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THE POWER TO WITNESS • The Holy Spirit

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 1:1-8

The book of Acts is the sequel to Luke. It opens with a greeting to Theophilus, who was also the intended recipient of Luke's gospel. In Acts 1:1 Luke references his "former book" and picks up where he left off. In this passage, Luke is restating the Great Commission challenge Jesus gave in Luke 24. Throughout the rest of the book, Luke shows how that command was being carried out, as the news of the gospel spread throughout "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

In verse 4, Luke quotes Jesus as saying something that seems counter-intuitive at first glance, given the urgency of their task. Jesus had told the disciples to, "Go, and make disciples of all nations." But here he says, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." It would seem that they should have gone with all haste to carry the news of the risen Savior to the ends of the earth. Understanding why they were to wait is the key to understanding this passage.

What Are You Waiting For?

The conversation Jesus is referencing is recorded in John 14-16. Take a second read through those chapters and then come back here for a bit of commentary. Pay special attention to John 14:25-15:8, and 15:26-16:16.

As you probably noticed, Jesus had a lot to talk about that night. Notice two topics that were prominent throughout his discourse: power and witnessing. In 15:1-8 He says over and over that there is no power, no fruitfulness, unless we are connected to Him:

- No branch can bear fruit in itself. It must remain in the vine. (15:4)
- Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (15:4)
- If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit. (15:5)
- Apart from me you can do nothing. (15:5)

And look how often he comments on how the Spirit will help us know and communicate truth:

- But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (14:26)

What's the Big Idea?

In this passage Luke shows Jesus' call to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and He specifies the power by which we must do this. The Holy Spirit is the source of that power, and in fact, is so indispensable that Jesus tells the disciples NOT to go tell people about Him until they are filled with the Spirit. We also need to be sure we are empowered by the Spirit, and then go tell people how they can begin a relationship with God through Christ.

What's the Problem?

Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit we have no capacity to influence people for Christ. All our efforts are in vain if He is not enabling us.

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- When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify. (15:26,27)
- When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (16:7)
- But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. (16:13)

Keep that in mind and you'll see that what Jesus is about to say isn't anything new. It's just a recap of what He'd already taught the disciples.

Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Being baptized with the Spirit is synonymous with being filled with the Spirit. Both terms describe a person who has surrendered his or her life to Christ and is being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

When that happens the power and ability to witness begins to flow. As we are filled with the Spirit, He teaches us what to say, He gives supernatural power to our words so they will actually have an effect, and He convicts the people we are speaking to of their guilt and need for a savior. Only the Spirit can open a person's eyes to see his or her deplorable condition before God. As He does, the gospel message comes with power to hearts He has prepared.

According to Jesus, the power that the Spirit provides is absolutely critical to the success of the mission. Without the Spirit and His power, the disciples were to do nothing. In fact, according to John 15:4-5, without His power they couldn't have done anything even if they wanted. Rather than try and fail, Jesus told them to wait for the Spirit to come upon them.

In verses 6-7, Luke interrupts the logical flow of the passage to show how the disciples' focus was off. Jesus responds to their question about the Kingdom of Israel by directing their attention back to the kingdom of heaven, and is more explicit: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (v. 8).

We are given that power so that we can tell people about Jesus, enabling them to know Him, too. There is no point to having the power of the Holy Spirit, if we aren't sharing the gospel. And there is no point in sharing the gospel, if we don't have the Spirit's power.

The critical thing for you to communicate is that great power is available to us in the Holy Spirit. By faith, we can be filled with the Spirit and receive supernatural power to be His witnesses as He has commanded. As we avail ourselves of this power, God will use us as He changes people's lives for all eternity.

What's Our Response?

Help the people in your study see their need for the power that the Holy Spirit can give. Encourage them to read through the article, "How to Witness in the Spirit" and receive the Spirit's power by faith.

End 

What Are the Questions?

Acts 1:1-8

LAUNCH

If I were to tell you we are going to cancel Bible study and go sharing right now, how would you feel? Excited, frightened, intimidated? Why?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 1:1-4.

1. What is the “former book” to which the author is referring?
2. Who is Theophilus?
3. In Matthew 28, the command given is: “Go, and make disciples....” Here, Jesus says, “Do not leave, but wait....” Why weren’t the disciples supposed to go and go quickly?
4. Where had the disciples heard Jesus speak about this gift before?

Read John 14:25-15:8 and 15:26-16:16.

5. What was the gift?
6. What are some of the themes you notice being repeated?

7. What is Jesus’ main point in John 15:1-8?

8. List all the times Jesus mentions the Spirit in reference to our knowing and communicating the truth.

Read Acts 1:5-8

9. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?
10. Why did the disciples ask about the Kingdom of Israel? How did Jesus respond?
11. What will the Holy Spirit give them? For what purpose?
12. What will they be able to do before the Spirit comes?
13. How does the Spirit empower us to witness?

APPLY

14. Have you ever felt powerless while talking to people about Jesus?
15. Jesus speaks of this power as a gift. Sometimes it may feel like a gift we’d like to exchange. Do you want this power? What is attractive or repulsive to you about the gift?
16. How are you experiencing His power in your life right now?
17. When was the last conversation you had with a non-Christian concerning Jesus?
18. What does that suggest to you about the reality of the Spirit’s power in your life?

What Are the Answers?

1. The former book is Luke.
2. The name means “lover of God.” It was either a literal individual, or a figurative way to address all who love God.
3. They were lacking something necessary to accomplish the task—namely, the Holy Spirit.
4. The disciples had heard Jesus speak of this gift in John 14-16 among other places.
5. The gift is the Holy Spirit.
6. Allow the group to discuss. Two of the major themes are power and witnessing.
7. We can do nothing if we are not connected to Him.
8. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (14:26)

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the

Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify. (15:26,27)

When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. (16:7)

But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. (16:13)

9. It is synonymous with being filled with the Spirit. Both describe a person who is yielded to Christ, and empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.
10. Their focus was on earthly things, not the heavenly kingdom. Jesus very graciously redirected their focus back to the critical task before them.
11. The Holy Spirit will give them power, so they can effectively tell people about Christ.
12. They are not able to do anything.
- 13.-18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

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

Acts 1:8

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A POWERFUL WITNESS • Evangelism

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 4:1-22

This passage is one of several great examples of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled. There, Luke recorded Jesus' promise: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses..." In Acts 4, he records one of the many times it was fulfilled. Over and over again in the book of Acts, and throughout the history of the church, this promise is lived out. The same is true today in the lives of Spirit-filled believers all over the world. When we yield our lives to Christ, confess our sins, and trust the Spirit of God to fill us, He empowers us to do great things for Him.

The events of the previous chapter are an important context for this chapter. Be sure to read both chapters three and four in preparation for this study. In chapter three, John and Peter healed a beggar who had been crippled for years. They used the opportunity to call their hearers to repentance and faith as they testified to the great power of the resurrected Jesus, and His willingness to forgive.

In chapter four, we see the power of the Holy Spirit on display in the apostles' lives. The religious leaders of the day are "greatly disturbed" because of this miracle and the preaching that followed it. Therefore, they arrest and jail Peter and John, hoping to intimidate them into silence, and quell the growth of this movement. They fail on both counts. The number of believers continues to increase to more than 5,000, up from only 120 at Christ's ascension! Peter and John speak boldly before their accusers, beginning the fulfillment of another promise Luke recorded in Luke 21:12-15:

They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

As Peter and John testify of the gospel, the leaders of the day, are astonished by their courage. They can't make sense of their bold, powerful witness. Confronted with incontrovertible evidence of a miracle, and men who can not be intimidated, they vainly order the apostles to stop speaking about Jesus. They probably aren't surprised by the response: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19,20).

What's the Big Idea?

Acts 1:8 promises that God will give power to believers so that they can speak about Jesus in a supernatural way. Not only will they have extraordinary courage, but their words will also have great effect. This passage is an example of that being lived out by the apostles. It is meant as an encouragement to us so that we would rely on the Holy Spirit and experience the thrill of being His witnesses.

What's the Problem?

There are many things that can keep us from sharing the gospel, including fear or our own disinterest. Without the Spirit of God living in and empowering us we're unable to overcome the hindrances.

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Notice that it isn't only the influence of the Spirit that gives them boldness. What they believe and are convinced of also compels them. In 4:12 Peter declares, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

That idea was no more popular in John and Peter's culture than it is in ours. But it just happened to be true and they knew it first hand. They were there when Jesus calmed the sea, healed the lepers and rose from the dead. They *knew* that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that apart from Him all men are lost. Knowing that He really is the only savior gave John and Peter boldness to speak and to suffer.

That kind of courage, and the compulsion to tell people about Jesus, is precisely what the Holy Spirit produces. He can do the same for the students in your group.

What's Our Response?

Look for opportunities to be put in a position where radical faith and great power is required. Could it be that you never experience the thrill of the Holy Spirit's courage because you never do anything frightening? Determine to share your faith in a way that will require you to depend on the Holy Spirit's power. Trust Him to fill you as He promised.

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 4:1-22

LAUNCH

What is the most frightening thing you have ever attempted for Christ? What happened?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 4:1-22.

1. What is the situation that has set up the events in chapter 4?
2. Why are the religious leaders so threatened by the apostles' preaching?
3. What would you expect to happen to your ministry on your campus if the administration tried to shut it down? What happened in this passage? Why?
4. When the religious leaders arrested and tried to intimidate Peter and John how did they respond? Why?
5. How do you think you would feel if a professor challenged you about your faith in front of your class? What would you say?
6. In verse 12, Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." How do you think this belief affected his message to the rulers?
7. How would you respond to the question, "How can you say Jesus is the only way to God? What about other religions, or those who haven't heard of Christ?"
8. What is the key to experiencing boldness and effectiveness in talking about Jesus?
9. Is courage something God gives us, or something He requires us to do?

APPLY

10. The religious leaders couldn't refute that a miracle had occurred. What is the evidence of the life-changing power of Jesus in *your* ministry? What steps of faith have you taken that would astonish those around you?
11. Unable to intimidate, the leaders vainly order Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. They refuse saying, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." How closely does that parallel your own desire to talk about Jesus?
12. What would it take to get you to stop talking about Jesus?
13. What does that tell you about what you really believe about Jesus? What does it suggest to you about the reality of the Holy Spirit's power in your life?

What Are the Answers?

1. Peter and John healed a crippled man and preached the gospel.
2. Jesus condemned them for their outward righteousness, and inward hardness of heart. As His followers grew, their influence was threatened.
3. Discuss the topic. Most would likely imagine the ministry would shrink, though the opposite happened here and throughout the history of persecution in the church. Persecution forces us to walk by faith, which God honors.
4. Discuss the topic. Peter and John were remarkably bold and testified of the gospel, despite knowing it would get them in further trouble.
5. Allow the group to discuss how they would answer these questions. See the accompanying article, "Lost" for additional insights. You might want to print out several copies for your group.
6. Only the power that the Holy Spirit gives to believers can produce that result.
7. Allow the group to discuss. God does motivate us, and can give us unusual boldness, but we are still responsible to act courageously. Courage implies that the task will not seem easy.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. He understood that apart from Christ, his opponents were lost. Their only hope was forgiveness in Christ. It was a small thing to suffer so that they could hear the gospel and believe.
- 10.-13. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

A POWERFUL PRAYER • Prayer

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 4:23-37

Prayer is one of the hardest disciplines in the Christian life – unless you are scared and desperate for help. Then, it is the easiest thing in the world. Peter and John have just been through the whirlwind. They’ve been arrested, jailed and threatened, but they stood strong. The Holy Spirit gave them courage to stand before the religious rulers and testify of His grace. They were bold witnesses for Christ. In verse 23, they are released from prison and returned to the fellowship of believers where they report all that has happened. Immediately, they join their voices in prayer to God. Their hearts are full of thanks for God’s deliverance, and they are earnest in their hope for His continued grace.

It’s clear from the text of their prayer that they knew that God could do anything and that, in fact, nothing happens outside of His sovereign will. They begin by asserting that He is the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. Surely, nothing is too difficult for Him.

As they pray, they quote Psalm 2, the first Psalm about the Messiah. Psalm 2 neatly divides into four three-verse scenes. They quote the first scene in which the narrator asks why the world rails against God, and His Messiah. (The word Messiah literally means, “Anointed One.”) Their rage is futile. God’s power is absolute.

Scene two is in heaven, where God is on His throne. Their threats against Him are not even sufficient to rouse Him from His chair. Rather, He laughs at the absurdity, and warns them that the Messiah King is reigning.

Scene three is a picture of the coronation of that King, where God the Father gives to Christ the nations over which He is to rule. He has total authority and sovereign power. Nothing can hinder Him.

In the final scene, the narrator returns and implores the nations to stop their rebellion, and pay homage to the King. “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way.” He will destroy the rebels, but offer safety to all who come to Him.

That is the understanding the believers had of God as they prayed to Him. Because of that, they pray with confidence that He can, and will, intervene on their behalf, as they preach the gospel. After praising God for His power, they make two requests. First, in verse 29, they ask that they might be able to speak with great boldness in the face of the threats against them. Second, in the next

What’s the Big Idea?

In the crucible of radical and risky ministry, prayer becomes spontaneous, dynamic and joyful. The key to experiencing great prayer is committing great acts of faith.

What’s the Problem?

When we aren’t engaged in the radical edge of our faith, prayer deteriorates into a boring monotonous discipline.

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verse they ask God to perform miraculous signs and wonders in the name of Jesus.

In verse 31, we see the answer to both of these prayers. First, the building shakes – clearly a supernatural response from God and an answer to their second prayer. Following that, they speak the word of God boldly, just as they had requested. As we've seen throughout Acts, they were able to speak boldly because they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Last, we see a demonstration of uncommon unity and oneness among the believers. This too is a natural outworking of radical and risky ministry and fervent prayer.

Hopefully your group is beginning to see the picture Luke is painting. In scene after scene there is great power, bold evangelism, fervent prayer and sincere affection. Our hope as you look at this each week is that it will whet your group's appetite to see the same dynamics at work on your campus and in your ministry. Do your best to bring this to life and invite them to daydream about what this could look like at your school.

What's Our Response?

Evaluate the sorts of things you pray about. Determine to undertake efforts for which you will be desperate for God's assistance. Pray in faith that He will meet you there.

Think about how to escalate the intensity and participation of group prayer on your campus. How can you fuel what is happening, or start something if it does not exist?

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 4:23-37

LAUNCH

Let's play a word association game. What are the first three adjective that come to mind when I say, "Prayer Meeting." Why do you think those terms came to mind?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 4:23-31.

1. What has been happening in Acts 4 prior to these verses?
2. How do you think Peter and John were feeling? How were the rest of the believers feeling as they waited for their release from prison?
3. When Peter and John were released, they went back and reported all that had happened. Luke says that in response, they raised their voices in prayer. This doesn't sound like a boring prayer meeting they went to because it was expected of them, but rather it seems that they couldn't help but pray. What is different here from our common experience?
7. Why was that appropriate to pray back to God?
8. In addition to praising God for His power, they make two requests. What are they?
9. How does God answer them?
10. These men and woman were obviously already indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. What is in view when it says that they were "filled" with the Holy Spirit?
11. How is radical evangelism connected to powerful, passionate prayer? Can they be separated?

The prayer contains a quote from Psalm 2. Read Psalm 2.

4. How does this Psalm relate to their current situation?
5. What are some of the thoughts it expresses concerning Jesus.
6. What assurances and hope would this Psalm provide the believers?
12. The next thing Luke records is the unity of the believers. How does this relate to the prayer and its result?
13. Why do you think they were so generous with each other?

APPLY

14. When has prayer been easiest and most natural for you?
is currently lacking in this time – in contrast to what you observe in this passage?
15. Why do you think we find prayer so difficult?
16. Is there currently a time when believers gather to pray for the campus? If there is, what do you see that
17. In what way can you contribute to bringing about this kind of prayer on campus?

What Are the Answers?

1. Peter and John have been arrested for preaching the gospel. Filled with the Spirit, they were bold and didn't back down. They were then threatened and released.
2. Peter and John may have felt exhilarated, scared, and in awe. The believers were likely very scared as they awaited the fate of their leaders.
3. They were at a place where they were desperate for God's help. That turns prayer from a monotony into the only thing that can satisfy the soul. Our problem is that we often don't attempt great things, or take great risks, so we don't need great answers to prayer. A radical life of faith is the cure for boring prayer.
4. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?" Psalm 2 is about the certainty that Messiah will reign victoriously despite the world's rebellion against Him.
5. Jesus is the sovereign Messiah and King who rules the nations.
6. They would gain assurance from God's great power, sovereignty, and the certain success of Messiah's kingdom.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. In verse 29, they pray that they could speak with great boldness. In verse 30, they pray God would perform miraculous signs and wonders in Jesus' name.
9. The building shakes in response to their prayer for a miracle. They are filled with the Spirit and enabled to speak with boldness.
10. Apparently, this is a special empowerment, which sometimes God provides people.
11. The two are joined together – passionate prayer does not take place without courageous evangelism and ministry.
12. The Spirit, besides empowering believers to share the gospel, also brings unity. It's also a natural result of attempting great things together and succeeding despite great trials.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. Usually when life has been hard and we are aware of our need.
15. Because we are rarely aware of our deep need. Arrogance and choosing the easy path contributes to this.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss. Decide to make radical decisions to walk by faith and do things that will fail miserably if God doesn't intervene. Take steps to see that uncommon prayer is happening on your campus.

Memorize

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

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A POWERFUL PERSECUTION • Persecution

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 5:17-42

In Acts 5, the intensity of the opposition to the gospel continues to mount. Even as more and more people believe the gospel, there is a parallel growth of hatred toward Jesus' followers. The persecution began in the last chapter with Peter and John's first imprisonment, and here continues with another imprisonment and the first beating of Jesus' followers. The story of the first martyr begins in the next chapter. The extraordinary thing is that Jesus' followers aren't hindered in the least by the persecution. Rather, filled with the Spirit, they continue to boldly preach the gospel with no regard for the wrath of their opposition.

Starting in verse 17, Luke gives a very brief, almost off-handed report of an extraordinary event. The apostles were thrown in jail again, but during the night they were miraculously led out of jail by an angel. The doors remained locked, and the guards were still in their places, but the apostles were gone! God didn't bring an end to persecution, but His unmistakable intervention in the midst of it must have been a great comfort to the believers as they suffered. Clearly, God knew their circumstances and could do absolutely anything He wished. The believers were willing to suffer, knowing that a sovereign God oversaw everything.

Immediately after escaping from jail, the apostles went back to the temple courts and continued to "tell the people the full message of this new life." They did this in response to a command given in verse 20. In that regard, it made sense. But, under normal circumstances, you'd expect someone who escaped from jail to get as far from that jail as possible and avoid attracting attention. Instead, the apostles went to the most public place, loudly doing the very thing that got them arrested in the first place. They had no fear of men, but a compulsion to make the gospel known. The Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish court) observed this in frustration when they said, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." Peter replied, "We must obey God rather than men." And, in his next breath, he again summarized the gospel for them!

The court was at a loss as to what to do, and (briefly) heeded the advice of the leading Jewish teacher, Gamaliel to stop the vain persecution. He had argued that if this movement were not of God, it would die and amount to nothing; but, if it is of God, then no persecution could stop it. Persuaded, they flogged the apostles, once again ordered them to stop teaching about Jesus, and let them go.

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What's the Big Idea?

This study is about persecution, and bearing up under it joyfully. Despite the myriad of things against them, the apostles preached the gospel unflinchingly. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do the same.

What's the Problem?

We often have a wrong perspective on suffering, seeing it as the judgment of God and a thing to be avoided at all costs. When we yield to this we miss out on a measure of joy that can only come by suffering for Christ.



Again, the apostles did something totally counter to our natural impulses – they left rejoicing that they were able to suffer for Jesus. Being flogged is a wretched affair. They would have been whipped across the back 39 times. Yet, there is no mention of them questioning God in this, or complaining. Rather, they were excited and praising God that they were counted worthy to suffer. And, they continued to preach the gospel. Day in and day out, they told all who would listen that Jesus loved them and would forgive them.

In this, we need to see that there is joy in suffering for the gospel, whatever form that suffering takes. Rather than shrink from it, we should embrace it, and boldly preach the gospel. Otherwise, there is a joy that we'll never know. What must it be like to put it all on the line for Jesus, suffer disgrace, and be found worthy? Peter, in his first epistle commented on this, saying, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:12,13) Peter knew from experience that there is a sweetness to suffering, when we suffer for doing good. Preach the gospel in season and out of season.

What's Our Response?

Please help your group identify the forms of persecution you seek to avoid. Pray for boldness and grace to face them and be a courageous witness for Christ.

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 5:17-42

LAUNCH

When in your life have you experienced the most physical pain? What happened? How did you take it?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 5:17-42.

1. What has been going on to arouse the jealousy of the Jewish leaders?
2. Their jealousy leads them to arrest and imprison the apostles. Then, in verse 19, Luke says something totally bizarre. Do you think it really happened?
3. What would you do if you escaped from jail? What did they do? Why?
4. When the Jewish leaders discovered the apostles were preaching again right in the temple courts, the passage says that, "they were puzzled, wondering what would come of this." Were they puzzled because the apostles escaped, or because they were preaching again?
5. In verse 30, when Peter is being questioned, he not only defends preaching, but he again preaches the gospel to his accusers! Read what Peter says, then share how you might have summarized the gospel in this situation.
6. The Jewish leaders are enraged and want to kill him, but are persuaded not to do so. How? What do you think of this reasoning?
7. In verse 40, the apostles are beaten, and in verse 41, they leave rejoicing. Why? How?
8. What does it mean to be considered "worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name?" Why would this be an honor?
9. When was a time you suffered disgrace for the sake of the Name?
10. From the study of Acts thus far, as the disciples' preaching grew in intensity, what other things intensified? How are they all related?

APPLY

11. Why do you think God intervened in their imprisonment, but allowed the beating to happen? Would you question God's goodness in that? Why didn't the apostles?
12. What have you experienced from Christ that would motivate joy in persecution?
13. What hinders you from sharing the gospel?
14. What are you missing out on when you yield to that pressure?
15. What would it take for your joy in the gospel to more closely match the apostles'?

What Are the Answers?

1. More preaching, miracles, and the growth of the early church aroused the jealousy of the Jewish leaders.
2. Let people discuss this and grapple with something so incredible. But yes, it happened.
3. Allow the group to discuss. The natural thing would be search for a safe place to hide. They threw caution to the wind and obeyed the order to preach.
4. Discuss the topic. It could be either or both.
5. Give the group time to think of how they would present the gospel. Share your answers.
6. Gamaliel argues that if this is not of God, it will fail. If it is of God, nothing can stop it.
7. They rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer disgrace for Jesus. They had come to value things very differently than the world does.
8. Because Christ suffered and died for us it is a special privilege to suffer for Him.
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. Persecution, jealousy, prayer, and community were heightened with the spread of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel brings out the intensity of the Christian life and spiritual battle.
11. God can and does sovereignly protect His children, but that does not mean immunity from persecution or suffering. In fact, we are told in Scripture to expect both.
12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. We miss out on the joy of obedience, and the opportunities to influence people's eternities.
15. You want to help your group see that the dynamic experience of being loved, forgiven and delighted in by Jesus is the only thing that can really fuel this sort of response to suffering.

Memorize

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.

I Peter 4:12-13

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND • Divine Appointments

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 8:26-40

Philip is an apostle who is introduced to the book of Acts earlier in this chapter. He is the second of the three great P's in Acts. The first seven chapters have largely concerned the church in and around Jerusalem, led by Peter. But, in the opening verses of chapter 8, a great persecution breaks out in Jerusalem and the church is scattered. God, however, uses this persecution to spread the gospel wherever the believers have fled. Philip is one who takes the gospel outside Jerusalem fulfilling, Jesus' call to expand beyond Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The rest of the book of Acts records that expansion under the leadership of Paul. Peter, Philip and Paul. Not very alliterative actually, but all P's nonetheless.

In verse 27, Philip leaves Jerusalem for a Philistine city 50 miles to the south. He goes in response to a command from an angel. Along the way, he meets an Ethiopian official who is reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah. Recognizing the opportunity, Philip initiates with him and offers to explain the passage. The official eagerly accepts, and Philip leads him to faith in Christ.

Philip had the thrill of experiencing a divine appointment. It was the Spirit's idea for him to walk down that road. It was the Spirit who coordinated the Ethiopian's travels to coincide with Philip's. It was the Spirit who prompted the official to read Isaiah 53 at precisely the right time. All Philip had to do was show up.

God does this all the time. According to Ephesians 2:10, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Those "good works" are divine appointments – opportunities He has set up for you. There are doorways all across campus that we merely need to walk through in obedience. As we do, we can have the thrill of being used by God. We need to learn to see these opportunities, and be obedient when they arise.

There could hardly have been a more opportune passage for the Ethiopian to be reading. It was from Isaiah 53, which is one of the clearest Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Look at it in context. From Isaiah 52:13 through the end of chapter 53, Isaiah describes in vivid detail a man who is a servant of God, but is despised and rejected, and who is killed for the sins of others. His death produces life for us. After His death, He sees life and is given a great reward. This is probably the single clearest picture of the Messiah's suffering in the Old Testament.

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What's the Big Idea?

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." There are divine opportunities all around us. God has set up appointments for us to walk into, if we just have the eyes to see and the will to obey.

What's the Problem?

If we are not looking for and open to the opportunities God gives us everyday to be His ambassadors we miss out on the opportunity to love and serve people for Christ.



As the Ethiopian reads this, he wonders who the man in the passage is. Philip is able to show him that it is Jesus, the Messiah. Isaiah was written more than 600 years before Jesus was born and describes perfectly how our redemption was accomplished. It would be exciting to walk through this passage with your group and observe how accurately it describes Jesus.

In Acts 8:38, Philip baptizes the official who goes away rejoicing at his new life in Christ. What a privilege we have to be used by God. Isn't it plain from this text that the God who oversaw all the details of this encounter, could have finished it all by Himself? But, He didn't! In His grace, He invited Philip to participate and lead this man to faith in Christ.

In the same way He invites us to participate in the most thrilling, exciting adventure the human spirit can ever know. He calls us to be His ambassadors to take the gospel of hope to a lost and dying world. He ordains the circumstances, works in people's lives, and lets us communicate the gospel to ready hearts. What great fun to be a messenger of the gospel! Keep your eyes open for opportunities he has prepared, and walk obediently into them.

What's Our Response?

Encourage your group to look for divine appointments this week. Train yourselves to believe that God is setting up such appointments around you. You'll be amazed at what you see. Walk by faith into those situations, trusting God to use you.

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 8:26-40

LAUNCH

Have you ever been benched on a sports team? What was it like? How did it feel if and when the coach finally put you in the game?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 8:26-40.

1. A new character is introduced in Acts 8: Philip. Who is he?
2. Up until this point, the main character has been Peter. What happened to change this?
3. In verse 27, Philip leaves Jerusalem heading south for a Philistine city. Whose idea was this?
4. Philip's eyes were open, looking for an opportunity to share Christ. When he hears the official reading Isaiah, he recognizes the divine appointment. Would you have? What would you say?
5. What can you do to find opportunities like this, and be ready for them?
6. The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah 53 and wonders about whom the author is talking. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. What in this description corresponds to what you know about Jesus?
7. If all you had to draw from was Isaiah 53 how would you communicate the gospel message to someone?
8. In verse 38, the official believes the gospel, is baptized, and goes away rejoicing. What did God do to bring this about? What did Philip do?
9. Did God need Philip's help? Why did He use him?
10. Some have seen in vv. 39 and 40 evidence of some sweet Holy Spirit teleportation power. Others with blander imaginations think it just means the Spirit led him from this place to that. What do you think is going on?

APPLY

11. Do you think God still directs our steps like this? How would you know if He was?
12. When was a time you felt particularly led by God to share your faith? What were the circumstances?
13. Why do you think God doesn't lead this way all of the time?
14. Have you gotten the impression from this series in Acts that sharing the gospel ought to be central in the lives of believers? How is our ministry doing in this regard? How are you doing?
15. Do you think if we threw a little teleportation into the mix you'd be more motivated to share your faith with castrated men?

What Are the Answers?

1. Philip is one of the apostles. He was introduced earlier in the chapter bringing the gospel to Samaria.
2. A great persecution struck in Chapter 8, and the church was scattered. The focus in Acts shifts from Jerusalem where Peter led the church, to the geographic spread of the gospel led by others. Philip is the leader we are watching here. Soon it will be Paul.
3. It was God's idea. See 8:26.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Discuss the topic. Go where people are. Initiate conversations. Be friendly. Know the gospel. Memorize a clear way to communicate it. Pray for opportunities, and look, with eyes of faith, to see how God provides them.
6. The passage is a prophecy about the Messiah's crucifixion.
7. Give the group time to formulate their presentation of the gospel.
8. God called Philip on that journey, coordinated the timing to match perfectly with the Ethiopian's journey, and caused the official to read a perfect passage at just the right time.
9. No, God didn't need Philip's help. But, He graciously allows us to be involved in His great work.
10. Who knows? Teleportation would be pretty cool though.
- 11.-12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. The answer is clearly speculative. One answer is that He probably does more than we realize, but we just aren't that open to sharing our faith.
- 14.-15. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

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UNLIMITED PATIENCE • Paul's Conversion

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 9:1-30

In Acts 9, we pick up the story of Saul, who was briefly introduced at the end of chapter 7, where Stephen was martyred. He was one of the great opponents of the gospel, who traveled around threatening the believers and seeking to have them imprisoned. This passage is the dramatic account of his conversion to faith. Later known as Paul, he became one of Christianity's first missionaries and its chief apologist, writing 13 New Testament books. God, in His amazing grace, loved him, opened his heart to believe, and forgave him.

In verse 3, Paul is on his way to Damascus to arrest any Christians he can find. On the way he meet Jesus, in all His blinding glory. Jesus asks him, "Why do you persecute Me?" Jesus took as an affront to Himself all the grief that was done to His followers. He suffered when they were hurt. Paul never answers the question, but immediately obeys Jesus' command to go into the city.

Meanwhile, a Christian named Ananias has a vision from God in which he is told to go meet Saul. He knows who Saul is and what his errand is, and so is afraid to go. But God assures him that He, too, knows all about Saul, and has a plan for his life that no one would ever expect. Believing God, Ananias ignores the risk, and goes to meet with Saul. He greets him as, "Brother Saul," identifying him as a believer, and restores his sight. Then Saul, signifying his new faith in Christ, is baptized.

As if that wasn't extraordinary enough, in verse 20, Saul begins to preach the gospel. The Jewish leaders are astonished, baffled, and angered. It's absolutely inconceivable to them that Saul could turn like this, and they try several times to kill him, but fail. Undeterred, Saul continues to preach, and debate, proving that Jesus is the Christ. The bulk of the remainder of Acts is the record of Saul taking the gospel throughout the known world.

Later in his life he wrote I Timothy, saying:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for

What's the Big Idea?

This passage is about an extraordinary and unexpected conversion. Saul, enemy of the gospel, came to faith and began preaching the gospel himself. No one is beyond the reach of the gospel. We should look for opportunities to lead people to Christ, even if we think they would never believe.

What's the Problem?

We tend to shrink back from sharing the gospel. Either because of our own fear or our lack of faith that the message will produce life change in those with whom we share it.

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that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

God still makes such examples. He may do it directly like he did with Saul, but He is more likely to use the people in your group as ambassadors to carry the message of the gospel.

Have you noticed that Luke seems bent on normalizing evangelism? To hear him tell it, it just seems to be what Christians do. Ananias is terrified of this antagonistic Christian hater, but Jesus tells him to go and he goes. Saul comes to faith and immediately begins to preach the gospel. Help your group grapple with the normalcy of redeemed people talking about their Redeemer.

God can use you and the people in your group to lead the Sauls on your campus to faith. They, in turn, can lead yet others to the Savior.

What's Our Response?

Please help the members of your Bible study think through who they most identify with in this passage. Are they like Ananias, fearful and needing prompting to obey? Or are they like Saul, forgiven a great debt, and therefore compelled to share the gospel with all who will listen. In either case encourage them to take steps of faith to make the gospel known in the world around them.

Perhaps you could challenge them to identify someone on your campus, or in their life, who they are tempted to believe is beyond the reach of the gospel. As a group, pray for them, and ask God to show you how you could lead them to faith.

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 9:1-30

LAUNCH

Who is the most outspoken critic of Christianity that you know? What would it take for you to believe that they might believe the gospel?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 9:1-2.

1. Christianity at this time was known as “the way.” What do you think is the origin of this name?

2. Why do you think Saul hated Christianity so much?

Read Acts 7:54-60.

3. What significance might the author, Luke, be intending by introducing Saul to us at this point? How might Saul be an answer to Stephen’s prayer?

Read Acts 9:3-19.

4. What is the first question Jesus asks Saul? Why did He phrase His question this way?

5. In verse 10, the focus shifts to Ananias. What does God want him to do? How does he feel about this?

6. How would you feel if God wanted you to meet with someone known for killing Christians? Would you do it?

7. What motivated Ananias to obey?

8. How did Ananias address Saul? What does that indicate?

9. In verse 15, God says that Saul is to be His chosen instrument for taking the gospel to the Gentiles. What would have made Saul a good candidate for this task?

10. In verse 16, God says, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Why do think God says this?

11. As demonstrated in the book of Acts, why does preaching the gospel go hand-in-hand with suffering?

Read Acts 9:20-31.

12. How did the Jewish leaders react to Saul’s conversion?

13. List all the verbs attributed to Saul in vv. 20-29?

APPLY

14. With whom do you identify more in this study? Saul or Ananias? Why?

15. Saul’s behavior in verse 20 is totally unexpected. He immediately begins to preach the very faith he once tried to destroy and people were astonished. Think of the most outspoken critic of Christianity on your campus. What would be the impact if they came to faith?

16. What would be the impact on your campus if you became an evangelist like Saul?

17. Why do you think Luke talks so much about evangelism?

18. How are his descriptions of the early church like or unlike things at this campus?

What Are the Answers?

1. The name, "the Way" comes from John 14:6 where Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
2. Allow the group to discuss. He had a misguided zeal for legalistic righteousness, and thought Christianity defiled God's holy laws.
3. One connection may be that Saul is a direct answer to Stephen's prayer for those who were persecuting him.
4. Why do you persecute me? He took the pain of His church personally.
5. He is supposed to go to Saul and restore his sight. He's scared.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. He believed God.
8. He calls him "brother," indicating he welcomes him as a believer.
9. There is no right answer. It might be his tenacity or even expertise in the Jewish Law.
10. Perhaps this is to say Saul will undergo as much, or more, persecution than he has caused. Due to his own involvement in persecuting Christians, Saul would have greater ability to patiently endure. Also, suffering goes hand-in-hand with preaching the gospel.
11. The true nature of this world, is a battle between God and Satan. Preaching the gospel advances God's kingdom, and brings this hidden battle to the surface.
12. They were astonished, angered, murderous. Paul continues to preach.
13. Preach, grew more and more powerful, baffled, proving that Jesus is the Christ, learned of their plan, tried to join the disciples, saw the Lord, preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus, stayed with them, moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord, talked and debated. The guy was a ministry machine.
- 14.-16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. It seems he wants to showcase evangelism as a normal, expected part of the Christian life.
18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

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PAUL'S STRATEGY I • Broad Sowing and Multiplication

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 13

Acts 13 records the first half of Paul's first missionary journey. The Holy Spirit has called Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel outside of the confines of Israel and Samaria. Obediently, they travel across the Mediterranean and through several cities in what is now Turkey. A close look at their actions, and the results that were produced, will reveal strategies we can employ on campus.

The first thing to notice is the diversity and number of places in which they communicate the gospel. In verses 4-5, they share the gospel in a synagogue in Salamis, Cyprus, then continue throughout the whole island. In Paphos, Cyprus they lead a Roman proconsul to Christ (verse 12). Leaving the island, they teach in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (verse 14), and later they teach the Gentiles in the same city (verse 46). At the end of the chapter, they leave Antioch to go to Iconium (verse 51), then Lystra and Derbe. In all the places they go, they offer the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. In every place they go, people become believers.

In the same way, we need to sow the gospel broadly. Because we don't know who will respond in faith, we need to communicate to everyone we can, and trust God to work in people's hearts. We need to go after every student in every dorm, and every student living off campus. We need to start ministries on campuses where there is no witness for Christ and go to countries where the gospel isn't heard. We need to reach out to students of every ethnicity, and reach into every subculture on campus.

Paul was captured by Jesus' heart for every person. This is why he said in Romans 15:19-20, "...So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known..."

A second thing to observe in this chapter is that the gospel spreads in ways greater than Paul and Barnabas could have personally accomplished by themselves.

In verse 16, Paul begins to speak in the Pisidian Antioch synagogue, arguing that Jesus is the Savior that God had promised to send. He is persuasive and clear and speaks in a way that his Jewish audience would understand and appreciate. He is invited back to speak again on the following Sabbath, only this time the entire city shows up to hear (verse 44)! Those that heard Paul's message the first week invited their friends and neighbors to hear him the second week.

What's the Big Idea?

In this passage, Paul and Barnabas begin their first missionary journey. Two strategies can be observed here: broad sowing – taking the gospel to every person they could; and spiritual multiplication – new believers becoming messengers of the gospel. Both of these strategies can be used on campus to help fulfill the Great Commission.

What's the Problem?

There are massive numbers of unreached people on our campuses and in the world. Since the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time, unwise and nonstrategic approaches leave millions at grave risk.

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Certainly, some had believed the gospel the first week, while others were still questioning. But whatever their maturity or faith, the people who heard Paul's message were themselves becoming the messengers of the gospel.

Similarly, in verse 49, Luke writes that "The word of the Lord spread through the whole region." Surely, this doesn't mean that Paul and Barnabas themselves shared with everyone in the region. The Word spread! From former unbelievers, to soon-to-be new believers, the gospel was carried throughout the region.

This "spiritual multiplication" is exactly what Paul directs in II Timothy 2:2. "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." That is how the gospel spreads. New Christians become messengers and carry the gospel to unbelievers, who come to faith and themselves become messengers to yet more unbelievers.

Our obligation is not only to share the gospel, but also to equip new Christians to share the gospel. Campus Crusade for Christ's mission statement is to "turn lost students into Christ-centered laborers." The essence of this mission statement is spiritual multiplication.

What's Our Response?

With your group, evaluate your current ministry.

Are you sowing the gospel broadly, or only to a limited number of people? Choose a group of people who aren't being reached, and make a plan to share the gospel with them. Think through a strategy. For example, an ad in the campus paper would give everyone on campus the opportunity to hear, or read the gospel.

Are you practicing spiritual multiplication? Seek out one reliable person to whom you can entrust the gospel. Teach them how to share their faith.

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 13

LAUNCH

Think of your favorite product – it might be a movie, computer, brand of shoes, anything. How did you hear about it? From how many sources and how many times? Was it through professional ads or word of mouth? What implications can you draw about effectively communicating the gospel based on that company's ability to get news to you about their product?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 13.

Pay special attention to the settings in which Paul and Barnabas preach and the people with whom they share.

1. How would you have felt if you were with Paul and Barnabas, leaving the fellowship of Antioch, and going out to make Christ known? Scared? Energized? Disappointed?
2. How many places do they visit?
3. With what types of people do they share?
4. What seemed to be the type of person with whom they had shared?
5. What were some of the barriers they overcame to make the gospel known?
6. What areas of your campus would you say are virtually unreached with the gospel?
7. Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogues first. What was the strategy in doing this?

Reread verses 42-45.

8. Why did Paul and Barnabas get invited back to the synagogue?
9. Verse 43 says that many followed Paul and Barnabas. This doesn't mean that they believed, but that they literally walked after them. Why?
10. In verse 44, the whole city shows up. Why did they come? How did they know Paul and Barnabas would be speaking?
11. As the Jewish leaders stirred up trouble, Paul and Barnabas went to the Gentiles and many believed. Verse 49 says, "The word of the Lord spread through the whole region." How was this accomplished?

APPLY

12. Let's say God has set you apart like Paul and Barnabas to reach an area of your campus. Where would you start? What would you do? What would be your strategy?
13. Come to think of it maybe He has set you apart for that very purpose. What would keep you from doing this?
14. What practical strategy could you implement to expose your entire campus to the gospel?
15. Another strategy for exposing many to the gospel is found in 2Timothy 2:2. Read the passage and explain how this approach would help spread the gospel.
16. Try to avoid a Sunday school answer here, but for you, why is it even worth it? What is it about Jesus that motivates you to put in the effort to tell people about Him?

What Are the Answers?

1. Allow the group to discuss.
2. They visit: two cities in Cyprus, in addition to the whole island (verses 4-6); The synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (verse 14); a gathering of Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch; Iconium (verse 51) and other cities in chapter 14.
3. The people they visit include: Jews in the synagogues (verses 4, 16); a Roman proconsul (verse 7); Gentile converts to Judaism (verse 16); and Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch (verse 48).
4. They shared the gospel with anyone at all.
5. The barriers include: racial lines, geographic lines, opposition, and hatred.
6. Allow the group to discuss. Think in particular of ethnic students or affinity groups like Greeks and athletes.
7. They felt the Jews would have the best chance to respond because of their familiarity with the Scriptures and anticipation of the Messiah. Also “god-fearing” Gentiles would attend the synagogue – another receptive audience.
8. Discuss the topic. Their message was attractive, and it was communicated in terms meaningful to their audience.
9. They were thirsty to hear more. Perhaps some of the people had questions.
10. Apparently, the people who were there the first week, spoke broadly about what they had heard.
11. The new believers must have shared the gospel with non-believers.
12. Allow the group to discuss and brainstorm the best approach.
13. Allow the group to discuss. Help them get to the heart level of what motivates their behavior.
14. A practical strategy might include a campus-wide ad in the paper or on Facebook. Maybe a student speaker or something weirder like an outreach built around beerisproof.org.
15. If you find (or produce) reliable people and motivate and equip them to share the gospel to others, and they do the same you can see exponential growth in the numbers of people experiencing and communicating the gospel.
16. This is the big heart question. Help your group wrestle with what they love about Jesus and how that should affect their everyday life.

Memorize

The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

PAUL'S STRATEGY 2 • Starting Points and Discipleship

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 14

Acts 14 gives us the second half of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Here they continue into Galatia as far as Derbe, and then retrace their steps all the way to Antioch. As in the previous study, there is much to learn from their model.

Take a look at verses 1-7. This chapter begins by saying, "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue." If you look back through chapter 13, you'll see that was their pattern. In Acts 13:5, they went to the synagogue in Salamis, and in 13:14 they taught in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Paul maintains this preference in all of his journeys. Whenever there was a synagogue in a city, he would begin to preach there. If a city didn't have a large enough Jewish population to support a synagogue, he would go to a place of prayer. If there was no place of prayer, he would find another gathering where he could teach.

There are several reasons why a synagogue was an ideal place to begin preaching. There, the people would be aware of the Old Testament promises, and they would have some notion of the coming Messiah. They were accustomed to having visiting rabbis teach, and were obviously open to spiritual things. Despite the constant persecution Paul also found in synagogues, he continued to visit them because they were the best possible place for the gospel to establish a foothold in a new community.

In our culture, there are also "synagogues" or natural places to begin an outreach. One of them is the college campus. A campus has a collection of people who are at critical crossroads in their lives, where they are evaluating decisions and beliefs, and are determining courses for their lives. There is a closed community with a defined identity living in a close geographic region and with strong social connections. Students also have more discretionary time than they ever will again. There is no place on earth like a college campus to have a ministry. Even on a worldwide scale, the campus is phenomenally strategic. An American student could travel to any campus on earth, and there find the future leaders of that nation, English speakers, people with whom they can connect, and people eager to meet them and learn about their culture. Universities are the key to reaching the world for Christ.

Even within college campuses there are "synagogues." Freshmen are perhaps the most strategic of college students. If you want to reach a campus for Christ, Freshmen are the key. Everyone is a Freshman at one point, so if you reach

What's the Big Idea?

In this study, you want to continue to help your group think strategically about ministry. Specifically, this passage shows how Paul was intentional about choosing a starting point for outreach, and how he valued discipleship in addition to evangelism.

What's the Problem?

The enormous task of reaching everyone on the planet with the good news about Jesus' life, death and resurrection cannot be accomplished without giving careful thought to the best ways to proceed.

Continued on page 2



all the Freshmen for four years, you will have reached everyone at the school. They will be there the longest, which means they will have the maximum time to mature and lead. They are often the most open to new relationships and new ideas. They generally live on campus. For these, and other reasons, Freshmen are an incredibly strategic “synagogue” to reach.

Look now at verses 21-27. It would be helpful if you had a map to see this. Perhaps there is a map of Paul's first missionary journey in the back of your Bible. Paul has just left Lystra where he was preaching, and where the people mistook he and Barnabas for Greek gods. After persuading the people that they were just humans like them, some Jews came and stirred up a mob to stone Paul. He was dragged outside the city and left for dead. Miraculously, he survived and continued on his journey.

The last point on their trip was Derbe, where they led a large number of people to Christ. Take a look at a map and see where they now are in relationship to their starting point in Antioch. (Note: They didn't begin in Pisidian Antioch of Galatia, but in Antioch, the large Roman city just inland from the northeast tip of the Mediterranean Sea.) They've almost come full circle, but instead of completing a relatively short over-land journey, they backtrack and revisit most of the cities where they preached.

Their reason for doing this is stated in verse 22. They were “strengthening the disciples, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.” They could have spent additional time on the road going to new, unreached cities. Or, they could have shortened their trip and gone home. Instead of either of these, they returned to strengthen the new churches. There always needs to be a balance between evangelism and discipleship. Both are necessary, neither can survive nor thrive without the other. If we do no evangelism, there will be no one to disciple. If we do no discipleship, there will be no one to do evangelism.

Paul loved his churches. He prayed for them, visited them and (fortunately for us), wrote to them. He was constantly striving for their faith and strength in the gospel. We, too, have an obligation to nurture and develop the people we lead to Christ.

One final word. Some people may take issue with the way this study values strategy, believing it's ungodly. For that reason we suggest you launch the study with a debate about that and air the topic. God can and does override strategy and sometimes call us to do things that appear entirely nonstrategic. But in general it seems He honors wisdom and invites us to think about how to best accomplish the tasks He has given us. So while we should invest the energy to make the best decisions we can, given what we know of our situation, human nature and God's ways of working, none of those things override obedience to God's specific commands, however counter-intuitive they may seem to us.

What's Our Response?

As a group, evaluate how strategic your ministry is.

Seek to reach out to the people who can best help you win the entire campus.

Evaluate the balance between evangelism and discipleship in your ministry. Adjust as needed.

End 

What Are the Questions?

Acts 14

LAUNCH

Divide your group in half and have them debate this proposition: “Strategic thinking is ungodly. If we were actually empowered by the Spirit we wouldn’t have to depend on strategy.”

EXPLORE

Read Acts 14.

1. Reread Acts 14:1-3. Where did Paul usually begin preaching the gospel when he would enter a new city?
2. Why would Paul begin by preaching there?
3. Where are the places in our culture that are natural starting places for outreach?
4. Where or with whom are the starting points on your campus?
5. What makes them strategic?
6. What about the people that are not in a “strategic” subgroup?
7. Read 14:21-27. Look at a map in your Bible of Paul’s missionary journeys. Where were they in relation to the Antioch where they started?
8. We know from Paul’s second journey that there was an overland route to connect those two points. Why do you think they didn’t just finish the loop and go home?
9. Which is more important: evangelism or discipleship? What should the balance be?

APPLY

10. If you were visiting a city where you had just preached the gospel, what are some of the follow-up topics and issues you would teach? Write down what you would consider to be the 12 most important issues.
11. Who do you know in the ministry who could use some “follow-up”?
12. How would you initiate this relationship and process?
13. Few of us are naturally balanced in evangelism and discipleship but we prefer one over the other. Which are you inclined to neglect in favor of your natural preference? What steps could you take to let your strength aid your weakness?

What Are the Answers?

1. Paul would begin in Jewish synagogues.
2. Take time to develop this advantage of synagogues. There were so many and it's a key concept in this study. People would be aware of Old Testament promises and open to spiritual things. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?" for a partial list.
3. Allow the group to discuss. College campuses are one example of natural starting places. Be prepared to help people discover all the ridiculous advantages to campus ministry and why it's so strategic. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
4. Allow the group to discuss. Freshmen are one starting point.
5. Discuss the topic. Freshmen are there the longest, open to new ideas, and often live on campus. See "What Do I Need to Know" for a list of benefits to reaching Freshmen.
6. We still want to reach them! Paul preached outside of synagogues all the time. These are merely strategic starting points. We need to figure out ways to get the gospel to everyone.
7. They are reasonably close, and have almost completed a loop.
8. According to verse 22, they went back through the cities they visited to strengthen the disciples and encourage them to remain true to the faith.
9. Allow the group to discuss. Both are necessary.
10. Give the group time to come up with what they feel are the most important teachings a young believer needs to hear. The "Walk by Faith" lessons in *The Compass* are a good place to start.
11. Discuss specific people.
12. Discuss the topic. Begin by simply getting together for a meal or coffee; look to make a regular time where you can meet, share, pray, and go through a mini-Bible study on a topic.
13. Allow the group to discuss. On using strengths to aid weaknesses you might suggest that the strong disciples see equipping someone to share their faith as an essential part of discipleship. It has been said that discipleship without evangelism isn't discipleship at all – it's counseling.

For those preferring evangelism you might encourage them to see following up new believers as an essential part of evangelism, grounding them in the faith.

Memorize

...We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

Acts 14:15

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AN UNKNOWN GOD • Connecting with the Culture

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 17:16-34

This passage is one of the most relevant in all of Acts. Here, Luke gives us a record of Paul's interaction with a group of philosophers in Athens. His tact and skill at communicating the gospel to this group of pluralists is fantastic. There is much here that we can model on campus.

In verse 16, Paul is waiting in Athens for his travel companions, Silas and Timothy. He was sent ahead alone because of the risk of violence from an unruly mob in the cities in which he had been. Although he is supposed to wait for them, Paul isn't one for inactivity. He sees that the city is full of idols, and is greatly distressed and moved to action. God alone is great. Mute idols of stone, gold, or silver ought not steal praise from God. So, Paul begins to preach, both in the synagogue and in the marketplace.

Some of the philosophers debate with him and invite him to come address the Areopagus, a society of philosophers. Luke, in this account, derides those philosophers for doing nothing but sitting around talking about the latest ideas. Their laziness may have been a character flaw, but it provided a great opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel.

In verse 22, Paul begins an extraordinary speech. The next nine verses are absolutely packed with wisdom about how to share the gospel in a critical and pluralistic setting. When teaching this section, give the group several minutes to read and observe what Paul does and says. Then, brainstorm together the principles that you can model on your campus. Below are several observations to get you started. There are undoubtedly more that you and your group may see.

- Verse 22: Paul commends the philosophers for the slightest good. Though they were idolaters, he begins by approving their religiousness. When persuading people, it is useful to start out with approbation, rather than accusation.
- Verse 23: Paul studied their culture. We, too, need to know the culture of the people we seek to reach. By what are they entertained? What are their political views? How do they view spirituality, morality, and philosophy?
- Verse 23: Because he studied the culture, Paul also found a launching point for the gospel within their circle of knowledge. What are the movies, sitcoms, beliefs or issues already in people's consciousness that can be a bridge to talking about Jesus?

Continued on page 2

What's the Big Idea?

In this passage, Paul shares the gospel with a group of pluralistic philosophers, whose worldview was very similar to that of college students today. His message is a study in how to tactfully, and effectively, create a thirst among unbelieving people to hear the gospel.

What's the Problem?

In a pluralistic culture the gospel message may get no traction in the minds of unbelievers. We need to be careful to speak in terms that are acceptable and meaningful to our audience or we won't be heard and will have little influence.



- Verse 24: Though Paul commends their religiousness, he does not commend their idolatry, but immediately affirms that the real God is not an idol. He avoids the temptation to point out that their sinful behavior is wrong.
- Verses 24-26: Paul affirms the majesty and sovereignty of God. This is particularly important, given the lifeless rocks they were presently worshipping. God is superior to everything people seek to fill His place in their lives. Show them that He is better and can better meet their deepest longings!
- Verse 27: He observes that God is personal, and wants a relationship with us. Again, see the point above.
- Verse 28: Paul quotes their poets. He was well read and was able to make a point by drawing from sources with which they were likely to agree. Sometimes, a quote from “Friends” or “The Simpsons” may be more persuasive than anything we would have to say.
- Verses 29-30: He condemns idolatry in general, without pointing a finger specifically. He’s incredibly gracious, even as he critiques their behavior honestly.
- Verses 30-31: He calls them to repent, and warns them that a judgment is coming. He is not so concerned about being culturally relevant that he removes essential parts of the message.
- Though he is drawing on Biblical knowledge throughout, he never directly quotes the Bible. As it would not be perceived as authoritative, or even accurate, it was better not to source it. With a Jewish audience, he quoted the Bible constantly.
- Verse 32: Paul earns another hearing, where he can continue to tell them about Christ, probably in more complete terms.

There is so much here from which to learn. Our task is so crucial, that it is imperative we learn to be effective, not merely faithful. Connecting with the culture, as Paul did, can help us share the gospel of life in such a way that more will believe and be saved.

What’s Our Response?

There are so many good application points to choose from in this passage.

Help the members of your group think through the next step in their personal attempts to reach out to people. There should be at least one principal from Paul’s methodology that can help them.

End

What Are the Questions?

Acts 17:16-34

LAUNCH

As our culture shifts toward a pluralistic, post-modern worldview some have observed with frustration that ministry is slower and harder than it used to be. How would you compare the difficulty of ministry today in our culture to ministry in the Roman Empire during the first century (which Acts records)?

EXPLORE

1. Why was Paul waiting in Athens?
2. Why was he distressed to see the city full of idols?
3. What does he do about it?
4. Paul communicates in such a way that the people want to hear more. They invite him to speak the Areopagus, a society of philosophers. In verse 22, Paul begins an extraordinary speech to that group. The next nine verses are absolutely packed with wisdom about how to share the gospel in a critical and pluralistic setting. Take several minutes to read and observe some of the principles you see in Paul's communication of the gospel.
5. Athens, like the college campus, was a place of diverse ideas and philosophies. How does Paul adapt his message to be effective in this setting?
6. What are some of the points of common ground that Paul tries to establish with his audience?
7. How is he able to demonstrate that with all of their beliefs and ideas, that "deep down" they know they are still missing something?
8. The danger of accommodating the gospel to an audience is that, if you aren't careful, you can compromise on some of the truths of the gospel message, or avoid the more confrontational elements. Do you think Paul does this, or do you think he maintains a good balance?
9. What are some of the major ways this speech differs from other speeches found in Acts that were given to a primarily Jewish audience?
10. How did Paul gain this "inside" information about the audience to whom he was preaching?

APPLY

11. Which of these ministry principles that we've gleaned from Paul can apply to your ministry on campus?
12. What are some specific ways you would explain the gospel differently to a person without any church or religious background?
13. Paul's speech earned him another hearing. What can you do to arouse people's thirst to know more about Jesus?
14. How did Paul's message arouse *your* thirst?

What Are the Answers?

1. He was trying to avoid a violent mob that was following him on his missionary journey.
2. Paul was distressed because only God is worthy of worship. Mute idols ought not steal praise from God.
3. He preaches the gospel in the synagogues and in the marketplace.
4. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”
5. The picture he paints of God is a universal one. The God that Paul proclaims is not simply one more slice of the religious pie. It is the whole pie – the true God of which the Athenians only have a small slice of understanding.
6. He notes that they are religious, and that they, too, worship. He quotes from common poets and uses ideas and concepts that they would be familiar with.
7. In pointing to their altar given to worship of “an unknown God,” he is alluding to the fact that with all of their religion, they instinctively know that something is still missing in their spiritual experience.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. It doesn’t contain the many Scripture references employed in sermons to the Jews. Paul knew that, unlike the Jews, the Greeks would not have taken the Scripture to be authoritative.
10. Most likely, in the course of actually spending time with lost people, reading their books, listening to what they talk about. The text says that he had been in the marketplace, day by day, sharing with those “who happened to be there.”
11. Having studied Paul’s adaptation of the gospel to his audience, the application is for the group to think through how they can apply similar principals in their ministry.
12. Allow the group to discuss. Among other things, the authority of the Scriptures cannot be taken for granted.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. Are there things he said that reminded you of your need for a Savior?

Memorize

...I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

I Corinthians 9:22

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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

GOD'S POWERFUL PRESENCE • God's Will

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts

Background

One of the chief signs that God's presence is in and among His people is the powerful sense that He is leading and giving direction. We see this clearly in God's manifestation of His presence to the Israelites in their exodus out of Egypt.

So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea...By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (Exodus 13:18,21-22).

The Jews had longed for such a day to return, and believed it would come when their Messiah came and ruled from the Temple in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, when He came, Israel as a nation did not recognize Him. Jesus had promised that though He, Himself, would return to heaven, His presence would remain in the person of the Holy Spirit.

When the promised Holy Spirit arrives in Acts 2, immediately we begin to notice a new dynamic: God is once again leading His people. We continually read that the Spirit said to, "go here" or "do this" or "say that." For the disciples it would have been clear that the powerful abiding presence of God had returned. It would have also dawned on them, quite shockingly, that His leading was, in fact, coming from the Temple as anticipated – the believers themselves comprising the new Temple where God's Spirit dwells.

A Contrast: Acts 1:23-26

The last thing we see the disciples doing before the Holy Spirit comes upon them is trying to discern God's will over who should replace Judas as the twelfth Apostle. As they sought God, they prayed and cast lots. Casting lots was a fairly common method of discerning God's will in biblical times. Lots were usually made out of small stones, and the method of using them was similar to drawing straws, or flipping a coin – yet with a component of faith in God's providence to decide a matter. It is clear from the Old Testament, that God did, at times, give Israel direction through casting lots.

What is interesting to note is that this is the last time the use of "lots" is recorded in the Scripture, and it is literally the very last event recorded before the coming of the Holy Spirit. From this moment on, in the book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit is very directly leading and speaking to the people of God. It could very well be that Luke has included this story to show the contrast.

The New Dynamic

Nowhere is God's leading and direction more miraculous and spectacular than in the incident of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. The text mentions that the "Spirit told Philip to go to the chariot and stay near it." Philip immediately finds an open door to

What's the Big Idea?

This study looks at the means by which God leads His people. It surveys the Book of Acts to see how the Holy Spirit gave wisdom and direction to the first disciples.

What's the Problem?

The will of God is not often plainly revealed to us which leaves us open to missing it entirely or wrongly leaning on uncertain indicators as we try to figure it out.

What's Our Response?

There are a few things that would make great application points in this study.

1. Help the people in your group understand that God does desire to lead us and give us direction.
2. Help them understand what are the basic tools we are to use to discern God's will. They are: wisdom, Scripture, Godly council, our emotions, our mind, direct revelation, and circumstances. Discerning God's will requires us to be good detectives looking for alignment among these various senses.
3. Most critically, encourage them to have a heart that desires to do God's will above all else (Rom 12:1-3).

Continued on page 2



proclaim the gospel. Then the passage mentions after the man was baptized “the Lord suddenly took Philip away.” God seems to be moving the disciples around like chess pieces, with direction that has not been experienced in Israel since the Exodus. It is the dawning of a new era.

The Jerusalem Council

In Acts 15, one of the most significant issues to ever face the church is addressed by the godly leaders and disciples in Jerusalem. Should the Gentiles be forced to embrace all of the rituals of the Mosaic Law, as well as Christ? This would clearly be a hindrance to the spread of the gospel. While the outcome is interesting to note (they decided the Gentiles did not have to), it is the process that is of interest to this study. While clearly God was leading the believers in many dramatic and miraculous ways, we don't see any evidence of that here. They prayed, listened to testimony, and deliberated on what they should do. They pondered what God had been doing in the circumstances of Paul's ministry, they prayed, counseled together, and used wisdom to make a decision.

The point is just this: While God desires to lead His people through the Holy Spirit, that does not always, or even usually, involve miraculous visions.

The principal in this story, as well as Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, is the same. God is now leading His people powerfully through His Spirit. The means may vary, and do, but God desires us to know His will, that we may do it.

Romans 12:1-3

Christians are always seeking a sure-fire way to know what the will of God is for their life. The most foolproof method is found in Romans 12:1-3. The passage speaks to giving ourselves entirely to the Lord and His will, with no reservations; having our minds (thoughts, hopes, dreams, and aspirations) transformed by Christ; then, we will be able to “approve what God's will is.”

The message of the passage is exceedingly simple, yet profoundly true. If we desire to do God's will with all of our heart, then He will disclose it to us. If, in the end, all we really want God to do is simply bless what we want to do, then we will not have that assurance. God gives us enough clues, that if we are looking for them, we will find them. But He also gives us just enough clues, so that if we don't desire to follow Him, they will not be perceived, or will be interpreted wrongly.

How Does God Make His Will Known?

How do you find where you are going when you are lost? You use your senses. You might look for familiar things, or try to hear a local highway. In a similar way, we are to use our spiritual senses to attempt to bring in as much information as we can, in order to discern God's leading. A basic list of those senses appears in the sidebar of this page.

Looking For Alignment

What we are looking for is alignment among these senses: that our hearts would be telling us the same things as our circumstances, and godly, mature believers. There are many decisions we can make by wisdom and a knowledge of the Scripture; but often the decisions that have the most gravity are not as clearly spelled out and need some detective work. As we mature as Christians, we become increasingly better detectives.

Tell Me Now!

So why doesn't God just make it immediately clear to us what we should do? Because God has other objectives than simply having you carry out His will. He wants you to know Him better, and rely on Him. He wants to bring out heart issues you are unaware of. God uses major decisions to accomplish many purposes, purposes which could not be realized by immediate disclosure of His will.

What Are Our Spiritual Senses?

Wisdom: Accumulated knowledge of how God has worked in your life thus far.

Scripture: Unlike the period of Acts, where more direct revelation was needed, we now have the New Testament, as well as the Old, to give us insight into God's will.

Godly Council: Discerning God's will requires detective work. God leads us through the council of others who have greater experience discerning God's ways, and who are experienced detectives.

Emotions: The Holy Spirit does lead through our emotions. Our emotions can be a “mixed bag,” and often requires sorting out. However, we will often find we have a desire to do what God is calling us to.

Mind: Prayerfully considering what would be the wisest stewardship of our time, gifting, and lives, can be a reliable way to discern the Spirit's leading.

Revelation: As in the Book of Acts, sometimes God leads through mental impressions, and even dreams, as we are prayerful over His direction.

Circumstances: Operating from the assumption that God is already at work in our circumstances, we can get a sense of where He might be leading us.

End 

What Are the Questions?

Acts

LAUNCH

How have you tried to discern God's will in the past? How confident have you been that you were figuring out what he wanted you to do?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 1:23-26.

1. This passage gives us a picture of the disciples trying to discern God's will before they had received the Holy Spirit. What did they do and why?
2. The following passages describe God's leading after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Read the passages and describe how God gave direction and what He was leading them to do.
 - Acts 6:1-7
 - Acts 5:17-20
 - Acts 8:26-40
 - Acts 9:10-16
 - Acts 13:1-3
 - Acts 16:6-10
3. What differences do you notice between how God led in acts 1:23-26, and these passages?
4. In Acts 20:22-23, Paul says, "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem...I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." How do you think Paul experienced the Spirit's compelling/warnings?

5. Do you think God leads believers the same way today?

Read Romans 12:1-2.

6. What is the essential ingredient in receiving God's direction? Why is this so important?

Share with your group the "Spiritual Senses" listed in the sidebar on page 2 of this study.

7. Is there anything else you would add to this list?

Read Acts 15:1-21.

8. The Apostle must make an extremely critical decision that will effect the whole direction of the church. What is the issue? What did they do to discern the answer?
9. Why do you think, for this critical decision, God does not give them a vision?
10. On significant issues, why do you think it's important to look for alignment from more than one of these "spiritual senses"?

APPLY

11. With which of the senses we talked about earlier have you experienced God's leading in your life? Describe how it happened.
12. What would you do if circumstances, as well as your emotions, were leading you to do something that seemed to go against a biblical principal?
13. What is the biggest issue in which you are currently trying to discern God's will? In what ways are you seeing His leading?

What Are the Answers?

1. They prayed, affirmed God's sovereignty, and cast lots, trusting Him to give direction through the "lots."
2. Allow the group to discuss what they see in each passage.
3. God is leading in a more direct, personal, and dynamic way.
4. We don't know for sure. It may have been through a mental impression, vision, or he may have simply felt compelled in the realm of his emotions.
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. The most important thing is to desire to live for God's will with all of our heart. We can always make the clues God provides say what we want it to say, if we don't desire His will above all.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. They had to decide whether or not the Gentiles needed to follow all of the Mosaic Law. They listened to testimony, and deliberated on what they should do. They pondered what God had been doing in the circumstances of Paul's ministry, they prayed, counseled together, and used wisdom to make a decision.
9. God desires us to use all of the different means of discerning His will. If he always provided a vision, we would never grow in wisdom or other critical areas.
10. It is a way to cross-check our detective work, as well as guard against the deceit of our own hearts.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Often sensing God's leading is more subjective. The Scriptures are much clearer, and God would not lead us to do anything contrary to His Word. All other sensing must be subjugated to the authority of Scripture.
13. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1-2

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