spirit (v. 3-4). Upon hearing a full explanation, the men placed their faith in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by them speaking in tongues and prophesying (v. 5-6). Paul then entered the Ephesian synagogue, where he spent three months boldly teaching about the kingdom of God (v. 8). When a group in the synagogue began slandering the Christian faith, Paul and his followers left (v. 9). Over the course of two years, God used Paul to work many miracles and spread the Gospel to every single person in Ephesus (v. 10-12). The believers in Ephesus were given a wake-up call when the seven sons of Sceva were confronted by a demon (v. 13-16). This event led to a move of holiness throughout the region. Believers confessed their hidden sins (18) and people who practiced witchcraft burned their scrolls. The total monetary value of these scrolls equaled 50,000 days' wages (v. 19). A person working six days a week would have had to work over 160 years straight to earn this amount! At face value these people gave up an astounding amount to follow Jesus. However, the value of eternal life and forgiveness is immeasurably more than what they gave up.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Having perfect theological knowledge is not the path to salvation, but as we see here it is important to think correctly about God. It has been said that what we think about God is the most important thing about who we are. Our thoughts affect our actions. Is there anything about God or the Christian faith that you don't understand? Spend some time thinking and praying about that area today. Ask God to speak to you about it. Commit to studying what the Bible says about that topic, reading books on it (our church library has a great selection) and/or asking mature, godly believers about it.
2. When we intentionally rid ourselves of sin, it allows the word of God to spread and grow in power (v. 20). Every believer and community could use more of God's word and His power! Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart for any hidden sin. Confess this to God and repent of it. If this sin has been a longstanding problem and you've confessed it before with no success, confess it to a mature, godly believer. You may also consider setting up an appointment for Personal Prayer Ministry at Southland.

3. Pray for churches in Canada. Pray that we would grow in their knowledge of and intimacy with Jesus. Pray that God would replace wrong thinking with thinking based on biblical truth. Ask God to show Christians in our country the importance of genuine repentance. Ask God to teach us about the value of laying down everything to follow Him. Pray that, even as you read this, people in our country would reach a point of total submission to Jesus. Imagine entering heaven one day and coming across a person who is there Jesus because of your prayers today! It is possible!

DAY 21

 **READ:** Acts 19:23-41

The second half of Acts 19 tells of how a few men resisting Paul caused a great disruption in Ephesus. Demetrius gathered a group of silversmiths, craftsmen and workers in related trades to discuss their situation (v. 24-25). We see that there were two causes for their worry. First, they recognized that as more people put their faith in Jesus, fewer people would buy idols, putting these craftsmen out of work (v. 27). They would have been hesitant to find a new use for their skills, as trade in idols was financially lucrative (v. 24). Second, we see that they were blinded to the truth of Paul's message by their worship of the false god Artemis (v. 27). These men were furious. Their displays eventually worked the entire city into an uproar (v. 28-29). This was a classic case of mob mentality, as some of the people didn't even know why they were gathering and chanting (v. 32). Paul and another man, a Jew named Alexander, both wanted to intervene, but were prevented from doing so (v. 30-31, 33-34). God is sovereign. Even without the work of Paul and Alexander, the crowd was quieted. The city clerk stepped up and reasoned with the crowd, eventually sending everyone away (v. 35-41).

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Idol worship was embedded in the culture of Ephesus. The introduction of a new faith that claimed to be the only way to God thus challenged the culture itself. Some people chose to abandon the aspects of their culture that would prevent them from following Jesus. Others chose to cling to what they knew and reject Jesus. Ask God if there is any part of our culture that is keeping you from greater intimacy with Him.
2. Many of the participants in the riot at Ephesus didn't know why they were there. Far from making an informed decision to stand for their convictions, they were merely swept up by the crowd. Ask God to show you any areas where you are too easily swayed by the words, actions, or opinions of others. Ask Him to show you how to lean on His strength to stand for truth.
3. Pray for the children and youth in our church (birth-high school). Pray that God would protect them from the lies thrown their way by our culture. Pray that God would help them form an identity based on their faith in Jesus. Pray that leaders (KidzLand, Middle School and Forefront) would be empowered to help our young people grow in submission, integrity and faith. Pray that the children and youth in our church today would grow up to influence many for Jesus Christ.

DAY 22 **READ:** Acts 20

We often picture Paul as a lone wolf, moving about independently, focused only on preaching the gospel. This is not a complete picture. Paul loved people. His life revealed the truth that people who love God wholeheartedly also love people wholeheartedly. Paul could not have completed his mission without a deep love for people. After the riot in Ephesus Paul encouraged the local believers, then moved on to Macedonia and Greece (v. 1-2). Paul wasn't alone in his work. He had several companions who worked alongside him (v. 4-5). On his last night at Troas, Paul spoke through the night, wanting to teach and strengthen the believers as much as possible while he was there (v. 7). While Paul was speaking, a tragedy happened. A young man named Eutychus fell asleep, tumbled out of a third story window and died (v. 9). Paul immediately ran to Eutychus and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, raised him from the dead (v. 10-11). While travelling from Troas, Paul sent for the elders from Ephesus (v. 17). Paul reminded them of how he had served God in Ephesus (v. 18-21). Paul then shared his heart with them. He had been prompted by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem (v. 22). He knew that prison and hardships were awaiting him (v. 23), yet he was not afraid or hesitant (v. 24). Paul finished by encouraging and warning the Ephesian elders (v. 25-31). He wanted to strengthen them to lead the church well and prepare them for the attacks of the enemy. The end of Acts 20 gives us a peak into a very tender moment (v. 36-38). These men were friends saying their final goodbyes. They had spent many hours together teaching, praying, eating and fellowshiping. They had laboured together for years to see God's kingdom advance. It is likely that Paul himself had directly led some of these men to Christ. They would have been eternally grateful to him.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. God created us for community. Every believer needs friends, mentors, and people to disciple. Our culture places a high value on individualism, which often hampers fellowship. Ask God to show you any ways you have valued independence over community. Ask God for a practical step you can take today to grow in community.
2. Ask God to show you his heart for community. Why do we need relationships? What are the benefits of community?
3. Pray for cells in our church. Pray that cells would grow in fellowship as they seek God together. Pray that individuals would learn to better love and support the people in their cells. Pray for wisdom, vision and creativity for cell leaders. Pray that God would give leaders His heart for the people in their cells.

DAY 23 **READ:** Acts 21

After completing his third missionary journey, Paul set out for Jerusalem. Along the way, he visited various towns (v. 1-4). In his travels he was given two prophecies from believers that warned him of the hardship to come in Jerusalem (v. 4, 11). But Paul was determined. He knew God had a purpose for him in Jerusalem and was willing to risk everything to serve Jesus (v. 13). When Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem, they went to visit James and the elders (v. 18). Paul shared the testimony of everything God had done and

the believers rejoiced (v. 19-20). In this meeting, the elders shared that false reports had been circulating about Paul (v. 21). People were saying that Paul was encouraging Jewish Christians to turn from, or rebel against, the Law. While Paul did teach that following the Law was not the path to salvation (Acts 15:7-11), the broader context of his ministry shows that he didn't teach people to entirely forsake the law (v. 25, Acts 15: 20-21, Romans 14). To counter the rumours, Paul took the elders' advice and paid for four men to take a temporary Nazarite vow (v. 22-24).

A few days later, a group of Jews from Asia saw Paul and began slandering him and stirring up the crowd (v. 27-29). The whole city was provoked against Paul (v. 30). A riot began and men beat Paul (v. 30-31). They were only stopped because the commander of the Roman troops intervened (v. 31-32). The commander arrested Paul, but could not get a clear charge of wrongdoing from the crowd. He decided to take Paul to the barracks (v. 33-34). The next verses show that the commander was confused – he thought Paul was an entirely different person (v. 38)! Paul explained who he was and asked to make one final address to the people (v. 39-40). The story pauses here, leaving us anticipating what Paul will say.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Rumours circulated about Paul because people took one aspect of his teaching and jumped to inaccurate conclusions. Ask God to show you a time when you judged someone too quickly. Confess and ask for His forgiveness.
2. By encouraging Paul to help men take a Nazarite vow, the elders were not saying that the Law was a requirement for salvation. Rather, they implied that the Law could be beneficial in living a life dedicated to God. The Law is God's way of telling us how He wants us to live. When viewed as a way of obtaining forgiveness of sins, rituals are harmful. When undertaken as a way to re-focus one's mind and set oneself apart for God's use, rituals are helpful. Contemporary examples of this are helpful. We do not earn salvation by going on a church retreat or practicing the spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, meditation, etc.), but they can help us focus on God, which allows us to become closer to Him. Ask God to search your heart. Do you act as though rituals and disciplines are your salvation or do you use them only as a way of drawing near to God. Ask God how he wants you to use spiritual disciplines to draw closer to Him.
3. Pray for Israel. Ask God to strengthen Messianic churches. Pray that Christian Jews would win the favour of their friends, neighbours and co-workers by living their lives wholeheartedly for Christ. Pray that many would be won by the testimony of the Messianic churches. Ask God to protect Israel from her enemies. Pray that many people in Israel would be drawn to study the Hebrew Scriptures and find that they point to Jesus.

DAY 24 **READ:** Acts 22

Acts 22 opens with Paul standing before the crowd, beginning his defence (v. 1). Through his testimony, Paul revealed that his calling to preach the gospel to Gentiles and his zeal for the Jewish God, Yahweh, were compatible. He began by stating his credentials: He is a Jew, educated under a well-respected Pharisee (v.3). He then identified with the crowd. He

too was once a zealous persecutor of Christians (v. 4-5). Then Paul shared the story of how He changed from a persecutor of Jesus to a follower of Him (v. 6-16). He shared how Jesus had met him on the road to Damascus (v. 6-11) and introduced him to a believer named Ananias (v. 12). Through Ananias Paul was healed and called into ministry (v. 14-15). Paul then told his listeners how God had sent him away from Jerusalem and called him to preach to the Gentiles (v. 17-21). Even after choosing to follow Jesus, Paul had continued to worship in the temple (v. 17). This shows that Paul had not turned away from Yahweh, but had drawn closer to Him through Jesus. It was while Paul was worshipping in the temple that Yahweh called him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 18, 21). This was too much for the crowd. They thought it blasphemous that Paul would claim Yahweh called him to the Gentiles in the temple. Surely, they thought, God wouldn't want unclean people to mix with the Jews. And He definitely would not make such a statement in the temple – the holiest of places. While the crowd had previously given ear to Paul's testimony, they were now infuriated and called for Paul's death (v. 22). The Roman commander was unsure of what was happening. He could not figure out why the crowds were so enraged at Paul (v. 24). He ordered Paul back to the barracks to be beaten and interrogated. Just before the interrogation was to begin, Paul shared a crucial piece of information: he was born a Roman citizen (v. 25). It was illegal for a Roman citizen to be beaten in such a manner, so the guards withdrew (v. 29). Despite this, the guard still wanted to know why Paul was being accused by the Jews, so he released Paul to the Sanhedrin (the ancient Jewish court system) (v. 30).



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Throughout the book of Acts, major moments are often marked by the sharing of a testimony. Take some time today and write your testimony. Record the story of how you first came to know Christ and what your journey with Him has looked like. Ask God if there is anyone He would like you to share your testimony with.
2. Paul's response to meeting Jesus was, "What shall I do, Lord?" Ask God this question today. Thank Him for any directions He gives you and commit to obeying.
3. Pray for your family today. Ask God if He wants to show you anything for each of your family members. Write in your journal anything you hear from Him. Then spend some time interceding for each of your family members.

DAY 25

READ: Acts 23

Acts 23 opens with Paul on trial yet again, this time before the Sanhedrin. Even with his opening statement, Paul didn't try to smooth the situation and calm people down. He boldly spoke the truth: "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day" (v. 1). The high priest ordered people to strike Paul on the mouth for this statement (v. 2). Paul firmly rebuked the high priest, calling him a hypocrite (v. 3). Paul promptly apologized upon realizing to whom he had spoken, for it was against the law to speak evil of the high priest (v. 5, Exodus 22:28). Having observed the crowd, Paul recognized that some were Pharisees and some were Sadducees (v. 6). He cleverly stated that he was a Pharisee and was on trial because of "his hope in the resurrection

of the dead" (v. 6). As Paul would have foreseen, this started a sharp debate among the Sanhedrin members (v. 7-9). The Roman commander was afraid Paul would be killed in the uproar, so he took Paul back to the barracks (v. 10). That night, the Lord told Paul he would testify in Rome (v. 11). At this time, a group of men hatched a plot to kill Paul (v. 12-15). However, Paul's nephew heard about the plot and immediately went to inform Paul (v. 16) and the Roman commander (v. 18-22). In order to prevent Paul's assassination, the Roman commander ordered Paul to be transferred to Caesarea under heavy Roman guard (v. 23-24). Paul's case was transferred to the Governor, Felix (v. 27-30). This set off a chain of events where Paul would have the ear of increasingly important Roman officials.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Paul was confident before the Sanhedrin because he had a clean conscience before God (v. 1). Ask God if there is anything keeping you from having a clean conscience before Him.
2. God told Paul that he was going to testify in Rome (v. 11). Knowing God's plan gave Paul peace in the midst of chaos. Paul wasn't afraid of dying in the uproar, because he knew God had more in store for him. Ask God if there is anything He wants to show you about the next season of your life. Write in your journal anything He shows you.
3. Pray for believers in the business community. They often face immense pressure to make immoral business decisions. Pray that God would show them the reward of having a clean conscience before Him. Pray that God would empower them with faith, steadfastness and joy. Pray that their hope would be in eternity with Jesus, rather than in the riches of earth. Pray that how they run their businesses would be a testimony that would lead many to Jesus.

DAY 26



READ: Acts 24

Five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, the high priest Ananias and a lawyer named Tertullus brought charges against Paul to the governor (v. 1-2). Tertullus began with flattery (v. 2-4). If he could win Felix's favour, he assumed, his case would have a better chance of winning. Tertullus then made three specific accusations against Paul. He said Paul was a troublemaker who stirred up riots among the Jews (v. 5). This was essentially a charge of stirring up rebellion against the governing Romans. He said Paul was a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, another name for Christians (v. 5). Small sects inciting uprisings were common in ancient Rome, so Tertullus tried to use Paul's faith to paint a picture of him as a revolutionary. Finally, he said Paul tried to desecrate the temple (v. 6). While this charge was blatantly false, it was a means to justify the Jew's involvement in Paul's arrest. After hearing the accusations, Paul had the opportunity to formally reply (v. 10). Paul reminds his hearers that he was recently in Jerusalem and made no attempt to stir up rebellion there (v. 11-12). He further states that Tertullus and Ananias have no proof for the charges they made (v. 13). Paul stated that he was not a heretic, as his beliefs lined up with the Jewish Scriptures (v. 14-15). His motive for being in Jerusalem was good (v. 17) and he did not defile the temple while there (v. 18). Felix dismissed the hearings, only to procrastinate on Paul's judgment (v. 22-27). Felix used this procrastination as a way of people-pleasing (v.

27) and avoiding making a personal decision for or against the gospel of Jesus (v. 25).

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Paul was confident in his faith, even though he was slandered on a regular basis. He was always willing to respectfully give an answer for the hope that he had (1 Peter 3:15). Drawing from your knowledge of Paul (both from Acts and from his other New Testament writings), why do you think he was able to do this? Ask God how you can grow in this area.
2. Felix has a lot of character flaws working against him in this account. Ask God to search your heart. Do you procrastinate to avoid making difficult decisions (v. 25)? Do you people-please (v. 27)? Do you harbour greed in your heart (v. 26)? Confess anything that is revealed and repent of it.
3. Pray for high school students in our community. Pray that they would stand firm against the temptation to rebel against parents and authorities. Pray that they would how to love extravagantly and work diligently. Pray that many would encounter God and build deep, permanent relationships with Him.

DAY 27

 **READ:** Acts 25

The chaos surrounding Paul's imprisonment had been going on for years. It was a local mainstay that nobody quite understood. The Jews continually produced false charges against him and the Roman officials didn't know exactly why Paul was facing legal opposition. Felix had delayed Paul's verdict so long that he was succeeded as governor by Porcius Festus (24:27). The Jewish leaders again presented their case against Paul (v. 2). They tried to get Paul transferred to Jerusalem so they could ambush and kill him, but Festus declined their suggestion (v. 3-5). The same Jews who accused Paul to Festus went to Caesarea to present their case before the court. They trumped up serious charges against Paul but couldn't offer any proof (v. 6-7). Paul, again, stated his complete innocence (v. 8). In a fair trial the failure of to produce evidence will result in the accused being released. However, Paul recognized that justice would not be executed fairly while he remained in that region. There were too many corrupt parties with vested interests in his case (v. 3). So, as a Roman citizen, Paul exercised his right to appeal to Caesar (v. 10-11). A few days later King Agrippa visited Caesarea (v. 13). After hearing about Paul's case from Festus, Agrippa requested to speak directly to Paul (v. 22). The next day Festus brought Paul into the audience room before King Agrippa (v. 23). Festus explained that he had no charges against Paul to send to Caesar (v. 25-27). He hoped that the charges against Paul would be clarified in this meeting.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Paul's persecutors were persistent and deceitful. By human standards, Paul had numerous reasons to be angry and resentful. However, we never once see Paul sin against his persecutors. Ask God to search your heart for bitterness or resentment. Ask Him to show you what event or situation first caused these feelings in your heart. Ask

Him to reveal to you any lies planted by this event or situation; then let Him show you His truth on the matter.

2. The Holy Spirit consistently empowered Paul to walk blamelessly and share the word of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you today and empower you to live boldly and blamelessly.
3. Ask God how He wants you to intercede today. Ask for specific people or situations to pray for and let Him show you how to pray for them.

DAY 28

 **READ:** Acts 26

The scene is now set for Paul to speak before King Agrippa. Because of the false accusations and delayed verdicts, Paul was given the opportunity to share the gospel with many prominent public figures. Paul defends himself against the accusations of the Jews by citing his blamelessness and dedication to God (v. 2-6). Paul shared his testimony and explained his hope in Jesus Christ. Festus, who was listening to Paul's speech, interrupted, accusing Paul of being insane (v. 24). A life submitted to Jesus, when analyzed by human logic, seems unwise or even crazy. As Christians we must be willing to stand firm even when the world rejects us. After Festus' interruption, Paul made a bold move. He rhetorically asked King Agrippa if he believed the prophets (v. 27). Agrippa saw that Paul was trying to get him to believe in the message of Jesus (v. 28). Paul did not soften his response. He merely said that it was his hope that everyone who heard his testimony about Jesus would believe (v. 29). The last words we hear from Agrippa confirm what Paul had been declaring all along: he was innocent (v. 32). However, Paul could not be released because of his appeal to Caesar. The promise of God would be fulfilled (Acts 23:11).

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. The gospel seems pointless and unrealistic to those with hard hearts. Part of carrying your cross for Jesus is being content even when people do not understand you or slander you. It means being steadfast and forsaking your reputation for His name's sake. Ask God to show you what denying yourself, taking up your cross and following Jesus means for your life. Ask Him to speak to you about the rewards of eternal life with Him.
2. Paul was very direct with his listeners. He didn't unnecessarily sugar-coat his messages. Ask God to show you any areas where you need to grow in honesty. Ask Him to show you why truth is so important.
3. Pray for the seniors in our church. Pray that God would use their wisdom and life experience to teach and bless many people. Pray that God would reveal more of Himself to them each day, curing any loneliness they face. Ask God to bless them for their diligence in prayer and love. Pray that God would use their days richly, healing any wounds they've received on earth and heightening their anticipation of heaven.

DAY 29 **READ:** Acts 27

Acts 27 opens with Paul beginning his voyage to Rome. Because the group had left late in the year, the weather conditions were poor (v. 9). This made sailing dangerous. However, the majority decided to continue on their voyage, rather than try to find a suitable harbour in which to spend winter (v. 12). We see immediately that the wisdom of the crowd is not always very wise. They immediately encountered a rough storm and had to throw cargo overboard (v. 14-20). Again, Paul was able to remain strong because of the Word of God (v. 22-25). God had given Paul a prophetic message that nobody on the ship would die because of the storm. Paul was then able to speak this message to the group to encourage them to remain strong. At this time, Paul became an informal leader of the group. By remaining hopeful and steadfast, he earned their respect. We see that played out as they followed his advice on the rest of their journey (v. 31-32, 34-36). This respect for Paul was a direct benefit for all of the prisoners. When the boat was shipwrecked, the soldiers wanted to kill all of the prisoners to prevent their escape (v. 42). "But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan" (v. 43). Our personal submission to God's plan can bless the people around us in ways we could not have imagined.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Scripture tells us that we are blessed when we do not follow the advice of the wicked (Psalm 1:1). If Paul would have blindly followed the decision of the group instead of pursuing God the entire group could have died. While most of our daily situations aren't so extreme, we are still clearly warned to avoid placing our hope in the advice of the world. Search your heart: where does the advice you follow come from? God gives us many practical ways to seek His advice. Ask Him how you can seek His advice through each of the following methods:
 - a. Scripture
 - b. Prayer/listening prayer
 - c. Seeking counsel from trusted, mature believers
2. God desires to give us everything we need to stay strong through whatever circumstances we face. We only have to ask! Think of been a time when God has spoken something that has encouraged you or helped you endure a difficult situation. Spend some time in thanksgiving for this. Is there currently any area of your life where you need God's help to stay strong? Ask God to speak to you about this area.
3. Pray for the voice of the Lord to be heard across our country. Pray that many people would hear the comfort and strength God want to speak to them. Pray that believers in our community would continually turn to God, through prayer and the Bible, for their source of wisdom.

DAY 30 **READ:** Acts 28

God is sovereign and loving, even in the midst of extreme chaos. Acts 27 closed with a shipwreck. Acts 28 opens with the inhabitants of the island caring for the shipwrecked travellers (v. 2, 7). God provided for the travellers, protected Paul from death (v. 3-5) and healed many people on the island (v. 8-9). He even ensured that Paul and his fellow travellers had provisions for the rest of the journey to Rome (v. 10). Often God's care for our needs comes at unexpected times through unexpected methods. After a description of Paul's stay in Malta, Acts 28 describes how he finally arrived in Rome (v. 11-15). It had been many months of travelling, parts of which were extremely difficult. God knew that Paul, as a human, was tired. So God called a group of believers to meet Paul and encourage him on his way to Rome (v. 14-15). Even though Paul was a prisoner, he was given a large amount of freedom (v. 16). This allowed his to preach the gospel to many, including local Jews (v.17, 30-31). God arranged Paul's living situation so that the news of Jesus would be spread in Rome. Paul, recognizing this, was faithful and obedient.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. It is important to take time in our busy lives to reflect and meditate on the things that speak to our hearts. Spend some quiet time reflecting on the book of Acts. What are themes, stories, messages or ideas that stuck out to you? What are some things you learned about yourself while working through this book? What are some things that you learned about God? Thank God for the gift of the Bible and for speaking to you through the book of Acts. Pray that He would take what you've learned through this time with Him and impress it as a permanent seal upon your heart.
2. Throughout Acts we see that God placed believers in Paul's life to encourage and strengthen him. Paul took delight in this. Ask God who He has placed in your life for this purpose. Ask God to reveal to you whether you joyfully accept this gift of community or try to maintain a false feeling of independence. Ask Him to speak to your heart about your role in the local community of believers.
3. Acts ends on a wonderful note: "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 31). Imagine what our world would look like if the Church lived like this! Spend some time praying for the worldwide Church today. Think of the many problems plaguing our world: war and conflict, poverty, abortion, growing secularism... Imagine what the world will look like when Jesus returns and makes everything right. Pray that believers around the world would become motivated to live out their faith boldly. Pray that, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church would rise up against injustice in the name of Jesus. Pray that the Church would be a tangible revelation of God's love in our dark world. Pray that believers would grow to become passionate intercessors. Pray that we would all live with an eternal mindset and grow daily in passionate love for Jesus.

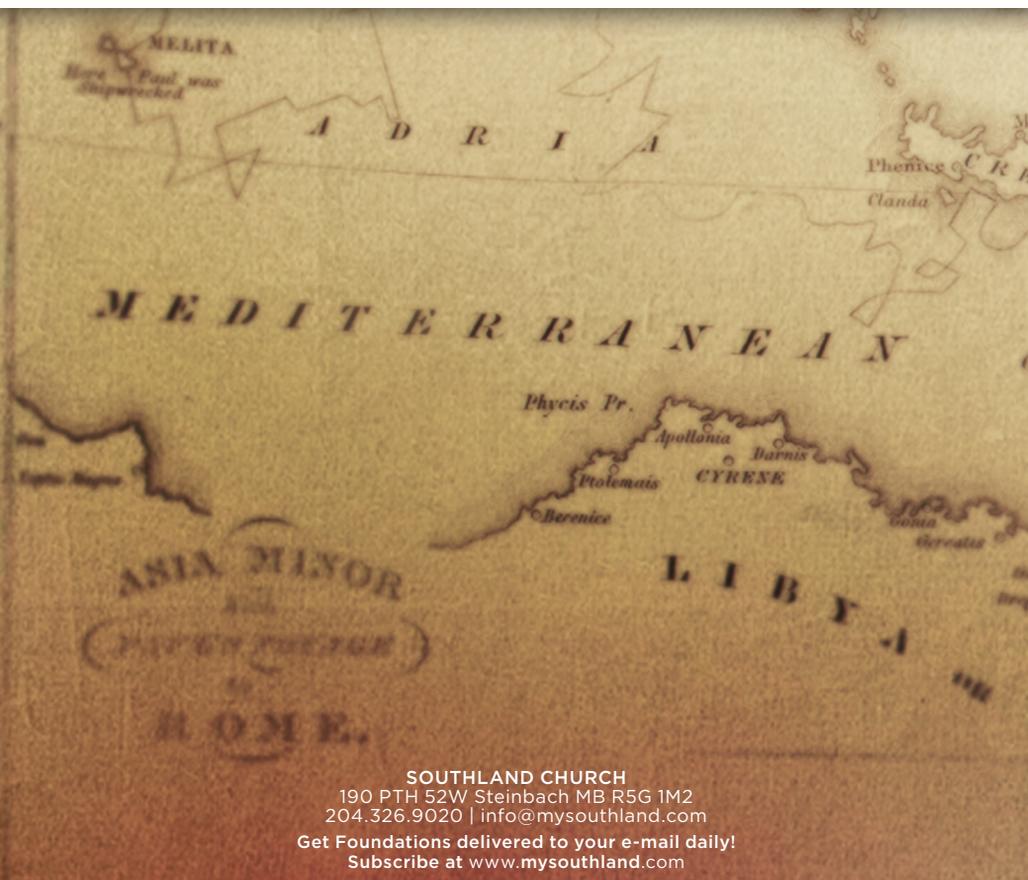


The Acts of the Apostles

The book of Acts recounts the history of the early church. The reader is given accounts of healings, salvations, miracles, the coming of the Holy Spirit, persecutions and steadfast devotion to the faith. Through this, Acts serves a dual purpose: to ignite our hunger to advance God's kingdom on earth and to strengthen our resolve against the opposition that will surely come when we do the work of the Gospel.

Acts 20:24 (NLT)

"But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus - the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love."



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