

EMPOWERED

The Acts of the Holy Spirit



PARTICIPANT GUIDE PART 4 - SPRING 2025



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LETTER FROM KURT

The book of Acts, in my opinion, is the most indispensable book of the New Testament. We have four Gospel accounts, 13 letters from Paul, and many letters from other writers which are all equally important. But Acts stands alone as a unique book unlike no other in our New Testament. It describes what the early church looks like, and prescribes what all churches should aspire to.

Acts is more than just a historical documentary...it is a personal narrative telling the story of God's followers. This narrative includes many scenes, acts (no pun intended), characters, and plot lines which lead us back to God. There is one person who ties everything together and is woven throughout the narrative as the main character with the leading role..and it may not be who you think it is.

Luke wrote the book of Acts, but he rarely mentions himself. Peter and John were the pillars of the early church, but they take a back seat in this story. Over half of the narrative follows the life and journey of the Apostle Paul, but he is still not the most important person in the book.

The main character in the book of Acts is the person of the Holy Spirit! You see his presence, power, and influence throughout every story and plot twist. Before Jesus left, he promised his followers something better was coming...the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

We learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and how he operates in the book of Acts than any other book in the Bible. In this book, we see the power of the Holy Spirit and how he empowered followers of Jesus to accomplish the will of God (Acts 1:8).

It is my hope and prayer throughout this LIFE Group season, you not only learn about Jesus and his first followers...but you receive, follow and EMPOWERED by the Holy Spirit!

May God bless,

Kurt Charlton



Lead Minister

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

The purpose of this guide is to help you dive deeper into the book of Acts and the works of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON NOTES:

Bring this workbook to church each Sunday. As you listen to the sermon, make a note when you hear something that surprises you, intrigues you, bothers you, challenges you, or encourages you. Use this as a starting point for your group discussion.

ACTS OVERVIEW:

Each week, we will provide extra insight into the background of the text as you begin your own study. These notes are meant to help the scriptures come alive for us. They will add a depth of meaning and help us see the continuity of the central themes throughout the book of Acts.

CONNECT QUESTIONS:

These questions will help you and your group members become more comfortable with talking and sharing with each other. Not only will you learn more about one another, the questions will help to steer the discussion in the direction of the topic.

DIGGING IN:

These questions are the “meat” of the discussion and will point back to the sermon each week. Feel free to read and answer the questions before your group meets. They will also help you dig deeper into the Scriptures during your group discussions.

CHANGE QUESTIONS:

Conviction leads people to significant actions. At the end of Jesus’ most famous sermon, he says if you do not put his words into practice, then you are a fool (Matthew 7:24-27). Life transformation is the ultimate goal of a follower of Christ. This happens through personal reflection and a genuine response to what you have heard from God. Feel free to answer the questions out loud when your leader reads them or you can quietly reflect and write a response in your workbook. This is the time to go deep and make it personal!

WRAP UP:

This section is a summary of that week's study.

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER:

Please focus this time on your own personal praises and requests instead of listing all of the bad things that happened to someone you know. We challenge you to get “deep” with one another relationally, which means becoming a little bit vulnerable as you are honest with one-another.

LEADER LEARNING:

This information may help you in preparing for the material you will be leading and anticipate some of the questions the group may ask. This section will not appear in the student’s workbook.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS:

INTRODUCTION

Acts is written by Luke, the physician, who is the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Luke covertly includes himself into the narrative a few times by saying we/us. The Gospel of Luke is episode one; Acts is episode two. The movement of the church in Acts follows the general flow of Jesus’ instructions in Acts 1:8; Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-8:1a); Judea/Samaria (Acts 8:1b-12:25); Ends of the world (Acts 13-28).

MAJOR THEMES

- HOLY SPIRIT (and his power)
Holy Spirit is mentioned 56 times, which is more per chapter than any other book of the Bible. He is responsible for every major turning point in the narrative. (1:2; 1:8; 2:1-4; 4:28-31; 5:32; 8:15-17; 10:44-46; 11:15; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:4-6; 20:22)
- PERSECUTION (and its results)
Early Christians suffered intense persecution, but Luke always records the positive attitudes and results. (4:3-4; 4:23-24; 5:40-42; 8:1-4; 11:19-21; 12:1-19; 14:1-7; 14:8-22; 16:25-34; 18:1-8; 21:11)
- BAPTISM (and its importance)
Baptism was clearly commanded as a response to faith in Jesus (2:38) and was the common practice for all new believers. (2:37-41; 8:5-13; 8:36-38; 9:10-12; 9:17-19; 10:47-48; 16:13-15; 16:27-34; 18:5-8; 19:1-5; 22:14-17)
- THE CHURCH (and its ups/downs)
Luke gives church summary statements like a narrator who wants to inform the readers of what they missed in-between each scene. (2:42-27; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 5:42; 6:7; 9:31; 12: 24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:19-20)
- PRAYER (and its effects)
Prayer is intentionally scattered throughout the entire narrative. It is almost like a supporting character beside the Holy Spirit. (1:14; 1:21; 4:31; 6:6; 9:40; 10:1-9; 12:12; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8)

DESCRIPTIVE VS. PRESCRIPTIVE

Be careful not to read the book of Acts as a prescription for how every single church should operate today. There are times when Luke is merely describing the events as they unfold. It is up to us to interpret and apply what these descriptions mean for us today. One way to do this is to seek the underlying principle that is described, and then turn that into a principle for life.

Should we cast lots or draw names out of a hat when choosing leaders for our church? Should we meet together every single day of the week? Should we sell all of our possessions and give our money to the poor? Should we speak in tongues when we accept the Holy Spirit? These are examples of descriptions not prescriptions for everyone, everywhere.

An example of turning a description into a principle can be found in Acts 2:42. Luke says the first converts devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship. The principle for our lives today is: we us in we should be devoted to God’s Word and to living in community with other Christ followers. Acts 2:46 says they met daily in the temple courts and in homes. The principle for us is we should regularly gather corporately and privately with other believers.

MARCH 9 - NEW TACTIC

ACTS 12:25 - 13:52 NIV

Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

²⁵ When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

On Cyprus

⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

⁶ They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹ Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰ “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

In Pisidian Antioch

(Acts 13:13-41 is not included due to space limitations)

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jewish leaders incited the Godfearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

ACTS OVERVIEW

PETER → BARNABAS → SAUL

Luke carefully and intentionally crafts together his narrative to show the shared roles of leadership and influence in the early church. It was never just about one single person. The main roles of leadership generally pass from Peter, to Barnabas, to Saul throughout the narrative. But Luke is cautious not to highlight one as more important than the other.

Notice that Barnabas was listed first (before Saul) by Luke and the Holy Spirit himself in Acts 13:2. Also notice that the Holy Spirit called Saul by the name Saul, not Paul. (See “Saul to Paul” in Lesson 15.)

HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS!

We do not know what this would have sounded like, but the Holy Spirit gave clear, audible instructions to the early church leaders in Acts 13:2. This is one of four times in the Bible where the Holy Spirit is quoted, all of which are in the book of Acts. (Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 13:2; 21:11)

We see many instances in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit acted as sort of a travel guide to the church missionaries. In Acts 13:4 the Holy Spirit gave specific directions to Barnabas and Saul. See also Acts 8:29; 8:39; 9:31; 16:6-8; 20:22-23.

DIVERSITY (13:1-3)

Mark Moore gives a wonderful breakdown of the five diverse church leaders who were praying and fasting in Antioch. Here is a breakdown of their diversity:

- Economic: Manaen was raised in Herod's household and was a wealthy aristocrat. Barnabas was a wealthy, yet generous, land owner (Acts 4:36-37.) Simeon was perhaps a displaced Jew from Africa who had less economic means.
- Cultural: Barnabas and Saul were Hellenistic Jews (Jews raised within a Greek background and culture). Manaen was raised alongside the Herodian royal family. Lucius was likely a Roman national and probably a founding member of the church in Antioch.
- Nationality: Africa, Syria, Cyprus, Cilicia, Israel.

(Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 228-229)

SYNAGOGUES FIRST (13:14-43)

Paul and Barnabas first took the gospel to the local synagogue. They reasoned with the Jews by looking at the prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. It was only after the Jews turned away that they devoted their time to the Gentiles. The Jews should have been easier converts to the gospel message. They already believed in a monotheistic theology system. They believed in one God, the Father, so convincing the Jews that Jesus fulfilled God's words and promises to the world should have been easier.

PSIDIAN ANTIOCH

Antioch was a rather common name for cities in the 1st century, much like Washington is a common city name in our states today. Paul and Barnabas began this missionary journey from the Antioch that was located at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. The Antioch they traveled to in this scripture was in Pisidia, in the heart of modern-day Turkey.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. **What countries would you like to travel to and why?**
2. **When have you been a part of a multicultural experience? What did you like about it?**
3. **When have you been around a group of people you did not know, but you felt right at home?**

DIGGING IN

1. **Read Acts 12:25-13:3. What were the church leaders doing when they heard the Holy Spirit speak to them? Why would Luke include these details?**

2. Why do you believe the leadership of the church in Antioch was so diverse? Is diversity required in every church?

3. What different strategy was employed to spread the gospel to new areas beginning with these passages?

4. Look at Acts 13:4-12. Why do you think Luke chooses this section to shift from Saul to Paul (vs. 9)?

5. Examine Acts 13:13-41. What stands out to you about Paul's message to these Jews in the synagogue? What principle can we learn from his remarkable speech?

6. Compare Acts 13:46 with Romans 1:16. Why do you think they needed to preach to the Jews first, and then the Gentiles?

7. How does vs. 50 show the strategy and success of the Jewish leaders as they opposed Paul and Barnabas? What methods do opponents of Christianity use in our culture today?

CHANGE

1. Where or to whom do I feel sent by God to share his message?
2. How can I use my knowledge of Jesus and my knowledge of our culture to evangelize people around you?
3. What is the biggest reason I follow Jesus? How can I use that to tell others about him?

WRAP UP

New tactics: To take the gospel news to the end of the earth. The church in Antioch prayed and sent the first missionaries to target unreached areas. The spread of the gospel seemed much less strategic up to this point. The call to do this did not come from the apostles or Jerusalem. It came from a larger, local church. It demonstrates an autonomy of the church and their willingness to try new tactics.

CARE

- How can we pray for each other?
- How can we pray for our church?

MARCH 16 - NEW RESILIENCE

ACTS 14:1-28 NIV

In Iconium

¹ At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. ⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵ There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the gospel.

In Lystra and Derbe

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

The Return to Antioch in Syria

²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² 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. ²³ 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. ²⁴ After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, ²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

²⁶ From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

ACTS OVERVIEW

WENT AS USUAL (14:1)

Luke includes the brief detail that it was the usual practice of Paul and Barnabas to visit the Jewish synagogue when they entered a new city. Synagogues would have been the hub of Jewish interactions in each city. The further away from Jerusalem they traveled, the more they would have seen Greeks also participating at the synagogue. This was the religious and commercial hub for heritage Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. It was a natural place to spread the gospel message of Jesus and have the largest impact.

When the missionaries received a negative response from the Jews, they took the message to the Gentiles. This is very similar to Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22:1-14: *"⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.'" (Matthew 22:8-9 NIV)* (See also Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46)

THE GOSPEL IS OFFENSIVE

The Gospel of Jesus Christ should offend people, but that does not give us the right to be offensive (compare Galatians 5:11 and 1 Peter 3:15). The core of the message is the assumption that others are doing something wrong, and they need to discover what is right. That can easily be offensive and turn people away from wanting to hear us. Be aware: speaking Jesus' truths will offend people. But we should be very careful not to offend others with our actions.

Christian artist Trip Lee said, “So the gospel itself is already offensive enough. We don’t need to add offense to it by being jerks about everything. We don’t need to add offense to it by being very condemning and self-righteous. We don’t need to add offense to it by being incapable of actually loving and being in relationships with people. We really want to show people the compassion of Jesus even as we say very hard things.”

THE GOSPEL IS OFFENSIVE

In the face of real, violent, and intense persecution, Paul and Barnabas encourage the disciples to remain true to their faith in Jesus. They said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22 NIV). Early Christians who were suffering did not have a victim mentality. Instead, they took it in stride and actually used persecution as an opportunity to prove their faith and encourage others.

Many churches and pastors today preach a false gospel of prosperity which leads people to believe that only good things happen to Christians. This is NOT at all what we see in Scripture. In fact, we see the exact opposite. (See Acts 5:41; John 16:33; 1 Peter 4:14-16; 2 Timothy 3:12)

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- 1. When have you not said something that needed to be said because you feared the consequences?**
- 2. What is something you find offensive but may not bother others?**
- 3. When have you inadvertently offended someone?**

DIGGING IN:

- 1. How many times in this passage do we see people react badly to Paul and Barnabas or to their message?**
- 2. In what ways do Paul's apostleship in these passages mirror the way Peter demonstrated his apostleship?**
- 3. How do you feel about Paul and Barnabas fleeing in the face of persecution?**
- 4. Do you think the gospel message of Jesus should divide or unite people? Explain.**
- 5. Look at Acts 14:8-18. What are some dangers that can arise when spiritual leaders allow others to revere them too much?**

6. Examine Acts 14:19-20. Why did things go so quickly from good, to bad, to worse? What might this teach us about life, ministry, and evangelism?

7. Read Acts 14:21-28. How does the attitude of Paul and Barnabas in vs. 22 compare with how many people think of Christianity today?

CHANGE

1. What is the “synagogue” in my sphere of influence where I should be evangelizing?

2. If I am honest, how much suffering could I endure for sharing the truth of Jesus?

WRAP UP

Jesus warned us in the Parable of the Sower that some would accept the word but would soon shrivel and die because they could not take the heat (Matt. 13). Paul and Barnabas faced much opposition to their presence and message, yet they persevered. Even after a stoning, Paul returned to planning for ministry the next day. We will face opposition. We must resolve to stand firm. Resilience emphasizes the message of faithfulness as an encouragement to believers and as a witness to unbelievers. It displays that who we believe in is worth the hardship we endure.

CARE

- How can we pray for each other?
- How can we pray for our church?

MARCH 23 - NEW WAY FORWARD

ACTS 15:1-35 NIV

The Church in Antioch

¹ Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶ The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ “‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’— ¹⁸ things known from long ago.

¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

The Council’s Letter to Gentile Believers

²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

³⁰ So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁴ ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

ACTS OVERVIEW

DOWN FROM JUDEA (15:1)

Antioch is north of Judea and Jerusalem, so “down from Judea” is an odd statement that is sometimes used to discredit the Bible. However, this expression was common in Jewish culture for two reasons. First, Jerusalem was geographically on higher ground, so quite literally you went up to Jerusalem and down to anywhere else. Second, Jerusalem was the epicenter of Judaism and thus revered as a literal and figurative place higher than anywhere else.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (15:28)

This small statement is buried in the details of this grand narrative, but it gives us an insight into how the early church understood the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used here for “seemed” can be translated as “think, appears, seems.” This statement, along with a long and lengthy discussion on the topic, shows us that the early church leaders were almost convinced, but not 100% sure that their requirements for the Gentiles were right.

It is often difficult to discern the will of God and understand the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Our understanding and response are not always neat, clean, and clear. That is why we have wisdom, Christian counsel, and especially the Word of God to direct us as well. The early church leaders were correct, but they were also honest to the fact that they might be mistaken. Their hesitation did not lead them to inaction. They did not suffer from paralysis by analysis. They debated, researched, prayed, and then acted according to what they thought was right. (See 1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Acts 17:10-11)

WHY THESE REQUIREMENTS? (15:20; 29)

James and the final letter give four restrictions for the Gentiles:

- Food polluted by idols
 - » Much of the food found in Gentile marketplaces would have been sacrificed as a part of pagan idol worship (See 1 Corinthians 8-10).
- Blood
 - » Unhealthy to handle and used for pagan rituals and idol worship
- Meat of strangled animals
 - » Unhealthy to handle because of the blood and used for pagan rituals and idol worship
- Sexual immorality
 - » Greek word “*porneia*” which would have included various Old Testament moral restrictions like adultery, fornication, homosexuality, incest, prostitution, etc. (Leviticus 18:6-30; 1 Corinthians 5:1, 6:13; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3).

These restrictions were not ways to earn salvation; they are, instead, ways to avoid the corruption of one’s salvation. All four of these are related to pagan temple practices and idol worship. They were culturally acceptable but were not the kind of conduct Christians should participate in. Gentile Christians might ruin their witness in the community by participating in them (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). They also might lead other Christians astray and get caught up in demonic activity (1 Corinthians 10:23-30).

JAMES

“James was apparently one of Jesus’ brothers, who had not believed in him during Jesus’ public career (John 7:5). Jesus had appeared to James in a special and separate occasion after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7), and James had joined with the apostles in prayer (Acts 1:14). By all accounts James became a prominent leader in the first generation of Christianity (Galatians 1:19 and 2:9). His judgment, summing up the debate and its results, is extremely important.” From *Acts: 24 Studies for Individuals and Groups* by N.T. Wright. Page 76.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **What is a long-time opinion you have held in the past about which you have not softened?**
2. **When have you been a part of a healthy debate? What made it healthy?**
3. **When have you been a part of an unhealthy debate? What made it unhealthy?**

DIGGING IN:

1. Examine Acts 15:1-5. Who were the ones causing the problems in this debate? What shocks you about these people?

2. What was at stake in this disagreement between the Jews and the Gentiles?

3. Look at Acts 15:6-11. What was Peter's argument? What leadership lesson can we learn from verses 6-7?

4. Read Acts 15:12-21. What reasoning did Barnabas, Paul, and James use to sway the conclusion?

5. Reread Acts 15:22-29. Why would the Jews mention these specific restrictions for the Gentiles? Why would they need to specify any restrictions at all? (See "Why These Requirements" on pg. 28.)

6. Examine Acts 15:30-35. Why would the Gentiles be encouraged to receive this letter even though it had restrictions?

7. In what ways do people make it difficult for others to turn to God today?

MARCH 30 - NEW LEADERSHIP

ACTS 15:36 - 16:15

Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas

³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

¹ Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ² The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³ Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Paul’s Vision of the Man of Macedonia

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Lydia’s Conversion in Philippi

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

ACTS OVERVIEW

PAUL’S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

Source: Mark Moore - Acts Notebook/Next Level/Ozark Christian College

- 1. Acts 13:1–14:28 (Barnabas, Saul, John Mark)**
 - Estimated: 1200 miles, approximately two to three years in duration
 - Planted at least six churches
- 2. Acts 15:36–18:22 (Paul, Silas, Timothy)**
 - Estimated: 2600 miles, approximately three years in duration
 - Planted at least six churches
 - Barnabas took John Mark on a separate trip to Cyprus
- 3. Acts 18:23–21:17. (Paul, Timothy, Luke, others)**
 - Estimated: 2700 miles, approximately four years in duration
 - Planted no new churches but strengthened countless established churches

WHO WAS JOHN MARK?

The first time we see John Mark is in Acts 12:25 as a ministry companion of Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey. Inexplicably, he leaves them to return to Jerusalem (13:13). Barnabas wants to bring John Mark on the next missionary journey, but Paul refuses, causing a division between them. John Mark goes with Barnabas to Cyprus (15:39). It is likely that Barnabas and John Mark are cousins (Colossians 4:10).

John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark, even though he was not one of the 12 disciples/apostles and not an eyewitness to many of the accounts he gives. Most scholars, and church historians, agree that John Mark recorded his Gospel from the firsthand accounts of Peter. Peter mentored John Mark and calls him “son” in 1 Peter 5:13. Some scholars believe John Mark is the unnamed disciple in Mark 14:51-52.

PAUL AND JOHN MARK RECONCILE

Whatever the disagreement between Paul and John Mark was, it was not broken beyond repair. Since John Mark wrote a Gospel and was mentored by Peter, he was obviously well respected within the church. Eventually, we even see Paul speak very favorably of John Mark.

- Colossians 4:10 (NIV) “My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)”
- 2 Timothy 4:11 (NIV) “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”
- Philemon 24 (NIV) “And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.”

LUKE JOINS THE STORY!

Acts 16:10 marks the beginning of a very exciting time in Luke’s narrative. He subtly begins to insert the words “we” and “us” into the narrative. He does not make himself the center of attention, but he humbly wants the readers (Theophilus and others) to know he has joined Paul on his missionary journey. This is the first of three distinct times Luke uses plural pronouns that indicate his presence:

16:10 to 16:18 - Troas to Philippi - 49 AD

20:4 to 21:19 - Philippi to Jerusalem - 54 to 57 AD

27:1 to 28:30 - Caesarea to Rome - 59 to 62 AD

It is unclear, but possible, that Luke was imprisoned and freed with Paul and Silas.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **How do you typically handle conflict? Are you a confronter or an avoider?**
2. **When have you lost a friend because of an intense disagreement? Was it ever resolved?**
3. **When have you seen conflict lead to a healthy resolution?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **Review Acts 15:36-41. What was the nature of the argument between Paul and Barnabas? (See also Acts 12:25 and 13:13)**
2. **What does this passage teach us about restoring people to ministry despite their past failures? (See “Paul and John Mark Reconcile” on pg. 38)**

3. How could this potentially detrimental situation be turned into a positive outcome?

7. Read Acts 16:6-10. What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in this passage?

4. What are some unhealthy ways to deal with conflict? What can happen if conflict is not dealt with in a healthy way?

5. Read Matthew 18:15-17. How do these verses give us a template to follow when we have been sinned against?

6. Read Matthew 5:23,24. What is our responsibility when we realize we have offended or sinned against someone else?

APRIL 6 - NEW BOLDNESS

ACTS 16:16 - 40 NIV

Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.”

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

ACTS OVERVIEW

POWER IN DARK ARTS (16:16)

Do not be deceived, there is real power in dark magic. A lot of what we see from horoscopes, fortune tellers, séances, divinations, mediums, etc. are charlatan tricks and scams. They are general enough to seem true, which is enough to trick people into handing over their money. But occasionally there is actual power in the dark arts.

Supernatural power can only come from one of two places: God or Satan. Luke makes clear that an evil spirit possessed this woman, and she actually had the ability to predict the future. Most people believe Satan and his demons cannot actually predict the future; instead they likely use their network of communications and influence in the world to bring about their “predictions”.

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH WHAT SHE SAID? (16:17-18)

1. Wrong Content: The original Greek text literally says, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you ‘a’ way to be saved.”
2. Wrong Tone: We can’t critique her tone because we were not there but she may have been speaking sarcastically to make light of their preaching.
3. Wrong Source: Maybe Paul expels the evil spirit because he doesn’t want any free press from the enemy. Like Jesus, the best thing Paul could do with a demon is to hush it immediately.
4. Wrong Audience: Would a Gentile crowd understand the significance of “Most High God?” They may have written off this terminology as nonsense, or maybe it created too much misunderstanding given their polytheistic background. (Source: Mark Scott - Acts Notebook/Next Level/Ozark Christian College)

PHILIPPIAN JAILER

This is another conversion story following a miraculous power of God. The Philippian jailer was a Roman soldier. He understood his duty. He was responsible for the containment of the prisoners within the jail at Philippi. If they escaped, he would be found guilty and executed in their place. He was a highly commissioned officer. He owned property. He had a family. His gratitude to Paul made him open to the gospel. They saved his life by staying. While it was unclear if he had listened to the prayers and singing, it is clear he wanted to hear why they were so different than the other prisoners. He saw enough in them to ask them for a way to be saved. Maybe he heard the testimony of the girl with the evil spirit. He knew there was something they had that he did not. Paul and Silas's message for him to believe in Jesus gave him hope in a moment when his life could have faced its greatest tragedy. He showed kindness to these men, and he and his household were baptized. They were filled with joy because they had come to believe in God.

BELIEF AND BAPTISM

As we read the conversion stories in the book of Acts, we rarely get the entire conversation between the Christian and the one learning about faith. In the Philippian jailers conversion, Paul and Silas challenged him to believe, and just a sentence later the jailer responds with baptism. Earlier in the book of Acts, Peter calls the Pentecost crowd to repent and be baptized (Acts 2). In Acts 9, Ananias lays his hands on Saul, promising him healing and the filling of the Holy Spirit, and Saul responds with baptism. In the gospel of Mark, Mark records Jesus' words in the Great Commission to include: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16) Individual passages give us glimpses, but reading the whole of scripture gives a more complete understanding of conversion: the type of heart God wants to receive (repentant); the willingness we to admit that our life needs to change (confession); the truth of Jesus we must profess before people (belief); and the acceptance of the forgiveness of Christ and promise of a new life (baptism).

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **According to a worldly perspective, how does following Jesus "ruin" a life?**
2. **Describe a time or circumstances when you expected a bad outcome only to have something good happen.**
3. **What songs do you sing to yourself when you're going through rough times?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **See Acts 16:16-24. Was the power the girl displayed to predict the future supernatural or a hoax?**
2. **Why do you think Paul was so upset about what she was saying? Why would he wait so long to cast out her evil spirit?**

3. Look at Acts 16:20, 21. What crime did the slave's owners accuse Paul and Silas of committing? Was it true?

4. What actions show that the jailer's faith in Jesus was genuine?

5. Describe the events of Paul and Silas's day. How would you feel throughout all of this?

6. Compare the conversion experience of the jailer with Mark 16:16. What are the similarities?

7. How do Paul and Silas show boldness for Christ throughout this passage?

CHANGE

1. How would I answer someone who asked, "What must I do to be saved"?

2. How can I turn bad situations into opportunities for evangelism and witnessing?

3. How can I constantly look for people who need to hear about Jesus?

WRAP UP

Paul and Silas demonstrated a willingness to live and promote the gospel despite their circumstances. Whether they were praying by the river with a group of believers, singing hymns in a jail cell, or boldly sharing about Jesus in a moment of the jailer's personal crisis, Paul and Silas would not back down. The Spirit inside of them bolstered a boldness in their faith and a confidence that the word of the Lord would always be the right message. We need to be prepared to share God's truth in a variety of circumstances. The Spirit will give us boldness.

APRIL 13 - NEW APPROACH

ACTS 17:1 - 34 NIV

In Thessalonica

¹ When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. ² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

⁵ But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, ⁷ and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” ⁸ When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. ⁹ Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

In Berea

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. ¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. ¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

In Athens

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbling you are saying?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

ACTS OVERVIEW

AREOPAGUS (Acts 17:19, 22)

The Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, can refer to both a place and a group. The place was a hill outside of the marketplace dedicated to Ares/Mars where civil and criminal cases were heard. The group was composed of well-respected city leaders including philosophers, judges, and pagan religious leaders. Socrates was brought to this same place for trial in 399 BC. At that time, the Areopagus represented the intellectual center of the universe.

STOICS (ACTS 17:18)

Followers of Zeno of Cyprus (335-263 BC). The Stoics were monastic in their approach to life. They felt that happiness came from detaching oneself from material possessions and relationships. Therefore, they craved nothing and avoided any pleasure other than the pleasures of simplicity. Since sadness would come from losing something you love, they sought to remain unattached. They shared some similarities with Christianity in that they believed in a creator, the gods determined one's destiny, and self-denial led to freedom. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul or the existence of a spiritual world; rather, they believed that all that is good is found within ourselves. Paul's quote in vs. 28 is from a Stoic philosopher. Brutus, who killed Julius Caesar, was also a Stoic.

EPICUREANS (ACTS 17:18)

As followers of Epicurus (341-270 BC), their basic understanding was "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you will die." They believed that carnal pleasure was the greatest good, but they were not excessively hedonistic since they avoided actions that led to painful consequences such as drunkenness. They were rational and scientific in their approach to life's dilemmas, so they rejected most religions as irrational. If they did believe in the gods, the gods were considered to be far off and not involved with humanity.

MODEL MESSAGE

Most scholars consider Paul's speech to the Areopagus as a model sermon for evangelizing to non-believers. This sermon corresponds with the model sermon to the Jews in Acts 13, and the upcoming model sermon to Christians in Acts 20 (for edification, not evangelism). Paul's intent was not to include all of the truths about Jesus, but to say enough to whet their appetite for more.

KNOWING AND USING SCRIPTURE

In these three sections, we see Scripture being used to show truth to those who were living in ignorance. In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned, explained, and proclaimed the truth of Jesus from the Scriptures (17:2-3). In Berea, Paul taught in a way that made the Bereans want to eagerly examine the Scriptures every day. In Athens, Paul did not quote any Scripture directly, but he taught the truths of Scripture to an unbelieving audience. Likewise, we should know the Bible in such a way that we can teach it, quote it, refer to it, paraphrase it, and reword it to be understandable to anyone.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **What phone numbers can you still remember from the past?**
2. **What is something you still have memorized from your childhood? Recite it for the group.**
3. **What is something you had previously memorized but have now forgotten?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **Give an example of when you needed to paraphrase or reword something in order to explain it to someone else?**

2. Read Acts 17:1-9. What 3 words are used in vs. 2-3 to describe how Paul used Scripture to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah? Discuss how each of these words is useful when sharing your faith.

3. Read Acts 17:10-15. Why were the Berean Jews held in such high regard? Why do you think such a response to Scriptures results in noble character?

4. How can memorizing Scripture be a benefit when sharing faith? How can quoting Scripture to someone actually become a hindrance at times?

5. Look at Acts 17:16-21. Why do you think they wanted to hear more from Paul? What can we learn from Paul's approach to evangelism in these verses?

6. Examine Acts 17:22-34. What can we learn from Paul's approach when he was speaking to the Athenians in vs. 22-23? How did he find common ground?

7. What are some ways Christians can ruin their opportunities to tell people about Jesus? What are some ways Christians can speak truth and still be asked to speak again, like Paul was in vs. 32?

CHANGE

1. **When and how can I find common ground with someone this week and begin a spiritual conversation?**
2. **How can I seek to understand Scripture better so I can explain God's truths to others?**
3. **Who is one person I will have a spiritual conversation with this week?**

CARE

- **How can we pray for each other?**
- **How can we pray for our church?**

WRAP UP

Paul was able to change his approach of sharing Jesus to accommodate those from a Jewish or Gentile background. He understood both cultures well enough to know where there is common ground. To the Jews, he began with the Old Testament, using the Old Testament to prove the identity of Jesus. As the audience became more and more Gentile, he began with their religious beliefs or with rumors about Jesus. Cities without synagogues required a different approach to sharing Jesus, but in every city, Paul found a way for the truth about Jesus to be heard. We must know the truth well enough to be able to share it with those who have some spiritual understanding, as well as to those who do not have any spiritual understanding.

