acts

A 28-DAY READING AND REFLECTION GUIDE

AYR HILL CHURCH

Thank you for your interest in this devotional guide to the Book of Acts. This is designed for 28 days, reading one chapter a day, with a highlight and thought that day's reading.

This devotional was written by Brenda Burns.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Day 1

read Acts 1

highlight: Acts 1:1-3

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Luke says that his gospel shared "all that Jesus began to do and teach..." The Book of Acts is a continuation of the "doings" and "teachings" of Jesus. And in this introduction, verse 3 includes the encapsulation of the Gospel (see 1 Corinthians 15):

- Jesus died (After his suffering)
- Jesus rose (He...gave many convincing proofs that he was alive)
- Jesus will come again (spoke about the kingdom of God.)

Be encouraged today that we live in the continuation of all that Jesus began. We are recipients of his grace, the temple of the Holy Spirit, formed and transformed into his image, ambassadors of his unshakable kingdom.

Day 2

read Acts 2

highlight: Acts 2:1-4

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Note the way this passage speaks of "all":

- ...all together in one place
- ...filled the whole house
- ...came to rest on each of them
- ...All of them were filled

Verse 21 continues this emphasis when quoting the prophet Joel:

And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a profound event with many facets to explore. But one thing is clear - it reaches all. You included. The in-breaking of the kingdom of God, the continuation of all that Jesus began, has reached all the way to now, and to each of us. We continue in the powerful flow that will carry us all the way to the end of the age.

Day 3

read Acts 3

highlight: Acts 3:14-16; 19-20

14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see....

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

What happens with people who made a choice against God? How many chances do they get? Are some people so far "gone" that there's no point in sharing the gospel? Following the lame man's healing in Acts 3, Peter preaches to a group that he claims helped get Jesus crucified. That's pretty bad. And yet he holds out to them the promise of faith in Jesus. Never give up. God is on the throne and he is the judge of us all. Who do you know or think about that it seems like they'll never come to faith in God? Keep holding them before the Lord, and should an opportunity come, speak life and faith and the promise of repentance that brings refreshing and the gift of knowing Jesus!

Day 4

read Acts 4

highlight: Acts 4:11-12

11 Jesus is
“ ‘the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.’
12 Salvation is found in no one else,
for there is no other name under heaven
given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Verse 11 is quoting Psalm 118:22. This is one of the many places in Acts citing the Old Testament. The whole Psalm is a beautiful declaration of God's love and power.

Today, ponder on the gift of Jesus' name. His name has been given to mankind for salvation. God's oceanic, everlasting, forever enduring love has been fully expressed through the Son. Jesus is Lord! Meditate on his great name.

Day 5

read Acts 5

highlight: Acts 5:40b-41

They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.
41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Last time, we pondered the wonderful name of Jesus. Today, we ponder the wonderful joy of suffering for that wonderful name.

Wait a minute, what!?!

I don't know about you, but I fear that I may not pass this test if it came down to getting flogged. Whenever I read this section of Acts, I am filled with a sense of awe and wonder. What kind of power is surging within the hearts of the apostles in this moment that moves them into rejoicing? I don't need to go looking for flogging opportunities, but if and when I am counted worthy to suffer for the Name, I hope to experience the wow of this kind of rejoicing. In the meantime, we still have the gift of Jesus' name by which we may be saved.

Day 6

read Acts 6

highlight: Acts 6:3-4

3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

This episode reveals a lot about what a local family of believers will experience. There will be moments of complaints; times where the leaders need to address issues; and situations that require spreading out responsibilities. As in all of life, this story also includes layers of ethnicity, tradition, and bias that humans must work and grow through. When the leaders discerned the need and shared power within the group to address the situation, the result was that the word of God spread. And it was important for the believers to be "full of the Spirit and wisdom." Our spiritual life isn't just about us; it affects your church's life.

Day 7

read Acts 7

highlight: Acts 7:48-50

48 “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.
As the prophet says:
49“ ‘Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.
Or where will my resting place be?
50 Has not my hand made all these things?’

Stephen gives a full summary of the history of Israel in his speech in Acts 7. He ends with the truth that even though God granted David's request for a temple to be built, completed by Solomon, it wasn't God's final goal. The Torah, the Tabernacle and the Temple were all signposts to the reality of heaven and earth coming together in Jesus.
"Jesus and his people are the new heaven and earth reality to which the law and the Temple had pointed all along... Jesus is the true deliverer." -N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Acts*, p. 45

This chapter is an example of how important the Old Testament is, and how beautifully the scripture works together to reveal God's purposes.

Day 8

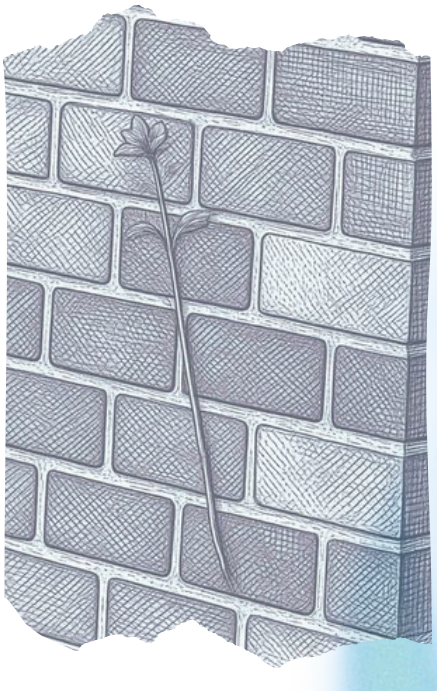
read Acts 8

highlight: Acts 8:4
4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

This verse astounds me. There was a reason people had been scattered - it was because of "the word". And yet their response wasn't an efficiency survey or a retooling of strategy. They continued to spread the good news of Jesus even when it made their life very difficult.

There's a plant growing out of the bricks on the side of the church building. It's just a plant that grew from a seed, doing what plants do. The yard is full of plants, but this individual plant growing out of the hard bricks stands out, precisely because of where it is growing. The word of God spread like good seed, and when the scattered people continued to generously share Jesus even though they were in a hard place, it just spread even more.

If you've been discouraged, I hope these spunky, tenacious, wherever-they-went preachers in Acts 8 give you a dose of inspiration!



Day 9

read Acts 9

highlight: Acts 9:22-25

22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.
23 After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

The story of Saul's conversion is given here, and then repeated in full two more times in Acts. It is an important story. And in this chapter we see how impressively his conversion transformed him into a bold preacher of the gospel. But in the verses above, we have a kind of mixture of action/ thriller/comedy going on. There's a group of people literally waiting to ambush and kill Saul. How does he escape? In a basket! Pushed through a hole in the wall! This is just the beginning of a slew of wild adventures and perilous episodes for Saul who is renamed Paul later in Acts.

Not many people experience the extremes that Paul did, but it does make me wonder: is my life with the gospel as exciting as it could be? If not, why not?

Day 10

read Acts 10

highlight: Acts 10:44-47

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.
46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.
Then Peter said, 47 "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

Acts 10 relates another story that is retold in full in later chapters. These two events - the conversion of Saul and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles - are crucial for the church. It is hard for us to grasp how radical this was, but one clue is that Peter argued back to the Lord's instruction to eat THREE TIMES! (Three seems to be an important number for Peter.) He finally relents, and accepts that somehow God is sending him to the home of Cornelius.

It is not until the Spirit falls on those gathered, though, that he fully perceives that God has torn down the barrier between Jew and Gentile. He'll have some explaining to do later, but in this moment all he can do is have a baptism service and continue to share the word of the Lord. I'm so glad he did!

Day 11

read Acts 11

highlight: Acts 11:20-23

20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene,
went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also,
telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was
with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.
22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem,
and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.
23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done,
he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord
with all their hearts.

The expansion of the church beyond the boundaries of Judaism continues. N.T. Wright makes this observation:

"...he 'saw the grace of God [and] was glad'. That's a great way of putting it: grace is something that you can see--presumably when you watch Judeans and Gentiles sharing in prayer, sharing in the Lord's Supper, sharing their whole lives as brothers and sisters. You can't fake that." (The Challenge of Acts, p. 64)

This grace is made even more evident later in the chapter, when the church at Antioch receives an offering to help those in Jerusalem. This multi-ethnic community is concerned about people 400 miles away, different from them in almost every way.

We are accustomed in our day to reach out to help others, whether here in our community or on the other side of the world. But that "custom" - when it is applied in such an egalitarian way, not according to race, theology, or nationality - is a uniquely Christian invention. It wasn't the way the Roman empire functioned, nor was it the pattern for synagogues located around the world. The Jewish and Gentile systems were limited to taking care "of their own." The abundant, visible, transforming, grace of God flows through his people to all the world.

Day 12

read Acts 12

highlight: Acts 12:1-3

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

This chapter begins decidedly worse than it ends. We often consider the somewhat humorous story of Rhoda trying to convince the faithful prayers that Peter is standing outside at the gate. And by the end of the chapter, Herod gets his comeuppance. What a wild turn of events!

But let's pause to consider the gravity of the situation in the first three verses. Herod had James killed. This is the James that is so often mentioned in the gospels, one of the three who most frequently was with Jesus - Peter, James and John. What grief must have come over the apostles and the church! And then we learn that Herod's decision-making was guided by a kind of "How's it playing?" motif. The murder of James brought approval from the Jews, so he decided to go for Peter next. And this takes place during Passover, just like Jesus' arrest and crucifixion had done years earlier. One can imagine that Peter and those praying for him may have concluded that this was it. This was Peter's time to follow in his Lord's footsteps (as had just happened with James) and die a martyr's death.

But even with that hanging over them as a valid possibility, they prayed. They asked God to set Peter free. I want to encourage us all today that prayer is always the right response to whatever is going on. We may not be able to untangle all the reasons why we find ourselves in a tough spot. Self reflection, theological study, and making things right with others - these are all good. But don't forget to pray. Don't wait until you've figured stuff out - that's not how faith works. Pray.

Day 13

read Acts 13

highlight: Acts 13:2-4

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said,
“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work
to which I have called them.”
3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them
and sent them off. 4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit,
went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

"The Holy Spirit said..." Acts is a story of divine initiative. There is a director in this narrative - God the Holy Spirit. And he directs through and with community - speaking during times of worship and fasting, sending out through the laying on of hands. We do well to remember this, that the work of God isn't dependent on us getting in a particular mood to do something for the kingdom, or for us to creatively design the next great outreach. Our part matters, but it is a role of response and obedience. Let's believe for sensitive ears and hearts to discern the Spirit's direction, and the willingness to move accordingly.

Day 14

read Acts 14

highlight: Acts 14:11; 14-15; 19

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!”
14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.
19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

Following a miraculous healing, the crowds decided Paul and Barnabas were gods, and began trying to worship them. They tore their clothes (an act of severe grief or peril) and pleaded for them to understand - they aren't gods, they are proclaiming the good news of the living God!
What happens next feels like whiplash, and reminds me of the way the crowds shouted, "Hosanna!" at Jesus' entry to Jerusalem, bit quickly a new shout arose upon Jesus' arrest, "Crucify him!" The crowd is stirred up by Paul's opposers, and their worship twists into self-righteous violence, stoning Paul as some sort of villain, leaving him for dead.

Amazingly, Paul survives, and this chapter goes on to tell how they revisited all the cities where they have met such opposition, strengthen the disciples, appoint elders in the newly-formed churches, and then return to Antioch, giving God glory for all he had done. Resurrection power - the power of the living God - continues to be at work through his people.

Day 15

read Acts 15

highlight: Acts 15:28-31

28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:
29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.
You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.
30 So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

The Jerusalem Council is very important in the development of the early church. We don't get all the details of each argument, but we are told there was "much discussion" - a phrase that doesn't fully capture the urgency and energy of the debate. These were not just drummed up charges or petty issues. Although a group had gone out unauthorized by the leaders in Jerusalem, their concerns were legitimate based on their background. But the Spirit was birthing something new, and the church had to figure out how to shape itself accordingly. What are the rules? What is essential?

Another gift from this chapter is the pattern for the church to use when significant issues must be addressed. The early church councils in the first, second, and third century were important gatherings of leaders from many countries. There is a common misconception that the councils such as at Nicaea were run by a bunch of white Europeans imposing their template on the world. Not so. Of the three-hundred+ leaders gathered from Asia, Africa, and Europe, only six were white. So let go of that myth. The Nicene Creed is available at our web site, and is a wonderful encapsulation of Christian belief. Jesus is the center of our faith, and the Spirit guides us into all truth. But/and, the pattern of faithful leaders coming together to bring clarity and encouragement to our faith, as shown in Acts 15, is a vital aspect of the Church.

Day 16

read Acts 16

highlight: Acts 16:4-5

4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Today's thought is simple. Following Jesus requires obedience. We read yesterday the instructions, which basically regarded putting away idolatry and sexual immorality. As these instructions were shared from town to town, the scripture says the churches got stronger, their faith developed muscles, and that they also grew in numbers of people.

Part of being a growing-stronger church family involves our lives being transformed by obedience. We won't cling to idols. We won't practice immorality. We'll grow up and away from disobedience. This is one of those realities that the K.I.S.S. acronym can help us with: Keep It Simple, Saint!

Day 17

read Acts 17

highlight: Acts 17:30-32

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.
He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."
32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead,
some of them sneered,
but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Please read the full chapter today - it's just so good. Paul's sermon at Athens is one of the most iconic classic speeches, not just in scripture but in all ancient literature.

We face the same challenge now that Paul encountered then. The idea of resurrection is just a bit too much for some people. The notion of a Creator God (see v. 24-26) kind of goes hand in hand with this doubt. And yet. This is what we believe - and are tasked/privileged to share this faith with others. It stings to be sneered at and that's no lie. But hang in there for the others that want to hear more.

Day 18

read Acts 18

highlight: Acts 18:24-26

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Alexandria was a center of learning, including for Jewish scholars in the centuries before Jesus birth and the time of the early church. Apollos had "a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" and had also come to faith in Jesus, although he needed to learn more. We'll meet some other disciples in the next chapter who also thus far had only known about the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila exhibit some important characteristics in this narrative:

- Priscilla is named first, showing that she took the lead at times, an important example of gender equity. (They were a married couple.)
- They show hospitality and generosity in bringing Apollos to their home.
- They show graciousness and kindness in explaining to him "the way of God more adequately".
- They show acceptance and share influence with this newcomer - he became a powerful teacher and traveled to other cities and churches.

An alternative story could be something like this: they became suspicious because he didn't have everything just right, they became envious because he was so well-spoken, they became stingy because they didn't want to share resources, etc. Unfortunately, I have experienced fellow Christians acting in some of these ways. Maybe you have, too. Let's take a cue from Priscilla and Aquila and choose equity, hospitality, generosity, graciousness, kindness, acceptance, and shared influence. What a lovely example they have given us!

Day 19

read Acts 19

highlight: Acts 19:32

32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.

In this tumultuous time, people jump on all kinds of bandwagons just because. Social media rants are common ways that people join in the yelling, some saying one thing, some another. There's confusion, there's boatloads of opinions, there's claims of doom and gloom, promises of wealth and power, and demands for things to be done the "right" way. But in all that noise, the same truth as in Acts 19 resounds: people can get caught up in the ruckus without even knowing *why* they're here.

One good way to re-center to your *why* is to remember the sayings of Jesus. The beatitudes are a great start:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
-Matthew 5:3-12

Day 20

read Acts 20

highlight: Acts 20:10-11

10 Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!”
11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate.
After talking until daylight, he left.

This story in Acts is so wild! First, Paul's travel plans seem to constantly shift in order to dodge his enemies. But now he was in Troas, and on the first day of the week, they came together to break bread. This is the early pattern of Sunday worship. On this occasion, Paul had SO MUCH he wanted to say. He went on and on for hours, and eventually a young man named Eutychus fell asleep and fell to his death!

And then...Paul raised him from the dead. Almost like, "All in a days work." Then he went back upstairs, broke bread and ate, and then continued talking until daylight.

In seminary, I was assigned a book titled "Saving Eutychus". It contained lessons on how to fashion sermons that would not put people to sleep, or metaphorically bore them to death! I'm sure I can keep learning in this regard, but it IS important to note that from the earliest days of the church, hearing the word of God was an important feature of the believers' gatherings. Every time we come together, I'm thankful for the opportunity to share the scripture together.

Day 21

read Acts 21

highlight: Acts 21:4

4 We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

Paul's journey to Jerusalem had several stops along the way, staying with disciples in each place. The group mentioned in verse 4 above joined a sort of parade to accompany Paul's departure, including all the family members. But while he was with them, they perceived in the Spirit that danger awaited Paul in Jerusalem. Later at the home of Philip, a prophet named Agabus vividly demonstrated the same warning, and the group urged Paul to NOT go to Jerusalem. But he was determined to go, willing to die for Jesus. Verse 14 says: "When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done.'"

Sometimes, it would appear, the Spirit gives us an insight or word of knowledge that isn't what we want to hear. I find this chapter to hold some mystery. Was God through the Holy Spirit trying to keep Paul from moving on? Or was he preparing the many disciples to brace themselves for Paul's imprisonment? Or something else? The mystery of life is true for us, too. We can't see the full picture, we can't predict the end from the beginning, and we can't control outcomes. In moments of uncertainty, our best response is, "The Lord's will be done."

Day 22

read Acts 22

highlight: Acts 22:17-21

17 “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’ 19 “ ‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20 And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’21 “Then the Lord said to me,
‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

Chapter 22 is one of the places where Paul repeats the story of his conversion. His audience in this case is a large group in Jerusalem. They have become convinced that Paul defiled the Temple, a grave offense. The Romans in charge cannot make any sense of the commotion. In his defense, Paul adds the paragraph above, where he tried to logically explain to God how surely people would believe in Jesus since he himself had been such a strong adversary to The Way. But logic was not enough, and the Lord knew this. Not only was Paul rejected all those years earlier (the time frame of the encounter he is relating) but now this group also violently rejects Paul and the good news of Jesus.

I don't know if Paul thought this group would be more open to his logical defense, but for some reason he restated it to the crowd. We can learn from this encounter that the resistance to the Gospel, and the enemy behind that resistance, will not give way to logic alone. It is a miracle of grace and mercy when the eyes of our heart are opened to receive Jesus. It's necessary for us to keep telling our testimony, and even provide logical explanations for our life of faith, but we must remain dependent on the Spirit of God for the illumination and revelation our world so desperately needs.

Day 23

read Acts 23

highlight: Acts 23:11

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

I find myself appreciating Luke's attention to detail in this chapter. There is so much intrigue, drama, suspense, plotting and counter-plotting. In the middle of it all is Paul, sometimes helpless and sometimes right in the thick of the drama. But the thing that carried Paul through all of this was a certainty gained from the Lord's word to him. He knew that Jerusalem wasn't his final stop, but that he was eventually going to Rome where he "must also testify..."

Treasure up the things the Lord speaks to you in your times of abiding with him. There is nothing to compare to the assurance and confidence that a word from God can give.

Day 24

read Acts 24

highlight: Acts 24:24-26

24 Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He
sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus.
25 As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to
come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now!
You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”
26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe,
so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

Felix enjoyed hearing about Jesus, but found some of the teachings of The Way inconvenient (and frightening!). He's not alone in that - there are times that each of us will find obeying God's commands inconvenient, and we'd rather not think about the consequences of disobedience, so we just put off the whole thing for later.

Verse 26 says that Felix was hoping for a bribe from Paul. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul addressed the fact that sometimes the gospel is shared with sketchy motives. (See Philippians 1:18) In this case, the gospel was listened to by someone with sketchy motives. But Paul kept talking with him, sharing about faith in Christ Jesus.

Two things in this brief passage to take to heart:
1. Don't let your faith (and obedience) be quenched or delayed due to inconvenience.
2. Don't let your testimony (and the gospel message) be quenched or distorted due to others' sketchy motives.

Day 25

read Acts 25

highlight: Acts 25:16, 27

16 “I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges.

27 For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him.”

Paul's imprisonment shares some of the same injustices that Jesus faced when he was arrested - false witnesses, unsupported accusations, etc. Verse 3 says that Paul's accusers had a plan to ambush and kill him en route to Jerusalem, if they could convince Festus to send him there. Paul knew the potential dangers, and instead appealed to Caesar. Festus was a politician and was looking for a way to appease all the parties. But he did require that Paul's imprisonment follow the norms of the law.

In our current day, can remind ourselves that from ancient times, justice has demanded that when someone is arrested, there should be clearly articulated charges and the accused should have an opportunity to defend themselves. The previous chapter relates that Paul was given the opportunity to communicate with his friends and to have his needs met. This also seems a reasonable expectation for people who are detained.

Let justice roll down.

Day 26

read Acts 26

highlight: Acts 26:22-23; 27-29

22 But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

This chapter includes the third re-telling of Paul's conversion. He is speaking to King Agrippa, a Jew who knows the prophets. The king and the governor conclude that Paul is not doing anything worthy of death, but since he has appealed to Caesar, the trial must continue.

What captured me in today's reading is Paul's passion for all to know Christ. He prays for "all who are listening to me today" - which likely includes those trying to get him killed - to become a follower of Jesus. With all the courtroom drama, pomp and circumstance, factions and intrigue, Luke's narrative continues to show Paul keeping his focus on one thing. He remained obedient to the vision. Let us pray for ourselves to do the same.

Day 27

read Acts 27

highlight: Acts 27:1; 23-24

1 'When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. '

23 Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'

The final chapters of Acts narrow the focus to Paul's thrilling journey to Rome. We get a first-person view of the Holy Spirit's guidance and protection at work in bringing about God's promise that Paul will testify in Rome. Along the way, though, testimonies for NOW take place. Yes - there is a vision for what's ahead, but there is also provision for the needs of today. Even in the midst of a terrifying storm, in a situation where seasoned sailors believed all was lost, God gave comfort and assurance, mercy and deliverance.

As you follow Jesus and move toward the places the Holy Spirit is leading, stay anchored to your future hope while also fully present to the people God graces you to be with and situations for which he empowers you. Verse 25: *So keep up your courage, [people], for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.*

Day 28

read Acts 28

highlight: Acts 28:28; 30-31

28“ Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”
30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.
31 He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

Acts ends without an ending. Scholars are divided on whether Paul's trial and execution had already taken place by the time Acts was written, or if in fact that part of the story hadn't happened yet. But the open-ended last verse allows us to consider the gospel's continuing power.

I live in a time and space that allows me to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ unhindered - no laws prevent me, no technology limits me, no community standards stop me, unhindered. But an honest question could be, "Do I proclaim the kingdom with boldness?" Paul's story ends with execution. Some might consider that a hindrance - to be waiting out your judgement in confinement. But Acts ends with the gospel unhindered.

Others are living in spaces where there are many obstacles to teaching about Jesus, and yet they persevere. I must be alert to this truth, and pray for boldness and joy in participating in Luke's mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

AYR HILL CHURCH

HERE FOR GOOD

ayrhillchurch.com