

Acts Evangelism

30 Day Devotional



By Chris Losey

Welcome to Acts Evangelism

The book of Acts is known as the Acts of the Apostles, but it might better be called the Acts of Peter and Paul since it primarily focuses on their ministries. But more importantly, it is a book that shows how the early church grew rapidly and expanded across the ancient world. It is filled with principles on evangelism that give the present-day Christian a clear view of what it takes to share the gospel with others.

Today, many Christians have a distorted view of evangelism. They think obeying the call to share their faith necessitates standing on a street corner handing out tracts or getting on a soap box and crying *turn or burn*. Some feel to be a good Christian they must share Christ with everyone who crosses their path. For these and many other reasons, most Christians do not share openly. The job is too ominous or too frightening. They see evangelism as work for hired guns like pastors, evangelists, and missionaries.

Looking closely into the pages of Acts reveals that sharing the good news is more than witnessing; it is being a witness. Even so, most Christians live in fear of evangelism. They dread the thought of confrontation. They fear rejection. They don't want to be labeled religious fanatics or Jesus freaks. They don't want people to be angry with them. And many, simply don't know how to share their faith.

Rather than intentionally sharing with neighbors, co-workers, family members or friends, Christians hope these people will hear about Christ by providentially reading a book or tract, turning on Christian radio or television, or by stumbling into a Billy Graham crusade. After all, if God wants people saved, He can draw them to Himself without anyone's help; right? Although this is true, He still calls us to join Him in the work.

Looking at the book of Acts through the lens of evangelism unlocks a treasure-trove of practical information for all who dare plumb its depths.

With this in mind, you are invited to dive into this devotional for the next 30 days to see how God might encourage you or change your life in regard to sharing your faith with others. Happy reading...

Chris Losey

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Dedicated to those who seek to share the wonderful news of Christ with others

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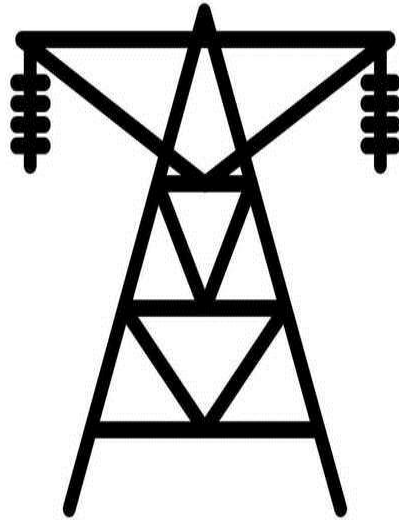


Day 1 - Who Has the Power?

Read Acts 1:1-8

Just the thought of sharing the gospel with a non-Christian makes many believers cringe. Thoughts of rejection or inadequacy grip their minds. Many think, “I just can’t do this,” or “Isn’t this the pastor’s job?”

If you are one of these people, take a deep breath and relax. The power for evangelism does not come from you, it comes from God! In other words, you are not on your own. You don’t have to *perform* or *prove* anything to anyone. You just have to let the Holy Spirit work in and through you.



In Acts 1:8, shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples, **“...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”**

There is no doubt that Jesus wanted His disciples to share their faith. After all, He called them to be fishers of men (Mt 4:19). Notice, however, Jesus did not want them sharing until they had the power to do it effectively. They were to wait until they received power from on high. It happened a few weeks later at the day of Pentecost (Ac 2), when the Holy Spirit arrived like a house of fire!

It is comforting to know that God never asks us to do anything He does not equip us for. And He has equipped us to share our faith. The power to do so is not any power, it is Divine power – power that healed the sick and raised the dead!

Since God sent the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, every Christian now has this indwelling power. It is given at the moment of salvation when believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, the church. 1 Corinthians 12:13 states, *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”* Romans 8:9 confirms the fact that every believer

possesses the Holy Spirit, “*However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*” All believers belong to Christ and thus have the Spirit.

If you are a Christian the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Don’t stress about sharing your faith. If you think you can’t share, you’re right, you can’t! But God can do it through you because He placed His power in you. Philippians 4:13 states, “*I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me.*” All you need to do is look for opportunities, step out in faith and let the power flow. What a concept – God empowering His people to do the work of the ministry! Awesome!

Questions

What do many Christians fear in regard to sharing their faith?

Does the thought of sharing your faith scare you? If so, what are your greatest fears?

How should knowing you have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit affect you in relation to sharing your faith?

Take Action

Take time right now to ask God to remove any fear you have regarding sharing your faith. Ask Him to replace it with confidence, not in yourself, but in Him. Ask God to bring this prayer to mind today. Pray it each time He does. Ask Him to give you the opportunity this week to step out in faith and talk to someone about spiritual things.

Day 2 - Being a witness

Read Acts 1:1-11

Many Christians equate evangelism with *witnessing*. Sometimes in their zealotness to share the gospel, Christians forget that Christ also called them *to be witnesses*. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”***



Being a witness refers to who a person is. *Witnessing* refers to what a person does. *Being a witness* should come before *witnessing*. For example, there are some Christians who are zealous to share their faith, but fail to submit their lives to Christ's Lordship. As a result, their actions, dress, language, habits, hygiene, lack of sensitivity or lack of compassion send the wrong message and undermine their witnessing efforts.

For example, Chris has a great desire to lead his neighbors to Christ. He even has a Christian bumper sticker on his car. The problem is, Chris' yard is a mess. His neighbors on the other hand, keep their yards relatively neat. Chris thinks he is making headway in witnessing, but his neighbors view him as a religious fanatic who ought to spend less time at church and more time behind a lawnmower.

Ashley is a fireball. She looks for every opportunity to witness at work, but sometimes gossips about co-workers. When things are slow, she pulls out her Bible and reads. A few times her boss has told her to put it away. She thinks she is making witnessing inroads at work, but her co-workers see her as someone who cannot be trusted.

Steve is always talking about Jesus to his acquaintances. He is friendly enough, but has a short fuse when others disagree with him. Rather than respecting Steve and wanting to hear his views, people head the other way when they see him coming.

Part of being a good witness involves removing witnessing roadblocks. Roadblocks are things that cause people to reject the message because they see a flaw in the messenger. Obviously none of us will be perfect messengers, but there may be areas we can change so others see past us and hear what we're saying. Hearers first judge a message by the credibility of the messenger.

Before witnessing, Christians need to work hard at being good witnesses. They need to take a long look to see if there is anything in their lives that might trip up others. If they remove these stumbling blocks ahead of time, they will add to their credibility and prevent the ears of the hearers from being plugged before hearing the message.

Just because Christians are good witnesses does not mean non-Christians will readily accept the gospel, but it does mean unbelievers won't likely write off the message because of the messenger.

Let's not forget to witness, but let's first be sure we are good witnesses!

Questions

What is the difference between being a witness and witnessing?

Why is it so important for Christians to be witnesses before seeking to witness?

What are some of the things Christians do or fail to do that cause non-believers to write them off?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to reveal to you anything in your own life that is a witnessing roadblock. If God brings something to mind, make plans today to correct the problem.

Day 3 - Spheres of Influence

Read Acts 1:1-14



A sphere is a three-dimensional, geometric object having all its points equal distant from a given point. In layman's terms, a sphere is simply a ball, like a basketball or a smooth globe of the world. Each point on the surface is the same distance from the center.

For a moment, picture yourself inside a large, hollow, glass sphere. From where you stand you can reach down, up, or out to touch every point inside the sphere. The entire area might be called your *sphere of influence*.

Standing inside a glass sphere may sound silly, but think of it in terms of life. Each person has various spheres of influence: home, work, school, sports teams, clubs, or special groups. In each realm a Christian has the opportunity to make a difference for the cause of Christ.

When Jesus gave instructions to His disciples in Acts 1:8, He told them to reach out with the good news beginning in their immediate area, and then to move out into ever widening spheres of influence, ***"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."***

Even though Jerusalem was not the disciples' home, it was where they were told to start. From Jerusalem, they would expand their witness outward to the rest of Judea, Samaria, and finally to the remotest part of the earth.

Many Christians feel overwhelmed with the immensity of the task of sharing the gospel. Because it seems so huge, many don't know where to start and end up doing little or nothing. Instead, each Christian needs to ask himself, "What is my Jerusalem? Where is my immediate sphere of influence? Who in my circle of family or friends can I reach out to? How can I do it? Who seems open to my friendship and might be interested in spiritual things?"

Rather than focusing exclusively on the remotest part of the earth, Christians need to bloom where they're planted. They need to build relationships with those in their immediate sphere of influence with hopes of eventually widening their focus. Here are some practical ways to start:

- invite a co-worker to lunch and just get to know them better
- show concern when someone is going through a tough time
- send an encouraging card to an unsaved friend
- be a good listener
- host a neighborhood barbecue or Christmas dessert
- be friendly and say hi to neighbors

After a relationship is built, people are more open to an invitation to church, other spiritual event, or simply to talk about spiritual things. Christians must remember, they don't build relationships for the sole purpose of getting notches on a spiritual belt. Relationships are built because people are important to God. In addition, truth often takes root on the soil of relationship. People don't care what a person knows until they know he cares.

God has uniquely placed each of us in spheres of influence, and given us the awesome privilege of building relationships in order to help others find Him. The question is, how are we doing?

Questions

What are your specific spheres of influence?

Who in your spheres of influence might be open to spiritual things?

Take Action

Ask God to show you one unsaved person with whom you can build a relationship. Make plans to reach out to that person this week. Pray and ask God what you might do. Perhaps you could invite the person to coffee or lunch...

DAY 4 - The Importance of Prayer

Read Acts 1:12-14



In Acts 1:4 Jesus told His disciples to remain at Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. They needed God's power to be effective witnesses. Acts 1:14 states that as they waited, ***"These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer..."*** Shortly thereafter on the day of Pentecost, the disciples' prayers were answered in a big way when thousands came to Christ!

Prayer is central to evangelism. A person needs to pray for God to open doors of opportunity. He needs to ask for wisdom to know what to say and when to say it. He needs to ask for sensitivity and boldness. He needs to pray for the heart of the hearer to be receptive to the message. He must surround everything he does in prayer!

Paul affirmed the need for prayer, *"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak"* (Col 4:2-4). Notice Paul wanted specific prayer for God to open a door for the gospel, and for boldness for him and his companions to share.

Even Jesus, prior to Pentecost, stressed the importance of evangelistic prayer. In Matthew 9:36-37 He told His disciples, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."* In essence, He was telling the disciples there were myriads of people who needed salvation, yet few people willing to tell them. The disciples needed to ask God to send people into the harvest. They prayed and, a few verses later, became the answer to their own prayers (Mt 10:5). Jesus sent them out!

Today, the situation hasn't changed much; the harvest is still plentiful, and the workers are few. We need to keep praying that God would motivate His children to go out into the harvest as workers. The exciting thing is, Christians can still be the answer to their own prayers!

Many believers sincerely want to share their faith but forget the need for prayer. Without prayer they will only minister in the power of the flesh with minimal results. With prayer, they will move in the awesome power of the Spirit and see greater impact!

If you are a Christian, God has called you to share the good news with a dying world. Certainly it is scary, and undoubtedly there will be those who won't listen. But in spite of fears or discomfort, we must prayerfully press into the task knowing that God is the one who moves hearts.

When we surround all of our evangelistic efforts in prayer, we will be pleasantly surprised at what God will do!

Questions

Are you currently praying regularly and fervently for the lost?

What do you need to do to increase the evangelistic portion of your prayer life?

Take Action

On a piece of paper, write the names of the three people you most want to come to Christ. Put the paper in a place where you will see it daily and be reminded to pray. Take time to pray for these specific things:

- *More workers to go into the harvest*
- *The three persons you most want to come to Christ*
- *Wisdom and boldness for yourself*
- *What you can do this week to reach out to one person*
- *Receptivity of the lost to the gospel message*
- *A divine appointment this week*

DAY 5 – Perfect Timing – Letting the Spirit Lead

Read Acts 2:1-13

In many pursuits, timing is critical. Professional baseball players only have a split second to hit a ball whizzing by at 90+ miles per hour. If they swing early, late, high or low, their efforts are in vain.



Timing in evangelism is important, too. Just as instincts help a batter know when to swing, the Spirit's promptings let believers know when to share. The wood

hits the spiritual bat when hearers respond positively to the message. Even with the Spirit's timing, there will be those who reject the message. Acts 2:13 states, ***“But others were mocking and saying, ‘They are full of sweet wine.’”*** No one bats a thousand!

God's perfect time for launching the church was the day of Pentecost. It was on Sunday, the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week. It was also known as the Feast of Weeks (Deut 16:10), the Feast of the Harvest (Ex 23:16), and the day of the First Fruits (Num 28:26). Certainly, Pentecost would bring a great harvest of souls and produce the first fruits of the body of Christ, the church.

Why was the timing on that day so perfect? It came at a time when Jews from all over the world were assembled at Jerusalem. They thought they had only come to celebrate a required feast, but God had bigger plans. He brought many to hear and respond to the gospel so they could take the good news of salvation back to their own country. They would become the church's first foreign missionaries!

Today God is still working His perfect timing in evangelism. The situations may not be as dramatic or large in scale as the day of Pentecost, but each incident is important. We, like the disciples, will be the ones who God uses to share the good news. We must not try to rush or short-circuit the process, but simply wait, pray, and share when the timing is right.

But how does a person know when the timing is right? Although no pat answer exists, right timing comes when a divine opportunity presents itself and the Spirit prompts a person to share. For example, I was talking to a friend about the general topic of religion. We got on that subject because of an event in the news. Although the person is generally rather guarded about spiritual things, on this occasion I sensed openness in his heart. He said, “It is difficult for me to believe a loving God would allow so many people to go through so all of this pain and suffering...” At that moment I sensed God opened a door of opportunity. The question was, “Would I step through the door or just sit there?” I began to share, and although I didn’t share the entire salvation message, I did get to explain that man, not God, is responsible for much of the pain and suffering in the world. People’s sinful choices often hurt themselves and others.

About the time I made my point, both of us were called to dinner. My wife and I were at my friend’s home. During the meal, no more opportunities presented themselves, but I felt the door was still open for future sharing. It was the first time my friend had allowed me to share so pointedly with him. I believe God is working in his heart and allowing me to be part of the process. I must wait and watch for another opportunity to take our sharing to the next level.

Questions

Have you ever sensed perfect timing for sharing part or all of the gospel message with another person? What happened?

What can a person do to get himself more ready to share his faith when opportunities arise?

Take Action

Ask God to give you a new sensitivity to the Spirit’s promptings. Ask Him to provide an opportunity today for you to step out in faith and share a word or do a kind deed for another person. Keep asking daily for this same thing.

DAY 6 – Raising One’s Voice

Read Acts 2:14-36

“Witness by all means possible and, when necessary, use words.” This statement reiterates the importance of being a witness before witnessing. But the fact is, no matter how good a witness a person is, there comes a time when he needs to open his mouth and present the gospel message. The day of Pentecost was one such occasion.

The apostles, moved by the Holy Spirit, opened their mouths and spoke the mighty deeds of God (Ac 2:11). This definitely got the crowd’s attention, but it did not necessarily reveal the specifics of the gospel. That would be Peter’s task. Acts 2:14 states, *“But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them...”* What did he declare? He explained what the other disciples were doing, but more importantly, he gave a clear gospel message that connected with his audience.



Many Christians don’t mind working hard at being witnesses; but when it comes to opening their mouths to share, they seem to get lockjaw. But Christians must remember that it is God who gives the power (Ac 1:8).

I’ll never forget my experience as a young Christian going on an evangelism retreat. We went to a private home on West Point Island on the East Coast. The home was owned by a student attending the Coast Guard Academy. It had been his family’s home but was left to him when his both parents were killed in a car accident. Despite great sorrow, he desired to use the home for the Lord. The retreat was attended by a handful of cadets and midshipmen from the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard Academies. The speaker for the weekend was an Air Force officer. All we lacked was a Marine!

The plan for the retreat was simple; pray, go to the beach, approach likely people, use a simple four-question survey, and present the gospel if God gave the opportunity. Although I now see cold-turkey evangelism as one of many methods of sharing one’s faith, at that time I assumed it was what all

Christians did. It seemed a little scary at first, but the results were gratifying. Several folks responded positively and received Christ as Lord and Savior. For most of us it was our first experience leading others to Christ – all we did was open our mouths and share! God did the rest!

All of us at the retreat agreed it got a little easier to share as the weekend progressed. By the end of the second day, we couldn't wait to get back to the beach to see what God would do!

God has called all of us to be witnesses. Part of the process involves opening our mouths and sharing when He gives the opportunity. It may happen while talking to a friend, sitting at lunch with a co-worker, or riding on an airplane next to a total stranger.

Let's boldly step out of our comfort zones and be like Peter, who saw what God was doing on the day of Pentecost and responded positively by raising his voice and sharing the good news. We may be amazed at what God will do when we simply open our mouths in obedience to His prompting.

Questions

Do you tend to get lockjaw when an opportunity arises to share your faith?

Describe a time when you were able to share some or all of the gospel message with a non-believer.

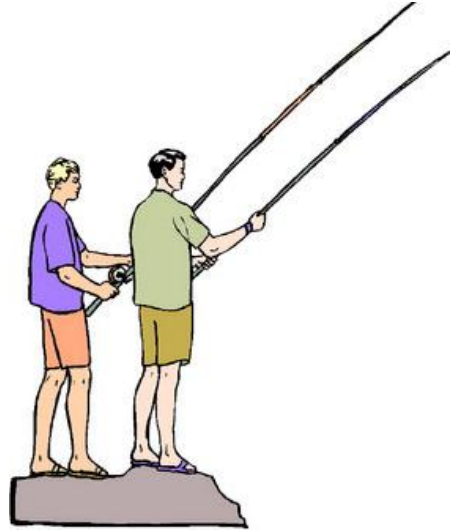
Take Action

If you have difficulty opening your mouth to share, try this. Find a willing fellow Christian (perhaps a spouse or friend) and practice sharing. Have them ask you questions that non-Christians often have and then try to answer them. Try asking them probing questions that steer a conversation toward spiritual things. You may find, as many others have, that the more you share, the easier and more natural it becomes. This practice will prepare you for the real thing! Spend time in prayer asking God to give you boldness to open your mouth and share when He gives the opportunity.

DAY 7 – Common Ground

Read Acts 2:14-36

When two people have something in common, it often creates an immediate bond in their relationship. This is true in witnessing. When the person sharing his or her faith has common ground with the hearer, there is often a measure of instant credibility. It doesn't mean the person hearing the gospel will rush to accept it, but it does mean he may be more willing to listen with an open mind.



Recently my daughter and son-in-law bought a home in another city. My wife and I went there to help them paint, clean, and do other miscellaneous chores in preparation for move-in. We were told by a friend at church that his brother's family lived in the same neighborhood. We checked the address and oddly enough, they lived next door! On our first day at the new house, we happened to be in the front yard when a lady came out of the house next door. We caught her eye and said, "Are you Nancy?" She replied, "Yes, who are you?" We explained the story about our friend from church and an instant bond was formed. Within a few minutes we were talking as if we were old friends.

On the day of Pentecost, when Peter got up to share with his fellow Jews, he applied the principle of "common ground." Before sharing the gospel, he first shared prophecy from the book of Joel that was familiar to his audience. He said, referring to the rest of the disciples who were speaking in tongues about the mighty works of God, *"For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel, 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...'"* (Ac 2:15-21).

After sharing what was familiar, Peter talked some about Jesus, and then bounced back to common ground by quoting David (Ac 2:25-28). He finished by sharing more of David's words relating them directly to Christ (Ac 2:29-36). Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit used this common ground to

reach the hearers' hearts. Ac 2:37 states, *"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'"* They wanted to know how to get saved!

It is important for Christians to keep the principle of common ground in mind as they build relationships and share. The common ground may come from a mutual interest in sports, having children who are the same age, working in a similar job, growing up in the same area of the country, having a common life experience or a thousand other things. It will increase people's connectedness and often open up opportunities for sharing the gospel. For example, if you and another person both like playing tennis, why not build a relationship around tennis and see what God will do. Your friendship may make it quite natural to invite your friend to a special church event where he or she can hear the gospel. You also might find in the course of playing tennis there will be a natural opportunity to share your faith.

How does a person discover common ground? Sometimes it comes simply by talking to a person. Let's be sure as Christians we utilize the power of common ground in our relationships with unbelievers.

Questions

Think about some of the unsaved folks you know. What common ground do you have with them?

How could you use this common ground to build a better relationship with your non-Christian friends?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to help you better answer the above questions. Ask Him to show you anything He wants you to do this week in the area of common ground.

DAY 8 – The Gospel Message

Read Acts 2:21-36

When Peter addressed his audience on the day of Pentecost he bounced back and forth between **common ground** and **the specifics of the gospel**. He shared prophecies from the Old Testament and then explained how Jesus' miracles were clear evidence that Jesus was from God. Peter also declared Christ's death as part of the predetermined plan of God and, that unlike David, Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter ended by declaring Jesus to be Lord and Christ (the Messiah for whom the Jews waited).



The hearers of Peter's message were so moved many asked, "What shall we do?" They wanted to know how to be saved. Peter told them they needed to repent. Earlier in his message, Peter also shared that each person must individually call out to God. Quoting from the Old Testament, Peter said, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Ac 2:21).

So what is the **gospel message**? Simply this – Jesus came to earth, lived a miraculous life, died for man's sin, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day so that all who repent and put their trust in Him will be saved.

There is perhaps no more concise presentation of what Christ did than 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, *"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."* In this passage Paul clearly states that Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead. This is not pie-in-the-sky, wishful thinking, but was confirmed by many eyewitnesses including Peter (Cephas) and the rest of the disciples. The only major element of the gospel lacking in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 is that people must repent and place their trust in Jesus.

Although knowing the basic message of the gospel is critical, knowing the details is also important. Rarely will a Christian get to share all the salvation verses with a non-Christian, but to share effectively, it is extremely helpful to know key verses and their corresponding truths. They are:

God loves all people - **Jn 3:16**

Sin separates people from God - **Is 59:2**

All people have sinned - **Rm 3:23**

The wage of sin is death - **Rm 6:23**

All people will die and be judged - **Heb 9:27**

Good works won't save a person - **Eph 2:8,9**

Morality won't save a person because one sin makes him guilty - **Jms 2:10**

Philosophy won't save a person - **Col 2:8,9**

Intellectual belief won't save a person - **Jms 2:19**

God proved His love for us even when we were sinners - **Rm 5:8**

Jesus died once for all that He might bring us to God - **1 Pt 3:18**

A person must believe in order to be saved - **Jn 3:16**

Jesus stands at the door of each heart and knocks - **Rev 3:20**

To believe means to receive – **Jn 1:12**

A person receives Christ through prayer – **Rm 10:9,10**

A person can have assurance of salvation – **1 Jn 5:11-13**

If you have not already learned these verses, you are encouraged to memorize them and their corresponding truths.

Questions

What are the basic elements of the gospel in Peter's message in Acts 2?

How many of the above verses can you quote and explain from memory?

Take Action

Make plans in the next month to memorize the above verses and their corresponding truths. One way to do this is to write each one on a three by five card in the version of your choice, and work at memorizing one new passage every other day, while reviewing them all each day.

DAY 9 – Is Water Baptism Essential?

Read Acts 2:37,38

When the hearers of Peter's message asked, "*What shall we do?*", they wanted to know how to be saved. Peter told them, "*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...*" So what did Peter mean? Was he saying repentance is the key to salvation, or does it require repentance *and* baptism?

The best understanding of Acts 2:38 is to view the phrase, "*and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,*" as parenthetical. In other words water baptism is not connected with the forgiveness of sins. There is good support for this view. The verb **repent** is plural, as is the pronoun **your** in the clause "*for the forgiveness of your sins.*" Therefore **repent** and **forgiveness** must be linked.

On the other hand, the clause, "*and let each of you be baptized,*" has the imperative "*be baptized*" which is singular. This sets it off from the rest of the verse. It is important to be baptized but it is not a prerequisite for having one's sins forgiven. It is repentance that brings God's forgiveness. Water baptism is simply an act of obedience, symbolizing being buried with Christ and raised to new life (Rm 6:3,4).



In addition, there are numerous verses in the Bible that teach salvation comes through faith alone. John 3:16 states, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" There is nothing in this verse about baptism being a prerequisite for salvation. It simply states that those who believe will have eternal life.

John 3:36 says the same thing, "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*"

John 1:12 also agrees, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”*

Romans 10:9 confirms that faith, not baptism is essential for salvation, *“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.”*

I John 5:11-13 puts the icing on the cake, *“And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who **believe** in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

Even Peter, the one who spoke the words of Acts 2:38, confirms in Acts 10:43 that salvation is based on faith alone, *“Of Him (Jesus) all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who **believes** in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”*

Simply put, if baptism was essential for salvation, a person who received Christ in the desert and was unable to be baptized due to lack of water would be lost. The same is true of someone who received Christ on his deathbed and subsequently died before being baptized. Salvation would then be based on works – the work of getting baptized. Scripture makes it clear that works do not save a person. Ephesians 2:8-9 states, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”*

If a person asks you what it takes to get saved, tell him or her they need to repent. Repentance means turning away from sin, turning toward Christ, and placing one’s trust in Him.

Question

Why is water baptism unessential for salvation?

Take Action

Out loud, explain why salvation comes through faith alone. Maybe your spouse or a friend would be a willing listener to your explanation. You might even ask them to critique you.

DAY 10 – The One who draws

Read Acts 2:36-47

Even if a person gives a flawless gospel presentation and does so in the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no guarantee the person/s hearing the message will come to Christ. This was true on the day of Pentecost and is still true today.



On the day of Pentecost after Peter told the crowd they needed to repent in order to be saved, he also said, *"For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."* (Ac 2:39). In other words not everyone who hears the message will respond positively, only those who God calls to Himself.

In John 6:44 Jesus confirmed that God is the one who draws people to Himself, *"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."* It is thus not up to Christians to convince non-Christians of the truth of the gospel, it is simply their job to share it. It is the Holy Spirit's job to open hearts and draw people in. This fact should further help Christians relax when sharing their faith. God is the one who brings the results, not us!

Unfortunately there have been those believers in past history who camped on divine sovereignty to the exclusion of human responsibility. In other words they said, "Since God draws people to Himself, we no longer need to share our faith. God will bring people with or without our help. In fact, He can do a better job than we can." This erroneous thinking led to few missionaries going out to the mission field. The results were predictable; few people got saved.

Although it is true that God is the One who draws people to Himself, He has, in His marvelous wisdom, called believers to share in the work. In this regard, divine sovereignty and human responsibility go hand in hand. God draws, but often in response to our witness. Evangelism is thus a team effort, men and women working together with God for His divine purpose.

There have been times in my ministry when I thought I gave the perfect gospel presentation, yet no one responded. Other times I wasn't even to the best part of the message when the person with whom I was sharing was ready to receive Christ.

The truth of John 6:44 is a great reminder that although Christians need to share, it is God who works in sinners' hearts to draw them to Himself.

Questions

Have you ever thought that if you presented the gospel clearly enough, or if the person with whom you were sharing read the right book or tract that he would surely come to Christ? Why is this a faulty understanding of how evangelism works?

Why should the truth of John 6:44 cause Christians to relax when sharing their faith?

What is the difference between divine sovereignty and human responsibility? Why do Christians need to remember that the two go hand in hand?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to give you great awareness of the truth of John 6:44, and to lead you to someone He is drawing to Himself.



DAY 11 – The Special Gift

Read Acts 2:38-47

Almost everyone enjoys getting gifts. The fun begins when we see the wrapping paper and bow, and the excitement builds as we remove both to see what's inside!

When a person repents and places his trust in Christ he gets a very special gift. Not only will he be saved and

raised up on the last day (Jn 6:44), but in the mean time he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. Listen again to Acts 2:38, *“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”*

The gift of the Spirit does not come wrapped with a bow, it is invisible, but the results certainly are not. I remember when I came to Christ, I felt something happen in my innermost being. I felt a new joy and peace I had never experienced. In the days following my conversion, I sensed a heightened awareness of sin and a desire to study the Bible. All of these came as a result of the Spirit of God who indwelt me at the moment I was saved.

When people come to Christ, it is important they be taught about this special gift. Understanding what the Spirit does will give them greater success in living the Christian life. In this regard, take into consideration some of what the Holy Spirit does in the lives of Christians.

- He seals them for the day of redemption – **Eph 1:13,14**
- He baptizes them spiritually into the church - **1 Cor 12:13**
- He becomes their comforter – **Ac 9:31**
- He guides them – **Jn 16:13**
- He convicts them of sin, righteousness and judgment – **Jn 16:7,8**
(it is important to note that the Spirit convicts them of these things even before they are Christians. After they come to Christ, I believe they have an even greater awareness.)
- He fills them – **Eph 5:18**

It is amazing to think that the God of the universe allows His children to personally experience His abiding presence through the indwelling Holy Spirit! Not only is the Spirit the One who convicts people of sin, drawing them to God, He also indwells them once they make the decision to repent. He baptizes them into the body of Christ, and leads, guides and comforts them as they endeavor to live the Christian life. He fills them as they submit to Christ's lordship in their lives. Wow!

As new Christians walk with God, the Spirit can help them share with others who need salvation, and the whole evangelism process starts over again. Awesome!!!

Let's be sure as we share our faith and see folks come to Christ that we share with them about the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit!

Questions

Why is it important for new believers to understand about the gift of the Holy Spirit?

What are some of the specific things the Holy Spirit does for those who repent and place their trust in Christ? Which ones have you experienced?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to give you a heightened awareness of the Holy Spirit's ministry in your own life. Ask Him to help you remember to share about His ministry with anyone you have the opportunity of leading to Christ. You also might want to be sure that other new Christians have heard about the Spirit's ministry.



DAY 12 – Divine Appointments – Divine Opportunities

Read Acts 3:1-4:4

Everyone schedules appointments from time to time – to see the doctor, dentist, or to get the car fixed. But there are also unscheduled appointments, at least unscheduled by us.

These are divine appointments. They happen when a Christian unexpectedly has the opportunity to help someone or to share the gospel.

In Acts 3, Peter and John had a divine appointment on their way to pray at the temple. They were minding their own business when a man who was lame from birth, called out for money. They had no money, but gave him something far greater – they healed him through God’s miraculous power! This incident captured the attention of all those in the immediate area. Acts 3:11 states, “*While he (the man who was just healed) was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.*”

When Peter saw what was happening he realized he was in the midst of a divine appointment in which God provided the opportunity to share the gospel. Rather than hesitating, Peter seized the moment and shared his faith. As he shared, he utilized the principle of *common ground* explaining the specifics of salvation. What was the result? Many people believed in Christ that day (Ac 4:4)!

We may not have an experience of the same magnitude as Peter and John, but God will bring people in our path who need physical help and salvation. We must keep our eyes open for these opportunities. They may come via a friend or on an airplane. They may come as we talk with a neighbor or co-worker going through a difficult time.

I’ll never forget the day I was out in my front yard minding my own business. One of my neighbors drove up, got out of his car and said, “Hi.” As we talked, the conversation drifted to world events and then to religion. Figuring I had been working hard in the yard and could use a break, my neighbor invited me inside for a cold drink. I accepted. As we sat and sipped our ice water, I felt led to ask my neighbor about his relationship with God.

As we talked, I had the opportunity to share God's plan of salvation. Although my neighbor was from a different denomination, he happily told me he believed in God and had Christ as his Savior. Until this encounter I had no idea what he believed. I left his home assured in my heart that he knew the Lord. In subsequent days my wife and I invited his family to church and they came.

When faced with a divine appointment a person has a choice. He can either open his mouth and share or remain a secret service Christian. I have met many people who said they squandered an obvious opportunity to sow the seeds of the gospel. I'm glad Peter didn't chicken out. If he had, the 5,000 men who came to Christ that day, might never have been saved.

It's God's great love for mankind that causes Him to give each of us divine appointments. That's why Paul requested prayer regarding what he called a door for the Word. He said, *"Praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak"* (Col 4:3).

God longs for people to come to Him. The question is, will we share His burden, recognize the doors of opportunity, and step through them?

Question

Have you ever sensed a divine appointment in which you had the opportunity to sow seeds of the gospel? What happened?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to give you a divine appointment this week. Ask for courage to do whatever needs to be done. Perhaps you will simply have the opportunity to help someone, or maybe God will give you the opportunity to share the gospel.

DAY 13 – Facing Persecution

Read Acts 4:1-31

It seems unfair that people are persecuted for doing the right thing, but that is often what happens in a fallen world. The question becomes, “Will people neglect doing what is right just because they fear they will suffer for it?”



When Peter and John healed the lame man in Acts chapter three, and subsequently led thousands to Christ, they were probably ecstatic. God had used them in an amazing way! Perhaps the last thing on their minds was getting into trouble, but that is what happened. Acts 4:1-3 states, *“As they (Peter and John) were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.”*

The next day the two apostles were faced with another challenge. Would they waffle in their faith when confronted by the religious leaders or would they face persecution head-on? Thankfully, they chose the latter. When asked to explain their actions from the previous day, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, clearly shared the gospel with his accusers (Ac 4:8-12). Acts 8:13 even states, *“Now as they (the religious leaders) observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”*

Because of the people’s positive response to the healing that had taken place, the religious leaders felt it would be risky to physically punish the apostles. They did, however, command, warn and threaten them to speak no more about Jesus. Acts 4:19,20 records Peter’s and John’s response, *“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God*

to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”

After receiving further threats, the apostles went their way and reported to the rest of the believers what had happened. Everyone rejoiced! Perhaps the prayer in Acts 4:29 best summarizes the disciples’ view of the whole situation, *“And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence...”* Subsequently the place where they were gathered was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began speaking the word of God with boldness. Wow!

Although there are places in the world where physical persecution is a reality, the United States, for the most part, is not one of them. It is, however, a place where many Christians are reluctant to share their faith. Why? Because they fear rejection, being looked down on or getting the label *religious fanatic*.

Although the disciples in the New Testament faced physical persecution they did not shy away from witnessing. They viewed sharing the gospel as a higher priority than avoiding persecution. After all, they were in God’s hands. He would protect them if it was best.

Let’s pray and ask God to fill us with the same attitude and values. Hopefully we will share the good news when God gives the opportunity. Being His witness is of utmost importance! Let’s be like Joshua, to whom God gave the following instructions as he went into the Promised Land, *“Only be strong and very courageous!”* (Josh 1:7).

Question

Have you ever been physically, verbally or emotionally persecuted for sharing your faith? What happened?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to give you a divine appointment this week. Ask Him to give you boldness to lovingly yet boldly be His mouthpiece.

DAY 14 – Rejoicing in Persecution

Read Acts 5:12-42

It is one thing to experience verbal threats for sharing your faith, it is quite another to endure physical punishment. Sticks and stones can break a person's bones, even if name-calling cannot.

In Acts 14, Peter and John were released from custody after being commanded not to speak any more in the name of Christ. Their response to the religious leaders who verbally threatened them was, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Ac 4:19,20).

After their release, the two kept right on preaching. God honored their faithfulness by adding many people to the church. This led to heightened jealousy on the part of the religious leaders who once again put the apostles in jail. During the night, an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison and told the men to go and speak the whole message of truth to the people in the temple. They obeyed and at daybreak began to teach.



Later that morning the apostles were re-arrested and taken before the Council, which intended to kill them. A Pharisee named Gamaliel, however, was the voice of reason and persuaded the Council not to kill the apostles. He said if the apostles' message was from God, nothing could stop it; but if it was not from God, the movement would die out soon enough. Reluctantly, the rest of the Council listened to Gamaliel and decided to send the apostles away after flogging them and warning them once again not to speak about Jesus.

How did the apostles respond to this heightened persecution? Acts 5:41 states, *“So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”* Verse 42 goes on to say, *“And every day, in the temple and from*

house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

Not even physical harm could dissuade the apostles from their appointed task of taking the good news of Christ to all the people. More astounding is that they considered it an honor to suffer shame for His name. They did not seek suffering, but when it came they did not allow it to silence them.

Today, Christians in the United States need to decide where they stand in regard to persecution. Currently, the level of hostility is minimal, but it is growing. Christians suffer persecution in many countries, and such treatment could easily reach our shores.

Will Christians allow verbal persecution to silence them? Will they be willing to suffer physical harm? If and when trouble comes, will they view it as negative; or like the apostles, will they consider it an honor to suffer for the sake of the gospel?

Each of us must count the cost.

Question

What true stories do you know from other countries where Christians suffered physical harm for their faith?

How have you or how do you think you would respond in the face of verbal or physical persecution?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to increase your strength and courage regarding your willingness to share the gospel no matter what the opposition.



DAY 15 – Focused and on Target

Read Acts 6:1-7

As an organization grows, its internal workings become more complicated, and it is more easily sidetracked from its central focus. Things were no different in the early church.

As the church grew, ministries had to be started to care for new converts. One of the important ministries in the Jerusalem church was the daily serving of food to widows.

Some of the Hellenistic Jews (Jews who had adopted the Greek language and culture) complained about the native Hebrews (Jews who held to the Jewish culture) because the Hellenistic widows were being neglected. Acts 6:1,2 states, *“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.’”*

The apostles could have fixed the problem personally by serving the widows themselves, but they realized as leaders they were called primarily to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Ac 6:4). For the apostles, a huge part of ministering the Word was evangelism. They shared the Old Testament writings with non-Christians, explaining how they pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Another aspect of ministering the Word was training new believers in the faith. These two ministries went hand in hand.

The apostles realized that if they shifted their central focus to secondary issues like serving tables, the church would get off course and lose momentum. To deal with the challenge of feeding the widows, the apostles instructed the congregation to select from its midst, godly men who could take on this ministry. The congregation agreed, appointed seven men, and the problem was solved (Ac 6:3-6).

What was the result? Acts 6:7 states, *“And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”* If the apostles had shifted their focus from the primary to the secondary, it’s likely that evangelism would have slowed or ground to a halt.

Today, it is still vital for church leadership to stay focused on prayer and the ministry of the Word. They also must keep the overall church focused. Unfortunately in many churches, the primary focus has shifted to secondary issues like managing finances, solving internal conflicts, or planning social events. While these things are good, few people in these churches are leading others to Christ resulting in plateaued or declining church attendance. As their congregations age and die off, few new people take their place.

Secondary concerns are important in the life of any church, but they must never replace the primary focus. Only as churches and church leadership stay focused on prayer and the ministry of the Word, will congregations continue to grow and be salt and light in a dark world.

How is your church doing?

Questions

Is the leadership in your church keeping focused on prayer and the ministry of the Word (remember, a large part of the ministry of the Word is evangelism)?

How important is it, in your opinion, for individual members of the church also to focus on prayer and evangelism, no matter what their other ministries may be? How can these two priorities be kept in proper focus?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to help your church stay focused on prayer and the ministry of the Word so that it continues to reach a dying world.

DAY 16 – Possible Martyrdom

Read Acts 6:7-7:60

If the threats of verbal or physical persecution have dissuaded some from sharing their faith, how much more the possibility of physical death!

Acts 6:6-7 states, *“The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power was*

performing great wonders and signs among the people.” The early church was certainly experiencing amazing things with Stephen performing great signs and wonders. Little did Stephen know he would be the church’s first martyr.



When God’s kingdom begins to grow in significant ways, Satan does everything to stop it. In the case of Stephen, Satan stirred the hearts of evil men. When they could not match Stephen’s wisdom, they induced others to spread lies about his teaching. They said he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God. This eventually caused others to drag Stephen before the same Council that was responsible for having Peter and John flogged.

While there, God inspired Stephen to preach an eloquent message recounting God’s leading and dealings with the Jewish people. He spoke of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and David. He showed how the Jews rebelled against God, and how the current religious leaders did the same by murdering Jesus!

When the Council heard Stephen’s message, *“they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him”* (Acts 7:54). Together they rushed Stephen, drove him out of the city, and stoned him. Before he died he said, *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”*

It is sobering to think many of God's greatest servants have lost their lives at the hands of godless men. Even today, countless stories abound of atrocities committed against Christians in communist and Muslim countries. Why would a loving God allow these to happen? We can't be sure, but it is certain our perspective is limited. Instead of second-guessing God, we need to listen to His words from Isaiah 55:8,9, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*" We also need to be more like Job who said, "*Though He slay me, I will hope in Him*" (Job 13:15).

Although many Christians have not faced severe persecution, there is no guarantee they will not face it sometime in the future. In this regard, Jesus' words are a stark reminder, "*If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...*" (John 15:18-20).

Paul's words also ring true, "*And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*" (2 Tim 3:12).

Questions

In your opinion, why does God sometimes allow His choice servants to die as martyrs?

Do you think you would be willing to die for your faith? Why or why not?

Take Action

Take time to pray for the persecuted church around the world. Pray for specific countries where persecution is great – China, Sudan...

DAY 17 – Scattering and Training

Read Acts 8:1-40

If a farmer owns many fields but only plants seed in one field, his crop will be limited. If he wants to maximize his harvest, he must scatter seed over a wide area.

In Acts 1:8, God told the disciples they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. It was God's desire for the early church to share the good news of Christ in ever-widening circles. Rather than heeding God's call, the disciples and early converts seemed content to stay in Jerusalem. This was a good start, but God had bigger plans – He wanted the whole world to hear the salvation message. What would motivate Christians to move into new areas with the gospel? Persecution!



After Stephen's martyrdom, Acts 8:1-4 states, *"And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word."*

Only the apostles stayed in Jerusalem when heavy persecution started. Although they traveled to and from remote areas to minister, perhaps they felt the need to stay in Jerusalem in order to encourage the Christians who did not flee the area. In any event, God used persecution to move the gospel to a wider audience. The persecution that Satan hoped would destroy the church, became the catalyst for its expansion. What Satan meant for evil, God used for good.

One of those who left Jerusalem to minister abroad was Philip. He went to the city of Samaria performing many signs and preaching the good news. Undoubtedly, God used the miracles performed by Philip and other church

leaders to confirm their salvation message. As Philip ministered, many people received the gospel and were baptized. One of them was Simon the magician. Subsequently, Peter and John visited Samaria and prayed for the new converts to receive the Holy Spirit. God unified His church by having Jewish believers (the apostles) in attendance each time a new group received the Spirit. These groups included the Samaritans – Acts 8, the Gentiles – Acts 10, and Old Testament Saints – Acts 19. Today all believers receive the Spirit at the moment of salvation (1 Cor 12:13).

When Simon the magician saw that the Holy Spirit was bestowed by the laying on of hands, he offered the apostles money so he could have the same power. Peter rebuked Simon and told him the gift of God could not be obtained with money. Simon's immaturity showed the need for getting new believers properly grounded in the faith.

Today, scattering and training are still important. On the one hand, it is important for some Christians to stay on the home front (like the apostles who stayed in Jerusalem), while others go to more distant lands. On the other hand, it is important that all new converts get grounded in the faith so they don't fall into error like Simon.

Is your church doing well in the areas of scattering and training?

Questions

Who do you know personally who has gone to the foreign mission field to minister? Have you ever had a desire to be a foreign missionary?

If you are not a foreign missionary, what are you currently doing to spread the gospel in your local area?

What is your church doing to help get new believers grounded in the faith?

Take Action

Ask God to raise up more missionaries to scatter the seeds of the gospel across the world. Also ask Him to help new believers get trained so they don't fall into spiritual error. Ask Him how you can be involved in this process of scattering and training.

DAY 18 – Ready, Willing and Able

Read Acts 8:25-40

Being willing to help others does little good if a person is not subsequently able to provide the needed assistance.



One day Jerry and his family were on vacation traveling through a remote part of Nevada. They were 25 miles from the nearest town on a deserted two lane highway. As their van crested a hill, Jerry noticed a mini-van up ahead on the side of the road. Slowing down, he opened his window and offered to help. The young mother driving the van had three children inside. She explained she was on her way to her parents' home in another town when her warning lights came on and the van engine died. It was only then she remembered leaving her cell phone at home. Jerry's was the first car to come by since she had become stranded...

Jerry asked if he could take a quick look under the hood. After checking and seeing no immediate problem, he knew the remedy was beyond his expertise. He informed the mom he would be happy to call a tow truck. She thanked him. When Jerry pulled out his cell phone, the battery was dead. Opening the glove compartment to get the charger, he realized he had left it in his other car. A bit embarrassed and frustrated, Jerry informed the woman he was willing to give her and her children a ride, but his own van was packed to the gills with family and luggage.

As the travelers stood discussing the dilemma, a police car rounded the corner and slowed down. They all breathed a sigh of relief when the officer pulled over and said, "May I help?"

In Acts 8:26, when Philip was instructed by an angel to go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem, he obeyed. On the road he discovered an Ethiopian official who was stopped in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip was prompted by the Spirit to go up to the chariot. Again, he obeyed. Acts 8:30-31 states, "*Philip ran up and heard him (the official) reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, 'Do you understand what you are*

reading?’ And he said, ‘Well, how could I unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.” Philip accepted the invitation and ended up explaining the Scriptures and how they related to Jesus. The Ethiopian official responded by placing his faith in Christ. He even got baptized!

Both Philip and Jerry came upon people in need, and both were willing to help. There was, however, a notable difference. Philip was not only willing to help, he was able to help because he had the right tools. His tools were a working knowledge of the Scriptures and a competency in sharing the gospel. These same tools are essential for every believer who desires to share his faith effectively today.

1 Peter 3:15 states, *“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”* God calls each believer to be ready to defend his or her faith.

Although the Ethiopian official didn’t ask Philip to defend his faith, he did ask him to explain it. Philip gladly agreed and did a masterful job because he was prepared.

Today, many Christians are willing to share their faith but don’t have a clear grasp of the necessary Scriptures to do so. They need to master various passages in order to recall them at will. We, like Philip, need to be *ready, willing and able to share* when God brings divine appointments our way.

Questions

Do you think you could thoroughly explain the gospel to someone if they asked you to do so?

If someone handed you a Bible, could you open it to the appropriate passages and walk them through the plan of salvation?

Take Action

Take a few moments right now to write down as many Scripture references as you know that explain the plan of salvation. When you finish, get a good salvation tract or book to help you complete your list. Devise a plan to become intimately familiar with these verses in the next month. Perhaps memorize all the ones you don’t currently know.



DAY 19 – Unlikely Converts

Read Acts 9:1-31

I'll never forget being stationed at Galena, Alaska. Galena is located 100 miles south of the arctic circle in the middle of nowhere. At that time there were no paved roads or sidewalks, and the only way in was by airplane, dog sled or boat.

Galena was home to two air force F-15s and the 300 military personnel who supported their mission. There was a small chapel on the base, and a core group of Christians who attended worship services each Sunday.

Because the base was quite small, everyone got to know everyone else. One particular individual at the fire department had the reputation for being a party animal who was rather antagonistic toward Christians. He, in the estimation of many, was the base's *most unlikely person* to come to Christ.

Because those at the fire department were on call while on duty, the only way they could attend worship services at the chapel on Sunday was if they came together and parked their fire trucks outside. It was all or nothing. There were several Christians in the fire department who convinced the non-church goers to come to chapel so they could attend. At first, the non-Christians stayed outside in their trucks, but after a few Sundays decided to come inside to see what was going on. After attending several services, an amazing thing happened. The base's *most unlikely person* raised his hand during the invitation to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. In a short time he became a bold advocate for Christ and influenced more folks to come!

At the start of Acts 9, Saul was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He was perhaps the most unlikely candidate of his day to come to Christ, but God had other plans. On the road to Damascus, God blinded Saul with a bright light from heaven. Saul then heard Jesus' voice asking him why he was persecuting the church. After being brought into the city and spending three days as a blind man, Saul was visited by the Christian, Ananias, who said, "*Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared*

to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Immediately after Ananias’ announcement, Saul was healed. Soon he was transformed from a great persecutor of the church into a bold witness for Christ. He began telling everyone that Jesus was the Son of God. His witness was so strong that his own people, the Jews, plotted to kill him. To save Saul’s life, the disciples in Damascus helped Saul escape by lowering him over the city wall in a basket.

Even with Saul’s amazing conversion, it took the believers in Jerusalem awhile to trust him because of all his past persecution.

Most Christians today know people who would qualify as most unlikely to come to Christ. The fact is, God may have other plans. Often those who vehemently oppose the gospel become its greatest advocates when God changes their hearts.

We need to be sure we don’t write off people because we think they are hard-cases. Instead we must pray for and love them, knowing God can bring even the biggest sinner to Himself.

Perhaps you were once on someone’s *most unlikely list*... Aren’t you glad God didn’t give up on you?!

Questions

Who do you know who qualifies for the list of those most unlikely to come to Christ? What is it about them that makes you say this?

Have you ever known a person who came to Christ who you thought never would? What happened?

Take Action

Pray for those who you think might never come to Christ. Admit your lack of faith and ask God to work mightily in their lives to draw them to Himself.

DAY 20 – Miracles and Evangelism

Read Acts 9:32-43

Have you ever thought it would be a whole lot easier to share your faith if you could perform miracles like the apostles? After all, your skeptical friends might change their minds if you healed one of their friends!



There is no doubt God gifted the early apostles with miraculous powers to confirm their message.

- On the day of Pentecost the gift of tongues got everyone's attention prior to Peter's sermon when thousands were saved. (Ac 2:1-14)
- The miracles mentioned in Acts 2:43 were undoubtedly connected with those who were saved in Acts 2:47.
- In Acts 3, Peter healed a lame beggar, setting the stage for his second sermon when many people responded positively to the gospel.
- Part of the spread of the church mentioned in Acts 6:7 was connected with the wonders and signs being performed by Stephen (Ac 6:8).
- Acts 8:6 states that the people in Samaria were giving attention to what Philip said as they saw the signs he performed.
- Saul's conversion came after he saw a bright light from heaven, was blinded, and later miraculously healed (Ac 9:1-19).
- Many came to the Lord when Peter healed Aeneas (Ac 9:32-35).
- Many more responded when Peter resurrected Tabitha (Ac 9:36-43).
- In Acts 13:5-12, Sergius Paulus believed after seeing a miracle.

Conversely, however, there were times when people came to Christ and no sign or wonder took place.

- There was no physical miracle when the Ethiopian Eunuch came to Christ after talking with Philip (Ac 8:25-38)
- In Antioch, many believed without seeing a miracle (Ac 11:19-21)
- On Paul's first missionary journey, many came to Christ at Pisidian Antioch, and there was no mention of signs or wonders (Ac 13:48).

Although God may choose to do physical miracles in connection with evangelism, He also may not. In any event, we are called to take the gospel into the whole world (Mt 28:18-20). As we do, we must not insist that God do physical miracles, but instead humbly ask Him to work in the hearts of hearers. Jesus said, *"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him..."* (John 6:44). He also said, *"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead"* (Lk 17:31).

Many of those in the book of Acts who saw or were aware of miracles rejected the gospel. It was not a matter of convincing them with miracles, it was a matter of whether God was working in their hearts and drawing them to Himself. Several verses confirm this fact:

"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2:39).

"When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

"And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14)

As we share our faith, let's remember that it is God who opens people's hearts to respond to the salvation message. Let's pray that He does!

Questions

Have you ever wished you could do miracles to confirm the gospel?

Has God ever used you to perform a physical miracle in connection with sharing the gospel? If so, what happened?

Take Action

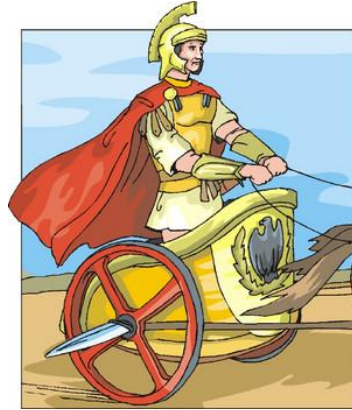
Pray that God would work in the hearts of unbelievers to open their hearts to the gospel message.

DAY 21 – No Partiality

Read Acts 10:1-11:18

Has there ever been anyone you hoped would never come to Christ? Perhaps they hurt you or one of your family members or friends. Maybe they did some heinous crime like rape or murder. Perhaps you even hoped they would wind up in that other place...

Undoubtedly it was pretty easy for the Jews who came to Christ in the first century to feel animosity toward their Roman oppressors. In their minds, if anyone deserved to go to hell it was the Romans. Roman soldiers often treated Jews harshly and had no mercy when quelling opposition. It was Roman soldiers who put Christ to death! Certainly they deserved to be eternally separated from God for their part in murdering the Savior! Right? Wrong!



In New Testament times it was unlawful for Jews to associate with or visit foreigners (Ac 10:28). The Jews felt superior to Gentiles (non-Jews). They believed salvation was reserved for them alone. But this was never God's plan. Although the Jews were His chosen people, God desired all people to come to Him (1 Tm 2:3,4). He is not one to show partiality!

In Acts chapter 10 when Peter was in Joppa he had a vision; a large sheet full of unclean animals and creatures descended from heaven. He also heard a voice telling him to arise, kill and eat. He objected and told the Lord he had never eaten anything unholy or unclean. God then informed Peter not to consider unholy what He had cleansed. This happened three times and the sheet was finally taken back up into heaven. In this vision God taught Peter not to be prejudice against anyone. Just as God made all food fit to eat, He made all people fit to hear the gospel.

As Peter contemplated the meaning of the vision, men from Caesarea arrived with a message from the Roman centurion, Cornelius. They told Peter that Cornelius had been directed by an angel to send for Peter so Peter could come and share an important message with them. Peter went with the men to Caesarea to meet Cornelius. After listening to Cornelius' story Peter said, "*I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in*

every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him” (Ac 10:34,35). Peter then shared the gospel with Cornelius and his family and friends. As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening and they began speaking in tongues and exalting God. Peter then said, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” (Ac 10:47). In other words, since these Gentiles (non-Jews) had received the Holy Spirit just like the Jews, they ought to receive water baptism as well.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem there were other Jews who confronted him about taking the gospel to the Gentiles. After explaining to them the whole incident, they quieted down and said, *“Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (Ac 11:18)*. Slowly the Jews realized that salvation was not just for them, but for all people from every nation who were willing to repent and come to Christ.

As we share the gospel, we also must understand that all people, even those we don’t like, have the opportunity to be saved if they turn from sin to the Savior. This is God’s desire. He is not partial.

Questions

Has there ever been anyone you hoped would never come to Christ? Explain.

In your opinion, why is God impartial?

Take Action

If you have been prejudice in the past, pray and ask God to forgive you. If there has been someone you hoped would never come to Christ, pray and ask God to save them, and to change your attitude toward them.

DAY 22 – Winning and Building

Read Acts 11:19-30

Recently, my wife and I refinanced our house. To make things more convenient, we had a notary bring the final paperwork to our home. The notary was very friendly and we talked about our families. At one point she said her father had been diagnosed with Lou Gerig's disease. Although he was starting to fail physically, she said he was spiritually strong. I saw an opening to turn the conversation toward Christ and asked her what she meant. She explained that her dad had been raised in Christianity, but had adopted his own philosophy as an adult. He believed if a person lived an honest life and treated people fairly he could experience heaven on earth. Conversely, if he was dishonest and treated people poorly he would experience hell on earth. In his view, heaven and hell were not places a person might go after death, but were experienced in this life.



In Acts 11:19-30, some of the Christians who were scattered because of the persecution, went to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch preaching the gospel. Many only talked with Jews. Other men from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and began sharing with Greeks (non-Jews). As this second group shared, God's hand was with them, and a large number of Gentiles came to Christ. When news of Gentile converts reached Jerusalem, Barnabas was dispatched to see what was happening. When he arrived at Antioch he rejoiced. Indeed, Gentiles were coming to Christ!

At Antioch, Barnabas encouraged the new believers to remain steadfast in their faith. He then went to Tarsus to find Paul. When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, they remained there for an entire year meeting with the church and teaching them about the Christian faith.

Why would Barnabas and Paul spend so much time in Antioch ministering to Gentile believers? The answer lies in the fact Gentile believers had so much to learn. Jewish converts understood the Old Testament and could be grounded in Christianity fairly quickly. Gentiles needed more training. They

came to Christ from a myriad of different backgrounds bringing all sorts of spiritual baggage and strange beliefs.

Although the woman with whom my wife and I spoke did not receive Christ at our home, there are countless people like her in the world who come to Christ every day. When they do, they need to be taught right doctrine. They need to know that heaven and hell are not here and now, but destinations for people after death. The final destination of each person depends on how he or she responds to Christ in this life.

It is likely the new Gentile converts in Antioch had a plethora of strange beliefs. After all, people of that day worshiped countless gods and goddesses, just like people in India, Africa and other places do today. Their accompanying false religious systems needed to be replaced with truth.

The need to get new believers grounded in the faith has not changed. We, like Barnabas and Paul, must ensure folks who come to Christ get grounded in the faith so their thinking is brought in line with God's Word.

Both winning people to Christ and building them in the faith are vital aspects of the evangelism process. Let's be sure both are part of our ministry.

Questions

Have you ever talked with someone who had a belief system that was a little far out?

Who do you know who is a new or relatively new believer and needs to get grounded in the faith?

Take Action

Make plans to connect with the person you identified above. Encourage them to become part of a Bible study or Sunday school class where they can learn right doctrine.

DAY 23 – The Tale of Two Men

Read Acts 12:1-25

Most people don't relish the thought of going to prison. It was a bit different, however, for a group of us who went inside San Quentin to minister to inmates. We were excited even though we had to sign a form stating the authorities would not negotiate our release if we became hostages. Although the chance of becoming a hostage was slim, I felt relieved when we departed.



Acts 12 tells the story of Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison. King Herod had him arrested, intending to put him to death. Herod's plan was thwarted when God sent an angel in the middle of the night. When the angel appeared in Peter's cell, a bright light shone, and Peter's chains fell off as the angel struck his side. Peter then followed the angel passed the two guards and out of the prison doors. When they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, the gate opened by itself. At that moment Peter realized his experience was not a dream. Undoubtedly, he was relieved to be free.

Because Peter's deliverance is so amazing, many people fail to see the fate of two other men in Acts 12. One is James, the brother of John, and the other Herod. Their stories might be called the "Tale of Two Men."

James faithfully served God and was a powerful witness in the early church. Unfortunately, he was martyred when Herod had him put to death with a sword (Ac 12:1,2).

Herod had a totally different story. He persecuted the church and intended on killing Peter as he did James. He even had the prison guards killed after Peter was found missing from his cell.

Not only was Herod ruthless, he was arrogant. Near the end of the chapter he traveled to Caesarea to deliver a speech. As Herod rose to speak, the crowd shouted, "*The voice of a god and not of a man!*" At that moment God struck Herod dead. Why? Because Herod failed to give God the glory, (Ac 12:21-23).

Much can be learned from these two men. Unlike James who had little by earthly standards, Herod had much. Unlike Herod who had little by heavenly standards, James had much. At death, James went into the glorious presence of God. Herod, on the other hand, went to a godless eternity.

Christians may suffer and even be martyred by those who oppose God, but that is far better than having everything the world has to offer, and dying in one's sin. Jesus said, *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36-37). The obvious answer to Jesus' second question is, there is nothing a man can give in exchange for his soul. Once he dies, there is no going back. A person must be saved in this life in order to spend eternity with God in the next.

No one wants to go to prison, but that is precisely where those who reject Christ will end up. They will be in eternal prison! The good news is that all people; rich or poor, great or small, can choose to follow Christ now. By doing so, they secure their place in heaven.

As we choose to be God's witnesses, even at the risk of ridicule, persecution or martyrdom, let us remember that serving God and suffering momentarily is far better than living for self and suffering eternally.

Questions

Why do you think God allows Christians to suffer in this life, and even suffer martyrdom?

Have you ever suffered for your faith? If so, what happened? If not, how does 2 Tm 3:12 apply to you?

Take Action

Ask God to give you boldness like Peter and James. Ask Him to help you share the gospel when He prompts you, and not to be worried about the consequences.

DAY 24 – Why the Opposition?

Read Acts 13:1-52

Have you ever asked yourself, “Why do people oppose the gospel when it offers abundant life now, and eternal life in the future?”

It seems amazing that anyone would reject something so wonderful, especially when the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus rose from the dead, and is the Son of God. Sadly, by rejecting Christ, people seal their own eternal fate.



In Acts 13 a group of Christians were ministering to the Lord and fasting. As they did, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart *Barnabas and Saul* (Paul) for a special ministry. After praying over the two men, the group sent them out on what became known as Paul’s first missionary journey.

One of their stops was the Island of Cyprus where Paul and Barnabas received opposition from a magician named Elymas. After confronting him, they did see fruit from their ministry when Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the city of Paphos, came to Christ.

From Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas sailed to Asia Minor, and after a brief stay in the coastal city of Perga, headed inland to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath, Paul preached a compelling salvation message. He and Barnabas were even invited to return the next Sabbath. A week later, new opposition arose when Jews, filled with jealousy, began contradicting Paul and Barnabas. The two then told the Jews the gospel would be taken to the Gentiles since so many Jews deemed themselves unworthy of eternal life. Paul’s words were a bit sarcastic.

The Jews then instigated persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district. In the mean time, many Gentiles (non-Jews) believed the gospel and rejoiced that it was available to them! All along, God intended to graft the Gentiles into the tree of life.

Why was the gospel opposed by so many even though some received it? It was rejected by Elymas the magician (v8) because it threatened his influence. As a Jewish false prophet he had deceived many, and feared losing his influence, especially with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. In the case of the Jews at Pisidian Antioch, their opposition arose out of jealousy (v45). If Jews received the gospel, they would look to Paul and Barnabas for guidance instead of the Jewish leaders.

For both Elymas and the Jews, the gospel brought unwanted change. They could not see beyond their own agendas to the wider plan of salvation. They were spiritually blind and stuck in their sin.

Today, just like in Acts 13, there will be those who oppose the gospel. It makes no sense, but it is reality. In the final analysis we must remember that unless God draws people to Himself they won't come. Acts 13:48 makes this clear, "*as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*" Somehow in God's mysterious plan, both human responsibility (man's freewill to choose) and divine sovereignty (God choosing) work hand in hand.

It is not our ministry to figure out ahead of time who will reject or accept the gospel. It is simply our privilege to share it when God provides the opportunity. We must become passionate in doing so!

Questions

What are some other reasons, besides the ones mentioned above, why people reject the gospel?

What can we do to help break down walls of opposition to the gospel?

Take Action

Ask God to send the Holy Spirit to open people's eyes to the truth of the gospel message. Ask Him to break down walls of opposition.

DAY 25 – Not Taking Advantage

Read Acts 14:1-18

Stories abound of religious leaders who took advantage of their followers. Jim Jones bilked money from unsuspecting seniors, and then led hundreds to commit mass suicide. Jim Baker wrongfully made millions as he oversold resort properties to faithful followers. David Koresh abused women for his own sexual gratification as he led the Branch Davidian cult.



Because we are sinners, none of us is above being tempted to abuse power. Thus, we must vigilantly guard our hearts so that we don't fall into that trap. One person cynically stated, "The only thing that keeps anyone from sinning and doing things to satisfy selfish desires is the fact temptation is often too weak or the consequences of sinning too great. Everyone would sin if the temptation was great enough or if they believed they would not get caught." Whether or not these statements are true, there are many people every day who choose to take advantage of those around them.

In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas had the perfect opportunity to abuse their power. After being chased out of Iconium, they fled to the city of Lystra where they continued to preach the gospel.

At Lystra there was a man who was lame from birth. When Paul saw the man's faith, he said to him, "*Stand upright on your feet!*" The man leaped up and began to walk. When the crowds saw this, they shouted, "*The gods have become like men and have come down to us.*" They then began calling Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes". The priest of Zeus even brought oxen and garlands to the gates intending to offer sacrifices to the two men. Amazing!

The crowds thought Paul and Barnabas were gods! What an opportunity for them to play the role and see what personal gain they could get! But instead of fanning the flame of falsehood, Paul and Barnabas tore their robes and rushed into the crowd saying, "*Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that*

you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”

Even with their strong testimonies, it was difficult for Paul and Barnabas to convince the people of Lystra to stop deifying them.

What motivated Paul and Barnabas to resist wrongful honor? They were totally committed to God and His plan of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. They humbled themselves under His mighty hand so that He could exalt them in His time. They cared more about their mission than about gaining personal fame or fortune. In short, they were men of integrity.

As Christians, if we are seen as spiritual giants by those to whom we minister, we must not take advantage of the situation. We need to see ourselves as humble servants of Christ whose mission it is to win people to Christ and build them in the faith – nothing more, nothing less!

When we keep our eyes on God, it will be more difficult to become side-tracked on self-aggrandizement. The writer of Proverbs was absolutely right when he said, “*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life*” (Prov 4:23). If we keep our hearts right, proper actions will follow.

Questions

Do you know of any religious leaders or people (other than the ones mentioned in this devotional) who took wrongful advantage of those under their care? What happened?

What can Christians do to help ensure they do not abuse their power or positions of authority?

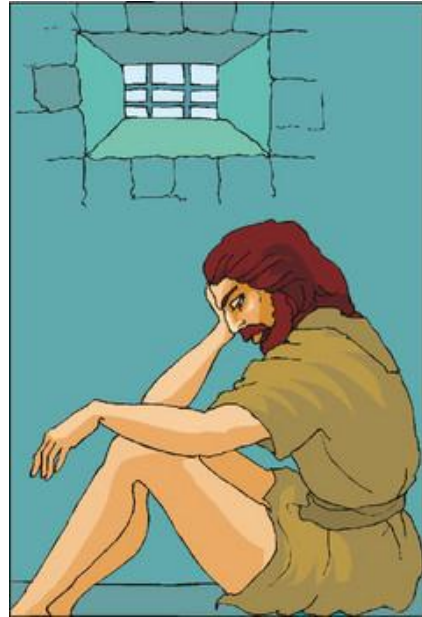
Take Action

Pray and ask God to give you a humble spirit and to keep your eyes on the goal of winning people to Christ and building them in the faith. Ask Him to help you never take wrongful advantage of any situation.

DAY 26 – Through Many Tribulations

Read Acts 14:19-28

I'll never forget attending a Christian gathering in college and hearing Richard Wurmbrand, the author of Tortured for Christ. As a pastor in Romania, he was imprisoned for his faith spending many years in solitary confinement. Pastor Wurmbrand related how one day his captors made him stand and stare at a spot on the wall. If he moved, he was beaten. After many hours of standing he felt like passing out, and turned toward the guard. Amazingly the guard fainted. When Richard looked down, his own legs were swollen from standing so long. He also told the account of fellow Christian prisoners crucified upside down as others were forced to worship them. He even spoke of being burned with a hot poker...



Frankly, as a new Christian living in the United States, I had difficulty believing Mr. Wurmbrand's stories. Just about the time I wrote him off, he said, "Let me show you what they did to me." He then removed his shirt. The sight was sickening. Not only was his body racked with scars, there were deep pockmarks where he had been burned with a poker. I quickly changed my opinion and viewed him as a living martyr rather than a charlatan trying to sell books.

In the city of Lystra after Paul and Barnabas convinced the crowds not to worship them, things went downhill. Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and poisoned the minds of the people causing them to stone Paul. They then dragged Paul out of the city supposing he was dead. Most likely, he was. As the disciples stood around their fallen apostle, God raised Paul, and he stood to his feet.

After such a painful ordeal it would have been reasonable for Paul to throw in the ministry-towel and say, "This Christian thing is much too dangerous. I think I'll go back to tent-making fulltime." Instead, Paul and Barnabas re-entered the city and continued on to the city of Derbe. There they boldly

preached the gospel and made many more disciples. From Derbe they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch strengthening the souls of believers. As part of his encouragement, Paul made a profound statement. He said, *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”* (Ac 14:22). In other words he told them the Christian life was not going to be easy. He was living proof.

Today, people want to be comfortable and stay in their perceived comfort-zones. Paul’s statement on *tribulations* makes it clear, comfort is not always the norm. Indeed, if believers choose to live godly lives, they will sometimes find themselves in hot water. People may label them fanatics. Fellow students or co-workers may ridicule them. Family members may shun them. They may even receive physical persecution.

Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:12 is another reminder that those who live for Christ will suffer, *“And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* Paul even said to young Timothy, *“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 2:3).

Are you ready to go through trials for the sake of the gospel? Are you willing to press on when the going gets tough? Is living for Christ and sharing the good news more important to you than personal comfort?

Paul and others like Richard Wurmbrand have become living sacrifices in order to spread the good news to the ends of the earth. As a result we have heard the gospel in our generation. Let’s be sure we pass the good news on to others no matter what the cost.

Questions

Are you willing to go through tough times for the cause of Christ?

What trials or tribulations have you faced as a result of living a godly Christian life?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to give you the courage to be a strong witness for Him. Ask him to give you the courage to deal with any difficulties that come your way. Ask for boldness, wisdom and strength...

DAY 27 – Faith or Works?

Read Acts 15:1-35

Haven't you ever thought the gospel was too simple? After all, to be saved, a person simply needs to place his or her trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Doesn't it make more sense to tell people there is a laundry list of rules they need to follow in order to go to heaven?



In Paul's day, the thought that people could be saved by faith-alone seemed too simple, especially to those who came from a Jewish background. That's why in Acts 15 some men traveled down from Judea and began teaching the Gentiles the necessity of circumcision. They said, in order to be saved, a person must also be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas vehemently disagreed.

The request was then made for the two missionaries to go to Jerusalem and explain their position. When Paul and Barnabas arrived they met with the apostles and elders and told them everything God was doing. But some of the Pharisees who had become Christians were also advocating the need for circumcision in order to keep the Mosaic law. A debate ensued.

As the whole group discussed the matter, Peter stood up and said, *"Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit just as He also did for us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."*

Upon hearing Peter's words, everyone kept silent as Paul and Barnabas related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. Finally James got up and said it was not good to trouble the Gentiles with rules and regulations, but simply to tell them it would be good

to abstain from things contaminated by idols, from fornication, from what is strangled, and from blood. Everyone agreed and a letter was sent by way of Paul and Barnabas, and a few others, to the church at Antioch. When the delegation shared the letter, the Gentiles rejoiced!

Today as we share the gospel it would be easy to stress the necessity of faith and works for salvation. We must, however, let people know that they are saved by God's grace through faith alone. Ephesians 2:8,9 states, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*" It is not faith plus circumcision, or faith plus Bible reading, or faith plus church attendance that saves a person. A person is saved by grace alone apart from works.

On the other hand it is important for new believers to understand the importance of good works in the Christian life. Ephesians 2:10 states, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" Those good works are proof that a person's faith is genuine. Real faith shows itself by its good works. Although the good works don't save the person, they are evidence that the person is saved. In short, real faith works! James said, "*Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works'*" (Jms 2:17,18).

Let's keep faith and good works in proper perspective.

Questions

Is it clear in your own mind that salvation is by God's grace through faith alone?

How can new believers be encouraged to do good works? What are some of the good works Christians can do? List a few of them.

Take Action

Pray and thank God that you are saved by His grace through faith alone. Also, thank Him for the good works that He has prepared for you to do. Ask Him to show you those good works each day, and to give you the grace to do them.



DAY 28 – Internal Conflict

Read Acts 15:36-41

Was there ever a time you had a sharp disagreement with a fellow Christian? Perhaps it was over a particular ministry in the church. Maybe you wanted to do things one way, and he wanted to do them another.

Unfortunately there are Christians who go toe-to-toe with each other in anger, step out of ministry, and leave the church never to return. In such cases Satan gets the victory. No wonder Paul encouraged the Ephesians to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

Church conflict is nothing new. It was alive and well in the early church. Not only were there heated debates over doctrine, there were strong words over other issues as well.

When Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey, they took along John also known as Mark (Ac 13:5). Mark stayed with them through ministry on the island of Cyprus, but, for some unstated reason, left them in the region of Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem (Ac 13:13).

After Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from the first mission trip, they went to Jerusalem to resolve the debate concerning salvation by faith alone. They then returned to Antioch with the positive letter from the church leaders, and everyone rejoiced. Paul then felt it was time to return to the mission field. He said to Barnabas, *“Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”* Barnabas thought it was a good idea, but desired to take along Mark his cousin. Paul, however, kept insisting that Mark not come because he had deserted them. This unexpected disagreement caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas, and they went their separate ways.

The good news in this conflict is that neither Paul nor Barnabas used the disagreement as an excuse to stop ministering. Instead, Paul took Silas and

headed north through Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches there. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus. What Satan meant for evil, God used for good. The foreign mission team had just doubled.

Paul's words to the Ephesians about preserving unity, may have come out of the situation with Barnabas. As time went on, Paul may have seen just how damaging church conflict could be. The world was hostile enough without Christians being at each others throats! Near the end of Paul's ministry, the relationship between him, Barnabas and Mark was mended. Mark visited Paul in prison (Col 4:10), and Paul requested Mark come be with him in his final days (2 Tm 4:11).

Satan and the forces of evil hate evangelism and will do whatever they can to stop it. One way is to fuel conflict between Christians. We must always be on guard. Because we are sinners, conflict is inevitable. We can seek to lessen its frequency and intensity, but most of all we need to deal with it calmly and wisely when it rears its ugly head.

Maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace will not only allow us to move forward together, but it will draw people to the Savior. Indeed, they will know we are Christians by our love.

Questions

Has conflict in ministry every caused you to veer off course? Explain.

How have you handled conflict when it came? Did you seek to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, or did you simply try to get your own way?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to help you handle conflict His way.

DAY 29 – All Things to All People

Read Acts 16:1-3

What a blessing it was for Paul and Barnabas to deliver the encouraging letter from the church leaders in Jerusalem! Converts did not need to be circumcised, and they did not have to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. No wonder everyone in Antioch rejoiced (Ac 15:31)!



It also must have been a joy to take the same message on the second missionary journey. Acts 16:4,5 states, *“Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.”*

As Paul and Silas headed on the second missionary journey, it wasn't long before they came to the cities of Derbe and Lystra. There they found a committed young disciple named Timothy whose mother was a Jewish believer, and whose father was a Greek. Paul saw Timothy's potential as a leader and wanted him to accompany them on the rest of the journey. In preparation for the trip, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Ac 16:3). If circumcision wasn't necessary for salvation, and if Paul was taking this message to the churches, why did he require Timothy to get circumcised? Wasn't Paul placing on Timothy the very same burden he spoke so strongly against in Jerusalem?

Upon closer observation it is clear why Paul had Timothy circumcised. It had nothing to do with salvation, but everything to do with making it easier for Timothy to minister to Jews on the missionary journey. Being half Greek, if Timothy wasn't circumcised, the Jews might refuse to listen to what he had to say. If he was circumcised, it might open doors of opportunity for the gospel.

In another passage Paul put it this way, *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win*

those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it” (1 Cor 9:19-23).

Without compromising God’s standards, Paul became all things to all people that he might win some of them to Christ. By having Timothy circumcised, Paul was teaching Timothy this same principle. The pain of circumcision was a small price to pay to win a hearing with the Jews. And even though many Jews opposed Paul’s efforts, many came to Christ.

Today as we minister we need to keep the principle of *becoming all things to all people* in mind. If we want to impact modern society we may need to change the style of music in our churches. If we want to win the younger generation we may need to take off our sport coats and ties. We need to learn to meet people where they are and then take them to the throne of grace. This will mean changing customs and traditions without compromising God’s eternal truth.

Becoming all things to all people doesn’t mean watering down God’s Word; it means looking beyond our normal way of doing things to find effective new ways to reach the lost. Let’s be willing to take Paul’s profound advice. We need to become all things to all people in order to win some of them to the Lord.

Questions

In your own words, explain the principle of becoming all things to all people. Why does this not mean compromising godly values?

What can you do to better identify with the people you are trying to reach for Christ? What specific things can you do to become all things to them?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to show you what you need to do in your various spheres of influence to win a hearing with those you are trying to reach with the gospel.

DAY 30 – Closed Doors, Open Doors

Read Acts 16:1-40

Many Christians have favorite verses in the Bible. Two of my wife's favorites are Proverbs 3:5-6, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."* The gist of these verses is clear – if a person trusts in the Lord with his whole heart, God will direct him down the right path. But sometimes that path is different than expected.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas came to Derbe and Lystra where they found a highly respected young disciple named Timothy. Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish woman who was a believer. Paul wanted to take Timothy with them and persuaded him to go. He also had Timothy circumcised so that it would be easier to minister to the Jews.

As the missionaries left the area and passed through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, the Scripture makes an unusual statement. It says they were, *"forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them"* (Ac 16:6-10).

Why would God forbid Paul, Silas and Timothy from speaking the gospel in Asia? Didn't those people need to hear the good news? Why would He prevent them from going north into Bithynia? Did He have something against Bithynians? The Scripture doesn't tell us why God prevented the missionary trio from entering certain areas, but it does make it clear that God was trying to get them to Macedonia as soon as possible. Perhaps God had other missionaries He would direct to Asia and Bithynia at a later time. For now He needed Paul, Silas and Timothy to concentrate their efforts in Macedonia.



Paul heeded the vision and determined it was God's for them will to go to Macedonia. They ran a *straight course* to the island of Samothrace and went the following day to the city of Neapolis and then on to Philippi, an important city in the Macedonian region. There, several people came to Christ including Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and their two families.

The visit to Philippi was not without incident, however. Certain Jews opposed the gospel, and Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison, but God provided them a miraculous release.

As we seek to share the gospel with those in our sphere of influence, God may close certain doors and open others. We may be unable to share with some we hoped to lead to Christ, and share with others we never thought would listen. The important thing is, we must listen to the Spirit's promptings and do what He says. If we trust God with our whole heart He will direct our paths and help us run a straight course.

Questions

Have you ever felt that God shut or opened a door for your witnessing efforts? What happened?

Who are the people you feel God is asking you to reach with the gospel?

Take Action

Pray and ask God to open doors of opportunity for you to share the gospel. Ask Him to make you sensitive to His leading.

Final note:

I hope you have enjoyed and been encouraged by this 30 day devotional. I certainly learned a lot putting it together. I encourage you to go through the material at least once a year in order to help you keep focused on the high priority of reaching others with the good news of Christ. If you have anything you would like to share with me, I would enjoy hearing from you. May the Lord richly bless you in your ministry.

Sincerely in Christ,

Chris