

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

Read Acts 28 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

Song for the week: Hard Fought Hallelujah - Brandon Lake

Song links: <https://youtu.be/KclMnHf3HyM?si=xGk1Py93ziHNgiFp>

Personal Reflection

Paul, along with his friends Luke and Aristarchus, the other prisoners, the ship's crew and the Roman soldiers were shipwrecked on Malta - all 276 were saved, just as the angel promised. "Therefore the improbable came to pass, and every man of the ship's company stood safe on the shore. Faith which grasps God's promise 'laughs at impossibilities' and brings them into the region of facts (*MacLaren Expositions*)."

Have you ever held on to any of God's promises in the Bible in faith, waiting for them to become facts in your life? If so, how did believing in God's promises affect you in the waiting?

Do you relate to "laughing at the impossibilities" either in the waiting or in the receiving of God's promises? If so, write about it. Consider sharing this story with others as a testimony of how God has been at work in your life.

Malta people were neither Greek nor Roman; they spoke a mixed dialect. The name Malta comes from the Greek word Melita which means calm, honey sweet or glorious, splendid. Malta was celebrated for producing large quantities of honey.

The islanders showed Paul and the others "unusual kindness." Luke was a doctor who may have known the healing properties in honey.

Read *Proverbs 16:24* and *Proverbs 18:21*. How was the people's kindness like honey to those from the ship?

Write about a time you ever experienced healing from someone else's words to you.

What changes do you need to make in your words to bring healing not death to another person's soul?

"Paul's activity in gathering his bundle of brushwood was an example of how he took the humblest duties on himself, and was not hindered either by the false sense of dignity (*MacLaren Expositions*)."

Paul wrote that we are

to “follow God’s example.” Jesus said “ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”
Optional, read Ephesians 5:1-2, John 13:15

When did Jesus show humility or when did He take on a humble duty?

What small things can you do as an act of humble service to others?

When the snake bit Paul, the islanders assumed he was a murder “pursued by the goddess of justice. The islanders had consciences, which bore witness to a divine law of retribution (*MacLaren Expositions*).” The Roman goddess of justice’s name was Justina; she symbolized fair judgment. When Paul did not die from the snake bite, they thought instead that he was a god.

False gods try to imitate God or be like Him. Read these verses, *Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalms 11:7*. What do they say about God?

The people were not completely wrong; Paul had been part of killing Christians. However, when we are tempted to call out someone through a critical lens we are participating in the brokenness of this world. Just as you are loved by Jesus, so is every other person. When you are tempted to view people by what they have done instead of how God sees them, what can you do to shift your thinking from critical to curious and loving?

Paul was no longer a murderer. Jesus called Paul from his past life to a life of serving Him. He was not god, he was serving God. How often do you hear the voices of people or satan reminding you of who you were? Or elevating you to who you are not? What does God say in scripture that speaks truth to you when the lies or condemnation confront you?

The people’s beliefs were reflected in their thoughts and words. The swift change of opinion was the reverse of what the people of Lystra thought of Paul where they first thought he was a god who healed and then stoned him and left him for dead. Everywhere Paul went, people believed in gods. He was testifying to the God of gods and the truth of the gospel of Jesus. *Optional, read Acts 14:8-20, Deuteronomy 10:17*

God was at work in and through Paul yet the people saw Paul, not God. When people see Jesus in you, if they give you the credit for it, are you tempted to feel proud or do you feel humbled? How could you use their misunderstanding to introduce them to Jesus?

Luke wrote that Paul prayed with the sick and then healed them. The people would have been introduced to God through Paul’s prayers. The word cured is the Greek word *therapeuó* which means to care for, attend, serve, treat, especially of a physician. Luke was a physician and chose this word when he wrote Acts. It is probable that Paul prayed and then he and Luke tended to the people’s physical ailments. Luke “shared the labor ... Luke also shared the call and labors of preaching. He was likely the first university-trained medical missionary (*Bible Gateway*).” *Optional, read Acts 28:8-10, Acts 16:10-13*

What skills or talents has God given you that you can use as you spread the good news of Jesus?

When they were ready to sail again, the islanders gave them all the supplies that they needed. The giving was reciprocal, Paul both gave and received.

Consider a time when you both gave and received, when your practical needs were met. Was it easier to give or receive? If receiving is a challenge for you, like it is for many, remember the feeling you have when you give - your provider has that same feeling!

The greatest giver is the one providing our greatest need. God gave us His Son so that we may be forgiven, redeemed and saved. While the gift of salvation is free to us, it cost God His Son. What has God asked us to do in response to His giving ? (some verses to consider, *Acts 2:38, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 22:37-40*)

The next ship that they got on had the carving of the twin gods Castor and Pollux who were the “patrons of the Roman knights. They also protected humans in danger during war times and at sea (*mythology.net*).”

Think back to their trip from Caesarea to Rome. Who had protected the ships and those on them up to this time? How?

The rest of their trip was uneventful; they stopped in Syracuse, Rhegium and then Puteoli where they found other believers who they spent a week with. On Paul’s journey, “some Christians came down from Rome to meet him. Some traveled 30 miles to the Three Taverns to meet up with Paul; others traveled 40 miles to the Forum of Appius. From those places, a joyful procession of believers accompanied Paul to Rome (*Got Questions*).”

It was during Paul’s two years in Rome, “probably chained hand to hand to the soldier who kept him, that the apostle wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews ... epistles showing, perhaps more than any others, the Christian love with which his heart overflowed, and the Christian experience with which his soul was filled (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*).”

At One Hope we have been taught about being filled with God’s love for us and then from that overflow, loving others. Paul experienced and lived out this message. How are you experiencing God’s love for you?

Shannon said, “when we choose to be curious, we are loving like Jesus calls us to love. When we choose to be critical, we participate in the brokenness of this world.” It is satan against Jesus and satan against the world which God created; He created all of mankind and desires each one of us to be in Heaven with him.

How are you loving others from the overflow of God’s love for you - being a responsible custodian of all He has given you?

Paul “kept to his principle, to know and preach nothing but Christ and him crucified. Christians, when tempted from their main business, should bring themselves back with this question, What does this concern the Lord Jesus? What tendency has it to bring us to Him, and to keep us walking in him? (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*)”

Three days after Paul arrived in Rome he was able to defend himself to the local Jewish leaders. While none of the Jerusalem Jews had sent leaders or come themselves, Paul was known by the Roman Jews. They did not let him go but they did go to his home and he witnessed to them; some believed and some did not.

“The Jews had afterwards much reasoning among themselves. Many have great reasoning, who do not reason right. They found fault with one another’s opinions, yet would not yield to truth. Nor would men’s reasoning among themselves convince them, without the grace of God to open their understanding (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*).”

Paul did his part and the Holy Spirit did His. Opinions do not lead to truth. How does this encourage you?

Putting it into practice:

One of Paul's most important journeys was to Rome, but he didn't get there the way he expected. Through a series of legal trials he finally arrived in Rome where he presented the gospel. God did not make it easier or comfortable, but He did make a way and provide the opportunity for Paul to do His work.

Read *Romans 8:28*. How did God do this for Paul? How does this help you trust God will do the same for you?

On Sunday Shannon encouraged us to continue cultivating our daily, moment by moment relationship with Jesus. She said, "We don't have to wonder how to root and solidify this most important relationship. It's scripture. We have ALL we need."

God has invited you into relationship with Him. We have the Bible to know Him. This next season commit to reading His Word, talking with Him and seeking His will for you. Ask the Holy Spirit in you to remind you of your commitment and to grow your desire for time with God; to keep you curious and loving with others.

Further Study

God instructed us to have no other gods before Him. We are not much different than the places we read about in Acts. Welcoming people into the United States is the Statue of Liberty which represents Libertas, a Roman goddess of liberty. The Statue of Liberty is the largest Idol ever made by human hands (*Ancient Pages*).

Have you considered that the gods are still being worshiped today? How can you, like Paul, help people know who the God of gods is?

"A good man may be stung by a serpent in the act of doing a good thing; that does not prove him to be a monster. He may be unhurt by what seems fatal; that does not prove him to be a god or a saint (*MacLaren Expositions*)."

How does Paul's life help you grasp that it is not what happens to us that defines us but rather God Himself Who defines us?

Watch the *Bible Project recap of Paul's ministry* in Acts 21-28. The story isn't over - you are part of it. Jesus' message is still spreading today. The Bible Project says that Luke made an important point in ordering the story of first Jesus and then Paul; the paths looked so similar. "When the people of Jesus follow the way of Jesus, their stories begin to look like His story which is beautiful but also comes with a cost."

How is your story looking like Jesus' story? What in your life reflects Jesus well?

The book of Acts deals mainly with the history of the Christian church - the spreading of the good news of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit Who was working in the lives of ordinary people: merchants & travelers, slaves & free, men & women, Gentiles & Jews, rich & poor. Many are unsung heroes of the Christian faith who continued the work through the Holy Spirit - through generations, changing the world with a changeless message: Jesus is Savior and Lord over all.

It is our responsibility today to be the unsung heroes, continuing the story to spread the Good News. Just as with God did with Paul, God uses us right where we are to love others and share the gospel with them.

Discuss, how are you an extension of the church of Acts? How did God use you at One Hope? How did God use you being part of One Hope to help ready you for the next thing He is calling you to?

Pray

Pray as a small group for each other, for our pastors and our brothers and sisters at One Hope as we all find new church homes and continue to be part of the church of Acts, spreading the gospel of Jesus.