

A vibrant pink ink splash or smoke plume rises from the bottom center against a light teal background. The ink has a textured, billowing appearance with various shades of pink and magenta.

# UNLEASHED

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A STUDY OF ACTS

Part 8

Name:

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

MAY 2022



wentzville  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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# LETTER FROM KURT

The book of Acts, in my opinion, is the most indispensable book of the New Testament. We have 4 Gospel accounts, 13 letters from Paul, and many letters from other writers which are all equally important. But Acts stands alone as a unique book which tells stories and teaches theology that are only found in this book. It describes what the early church looks like, and prescribes what all churches should aspire to.

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

It may surprise you that the leading role in Acts is not Paul. It's not Peter. It is not even Jesus. The main character in the book of Acts is the person of the Holy Spirit! You see his presence, power, and influence throughout every story and plot twist.

Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and then released his Spirit to God at the cross. Then he promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be unleashed upon them after he leaves [John 14:15-17; Acts 1:4-8]. We learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and how he operates in the book of Acts than any other book.

Luke's gospel account was the first episode in his biblical drama, which focused on all that Jesus began to do [Acts 1:1]. The book of Acts is the second episode which changes the focus to what Jesus' followers continue to do through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is my hope and prayer that throughout this Life Group season you not only learn about Jesus and his first followers...but that you receive, discern, and UNLEASH the Holy Spirit in your life!

**Kurt Charlton**

Discipleship Minister

*[See the next page for an introduction to the book of Acts]*

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## INTRODUCTION

Acts is written by Luke, the physician, who is the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Luke covertly includes himself into the narrative a few times by saying we/us. The Gospel of Luke is episode 1; Acts is episode 2. Acts follows the general flow of Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8. Jerusalem [Acts 1:1-8:1a]; Judea/Samaria [Acts 8:1b-12:25]; Ends of the world [Acts 13-28].

## MAJOR THEMES:

### -*HOLY SPIRIT [and his power]*

Holy Spirit is mentioned 56 times, which is more per chapter than any other book of the Bible. He is responsible for every major turning point in the narrative. [1:2; 1:8; 2:1-4; 4:28-31; 5:32; 8:15-17; 10:44-46; 11:15; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:4-6; 20:22]

### -*PERSECUTION [and its results]*

Early Christians suffered intense persecution, but Luke always records the positive attitudes and results. [4:3-4; 4:23-24; 5:40-42; 8:1-4; 11:19-21; 12:1-19; 14:1-7; 14:8-22; 16:25-34; 18:1-8; 21:11]

### -*BAPTISM [and its importance]*

Baptism was clearly commanded as a response to faith in Jesus [2:38] and was the common practice for all new believers. [2:37-41; 8:5-13; 8:36-38; 9:10-12; 9:17-19; 10:47-48; 16:13-15; 16:27-34; 18:5-8; 19:1-5; 22:14-17]

### -*THE CHURCH [and its ups/downs]*

Luke gives church summary statements like a narrator who wants to inform the readers of what they missed in-between each scene. [2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 5:42; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:19-20]

### -*PRAYER [and its effects]*

Prayer is intentionally scattered throughout the entire narrative. It is almost like a supporting character beside the Holy Spirit. [1:14; 1:21; 4:31; 6:6; 9:40; 10:1-9; 12:12; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8]

## DESCRIPTIVE VS. PRESCRIPTIVE

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

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

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

# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

May 1 | Week 29 | Arrested in Jerusalem

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 21:17 - 23:35

## WHY DID PAUL GO TO JERUSALEM?

Paul knew that harm would come to him when he arrived in Jerusalem, but he went anyways. There were many Godly believers who tried to talk Paul out of going to Jerusalem, including Luke himself [Acts 21:12]. But Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem [Acts 20:22-24]. This scene is very reminiscent of Jesus being compelled to go to Jerusalem to be arrested and murdered [Luke 9:51]. The disciples also tried to talk Jesus out of going to Jerusalem to die. But it was ordained by God.

## PAUL'S NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

- Acts 21:30-31 - Jewish rioters almost killed Paul; Roman troops arrested him to save him.
- Acts 21:35-36 - After being arrested Paul had to be taken away again because the crowd was going to kill him.
- Acts 22:22-24 - Again, Paul was almost killed after his speech to the crowd and had to be removed.
- Acts 23:10 - Paul was almost torn to pieces by the Sanhedrin/religious leaders and had to be removed.
- Acts 23:12 - More than 40 Jews formed a conspiracy and took a vow to kill Paul; the Roman commander sent Paul away to save him.

## PAUL KNEW HE WOULD NOT DIE

An often used saying is “a man destined to hang can never drown.” This is usually used to give someone courage and resolve to keep on fighting knowing that they will be able to endure what they are going through because of their destiny. Perhaps Paul had a similar encouragement throughout his near-death experiences. In Acts 19:21, Paul decided in the Spirit that he was destined to go to Rome. In Acts 23:11, Jesus confirms this and encourages Paul that he must go to Rome. This would have strengthened his resolve to continue preaching, leading, and evangelizing in the midst of some terrible situations.

## PAUL'S MINISTRY...GOD'S SUCCESS

Acts 21:19 says *“Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.”*

Notice the words Luke uses in this detailed report of Paul's missionary journeys. Paul's report was about what GOD had done among the Gentiles...not himself. Paul did not take credit for the success. It was his ministry and his work, but it was ultimately God who was responsible for the success. Pastors should celebrate successful ministry accomplishments, but they should never take the credit for the success. God does the work! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:7 *“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”*



## ACTS 21:17-26 [NIV]

### Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

**21**<sup>17</sup> When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. <sup>18</sup> The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

<sup>20</sup> When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. <sup>21</sup> They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. <sup>22</sup> What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, <sup>23</sup> so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. <sup>24</sup> Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. <sup>25</sup> As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”

<sup>26</sup> The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

## ACTS 23:1-11 [NIV]

### Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

**23**<sup>1</sup> Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” <sup>2</sup> At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

<sup>4</sup> Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!”

<sup>5</sup> Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

<sup>6</sup> Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” <sup>7</sup> When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

<sup>9</sup> There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” <sup>10</sup> The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

<sup>11</sup> The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

# MAY 1 - 7 | WEEK 29 | ARRESTED IN JERUSALEM [ACTS 21:17-23-35]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. When have you gone into a situation knowing it was not going to turn out well?
2. Have you ever had a near-death experience? What happened?
3. Who is a person you have met whose reputation precedes them?

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 21:17-26. What was the report that Paul gave to the church leaders in Jerusalem? How did they respond to this success? [See “Paul’s Ministry...God’s Success” on pg. 6]
2. How did Paul’s success in ministry lead to a bad reputation in Jerusalem? What did he do to delay his inevitable arrest?



3. **Read Acts 22:1-21. In what ways did Paul relate to the Jewish crowd he was talking to? What can we learn from this when we are telling people about our testimony?**
4. **How does Paul describe his “former life” in verses 3-5 and 19-20? Why do you think he includes his failures?**
5. **What is your testimony? How would you describe your former way of life and compare that to how you have been transformed by Jesus?**
6. **Read Acts 23:1-11. How do you see Paul being bold and crafty in his responses to the Sanhedrin?**
7. **We are told that Paul was almost killed at least 4 times while in Jerusalem [See “Paul’s Near-Death Experiences” on pg. 6]. How would Jesus’ words and presence in 23:11 impact Paul at this moment?**

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How can you use the mistakes of your past as a testimony to your transformation?
2. If Jesus were to stand by you today, what do you think he would say to encourage you?
3. When and where do you need to “take courage” as a follower of Jesus today?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR THE MISSIONS OF THE WEEK

### **CMF International: Eric & Cait Pitts - Kenya**

Eric & Cait serve with the Kenya Church Catalyst Team among the Turkana in northern Kenya. Eric's focus is on developing church leaders and pastors as well as working with a group of local disciple makers to begin a Disciple Making Movement that spreads throughout Kenya and beyond. Cait's focus is on community Health Evangelism, mainly with girls and women throughout Turkana. You can find more information at [cmfi.org/ecpitts](http://cmfi.org/ecpitts).

### **LOVEtheLOU**

LOVEtheLOU is a community development initiative that connects resources to the needs of St. Louis. During the constant process of growth and development, they strive to see St. Louis restored through transforming actions. LTL is proud of the progress in St. Louis and are excited about what will continue to happen as they grow and develop. [lovethelou.org](http://lovethelou.org)

### **Christian Prison Ministry of Mid-America**

Missouri is home to 29 prisons and 2 county jails in 5 states. CPMM's goal is to evangelize, encourage, and equip the believers in all of these prisons. To date, over 400 inmates have been baptized!

[christianprisonministryofmissouri.org](http://christianprisonministryofmissouri.org)

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.”  
[Acts 20:22, NIV]

► When have you felt a compulsion to do something that did not make sense? Did you listen? How did things turn out?

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► Why would Paul be so resolute about continuing his ministry in the face of danger? What does this encourage you to do as a follower of Christ?

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DAY 2:

“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.”  
[Acts 20:23, NIV]

► When have you jumped into a situation where you knew it was not going to turn out well? What was your motivation for continuing?

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► Would you continue to follow Christ if you knew your future life on earth was going to be filled with prison, hardships, and suffering? Why would God allow this?

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DAY 3:

“However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”  
[Acts 20:24, NIV]

► What are some big projects or tasks you have completed? Was the finish line worth the hard work?

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► What are some tasks you feel Jesus has given to all of his followers? What are some specific tasks or races you feel he has given you to complete?

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DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”  
[John 16:33, NIV]

- ▶ Why would Jesus tell his disciples about all of the bad things that are going to happen to them? How would this give them peace?

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- ▶ What does it mean for you to “take heart”? How does it bring you peace to know that Jesus has overcome the world?

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DAY 5:

“Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.’”  
[Acts 23:1, NIV]

- ▶ When have you fulfilled your duty to a commitment even though you did not want to complete it? How can you keep a good conscience before God and others?

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- ▶ What do you think your duty to God is? What do you think God desires for you to do for him today? This week?

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DAY 6:

“So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”  
[2 Timothy 1:8, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been ashamed to admit something you believed in? Why are you sometimes hesitant to share your opinions or beliefs?

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- ▶ What do you think it means to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel? How does the power of God help you do this?

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# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

May 8 | Week 30 | Paul on Trial

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 24-26

## 5 TRIALS OF JESUS & PAUL

- Luke: 5 Trials of Jesus
  - Caiaphas
  - Sanhedrin
  - Pilate
  - Herod
  - Pilate
- Acts: 5 Trials of Paul
  - Jewish populace [ch. 22]
  - Felix
  - Festus
  - Agrippa II
  - Rome

## FELIX

Felix was the governor of Judea and Samaria when the apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the Gospel. Antonius Felix was formerly a slave but was promoted by Claudius Caesar to the office of governor. The Roman historian Tacitus described Felix as “cruel, licentious, and base.” He attempted to solicit a bribe from Paul but did not receive it.

## FESTUS

Herod Agrippa II was the fifth and final “King Herod” and was the figurehead King of the Jews. He lived with his sister, Bernice, and was rumored to have relations with her. Late in his career, Herod Agrippa II saw that tensions were rising between Rome and the Jews, and he tried unsuccessfully to prevent war. Ultimately, he sided with Rome, and he was expelled by his Jewish subjects. He lived out the rest of his life in Rome.

[[www.gotquestions.org/Felix-in-the-Bible](http://www.gotquestions.org/Felix-in-the-Bible)]

## WITNESS

Acts 1:8 [NIV] *“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 26:16 [NIV] *“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me.”*

## ACTS 24:1-16 [NIV]

### Paul’s Trial Before Felix

**24** *Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.*

<sup>2</sup> *When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation.”* <sup>3</sup> *Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude.* <sup>4</sup> *But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.*

<sup>5</sup> *“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect”* <sup>6</sup> *and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.* <sup>8</sup> *By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.”*

<sup>9</sup> *The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.*

<sup>10</sup> When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense. <sup>11</sup> You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. <sup>12</sup> My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. <sup>13</sup> And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. <sup>14</sup> However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, <sup>15</sup> and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. <sup>16</sup> So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

## ACTS 25:7-12 [NIV]

### Paul’s Trial Before Festus

**25**<sup>7</sup>When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

<sup>8</sup> Then Paul made his defense: “I have done nothing wrong against the Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.”

<sup>9</sup> Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?”

<sup>10</sup> Paul answered: “I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. <sup>11</sup> If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”

<sup>12</sup> After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

## ACTS 26:12-19 [NIV]

### Paul’s Trial Before Felix

**26**<sup>12</sup>“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. <sup>13</sup> About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. <sup>14</sup> We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

<sup>15</sup> “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. <sup>16</sup> ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. <sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

<sup>19</sup> “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.



# MAY 8-14 | WEEK 30 | PAUL ON TRIAL [ACTS 24-26]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. When have you been punished for something you did not do?
2. When was a time growing up that an entire group was punished for something only 1 or 2 people were guilty of?
3. When have you had to explain yourself before a boss, board, or group of people in authority? How did it go?

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 24:1-9. What is at the center of the Jews' complaint against Paul? Is there any substantive truth to their claims?
2. Read Acts 24:10-27. How does Paul's response line up with the accusations made about him? What's different about Paul's presentation and that of the Jews?

3. **Why do you think the topics of righteousness, self-control, and judgment were frightening for Felix [see Acts 24:25]? Are these topics difficult or alarming for people today? Why or why not? [See “Felix” on pg. 14]**
  
4. **Browse through chapter 25 and have someone summarize the events.**
  
5. **Read Acts 26. Why do you think Paul appealed to Caesar even though it seems like he could have gotten out of trouble another way?**
  
6. **Read Acts 1:8. How does this relate to Acts 26:16 and what we are seeing from Paul in these trials? How does it relate to what we have seen through the book of Acts?**
  
7. **In what ways can Christians quickly lose their witness in the midst of false accusations and trials of public opinion today?**

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
2. How would you respond if you had to testify in court as to your activities for God?
3. What is your testimony? How can you be a witness to what you have seen and heard?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR THE MISSIONS OF THE WEEK

### **Daniel & Kelsey H.**

Daniel & Kelsey serve in a closed country in North Africa through Frontiers Missions, where they are leading others to Christ while helping to run skate parks as their reason for being in the country. They moved to North Africa last year with their 2-year-old son and 6-week-old daughter. Please pray that they are able to continue to change lives through the power of the Holy Spirit working through them and in the people around them.

### **High Hill Christian Camp**

High Hill Christian Camp and Retreat Center's goal is to offer a fun, Christian atmosphere in a modern camp setting surrounded by God's wilderness — all designed so that children will leave with a closer relationship with Jesus. [highhillcamp.org](http://highhillcamp.org)

### **HOPE Ministries Food Pantry**

HOPE provides families in St. Charles county assistance with food and physical needs. You can donate non-perishable food items to this ministry by visiting the food cart in the WCC café. Take home a bag and bring it back with the items requested for the month.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”  
[Acts 4:20, NIV]

▶ What is a product or brand you have become an evangelist about? Why do you tell people about it?

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▶ When you think about the typical conversations you have in a week, how many of them are spiritual? Why do you think people tend to not talk about spiritual matters?

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DAY 2:

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”  
[Philippians 4:12, NIV]

▶ Paul was falsely imprisoned many times and suffered great harm for the Gospel. What are you willing to give up to follow Christ?

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▶ What would be the most difficult 1st world amenity to live without? What do you think is the secret of being content, and what steps can you take to move in that direction?

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DAY 3:

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”  
[Philippians 1:21, NIV]

▶ Who are some people you personally know who live life to the fullest? What attributes about them are attractive to you?

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▶ How might a life lived completely and wholly for Christ look different than your current life? What needs to die so you can gain Christ?

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DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”  
[1 Peter 2:12, NIV]

- ▶ When have you done something good and hoped someone would see it? When have you done something good and it led to others being blessed?

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- ▶ Do you find it difficult to do good in front of others? How might you strike a balance between this verse and also not becoming conceited.

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DAY 5:

“For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”  
[1 Peter 3:17, NIV]

- ▶ When have you done the right thing but were treated as if you did something wrong? How did you respond?

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- ▶ How do you feel about it being God’s will that you might suffer for doing good? How does that affect your perspective of suffering?

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DAY 6:

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”  
[Colossians 4:6, NIV]

- ▶ Do you like a lot of salt on your food? What are your go-to seasonings when cooking? How do they enhance the flavor?

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- ▶ Do your conversations typically provide graceful seasoning to others? How might your conversations be able to open a door to share your testimony?

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# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

May 15 | Week 31 | Paul Shipwrecked

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 27-28:10

## JULIUS THE CENTURION

It is not known, but it is possible that Julius the Centurion became a Christian since we are told his name by Luke. Many believe that when Luke mentions the names of people in the book of Acts it may be an indication they became a follower of Christ. He may have given Julius' name to lend credibility to the story since the readers may know him and could confirm the details of the account.

## GOD ALLOWS STORMS IN YOUR LIFE

God could have paved the way for Paul to have an uneventful voyage to Rome. Instead, God orchestrated the events that took place so His name would be praised. God used Paul to prophesy about the shipwreck [Acts 27:10] and then offer hope and encouragement to hundreds of men when the storm hit [Acts 27:21-26].

We often pray for God to calm the storms in our lives...and sometimes He does. But when the storms do not stop raging, perhaps our response should be more than just seeking a prayer of rescue. Perhaps our prayers should also be prayers of opportunity. We should seek to praise God, offer hope, and make His name known to everyone around us...especially when storms hit!

## I TOLD YOU SO

Paul apparently never read the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. He attempted to encourage a shipload of terrified, hungry, and seasick sailors, soldiers, and prisoners. How did he get their attention? With a good old fashioned "I told you so." The fact that he was right may have done little to win their approval. His purpose, of course, was to convince them that he did, in fact, know what he was talking about.

Paul's evidence was an angel who appeared to him the previous night. Verse 24, coming from anyone else, would sound incredibly arrogant. Paul not only claims to be the servant of God but the savior of the ship and destined to stand before their Caesar. This was intended to encourage them, and Paul's own faith in God was to bolster theirs. Paul adds one P.S.: "Oh, by the way, we will run aground on some island." It would add yet another bullet point to the accuracy of God's revelation to Paul. [Acts, Mark Moore pg. 412-413]

## COMPARE WITH JONAH

We do not know if it is intentional, but the parallels of this story with Jonah from the Old Testament are difficult to ignore. Both were heading to Spain. Both sailed on the Mediterranean. Both encountered a great storm on the sea. Both crews threw cargo overboard. Jonah does not seek God's guidance while Paul receives a vision. The captain advises Jonah while Paul advises the captain. Jonah did not listen to the captain, while the captain did not listen to Paul. Jonah is running away from the will of God while Paul is running toward the call of God.



## ACTS 27:9-11 [NIV]

### Paul Sails for Rome

*27<sup>9</sup> Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, <sup>10</sup> “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” <sup>11</sup> But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship.*

## ACTS 27:21-26 [NIV]

### The Storm

*27<sup>21</sup> After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”*

## ACTS 27:33-44 [NIV]

### The Shipwreck

*27<sup>33</sup> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. <sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” <sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. <sup>37</sup> Altogether there were 276 of us on board. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.*

*<sup>39</sup> When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup> Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.*

*<sup>42</sup> The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.*

*<sup>43</sup> But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. <sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.*

## ACTS 28:7-10 [NIV]

### Paul Sails for Rome

*28<sup>7</sup> There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. <sup>8</sup> His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. <sup>9</sup> When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. <sup>10</sup> They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.*

# MAY 15-21 | WEEK 31 | PAUL SHIPWRECKED [ACTS 27-28:10]

## CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. Would you rather know the day you are going to die or the way you are going to die?
2. When have you been broken down and needed to rely on someone else for help?
3. Do you stop to help people who are broken down? Share a story.

## COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the storms—literal or figurative—that appeared to create a hopeless situation in your life? How did you respond to those situations?
2. Read Acts 27:9-26. Why do you think the shipmates decided to listen to Paul now, but ignored his warnings before they set sail? What can we learn about people from this?
3. Read vs. 21 again. When have you had a “I told you so” moment with someone? How did it feel? How do you think Paul felt when he addressed everyone?

4. **Why do you think Paul was able to stay so positive and helpful throughout the storm and shipwreck?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. **Read Acts 27:27-44. Why do you think the Centurion wanted to save Paul's life? Read vs. 11 and 31 again.**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. **How did Paul's words and calm example encourage others? How have you been encouraged by other people's faith in God while facing difficulties?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. **Read Acts 28:1-10. How can you see God's providence and provision in this story? Why do you think He allowed Paul to go through the shipwreck and other ordeals?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. **OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: "Praise You In This Storm" [by Casting Crowns]**

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How can you respond with hope and encouragement when you and others face storms in this life?
2. How can you show the resolve, hope, and leadership Paul showed in the midst of crisis?
3. What are some storms or difficult situations you are involved in? How can you turn those storms into opportunities?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR THE MISSION OF THE WEEK

### Jireh India Missions

This ministry in India shares the good news of Jesus with those who have never heard His name. They provide homes and education for orphans at House of Peace, teach widows to sew so they can provide for their children, provide bread for much of their community through Five Loaves Bakery, and work with a leper colony. They strive to fulfill Psalm 82:3 — *Defend the poor and orphans; do justice to the afflicted and needy.*

### Show-Me Christian Youth Home

This faith-based organization seeks to improve the lives of children struggling because of circumstances in their current home environment. [showmehelpingkids.com](http://showmehelpingkids.com)

### Shiloh Christian Children's Ranch

Located in Kahoka and Clarence, MO, Shiloh is a safe haven for abused and neglected children, and includes six homes for children, two relief homes, and an onsite school. [shilohranch.org](http://shilohranch.org)

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”  
[Joshua 1:9, NIV]

- ▶ What are you afraid of? What gets you discouraged? Why?

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- ▶ How can you be strong and courageous when you are afraid or discouraged? How does it help to know God is always with you wherever you go?

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DAY 2:

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.”  
[Psalm 28:7, NIV]

- ▶ What are some different types of physical shields people use? What are some other types of shields people use to protect themselves? How are they used?

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- ▶ How does God’s strength and shield help you? When was the last time your heart leapt for joy because of something you saw God do?

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DAY 3:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”  
[Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV]

- ▶ Are you a trusting person? What leads you to trust or not trust someone?

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- ▶ Why is it difficult for you to trust God with your paths? How do you need to lean on God’s understanding instead of your own this week?

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# DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

## DAY 4:

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”  
[Romans 15:4, NIV]

- ▶ What does Paul say is the purpose of Scripture that was written in the past? What is the result of being taught by Scripture?

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- ▶ What are some examples of endurance from the Bible? How does this provide encouragement and hope for you and others?

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## DAY 5:

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.”  
[Romans 15:5, NIV]

- ▶ What kind of endurance do you most struggle with: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual? Why?

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- ▶ What does endurance and encouragement from God look like? How should that affect your attitude with others this week?

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## DAY 6:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”  
[Romans 15:13, NIV]

- ▶ What are some things you hope for in this life? What would complete joy and peace look like to you?

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- ▶ Paul prays for God to fill the Romans with joy, peace, trust, and hope. Which of these do you need to receive from God today? How might you receive these?

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# UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

May 22 | Week 32 | Paul in Rome



# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 28:11-31

## WHAT HAPPENED AFTER ACTS?

The book of Acts precariously ends while Paul is under house arrest in Rome. Since God promised Paul he would stand trial before Caesar [Acts 27:24] we can assume he appeared before Emperor Nero. It is assumed Paul was released since he expected to visit Colossae in Philemon 1:22. Based on early church historians, many scholars believe Paul went on a fourth missionary journey to Spain, as he planned in Romans 15:24. The Christian historian Clement wrote in 95AD that Paul had preached in the East and in the West, which would have been understood as Spain. This means Paul would have taken the Gospel to the limits of the known Roman world.

## PRISON CONDITIONS FOR PAUL

Although Paul was often arrested, beaten, and persecuted, his time in Rome was relatively comfortable, comparatively speaking. He was allowed to write and receive letters, have others bring him provisions, and had many visitors. This was perhaps because of his Roman citizenship and popularity.

## LETTERS FROM PRISON

Paul did not stay idle during his extended house arrest in Rome. He kept up on his correspondence and ministry to many different churches. He wrote the Biblical letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon during these two years. Paul established the churches in Ephesus and Philippi during his second missionary journey and returned to each city in his third missionary journey. We do not have record of Paul visiting Colossae, but it is possible since he was nearby on his journeys. The book of Philemon is a letter to Paul's personal friend who was the leader of a house church in Colossae.

## END OF PAUL'S LIFE

In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul anticipates the end of his life. He was writing from a prison in Rome, in which his conditions were not as nice as his previous house arrest. The historian Eusebius records that Paul was eventually martyred by Emperor Nero in AD 67 by being beheaded.

## ACTS 28:11-31 [NIV]

### Paul's Arrival at Rome

**28** <sup>11</sup> After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. <sup>12</sup> We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. <sup>13</sup> From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup> There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup> The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. <sup>16</sup> When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

### Paul Preaches at Rome Under Guard

<sup>17</sup> Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. <sup>18</sup> They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. <sup>19</sup> The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. <sup>20</sup> For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

<sup>21</sup> They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. <sup>22</sup> But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

<sup>23</sup> They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. <sup>24</sup> Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. <sup>25</sup> They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

<sup>26</sup> “Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

<sup>27</sup> For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

<sup>28</sup> “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” [<sup>29</sup> Some manuscripts include here “After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.”]

<sup>30</sup> For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

## MAY 22 - 28 | WEEK 32 | PAUL IN ROME [ACTS 28:11:31]

### CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. How do you typically spend your free time? What are some productive things you do with your free time?
2. If you were stranded on a deserted island, what is something you would bring to occupy your time?
3. If you were under house arrest for 2 years, what would you try to accomplish in that time?

### COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 28:11-16. When has just the sight of someone brought you joy and encouragement? Why do you think Paul was so happy to see fellow disciples?
2. Why do you think Paul was able to make his own travel plans and live by himself? What does this say about his influence?

- 3. Read Acts 28:17-22. Why do you think Paul called a meeting of the local Jewish leaders when he got to Rome? What did he say to them?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4. Read Acts 28:23-31. What do you think it was that drew people to hear Paul each day? What do you notice about his teaching?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5. What do you think Paul did to pass the time while under house arrest [See “Letters from Prison” on pg. 30]? What can we learn from this?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6. When have you had a potentially negative situation turn into an opportunity for good? How did your attitude change the outcome?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 7. Read Acts 28:31 again. Why do you think Luke ended this narrative with these words?**

## CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. What are some current opportunities you may have to turn a bad situation into an opportunity for good?
2. What is hindering you from proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching others about Jesus?
3. What does it mean for you to unleash the Holy Spirit in your life and proclaim him with boldness?

## PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

*[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]*

## PRAY FOR MISSION OF THE WEEK

### **Team Expansion: Allen & Cherry Messimer – Taiwan**

The Messimers have served as missionaries in Taiwan since 2004. Their mission is to evangelize, disciple, and provide training so every believer can use his or her gifts in a simple church ministry. This also means every church can start new, indigenous churches. Over 90% of Taiwanese people still worship idols. [teamexpansion.org](http://teamexpansion.org)

### **Team Expansion: Tim & Amy Maxson**

The Maxsons work at Fellowship Dubai church in the Middle East and are making disciples of migrant workers. Tim & their ministry are where we first learned of the 3-Circle Method of telling others about Jesus. The Maxson family has five children. [teamexpansion.org](http://teamexpansion.org)

### **LOVetheLOU**

LOVetheLOU is a community development initiative that connects resources to the needs of St. Louis. During the constant process of growth and development, they strive to see St. Louis restored through transforming actions. LTL is proud of the progress in St. Louis and are excited about what will continue to happen as they grow and develop. [lovethelou.org](http://lovethelou.org)

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

**“But the Advocate, 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.”**  
[John 14:26, NIV]

► Why would Jesus need to tell his disciples that the Holy Spirit will help them remember his teachings? What were they about to face for themselves after his crucifixion?

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► When have you felt the Holy Spirit helping you remember a truth from Scripture? How would being reminded of Jesus’ words help you today?

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DAY 2:

**“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”**  
[John 14:27, NIV]

► When have you been given something but it did not end up being what you thought it was going to be? Why was it better or worse than what you expected?

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► Why do you think Jesus says to not “let” your heart be troubled and be afraid? How can you fight against this and accept the peace that Jesus leaves for you?

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DAY 3:

**“<sup>15</sup>Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”**  
[Ephesians 5:15-16, NIV]

► When have you missed a great opportunity because you made an unwise decision? What led to your decisions and why do you regret it?

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► How does the way you live affect the opportunities that may come your way? How can you make the most of the opportunities that come your way today?

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DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”  
[Colossians 4:2, NIV]

- ▶ How does prayer relate to thankfulness? How does prayer relate to being watchful for opportunities?

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- ▶ Why do you think Paul would say this to the Colossian church while he was in jail in Rome? How can you be devoted to prayer, watchfulness, and thankfulness today?

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DAY 5:

“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.”  
[Colossians 4:3, NIV]

- ▶ When is a time you have seen a door of opportunity opened up for you? Did you take it? What happened to that opportunity?

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- ▶ Paul writes this from jail in Rome where his opportunities were limited. What are some potential opportunities you might have to proclaim the mystery of Christ to people?

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DAY 6:

“<sup>a</sup>Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>b</sup>Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”  
[Colossians 4:4-5, NIV]

- ▶ When have you struggled to clearly explain yourself to someone? What did you do to make your point more clear?

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- ▶ How does the way we act toward others affect our opportunity to proclaim the message of Jesus to them? How can you be wise in your actions with others today?

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