

ACTS
FROM
ACTS



DEVOTIONALS

ACTS 1

WRITTEN BY: JOHN BODILY

Thought

The book of Acts comes right after the Gospels in the Bible and is a little bit like a sequel to the Gospels, the stories of Jesus' life. Bible scholars have traditionally agreed that Acts was written by one of the Gospel authors, Luke, who was a friend of Paul and shared many of the adventures we'll read about in the coming days.

Like all good sequels, Acts begins where the Gospels leave off - after Jesus' death and resurrection, when He tells the disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He promises them:

"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The book of Acts goes on to tell the story of how that happened: how this handful of Jesus followers became filled and empowered by the Spirit, and travelled the world to be witnesses of Jesus. God used them to start something that would change the world as we now know it.

TODAY – We live in a world where people want their lives to make a difference – to count for something. I know I feel that way – I want to devote my life to something worthwhile and significant. Our culture tells us that the secret to that vision is to look within ourselves and discover our true identity and destiny. But, the book of Acts is about how a bunch of people devoted themselves to a cause bigger than themselves – tapping into a source of power and authority not from within but from God: the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. They found a cause worth living and dying for, declaring the message of Jesus to the world.

And as we now know, this handful of ordinary people had an extraordinary impact on the world. In the coming days, our hope and prayer is that we would be equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit as we read these stories to live lives that make a difference. We are so excited to be sharing in their journey together and we hope you enjoy it!

Meditation:

Jesus told His followers to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit - take a moment now to wait in His presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart.

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Jesus said:

"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Take a moment to reflect on these words and what it might mean for you today.

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The same Holy Spirit that we read about in the book of Acts is available to us - to empower us to acts of generosity and hospitality, acts of worship and devotion, acts of supernatural power and evangelism – to share the love of Jesus with the world. Take a moment to reflect on one area of your life where you feel the need for God's power today and ask God to bless you in that area.

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Prayer

Thank you, Lord that You fill and empower us with Your Spirit - help us to live lives that make a difference for You. Amen.

ACTS 2

WRITTEN BY: JACOB PARTON

Thought

During the festival of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. Empowered, Peter proclaims to a large crowd all that God has achieved in Jesus' life, crucifixion and resurrection. Amazingly, three thousand people respond and get baptised.

I first encountered the presence of the Holy Spirit in my early teens. My youth leaders had offered to pray for us, which was nothing new to me - but this time something was different. I experienced a strange sense of breathlessness, which was soon replaced by a profound sense of peace. I'd never felt anything like it, but have since met with the Spirit many times in numerous different ways.

My experience was quite different from that of the disciples - they heard a wind, saw flames, and spoke in different languages. Something physical must have been going on too as the crowd thought they were drunk! Shaking, swaying or falling over can be the experience for some today. But the purpose of the Spirit's coming was for empowerment. Peter powerfully told the crowd all about Jesus and how the Spirit was a gift that God had always planned to give to us. When the Spirit is poured out, people are drawn to Jesus and, as it shows in verse 42 onwards, Christians are drawn together in unity.

Are you welcoming the Spirit into your life regularly, to make yourself more like Jesus and able to share Him with others ?

Meditation:

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life right now - let Him draw you to Jesus.

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Spend some time reflecting on verses 17-18:

"In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy."

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Ask God to empower you through His Holy Spirit, to receive spiritual gifts like prophecy and healing, so that others might be drawn to Jesus. Listen for who He may want you to pray for today.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that when Your Holy Spirit draws us to You, He changes us to look more like You. Help us to receive Him today and allow Him to lead others to You through us. Amen.

ACTS 3

WRITTEN BY: JO GRETTY

Thought

On the way to the temple, Peter and John encounter a lame man begging. Peter reaches out, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Immediately, the man receives strength and enters the temple exuberantly praising God. Peter tells astounded onlookers about Jesus, urging them to turn to God.

I had become accustomed to some past brokenness, rooted in a childhood trauma. Relating my experience to others secured their pity but the pain and victim identity remained. It hadn't occurred to me that Jesus was able to heal and restore that part deep within me. In prayer with a trusted friend, I reached out to Jesus and in a moment the part of me imprisoned to my past was set free. Now I can show compassion to those who have suffered similar trauma but I can also proclaim the healing, restoration and freedom that Jesus offers.

Luke tells us the beggar was lame from birth, that others would carry him to the temple gate where every day he would beg. Imprisoned by his identity as lame beggar and downcast, he watched many feet pass by. Though grateful for pity and generosity, they affirmed his identity. Peter commands him, "Look at us." In other words: look up, change your perspective. Look into my face, not at my feet. Without silver or gold, Peter could only offer the healing power of Jesus' name. This changed perspective brings hope; the beggar reaches for Peter's hand and experiences miraculous healing.

Are you stuck in an identity that highlights your brokenness or vulnerability? Is there another perspective that God would have you see? What healing, restoration or freedom might he be inviting you to experience?

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit and invite Him to reveal Jesus reaching out to you with His hand right now.

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In a brief moment, the lame beggar's perspective changed from watching dusty feet walk by to responding to Peter's invitation to look up. He had been seen. Peter commanded the impossible because he watched Jesus do it.

Jesus sees you now. What is He offering you?

With open hands, prepare to receive whatever Jesus is offering you today.

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Ask Holy Spirit to enable you to receive what Jesus offers you.

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Prayer

Father God, thank You that through Jesus ALL things are possible. Help me to welcome the work of the Holy Spirit that brings healing, restoration and freedom so that I might fully become the person You created me to be. Amen.

ACTS 4

WRITTEN BY: SAM MCDERMID

Thought:

Peter and John are arrested and questioned by the religious leaders, but after proclaiming the saving name of Jesus are released. The believers ask God to empower them more and share their possessions, so that no one among them was in need.

I didn't grow up in a Christian family. My parents were pretty concerned when their teenage daughter started going to church. I knew they disapproved of my new found faith, so I never talked to them about it. I was worried we would argue, or that they would tell me I couldn't go to church. But I do remember overhearing my mum telling a friend that I wasn't like the other teenagers at school, since I started going to church. Despite their misgivings, they couldn't deny that faith was having a positive impact.

I wish I had had the courage that Peter and John show in this chapter, who, despite being arrested, admit in verse 20, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen or heard," and go so far to ask God to do more! Despite their concerns about this rising group, the religious leaders couldn't ignore the evidence – People were being healed and the gospel was spreading around Jerusalem. It doesn't say so in the passage, but I also wonder what impact the believers sharing their possessions had on those who saw it. The work of the Holy Spirit was undeniable, even to those who were against the believers.

When I read the passage, I find myself wondering how the Holy Spirit is evident in my life.

Meditation:

Let's welcome the Holy Spirit.

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The same Spirit that empowered the believers in the early church is at work in us today, whether it is boldness in the face of opposition or changing an area of our lives. Reflect on where you need the Holy Spirit's empowerment today.

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Ask the Holy Spirit to come into those areas. That, like Peter and John, you would not help speaking about what you have seen and heard.

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Prayer

Thank You, God that however bold or otherwise we might feel, You are at work and evident it us. May the presence of Jesus be with us today, helping us to share our faith, and to shape our lives according to Your purposes. Amen.

ACTS 5

WRITTEN BY: JACOB PARTON

Thought

Despite the presence of sin and the imperfection of the early church, the apostles continue to perform wonders and healings, causing many to follow Jesus. In reaction, the high priest imprisons the apostles, but the Lord miraculously frees them. Undeterred, they continue to speak about Jesus, even to the religious leaders themselves, despite persecution.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is the most controversial passage in Acts. It's also mysterious, as it generates questions without giving explicit answers: How did Ananias and Sapphira die? Did God kill them? If so, where's the opportunity for repentance? Or was Peter the executioner, wielding the miraculous, God-given power of the Spirit? Alternatively, does the mere magnitude of their sin overwhelm or shock them to the point of death? Or is Satan behind this, having already filled Ananias' heart? The text simply doesn't say. What we can observe is that this is a specific situation at the unique starting moment of the early church. Ananias and Sapphira sell their field under an agreement to give all the proceeds to the apostles. They don't simply tell a lie, but they deceitfully withhold some of this promised money and then falsely tell Peter that they've given the full amount. They've actually broken an oath they've made, something which was clearly significant in 1st century Palestine, as Jesus had advised his followers against taking oaths at all (see Matthew 5:34). This was quite likely because oaths often became a means through which we become entangled in falsehood and deception.

Whilst the passage clearly highlights the seriousness of sin and the need for truthfulness as Christians, the overwhelming emphasis of the New Testament is on God's eagerness to forgive and reconcile. It would be a mistake in my view if this story generated a fear in us – a fear that punishment is waiting around the corner for our next lie or act of stubbornness in not fulfilling God's will. The scriptures teach us that obedience to God should come from a place of friendship and love, because a relationship cannot flourish if one party is harbouring mistrust or fear. As John reminds us in 1 John 4.18: *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."* Fear of God's punishment is an imperfection, John says, which needs to be eradicated by God's love.

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit. Allow Him to fill you with God's love that casts out fear.

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Spend a little while reflecting on whether your relationship with God is dictated more by fear or by love. Allow the Spirit to speak to you through this verse:

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

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Ask the Lord to show you any areas where you have been untruthful, deceitful, or not following God as well as you could. Receive the overflow of His forgiveness and love afresh.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that we are called friends of God – our Father – the creator of heaven and earth. May we experience more of Your love today, which is stronger than our fears and may Your Holy Spirit expel fear from inside of us. Amen.

ACTS 6

WRITTEN BY: JOHN BERNARD-CARLIN

Thought

Seven leaders, including Stephen, were appointed to ensure ongoing care for all widows in the church (required to be of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom). Stephen was doing the stuff inside and outside the church, upsetting some, who conspired against him with trumped up charges.

Our culture today is crying out for leaders (influencers) who conduct themselves with good character – where the public face matches the private reality – men and women, young and old, who will serve their communities with grace and goodness. And we are all leaders in any place where we have influence, whether in our family, amongst friends and neighbours and in our workplaces.

Stephen was such a man – of good repute, full of wisdom, faith and of the Spirit, whether serving those in need or demonstrating God's power in the public square. Stephen was like a piece of seaside rock – where the character of Jesus and the power of the Spirit ran right through the middle of him – a thing of beauty to some but offensive to others. He was not just a follower of Jesus of good character but also one who lived in ongoing relationship with and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

How is God inviting you to step into your calling as an influencer - as He continues to shape your character daily in spending time in His presence and allow His Spirit to fill you to reach out and love those around you?

Meditation

Welcome the same Holy Spirit now who filled and empowered Stephen to fill you now and throughout this day.

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Reflect on what it was that Stephen's accusers witnessed in him as they falsely tried him:

Verse 15:

"And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

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Ask God to empower you to be His witness to all those around you as you walk though this and that you would see what the Father is doing in every situation.

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Prayer

Father, thank You that as we spend time in Your presence, we are transformed into the likeness of Your Son, Jesus. May we be changed day-by-day, reflecting You to those around us that they may encounter Your beauty and wonder, grace and love. Amen.

ACTS 7

WRITTEN BY: JACOB PARTON

Thought

Stephen confronts the Jerusalem council with how they are rejecting God's rescue plan enacted in Jesus, just like their ancestors rejected God's efforts to rescue them through Moses and the prophets. The Council retaliates by killing Stephen, who nevertheless, prays that God forgive them of his murder.

In our culture, people can think that Christianity is essentially concerned with getting into heaven, achieved by private acts of devotion or good deeds. Attending church services, supplemented with occasional prayer or Bible reading – these things alone are considered to make Christians distinct. But, this is far from what we read in Acts – the church's whole existence and lived out experience was a radical challenge to the surrounding culture.

Stephen's martyrdom is a prime example of this. He understood that he was playing a part within God's grand plan of rescue and, consequently, gave his whole life to following Jesus. Not only was he empowered to confront the injustice of the Jerusalem Council, but he forgave in a way that would leave our culture dazzled. He prayed that God would forgive the very ones killing him, rather than retaliating or seeking vengeance. By this, Stephen was testifying to his culture of who Jesus was, as Jesus himself had forgiven His murderers in the same way (Luke 23.46). Stephen lived this radical life because, as verse 55 says, he was "*full of the Holy Spirit.*"

In what ways are you living counter-culturally to demonstrate who Jesus is to your workplace, friends and family?

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life right now - let Him reveal Jesus to you.

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Reflect for a few moments on how the Holy Spirit can reveal Jesus through an act like forgiveness. Concerning Stephen's martyrdom, American theologian Stanley Hauerwas said, *"No act of forgiveness so great could occur apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, who makes Christ present both to the martyr and the murderer."*

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Thank God for His forgiveness in your life. Ask God to highlight areas of your life that could better represent Jesus and ask for the Holy Spirit to empower you.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You offer an alternative to the retaliatory actions of our culture – in the form of forgiveness and transformation. Help us to live peaceably through Your Holy Spirit today, whilst still standing up to injustice. Amen.

ACTS 8

WRITTEN BY: JOHN BERNARD-CARLIN

Thought:

Following the murder of Stephen, we meet the church in a place of mourning and persecution leading to the scattering of believers. Philip and fellow scattered followers of Jesus chose to continue to trust God and share the gospel in Samaria and lives were changed in amazing ways.

As I consider Philip's amazing feats, I can easily overlook Philip's situation. Here – a community in shock and mourning, also experiencing the trauma of persecution and dispersal. What follows are remarkable stories of God's intervention in people's lives like Simon and the Ethiopian eunuch. I am challenged and humbled by Philip's expectancy that God would move, but equally that he did so in the midst of suffering. The same God who walked close with Philip in his suffering was present and moved powerfully as he reached out to others.

It is the same God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) who walks by my side through the real and painful circumstances of life and that same God invites me to walk with Him in loving those around me – to walk in faith and expectation that He is working always and in every situation. Saul was destroying the Church and yet the Church was not destroyed – the Church in its weakness was empowered to bring God's presence to the world around.

The same God of grace, compassion and love walks right by our side both in the circumstances of life and as we extend that love to those around us.

Meditation:

Welcome God into the midst of your circumstances – let Him love and abide in you.

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“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.”

Today, we stand with our brothers and sisters around the world who encounter this same persecution, but who continue to faithfully live out their faith in the midst of hardship. Reflect on this for a few moments.

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Now, ask God to reveal more of His presence to you in the midst of your circumstances and as you serve and love those around you.

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Prayer

Father, thank You that You dwell within me in the circumstances of life and accompany me as I seek to love those around me. Help me today to see what You are already doing and to co-operate with You in bringing the power of Your gospel to others. Amen.

ACTS 9

WRITTEN BY: CATHAY BURNSIDE

Thought

On his way to persecute believers, Saul encounters the risen Jesus and is blinded. God sends Ananias to Saul and his sight is restored. Saul receives the Holy Spirit and immediately starts preaching about Jesus. Peter visits believers, healing a paralysed man, and raising a woman from the dead.

An encounter with the glory of God changes who we are and how we see the world. The people around us don't need us to have all the right arguments, or to fix their problems, or to live "good moral lives." They need to encounter the power and the person of Jesus, and so do we. When my daughter was younger, she talked a lot about "baby Jesus in the manger" and every time I would gently add, "Yes, He's a baby in the Christmas story, but He's not a baby anymore. He's the king of the world, isn't He?"

Saul thought he knew God's plan, and it couldn't possibly be this carpenter who had been crucified. He's so sure of it that he is persecuting believers. And then Saul meets King Jesus. He'll talk years later in 2 Corinthians 4:6 about "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." When he sees this "glory of God in the face of Christ" on the road to Damascus, he is blinded and doesn't eat or drink for three days. It is the great undoing of his life. A glimpse of the glory of Jesus changes everything.

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit – breathe slowly and deeply and become aware of the presence of Jesus with you.

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Paul saw the “*glory of God in the face of Christ,*” and it changed him completely and forever. Revelation chapter 1 describes Jesus with: “*eyes like fire, his face like the sun, shining in all its brilliance.*” Reflect on who Jesus is now and ask for a fresh revelation of the glory of God.

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Thank God that He loves to show us who He is. Because of Jesus, we can come into the holy place and see His glory. Ask God for more glimpses of Him, which change us forever.

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Prayer

Thank You, Jesus that You change lives completely and forever. May we be a people of Your presence, hungry to know You more, and to make You known, that the glory of God may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Amen.

ACTS 10

WRITTEN BY: MARIE HAMMOND

Thought

Cornelius, a godly Centurion, has an angelic visitation. He's told to send for Peter. Meanwhile, in a puzzling vision, Peter is commanded to eat "unclean" meat! Peter then visits Cornelius' household. While sharing about Jesus, the Spirit descends upon everyone listening! Astounded that this has happened to non-Jews, Peter agrees to baptise them.

I'll never forget the night I decided to follow Jesus. It was with a small congregation of older folks and I was the "new" young person. That night someone shared the story about Jesus. I remember bursting with faith that I believed that Jesus is Lord! I'm so thankful the gospel was shared with me (the young girl at the back).

Peter took a step of faith to share the good news of Jesus, with outsiders. (Up to this point, the gospel had only spread among the Jews.) However, the Holy Spirit moved to form faith in Cornelius' heart and overcame him with His presence. May we, along with Peter, recognise that "God does not show favoritism." And, may we, remember that no-one is so "different" that Jesus' love cannot be established in them, through God's power in the gospel.

Who is in your world right now, that might seem "different"? Just as Peter was guided, whom might the Holy Spirit want you to talk to, about Jesus' love for them, no matter who they are?

Meditation

Welcome the Spirit's presence. Allow for a moment's silence as you do this.

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Spend a little while reflecting on the following verses from our chapter. What words or phrases stand out to you?

"Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.'

The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'"

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Ask the Lord to show you where you might need Him to expand your outlook and deepen your compassion – especially among those considered "outsiders." Make space for a moment of silence as you do this.

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Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus that You don't show favouritism. You are Lord of all. Reveal to me Your love for those around me – especially those that I may consider unlikely to come to know You. Amen.

ACTS 11

WRITTEN BY: MARIE HAMMOND

Thought

Peter has been ministering to non-Jews. He defends his actions to the leaders back in Jerusalem. They finally see it – God has broken out – “outsiders” are coming to faith! Now, the Way of Jesus has expanded beyond this group of Jewish believers and become an international Jesus-movement, spreading throughout the world.

When God acts in ways that we do not expect, with people we don't recognise, it can be confusing – we might be tempted to hold back. Years ago, I was in a church service with a group of visiting international leaders. The Spirit was moving powerfully through them. I'd never seen anything like it! It was a new expression of God moving for me. I had a wonderful encounter with the Holy Spirit. Here, in our passage, we see that Barnabas was sent to inspect the hubbub with the non-Jewish believers at Antioch. However, when he got there, he recognised the Spirit's work and threw himself in!

It's so easy to bless what God is doing when it's familiar. The early church was going through a season of profound change, and so many new things were springing up, beyond their imagination! We all forget that we have a worldview – through which we process and understand things. The Holy Spirit is constantly challenging this worldview – in order that we can embrace our environment through a Kingdom lens, enabling us to freely bless (and join in with) what God is doing.

Where might God be challenging you to leave behind an old way of viewing things, and to look through the lens of the Kingdom?

Meditation

Welcome the Spirit's presence. Allow for a moment's silence as you do this.

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Spend a little while reflecting on the following verses from our chapter. What words or phrases stand out to you?

"News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts."

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Ask the Lord to show you how you might be viewing life through a worldview that is out of sync with the Spirit and the Kingdom of God. Make space for a moment of silence as you do this.

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Prayer

We thank You, Lord Jesus that You are able to shift our focus – to see things the way You do. May we view the world and everything in it as You do and may we readily recognize and bless what You are doing amongst us. Amen.

ACTS 12

WRITTEN BY: JONNY NORRIDGE

Thought

Herod is persecuting members of the church. He has James killed and Peter imprisoned. The church are praying for Peter and, on the night before his trial, he miraculously escapes – surprising everyone. Herod’s power games continue and at the height of his egotism, he is struck ill and dies.

Corrupt leaders are an unoriginal bunch — as history testifies. Even now, we see figures in authority, either overseas or closer to home, seeking approval or securing control by scapegoating one group or manipulating another. It’s no wonder that many find themselves unsettled.

Herod’s pattern of leadership is on show in these stories, first with persecution and then leveraging political power for selfish gain. The reaction of Peter and the church gives us much to learn from as they entrust their situation to God. The church community do this through prayer. Peter does this through rest. He sleeps! — Incarcerated between two guards and with his trial looming. This non-anxious response seems fitting for a follower of Jesus – who, during a storm, could sleep on a boat and speak stillness and calm over it (see Luke 8).

Throughout all these circumstances, God is at work. Though one disciple is killed, another is miraculously set free. Though a leader masquerades as godly, his mortality is dramatically confirmed. Unhindered by violence and political posturing, the message of God’s rule and reign flourishes.

How do you feel prompted to stand alongside the suffering in prayer?

What difficulty or distress do you need to entrust to God?

Meditation

Settle your breathing and take a restful posture.

Holy Spirit, I welcome You, I recognise Your presence here and now.

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The author Parker Palmer notes how we can unconsciously live out a “functional atheism,” where our behaviour assumes nothing good happens around here unless we make it happen. Worrying replaces prayer and rest is diminished by relentless activity.

Yet, Psalm 47 reminds us to receive these words:

“... be still and know that I am God.”

As you breathe now, rest in these words

“... be still... and know... that I am God...”

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Where do you need reassurance that God is at work, even as trouble looms?
Bring that situation to God in prayer.

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Prayer

Father God, You who free captives and uphold the cause of the downtrodden, we look to You, our refuge and strength. Help us Spirit, to bring everything to You in prayer. May we find rest in You. Amen.

ACTS 13

WRITTEN BY: CATHAY BURNSIDE

Thought

Barnabas and Saul travel to Cyprus, meeting a proconsul who wants to hear about God. His sorcerer opposes them and is blinded. In Antioch, Saul preaches about the story of God and His people, showing Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promises. Some listeners are jealous but many believe.

I read *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* to my daughter recently for the first time. The waves of shock and then delight as Aslan was killed and resurrected was a plot twist which captured her heart. I suddenly realised I'd become too familiar with the story to properly appreciate it.

In Acts 13, Saul (also called Paul), tells the story of God and His people, working through the Exodus, the Law, and the Prophets, and showing Jesus was the culmination of every part. For us, it seems obvious that Jesus was the fulfilment of all God's promises, because we have heard the end of the story. But for those listening to Saul, a suffering, crucified and resurrected Messiah was the biggest "plot twist" in all of history.

Humanity communicates truth and makes sense of our lives through story. The best and truest story ever told is the story of God and His people. It's time to look again at the grand narrative of what God has done, to recapture our delight that Jesus came to bring "salvation to the ends of the earth," which even includes us here in Nottingham. It really is good news.

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit – breathe slowly and deeply and become aware of the presence of Jesus with you.

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The story of God and His people, culminating in Jesus' death and resurrection, really is good news. It can feel overwhelming to see all the bad news around in our world and sometimes it's easy to forget what Jesus bought for us and how good it really is. We were lost, and grace found us. Pause and remember all that God has done.

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Pour out Your thanks to Jesus. This good news changes our mindset, habits and affections forever. Ask God to release joy as you grasp the good news all over again.

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Prayer

Thank You, God that You're always acting, always moving, and always faithful to Your promises. May we know who we are, and where we belong in Your great story with Your people and may we always be full of joy at the good news of Jesus. Amen.

ACTS 14

WRITTEN BY: SHINO & SHANIA GABO

Thought

Paul and Barnabas travel to various cities in order to make new disciples and preach the gospel. As they were preaching, many believed, but some were heavily opposed and stirred up hatred. Through all hardships faced, they continued to spread the word of God.

When we first became followers of Christ, we started evangelising to our family and our community straight away. From this, a lot of them turned against us and wanted to stop us spreading the gospel. They began threatening us unless we stopped; and threatened our lives. They even encouraged others to kill us. This was very difficult to come to terms with – the amount of hatred which was stirred up due to us preaching the word of God. Despite all opposition, we've continued to preach the gospel and, through us, God has saved many people from our community. Praise God.

When preaching the gospel, there are many ups and downs. Paul and Barnabas were thrown out of cities and Paul was stoned, which shows how heavily persecuted they were, wherever they went. They continued on though, making many disciples, performing miracles and even returning back where Paul was stoned, telling them that "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." Similarly, though we face hardships and opposition, we must focus on the gospel to be spread. It is also important to encourage the disciples by reporting all of the amazing work God had been doing, despite the difficulties faced.

Are you willing to share the word of God with everybody you meet, despite possible opposition?

Meditation

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit now, let Him bring you closer to Jesus.

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Reflect on verses 21-23:

"They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."

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Ask the Lord to give you the spirit of boldness to preach the word of God, even in times of hardships and to remain in faith always. Ask the Lord to give you the habit of prayer and fasting, to draw you closer to the Lord.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we want to thank You for opening doors and providing us with opportunities to preach Your word to other people. Help us to remain strong in our faith and strengthen us with Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

ACTS 15

WRITTEN BY: SAM MCDERMID

Thought:

There is disagreement about circumcision among the Gentile believers, so Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to resolve it. They write to the Gentile believers with their response. Paul and Barnabas disagree and part company.

Have you ever sat and listened to two people arguing over some obscure point in a film? Like whether Han Solo or Greedo shot first in the bar scene in Star Wars: a New Hope? I love films and can get really passionate about them, my friends can't understand why I care so much. When we as modern, western Christians read this passage about circumcision, it can be hard to understand the depth of feeling. But, unlike some obscure plot point in a film, circumcision had deep significance. It was a key part of the Jewish identity, signifying God's covenant with the Jewish people, distinguishing them as God's holy people.

While it can be hard to relate to this particular topic today, we can all relate to the solution that James offers. He reminds the believers that God is clearly showing His acceptance of the Gentiles by moving among them – in fact, this is in line with the Old Testament promises, and as such: *"We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."*

We might not practice circumcision any more, but church can be a strange place for the first time visitor and we can sometimes accidentally create barriers between us and people who are different from us. We are called to be radically holy, but we are also called to be radically welcoming. God has thrown the doors open to all, without distinction and we are encouraged to do the same.

Meditation:

Let's take a moment to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit.

.....

Take a moment to reflect on whether there are times that you have created barriers between yourself and those who are different.

.....

Pray for those people, and ask God to show you ways that you could reach out to them and show God's love to them.

.....

Prayer

God, thank You that You have saved us by Your grace; that You have made a way for everyone to be loved and accepted by You. Teach us how to love one another. Amen.

ACTS 16

WRITTEN BY: JO GRESTY

Thought

Paul's second mission is filled with purpose to strengthen the early church by encouraging them to follow decisions made by the apostles in Jerusalem. He encounters Lydia and Timothy and the Holy Spirit directs their travel. They endure beatings and imprisonment, ever-ready to introduce Jesus to any who might listen.

I was raised to be God-conscious – I thought I was a Christian. One day, my friends started talking about what they believed and telling me about a church they had started attending with other young people; it sounded vibrant and full of life. I listened attentively. Something stirred within me – I was excited! I wanted to experience what they were talking about. Was this the God I had been brought up to pray to and believe in? Looking back now, I believe it was the moment the Holy Spirit began to open my heart to Jesus.

Lydia was a successful businesswoman, a merchant of expensive purple cloth. Her wealth and position in society probably gave her security. Yet, as a Gentile, she chose to believe in the God of the Jews. Lydia had gathered with other women on a riverbank outside of the city to pray. Whilst there, Paul and his companions came and spoke of Jesus and what they understood about God. Lydia was captivated and as she listened, the Holy Spirit opened her heart. She accepted Paul's words and was baptised.

It's the Holy Spirit that opens our hearts to Jesus.

Do you have family, friends or loved ones whom you would long to know Jesus? We can try our best to demonstrate and convince them of God's love but, ultimately, it's the Holy Spirit who opens their hearts.

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit to draw near to you and rest in His presence

.....

Lydia listened to Paul and his companions and the Holy Spirit opened her heart to be able to accept what Paul was saying.

Do you hear God as well as you would like to? Is your heart open to God? Spend a little while reflecting.

.....

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to listen with an open heart.

Ask Him to draw near to your family, friends and loved ones, giving them ears to hear and open hearts to receive His love.

.....

Prayer

Father God, thank You that it is Your Holy Spirit that empowers us to listen and opens hearts to know You. Give me ears attuned to You, together with the courage to tell others about Your incredible love. Amen.

ACTS 17

WRITTEN BY: NIGEL BRIGGS

Thought

Listening to Prime Minister's questions on the radio a few months ago, before the election, was at times uncomfortable, as the verbal wrestling match often spilled over into personal insults and below the belt punches. The battle for facts and the "truth" was at times hard to find.

In this chapter, we see Paul and Silas are in difficult yet similar circumstances. Preaching the gospel was not for the faint hearted. We see disruption, riots and insults flying as they try to preach the truth of Jesus. It's a battleground!

In Athens, Paul is actually called a "babbler," a cruel insult that we would not associate with him. John Stott puts context to the meaning of the word in his book *The Message of Acts*:

"The word was used to particularly describe a teacher who, not having an original idea in their own heads, unscrupulously plagiarised from others, picking up scraps of knowledge from here and there."

The fact is, not everyone wanted to hear what Paul had to say. Not everyone wanted to except Jesus as Lord and Saviour, but Paul had the courage say it anyway – never swaying from his message of Jesus, no matter what the cost was, even if it meant being a fool for Christ.

Speaking the truth will often require you to risk how you are viewed. Not everyone will want to hear what you have to say, and not everyone will want to embrace it. You might find, just like Paul and Silas, you have to put your reputation on the line for the sake of the gospel.

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life right now. Draw your attention to His presence.

.....

Reflect for a few moments on these words spoken by the crowd, after Paul proclaimed the gospel in Thessalonica:

"These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."

.....

Ask the Lord to highlight areas where you could take more courage to be a fool for Christ and put your reputation on the line for King Jesus.

.....

Prayer

Lord, give us the strength and the courage to share Your wonderful good news. We ask for divine opportunities and promptings to know when to speak and what to say. We say yes, King Jesus, use us to unlock the hearts of those that don't know You yet. Amen.

ACTS 18

WRITTEN BY: AMY PRINSLOO

Thought

Did you know, Paul travelled to approximately 50 cities during his time sharing the gospel? In chapter 18, Paul visits at least 7 different places! He begins in Corinth, and after a vision from the Lord, remains there for one and a half years before dropping his new friends off in Ephesus and moving on to “strengthen the disciples” elsewhere.

I remember when I was an 18 year old student, and someone first told me they wanted to invest in me. A friend of mine who was a bit older than myself sat with me over a can of coke and told me they wanted to help me grow in my walk with Jesus. Eight years on, that relationship has encouraged and blessed me in too many ways to count.

Living for Jesus isn't something we can do on our own. We need to be rooted in relationship if we're going to be in this for the long haul! In the same way, Paul encourages the faith of Priscilla and Aquila, who then go on to do that for Apollos. They invite him into their home and teach him everything they know; sending him out with all the encouragement of the church. I believe this is a picture of how Jesus wants us to be. Young and old, investing in relationship with one another and sharing the knowledge and experience we have with each other.

How are you investing in relationships where you can encourage others and be encouraged in return?

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit - ask Him to speak to you through this chapter.

.....

Now spend a moment reflecting on the words of Jesus in John 13:

"A new command I give you:

Love one another.

As I have loved you,

so you must love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,

if you love one another."

.....

Thank God for the people who have invested in your relationship with Him. Ask Him to highlight how you could better invest in His family, either by encouraging others or by opening up and asking them to walk alongside you.

.....

Prayer

Lord, we thank You that You have given us a new family in Your Church. Give us opportunities to learn from one another and encourage each other. Help us to support each other as we come together to live for You. Amen.

ACTS 19

WRITTEN BY: BEN HYETT

Thought

In this chapter, we see the good news about Jesus continuing to spread through the apostle Paul. For two years, Paul ministers in the ancient city of Ephesus and many come to faith in Jesus, but they encounter opposition from others who remain devoted to the false god "Artemis."

It's such a joy to see new people come to faith in Jesus at Trent through things like Alpha and ministry on the streets. I never get tired of hearing stories about how God has demonstrated His love and power in people's lives. What a privilege it is that we're invited to get involved and play our part. I feel challenged by the example of the apostle Paul to make myself more available for God to use me.

Paul's commitment to both proclaim the "word of the Lord" (verse 10) and demonstrate the works of the kingdom resulted in many coming to faith. Even handkerchiefs he had touched were used to heal the sick (my handkerchiefs might have the opposite effect!). Some people gladly left their old ways behind and followed Jesus, but others considered the cost too much and stood in opposition. Just as in the days of Paul the apostle, the good news about Jesus is still spreading in our city, our nation and our world despite the challenges.

God invites each of us to play our part in spreading the good news about Jesus. Wherever you are today, how could you respond to His invitation?

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life right now. Ask Him to fill you with His presence, His love and His power.

.....

Spend some time reflecting on verse 8 and verse 11 about the apostle Paul:

"Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God."

"God did extraordinary miracles through Paul..."

.....

Ask God to empower you and give you opportunities to share or demonstrate the good news about Jesus in your context.

.....

Prayer

Father, thank You that You are a God of extraordinary miracles and amazing love. Fill me with Your love and power to serve You today. In Jesus name. Amen

ACTS 20

WRITTEN BY: JOSH DILLINGHAM

Thought

Paul begins the return leg of his third missionary journey. One of his sermons is interrupted by the untimely death (and then resuscitation) of a disengaged listener. Paul then spends time with the church leaders of Ephesus instructing and equipping them one last time.

In President Obama's final address as commander-in-chief, he famously closed with the line *"I am asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change – but in yours."* Final words can be so powerful. Used well, they can equip those following in your footsteps, they can galvanise those who have become disheartened and they can act as a powerful and lasting reminder of who you were and what you stood for.

Paul's final words of wisdom to the leaders of a church he dearly loved were simple: *"Keep watch over yourselves"* (verse 26). Paul wanted to remind these leaders that so often the enemy of living the Christian life is apathy; it's allowing ourselves to "just go through the motions" as we follow Jesus; it's failing to perform regular self-examinations of where we're at with Jesus until we've drifted so far we can barely see Him. Paul, therefore, emphasises how vital it is for each of us to "keep watch" over ourselves; to take responsibility for regularly examining our hearts, minds, beliefs, motivations and actions to ensure that the love of Christ that brought us into this life is still the thing moving us forward. Is there anything in your life that you know has drifted, and needs to be recentred on Jesus today?

Meditation

Become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit with you. Let His peace and stillness fill you.

.....

It's so easy to find ourselves drifting from Jesus in an area of our lives. We might not even be aware of it, and so it's so important that we ask God to highlight these things to us. Reflect on these words from Psalm 139, and ask God to highlight an area of your life that may need to be recentred on him today.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Point out anything in me that offends you,

and lead me along the path of everlasting life."

.....

Prayer

God, would You renew our hearts and minds today. Would we walk in step with You in all the areas of our lives. Draw to our attention the things in us that are not of You and help us, day by day, to grow more into Your likeness. Amen.

ACTS 21

WRITTEN BY: DORINDA MILLER

Thought

Paul continues his journey and connects with believers along the way. Many urge him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul is undeterred and arrives in Jerusalem, where he is warmly received by James and the elders. He takes their advice, but is seized by the Jews in the Temple.

When we were led by the Spirit to go and work overseas, we like Paul encountered a number of people who tried to persuade us not to go! They argued that our children were too young, our relatives too old, or it was not God's will for us. We had a sense of peace about going and were greatly encouraged by a detailed picture a friend had while praying for us. Overseas we saw God move in incredible ways, including reversing a deportation order, which was issued to my husband!

Paul's experience resonates a little with me. But, we had neither his degree of revelation (Acts 20:22-23) nor his depth of experience of the Spirit, at that time. Paul knew what was coming, even if he did not know the details – and he continued his journey. He was determined to fulfil the purpose of his calling, by leading many Jews and Gentiles to Christ. He knew God's faithfulness and was totally open to all that lay before him, especially if it meant proclaiming the gospel in more places, and even if it resulted in his own death.

Are you clear about your calling? How committed are you to completing the race marked out for you?

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit now, as you breathe in deeply and out slowly three times.

.....

Reflect on how the Holy Spirit has lead and guided you on your journey of faith. Then ponder on this quote from Teilhard de Chardin:

"Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new."

.....

Ask God to increase your awareness of and responsiveness to the Holy Spirit.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that You sent the Holy Spirit to guide, counsel and comfort us. Help us to recognise His work in our lives and to respond to it, so that others may come to know You, too. Amen.

ACTS 22

WRITTEN BY: JOSH DILLINGHAM

Thought

Paul stands before a Jewish crowd that's baying for his blood, and shares his testimony. His audience can't accept the extraordinary things he is saying and so revolt. To keep the peace, the Romans step in and detain Paul. Fortunately, Paul's Roman citizenship qualifies him to receive a fair trial.

We are fascinated with hearing people's real stories. Last year, autobiographies made up 3 of the top 5 bestselling books on Amazon, and sold over 2.5 million copies in the UK. Real stories touch us, and inspire us in a way few things do. My wife and I recently brought some friends to church. They're not Christians and were honestly fairly sceptical about the whole thing. During the service, we heard the testimony of a man who'd had his life transformed by Jesus. On leaving, we asked them what they thought. They said, "I'm still not sure about any of this, but hearing that man's story has made me feel like there might be something to this after all."

Paul knew the incredible value in just sharing his story. He doesn't try and convince this crowd with clever theological arguments, or a well executed 3 point sermon, he simply shares his story. He describes his life before Jesus, he describes the moment he met Jesus, and he describes the difference he's made in his life since. You might not have had a "road to Damascus" moment like Paul, but you still have a story – a story that is a testament to God's incredible love and grace in your life. Know your story, and share your story.

Meditation

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit – become aware of the intense love that the Father feels for you.

.....

Take a moment to reflect on your own story. Where were you at when you first met Jesus? What exactly was it about Jesus that drew you in? How is your life different as a result now?

.....

Thank God for those key moments in your story, and for His grace. Ask God to draw to your attention anyone He is prompting you to share your story with.

.....

Prayer

God, we thank You that whilst we were still a long way off, You pursued us. Would You continue to write Your story in each of us, that our lives would be a living testament to Your goodness and love. Would You use our stories to bring glory and honour to Your name. Amen.

ACTS 23

WRITTEN BY: ALI COURTNEY

Thought

Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin in an attempt to resolve the dispute among the Jews. However, this leads to further uproar and arguments between two Jewish groups, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Paul then evades a plot by the Jews to have him killed and makes his way onto Caesarea.

As Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin to be interrogated, he continues to speak out vigorously against his treatment to one of the group without realising that the man he is speaking to is the high priest. When Paul becomes aware of what he has done, he recalls the Old Testament law, "Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people." In our divided culture today, it is so easy to ignore this principle. Our media is saturated with inflammatory words about politicians, leaders and the monarchy.

Although Paul didn't condone the way the high priest had treated him – breaking the law by harming a Roman citizen – Paul sought to respect the office of the ruling high priest. He manages to hold both aspects in tension; respecting the ruler (without which there would be chaos) whilst standing up to the person in charge and pointing out injustice. Respecting the structure of leadership God has put in place includes our duty to remind our leaders what they ought to be doing.

How do you actively show respect and avoid speaking evil about our leaders and rulers, when to do that is so countercultural at the moment?

Meditation

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit wherever you are right now, ask Him to search your heart.

.....

Where our media and national conversation is full of harsh words and divisive views, how can you be a unifying, Christ-like presence to those around you? How can you show respect to your leaders even when you don't agree with them?

.....

Pray for our rulers and leaders, even if we may consider them to be our political enemies, as Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

.....

Prayer

Lord, help us to be united as Christ followers rather than divided, to stand in peace against the worldly hatred and anger towards our rulers. Give us the courage to respectfully stand up to those in power against injustice, corruption and sin. Amen.

ACTS 24

WRITTEN BY: BEN HYETT

Thought

The apostle Paul is in Caesarea, having been taken there by the Roman authorities for his own protection. The same Jewish leaders who violently opposed Paul in Jerusalem now come to Caesarea to bring charges against him before the Roman governor, Felix. Paul defends himself but also takes the opportunity to share his faith.

It has often been during trials in my life (not literal ones like those of the apostle Paul), that I've experienced God's presence and help the most. I remember one season where it felt like lots of things were going wrong all at once but God seemed especially close to me. My faith in Jesus and His resurrection brought comfort in the midst of the difficulties. I'm amazed and inspired by Paul's courage and example during the trials he faced.

The apostle Paul faced immense pressures. A group of his own Jewish people had taken an oath to kill him and he found himself under the uncertain protection of the Romans. All this was because of his faith in Jesus and his courageous willingness to share the good news at huge personal cost. In the context of Paul's trials (literal and metaphorical), he demonstrates a resilience, poise and boldness that could only be explained by his faith and hope in Jesus.

Are you or someone you know facing a particular trial at the moment? Ask the Lord for help in your situation or think about how you might be able to encourage someone else facing difficulty.

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your life right now - let Him draw you to Jesus.

.....

Spend some time reflecting on verses 14 and 15:

"However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

.....

Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit right now. Ask Him to help you or guide you to someone in a season of trial at the moment.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that even though in this world we face trials and trouble, You have overcome the world. Thank You for the hope we have in You. Amen.

ACTS 25

WRITTEN BY: KATIE ELAM

Thought

Paul has been a prisoner since the rule of Felix and the chief priests and Jewish leaders are still desperately plotting to get Paul killed. They bring charges against Paul to Festus the governor, but Festus struggles to write anything bad about him.

One thing that stands out about this passage is Paul's boldness. Paul has been imprisoned for two years since his last trial and has had time to think and pray about what he might say in front of the authorities. In verse 10, Paul declares his innocence to Festus and then makes a bold move, appealing to be tried by Caesar. He knows his rights as a Roman citizen for a fair trial and also knows that if Festus hands him over to be tried by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem then the outcome could look very different.

In the West, we don't often find ourselves in extreme life and death circumstances like Paul! We may, however, face tricky circumstances where we are accused of something we didn't do and be fearful of what others may say. It's clear that it's Paul's act of courage in speaking out which saves him. Paul's boldness demonstrates that he is confident about who he is called to be and what he is called to do. We know that Paul is convinced he will make it to Rome from Jesus speaking in chapter 23:11.

Are there circumstances in which you are aware that God is asking you to speak boldly?

Meditation

Welcome the Holy Spirit into your heart in this moment, let Him draw you to Jesus.

.....

Reflect on Paul's boldness in this situation. The very fact that he was a prisoner and speaking to officials and making demands was audacious and meant he was sticking his neck out. However, being sent to be tried in Jerusalem probably wouldn't have ended well for him either. Where did Paul's boldness and certainty that God was with him come from?

.....

Allow the Holy Spirit to show you how to become more certain of who you are in Him and who He has called you to be.

.....

Prayer

Thank You, Jesus that knowing who I am in You makes me bold. Help me to understand more fully who You say I am, and empower me to speak out with boldness when You are asking me to. Amen.

ACTS 26

WRITTEN BY: KATIE ELAM

Thought

In this chapter, Paul addresses King Agrippa, Bernice, Festus and the rest of the dignitaries and makes his defence against the Jews' accusations, describing his early life as a zealous Pharisee, his conversion to Christ and call to preach to both Jews and Gentiles.

Have you ever been asked to share your testimony in front of a large group in a pressurised situation? On a handful of occasions, I've been asked to explain how I came to faith in Jesus. To be honest, I've been taken aback and managed to share, albeit not always very eloquently. However, my life wasn't hanging in the balance like Paul's was! Paul was always prepared to preach the word; be prepared in out of season as he instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2.

In this passage, Festus interrupts Paul and accuses him of being insane, but Paul doesn't lose his nerve. Paul responds to Agrippa's question in verse 29 that he is praying that all who are listening to him may become like him or rather come to know Jesus. He even uses a little humour to lighten an intense moment, he isn't praying that they would be like him in chains! Paul is always praying and ready, convinced that God will use him and his testimony wherever he finds himself and whatever the circumstances.

Are you and I always ready to explain how we came to trust in Jesus, and praying that those around us would come to know Him?

Meditation

Invite the Holy Spirit to come and fill you afresh today, let Him draw you to Jesus.

.....

Spend some time reflecting on how you came to know Jesus. Notice your emotions in this moment... thankfulness, joy, even sadness of years lost? Bring them to Jesus.

.....

Ask Jesus to help you to grasp more of how His grace and truth has changed your life. Express your thanks and love to Him in prayer.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may Your love and grace at work transforming us, spill over to those around us. Out of a love for others, may we pray for and share our testimony and stories of transformation with those around us. Amen.

ACTS 27

WRITTEN BY: JOHN BODILY

Thought

Some years prior to this encounter, Paul had written to the church in Thessalonica encouraging them to: “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). But how could Paul expect us to be thankful in difficult circumstances? When we lose our job, receive the diagnosis we dread – when we lose someone we love or when things fall apart? How realistic is it really to be thankful in all circumstances?

Acts 27 helps us see how Paul may have answered that question: “Well yes, it can be hard, I remember that time I was on my way to Rome to be tried by Caesar and found myself starving on board a boat that was falling apart – in the middle of a fierce storm – with a crew that wanted to jump ship and surrounded by soldiers that were planning to kill me...”

“Sounds pretty bad, Paul - How on earth did you get through it?”

“Well – I gave thanks for the bread in my hand and God’s promise that we would survive the shipwreck – I chose to be thankful in all circumstances.”

Paul understood that thankfulness is a choice. Someone once said that, as Christians, we can either be like a thermometer – simply reflecting the spiritual temperature around us – or a thermostat – seeking to influence the environment around us – setting the temperature. In this passage, Paul behaves like a thermostat. Rather than panic like the people around him, he tries to establish an environment of hope and thankfulness on board.

He reassures the crew that they will survive, he level-headedly encourages them to eat - and in the midst of the storm, he gives thanks to God for the food and for the promise of deliverance through the storm. Even though he is the on board prisoner, he emerges as a source of hope, stability and leadership.

Meditation

Paul's confidence was bolstered by the reassurance of the Holy Spirit - take a moment now to wait in His presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart.

.....

Paul wrote: *"give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

In Jesus, we always have a reason to be thankful that is greater than any challenges we face. Take a moment to reflect on these words; express thankfulness to Jesus for the love and grace He offers you.

.....

What environment might God want you to be a thermostat – someone who changes the atmosphere around you for good? Where might He be inviting you to bring hope, thankfulness or joy? Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen and encourage you to do this.

.....

Prayer

Lord, we ask that You would strengthen us and help us to be people of hope and confidence even in the midst of trials. Thank You, Lord, that You fill and empower us with Your Spirit – help us to live lives that make a difference for You. Amen.

ACTS 28

WRITTEN BY: NIGEL BRIGGS

Thought

As we conclude the final chapter of Acts, you could easily think Luke may have come up with a snappier title for this amazing adventure.

Why call it "Acts" and not....

"THE BATTLE FOR THE KINGDOM"

"POWER SOURCE"

"THE EDGE OF THE NEW WORLD"

Any Hollywood director worth their salt could see the potential of this blockbuster. However, when we look a bit deeper, we discover that, although it is an incredible adventure full of ups and downs, twists and turns, victories and defeats – the book of Acts is quite simply a record of the acts and deeds carried out by ordinary people called to do extraordinary things with God by their side.

In this final chapter, we see Paul finally arriving in Rome, the place the Lord had told him to go, back in chapter 23. His route (it has to be said) is an unconventional one, and even in this final chapter, we see him being washed up on the shores of Malta, going from a murderer to a god in the space of a few hours.

He does some amazing works there, before being escorted to Rome and placed under house arrest. As we look back over Luke's account, we are left with a wonderful picture of what true faith really looks like. Through all that Paul endured, his faith in Jesus never wavered. Through it all, he remained true to his calling and willingly played his part in the story.

The truth is each one of us is called to carry on the story. We might not be shipwrecked and washed up on the shores of Malta, we most probably won't find ourselves imprisoned and threatened with death or under house arrest in Rome – but, we are in our own "God story," where He will use the twists and turns of our own lives to reveal Jesus to those who don't know Him yet.

Meditation

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit – ask Him to reveal Jesus to you afresh.

.....

Reflect for a few moments on the last words of the book of Acts:

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”

.....

Ask the Lord to remind you of your own story and how it connects with the grand story that we’ve been reading through Acts. Pray for the names of those you could share this story and your story with today.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us to “take courage” as Paul did and live a life without hindrance for You. Give us the faith to go where You ask us to go and carry on the story You’ve called us to. Help us as ordinary men and women to be extraordinary followers of Jesus. Amen.



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