



# HIS Story Continues

Story Cloth 2

**THE BOOK OF ACTS**

*The Ministry of the Lord Jesus through the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*

## TEACHERS MANUAL



**CREDITS:**

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## The Acts Story Cloth



**Introduction:** The purpose of Story Cloth #2 is to help disciple those who have prayed to receive Christ and have been taught the stories in Story Cloth #1 covering God's Redemptive Plan (HIStory) from Genesis through the Gospel of John. Story Cloth #2 is based on the Book of Acts and shows how Jesus fulfilled His promise to send Another Helper, the Holy Spirit, after His death, burial, and resurrection (see John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15).

**Theme:** The main purpose for the coming of the Holy Spirit was to convict of sin, bring the lost to the saving power of Jesus Christ, sealing them until "the day" and to empower believers in reaching the lost, teaching the Word of God, and ministering in the Name of Jesus. It is the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit that enables every believer, by the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the work of the Lord through the Body of Christ, the Church.

**Method:** Each picture contains a Bible story. Scriptures associated with each story should be reviewed, but do not read them to those with whom you are sharing the stories. Tell the story behind each picture in a conversational way, and then make personal application. Using personal experience adds individual wisdom in making application of each story to individual lives. However, please remember to make it culturally appropriate...do not use Western idioms in sharing, for those not of the Western culture cannot understand them in context. Also, remember that we are to keep everything we do culturally appropriate, indigenous, and self-sustaining (making sure you understand at least the basics of the culture you are attempting to reach).

All Scriptures quoted or referred to in this teaching will come from the New American Standard Translation (NASB)<sup>1</sup>, unless otherwise noted.



**Application:** Suggestions on how to bring knowledge taught to usefulness.



**QUESTION:** Questions designed to impact learners understanding.



**NOTE:** Be sure to review the Scriptures associated with the stories before sharing them, but **remember that we are telling the "Story" God has revealed in the book of Acts.** The overall message of Acts concerns the revelation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the work of the Church. As you point to the picture of the story, share the main points of the Scripture just as you would tell someone a story about something important.



This picture will be used to give you some ideas on how to illustrate the story.

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## Story 1 – The Ascension of Jesus - Acts 1:8-11



**The Scriptures:** “To these, He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of* forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ *He said*, ‘you heard of from Me; (Acts 1:3-4). Jesus continued, promising His followers, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:8-9)

**Jesus' ascension depicts that His work on earth is now finished, and He is going back to His Father in heaven to wait there until the time for His Second Coming. Point out that He is in heaven interceding for each of us.<sup>2</sup>**

**The Story:** Upon going back to His Father God in heaven, Jesus challenged His followers to: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you ...” (Matthew 28:19-20a)

To give them confidence in completing this commission, He promised three things:

- He would be with them always: “...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)
- He would never leave them without a Helper: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” (John 14:26)
- They would receive power after He went back to His Father when the Holy Spirit came upon them: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

They were to wait for the Holy Spirit to arrive before beginning the task of being His witnesses. The Holy Spirit’s power would enable them to be His witnesses in their city (Jerusalem), in their towns (all Judea), to those who lived in areas next to theirs (Samaria), and even to those who lived very far away (to the ends of the earth). (Acts 1:8)

**Summary:** Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies made in Scripture regarding His life, death, and resurrection. He provided the only way for sinful mankind to be saved. He gave His disciples the task of taking the message of salvation to the world. The Great Commission is about evangelism *and* discipleship. We are to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded.



**Application:** In the message of the angel as Christ ascended, we learn that our purpose for life on earth is to be His witnesses in sharing the Gospel and giving those we meet in life an opportunity to pray to receive Christ and then mentor them into disciples who be committed to make disciples who will make disciples as well.



**QUESTION:** Where is the Lord calling you to serve in the fulfillment of His Great Commission to go to all the earth with His message?

<sup>22</sup> The words in **BLUE** are those John Shepherd used in his original work on Story Cloth #2.

## Story 2 – The Coming of the Holy Spirit - Acts 2



**The Scriptures:** “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

**The Story:** **Share how the disciples were gathered, praying and seeking the Lord.** (“These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” [Acts 1:14])

As they continued to gather together, **the Holy Spirit came upon them and filled them with His power so they could boldly proclaim the Gospel:** “But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them, ‘Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.’ (Acts 2:14); and with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:40-41)

**So (it can be) with each of you. If you have prayed to receive Christ, the Holy Spirit now lives in you, and you are to live as He wants.** The Christian life begins with allowing Jesus Christ to be the Lord of your life. Everything He has done, His virgin birth, His teaching and ministry on earth, His dying on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead, was done so man could have a relationship with Him as Lord (King) of their lives. The Bible teaches this truth in Romans 14:9, “For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”



**Application:** God has only given one command to the church: Make Disciples. So, if you are saved, as you go through life, God expects you to share with the people you meet what has happened to you and how they, too, can accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. He is the only One who is able to forgive sin through His sacrifice for sin. Those who receive Him are able to begin to live as He lived and serve as He served. But, that is something we cannot do ourselves. The only way we can live for Christ and serve Him is through the same power He had; the greatest source of power known to all people: The Holy Spirit.



**QUESTIONS:** The disciples had much truth and experience in knowing about Jesus. But, they needed something else to carry out their Great Commission and to live the life of faith Jesus made possible – the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit. If you have believed in Jesus and accepted Him as your Savior, the Holy Spirit will work through you as you are willing to allow Him to work. Will you make yourself available?



**Share:** Share your own testimony of how you were saved and give examples of how God has empowered you to share Him and serve Him in the power of His Spirit. Then ask your listeners to share their testimony. Because they may be unfamiliar with giving a testimony concerning coming to faith, you may have to help in what to say: “What was it like before you were saved; when did Christ come into your life; what difference has He made since you were saved?” (Both salvation and live changes are evidence of the Spirit’s work.)



### Story 3 – Peter Healing the Lame Man - Acts 3:1-7

**The Scriptures:** “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth *hour*, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.” (Acts 3:1-2)

**After the Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples, they began their public ministry of spreading the Good News about Jesus and how to receive Him. God will perform any miracle He chooses in order to reach a lost people.**

**The Story:** The early believers were dedicated to follow the religious traditions they were taught by their teachers (the rabbi’s). One of those traditions was to pray at certain times during the day. One of those times was three in the afternoon. As Peter and John were going to the Temple to worship God, they were stopped by a lame man. He was 40 years old and had been lame from birth (Acts 4:22). Being unable to work, the only way he had to support himself was through begging.

**The Scriptures:** “But Peter said, ‘I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!’ And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.” (Acts 3:6-7)

**The Story:** Peter knew what he really needed was to know God and be able to walk and so he said, “In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, walk.” and the lame man was healed. He was not only walking, he was jumping up and down! He was praising God! People were amazed to see this because they had known him to be lame from his birth.

Even though this amazing miracle had taken place, there were many who saw the disciples as people who were upsetting the way their religion was practiced. The persecution was motivated by the religious leaders (Acts 4:4-5) whose beliefs and traditions were being threatened. As a result, they began to persecute believers.



**Application:** This miracle by the Holy Spirit was for the purpose of verifying the power of Jesus to save. Whenever the Holy Spirit moves in power, whether to heal, save people, or do a miracle, the greatest of which is the salvation of our souls, it is always for the purpose of glorifying Jesus and empowering others to share the Good News of salvation with others to serve Jesus.



Remember the recent past of Peter and the disciples. They had just experienced the salvation of thousands; now they had ministered to just one man. The Spirit empowers people to do ministry with large numbers of people, but He also empowers ministry to one person at a time.



**QUESTIONS:** Because he was lame, someone had to bring the lame man to the place where God could do something in his life. Would you be one of those who are available, even if you do not fully understand what God may be doing? The opportunity for ministry often comes upon us unexpectedly (to us). Do you look for opportunities for God to use you? Are you ready at all times?



**NOTE:** The lame man was worshiping God, not Peter and John. His healing had taken place to demonstrate the power of Jesus to save (Acts 3:16). He was healed where he was, like he was, because of his faith in Jesus.



**Additional Teaching Moment:** You might take time to teach on the concept of faith. It is an essential part of the Christian experience and foundational to understanding Scripture. Remember, this faith is focused upon Jesus, not us.

Hebrews 4:2 states, “For indeed we have had Good News preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.” The hearing of Scripture does not change lives; it is hearing in faith that does. Scripture combined with faith. Faith is not something that we seek in order to have “spiritual power.” It is what connects us to Jesus, Who does His work in and through our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. The lame man was not healed because he had “enough faith.” He was healed because he had faith in who Jesus **IS** and what Jesus said **He would do**. In the Christian life the object of our faith is Jesus Christ – the realization that we cannot, but He can and has. (Galatians 3:2, “...did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”)

**Story 4 – Jesus, the Only Way - Acts 4:1-12** (Show the man standing before a fork in the road.)



**The Scriptures:** “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people,’ (Acts 4:8) ... ‘let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health.’ ” (Acts 4:10) “**And**

**there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**” (Acts 4:12)

**The Story:** One day the disciples were telling people that Jesus rose from the dead because He was the long-awaited Messiah. And as they were telling the story to the people around them the captain of the Temple Guard, along with some rulers, became very angry and arrested them and put them on trial. (The Sadducees were especially upset because they did not believe in resurrection from the dead.) The disciples were asked, who put you up to this, and in what name have you done this? (Acts 4:7)

Peter’s answer was, “in the name of Jesus, the only name under heaven by which we can be saved.” During His time on earth, Jesus taught that there were two paths people take in life. One leads away from God to trusting in yourself and the things the world offers; the other way leads one away from trusting in themselves and the world, to trusting in God. There is only one way people can be saved and come to God; through Jesus Christ!

**As your new life in Christ begins, you must make a choice which way you will go for the rest of your life...following Jesus or your own flesh and self-life. (Carnal Christian?)**



**Application:** If you chose the path that leads to God through Jesus, you will be saved, but you still have another decision to make. That decision determines whether you continue to walk by faith in Jesus or by what you see in the world.





**QUESTION:** Every religion has similar characteristics; how does one go about finding their god, what do they have to do to reach him, and how do they please him? In that light: How did you find Holy God? How did you reach Him?



**Wait for an answer:** It is important that each individual who receives Christ knows this truth from the beginning. New believers are eager to learn and put into practice what they know about the Lord. No wonder Paul encouraged believers to walk with Jesus in the same manner as we first received Him.



**Story 5 – Disobedience Is Costly - Acts 4:36-5:11** (Point to Ananias lying dead on floor.)

**The Scriptures:** “Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property and kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet.” “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land? While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’ And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.” (Acts 4:36-5:5)

**The Story:** (Tell the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Emphasizing the importance of living a Holy Life yielded and surrendered to the Lord in every area.)

After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church began to grow and reach the people who lived near them. The author of the book of Acts described them as being of “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). They were even sharing their property with others in need (Acts 4:32-35 cf. Deuteronomy 15:4-11). A man named Joseph (also called Barnabas) sold his land and gave all he received for it to the apostles for use in ministering to others.

A man named Ananias saw what Joseph did and sold some of his land and gave a portion of the money to the apostles, as well. Instead of telling Peter, he kept some of the money for himself; he lied and said he gave all of the money. Peter was grieved. He said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land?” (5:3)

You did not have to do that – wasn’t it yours all the time? And after you sold it wasn’t the money all ours? You have lied not to man but to God!” Immediately after Peter stopped speaking, Ananias fell dead on the floor, and some men rolled him up in a rug and carried him outside to be buried. There was much fear among the onlookers.

Well, just three hours later, Ananias’ wife, Sapphira, came into the room looking for her husband Ananias. When she came into the room Peter asked her, “...Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.” Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?”

Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out *as well*." And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things." (Acts 5:8-11)



**Application:** The Lord expects us to be truthful in our lives so that others will believe us when we share the truth of His Word with them. Our motives must be pure. We should be motivated to tell others about the salvation of Jesus. Ananias and Sapphira were both motivated by pride. Psalm 139:23-24 is a good scripture prayer to keep before the Lord, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way."



**QUESTIONS:** Think about the impact of that event on everyone who was looking on. How would it have affected you if you were there? What do you think God was trying to teach by His response to Ananias' lying?



**Additional Teaching Moment:** As Jesus taught His followers, salvation seems to be "free," but in fact there is a "cost." Jesus taught: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me **cannot** be My disciple." "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You **cannot** serve God and wealth." (Matthew 6:24)

## Story 6 – Gamaliel Standing before the Religious Authorities (Jerusalem Council) Acts 5:27-42

(Context: "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*," Acts 5:14)



**The Scriptures:** "When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and *so is* the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.' But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them." (Acts 5:27-33)

"But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.'" (Acts 5:34-35)

"So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." (Acts 5:38-39)

**God's Word cannot be stopped. The Lord will use whomever and whatever He chooses to cause His Word to spread.**

**The Story:** Once, while the apostles were teaching the captain of the temple guard and his officers brought them before the religious authorities once again. The High Priest spoke against them, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28). But instead of being afraid, Peter spoke with resolve.

Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross (Acts 5:29-30) and we were witnesses of it – how could we not tell about it?"

Peter was convinced of the truth he and the others were teaching and living, and was willing to be the Lord's witness, even in the face of great danger.

Such a courageous stand made the religious officials mad, and they wanted to kill the apostles. But a wise Pharisee named Gamaliel intervened. He appealed to the officials, reminding them of other men who supposedly found the long-awaited Messiah.

Gamaliel's advice was to let the men go. For if they were frauds they would reveal themselves; but if they were real, then the officials were in danger of offending Holy God – which would not be good. The religious officials decided to take the safe answer, but insisted on two conditional actions: they caused the apostles to be beaten with whips, ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus again, and then let them go. Notice the response of the disciples: "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ." (Acts 5:41-42)

They departed from the religious leaders and continued to share Jesus, filled with joy, understanding the charge given them by the authorities, but counting themselves worthy of being beaten for the sake of Jesus' Name.



**Application:** Obedience to God is always more important than obedience to man, even the authorities of the land when they tell you to do something that is clearly against what God commanded you, or if they tell you not to do something that God has instructed you to do.



**QUESTIONS:** Will you be an instrument of the Lord to spread His Word with everyone, no matter what it may cost? Are you willing to go in Jesus' name?



### **Story 7 – Stephen Preaching before Religious Leaders - Acts 7:1-53**

**The Scriptures:** "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it." (Acts 7:51-53)

**Sometimes there is a price to pay in order to preach the Word.**

**The Story:** To help the leadership in the first church, seven men were chosen to serve. One of those men, called Stephen, was full of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.



God performed signs and wonders through Stephen, and most rejoiced, but others disputed with him. They even found other men to lie about what Stephen was preaching. Those lies stirred the people up and he was brought before the council of religious leaders. When the High Priest asked Stephen if the charges of blasphemy were true, Stephen, rather than defending himself, took the opportunity to remind them of the history of the Jewish people and how they not only rejected God, choosing their own way of worship, but rejected His Son, the Messiah, as well.

He ended his speech by calling them “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in their hearts and ears” (Acts 7:51). When they heard that, they were enraged in their hearts (7:54) and condemned him to death by being stoned.



**Application:** The Holy Spirit will give you boldness if you are surrendered to Him, and He will empower you to proclaim that Word without fear of consequences! In the midst of a raving mob, Stephen looked up at heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This empowered him to not be afraid. Believers today may or may not see a vision of Jesus, but we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who will give us like power should we turn to Him.

Remember, the main work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is to empower him for ministry and the Word!



**QUESTION:** How do you think you would act if you were put into the same position as Stephen? Has your faith developed to the point of trusting God?

**Story 8 – The Death of Stephen - Acts 7:54-60** (Stephen was stoned to death as Saul, who was later called Paul, was watching over the robes of Stephen’s assailants as the stoning took place).



**The Scriptures:** “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.” “When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ Having said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:54-60) **God used this event in the life of Stephen to later bring conviction to Saul (Paul). He could not escape the calm with which Stephen exhibited while being stoned to death.**

**The Story:** The religious leaders and the crowd were so upset at Stephen’s answer, they erupted with anger. Furious men rushed at him all at once, took him out of the city and began throwing stones. To be able to throw the stones harder, they took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man standing in the crowd, who approved of their actions. His name was Saul.

What Saul was about to see would become a turning-point in his life. Stephen looked up and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of His Father God (a two-fold reference to the role and identity of Jesus) – an event that must have reminded him of the sovereignty of God and the power of Jesus. He was about to suffer for Jesus' Name. The crowd began to stone him all the more. As the stones kept hitting Stephen, he kneeled and spoke loudly, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." with the same forgiving heart of mercy as His Savior did, and then he died. In an instant, Stephen was in the presence of God. He was mistreated on earth, but is now filled with continual joy and peace in heaven.



**Application:** Mankind's whole purpose in life is one thing: To glorify God in all that we do! Some receive Him, some do not. Whether it is life or death...it is His plan that we be obedient to Him. They had accused Stephen of rejecting Moses, God's prophet, but in actuality, they were rejecting their Savior, Jesus Christ. Here, what seems to be tragedy would later be seen as the point from which the great persecution and dispersion of the church began. An event which proved to be the commencement for the evangelistic thrust of the church to the surrounding world.



**QUESTION:** How could Stephen be so confident and assured while dying? How does this story impact your life? Are you among those who reject Jesus or those who accept Him? If you are a follower, are you ACTUALLY following? What if it were YOU who was being attacked?



### Story 9 – The Church under Persecution - Acts 8:1-4

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

**The church and all believers were under extreme persecution, and yet the number of people receiving Jesus as their Lord was increasing dramatically.**

**The Story:** The young man named Saul, motivated by seeing Stephen stoned to death, was even more convinced the Christians were doing something wrong, something that was evil in God's sight. Some people believed he was responsible for Stephen's death (as evidenced by placing their cloaks at his feet). He devoted himself to persecuting believers even to the point beating or putting to death anyone he identified as a believer (Acts 22:4, 19; 26:10). Saul even went into their homes with soldiers and had them dragged off to prison. He was determined more than ever to stop them from telling others about Jesus, so much that he even asked permission to travel in the surrounding areas to further his task (Acts 9:1-2; 26:11).



**Additional Teaching Moment:** This moment gives us an great opportunity in bringing to mind Paul's remorse concerning these choices after his conversion on the Damascus Road [why are you persecuting Me....?] as well as the forgiveness he experienced (1 Cor. 15:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:13).



**Application:** The greatest times of personal persecution can come when we are seeking to follow Jesus and share Him with others. Even when we are doing the right thing, we can be accosted by others who, although wrong, chose to persecute or lift their voice against our ministry. In fact, according to Scripture, we WILL be persecuted when we live out our faith in a godless world (Matt. 5:10, 12; John 15:20; 1 Cor. 4:12).



**QUESTION:** Understanding the possible (most likely probable) outcome: Will you continue to follow Him? Will you continue to share Him?



### Story 10 – Peter and Simon, the Sorcerer - Acts 8:18-23

**The Scriptures:** “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your

heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.’ ” (Acts 8:18-22)

**The Holy Spirit can never be earned, purchased, or even bargained for. He is a gift from God to every believer who receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and comes to reside in your heart (soul) the moment you accept Jesus Christ by faith. He comes to reside forever and to empower you for ministry in His Kingdom so that you may share the Good News of Jesus wherever you go.**

**The Story:** Simon was a man who practiced demonic sorcery (magic). Over a long period of time, he had performed many acts that made the people of his area think he was a great man. In fact, he claimed to be a great power and they believed him, thinking he had special power from God, so they listened to what he had to say.

At the same time, in their area (City of Samaria), the apostle Phillip was preaching about Jesus, and how He came to save people from their sin. Many people believed what Phillip preached and became believers who later were baptized. In fact, Simon also believed what Phillip said and was baptized himself; but he may have been more influenced [amazed] by the signs and miracles Phillip did, than conviction over his sin and need for repentance, which would have resulted in true salvation.

Upon the apostles in Jerusalem hearing what was happening in Samaria, Peter and John were sent there to assist and guide Simon and the others that they might receive the Holy Spirit.



One day, while they were laying hands on several people praying that the Holy Spirit would come upon the new believers, Simon walked up to them and asked them how much money it would cost for him to get the Holy Spirit as well. Peter told him to keep his money – that he could not buy God’s gift nor earn it because it is given by grace, not by what people do. “Your heart is not right, you are poisoned by bitterness and controlled by sin,” Peter said, “and you cannot have any part in sharing the Good News. In fact you need to repent.” (Acts 8:21-22)



**Application:** It is very important for you to realize that even though Simon stated belief, was baptized in water and possibly prayed over by someone, he never became a Christian [never received the Holy Spirit—compare Rom. 8:9]. True salvation is always evidenced by a changed heart. Don’t be fooled by actions; anyone can pretend.



Remember the word translated “believe” does not always mean believing faith (as in becoming saved) – see John 2:23-25; James 2:19. One’s faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. In Simon’s case, he seemed to be wanting power that he could use for himself rather than the work of God.



**QUESTIONS:** Will you commit to teaching others the truths that Jesus taught and helping new Christians to live them out every day?

### Story 11 – Philip and Ethiopian Eunuch - Acts 8:26-39



**The Scriptures:** “So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a desert *road*.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go up and join this chariot.’” (Acts 8:25-29)

“Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: ‘HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.’” (Acts 8:30-32)

“The eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.” (Acts 8:34-35)

**The Story:** After Peter and John left Samaria to return home, Philip went about telling everyone about Jesus. He went to several villages traveling as far south as Gaza (about 80 kilometers [50 miles] away). One day an angel stopped him and told him to start walking south on the road that led to the desert, and he did. Can you imagine how he felt, walking down a dusty road which led to a desert that was not very welcoming to travelers?

As he walked he came upon a very important man – he was the treasurer for the Queen of Egypt whose name was Candace. The man was on his way home from celebrating a Jewish holiday in Jerusalem. The man was intently reading from a scroll.

Then an amazing thing happened; the Holy Spirit told Philip to go and talk to the man. Even though this man was an important government official, Philip ran toward the man and asked him, “What are you reading? Do you understand it?” The man answered, “How can I unless someone teaches me? Come up in the chariot and tell me.” The man was reading a prophecy about Jesus coming as Messiah! Phillip then explained the Gospel message to the man, and he became a believer. He knew that the way to find Jesus was through the Old Testament Scriptures. (Luke 24:45) Having placed his faith in Christ, he asked Philip to baptize him, and Philip did. Most likely, many people heard about Jesus from this official. Philip “...kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.” (Acts 8:40)



**Application:** The Holy Spirit will lead us to people whom He has prepared to receive Christ. All we need to do is to be willing for the Holy Spirit to lead us.

We should always be on the lookout for those who are seeking the answer, but need some help understanding the way. After they become Christians, people still need for someone more mature to be with them and continue teaching them, to mature them.



**QUESTIONS:** Did you notice that Philip was prepared to talk to the man. That takes commitment, time and effort, but we have a command as well as a real need to teach others about Jesus. Will you be one of those? (Wait for answer)



Philip was traveling and sharing the Good News to those he met, perhaps heading for Gaza, one of the main cities of the Philistines. Think of the impact he could have there. At the onset, it seems a very small negligible target, but consider the results of the gospel going to Ethiopia. BUT, the target was not Gaza, but Egypt and the Ethiopian man.



**Note:** This is the time to **share the importance of baptism** and what it means, and a new Christian should be baptized as soon as possible. Philip clearly understood this fact. (Acts 8:12) Use Romans 6:1-10 to explain the death, burial, and resurrection of the individual who has received Christ and that baptism is a picture of their own “death, burial, and resurrection in Christ!” The word “baptize” (*baptizō*) always means immersion (see Acts 8:38, going down into the water, coming up out of the water).

## Story 12 – Conversion of Saul - Acts 9:1-6, 10-19

**The Scriptures:** “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was



approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He *said*, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.’” (Acts 9:1-6)

**The Story:** A man named Saul, a devout Jew, has been persecuting the early church and believers. One day while on his way to get more Jews to take back to Jerusalem, the Lord appeared unto Him in a blinding light and said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul replied, “Who are you Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Saul got up from the ground, and even though his eyes were open he could not see. The men traveling with him heard a great sound, but did not see anyone; they took him by the hand to Damascus. He was unable to see for three days and he did not eat or drink.

**Notes:** Saul considered himself a righteous man, committed to stopping the “unrighteous” followers of Jesus (called followers of the Way), even if he had to murder them. He even asked the religious authorities for permission to go far away to find the followers of Jesus [both men and women] who moved from Jerusalem and arrest them. Not only did they give Saul that authority, they also sent soldiers to help him. Saul started out for Damascus on a six-day journey. Damascus was a very important city and it seems many disciples had fled there following the stoning death of Stephen.

As he was nearing Damascus, Saul was suddenly surrounded by a great light. Even though it was daylight, the light was brighter than the sun. And words were spoken to him that only he heard. (His traveling companions only heard a sound.) The voice accused him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul was stunned, he asked, “Who are you Lord?” The next words would change Saul’s life: “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting!” Saul was very frightened. With a trembling voice he asked, “What do You want me to do?” And Jesus told him to go to Damascus (nearby city) and there he would find out.

**The Scriptures:** “Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> And the Lord *said* to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; <sup>16</sup> for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” Acts 9:10-16 (NASB) .



In Damascus, there was a man by the name of Ananias and the Lord had spoken to him in a vision and told him to go to the place where he would find Saul praying. Ananias began to say that this man had persecuted Christians and done much damage to many believers and has authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.

The Lord spoke to Ananias and told him, "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument [vessel] to carry My name before the Gentiles, kings, and the Sons of Israel, I will show him how much he must suffer for My name."

So Ananias left and entered the house and placed his hands upon Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling has sent me so you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit!" At once something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he regained his sight and got up and was baptized in obedience to the Word of God.

**Notes:** In Damascus, a man called Ananias was spoken to by God in a vision. God told him to go to where Saul was. God also told him that Saul was blind and was praying and awaiting him to arrive there so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias immediately began making excuses for not obeying God. He said, "Lord, you do not understand, this man will cause me trouble, he is very dangerous." Note that this is a human reaction to a problem that was not designed to be handled by humans – God wanted to use Ananias.



**Application:** Obedience always follows faith. When one prays to receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into that man and never leaves, filling Him with the person of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. He is never the same again; that man becomes a New Creature in Christ and begins to walk under the control of the Holy Spirit.



**NOTE:** God not only calls people to salvation, but He also calls them to service, as well. Here God calls Saul, a man who is trained in the Old Testament Scriptures, and gives him the light he needs to become a missionary to all the people who were not children of Abraham. He was a logical choice, since he was familiar with the people who lived in Asia. (But first He blinds him in order that the light might be given to him.) The story of Ananias demonstrates being set apart for doing God's will. Even though Paul had persecuted believers, Ananias trusts God and obeys His words.



**QUESTION:** Ananias, a more mature believer, was commanded by God to help Saul. A command that included the possibility of some danger to Ananias – would you be an Ananias to someone should God give you that instruction?

### Story 13 – Peter Sees a Sheet from Heaven with Unclean Animals - Acts 10:9-16



**The Scriptures:** “On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he \*saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all *kinds of* four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.’ Again a voice *came* to him a second time, ‘What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy.’ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.” (Acts 10:9-16)

**The Story:** In a city named Caesarea **there was a soldier named Cornelius, who was a very high ranking officer in the army. He and his family worshiped God. He did many acts of charity for the Jewish people and was a man of prayer. About three o'clock in the afternoon he had a vision, and an angel of the Lord spoke to him, “Cornelius your prayers and acts have come up before God; send men and call for Peter to come to your house.” At the same time, God was getting Simon Peter prepared to minister to Cornelius.** God knew that Peter would have a problem talking to a Gentile about his God. It was a problem in Simon Peter’s eyes, not in God’s eyes. God knew all along that all nations were going to be able to turn to Him, but the children of Abraham somehow thought that God was reserved for them alone. God was going to confront Simon Peter in an exceptional way.

One day, about noon (a prayer time set by tradition), Simon Peter was on his housetop praying, when all of a sudden a large cloth appeared before him in a vision (point to the story in the cloth). Its contents alarmed Peter. It was full of all of the kinds of things which Peter had been taught were unclean that he was not to eat. What Peter heard next not only shocked him, but challenged his entire belief. “Peter, kill and eat.” Simon Peter thought, “How could I ever do such a thing?” Simon Peter thought that to eat those unclean things would make him unfaithful to God. The response was: “What God has cleansed you must not call unclean!”



**Application:** As a Christian, we must abide by the teachings of the Word of God and not be bound by ritual, custom, or tradition if they conflict with the Word of God. That is why it is imperative that all Christians belong to a church that teaches the Word of God and also to have a Bible from which you or one of your children can read to you or someone who can accurately tell you the stories of Scripture. The only way you can grow as a Child of God is to become teachable, learn the Scriptures, and obey them. Did you note that Simon Peter answered, “No, Lord!” Here is a man who is a leader of the Way, accustomed to Jesus, and who was saying “no!” How could Jesus be “Lord” in his mind and Peter say “no” to Him?



What made things clean or unclean? It was the Law. (Lev. 20:25-27) What was the significance? Observing this prohibition would give clear evidence that Holy God had separated for Himself a people (Descendants of Abraham) whom He would call "Mine." This would be a good time to remind learners that before Abram everyone was a Gentile. What was Peter's main difficulty? It was the teaching of his life – those who were not children of Abraham were unclean, not to be trusted. He had even been taught not to let them touch him or his food, for they would make him unclean. Now, Simon Peter was being asked to testify to a Gentile about salvation! Why would he even want to do that? Christians must be careful not to believe the same kinds of things Peter was taught when we look at other people. What could change Simon Peter's mind-set? Only grace through obedience – What God calls clean IS!



**QUESTIONS:** Do you, as Peter, allow your traditions and customs to enter into your understanding of God's purposes and will? Are you teachable? What should your reaction be when someone confronts what you have been taught in the past?

## Story 14 – Cornelius - Acts 10:1-8; 24-48

(NOTE: Remember, God had already been working to prepare Peter to be His servant in the life of a man named Cornelius who had also had a vision from the Lord.)



**The Scriptures:** "Now *there was* a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the *Jewish* people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had *just* come in and said to him, 'Cornelius!' And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said to him, 'Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now dispatch *some* men to Joppa and send for a man *named* Simon, who is also called Peter.'" (Acts 10:1-5)

**The Story:** **In a town nearby there was a soldier named Cornelius, who was a very high ranking officer in the army. He and his family worshiped God. He did many acts of charity for the Jewish people and was a man of prayer.**

**About three o'clock in the afternoon, he had a vision and an angel of the Lord spoke to him, "Cornelius, your prayers and acts have come up before God; send men and call for Peter to come to your house." Peter was on the house praying and thinking about all that the Lord had shown him when the Spirit told him that these three men were coming, and were there. They explained why they were there and asked Peter to accompany them to Cornelius' house, and so he went with the men.**

**The Scriptures:** "Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there.



While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.' Peter went down to the men and said, 'Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?' They said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was *divinely* directed by a holy angel to send for you *to come* to his house and hear a message from you.'"

(Acts 10:17-22)

**The Story:** *By the time they got there, many family members and others had gathered, and Cornelius told Peter of his vision and why he sent for Peter, so that all present could hear what the Lord has given you to say to us.*

**The Scriptures:** "So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.'

Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)' " (Acts 10:33-36)

**The Story:** What then followed was Simon Peter telling the Gospel message to Cornelius and those others in the room. Beginning with John the Baptizer, continuing through the sinless life of Jesus, His death by crucifixion and ultimate resurrection, Peter ends by recalling the command to tell all about the wonderful story of God's grace-full salvation – EVERYONE who believes in Him can receive forgiveness of sin.

**The Scriptures:** "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also and they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?' And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days." (Acts 10:44-48)

**The Story:** *So Peter began to preach Jesus, and when he finished, the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the message and all believed and were baptized.*

The Jewish men were astounded that the Gentile converts were acting just like the Jewish converts at Pentecost. Peter commented, "How can we refuse to baptize them? They have the Holy Spirit, just like we do." And they were the first Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit and be baptized into the family of God. **Thus, the Gospel is now given to the Gentiles.**



**NOTE:** Please perceive the difference between Simon Peter and Cornelius. Simon Peter, a devout child of Abraham said "no" three times, while Cornelius, a non-believing Gentile said "yes" immediately. It was Peter's pride that kept him from being immediately obedient, and pride will do the same in our lives, as well.



**Concerning those who spoke in tongues:** God used this unique experience to confirm to the cautious (or even doubting) Jews that the Holy Spirit did, in fact, enter (come upon) the lives of Gentiles who believed. We should not expect or demand that every person who repents and believes in Jesus should (or will) have the same experience. There is NO ONE in bondage to sin that God's grace cannot liberate.



Jesus.

**Application:** It is not enough that a man is a good man, or even a righteous one...that same man needs forgiveness of his sin, and the only one who can do that is Jesus Christ the Son of God. God uses obedient believers to tell others about



**QUESTIONS:** Are you willing to share Christ with others, no matter how different they are from you?

**Story 15 – Famine in Land** (The disciples sent with offering to assist those without food.) **Acts 11:27-30**



**The Scriptures:** “Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.” (Acts 11:27-30)

**The Story:** Because the hand of the Lord was on the church in Antioch, it was multiplying. Barnabas (an experienced missionary and teacher) was sent from Jerusalem to assist the church leaders there. When he saw how great the growth was, he decided to go to Tarsus and find Saul – who, sometime after his conversion on the road to Damascus, was renamed Paul. (Acts 13:9) Paul had prior experience preaching to Gentiles and Jews, and so Paul led in the mission effort in Antioch. Once, while they were ministering, a prophet from Jerusalem named Agabus told them that a great famine was coming, and the believers in Judea were going to be very much in need because they were so poor. **As this began in the days of Saul...the early church decided that they needed to take up an offering and send it by Saul and Barnabas.** So these new believers, together, decided to show their love for the believers in Judea and collected money to be sent to help them when the famine arrived. Even though they were not like them, or did not know them, they understood helping others was important and demonstrated that change in their hearts.

**Note: Much like Maasai Land, Israel is often plagued with famine and drought.**



**Application:** Because all believers are part of the family of God, we must be aware when we see His people hurting and be ready for God to use us to meet needs.



**QUESTION:** When Paul lived in Tarsus for several years after his conversion, he may have thought that his sins in persecuting the church were too great for God to forgive him. Remember, Paul gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen. Have you ever wondered if God could forgive you or use you?

### Story 16 – Peter in Jail - Doors Opened by Angel - Acts 12:1-12

**The Scriptures:** “Now about that time, Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.” (Acts 12:1-4)



**The Story:** (During this time) Herod (Agrippa), the King, began to really persecute the church. He had James, one of the leaders in the church, killed. When he saw that it pleased the religious people, he arrested Peter and had him put in jail and planned to execute him after the huge festival that was being held (Unleavened Bread). But, while Peter was in jail, the church was praying for him day and night.

**The Scriptures:** “So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter’s side and woke him up, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. And he \*said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.” (Acts 12:5-9)

**The Story:** On the night before Herod was going to execute Peter, while he was in jail guarded by a host of soldiers and in chains, during the middle of the night an angel of the Lord came and a light shone over the cell; the angel woke Peter and told him to get up, get dressed, and leave. The chains fell off, the door opened, and Peter walked out free in Christ. The angel walked with him through all the gates, and even the main gate leading into the city. As they came to each gate, they all opened by themselves.

As they passed through the last gate and into the city, the angel disappeared. Peter hardly knew what was happening, in sort of a trance until outside, and then he knew that the Lord had set him free.

**The Scriptures:** “When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter came to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’” (Acts 12:10-11)



**The Story:** He went to the house of Mary (John Mark's mother) and knocked on the door. Several believers inside were praying for him, and finally Rhoda came and saw who it was and was so surprised that she did not open the door but ran to tell the others. Finally, after a while when they were through debating whether it was Peter or his angel, they opened the door and let him in.

**The Scriptures:** "And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, 'It is his angel.' But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Report these things to James and the brethren.' Then he left and went to another place." (Acts 12:12-17)

**Summary:** James, the brother of John, was the first apostle to be persecuted and killed. Most think he was beheaded. How sad for us to learn that the Jewish people were happy that they had silenced him and he was now out of their way. It happened just before a very holy time for the Jews, one on which they celebrated their release and escape from the Pharaoh, King of Egypt. King Herod saw that James' death made the people happy, so he decided to kill Peter as well. He arrested him and put him in jail (this was his third time, 4:3; 5:18) with a four-squad (each with four men) special guard 24 hours a day. That's 16 guards for one man who was not guilty of a horrible crime.

He was chained to two guards, and the other two guarded to door. From Herod's point of view, escape was impossible (maybe he remembered the time when the apostles escaped from jail without a door being opened and the guards at the door unaware that the prisoners were not inside, but had disappeared, Acts 5:22).

When the church members heard Peter was arrested, they started to pray that the trial would turn out in Peter's favor, or if not, that they would have strength to endure the persecution and cruelty (Cf. 5:40). But Holy God had different plans. On the very night before his trial was to take place, sometime between 4 and 6 in the early morning, an angel sent by the Lord appeared to Peter in his jail cell. Peter was sleeping soundly, apparently not worried about tomorrow. The angel touched Peter and said "Wake up! Get dressed for travel!"

Immediately the chains on Peter's wrists fell off. "Follow me out of the prison," the angel instructs Peter. Peter did not really understand what was happening (thought he was dreaming?), but he followed the angel just as he was told. As they approached the main gate, it opened by itself (with the power of God) and the angel disappeared. On the outside of the prison the angel went back to God, and Peter, now understanding what was taking place, went back to his church family.



**Application:** How many times do we pray for something, and down deep in our hearts we really do not believe God will answer, and when He does we are shocked? God always answers our prayers if we ask them in faith believing.

(a) Sometimes He says “wait, not right now,” so He can answer them at a different time, or in a better way; (b) At times He answers “No” because He knows to give us what we ask for will not be good for us; (c) Often He will answer them “Yes,” and this serves to encourage us in the walk with Him. A key to contentment is to learn to be satisfied with whatever answer God deems best (Phil 4:11-12).



God, in releasing Peter (don't miss the implications of the Passover time frame), demonstrated that His plan was invested in those who believed and received Jesus, His Son. God still has a plan for the people of Israel, but not for the man-made traditions they now saw more acceptable than God Himself.



**QUESTIONS:** When Luke wrote this account, he was writing to a man to whom he was trying to explain things about Jesus and the church. Why do you think he included this story? How do you think Peter felt while he was waiting to be executed in jail? How do you see Peter's release from jail affecting his life? How do you suppose it would affect yours? There is no mention of how the guards reacted; how do you think they did?

### **Story 17 – Paul and Barnabas...Anointed with Power, Preaching and Planting Churches - Acts 13:1-4, 14:19-23** *(Point to men laying hands on another).*

**The Scriptures:** “While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:2-4)



“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.’ When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:19-23)

**The Story:** After Barnabas and Paul brought the offering to Jerusalem and gave it to the leaders there, then returned to Antioch (Antioch was now the center of missions work in the church). After a time, the church, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, commissioned Barnabas and Paul to focus on the great commission Jesus gave to the church – make disciples. Many people became believers on their journey; some were Jews who left Jerusalem, and others (Gentiles) citizens of the towns where they preached.

People were coming to God. It should have been a time of rejoicing, but the Jews were very angry that the Gentiles were becoming believers, so they started to speak against Paul and Barnabas.

**While preaching and teaching in Lystra, the people became disturbed and took Paul and began stoning him...and left him for dead. Some of his brethren came and took him away, and the next day he and Barnabas left for another city (Derbe). They are now going from city to city preaching Jesus and planting churches everywhere... people became believers. They began to set aside elders and church leaders in each of the new churches.**

Having been set aside by the church at Antioch, they returned there to report all that God had done on their mission trip.

**The Scriptures:** “From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples.” (Acts 14:26-28)

**The Story:** **As the church began to grow, so did the opposition. And Paul and Barnabas went from city to city proclaiming the Good News on their way to Jerusalem, where they were received with open arms and much rejoicing as the two shared all that God had done on this journey.**



**Application:** We are to preach, testify, share the Good News and leave the results to the Lord, understanding (sadly) that some have become their own god and will not surrender to the Lordship of Jesus. When we bring God’s message to people, even when an immediate response is not seen, the seeds are, and will be, forever.



**QUESTIONS:** What, in your opinion, did Jesus mean when He said, “Blessed are you WHEN people insult, persecute and tell lies about you because of Me?” (Matthew 5:11-12) Do you think you will be able to “Rejoice and be glad?”

## Story 18 – Paul and Silas in Jail - Acts 16:22-30



**The Scriptures:** “It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, ‘These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.’ She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!’ And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities.” (Acts 16:16-19)



**The Story:** Paul and Silas are now going from city to city preaching Jesus, and the hostility and growth are increasing, too. One day as they were going to someone's house for prayer, there was a girl who was possessed with a demon of prediction. She made large sums of money for her owners. She began to follow them for days shouting, "These men are servants of the most High God, and they are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." Paul, being greatly perplexed, turned to the spirit and commanded that it come out of her, and it did immediately. The owners were very angry and seized them both, taking them to the authorities and accusing them of falsehoods. They were beaten and thrown into prison, and the guard was ordered to keep them secure.

**The Scriptures:** "When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened." (Acts 16:23-26)

**The Story:** He put them into the inner part of the prison and bound them in shackles. About midnight, after having been beaten and thrown in prison, Paul and Silas were singing and praying to the Lord. As the prisoners were listening in, a great earth-quake occurred that opened the cell doors and loosed their all the prisoners chains.

**The Scriptures:** "When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!' And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" (Acts 16:27-3)

**The Story:** When the jailer awoke and saw the cell doors opened, he became distraught because he knew that if the prisoners escaped he would be killed. But Paul called out for him not to take his own life for we are all here. Then the jailer came and fell at their feet and asked "What must I do to be saved?" And Paul answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and your household!" He and all of his household were saved and baptized that very night.



**Application:** One never knows when God will create an opportunity for us to share Jesus. We must be in proper relationship with the Lord all the time so that the Holy Spirit can use us to preach the Gospel in any situation, for He is in control all the time in every place, even in jail!!! The key is being sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and then being obedient.



**QUESTIONS:** In many countries, people are persecuted and even killed for just saying they are followers of Jesus. Why do they keep on going in spite of this?



Once there was a man who asked another man who was being persecuted for his witness, “Did you expect to be treated this way?” The man answered him, “In the morning, do you ask your children to come to the window and exclaim, ‘look the sun came up today?’” The first man said, “No, we expect it to come up” – and then caught the idea!

### Story 19 – Paul and Silas Going from City to City - Acts 17:1-12

**The Scriptures:** “Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.” (Acts 17:1-5)



“The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.” (Acts 17:10-12)

**The Story:** *The ministry is now really growing, and Paul and Silas are traveling even more as they go from city to city and province to province preaching, teaching, and ministering the Good News. Some cities were open to their message and many received; but in other places the message was rejected, and they were cast out of the cities or sometimes beaten and thrown in jail.*

After their ministry in Philippi (Paul left Luke to lead the ministry there), Paul and the men with him set out for Thessalonica, a city very far away (160.9 kilometers = 100 miles). It was a long distance, so Paul most likely used horses to travel. On the way, they stopped at several cities telling people about Jesus and the Gospel message. When they arrived at Thessalonica, Paul went to the Jewish synagogue for three weeks talking with the men there about the Gospel message. Many men and women were converted and began following Jesus, becoming people of “the Way.” In fact, so many people became believers that Paul and the men were accused of “turning the world upside down.” The religious Jews were outraged and accused Paul of many things that were not true. They even hired lazy, worthless people to stage a riot in order to get Paul and the others in trouble. But while the riot was taking place, they could not find Paul or any of the others, so they wrongly accused Jason, a man with whom Paul was staying. But the authorities didn’t punish them for lack of evidence. It is encouraging to see that the next city Paul visited (Berea) reacted totally different than Thessalonica.

In fact, they were opposite, hearing Paul and then taking time to study the Scriptures to check if Paul was teaching truth and, if so, better understand what he was teaching.



**Application:** We need to emphasize that we are just messengers. It is the Holy Spirit's responsibility to convict and to save those who will receive His message. We must keep in mind that God saved us to spread His Word through us personally.



**QUESTIONS:** When persecution comes and lies are told about you, to what will you turn to deal with it? Does it surprise you that some Jews from Thessalonica traveled the distance to Berea (96.5 kilometers=60 miles) to oppose Paul's teachings about Jesus? Why or why not? Does it take more faith to tell people who will reject the Gospel than to tell people who will accept the Gospel? How will it make you feel when people you are telling want to learn more and follow better? What will your actions be then?



### Story 20 – Paul and the Unknown God - Acts 17:16-34

**The Scriptures:** “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.” (Acts 17:16-17)

“So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.’” (Acts 17:22-23)

**The Story:** As they continued on their message tour, they came to the city of Athens. As they walked through the streets they saw all these icons, idols, statues to different gods. And one they came to was a monument to “The Unknown God.” This was the most interesting one to Paul...for it said that if they had left any gods out this was for that one. Paul being troubled went to the synagogue of the Jews and began to discuss and preach to them. They noticed that he was a well learned person and were curious about this “new god” that He was teaching. Finally, they began to gather in the great arena and Paul began to address the “Unknown God” and said, “I have come to tell you about Him.”

**The Scriptures:** “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:24-31)

**The Story:** Paul began by giving them the background of God's creation and His movement throughout the centuries. In times past, God overlooked the ignorance of man, but no longer. He is now calling all men to repent. So, he began sharing Jesus with them...many wanted to hear more, and some repented then and received Christ. Others mocked him.

**The Scriptures:** “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, ‘We shall hear you again concerning this.’ So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” (Acts 17:32-34)

**Notes:** Things became more dangerous in Berea for Paul and the men, so the people of Berea helped Paul to get out of town and start their journey to Athens. Athens was a very wicked city that was full of idolatry with many statues that represented each of the many gods they worshiped. In fact, Athens was the very center of idol worship in that area. Just seeing so many statues grieved Paul that he felt compelled to tell the people about Jesus. The first place Paul went to teach was the synagogue (as was his practice). He then went every day to the place where the market was located. The men of Athens, did not understand Paul, so they took him to a hill (Areopagus, after their god of war—Ares) sometimes called Mars Hill (after the Roman god of war—Mars) where people gathered to talk about different things. There, Paul told them about the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. On that hill Paul saw a statue that was dedicated to an “unknown god.” Pointing to it, Paul said there is another God, a Holy One, who has no needs (like their gods), who has all knowledge (unlike their gods), who was the Creator of everything (their gods did not and could not), nor is He dependent on what anyone does. He then told them about idolatry and sin (that it was wrong), the need for people to repent from sin, how God will judge everyone who ever lived, and especially about salvation through Jesus who was raised from the dead. Some who heard Paul laughed and scoffed at him. Some said, “We will think about it,” and others accepted what he said as truth, becoming believers.



**Application:** Some people know that there is a God, but do not understand that He had a Son who died for them. God has sent us to tell them about Jesus and how to receive Him! Always be observant in the place you are visiting.



Notice that while Paul, having no time to prepare a speech, was talking to the people of Athens, he used illustrations from the people they held in high regard. Two times he used quotes from their greatest thinkers (Epimenides and Aratus) using what they knew to introduce them to what they did not know. It is always easier to start sharing with people when you know something about what they believe and customs.



**QUESTIONS:** Have you sufficiently prepared to share the Gospel message whenever there is an opportunity to do so? If you were trying to tell others about Jesus, what stories from Scripture or your life would/could you use to illustrate that truth? When you go to talk to another about the saving message of Jesus, do you take time to find out something about them?



## Story 21 –God Appeared to Paul in a Night Vision to Encourage Him - Acts 18:6,9

**The Scriptures:** “After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.” (Acts 18:1) “And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” (Acts 18:4-6)



**The Story:** Paul and Silas are now in Corinth, a very wicked and carnal city. He was preaching to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Son of God). But, they resisted and blasphemed; Paul shook out his clothes and said, “Your blood is on your own heads; I am clean. From this day forward, I will go to the Gentiles (explain that everyone who is not a Jew is a Gentile...that is you and me, as well).”

**The Scriptures:** “And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.’ And he settled *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” (Acts 18:9-11)

**The Story:** Some of the Jews believed and were baptized, as well as many Corinthians. Then the Lord appeared to Paul in a night vision (apparently Paul was a little discouraged and afraid due to the response of the Jews in the city). The Lord said to Paul, “Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city.” Paul remained for 18 months, teaching the Word of God to the people.

**Notes:** After the ministry at Athens, the team (Paul and the others) went to Corinth. It was several days away (74 Kilometers=46 miles). Because of its location, Corinth was considered by many to be the intellectual capital of the world.

Paul most likely had great expectations there. The Bible teaches us that he said, “I came to you with weakness, in fear, and in much trembling—that your faith should not be in man’s wisdom, but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5) But when he preached to the Jews, they turned the truth aside and were hostile toward him, which highly bothered Paul. He told them, “your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean,” which meant “you have made a poor decision, and now you will have to bear the consequences!” Then he said, “Now I am going to preach to the Gentiles instead of you.” He must have been very disappointed in their decision, because he very much wanted his people to become believers in Jesus. So, he left the synagogue and went to the house next door where a Gentile man named Justus lived.

In Corinth Paul was, surrounded by sin, extreme idolatry, and even two idol temples where people used sex as a way of worship; and when he preached, his message was rejected.

Several people believed in Jesus, including Crispus, the leader of the synagogue. Paul was joined by several other men and women (Aquila, Priscilla, Timothy and Silas). Paul must have had some reservation about his decision, maybe nervousness or apprehension in going to the Gentiles. It was while he was in that state that God appeared to him in a vision and told him not to be afraid to speak because He would be with him, and no one would hurt him. Besides, there were other God-fearing people in the city of whom Paul had no knowledge. With God's assurance, Paul had new confidence and stayed in Corinth for one and a half years teaching the Word of God.



**Application:** There will be times that we may become discouraged, but we must remember that the Holy Spirit now resides in us, and He is the one who gives us assurance, provision, protection, and ministry...have we been obedient to His purpose: "Sharing Jesus with everyone with whom we have the opportunity?"



While in Corinth, Paul saw many come to Christ, including Crispus (leader of synagogue), Gaius (of the house of Stephanas, 1 Corinthians 1:14-16), and possibly Stephanas himself (1 Corinthians 16:15). Later, he stated that he was the house guest of Gaius. These three men were very influential in Paul's life. Real relationships are forged in ministry; lasting relationships that are used and demonstrated in and to the Kingdom.



**QUESTIONS:** When Paul preached in the synagogue in Corinth, the Jews rejected and even blasphemed the Gospel of Jesus. What will you do when the message of Jesus you bring to others is rejected? (Paul went next door and continued.)

## Story 22 – Seven Sons of Sceva, a Jewish Priest, Trying to Cast out a Demon in Their Own Power - Acts 19:11-20



**The Scriptures:** "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this." (Acts 19:11-14)

**The Story:** *God was performing many miracles at the hand of Paul, and some of the itinerant Jewish vagabonds (the sons of a Jewish Priest who went from place to place supposedly casting out demons) attempted to do the same by saying the name of Jesus over those who had evil spirits saying, "I command you by the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.*

**The Scriptures:** "And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified." (Acts 19:15-17)

**The Story:** The evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize—but who are you?” Then the man, who had the evil spirit, leaped on them and overpowered them; and all of them ran out of the house naked and wounded. This spread all over Ephesus, and great fear came upon the people, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

**Notes:** As in Corinth, Paul started speaking in the Jewish synagogue and, as in Corinth, the Jewish religious community resisted. They were hard and vocal doubters. The more Paul taught, the harder and more incorrigible they became. Finally, just as he did in Corinth, Paul left the synagogue and began teaching in the hall of Tyrannus (19:9). He taught during the day, six days a week for two years, and, after a while, the gospel was heard throughout the area. Many people were becoming believers and were being healed by God through Paul’s ministry. But, as in our world today, there were men in the town who longed for position, power, and wealth. These men saw Paul’s popularity and decided to get some of it for themselves. Not understanding the power that drove Paul’s seeming success, they attempted to imitate what Paul was doing, even to the point of mimicking Paul’s words about Jesus. However, their eyes were not focused on Paul’s Jesus, but on Paul’s popularity and the perceived profit available. As they attempted to cast out the demon, the demon did not obey them (as he would have obeyed Paul). Instead, the man, under the influence of the demons, jumped on the seven sons, beat them up, and they ran out of the house wounded and naked!

When the people of the town heard about what happened to those seven men, they were very frightened because they finally realized the power of Jesus. They even went around magnifying His Name. The God was demonstrated to have power be over the demon world.



**Application:** To copy what someone else does that you have seen or heard about can be spiritually dangerous. The desire to do that is rooted in pride. Doing things like this to make you more popular can lead to deep spiritual attack in your own life!



Many of the believers saw the implications of demonic materials or books they had for practicing magic. They went through their homes, collected those things, and brought them to a place and burned them so everyone could see what they were doing. That had impact on the Word of God being shared with greater intensity and effectiveness.

**The Scriptures:** “Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” (Acts 19:18-20)

**The Story:** Many who had become believers came forth confessing their pagan practices that they had mixed in with their Christian beliefs and brought their books on witchcraft and burned them before the people, and the price of all that was burned was about 50,000 pieces of silver. In this way, the message of the Lord flourished and prevailed.

**Notes:** These fairly new Christians, who began to clean up their own lives, who came and divulged their hidden practices, confessed what they were doing in private. It is probable they had never believed anything was wrong with these practices. But the teaching of Scripture illuminated to them the kingdom of God, and they began to see that what they had been doing held them in bondage. They were weak and fearful, upset and distressed within themselves and now they saw the reason. So they began to confess all this and therefore to be free from their bondage. And that, in turn, influenced the pagans in the city who began to take a second look at their own practices. The practice of magic arts was common. They brought their books together and burned them when they became Christians under the influence and power of the gospel, and thus they were set free from their own deadly delusion.



**Application:** The influence of the world is greater than any of us can imagine. The greatest problem is best seen in the book of Judges where it states, “...everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Doing things to make yourself more acceptable to the world can lead to deep spiritual attack in your own life!



**QUESTIONS:** How popular are you in heaven? Does God know you? What is the problem of imitating others for your own gain?



**The implications of ministry** - The success of the Gospel in Ephesus had one additional result. So many citizens were becoming believers and aware of the moral wrongs being done in idolatry that they ceased from buying statues and charms about those idols. Especially impacted were the craftsmen who made little images of the shrine at the Temple of Diana. The believers no longer sought their wares, and their income was being drastically reduced. One craftsman started a riot. He wanted money more than godliness.

When the church effectively spreads the gospel, Satan will arouse opposition. But, remember that “...the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, [not worldly, not the ordinary human plans and programs] but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5).

### Story 23 – Paul Leaves Ephesus for the Last Time - Acts 20:16-25, 28-32, 36-38

**The Scriptures:** “For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, ‘You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.’” (Acts 20:16-23)





“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.’” (Acts 20:24-25)

**The Story:** Paul is about to leave Ephesus, probably his favorite place to minister, and he knows that he will never see these wonderful brethren again. He knows that as he returns to Jerusalem, that town after town is ready to bind him in chains. But he says, “I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the Gospel of God's grace. I have been faithful to the calling of God and have not veered to one side or the other with the truth.”

**The Scriptures:** “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:28-32)

**The Story:** (Paul said to them), **Therefore, be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Lord has given you. I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in to destroy the work, and men from among you will rise up with a different doctrine to lure the disciples away from my teaching. Paul says that I have spent three years teaching and preaching the truth, so stay true to this teaching. I now commit you to the Lord and to the message of His grace which is able to build you up in the faith.**

**The Scriptures:** “When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.” (Acts 20:36-38)

**The Story:** **After saying this, Paul knelt down and prayed with all of them, there was much weeping and sorrow at his leaving, and they began embracing and kissing him as he departed to the ship.**

**Note:** Paul had spent three years with the people in Ephesus. Over the course of time, a church had been planted and growth was taking place. Leaders were appointed who were able to continue the ministry in Paul's absence. It was time for him to continue on the mission to which he was appointed and called, so Paul encouraged the leaders to continue the work and to finish well. They would be able to do this because Paul had taught them well and equipped them for ministry. Before he left, Paul knelt down and prayed with all of them.



**Application:** Once we have led people to the Lord, there is a special bond with that person or people that is closer than any other. They become a part of our spiritual family. They will always be brothers and sisters in Christ. This is why belonging to a church is so important: to learn, to share, and to fellowship with one another and to encourage each other in the Lord.



**QUESTIONS:** Why do you feel it was important to Paul to speak to the leaders of the churches again? Are you allowing yourself to draw close to the people with whom you are in ministry? Have you ever felt in need of encouragement in your ministry? Who do you feel may be in need of encouragement?

### Story 24 – Paul’s Message Rejected in Jerusalem - Acts 22:22-26



**The Scriptures:** “And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ They listened to him up to this statement, and *then* they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!’ And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard *this*, he went to the commander and told him, saying, ‘What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.’” (Acts 22:21-26)

**The Story:** When Paul returned to Jerusalem, much persecution occurred and he found himself confronted by a huge Jewish mob. As he began to preach and share his personal experience, the mob became angry and began shouting, “Wipe this man off the earth, it is a disgrace for him to live.”

The commander then ordered him brought inside to be flogged and questioned. As the centurion prepared to beat him, Paul asked, “Is it legal for you to scourge a Roman citizen that is not condemned?” The centurion went immediately to his commander, and he came to Paul and asked if he was a Roman citizen. Paul answered, “Yes!” The next day they took him before the Sanhedrin to be questioned; Paul told them his story. The High Priest ordered him slapped in the face and Paul rebuked him. Upon hearing that this was a High Priest, Paul repented, and realizing that the crowd was a mixture of Pharisees and Sadducees, he began speaking about the resurrection of the dead. Immediately a dispute broke out between the Sadducees (who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead) and the Pharisees. The commander ordered his troops down to rescue Paul and took him to safety inside.



**Application:** God has a way of getting His Word out when we are obedient, even when there is danger present or threatened. The key is to keep our focus on Jesus.



**QUESTIONS:** Paul knew he was in danger when he desired to go to Rome. Why do you think he kept that desire deep in his heart? (Acts 19:21)

## Story 25 – Jesus Standing by Paul, Always Faithful - Acts 23:11

**The Scriptures:** “But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.” (Acts 23:11)



**The Story:** The following night, the Lord visited Paul and said, “Have courage! For as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” Paul had always wanted to go to Rome and preach, and now the Lord gave His approval. The hatred for Paul was at a fever pitch, and the plot thickens as 40 men bound themselves in an oath swearing that they would not eat or drink again until Paul was dead! A young man, who overheard the plot, ran to the commander and told him not to take Paul before the Sanhedrin the next day for there was a plot to kill him. So the commander ordered his men to take Paul to Felix the governor. Felix read the order from the commander and told Paul that he would listen to his case when his accusers appeared before him. He then ordered Paul to be taken to Herod's prison and kept there until the time of the hearing.

**Notes:** After his confrontation and accusation with the Sanhedrin, Paul was taken (for his own safety) to the barracks of the Roman guard. The following night, Jesus encouraged him.

“Be of good cheer, Paul; for you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” (Acts 23:11) When the Sanhedrin refused to condemn Paul, the Jews hated him even more. So intense was their hatred, they made a pact that they would not eat again until they killed him. Paul's nephew found about it and warned Paul of the plan to kill him. Paul sent him to the soldiers who took Paul away under heavy guard from the area to Felix, the governor. A few days after Festus took over Paul appeared before him at the request of the Jewish leaders. As they made their accusations with no evidence, Paul told them that he was innocent of all these charges and demanded to be sent to Caesar in Rome, so Festus said, “And so it shall be.” (See Acts 23:1-25:12)



**Application:** We need to share the Good News of Jesus everywhere God sends us. The Great Commission was given for a reason—God wants us to make disciples as we travel throughout the land. Disciples are **made**, not **born**.



**QUESTIONS:** For what purpose do you suppose the Lord saved you? Let me help you with the answer: So that we would become witnesses of and for Him to our people! With whom are you in the process of making a disciple?

## Story 26 – Paul before King Agrippa - Acts 26:25-29

**The Scriptures:** “Then Agrippa *said* to Festus, ‘I also would like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he *said*, ‘you shall hear him.’” (Acts 25:22)

“So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.’



While *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus \*said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad.' But Paul \*said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' Agrippa *replied* to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.' And Paul *said*, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.' The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had gone aside, they *began* talking to one another, saying, 'This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.' And Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.' " (Acts 26:22-32)

**The Story:** (After appealing to Caesar, Paul remained in the custody of Felix and then Festus for two years.) **Paul's time finally came, and he appeared before the King to give his story; he took this opportunity to share his personal testimony of how he became a Christian. As he finished, the King asked a very interesting question: "Are you trying to persuade me to become a Christian?"**

**Paul replied, "I wish before God that you this day would become as I am except for these chains." The King and his wife left, saying that this man has done nothing that deserves death or these chains. Then Agrippa said to Festus that this man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.**

**Notes:** The 23<sup>rd</sup> through 25<sup>th</sup> chapters of Acts deal with Paul's accusation and trial. He was shuffled back and forth from Felix, then two years later to Festus (who replaced Felix as procurator), and then to King Agrippa II (who was the king of Judea and Samaria and recognized by the Romans as an expert on Judaism). He was being accused of offending the Law (21:28), defiling the Temple (21:28; 24:6), and planning treason against Rome (24:5). He was accused of dissension (24:5-6). Paul had already faced the leaders of the Jewish council, Felix, and Festus concerning these charges, all of whom found nothing in his actions that were deserving of death. He was innocent, yet he was still in prison! Finally he had opportunity to defend himself. Standing before Agrippa II, Paul begins to give his life's story, beginning with his absolute zealous obedience to the Jewish Law and the Temple.

With measured preciseness Paul recounted his conversion on the Damascus road, all the time reminding King Agrippa of the promises and prophecies in Scripture, and the fact that he was guilty of nothing but believing and following them. So convincing was his testimony that the king asked Paul if he was trying to make him a believer as well. Paul answered that he wished he could; in fact, he wanted that everyone present would be just like him, except not being a prisoner. The king then, like all of those before him, came to the conclusion that Paul was not deserving of death, but sent him to Rome because of his request to see Caesar Augustus.



**Application:** God uses even persecution and wrongful imprisonment for His glory and promoting His Kingdom... Now Paul will go to Rome, where God told him in a vision that He would be going! God truly works in mysterious ways in order for His Word to be proclaimed. Just as Paul was going to Rome, so was the gospel!





**QUESTIONS:** During the long years of his imprisonment, how do you think Paul dealt with being there? What was so important about Rome that God wanted Paul there? Did you note the content of Paul's testimony? Can you list the main points? Do you feel your testimony must be as spectacular as Paul's in order for you to share the gospel in hostile circumstances?



### Story 27 – Paul Is Put on a Ship Leaving for Rome - Acts 27: 1-6

**The Scriptures:** “When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care. From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary.

When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.” (Acts 27:1-6)

**The Story:** After his encounter with the Jewish council, standing before the Roman procurators Felix and Festus and even the King of the area, Augustus II, Paul, [because of his demand to appeal his innocence to Caesar Augustus], has to travel to Rome. **Paul's ministry is now coming to an end, and he is leaving Jerusalem for last time aboard ship for Rome. It was a bad time of the year to be on the sea headed for Italy; the winds were high and the weather was very bad, preventing them from making much progress.** The ship that was used to transport Paul, his associates, as well as cargo, was not sufficient to endure a crossing of the Mediterranean Sea during that time of year, so the centurion in charge of the mission selected another vessel for the remainder of the trip.



**Application:** Paul's journey to Rome included many harrowing experiences, yet Paul steadfastly remained calm, making decisions that affirmed his confidence in completing the journey. Confidence which was no doubt founded on the Lord's promise that he “would bear witness at Rome.” (Acts 23:11)



**QUESTIONS:** Have you thought of the great promises God has made to take care of you when things are going contrary to your plans?



Without doubt, the entire experience gives solid evidence of God's command and sovereignty over the elements and mankind. Paul was to be used by God in Rome, so it was to Rome he “must go.” **Notice** that Paul received help from “friends in Sidon. Also, note that it was Julius the centurion that God used to treat Paul “kindly.” God is faithful to provide for His servants who are doing His will.



**Additional teaching moment:** Paul was not alone on his voyage; he was accompanied by Luke and a man called Aristarchus, as well. Aristarchus was with Paul in Ephesus during the dispute with the idol makers there. He was at Paul's side in Caesarea. And when Paul was sent to Rome, he was permitted to travel with Paul as an attendant. God works through our relationship with others to meet our needs.



### Panel 28 – Paul’s Ship in Terrible Storm - Acts 27:18-26

**Scriptures:** “The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing *us*, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned. When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, ‘Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. *Yet* now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship.

For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’ Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on a certain island.’ ” (Acts 27:18-26)

**The Story:** The storm became so bad that they began throwing cargo overboard to keep the ship afloat. Paul told them to not sail from Crete, but they would not listen; and finally, the ship was about to break apart in the storm. For fourteen days they fought the storm and many had not eaten any food. During the night Paul had a Word from the Lord that no life would be lost...only the ship. We will run aground on an island. As daylight approached, Paul urged them all to take some food. After he took bread and gave thanks to God, they all ate; in all there were 276 on board. When daylight came, they saw land and the ship ran aground on a sand bar and was stuck aground. They had landed on an island called Malta; the people there welcomed them and treated them with kindness.



**Application:** Paul was warned by the Angel of the Lord about what would happen and how it would turn out. He was willing to share this in the midst of the crisis.



**QUESTIONS:** God gives us warnings in the Scriptures, as well as through people who share His Word in our lives. Are you responding to God’s Word by faith?

### Story 29 – God Affirms Paul’s Witness on the Island - Acts 28: 1-10

**The Scriptures:** “When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began* saying to one another, ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.’ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.” (Acts 28:1-5).



**The Story:** Now that they were on land, Paul began helping them gather wood for a fire; as he began putting the wood on the fire, a viper came out of the wood that was thrown on the fire and fastened itself to Paul's hand. He shook it off and suffered no ill effects from the bite. The people expected Paul to drop dead at any moment, but after a long wait nothing happened, and they then began to think that Paul was some sort of god.

**The Scriptures:** "Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. And it happened that the father of Publius was lying *in bed* afflicted with *recurrent* fever and dysentery; and Paul went in *to see* him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured. They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied *us* with all we needed." (Acts 28:7-10)

**The Story:** A man came forward and invited Paul to come and stay at his house, which he did. The man's father was very ill, and Paul came to him and prayed over him, and laying hands upon the sick man...he was healed. When this became public, many on the island brought their sick to Paul for healing, and they were cured. By now it was time for Paul to set sail for Rome.



**Application:** The Lord's destination for Paul's final journey was Rome. God paved the way through the kindness of the people, their response, and willingness to assist. When we are in God's will, He provides all that is needed to do His will for His glory.



**QUESTIONS:** There were 276 passengers and crew on the vessel that sank (Acts 27:37). It was Paul who, through the Holy Spirit, gave them confidence and direction by which they would have their lives saved. Do you have the confidence in God that would allow Him to use you in such a situation? Would your testimony be such that you would be viewed as someone people can come to in the midst of a crisis?



### **Story 30 – Paul, A Faithful Witness in Rome - Acts 28:16, 23-30**

**The Scriptures:** "When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him." (Acts 28:16)

"When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe." (Acts 28:23-24)

**The Story:** Paul was now settled into a house, even though a guard was present all the time, and for two years he had people coming to him day and night as he taught, and mentored many in the ways of the Lord. He preached and taught with boldness all during this time without any hindrance.

Until the day that he was executed in Rome, Paul stayed faithful to his Lord's calling to bear the Name of Jesus "...before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;" (Acts 9:15)



**Application:** When we are in difficult circumstances, feeling sorry for ourselves is not an option; it is a comment on God's sovereignty. Wherever we find ourselves is God's provision of an opportunity to demonstrate obedience in our lives our love for and relationship with Him as we proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ through our own testimony.



While under house arrest, Paul called the leaders of the Jewish congregation to him and, once again, gave his testimony. Paul explained his mission to them. It took him the entire day. Some believed and some did not. Paul's last words to them were from the prophet Isaiah: "He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.'" Isaiah 6:9-10 (NASB). Therefore, salvation has come to the Gentiles. No matter how people may respond, our goal is set: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world—until all the nations hear.

Our reward is to be in heaven with our Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father for all eternity. Won't it be wonderful to hear from the lips of our Savior, **"Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your Lord?"** **Is that what you will hear?**