

60 days of Impact

A daily devotional
through the book of Acts

April 1 - May 30



The book of Acts

picks up from the gospel of Luke. It unfolds the story of how the gospel spread from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, Samaria, and to the rest of the Mediterranean world. It's an amazing look at how God's Spirit uses his people to proclaim the message of Christ.

We really felt like it would be amazing for our church to study the book of Acts together, and open up our lives to seeing God at work. As we read his Word and see the truth of God at work there, let's open our eyes to see His work here as well.

When Jesus died on the cross, and then resurrected, the impact of that event changed our relationship with God forever. It was the deepest and greatest impact. And God's desire is to let that defining moment in history, become the defining moment in your life. To let your future and past be completely impacted by Jesus.

During these 60 days, commit to letting God impact your life. Open up your heart, mind and soul to Him and invite Him to massively impact your life in new ways, and commit to spending this time forging your relationship with Him.



Basic Instructions

Let God Impact You Through His Word

We've divided the book of Acts, to be read over 60 days. And at each day, we've got some thoughts and observations to reflect upon. Use this devotion to read God's Word, and believe that He is going to speak to you through it. God's Word is living and active - and it makes an impact whenever you approach it that way.

Actively Pray for God's impact to 5 Specific People

5 People. Write down the names of 5 people you want God to impact.

We don't want these 60 days of hope to just be personal. Reading through Acts, you'll discover just how amazing it is to see how the disciples and apostles were watching God impacting lives around them. Ask God for that same powerful impact in the lives of your 5.

So pray for 5 people each day. Find opportunities to meet, listen and share with them. Discover new ways to bless them, and share the life of Jesus with them - through prayer, through words, and through action.

Increase Your Faith

This might be the hardest part. Increase your faith in what God can do in your life, and in those around you. God's impact is true and powerful. So believe in Him and what he can do - and then be willing to follow Him as he leads. During these 60 days, as you pray for yourself, your five, and your church, increase your faith in God's impact. Read the stories in Acts, and increase your picture of God at work. And then ask Him to open up opportunities for you in your life too. Don't just be a believer, but follow Him.

ACTS 1:1-11

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, **2** until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. **3** He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" **7** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **9** And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, **11** and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

// In many ways, the Holy Spirit marks us as believers - it's the seal of his Kingly authority in our lives. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v3. Jesus spent those 40 days teaching and proving himself to the disciples. So that there would be no doubt that Jesus had resurrected.
- v.5 Jesus is promising a baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is pretty amazing, because up until now, people have only thought about baptism with water - and for forgiveness of sins. But Jesus is promising something completely different. Baptism of the Holy Spirit - in a sense, being completely immersed in the Holy Spirit! Cool!
- v.6 The disciples are still looking for the arrival of an earthly kingdom. But I love how Jesus says that it's not for them to know the times or the seasons that God has fixed. The disciples are focused on a point - a kingdom. But Jesus responds with the reality that God is doing a "work" across a period of "time" - and we can trust him in that.
- v.8 "power" - the promise is that as disciples, we will receive "power." What is that power? It's authority given to us through the Holy Spirit. In many ways, the Holy Spirit marks us as believers - it's the seal of his Kingly authority in our lives.
- v11 "why do you stand looking into heaven?" The angels ask the disciples why they are still standing around. It's as if, we shouldn't just be standing and waiting for Christ's return - but we should live life for Him.

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to immerse you in His Spirit this week - reminding you daily that you are His child and have His authority and power!

For Your Five

Pray for your five, asking God to open their eyes to know that Jesus is alive.

For Our Church

Pray that God might lead our church to seeing how we are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 1:12-26

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. **13** And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. **14** All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,

16 "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. **17** For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."

18 (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the

middle and all his bowels gushed out.

19 And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) **20** "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

"May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and

"Let another take his office.'

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." **23** And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen **25** to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." **26** And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

// Do you commit to prayer as a primary focus in your life? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v.14. The disciples gathered together after returning to Jesus, back to their meeting place and devoted themselves to prayer. I wonder what they were praying for and praying about? Were they asking God to fulfill his kingdom? Were they asking for instruction on what to do next? Were they just praying the scriptures? The Bible doesn't specify what they specifically were praying about, but we see that in times of uncertainty, the disciples prayed. And they committed to prayer. Do you commit to prayer as a primary focus in your life?
- v.16 Even before the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost, we see Peter's character beginning to change. He begins to have a deeper understanding of the Scriptures, a clearer voice of wisdom, and the same boldness to speak, but now it's balanced with understanding.
- v.20 the passages quoted are from Ps 69:25 and Ps 109:8. By quoting those, Peter acknowledges that Jesus is greater than David, and the crime against Jesus was worse than the conspirators against David.
- v.24 In their prayer, the disciples are praying to Jesus - clearly marking him out as God. They understand that they are representatives and ambassadors of Christ's authority.
- v.26 This is the last recorded instance of anyone in the Bible ever casting lots. After the Holy Spirit comes, they don't need to seek God through superstitious rituals or customs. The Holy Spirit enlightens them through the Scriptures and understanding.

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Peter and the disciples acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. Take some time to praise Jesus - and tell him about the authority, power and honour that he deserves. Jesus, you are Lord of all, the one who knows me inside and out. Search my heart and know my weakness and take your rightful place in my life.

For Your Five

Set a time for yourself to pray daily for the specific people that you are committed to pray for. Then ask God for wisdom on how to pray for them and for what he is asking you to do.

For Our Church

Pray that our church becomes a house of prayer - where the decisions we make start with submitting to His Lordship.

ACTS 2:1-13

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own

language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." **12** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

// *Jesus was crucified, resurrected and raised up into heaven. He then sent down the Holy Spirit onto those who believed in Him.* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- In this Chapter, we see God's perfect plan of salvation: Jesus was crucified, resurrected and raised up into heaven. He then sent down the Holy Spirit onto those who believed in Him.
- The Holy Spirit is connected with God; this is not merely a name. The Holy Spirit being sent down was real - from Heaven with a sound like a mighty rushing wind, like a fire filling the entire house where the disciples were sitting. It arrived upon the disciples and rested upon each one of them. The Holy Spirit filled the entire being of the disciples and gave them utterance to speak in other tongues. The gift of the Holy Spirit is much more than what the disciples could have ever imagined. The great and wonderful Father sent His Son to fulfill the great salvation plan, and then sent the Holy Spirit to give us power, and He will always be with us to the very end of the ages!
- In Genesis chapter 11, we can see that when man sinned and left God to build their own Tower of Babel, God said: "Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." Since then, the people were dispersed over the face of all the earth. But when Jesus was crucified, resurrected and raised into the Heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to those who believed in Him, and the people became one in God. Through the Spirit they have the same language, and are forever in the Kingdom of God.

- Verse 5 to 15: When the Holy Spirit came down from Heaven and displayed God's mighty power, there were some that did not believe and doubted. Their eyes were darkened and blinded, and they could not see the light, even though they might have seen the miracles worked out by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they did not believe in the Holy Spirit and feared, but were confused, surprised, or some even doubted and mocked the disciples, thinking that they were drunk and had lost their senses. From this incident, we can see the fight between the Spirit and the Flesh - which both oppose each other.

submitted by Li Qiang

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit, so that the fire of the Holy Spirit will burn away all the desires that are not honorable to God. And pray that God will sit on His Throne in our hearts.

For your Five

Pray that God will open each other's eyes to receive the Holy Spirit by faith, and to know that He is the living God.

For our Church

Pray that the Holy Spirit will fill our church like fire so that we can live and speak the truth of the mighty work of God, and that the people will see and give glory to God.

ACTS 2:14-41

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. **15** For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. **16** But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

*17 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
18 even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke;
20 the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the
great and magnificent day.*

21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—**23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. **24** God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be

held by it. **25** For David says concerning him,

*"I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
28 You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'*

29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. **30** Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, **31** he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. **33** Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. **34** For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

*"The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at my right hand,
35 until I make your enemies your footstool.'*

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” **40** And with many other words he bore witness and continued to

exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” **41** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- When Peter and the 11 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they started to spread the Gospel courageously and without fear. They achieved this by relying on the Holy Spirit, by which this reminds us that people are brought to God to be truly reborn and baptized with the help of the Holy Spirit. With the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples spoke the truth, without reservation, about the prophecy of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and God’s perfect plan of salvation as written in the Old Testament.
- Verse 14 to 21 is telling us that before the day of the Lord comes, He will show His wonders and powers, and pour out His Spirit onto His people. And the sons and daughters shall prophesy, the young shall see visions, the old shall dream dreams—so that many will see these wonders and come to God. They will call upon the name of the Lord and God has promised to save them. We can see that God is an omnipotent God, and everything in Him is possible. God so loves the world and He is doing wonders and all that He possibly can to save all.
- Verse 37 to 38 mentions a question: “What shall we do?” God spoke through Peter saying “Repent, believe in Jesus, be

baptised. And your sins will be forgiven, and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” This is the promise of God, it is God who calls us back to Him, to save us from this deceived world.

submitted by Li Qiang

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us, and so that we may a deeper understanding of God’s Word, and to proactively live everyday fully depending on Him with His strength and gifts.

For your five

Ask God to touch your five’s hearts so that they can repent and be baptized in Jesus Christ’s name. Pray that they will seek God to have their sins forgiven and that will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For our Church

Pray for the Holy Spirit to set our church aflame with passion and pray that we live out as God’s people as described in Acts. Pray for the church to have the courage to spread the Gospel like the disciples, without fear.

ACTS 2:42-47

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

// When we love each other with our hearts or through kind acts, we will be like the disciples in the earlier church //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Verses 42-43: In the early church, people devoted themselves in four aspects: teaching, having fellowship, having communion and praying—which are also things that we too should be devoted to in the present day. We need to understand the truth, to build up each other within the fellowship, to remember the salvation of our Lord on the cross, and to pray together. These would enable us to influence the people around us, and to perform many signs and wonders. In this way, we demonstrate being the light and salt in this world.
- Verses 44-45: Apart from devoting us to each other in spirit, we shall also help each other in physical need. As Paul taught in the Roman 12:13, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need”. In this verse, the people who are in need are not only lacking in money or food, but rather can be those who in trouble and pain. We should share each other’s burden and be merciful to the poor.
- Verses 46-47: When we love each other with our hearts or through kind acts, we will be like the disciples in the earlier church, living together with glad and sincere hearts. With praise and joy, the Lord will also add to our number daily those who will be saved.

submitted by Li Qiang

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

May the Lord grants me this week of deep sharing with brothers and sisters in spiritual matters. When we gather, we will care more on issues that are related to Christ and talk more on topics that can build up each other. As written in Malachi 3:16 “Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard.”

For Your Five

Pray that they will not be lacking in spirit and in need. For no fears among them, and to receive the grace of our Lord with glad and sincere hearts

For Our Church

Pray that our Lord will lead our church in teaching of the truth. That we will build each other, and be able to preach the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, and to pray together constantly. May our Lord increase the numbers daily those who will be saved.

ACTS 3:1-10

3 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. **3** Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. **4** And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." **5** And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold,

but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" **7** And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

8 And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, **10** and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

// Offer your life to His glory, in any way He desires. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v.2 This man was born lame. Do you think he ever questioned why God made him that way? Or wondered about why he was alive? Even though he didn't have answers to those questions, he spent his whole life going up to the temple to beg.
- v.4 Peter and John, who probably are familiar with this beggar - this time round they do something different. They direct the man to look at them. Why? How did they know? What was different this time? They were full of the Holy Spirit.
- v.6 Peter tells him plainly: He has no silver or gold, but gives him what he has. What does he have? Does Peter have the power to make him walk? Peter has the authority of Jesus - and with that authority he gives the man hope, life and the knowledge of Jesus.
- v.8 Immediately this man begins praising God. God's timing is perfect and at this moment, all the years of not knowing his purpose changes. He is part of the birth of the early church.
- This man was recognised as crippled from birth. Regularly begging outside the temple. He was familiar to all those who would go there to worship. The many years he spent in front of that temple were vital in making this miracle even more triumphant. When Peter and John

healed him in the power and the name of Jesus, people were filled with "wonder and amazement" because it declared that the power and authority of Jesus was alive today.

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

If you are struggling to find meaning and purpose in your life/work/situation at the moment, take time to pause and surrender your life to God again. Offer your life to His glory, in any way He desires.

For Your Five

Ask God to fill your five with the same "wonder and amazement" that the people had. Ask God to use you in that process.

For Our Church

Jesus, stir our church to be one that jumps up and leaps and praises You, the same way that this crippled man does. Because we were born lame, but Your victory on the cross has given us new life!

ACTS 3:11-26

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. **12** And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"

13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. **14** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **15** and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. **16** And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your

rulers. **18** But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, **20** that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, **21** whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. **23** And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'

24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. **25** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

// *The healing shakes people from their preconceptions, but the preaching shows them the truth.* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Picking up from yesterday, today's passage sees Peter and John suddenly getting the opportunity to talk. It goes hand in hand - the miracle and then the preaching. The healing shakes people from their preconceptions, but the preaching shows them the truth.
- v.13 Peter speaks so boldly - he doesn't try and cut corners in the message. He starts his message by telling the Jews that they are guilty for the death of Jesus.
- v.17 But Peter's message is not about condemnation, but of God's amazing grace, forgiveness and love.
- v.19 Repent - not because you've failed - but because Jesus saves. Turn back to Jesus and receive His times of refreshment.

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Do you need to repent? Pray and ask God to forgive you and take joy in belonging to Jesus.

For Your Five

Pray that your five will have receptive ears and hearts to God's truth. That instead of rejecting Jesus' message, they receive it with joy.

For Our Church

Peter and John had the boldness to proclaim God's truth, even to what might have been a hostile audience. Pray that our church is bold enough to proclaim God's truth in every situation - and declare His love and grace too.

ACTS 4:1-22

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, **2** greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. **3** And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, **6** with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. **7** And when they had set them in the midst, they enquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" **8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, **9** if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, **10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. **11** This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the

cornerstone. **12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. **14** But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. **15** But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, **16** saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. **17** But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." **18** So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." **21** And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. **22** For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

// Pray that the Holy Spirit will recharge us and we will spread the gospel energetically. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v2. The Sadducees initiated the persecution of the Apostles. They were Israelite's ruling class and did not believe in Christ's resurrection. With the death of Jesus, their trouble was over, or so they thought. Instead, Jesus was risen. Can we ignore the Saviour like the Sadducees did and hope that our troubles are over?
- v4. They killed Jesus, arrested apostles. But they could not stop the truth from spreading nor imprison the gospel. 5000 people heard the gospel and believed. After more than 2000 years, the gospel has not failed to spread because what we believe is true and is from God. It is worthy to be preached and passed on with enthusiasm and joy. The Sadducees and those who do not believe cannot escape their trouble in the future. Jesus will certainly return.
- v8. This was a repeat of the scene of when Jesus was tried and was the same question that Jesus had been asked. Peter and John were cornered. It didn't matter if they panicked or not as the Holy Spirit filled Peter to help him to witness that Jesus was the Saviour. The presence of the Holy Spirit was the driving force behind spreading Jesus' good news.
- v19. We know what is right in God's eyes only if we know Him. Peter and John could not help but to speak out about what they had seen and heard. The

Sadducees and the people in the Sanhedrin knew Moses' Law very well. They saw the miracle with their own naked eyes, but decided not to accept Jesus as the Saviour. They became a group of well-educated simpletons. We can communicate with God through Jesus Christ and we will understand the bible with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I hope I will not be a well-educated and stubborn simpleton.

submitted by Mei Chan

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that I will not be afraid of hardships and persevere on with the work God has given me.

For Your Five

Pray that the Holy Spirit will fill their hearts. Let them experience the presence of God and fill them with peace and joy.

For Our Church

Pray that the Holy Spirit will recharge us and we will spread the gospel energetically.

ACTS 4:23-31

23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. **24** And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, **25** who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

*"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*26 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered
together,
against the Lord and against his
Anointed'—*

27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. **29** And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, **30** while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." **31** And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

// We are reminded that 'prayer' is the most effective 'action' a Christian can do. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v23. Peter and John were threatened then released. They immediately went to tell their Christian friends about what happened. It is so great to have Christian friends who can support and share with you.
- v24. When in the church in Sanhedrin, they prayed to the One who created "the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them". We are reminded that 'prayer' is the most effective 'action' a Christian can do.
- v25. They prayed to the One who revealed His plan around 1000 years ago through David. Isn't it wonderful that our Creator actually likes to share His plan with us and let us have a part in it? We have a choice which part we want to play: to either accept His love through Jesus or to ignore and reject it.
- v28. They prayed to the One who decided and did His wonderful salvation. God decided and finished His work no matter what. So it is better to follow Jesus because we are promised to have eternal life and be with this Almighty One and Holy God, forever. After all, if you have experienced His power, love and mercy, you too would want to be close to Him all the time.
- v29. Occasionally there is rejection, social discomfort or difference in opinions. Sometimes people mistook these as

persecution and decided to lie low, quit and even disappear completely to avoid uncomfortable situations. Wow! But look at these apostles - they were not afraid of trouble and embarrassment. Though they were just tired and threatened, they asked God to help them be bold and went out preaching again! Not for personal gain or reward, but they did so for the holy servant Jesus. They were truly shining God's light. Let us be inspired to go and shine God's light like them!

submitted by Mei Chan

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that I will be a Christian that will shine God's light too.

For Your Five

Pray that God will help them to live an energetic and active Christian life. Also pray that they find close Christian friends.

For Our Church

Pray that our church is always a place for brothers and sisters to support and to share with each other.

ACTS 4:32-5:11

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold **35** and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. **36** Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, **37** sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, **2** and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. **3** But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart

to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?

4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." **5** When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. **6** The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." **9** But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." **10** Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **11** And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

// Ask God to help you speak the truth like Barnabas, boldly and with dedication... //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Verses 32-35 tells us that the way of life for true believers is believing in the one true God; loving each other; helping each other; sharing everything we have with each other, so that no one is lacking in anything; so that we are more able, that we can all be blessed and thus to give a good testimony of Jesus Christ. Through loving our God with all our heart, soul and strength, and loving each other as ourselves—this is better than any sacrifice or other rituals. This is the most beautiful blessing we can receive.

Verses 36-51 tells us of two kinds of people:

- Barnabas: Honestly and willingly sold his fields and gave all his silver and everything he owned to God, and God blessed him with treasures from heaven, "Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great many people were added to the Lord." (Acts 11:24). The Holy Spirit says: "Assign me Barnabas and Saul to go and do the work I have called them to do". During the time when the disciples were too afraid to meet with Saul, Barnabas took Saul and led him to the other disciples. Paul openly shared about his encounter with God on the road, how God spoke to him, and how he went on to boldly proclaim the gospel in Damascus. Later Barnabas sought Saul out again in Tarsus, and when he found him took him to Antioch. Together they spent a year teaching and developing church fellowship, bringing

the gospel to many. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians".

- Ananias and Sapphira: They also sold their land, however not in an honest way or as a willing offering to God. They lied in front of God and others, not telling the truth. God is righteous and holy, God cannot be mocked, cannot be despised, nor does God deal with their guilt lightly. Ananias and Sapphira were killed not because they did not give up all their silver, but because they lied to men, lied to God, and had let their hearts be filled with Satan, who caused their hearts to do evil deeds and lie to the Holy Spirit.

submitted by Li Qiang

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to guide you, so that you can let your heart be willing, and sincerely give everything to God, to fear God and acknowledge His righteousness, so you can serve Him well.

For your five

Ask God to help you speak the truth like Barnabas, boldly and with dedication, to love God with all our mind and to love your five (and our neighbours) as ourselves.

For our church

Pray that God will lead our church, so that we can wholeheartedly love each other and help each other. Pray to have courage and grace to give the testimony of Jesus.

ACTS 5:12-16

12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico.

13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. **14** And more than ever

believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

16 The people also gathered from the towns round Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

// Our God is an omnipotent God; He also does signs and wonders. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Our God is an omnipotent God; He also does signs and wonders. In this world there are many people who are sick or possessed by demons, but God loves us and has mercy on us. He is willing to set us free, to heal us and give us peace. He is our Father, and His love for us is higher than the mountain and deeper than the sea, not wishing that any should perish. He wants all who are chained to be healed. There were many people who were sick or possessed by the demons coming from all around Jerusalem to see Jesus, not one did he reject.
- God does not only work out these miracles by Himself, but He also sent out His servants to do His work. He gave this authority and power to them. Jesus said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do" and "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Jesus also told His disciples: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Through His disciples, the Holy

Spirit works miracles and reveals His mighty power, His amazing love and mercy. When the people see His wonderful signs, they will give glory to God, and so, the number of those believing and returning to God will increase.

submitted by Li Qiang

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to help us to be faithful, to believe in His promises, and that God would heal the sick and release those who are possessed by demons.

For your five

Ask God to help your five to stand before His throne, for their chains to be broken and that they will receive freedom, experience healing and receive His peace. Pray that they will know that He is the living God.

For our church

Pray for God to lead our church, and let us rely solely on His strength to spread His gospel and to increase the number of believers in the world.

ACTS 5:17-42

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy **18** they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. **19** But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, **20** "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." **21** And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the people of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought. **22** But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, **23** "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." **24** Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. **25** And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." **26** Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, **28** saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood

upon us." **29** But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. **30** The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. **31** God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. **32** And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. **34** But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. **35** And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. **36** For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. **37** After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. **38** So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; **39** but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice, **40** and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. **41** Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. **42** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- As soon as the disciples started to spread the gospel, they immediately encountered persecution. Yet they were not at all afraid, but rejoiced in their hearts over this persecution, and even felt proud for being mocked for the name of Jesus. Why? Because they deeply believed that: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
- So what about us? How should we feel when we are persecuted when spreading the gospel? Should we feel sad? Fearful? Lose heart? Or even blame God? When we are persecuted in this world for the righteousness' sake (not as a punishment for our sins), we should be like them, not feeling sad, scared, disappointed or desiring to take revenge. Instead we should be delighted from the bottom of our hearts, because the kingdom of heaven is ours, and the reward from above is great.
- Verse 29, the disciples were persecuted and challenged when they were spreading the gospel. They were neither scared nor kept silent because of opposition. They also did not hate the people who persecuted them but continued to courageously share with them the truth and never ceased to declare Jesus' gospel to them. This was because the disciples had decided to be obedient towards God and not men, and they took it as their responsibility to do so. When they had this firm determination and faith, the great work of

God was revealed: God sent His angels to open the gates of the prison at night and led them out. The disciples obeyed God rather than the high priests and their followers, and when they spread the gospel of Jesus, the public was enraged and wanted to kill them. At that time, God used a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour by all the people to protect and release them from the people. This tells us that everything is in the control of our God, even the heart of the king is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He will.

submitted by Li Qiang

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to strengthen our faith - when we are persecuted and challenged in this world, we shall not fear or keep silent, but we shall be courageous in spreading the gospel, and be a testimony of God with a firm heart, and we will receive the gifts and blessings from heaven.

For your five

Ask God to help the five be obedient to Him rather than to men, and to Him be the glory.

For our church

Pray for God to lead our church in spreading the gospel of Jesus with one heart and mind, and to allow the great work of God to be revealed. Pray for His kingdom to come.

ACTS 6:1-15

6 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. **2** And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. **3** Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. **4** But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." **5** And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in

Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. **10** But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. **11** Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." **12** And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, **13** and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, **14** for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." **15** And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v2 I don't think that it is a matter of thinking that it is inappropriate to get involved in the distribution of good, but that it is a matter of prioritising. In order to obey God's teachings and the blessing of the Holy Spirit, as commanded in Acts 1 in the Great Commission, they wanted to give their 'attention to prayer and the ministry of the word' in order to be most useful in their service.

- This is a reminder to our service in Church. Sometimes we think to love God means we need to increase our service. However, the sign of the truly Godly is waiting on the Spirit's guidance and leading, to further understand God's will and work, in order to let God make use of us as his vessels, to place us where he will and use our lives to fulfill his plan. As servants we can't trust in ourselves to do anything, but should willingly submit ourselves to God's hands to be used. Ultimately the one fulfilling the work of God is God himself.
- V3 Organising the meals is a very important position, not to be undertaken lightly. Here those who serve must 'be full of the Spirit and wisdom'. Those who deal with people's needs need to be patient, kind, gentle, honest and faithful, as Stephen was. No wonder our brothers and sisters serving in the kitchen grow quickly.
- V7 When disciples and apostles focus on serving God, He uses their service to enable the Gospel to thrive, to reach more people.
- V8-10 Stephen was chosen to manage the meals and God blessed him with wisdom and ability. Stephen acted in wisdom and the word of the spirit. Hence even though evangelism was not his main ministry, his service was still a good witness and bore much fruit. Our ministry should be likewise. God can work through us and use our lives as a witness in order to spread the gospel, no matter if it be serving, cleaning or providing transportation. Zechariah 4:6, So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD. Nothing can stand in the way of the Spirit's power.
- V11-15 Stephen encountered attacks and false accusations as Jesus did. Today, persecution still occurs in some countries. For example in Iran, there are several pastors who are under false accusations, and are locked up in prison, tortured physically and mentally. We need to pray for these disciples who are persecuted for righteousness's sake. Matthew 5:10- Blessed are those who suffer for righteousness's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Hence Stephen had the face of an angel, reflecting God's glory and majesty.

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to give us servant hearts which are more understanding and obedient, to enable God to use our service and lives to fulfil his plan.

For Your Five

Pray for your five, asking that God would give us wisdom and fill us with wisdom, that we may bear fruit, to bear witness for Christ.

For Our Church

Pray that God will lead our church to follow God's heart and plans in every way, and to help us prioritise and focus our service, to best enable God to use our church to spread the gospel, to add to the number of disciples, and bring more people to Christ. Pray that God will guide our church, that we may continuously support those who are persecuted for their faith, pray for them and provide assistance to them and their families.

ACTS 7:1-53

7 And the high priest said, "Are these things so?" **2** And Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, **3** and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' **4** Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. **5** Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. **6** And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years. **7** 'But I will judge the nation that they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' **8** And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. **9** "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him **10** and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favour and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. **11** Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. **12** But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. **13** And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. **14** And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. **15** And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, **16** and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. **17** "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham,

the people increased and multiplied in Egypt **18** until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. **19** He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. **20** At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, **21** and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. **22** And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. **23** "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. **24** And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. **25** He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. **26** And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarrelling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' **27** But the man who was wronging his neighbour thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? **28** Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' **29** At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. **30** "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. **31** When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: **32** 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. **33** Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. **34** I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.' **35** "This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. **36** This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. **37** This is

the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' **38** This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, **40** saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' **41** And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. **42** But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

"Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

43 You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.'

POINTS OF INTEREST

It is interesting that the Holy Spirit used what Stephen has already known about the historical facts and brought in new insights on what they meant in a way that challenged the minds and hearts of the audience.

- The accusers claimed they followed Moses and the Law, but history revealed that since the very beginning, their forefathers had been following this pattern of rejecting what God had planned. First rejecting Moses, then the prophets, and now Jesus, the Righteous One.
- Stephen was accused of teaching that the Temple would be destroyed. This offended the Jewish people, as they believed that having the Temple was a sign of God's blessing and favour. However, Stephen recalled from Isaiah that there is no physical building that would be good enough to represent the majesty and glory of God, for the whole heaven and earth is under His sovereignty. And so there is nothing that humans can do to pride themselves in, for everything comes from God and salvation is through Christ alone.
- V51-53 Stephen quoted historical facts that his audience would know well, but yet they never

44 "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. **45** Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, **46** who found favour in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. **47** But it was Solomon who built a house for him. **48** Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by 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 what is the place of my rest?
50 Did not my hand make all these things?'

51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. **52** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, **53** you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

truly understood it all. He rebuked the people for resisting the Holy Spirit. God is more concerned about how much room we have made for the Holy Spirit to live in our heart, rather than where or how impressive the place of worship actually is.

submitted by Abel Leung

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray for God to stir up our hunger for His Word, to meet with Him daily. Pray that the Holy Spirit will let this communion with Him bring us new insight and perspective from God in understanding what is happening around us, so that we can walk even closer with Him.

For your Five

Even as believers we may still be resisting the Holy Spirit from time to time (either through lust, guilt, or pride). Pray that the Holy Spirit will give your five courage to be honest and accountable to one another.

For Our Church

Pray for the church to have a heart of humility, not to put reputation before repentance and to have love for God and others.

ACTS 7:54-8:8

54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. **55** But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." **57** But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. **58** Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." **60** And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2** Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. **3** But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. **5** Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. **6** And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. **7** For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. **8** So

// No matter where it is, there are still people with needs that desperately cry out for hope. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V54-60 Stephen's last moments resembled those of Jesus'. The Holy Spirit is stirring up believers to be true follower of Jesus. Stephen followed Jesus all the way to the end, suffering for Jesus' sake, but also joyously entering into His glory.
- V58 Luke first introduced Saul here (later known as Paul) into his record. Whether Saul has initiated or was just being a witness of Stephen's death, his later actions confirmed that he played a big part in resisting the Gospel being spread. We later learn that he actually became one of the greatest apostles that God had used. This period of resistance will mark a major part of Saul's life that he will reflect back on and appreciate the grace, power and wisdom of God.
- 8v4 The believers that were scattered out actually sparked a wider spread of evangelism. Believers did not stop sharing Christ just because they were fleeing. From man's perspective, even to this day, Christianity is dying, but in God's eyes He knows that everything is under His control and His grace is sufficient for those that trust in Him. He gave the apostles and even us, more courage to witness for Jesus.
- V5-8 No matter where it is, there are still people with needs that desperately cry out for hope. God understands our physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The Holy Spirit worked through Philip to fulfil those needs, through sharing the hope of Christ and healing the sick.

submitted by Abel Leung

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Have we been like Saul, having a period where we resist God's voice and block Him out of our hearts completely? Take some time to honestly confess to God about this heart of resistance. Come back to Him and think about how good it tasted to be walking with Him again, and willingly accept the grace of God that He gives so freely.

For Your Five

Think about the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of your five. Pray for the Holy Spirit to meet those needs and also ask how the Holy Spirit is leading you to be part of meeting the needs of your five.

For Our Church

Pray that our church will grow to be a community of believers who follow Jesus right to the very end. Pray for the congregation to be united in one vision: Christ being proclaimed. Though we may be 'scattered' through different opinions and ways of doing things, let us not lose sight and continue to ask God to show us a bigger picture of what He is doing.

ACTS 8:9-25

9 But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practised magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. **10** They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." **11** And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. **12** But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **13** Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, **15** who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **16** for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only

been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17** Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, **19** saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." **20** But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! **21** You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. **22** Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. **23** For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." **24** And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

25 Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

// God works in us to help us let go of these and to grow in knowledge of His truth. But we must be humble and willing enough to allow Him. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Simon was able to recognise that there was a power greater than the magic he could perform. Arrogance and popularity could have blinded him to seeing this.
- The good news preached by Philip did not come with special effects, simply the truth spoken about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus led Simon to believe and be baptised.
- It appears that Simon had the right intentions (only God knows), but being a new believer there was much to learn. His magician background may have led him to think that he needed to pay for the secret to be revealed. The apostles rebuked Simon for thinking he could obtain the Holy Spirit with money.
- Simon's understanding of the Holy Spirit was clearly wrong and he asked the apostle to pray for him that his hearts evil intent would be forgiven.
- Such things as bad habits, weaknesses, emotional hurts, addictions, wrong ideas and views, don't just disappear the moment we accept Jesus as our Saviour. God works in us to help us let go of these and to grow in knowledge of His truth. But we must be humble and willing enough to allow Him.

submitted by Kiet Van

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that you would be humble enough to depend on God and not in your own abilities

For your five

Pray for your 5 to grow in humility, in so doing depend more on God and not on themselves

For our church

Pray that church is where all people are accepted, we may not know their true intentions, only God does, but pray for wisdom for guiding them in the truth.

Acts 8:26-40

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. **27** And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship **28** and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. **29** And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." **30** So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" **31** And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

*"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth."*

*33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."*

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. **36** And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" **38** And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

// Pray to be as Philip, a Spirit filled, faithful and obedient servant. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v26: Philip had clear and direct instructions from God, which he obeyed without question, even when it meant travelling through a desert place.
- v27: the Ethiopian eunuch had travelled a great distance to Jerusalem just to worship in the Temple showing him to be an extremely dedicated believer in Judaism.
- v29: The encounter between the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip was clearly a divine one, in which God was using to fulfill his purpose of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- v31: The Ethiopian eunuch's response to Philip's question, "do you understand what you are reading?" was a man hungry for understanding and truth. He was not proud to ask for guidance, even as a person of high position, he invited Philip to sit with him in his chariot.
- v35: Philip opened his mouth and out poured the good news of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. No words of Philip could have convinced the Ethiopian eunuch to believe and ask to be baptised, it was the work of God's Spirit through Philip's obedience.

submitted by Kiet Van

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray to be as Philip, a Spirit filled, faithful and obedient servant.

For your Five

Pray that your 5 will have a hunger and thirst for the word of God that leads to conviction and change.

For Our Church

Pray that BCEC will be a place of spirit filled worshippers not bound by earthly traditions and comforts.

Acts 9:1-19

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. **3** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4** And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" **5** And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." **7** The men who were travelling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. **8** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. **9** And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **10** Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." **11** And the Lord

said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, **12** 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." **13** But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. **14** And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." **15** But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. **16** For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." **17** So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; **19** and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

// I'm deeply grateful for God's mercy to open my spiritual eyes to see Jesus as my saviour. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Verse 5 - I remember one verse in Colossians 1:24, ...his body which is the church. To attack any part of the body (the church) is to attack (or to persecute) God. All brothers and sisters are united in Christ as different parts of the body (the church). May the Holy Spirit help us continually to pray for those churches under political persecution or prohibition of evangelism.
- Acts 9:10-19 Lord Jesus called to Ananias in a vision and sent him to restore his sight. Ananias had heard lots of reports about all the harm Saul had been doing to the believers in Jerusalem, so he himself was quite worried and afraid to visit Saul. Ananias seemed to question this plan and doubt Saul's conversion. However, he still went ahead with the plan after the Lord reiterated that Saul was his chosen instrument.
- Verse 9:17 "Then Ananias went ..." When I read this verse, I am reminded of another verse "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22). For those obeying God's commands we are reminded that we will always be blessed.
- verse 9:17 ...he said, " Brother Saul, ..." I'm deeply moved that God's love has been penetrating Ananias's heart through the Holy Spirit. He surrendered to God's love and was willing to love and

pray for Saul. I recall Jesus saying, dwell in the love of the Lord and to love one another, as the Lord loves us. It reminds me to be God-centered instead of self-centered. To have our minds not to set on what the flesh desires; but to set on what the Spirit desires and walk with the Holy Spirit in order to understand the Father's good, pleasing and perfect plan for His people and His Kingdom.

- verse 9:17 " ... you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Through reading this, I'm deeply grateful for God's mercy to open my spiritual eyes to see Jesus as my saviour, and be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that we will walk with the Holy Spirit moment by moment. Let us pray that we will be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to be dependent and obedient to the guidance.

For Your Five

May the Holy Spirit pour God's love in to our brother/sister's hearts. Pray that God's words will be their deepest satisfaction and that they will joyfully experience God's presence.

For Our Church

May the Holy Spirit help us to be alert always and let us pray for other churches within the UK. May our lives be transformed to mirror Christ, so much so it will affect those around us.

Acts 9:20-31

20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." **21** And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" **22** But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, **24** but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, **25** but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. **27** But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. **30** And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

// Pray that God will take away all pre-conceived prejudices we have against one another. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v20: A few days after Saul's conversion, Saul began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God. This shows us that Saul had a genuine conversion and was simply ready to proclaim the good news to everyone without fear or being worried about what people said or thought about his past.
- v21-22: Many people were astonished and asked one another to clarify if this Saul, who was preaching that Jesus is the Son of God—asking “wasn't he the man who used to cause trouble and take away the believers?” Instead God continued to use Saul to prove that Jesus is Christ despite Saul's old reputation. Miracles happen and this was an obvious one.
- v23-25: Many people were planning on killing Saul and kept a watchful eye on him, should he wish to escape. Saul was careful after discovering their plans and with the help of his followers, they helped him to escape by a basket being lowered down the wall (a basket was usually used to carry food in those days).
- v26-27: When Saul had arrived to Jerusalem, all the other disciples were afraid of him due to being cautious or skeptical over Saul's conversion. They had reason to feel this way, after all Saul used to be the leader of a lot the violence against Christians, so of course there were many who had prejudices against Saul. But it wasn't until Barnabus testified and explained, did the other disciples finally trust Saul. At times we too are cautious and suspicious, we judge

people by their outward appearances, but we are told not to judge for we too will be judged.

- v28: Saul stayed with them and “moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.” He was accepted amongst the disciples and was recognised now as a Christian, as he spoke boldly of the Lord, Saul was very open about his new faith.

submitted by Ansy Wong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to show you if there is an element of prejudice you have against another person, and instead to ask God to help you love and to have boldness in speaking words of love, truth and wisdom to them.

For your five

Pray that God will give you an opportunity this week to use you to speak to your five boldly: that Jesus is Lord—and that your five will accept this truth.

For our church

Pray that the church will pray more boldly, speak more boldly and boldly proclaim that Jesus is Lord. Pray that God will take away all pre-conceived prejudices we have against one another. And instead to show love just how Christ has shown love to us.

Acts 9:32-43

32 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. **33** There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralysed. **34** And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. **35** And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

36 Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. **37** In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. **38** Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter

was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." **39** So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. **40** But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. **41** And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. **42** And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. **43** And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

// Pray that God will increase your faith tremendously. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v32-35: Peter was now visiting in Lydda (which was about a days journey from Jerusalem). Through Jesus's name, Peter healed Aeneas: a man who was paralyzed for 8 years. Right away, the news of this miracle caused many who lived in Lydda and Sharon to become Christians.
- v36-37: Tabitha or Dorcas, was a disciple and was known for always doing good and helping the poor. In this verse we learn that she fell sick and died. Many widows mourned for her (v39) which shows that Tabitha was loved by many; and when Tabitha was alive, she liked to make clothes and robes, she was the type that liked to make things, do good and help others; she was a charitable disciple –always doing things for the Lord.
- v40: After Peter had sent out everyone from the room Peter got down on his knees and prayed. So far from what we know, Peter had never performed "big" miracles such as raising a person from death back to life. Previously it was Jesus who rose the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15); the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41,42, 49-55); and Lazarus, brother of Martha and Mary. But for Peter it was not known if this miracle could be achieved, hence why he sent everyone out of the room before he prayed and commanded Tabitha to get up.
- v41-42: after Tabitha was risen back to life, it was clear her body was weak as

Peter helped by taking her hand and helping her get back on her feet. He then presented them to the believers and widows. This miracle was made known to many people all over Joppa, and as a result many believed, just like when Jesus rose the others back to life, the same positive result happened: many believed.

submitted by Ansy Wong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that God will help you have faith when you doubt your own abilities of doing God's work. Pray that God will increase your faith tremendously.

For your five

Ask God to grant a miracle for your five so that they too, will believe. Perhaps you can ask God to heal them? Or even to make them experience God's grace.

For our church

Pray for the church to be more zealous and faithful in God, not lacking in faith that God can grant miracles: big or small.

Acts 10:1-23

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, **2** a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. **3** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." **4** And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. **5** And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. **6** He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." **7** When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, **8** and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. **9** The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. **10** And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance **11** and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. **12** In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. **13** And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." **14** But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." **15** And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." **16** This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate **18** and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. **19** And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. **20** Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." **21** And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" **22** And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." **23** So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v3 What is a 'vision'? A vision can refer to what one can physically see with their eyes (as in Cornelius case), but it can also refer to a trance revealed by the Spirit (as Peter experienced in verses 10-17). This is one of God's way in communicating with us. Whilst not every Christian has experienced a vision, we should be open to the possibility that one day God will talk to us in this way, as it was recorded in this passage.
- v4 From Cornelius' response here and his subsequent reaction, we can see that he was awake and not dreaming when he received the vision. It also proved that the vision came from God.
- v6 A 'tanner' was a craftsman of leather. In his job, he had to handle animal

carcasses daily and were often thought as 'unclean' as a result. The Jewish law would forbid him from living amongst other Jews within the city hence the reason why he lived by the sea. In spite of this, Peter willingly stayed in his house. You can see how God had prepared his heart. Praise Him indeed!

- vv9-10 Cornelius received a vision in his prayer (vv2-3), and the same happened to Peter here (vv10-16). A lot of Christians concentrate too much on serving Him but neglected drawing close to Him daily. Let us all remember to seek Him in prayer and quiet time even as we serve Him in our daily lives.
- v10 What happened to Peter here? A 'trance' is when the soul is in an unusual state of dreaming but not asleep. Itself, a trance is not the vision but it is the state where one can receive the 'vision'. Therefore a vision is not confined to what one can see with the naked eyes, but what we can experience spiritually. When we are praying for vision from God, we have to be careful not to limit this to a physical revelation.
- v14 We often used "we have never" as an excuse not to obey His prompts for changes. Our cultural traditions or beliefs often hinder us from obeying Him. It can be difficult to change our thinking which has been heavily influenced by religious practices or traditions. God gave Peter the vision three times to breakthrough Peter's cultural biases. May God speak to each of us, confronting our wrong beliefs or traditions.
- vv19-21 How did Peter hear so clearly from the voice of the Spirit? In contrast, we often find it hard to hear the voice. I believe our sensitivity to the voice of the Spirit is enhanced by an active prayer life. Let us commit ourselves to daily prayer in order that we can receive from Him with clarity.

- v20 These men were sent by Cornelius for Peter. But why did God say that He had sent them Himself? This is an indication that when we obey His instructions from a vision, we are obeying His will. And this is why men's action in obedience is Him at work! What an example of us working in partnership with Christ.
- v23 In Jewish tradition, they are not permitted to receive people from other nations into their homes. Peter invited the three men into his house as a reflection of God's amazing power in changing his thinking and practices.

submitted by Ithiel Kong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Dear Father, rather than me fervently seeking after vision and spiritual experiences, I pray that I would be seeking after You in prayer so that I can hear your voice clearly! In on the day when I hear from you clearly, may you grant me with the same obedience of Cornelius and Peter. May you grant me a submissive heart as I pray.

For your five

Pray that God will continue to change their old thinking and ideas about worshipping Him. So that their mind and soul and heart can be released to worship and receive from Him. Pray that they are then able to experience fully the amazing love of God!

For our church

Dear Father, we are in need of a new premise to worship You. May you grant us a prayerful heart in this matter and a unified vision of Your plan for our church, and the place You have prepared for us.

Acts 10:23-48

23 So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. **24** And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25** When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. **26** But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." **27** And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. **28** And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing

31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. **32** Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.'

33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, **35** but in every nation anyone

who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. **36** As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), **37** you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. **39** And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, **40** but God raised him on the third day and caused him to appear, **41** not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **42** And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. **43** To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. **45** And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, **47** "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v25 “When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.” Cornelius was a commander in the Roman army, yet he was humbled to worship a foreign commoner. Dear God, this would not have been possible without His trust and devotion to You!
- v26 Peter was certainly not puffed up by Cornelius’ bowing before him. Instead he knew well that his identity was a servant of God, preaching the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. If anyone through preaching the Gospel yet became proud of themselves, the truth is passed on but he himself would have fallen. Beware!
- v27-28 We believe in a God whom prepares the people’s hearts to receive Him. Here we can see how he patiently prepared Peter’s heart and had transformed him from his old thinking and beliefs.
- v33 Cornelius speech was a great example of the kind of attitude we should have when listening to the sermon, ready to receive from Him with an open heart, prompted by the Spirit of understanding.
- vv34-43 Here we could see that Peter succinctly explained the gospel to Cornelius and his family. He did not make any special preparation but only spoke from His heart, which was always prepared to spread the good news. Are we always at the ready, just like Peter?
- v34 “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.” This indicated that Peter understood how God’s love is for every one, showing no partiality. I have heard of brothers and sisters saying, “He will never believe in God!”, “She can’t possibly be saved!” Who are we to say

that if our God is one whom desires for all men to be saved! Our God never thought more or less of anyone by outward appearances and we mustn’t do so ourselves!

- vv46-47 “For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.” Speaking in tongues is a gift from God, enabling one to speak in another language or dialect but not meaningless syllables or utterances. When the Holy Spirit falls upon some one, the person could be granted the gift of speaking in tongues; but not all spirit-filled person can do so. God had called Peter to be his messenger of good news to the Gentiles. He first prepared him with a vision, then confirmed his calling by revealing the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the Gentiles who believed. As a result, Peter knew it was God’s plan for them to be saved and baptized them!

submitted by Ithiel Kong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that God will grant you a humble and prepared heart, always ready to spread the good news.

For your five

Pray that God will grant each one of them a receptive and obedient heart, ready to receive from Him through personal sharing or by listening to sermons.

For our church

Dear Father, pray that the differences in language, culture, educational background and upbringing will not hinder us from loving one another in this family of Yours! Pray that Your love continue to be the foundation through which we can freely serve and grow in relationship with each other.

Acts 11:1-18

11 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, **3** "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." **4** But Peter began and explained it to them in order: **5** "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. **6** Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. **7** And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' **8** But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' **9** But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' **10** This happened three times, and all was drawn up again

into heaven. **11** And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. **12** And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. **13** And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; **14** he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' **15** As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. **16** And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' **17** If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" **18** When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

// How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- According to their tradition Jews would segregate themselves from Gentiles (that is non-Jewish people; see Acts 10:28). This was a somewhat misguided idea based in the Old Testament where God calls the Jewish nation to separate themselves from the nations around them. The original intention of this was, firstly, so that their lifestyles would be distinct from the people around them—reflecting God’s character; and secondly, to avoid being drawn into foreign, false religions. However, this teaching had led to the belief that salvation from sins was only for the Jews although this was never God’s intention. It was always God’s plan to bring salvation to all people (Romans 9:23-26) and this is the crux of the message in chapters 10 and 11.
- v2-3 It is always easy to criticise people’s actions that break with our traditions or expectations. But it is important to return to the Bible and see what God actually says about it – not what we think He says.
- v9 Are there any people we deem as ‘unclean’ or ‘common’ who we tend to avoid? How would I respond if a homeless person started attending my Church? What if he smelled really bad, or was slightly disruptive in the services? What if a prostitute started attending my Church? It’s easy to befriend and share the gospel with people who “are like me” but what about the people who are different? “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14)
- v17 Peter asks, “Who was I to think that I could oppose God?” Sometimes we take our own ideas and try to fit God’s plans to match our own, instead we should be seeking what God is doing and how we can conform our plans to match His. Peter set aside his former ideologies and followed God’s leading into what was for Peter a rather unorthodox situation.
- V18 The objectors recognised God was doing something amazing and praised Him for it. What a great response. Instead of grudgingly accepting it (but still perhaps holding onto their own ideas) they could see that God was at work and gave Him glory.

submitted by Matt Seiboth

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that you will be willing to step out of your comfort zone to befriend and share the Gospel to the people God calls you to reach, whether they are “like me” or not.

For your five

Pray that your 5 will know the power of the Holy Spirit acting in their lives and that they will one day experience Him for themselves.

For our church

Pray that our Church is one which actively acknowledges the work of God, rejoices and praises Him for what He does.

Acts 11:19-30

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. **20** But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. **21** And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. **22** The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, **24** for he was a good man, full

of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, **26** and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. **28** And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). **29** So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. **30** And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

// Pray that our Church will be united as one and that we will use our gifts to serve one another on a local and global scale. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- The heart of this passage is about how the good news of salvation reaches beyond the Jewish nation and really begins to overflow to all other ethnicities and people. What is more, these non-Jewish believers are not just a secondary part of the Church, but are an equal part of it with their fellow Jewish believers, able to contribute in a time of crisis (i.e. giving support when others were affected by the predicted famine). This is great news for most (if not all) of us reading this as we are all Gentiles (non-Jews)!
- v24 The description of Barnabas given here is something to be desired. He is described as:
 - A good man - someone known for his big heart and righteous conduct
 - Full of the Holy Spirit - someone who is led by God
 - Full of faith - someone who truly trusts and lives by God's Word.
- v26 Barnabas and Paul stayed a year in Antioch to help the new believers grow in their understanding of God and how to live to honour Him. It is important to not only bring the good news to people, but also, to support them and teach them how to live as Christians after they have made a commitment to God and not just leave them to try and work it out on their own. The great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is not just a call to see people converted, but to "make disciples" and "teach them everything [Jesus] have commanded [us]".
- v26 It was at Antioch that the believers were first called 'Christians'. This may have originally been used as a derogatory term by those outside the

Church, however it is a term that is beautiful because it so captures the meaning of who we are - people defined by our devotion to Jesus Christ so much so that that we are identified by His name.

- v29 The believers in Antioch helped according to their ability. We each have individual gifts to serve with and God doesn't call us to do more than He has enabled us to. Instead, He wants us to use our gifts (Matthew 25:14-30). We are not in a competition with other believers, but are part of the same Church working together to strengthen one another (1 Corinthians 12).

submitted by Matt Seiboth

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that you will be more like Barnabas, known to be good, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

For your five

Pray that your 5 will have friends like Barnabas and Saul who will help them to understand more about the Bible and God.

For our church

Pray that our Church will be united as one and that we will use our gifts to serve one another on a local and global scale.

Acts 12:1-20

12 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. **2** He killed James the brother of John with the sword, **3** and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. **4** And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. **5** So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

6 Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. **7** And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. **8** And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak round you and follow me." **9** And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

10 When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.

11 When Peter came to himself, he said,

"Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. **14** Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. **15** They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"

16 But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. **17** But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

18 Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. **19** And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

// How will we react when we encounter a miracle of God? Will astonishment distract us from praising Jesus? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v1-3. King Herod is Herod Agrippa who started to persecute the Christians in a political move designed to please the friends he had made amongst the Jewish leaders. Arresting Peter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread was also strategic, since more Jews were in the city than usual, and Herod could thus impress the most number of people.
- v7-10. Besides the incredible miracle of the angel appearing and helping Peter escape, what is more remarkable is that none of the 4 guards on duty were aware of anything. We learn in v18 that the guards only realise that they had lost their prisoner in the morning!
- v5&12. We know it was evening time as Peter was asleep before the angel appeared. How encouraging it was to find the fellowship of believers praying steadfastly, no doubt partly for Peter's safety and welfare. This is certainly a dramatic answer to prayer that would have only affirmed to the early church (and should teach us) about the power of prayer and intercession.
- v13-14. One gets the impression that Rhoda is named because this account of her being so joyful and excited that she forgets to open the door, could have been re-told in the early church as an

amusing anecdote. How will we react when we encounter a miracle of God? Will astonishment distract us from praising Jesus?

submitted by Ashley Liew

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to open the eyes of your heart and mind to see that He is in total control and is sovereign over all the earth, capable of miraculous signs and wonders.

For Your Five

Pray that Jesus will use each of you to encourage one another about His faithfulness in fulfilling His plan and purposes in each of your lives.

For Our Church

Pray that God will help us as a church to pray earnestly like the early church, with steadfast confidence that God will answer.

Acts 12:20-25

20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. **21** On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.

22 And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"

23 Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

24 But the word of God increased and multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

// Do we sometimes fail to give God the due glory and claim the achievements by our own strength? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v20 Tyre and Sidon were famous and important cities of Phoenicia on the Mediterranean. They were very ancient, large, splendid, flourishing in commerce, and powerful by land and sea. Both are now located in Lebanon. We know that Herod was a very powerful man over the whole region of Palestine, as well as Syria, including Tyre and Sidon (part of Lebanon).
- v21-22 Look at how man glorify themselves through royal robes made of silver that sparkled in the sun, provoking the crowd's acclamation. Do we sometimes fail to give God the due glory and claim the achievements by our own strength?
- v23 "because he did not give God the glory." In contrast to Peter's instantaneous rejection of worship in Acts 10:26, Herod receives this wrongful praise with delight. In both cases, the instinctive response to an unexpected situation revealed the condition of the man's heart. Judging by Herod's gruesome outcome, indulging in man's own greatness instead of proclaiming God's glory, greatly displeases the Lord.
- v24 "the word of God increased." No power can triumph over the word of God, and those who attempt to harm God's people will in the end face judgment themselves. This reminds me of God's promise in Hebrews 13:6 "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what

can man do to me?" Take heart that we will emerge victorious with God in whatever circumstances that we are now in.

- v20-25 Chapter 12 begins and ends with Herod Agrippa I: the persecutor of the church now brings about his own death. Romans 8:31 "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Praise God that we have a much bigger and powerful God that evil has no stronghold against us.

submitted by Violet Lee

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Have we remembered to praise God and give Him the due glory today?

For your Five

Pray that they will get to know this powerful God who will always be their friend and helper.

For Our Church

Pray that God will continue to strengthen us as we do His work. Pray that we will be a church that truly seeks God's heart and not become self-centred.

Acts 13:1-12

13 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** While they were worshipping 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** Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. **6** When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish

false prophet named Bar-Jesus. **7** He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **9** But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **10** and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? **11** And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time."

Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. **12** Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

// *In the face of
opposition, trust
in the promises
of God* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v1-3. Mentioned here and numerous other times in the earlier 12 chapters, was the early church's priority in ministry to the Lord (through worship, prayer and fasting). We are saved to a restored relationship with God. Out of the devotion to the Lord came the call to service. The important principle for us is this: the ministry for the Lord overflows out of having devotion to the Lord.
- v2. God's work, when initiated by the Spirit of God, will receive direction through the Spirit of God (v4) and empowerment by the Spirit of God (v9), resulting in glory to the Lord (v12). Likewise, we must never be presumptuous in our decision making. Decisions must be prompted of the Spirit through prayer.
- v6 - 12. There will be opposition to the work of God but the nature of the opposition is spiritual, not physical. Those with a desire to grow closer to God or labouring for God will face resistance. In the face of opposition, trust in the promises of God (nothing can separate us from the love of God, God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, etc..)

submitted by William How

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

That we return to the basics of worship, prayer and fasting as we embrace the disciplines that will help us grow close to God.

For your five

Pray that your five will have a spiritual hunger for God that only the Spirit of God can give.

For our church

Pray for a church devoted to Jesus and that our members grow in their knowledge and understanding of the love of Jesus and what it means to live life in the Spirit.

Acts 13:13-43

13 Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, **14** but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it." **16** So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

"Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. **17** The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. **18** And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. **19** And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. **20** All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. **21** Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. **22** And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' **23** Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised.

24 Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. **25** And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he.

No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

26 "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. **27** For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. **28** And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. **29** And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. **30** But God raised him from the dead, **31** and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. **32** And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, **33** this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

*"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.'*

34 And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, *"I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'*

35 Therefore he says also in another psalm, *"You will not let your Holy One see corruption.'*

36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, **37** but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. **38** Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this

man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, **39** and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. **40** Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

*41 "Look, you scoffers,
be astounded and perish;
for I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will not believe, even
if one tells it to you."*

42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. **43** And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v17-42. Throughout history, there were partakers (e.g. Abraham, Samuel, David and John the Baptist) and there were spectators in the work of God. God is still actively at work today. Let us determine to be God's people who are partakers of history - live that life of faith and adventure, and do not let life pass us by.
- v36. 'David served the purpose of God in his own generation'. What a wonderful epitaph of David's life written by Luke. What would people write of us when we passed from this earth? What is the legacy that we leave behind? The Church is God's chosen instrument to accomplish His purposes - there is no plan B. BCEC is part of God's plan to reach out to Birmingham, West Midlands, the UK and beyond. Respond to God's call today with faith and determination.

submitted by William How

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

That our lives are aligned with the purposes of God

For your five

Wisdom and discernment in waiting upon the Lord for His purposes to be revealed

For our church

The church move with a greater sense of destiny, purpose and urgency

Acts 13:44-52

44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. **46** And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. **47** For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, *"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. **49** And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. **50** But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. **51** But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. **52** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

// *In fellowshiping with the Spirit of God, being filled with the Spirit of God for empowerment, we experience joy //*

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v45, 48, 50. Contrast the response of the people to the gospel. While some will receive the Good News gladly, others will react in jealousy and stir up persecution. The disciples were reminded that it was not them the people were rejecting, it was Jesus.
- v47, 48. God's love transcends race. Jewish apostles appointed to serve the Gentiles. It was in God's plan that all people, Jews and Gentiles, are to be recipients of God's grace. We celebrate our ethnicity and more importantly, our identity in Jesus before we can embrace God's purpose for our lives.
- v52. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. In fellowshiping with the Spirit of God, being filled with the Spirit of God for empowerment, we experience joy. This way of living is opposed to living according to the flesh - we sin and experience sorrow.

submitted by William How

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

That we do not waste our lives for frivolous things but we live for eternal things.

For your five

They will fix their eyes on the eternal, not on the temporal.

For our church

Pray that we do not fellowship for fellowship sake but we are a community that reach out together, and serve together

Acts 14

14 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. **3** So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. **5** When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, **6** they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, **7** and there they continued to preach the gospel.

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. **9** He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, **10** said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. **11** And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. **13** And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. **14** But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the

crowd, crying out, **15** "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. **16** In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. **17** Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." **18** Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. **21** When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, **22** strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. **23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. **25** And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, **26** and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. **27** And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them,

and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. **28** And they remained no little time with the disciples.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v1-7: Once again the apostles “spoke so effectively” with much evidence and proof of the Spirit through “miraculous signs and wonders”, winning many to Christ. Yet despite this, it was met soon after with stubborn Jews that tried to stir up trouble and cause the Jews and Gentiles not to believe (thus causing them to be divided); and still the Jews plotted against the apostles with plans to stone them, and once again, the apostles manage to escape. It always seems this way, the apostles preach, people are won to Christ, but then there is great persecution, a spiritual battle between good and evil.
- Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were all in Asia-Minor: in today’s world it is in modern-day Turkey. All were governed under Roman rule, and as a result they worshipped greek gods, which explains why the people tried to worship Paul and Barnabas, thinking they were Zeus and Hermes due to a miracle they performed in v9-10.
- v9-10: we learn that the man that was crippled from birth, listened to Paul, and Paul saw that “he had faith to be healed”, and thus he was healed in v10. This demonstrated that he had listened intently to the hearing of the word, as faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). We are reminded of the many times when Jesus healed people because their faith has saved them (Luke 7:50, 18:42 to name two,) in this section, Paul says the same.
- v15-17: in response to the people offering sacrifices to Paul and Barnabus, thinking they were gods, the apostles were passionate in explaining that they were only men/human beings and giving the credit back to the Creator God. They share how He made everything and they explain God’s great providence and kindness. These testimonies of God’s goodness can still be used as a reminder for us even today.
- v18-20: The people still offered sacrifices to them because the truth meant nothing to them; and once more, the Jews won the crowd over against the apostles and as a result they stoned Paul until they thought that he was dead.

submitted by Ansy Wong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that we can have faith that comes from hearing God’s word and that we can practice obedience as a result.

For your five

Ask God to increase the faith in your five, so they can be more susceptible to hearing God’s word.

For our church

Pray for our church to grow in faith and to be reminded of God’s rich kindness and providence.

Acts 15:1-21

15 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." **2** And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. **3** So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. **5** But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. **7** And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. **8** And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, **9** and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. **10** Now, therefore, why

are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? **11** But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

13 After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. **14** Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. **15** And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

*16 "After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;*

*I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,*

*17 that the remnant of mankind may seek
the Lord,*

*and all the Gentiles who are called by my
name,*

says the Lord, who makes these things

18 known from of old.'

19 Therefore my judgement is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, **20** but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

// after all, Christ's gift of grace is free for all. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v1-6: Some men from Judea taught the Gentile converts at Antioch that they could not be saved unless they followed the customs of the law given by Moses: to be circumcised. Many times we too are prone to think others are wrong and we are right, if what they do is not the same. There was much "sharp dispute and debate" over this matter, and there continues to be sharp dispute and debate over things within the Christian faith today.
- v8-9: "God, knows the heart"—God knows everything single detail about us, even the things in our hearts. Peter explains that justification by faith and sanctification by the Holy Spirit cannot be separated and that both are gifts from God. ("Justification" means as our sins have been forgiven, just as if I never sinned) ("Sanctification" means being made perfect like Christ).
- v11: "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that [they] are saved, just as they are." Regardless of us being circumcised or uncircumcised, Christ still saved us, a free gift of grace, just as we are.
- v19: "we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." That we should make it easier and not oppress people with unnecessary rituals and requirements to turn to God, after all, Christ's gift of grace is free for all.

submitted by Ansy Wong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that we will not judge our fellow brothers/sisters when they do things a different way, but instead to view them as Christ views them: with love.

For your five

Ask God to show them that Christ loves them and they are saved, just as they are.

For our church

Pray for our church to have peace and not to dispute and debate over trivial matters, but to glorify God through unity as a body of Christ.

Acts 15:22-41

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, **23** with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. **24** Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, **25** it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, **26** men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. **27** We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. **28** For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: **29** that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. **31** And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. **32** And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. **33** And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. **35** But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. **36** And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." **37** Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. **38** But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. **39** And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. **41** And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v24-29: Following on from the previous passage (Acts 15:1-21), the letter in v24-29 was with regards to the incorrect teaching of gentiles needing to be circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses. A letter was sent along with the apostles to Antioch to preach, encourage and strengthen the brothers and the church (v32)
- v39: In this section, Paul and Barnabas have a disagreement. Paul was influenced primarily with the love of righteousness: doing things faithfully even in trying circumstances (which it is recorded John Mark failed to continue, hence why Paul would not trust him again); and Barnabas was bound by the fact that John Mark was his nephew and wanted to give him a second chance at another trial. This disagreement between two apostles was only sparked out of love and for the purpose of spreading the gospel and doing God's work. However in v39 "They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company." They were both ministers of the word, and both with much passion and both not willing to step down for the sake of the gospel, both intentions were good.
- It was concluded that they both agreed to depart from each other and take different parts of the work, each had their own companion: Barnabas took John Mark sailing to Cyprus; Paul took Silas and went to Syria. John Mark's second chance at another trial went well and he proved faithful to God by staying to help his uncle Barnabas. Though disagreements might seem like bad

storms at the time, God can still use that situation and turn it well for His Glory. The fact that they split into two parties wasn't a bad thing, but it meant the work could be done more widely, effectively and visitations were made at double speed.

submitted by Ansy Wong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that we can see past all disagreements with our fellow brothers/sisters and to humbly have good intentions for each other and for the sake of the gospel.

For your five

Ask God to strengthen your five to see past the outward appearance, and instead to give the gospel a chance as it is a gospel of love.

For our church

Pray for our church to be used by God for the extension of His Kingdom, and that we as a church can be used effectively.

Acts 16:1-15

16 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. **2** He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. **3** Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. **4** As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. **5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **7** And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. **8** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. **9** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of

Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." **10** And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, **12** and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. **14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. **15** And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

// we should ensure our day to day living is a powerful witness, so that the next generation of believers might be equally impacted //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v1-2 Timothy's mother was Jewish and a believer, but his father was Greek. It must have been his mother's influence and nurturing, which led the believers to speak highly of him. Likewise, we should ensure our day to day living is a powerful witness, so that the next generation of believers might be equally impacted.
- v.4-5 As Paul and Timothy travelled to different cities, they took the decisions made by the apostles and elders to the disciples for them to obey, strengthening their faith, and increasing the number of believers. As church leaders or pastors, we should diligently take the word of God in order to teach and guide our brothers and sisters, in order to help the church grow in spirit and in numbers.
- v. 6-8 Paul and Timothy were obedient to the Spirit's leading, and travelled to Troas. As those who walk with the Lord, we should allow the Spirit to guide and lead us in all things.
- v. 10-11 Paul saw a vision to immediately head to Macedonia. Under the guidance of the Spirit, Paul knew that God was calling them to preach the gospel in Macedonia, so they immediately set sail for Macedonia.
- v.14-15 Lydia worshipped the Lord, but her knowledge was not extensive. As she

was listening to Paul's preaching, the Holy Spirit opened her heart, guiding her to listen intently, so that her entire family was baptised. When we listen to the gospel, are we allowing God to open our hearts and His words to enter them, in order to renew and change us?

submitted by Man Wah Lee

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that God may allow us to be good witnesses at home, to enable our children and family to know that our faith is true and not in vain.

For Your Five

Pray for your five, that God may teach our church leaders and pastors to preach the word of God clearly to our brothers and sisters, to enable spiritual growth in the church.

For Our Church

Pray that God will enable our church to become one that is led by the Spirit's guidance and leadership. Pray that God will allow the church to share the same vision and know God's heart, so that the gospel may thrive.

Acts 16:16-40

16 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. **2** He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. **3** Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. **4** As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. **5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **7** And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. **8** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. **9** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of

Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." **10** And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, **12** and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. **14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. **15** And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

// we should also prepare ourselves to seize every moment, always ready to share our faith with others //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v17 "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." The evil spirits seemed to be speaking on behalf of God. We need to have a clear understanding of our faith, as even heretics believe in God.
- v.19-22 After the masters lost this source of income, they created an excuse in order to incite the masses and attack Paul and the other disciples. Their actions sprung from selfishness. Selfishness is a sin. Sometimes people attempt to cover up selfishness, but the consequences are serious if we don't deal with sin.
- v.30-31 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' The jailer saw the power of God, and immediately realised his own need for salvation. In order to receive God's offering of salvation, we must recognise our own sins, be willing to repent and change, and believe in the saving power of Christ. As Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved". We need to continuously deal with sin, not only when we first believe.
- v. 32 Paul and Silas brought the word of God to the family of the jailer. Likewise, we should also prepare ourselves to seize every moment, always ready to share our faith with others.
v. 40 Paul and Silas encouraged the disciples. Part of the benefits of being the body of Christ is the chance to grow together through mutual encouragement and exhortation. Our

attitudes should be positive in order to edify one another. However, sometimes advice and criticism can be unpleasant as we enjoy hearing what is pleasing to the ear. Let us pray that we may open our hearts- when we are open to listening, and that others will also be open to sharing.

submitted by Brenda Lee

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that the Spirit may search our inner hearts, revealing those sins that are hidden.

For Your Five

Pray that God gives them a desire to seek the truth, draw near to Christ and increase their time in His word.

For Our Church

Pray that God helps grow our relationships as the body of Christ, in all aspects from pleasantries to mutual encouragement and exhortation, and to give us hearts willing to accept criticism from others.

Acts 17:1-9

17 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. **2** And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, **3** explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." **4** And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. **5** But the Jews were jealous, and taking some

wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. **6** And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, **7** and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." **8** And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. **9** And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

// in the same way we need to meet the people around us at a level they know, and then lead them to what Jesus has done //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V1 - Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in Macedonia.
- V2-3 - Paul used the scriptures to show how Jesus the messiah was fulfilling the prophecies from the Old Testament scriptures. This is cool as he met them with what they knew and where they were at and then used this to introduce them to who Jesus is... in the same way we need to meet the people around us at a level they know, and then lead them to what Jesus has done.
- V4 - The start of the church at Thessalonica was due to Paul sharing how Jesus fulfilled God's plan. We need to remember the power that this truth has. We can then see in Thessalonians Paul's letter of encouragement to them.
- V5-6 - Here we can see the power of God's word. It's crazy to think that such a small group of people peacefully sharing their beliefs would cause such a stir, that they would discuss far & wide - to "cause trouble all over the world". We can also see that the other Jewish leaders didn't try and disagree with the theology that Paul preached, but were jealous and decided that a riot and mob was the best option.

- V9 - Here Jason posts bond, this is basically posting bail - where money is paid for freedom and an agreement is made that no more trouble will be caused.

submitted by Michael Gregory

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

That God would help you to be bold as Paul was to stand and share about Jesus.

For your five

That they too would see that Jesus' death was part of God's master plan.

For the church

That we would stand together as a body of believers, helping and encouraging one another.

Acts 17:10-21

10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. **11** Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. **12** Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. **13** But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. **14** Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. **15** Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market-place every day with those who happened to be there. **18** Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbling wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. **19** And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean."

21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

// We need to ensure that we have discernment in making sure that teachings are in line with what the Bible says. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V11 - The Berean Jews searched the scriptures for themselves to verify the message that Paul was preaching. We need to ensure that we have discernment in making sure that teachings are in line with what the Bible says.
- V16 - It is amazing to see how eager Paul is to stand up and speak for God. Everywhere he goes he is preaching to those around him that are worshipping other gods, even when he's waiting for Timothy and could just as easily use that time to rest.
- V16 - The Greek word used for "distressed" is "Paroxysm" meaning sudden violent emotion. Here we can see just how much the idol worshipping caused Paul to be filled with anger and grief! Does the idol worship we see in the world today leave us feeling troubled and wanting to see a change?
- V18 - The Epicurean believed that seeking happiness & pleasure was the primary goal in life - so you can see why when Paul preached about our purpose was to be in a relationship with God and to glorify God, this was an alien concept to them.

- V18 - The Stoics belief was that thinking was before feeling, trying to live in harmony with nature and reason. This mentality that a higher form of life was to be earned, also stands in stark contrast to the personal relationship God wants with all—which involves a God who humbled himself to die for all.

submitted by Michael Gregory

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

That God would change your heart through the Holy Spirit, so that you too will feel the grief Paul felt concerning idolatry, even the idolatry around you today.

For your five

That your five would be interested in hearing about what you believe as a Christian and that you would have the opportunity to share this with them.

For the church

That as a church we would be discerning about what we hear and that we encourage each other to study God's word.

Acts 17:22-34

22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. **24** The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, **25** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. **26** And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, **27** that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

28 for

"In him we live and move and have our being";

as even some of your own poets have said,

"For we are indeed his offspring."

29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. **30** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, **31** because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." **33** So Paul went out from their midst. **34** But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

// Don't be discouraged by people's response - instead continue to faithfully declare the truth about God. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v23 Paul sees the altar to an unknown god, and then uses that to proclaim to the people of Athens who that unknown god is. He uses a local cultural item, in a way that declares the truth about God. He offers them knowledge they previously didn't have.
- v24-27 This is a beautiful and powerful evangelistic message. See how Paul started off talking about the altar, and then went on to talk about how God is beyond human altars. And then he moves onto how we are God's offspring. He even references the Athenian poets.
- v.29-31 Then he moves to a message of repentance. God is calling us to follow him!
- v32 For some people they heard the message and immediately believed. For others they needed to hear more. And others still rejected it straight away. Don't be discouraged by people's response - instead continue to faithfully declare the truth about God.

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

I'm sure most of us wish we were as eloquent as Paul. But it's no use wishing - pray that God teaches you to open your mouth to explain his message to those around. And then take those learning opportunities!

For Your Five

Pray that your five will be the ones who hear the truth and respond.

For Our Church

Pray that our church can have an open heart to God's gospel message - some of us have forgotten how God's news is the good news! Ask God to remind us how precious it is to be God's children.

Acts 18:1-17

18 After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, **3** and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. **4** And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. **6** And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." **7** And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.

8 Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his

entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. **9** And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, **10** for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." **11** And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, **13** saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." **14** But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. **15** But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." **16** And he drove them from the tribunal. **17** And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

// But the Lord knows our weaknesses, he will never forsake us. //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V1: Paul left Athens, a place that was filled with idolatry, and came to Corinth, a place full of lust and corruption. These two places are also currently two places that present the greatest challenges to ministry.
- V 3: Paul, for the sake of the gospel, gave up making a living from preaching (1 Corinthians 9:14). Like Aquila and Priscilla, they made tents for a living, not charging money for preaching the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:18). When we share the gospel we should also serve others in the same way. Like Paul, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:23).
- V5: When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, they had a lot of respect from the Philippians. This prompted Paul to stop working for a living but to fully dedicate himself to missionary work.
- V9: When many of the Corinthians started believing in Christ, the Lord again appeared to Paul, telling him do not be afraid, to speak out and not be silent. Once we bear fruit, threats and challenges will also follow. But the Lord knows our weaknesses, he will never forsake us. Therefore we should be bold.

- V10: We can always turn to God's promise for help and guidance, "I am with you". This is the work of the Lord, whatever difficulties or challenges you face, He will protect the ministry that He began. The Lord's promise will never fail, "no one will lay a hand on you, because I have many people in this city".

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to give you the opportunity to spread the gospel this week, to rely on God's grace and strength to not be afraid, to speak out and not be silent, working with God to fulfil His purpose.

For your five

Ask God that your five will be just like those at Corinth, hear and believe in the Gospel and be baptized.

For our church

Pray that God will guide our church to become revitalized in ministry.

Acts 18:18-28

18 After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. **19** And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. **20** When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. **21** But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills"; and he set sail from Ephesus.

22 When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. **23** After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

24 Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. **25** He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. **26** He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. **27** And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, **28** for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

// O God Almighty, I beg you to lead us, to make us strong and courageous; and to spread the gospel, anytime, anywhere //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- This passage described the end journey of Paul's second sermon, and the beginning journey of the third sermon. We can see how Paul followed the God's leading (in verses 20-21). God also used different people (Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos), and we can see they were all equally used by God despite their different personalities and they were joyful and helpful. (24-28).
- It is mentioned many times in the Bible that people should obey their vows that they have made to God. Particularly, when we are in difficult times, we always pray for God's mercy and help; when God answers our prayers, obviously we should give praises back to God. We are not sure of the vow Paul made in verse 18, but we read that Paul did not break this vow as he cut his hair. Sometimes it is worth evaluating ourselves whether we break vows or promises made to God or to people. And do we often not trust in God's promises? Do we not trust people? This is worth thinking about.
- From verse 25-26 you can see the importance of the full gospel; sometimes having just a kind heart is not enough but it is great to know that we can believe as we have the free gift of grace.

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

O God Almighty, I beg you to lead us, to make us strong and courageous; and to spread the gospel, anytime, anywhere! O God, please remind us to give thanks in all circumstances and not to boast in our own strength.

For Your Five

O God, have mercy on people who have not known you yet, pray that You can give them more opportunities that they can join us for fellowship; and we pray they can also become your children in the future.

For Our Church

Lord, thank You for leading our church, and our church in Birmingham to become your testimony. Pray that You will continue use the church to bless every brother and sister; pray that we will love you more and draw closer to You.

Acts 19:1-20

19 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. **2** And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." **3** And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." **4** And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." **5** On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. **7** There were about twelve men in all. **8** And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. **9** But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. **10** This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia

heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

11 And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, **12** so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. **13** Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims."

14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. **15** But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"

16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. **17** And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. **18** Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. **19** And a number of those who had practised magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.

20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

// *It is encouraging to know that God can work powerfully through all occupations and all types of people.* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v5 The immersion of Jesus is to identify with his death, burial and resurrection, which then leads to the Spirit living in us, which is the same Spirit who performed miracles through the disciples of Biblical times.
- v.9 Acts 20:34-35 also mentions that Paul combined teaching with tent-making. It is encouraging to know that God can work powerfully through all occupations and all types of people.
- v10 Paul had a back-up plan and was undeterred by obstacles. Purposeful meeting and discussions spread the message of the Lord like wildfire, and all of Asia heard in 2 years.
- v17 Is the name of God regarded with honour today? If not, as Christians, what can we do to change that?
- v18 The believers were convicted to confess their sins openly and this led to action which was sacrificial.

submitted by Kay Lau

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to show us areas in our lives which we need to bring to the Lord in confession, and that we may truly repent and start afresh with God's grace.

For Your Five

Pray for your five, asking that God might reveal his very real power to them.

For Our Church

Pray that God might lead our church to speak boldly and purposefully about our faith as Paul did.

Acts 19:21-41

21 Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." **22** And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

23 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. **24** For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. **25** These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. **26** And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. **27** And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

28 When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" **29** So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. **30** But when Paul wished to go in among the

crowd, the disciples would not let him.

31 And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theatre.

32 Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. **33** Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defence to the crowd. **34** But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

35 And when the town clerk had quietened the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? **36** Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. **37** For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. **38** If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. **39** But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. **40** For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." **41** And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

// Are we following blindly to the agendas of the world? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v21 This verse provides an outline for the remainder of Acts. After leaving Ephesus, Paul returned to the churches in Macedonia (including churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) and Achaia (including church in Corinth) and from there went to Jerusalem and eventually to Rome. Places play a key role in Acts. Geography assumes a symbolic as well as literal importance. Jerusalem symbolises the Jewish religion from which Christianity emerged and Rome symbolises the Gentile world to which Christianity gravitates as the early history of the church unfolds.
- v24-28 Demetrius was a skilled demagogue. His real problem was that Paul's polemic against idolatry was hurting his business, but he added more volatile accusations that aroused civic and religious pride. "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Civic and religious pride were the decisive factors provoking the riot. Perhaps we need to be aware of people who use superficial reasons to disguise their true motives.
- v32 As with most mobs, confusion reigned, many not knowing why they had assembled. Are we letting others influence our emotions too easily? Are we following blindly to the agendas of the world?
- v38 "the courts are open". The legal means for settling disputes were the regular courts conducted by the Roman proconsul and the scheduled meetings of the town assembly. A proconsul was the head of government in a Roman province.
- v40 "in danger". The crowd in the theatre had the appearance of an unlawful assembly and risked bringing Roman reprisals. Christian gospel was not contrary to the Roman rule of law and was not disruptive of public order, and that accusations made to that effect were untrue. Its is a reminder that we need not go against the law to prove our point.
- v23-41 Paul experiences violent opposition at Ephesus. The account of Paul's Ephesian ministry concludes with a riot against Paul. This brings to light that sharing the Gospel is never an easy task.

submitted by Violet Lee

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

The work to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ is not completed yet. Ask God to give you the strength and faith to continue this paramount task despite resistance.

For your Five

Ask God to open their eyes to distinguish The Truth from the hidden agendas of the world.

For Our Church

What is our true agenda? Has the church done enough to share the Gospel? Pray for strength and wisdom to effectively do God's work.

Acts 20:1-16

20 After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. **2** When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. **3** There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. **4** Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. **5** These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, **6** but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

8 There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. **9** And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead.

10 But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." **11** And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. **12** And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

13 But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. **14** And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene. **15** And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. **16** For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- The riot described in Acts 19 seemed to be caused by the disrepute in the trade of the craftsmen, as they were hoping to prosper from the business of making silver shrines. But actually, this incident had once again shown the truth of Jesus: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you...but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:18-19) "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account!" (Matt 5:11).
- Paul clearly knew that God's work had been accomplished in Ephesus and the churches had been established. He then departed from Ephesus and revisited churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea etc.) and encouraged the churches.
- Throughout all the persecutions, the Lord had prepared for companions for Paul, that were willing to suffer for the sake of God's work. There were 7 workers described in this chapter, who had accepted the Lord in the 3 journeys that Paul made. 3 of them were Macedonians who had then become

loyal helpers in Paul's ministry. The Macedonians, Gaius and Aristarchus, were caught and shamed in the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). From the perspective of men, they might have been losing their minds; but from the Lord's perspective, God was placing them in a trial. After this trial, they were still willing to follow Paul faithfully.

- In Acts 27:2 Aristarchus was there willing to accompany Paul by becoming a 'prisoner' even without being chained.
- Tychicus was faithful in spreading the gospel and to proclaim God's will by travelling to various places.
- Trophimus, a Gentile, followed Paul to Jerusalem and became the main reason of the arrestment of Paul. From this we can see that the close relation between Paul and his company was out of God's love.
- In Philippi, Paul spent his days of Unleavened Bread, which was the day that the Lord had been crucified and resurrected. One week later, they sailed to Troas, which was the place when Paul received the Macedonian call. He was once again reminded of the Lord's calling when he revisited this place, and it was wonderful for him be in touch with the members of the local churches. The second Sunday after Easter, they gathered and had communion, and also being reminded of God's Word. The gathering was extended to late night due to the desires of brothers and sisters for God's word and so Paul dutifully and faithfully proclaimed it. This gathering is good since, 1) we are being reminded of the Lord's body being broken for us; 2) the word of the Lord is revealed by the work of the Holy Spirit, which is according to the ultimate truth (2 Timothy 2:15) - the unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple (Psalm

119:130). No one would ever want to stop this kind of gathering!

- Looking back to the initial plan of Paul, which was to sail back to Syria, he was instead being persecuted by the Jews and was forced to go to Macedonia (Acts 20:3). It seemed that Paul was changing his plan to avoid being arrested, but now it is clear the entire incident happened because God wanted to use Paul to fulfill one of the many parts of his great plan. We should praise the Lord, because He is great and powerful! His wisdom is immeasurable!

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to strengthen our faith to serve Him faithfully in our lives and to relieve us of our anxieties.

For your five

Ask God to help us to work together for Him, encouraging and support each other according to the Lord's will.

For our church

Pray for God to lead our church, to remind, encourage, comfort each other, and to strengthen the relations between the members of Christ to work together for God, to spread the gospel of Jesus and to revive His church.

Acts 20:17-24

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. **18** And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, **19** serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; **20** how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,

21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. **22** And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, **23** except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. **24** But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

// For so many times we forget, we ignore or even walk away from our Lord Jesus, so can we say we lack “no shame” in our testimony? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Paul knew that he would not return to Asia and just before he left for Jerusalem to face the persecution, he earnestly talked to the Church in Ephesus and therefore, these words were very important.
- In the first half, Paul reviewed his experiences and trials in serving the Lord. His words revealed that he had ‘no shame’ in serving the Lord and used this to remind and encourage the whole church. How we long for having ‘no shame’ in serving the Lord. For so many times we forget, we ignore or even walk away from our Lord Jesus, so can we say we lack “no shame” in our testimony?
- Paul said “You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you”. Paul loved the brothers and sisters in the Church, but at the same time, he did not give in on things concerning the “truth”, what wisdom he had in his love!
- In the second half, Paul was compelled by the Spirit and was going to Jerusalem even though he knew that prison and hardship were awaiting him. He had no hesitation and this courage came from his obedience to God’s will and he was determined to live a life for Christ.

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

We pray that God gives us His Holy Love and to be full of wisdom so that we can have testimonies without shame.

For Your Five

We pray that God can help us to support each other in prayer so that when other people see how we love each other, they will know that we are Christians.

For Our Church

We pray that God will lead our brothers and sisters so that we can walk and love in His Truth, and do His great work in our city.

Acts 21:1-16

21 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. **2** And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. **3** When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. **4** And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. **5** When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed **6** and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. **8** On the next day we departed and came to

Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. **9** He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. **10** While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. **11** And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" **12** When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." **14** And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

15 After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. **16** And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

// *Prayer is the best gift we can give to brothers and sisters when they leave us for a long journey.* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Chapter 21 consists of Paul's journey to Jerusalem after leaving the Ephesian elders at Miletus. From V4,7,8,16, we find that Paul met with believers and had fellowship with them in the cities where his ship made port on the way to Jerusalem. We learn that Paul enjoyed fellowship with the brothers and sisters. We too should develop a deeper relationship and have regular fellowship with each other too.
- V5-6 What a beautiful scene we can see here - having been able to bond with others for just seven days, the disciples at Tyre, together with their wives and children, knelt down and prayed at the dockside for Paul. What a deep bond in the Lord we can have! Prayer is the best gift we can give to brothers and sisters when they leave us for a long journey.
- V7-8 As he was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, Philip was one of the seven men chosen to serve as deacons (Acts 6:1-6). He was an evangelist and had 4 daughters who were given the gift of prophesy. It seems like such a blessing that not only himself, but also his children, were able to serve the Lord together as a team. As said in the book of Joshua 24:15, 'But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'
- V10-13 Although Paul was forewarned by Agabus the prophet and many other disciples that he would be prosecuted in Jerusalem, he did not listen but responded that he was ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus (v13). How precious is Paul's determination and zealous heart for our Lord! Today we may not be asked to die for the Lord but there may be times when we need to surrender something precious for the Lord in order to follow Him.

submitted by Terry

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray for yourself that you can have a determination to follow Jesus no matter what happens.

For your five

Pray for your five can serve for the Lord together with their family members.

For our church

Pray that God may lead our church to have a deeper bond in Christ.

Acts 21:17-26

21 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. **2** And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. **3** When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. **4** And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. **5** When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed **6** and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

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11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" **12** When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." **14** And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

15 After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. **16** And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

// *We should learn how to forgive and forget, and accept others just like God accepts us.* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V17 What warm brotherly love is shown here when the leaders of the Jerusalem church, forgetting that Paul was once the enemy of the gospel, genuinely embraced Paul when he arrived! 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.' (2 Corinthians 5:17) We should learn how to forgive and forget, and accept others just like God accepts us.
- V19-20 Paul reported how God had saved many gentiles through his preaching. Although God had honoured him more than any of the apostles, yet the response of other apostles to the successful ministry of Paul was encouraging - they did not envy him but on the contrary, glorified the Lord upon hearing these things.
- V21 There were some false reports stating that Paul told the Jews who lived among the Gentiles to turn from the Law of Moses - not to circumcise their children nor to keep the Jewish customs. However, there is no evidence that Paul ever taught these Jewish believers this way. When we work for the Lord, Satan will work at the same time - spreading rumours and hostility is one of Satan's ways to ruin the unity of the church. 'Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things' (James 3:5). We must be aware of the terrible consequence of spreading untrue messages.
- V23-24 In order to demonstrate that Paul did not ask the Jews to forsake the law of Moses, the elders asked Paul to follow a Jewish custom in public - to

accompany the four men who made a vow; to go through purification rituals with them and to pay their expenses to do so. Paul acted accordingly. This is a symbolic action to show that Paul stood in line with the law. Paul accommodated himself to the life-style of those whom he hoped to win for the gospel. As he said, 'When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ.' (1 Corinthians 9:20) This is something we should learn in our ministry.

- V25 The Jerusalem Council decree set in Acts chapter 15 is reconfirmed here. Gentiles do not need to convert to Judaism in order to be saved as salvation is not about keeping law but by faith alone. The Jews could continue with their Jewish customs as long as they did not deny the gospel. Hallelujah! The salvation is finished and we can enjoy the salvation everyday by faith!

submitted by Terry

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that you really understand that we enjoy the salvation by faith but not by law keeping, so that you don't please God by doing good things.

For your five

Pray that your five can accept brothers and sisters as Jesus accepts us.

For our church

Pray for our church that we don't spread rumours and that we can endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Acts 21:27-36

27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, **28** crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." **29** For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. **30** Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. **31** And as they were seeking to kill

him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. **32** He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. **33** Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He enquired who he was and what he had done. **34** Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. **35** And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, **36** for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

// do we trust our own understanding in situations instead of seeking God? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v28-29 There was no truth in the testimony of the Jews. They stated that Paul had bought Greeks into the temple, based on an assumption. How often do we trust our own understanding in situations instead of seeking God?
- It is interesting to see how the devil uses lies to try to hinder God's work.
- v32 The plural used suggests that the commander would have taken at least two centurions and 200 soldiers with him.
- v35 Yet despite the large number of soldiers, they still had to carry Paul because the violence of the crowd was so severe.
- v36 I wonder how many of the crowd actually knew the original reason that Paul was being persecuted? Did they follow, or did all of them truly believe what the Jews from Asia said in v27-28?

submitted by Samantha Gregory

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray for yourself that when there is confusion all around and the crowd is surging one way, that we might know God's calm in the storm and have His wisdom to know whether to follow, or to choose not to.

For Your Five

Pray for your five that they might not believe lies told to them by others about God, His church and His people. Rather they might see His truth.

For Our Church

Pray for our church that we would spur each other on to God, love and good works. That as a church our hearts would be angered and broken for what angers and breaks God's heart.

Acts 21:37-22:21

37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? **38** Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" **39** Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." **40** And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:

22 "Brothers and fathers, hear the defence that I now make before you."

2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. **4** I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, **5** as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed towards Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. **7** And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are

you persecuting me?' **8** And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' **9** Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. **10** And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' **11** And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, **13** came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him.

14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; **15** for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. **16** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

17 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance **18** and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' **19** And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. **20** And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' **21** And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

POINTS OF INTEREST

- It is amazing to see how God uses Paul's background to help him connect with this large crowd of Jews. Though Paul was not proud of his past and his previous persecutions of Christians, God powerfully uses his testimony. Will we let God use those things we are not proud of? Would we speak so freely of the sin that God has released us from? When we become Christians, God asks us to lay down our lives - the entirety of it for His kingdom and His glory.
- 22v8 It is interesting that Paul called Jesus 'Lord', even before he had been told who He was. There is power and authority even in His voice.
- 22v9 God's love and care for us is so individual. He had a message specifically for Paul, He loved him so much - He spoke to him individually, with words no one else could understand. God speaks to you too today, through His word.
- Moments before, the crowd that Paul speaks to here were persecuting him. They were acting so violently towards him that soldiers had to carry him on their shoulders! Yet Paul fights to be able to share God's work in his life. The gracious love of God flows out of him - he does not condemn them for persecuting him, but instead shares God's love with them. This is the transforming power of the Spirit! God can do this too in your life! Are you willing?

submitted by Samantha Gregory

// When we become Christians, God asks us to lay down our lives - the entirety of it for His kingdom and His glory. //

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that you, like Paul will have the courage to bear testimony to the work that God has done in your life.

For Your Five

Pray for your five, that God will speak to them as clearly as He spoke to Paul. That in whatever way He chooses, He might reveal Himself to them.

For Our Church

Pray for our church that we would stand and proclaim God's message and truth. That we will use all situations that God puts us in - no matter how bleak - to share His message with the people He loves.

Acts 22:22-29

22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."

23 And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, **24** the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. **25** But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to

flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" **26** When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." **27** So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." **28** The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." **29** So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

// *Our identity is formed by our salvation in Jesus Christ and adoption into his Kingdom, the world has no hold over us* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Habitual reading of the Bible can make our reading patterns formulaic. Reflecting on the incident of Paul being bound, sometimes after reading this, one will automatically try to figure out the context and why he was bound. However, it is also important to read this in a spiritual light, and be moved by his plight. An inquisitive manner is not the only thing important to our study of the Word. We can first consider not why he was bound but to see a spiritual truth: that we are always accused in the world, blamed and persecuted, as we are not of the world. However as our identity is formed by our salvation in Jesus Christ and adoption into his Kingdom, the world has no hold over us. It cannot torture or defeat us, as Christ has already taken the blame for us.
- V25- Paul asked, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" When our enemies are accusing us, are we conscious of our heavenly identity?
- The commander was alarmed. Similarly, if we reveal our identity in God, then those without true authority will also be afraid. This is because those who belong to God have true authority than those who have worldly authority. True heavenly authority is more noble and glorious. Without consent, the enemy will not dare attack.
- V28 The centurion said he spent a lot of silver to gain Roman citizenship. Paul said he was born a Roman citizen. Similarly, God gave to us our status as His children, we do not need to pay or work for it. Not even good works can gain this identity. We were born into this identity as Paul was born into his Roman identity, when we were born again. This identity cannot be earned by our own ability.

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that our merciful God will give us grace, and share himself through us to those we come into contact with. Bless us with faith, that it may be a shining example of our identity in Christ. Thank Him for meeting all our needs.

For Your Five

Pray that God will bless his servants, that we may be crowned with confidence, bound together in the body of Christ with love. That our salvation will be proudly shown as our adornment, that we may demonstrate Godly qualities and bring glory to Him with our identities.

For Our Church

In the name of Jesus Christ, pray to God that our church will be safe from temptations and delivered from evil. Pray that those who belong to God will follow his commandments, and bring others to salvation. Pray that the Church is drawn to God's word as a deer pants for the water, and lastly, that we will gain our sustenance from Him.

Acts 22:30-23:16

30 But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

23 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." **2** And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

3 Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" **4** Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" **5** And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." **7** And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. **8** For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" **10** And

when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

A Plot to Kill Paul

12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. **14** They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. **15** Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V30 Sanhedrin was a Jewish Supreme Court; this was where all the high-ranking officials gathered, to listen to what Paul had to say. People would usually feel intimidated in such a situation but Paul still spoke boldly. Surely he had a lot of courage from God.

- V1 For Paul to say that he had fulfilled his duty to God in all good conscience until that day, what a statement! Of course it didn't mean that he was sinless. He was claiming that he has never acted as a hypocritical man in his life. Sometimes our conscience will be corrupted in order to achieve a certain goal, but God indeed knows everything. Let us serve him with a pure and honest heart in our ministry.
- V6 Not only did Paul have courage, but he also had wisdom. Although Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, sensing that the audience would not listen to him and he was not going to get a fair trial, he referred himself as a Pharisee. He certainly knew his audience - the Pharisees and Seducees. He proclaimed that he was being judged on the basis of his belief in the resurrection, a hot issue between these two parties. So he could get the Pharisees to sympathize with him, instead of having them united against him. Recalling what Jesus said to his disciples in the book of Matthew 10:16- 'I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves'. In our ministry we certainly need to ask for wisdom to deal with difficult situations.
- V11 It is so wonderful that our Lord does not leave us in despair. He is always there to guide us and to encourage us when we are down. 'Take courage' - one phrase from our Lord is much better than a thousand words from friends. When all seems lost and we may be unsure if we are doing the right things, the Lord is always there to support and guide us to His glory - especially when our desire is to glorify Him.
- V12 - V16 What an evil and devious plot the 40 Jews had planned with the help of the high priest to kill Paul! However, God had saved Paul through his nephew. No one can hurt us without the permission of God. In these unusual circumstances, we see God's protecting hand all over Paul. God knows how to take care of His servants. Let us put our trust and faith in Him.
- This was clearly a serious plot designed by what would equal modern day terrorists. There was collusion with the Jewish leaders, who themselves had become so concerned about politics and their own reputation, that murder was even entertained, just as they had done with Jesus. We must guard against pride, which may insidiously replace Jesus as our focus, as this is one reason why we end up sinning.

submitted by Colleen

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray to the Lord that you can serve Him with a pure and honest heart.

For Your Five

Pray that your five will have courage and wisdom to cope with difficult situations and most importantly, put their trust and faith in Him as it is written that He will never forsake us.

For Our Church

Pray that our Church will be steadfast as a beacon of hope to this world of darkness and corruption so that we can lead people to Christ and glorify Him.

Acts 23:17-35

17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." **18** So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." **19** The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" **20** And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him." **21** But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." **22** So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

Paul Sent to Felix the Governor

23 Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. **24** Also provide mounts for Paul to ride

and bring him safely to Felix the governor."

25 And he wrote a letter to this effect:

26 "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. **27** This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.

28 And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. **29** I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. **30** And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him."

31 So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. **32** And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. **33** When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. **34** On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, **35** he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v17-22. This young man displayed courage and obedience and was ultimately used by God in His plan to protect Paul's life. It is easy to overlook children but God can use anyone of any age (Matthew 18:2-6) who are willing to submit to Him.
- v29-30. The commander appears to be convinced that despite the Sanhedrin maintaining that Paul had broken Jewish law, that Paul had not actually broken Roman law to warrant imprisonment or death. He would have probably let Paul go if not for hearing that there was a plot to kill Paul, and Paul would not have had an opportunity to travel to Rome to testify about His faith. Our Lord God can wondrously use seemingly negative events to fulfil His purpose - Praise Him whose thoughts are above ours!
- v31. The scene can be imagined to comprise of a somewhat small Jewish man probably with poor eyesight and other physical infirmities, travelling on horseback in the midst of 400 burly tough Roman foot soldiers and 70 soldiers riding horses. It must have looked pretty strange! I doubt Paul looked like the normal VIPs they would usually escort.

submitted by Ashley Liew

// *Our Lord God can wondrously use seemingly negative events to fulfil His purpose - Praise Him whose thoughts are above ours!*

//

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to convict you if pride is getting in the way of you fully submitting to His authority and Lordship, and repent so that you can be lovingly restored in your relationship with Him. .

For your Five

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help all of you see past the sometimes frustrating and defeating events in life that God remains faithful and that His ways and thoughts are above ours.

For Our Church

Pray that God will guide us as a church to see that all our members, no matter young or old, can be used powerfully by God.

Acts 24:1-21

24 And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. **2** And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, **3** in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. **4** But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. **5** For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. **6** He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. **8** By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.”

9 The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

10 And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied:

“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I

cheerfully make my defense. **11** You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, **12** and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. **13** Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. **14** But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, **15** having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. **16** So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. **17** Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. **18** While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— **19** they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. **20** Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, **21** other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

// *Pray that the Holy Spirit will challenge you to understand systematically the basis of your faith in Jesus.* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v1. The Jewish leaders travelled 60 miles and employed a lawyer, so as to perpetuate their false accusations against Paul. Their murder plot (Acts 23) had failed but they continued on their premeditated and determined attempt to seek Paul's death.
- v2-8. Luke in his recording of Tertullus' speech, appears to emphasise that it is more composed of flattery and lacked substantial evidence to back up his specific accusations.
- v10-21. In contrast, Paul's defense systematically refutes the lack of evidence point by point. Paul's accusers were unable to present evidence to support their claims. For example, Paul was accused of starting trouble among the Jews in Asia but these individuals were not present to confirm this.
- v14. This is an example of Paul using every opportunity to witness for Christ. If we were faced with such pressure from false accusers, would we be seeking such opportunities to testify of God's grace and love?

submitted by Ashley Liew

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Ask God to help you see the opportunities to testify of His goodness in your daily lives, even if it may seem initially out of place.

For Your Five

Pray that the Holy Spirit will challenge you to understand systematically the basis of your faith in Jesus.

For Our Church

Pray that God will give our church courage and boldness to act as a beacon of His truth and love in the midst of a world that is in rebellion against Him.

Acts 24:22-27

22 But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." **23** Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

24 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. **25** And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you." **26** At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. **27** When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

// *Will I also try to gain the fame and wealth of the earth under the guise of taking about the word of God?* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- V22: “Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of the Way” , according to verse 21, “the Way” is connected to “the resurrection of the dead”. It can also be noticed that Felix not only knew about the Way, but he also had more perfect knowledge of it, knowing it very well, but from the beginning to the end, he did not really fully grasp the Way and still did not believe or accept its truth. It reminds me of Isaiah 6:9, “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving”.
- V24: Felix came with his wife Drusilla to listen to Paul share about faith in Christ Jesus. But after Paul spoke about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come—Felix grew afraid, which I associate with the example of the man who received one talent and was too afraid to do anything with it. For the word of God is alive and active, it is promised to set us free and give us a happy life, but Felix accepted it by what he saw with his eyes and what he heard with his ears. In addition, under the guise of taking about the gospel with Paul, Felix sent Paul for him frequently and hoped Paul would offer him a bribe. In fact, Felix rejects the gospel, but was greedy for the treasures on earth.
- At this point, I am also reminded that in verse 23 I cannot understand why at the beginning Felix gave Paul some aspect of freedom and permitted his friends to take care of his needs, I think the fundamental reason is also due to Felix’s greed of earthly treasures.

- In verse 27, because Felix wanted to grant a favor to people: the Jews, he left Paul in prison, but did not consider that Paul was the servant of God.

PRAYING IN FAITH

Ask ourselves: I also have more perfect knowledge about “the way”, what is my response to it? Am I also afraid like Felix?

Will I also try to gain the fame and wealth of the earth under the guise of taking about the word of God?

Pray that you, your five, and our church will see the greatness of God's will above all else.

ACTS 25:1-12

25 Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. **2** And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, **3** asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

4 Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. **5** “So,” said he, “let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.”

6 After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. **7** When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. **8** Paul argued

in his defense, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.” **9** But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?” **10** But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. **11** If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.” **12** Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

// *If we follow Christ we may face opposition and false accusations. Can we still stand strong against them?* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v.1-3 Festus was the new Roman governor of Judea succeeding Antonius Felix from about AD 59 to 62. The Jews in the province immediately took the opportunity to accuse Paul before the new governor of political dissent and to stir up riots. They requested that Festus send Paul back to Jerusalem to stand trial with the intention to ambush and kill him on the road.
- v. 4-5 Festus, bearing in mind that Paul is still a Roman citizen, did not go along with the angry Jews' plan and decides to hear Paul's case in Caesarea.
- v. 6-7 Many charges were brought against Paul, but none of them could be proven.
- v. 9 Festus wishes to gain favour with the Jews in Judea, over which he governs, given the bad history with his predecessor Felix.
- v. 10-12 Paul, however, refuses to be tried in Jerusalem, stating that he has done nothing wrong, and appeals to Caesar. Festus happily agrees as he can wash his hands of this matter.
- Paul's enemies are putting immense pressure on Festus to get Paul into trouble, possibly using bribery and applying political pressure.
- Festus tries to please people, their opinion matters to him, whereas Paul isn't worried about what people think of him. He stands boldly in his innocence as no one can prove that he has done anything wrong. You can see God's hand protecting Paul.

submitted by Phan Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

If we follow Christ we may face opposition and false accusations. Can we still stand strong against them? Pray that God gives you the strength and wisdom to navigate through these tough situations. Ultimately He is in control, even of our accusers and He has a plan.

For your five

Pray that your five will have integrity whether it is at work/school and a desire to please God rather than people.

For our church

Take some time to pray for persecuted Christians around the world. Pray that God continues to strengthen them and encourage them even in the face of injustice and persecution.

ACTS 25:13-27

13 Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. **14** And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, **15** and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. **16** I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. **17** So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. **18** When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed. **19** Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. **20** Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding

them. **21** But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." **22** Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. **24** And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. **25** But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. **26** But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. **27** For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

// The world tells us that we have to be a certain way to be successful in life, but God has set us apart to be different //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v. 13 King Agrippa ruled a small kingdom north of Judea under the emperor's authority. King Agrippa along with his sister Bernice visited Festus in Caesarea.
- v.14-21 The Jews had spoken badly of Paul and had accused him of many serious crimes, but following Festus' examination of Paul, he could find no crime that Paul had committed. Festus concluded that Paul's case was only a dispute over religious matters.
- v. 22 King Agrippa, being a Jew himself, wanted to learn more about Paul and asked to see Paul himself.
- v. 23 King Agrippa and Bernice arrived into the audience room with "great pomp". You can imagine the procession and fuss made and the entourage of high-ranking officials and other "important" people that would have stood on one side of the room, while Paul, a single prisoner in chains, stood on the other side.
- v. 25-27 Festus recounts that Paul is innocent of the charges made against him. In order for Festus to send Paul to Caesar he has to provide some explanation for why he is being sent, so he enlists the help of King Agrippa.

submitted by Phan Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

"God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that none may boast before him." (1 Cor 1:27-29)

The world tells us that we have to be a certain way to be successful in life, but God has set us apart to be different. Not to be weak in the sense of letting people trample over us, but weak in the sense of self and yielding to God-following his way of doing and being, that ultimately will achieve better results than this world ever could. Pray that we humble ourselves for God to use us more.

For Your Five

Paul's identity was firmly grounded in Christ and his confidence in God. Pray that your five will have a solid assurance of who they are in Christ, wherever they go and whatever people they are surrounded by.

For Our Church

Paul is about to give testimony about Jesus Christ to King Agrippa and Festus. He's ready for any opportunity to share about Jesus. Pray that our brothers and sisters in church have that same preparedness in our hearts-ready to testify about Jesus in any circumstance.

ACTS 26:1-32

26 So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defence:

2 “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, **3** especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

4 “My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. **5** They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. **6** And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, **7** to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! **8** Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

9 “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **10** And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. **11** And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Paul Tells of His Conversion

12 “In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. **13** At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. **14** And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are

you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ **15** And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. **16** But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, **17** delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **18** to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

19 “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, **20** but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. **21** For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. **22** To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: **23** that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” **25** But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.

26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. **27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” **28** And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” **29** And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

30 Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them.

31 And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." **32** And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Verse 19: After Paul shared his testimony of being called in Damascus; he claimed, with no shame that all of his acts were so that he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". This had, indeed, always been Paul's goal and direction for the rest of his life. – For me, as a saved believer, there must also be a calling and vision from the Lord. Do we also have a clear knowledge as to what this heavenly vision is? And are we living in an obedience or disobedience to it?
- Verse 22a: Paul had suffered many persecutions as he lived his life for the Lord. Nevertheless, he still stood there and testified the truth, regardless of the possibility of his life being taken away– Are we willing to suffer and be persecuted for the Lord like Paul?
- Verse 22b: Moreover, Paul knew that him standing there to testify, was not through his own strength, but rather God willed it to happen and was helping him. He did not boast on his own behalf; instead, he gave all the Glory to God. As he followed the Lord, he was experiencing man's weakness but with God's strength, so it was clear that it was the Lord who saved him; God strengthened his faith, and upheld him by His power and grace. –

// Do we testify to others about God? Do we also walk in the light with God? //

When we experience spiritual victory, do we boast about what we did? Or do we say "I have had the help that comes from God"?

- Verses 25-26: When Paul testified to Festus, he spoke "true and rational words", and what he testified about had "not been done in a corner". Paul was honest, as he showed us that a true witness for Christ is a person who walks in the light with God. People of such a kind should be known to everyone, and to set a good example for the sake of Christ. Do we testify to others about God? Do we also walk in the light with God?

PRAYING IN FAITH

Father God, I thank You for calling me to be your child and to be part of your people and I thank You for Your good and acceptable and perfect thoughts towards me. Please help me to understand your mind and will, and to be obedient to the heavenly vision You show to me. I pray for my family who have believed, please strengthen their hearts and faith, so that they can stand still on the way to following You. I also pray for my family who haven't believed, please show your mercy and grace upon them, open their eyes, destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of You. Please soften their hearts, so that the seeds of Gospel will fall into the good soil and find growth. I also pray for our church, please keep us unified in You, so that we shall have one mind to follow and serve You. Please help us in whatever trials, thus we stand still in Your power and grace. Also help us walk in the light with You, and we can testify boldly to people. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Acts 27:1-26

27 And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius.

2 And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. **3** The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

4 And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. **5** And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. **6** There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. **7** We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. **8** Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

9 Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, **10** saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." **11** But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.

12 And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete,

facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

13 Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. **14** But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land.

15 And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. **16** Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. **17** After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. **18** Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. **19** And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. **20** When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

21 Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. **22** Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.

23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, **24** and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' **25** So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. **26** But we must run aground on some island."

POINTS OF INTEREST

- After preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem and Paul was arrested, Paul had a right as a Roman citizen to be put on trial before Caesar. The method of travelling by ship, in those days were functional, usually used by merchants and traders dealing with business. Paul was allowed to take Luke (the physician and author of Acts) and Aristarchus on a large ship that also boarded a captain, pilot and some 270 soldiers, sailors and prisoners—making it a total of 276 on board (v37).
- v10-11: The ship's crew consisted of experienced seamen that were familiar with navigating the seas in different weather conditions, yet Paul, as prisoner, warns them "I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also". And as expected, the centurion did not listen to him but rather listened to who he thought knew best.
- v18-20: Eventually the ship's planned route was forced to go off course due to the storm and eventually the cargo had to be thrown overboard to lighten the load (v18), then three days later in v19, thrown overboard was the ship's tackle (a mechanism with ropes and blocks that help for hoisting, lowering and shifting objects or materials). Eventually the author of Acts writes that they had not seen sun nor stars for many days and that the storm continued to rage on, they "finally gave up all hope of being saved." Sometimes for us when storms

rage on, we also give up all hope all too easily.

- v21-26: When they had all given up hope and were prepared to die, Paul encouraged them by sharing a vision he had of an angel telling him that no one on board would die. He did, however warn of the ship being destroyed (v22). Paul was able to be calm through the storm as he had great confidence in God's faithfulness, he believed the word of the Lord, delivered by the angel and he trusted God would fulfill His promise.

submitted by Ansy Wong

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that when you experience storms (or if you are currently in one), that you will not lose hope all too easily, but instead to be encouraged, not discouraged; and to persevere through the storm, having faith in God.

For your Five

Ask God to grant them hope when all hope seems lost.

For Our Church

Pray for our church to continue to trust in God that through storms and trials we would stand firm and have confidence in God's faithfulness.

Acts 27:27-44

27 When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. **28** So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. **29** And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. **30** And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, **31** Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." **32** Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

33 As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing.

34 Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, [c] for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." **35** And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. **36** Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. **37** (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) **38** And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

39 Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they

planned if possible to run the ship ashore.

40 So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. **41** But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. **42** The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. **43** But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, **44** and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- All 276 people were still trapped on the boat for 14 days experiencing a bad storm (like that of a typhoon or hurricane). And in v29, they pray for daylight for fear of the boat crashing against the rocks, risking their safety.
- v30-32: Despite God appointing that by the very end they would all be saved—the sailors still feared for the worst and attempted to escape themselves, by pretending to let down the anchors when they wanted to abandon the ship on the lifeboats. As human beings, we have a tendency to be selfish and want to seek our own safety first, regardless of it being a duty to help or serve others first. Paul explains "unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be

saved." Paul says this because God had promised to save everyone, and so for the sailors wanting to save themselves first and not trust in God's providence of help, abandoning ship would not be helpful, also for practical reasons as the sailors were skilled on how to work the ship. For the sailors to leave the ship, Paul states the obvious fact that the soldiers cannot be saved, they would all die. So under Paul's request the soldiers cut the ropes of the lifeboats letting it fall away.

- v33-38: Paul encourages all the people to eat as they had all "been in constant suspense and [had] gone without food" He reminds them "You need it to survive" as the group were probably lacking in energy and strength. He continues "Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head" to remind them yet again that God is going to protect them, they will all be saved, not one will die (v34). As a result, all were encouraged and ate (v36). With strength regained and having been reminded of God's providence, it seemed like there was more hope for their predicament.
- v42-43: Things started to seem better, they were drawing close to land, but they had to swim to shore after their ship was broken (v41), they all swam. The soldiers were planning to kill those prisoners to prevent them escaping, however, it was good that the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life—as he saw that Paul was not only an innocent man, but an extraordinary one that was in close communication with God.

submitted by Ansy Wong

// *Continue to pray for our church to continue to trust in God that through storms and trials we would stand firm and have confidence in God's faithfulness.* //

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that God would reveal in your heart any selfish desires you have that may not glorify God. Instead, ask God to help you to have a humble attitude that follows and listens Him first.

For your Five

Ask God to use you and give you an opportunity so you can encourage your five just like Paul encouraged those on the ship.

For Our Church

Continue to pray for our church to continue to trust in God that through storms and trials we would stand firm and have confidence in God's faithfulness.

Acts 28:1-10

28 After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. **2** The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. **3** When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. **4** When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." **5** He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. **6** They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead.

But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. **8** It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. **9** And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. **10** They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

// *Do things in your life seem out of control - that things seem to be going against you?* //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- It seems that things are out of control on this trip. The storm, the shipwreck, the viper, the sickness - all these things seemed to be against Paul. But in reality, God used each of these situations to bring glory to Himself.
- v.2,3. There is this understanding in this world, about good people being rewarded and bad people being punished. That is why the natives showed kindness upon arrival, but assumed Paul was evil when he was bitten by a snake. Paul's survival throws that preconception on their heads.
- v.6 The second preconception is that Paul must have been a god. Because Paul was not subject to the same "laws" of the natural world, they assumed he was a god. It tells us that they believed gods could just do things as they pleased.
- v.7 This series of unfortunate events, instead of being negative, becomes an opportunity for healing and freedom. God is at work all the time.
- v.10 Paul didn't heal and bless the people there, hoping that they might give the ship supplies. But as God's love was shared with the natives, they returned with love and gratitude towards Paul and the crew.

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Do things in your life seem out of control - that things seem to be going against you? Like Paul, he could have been down about his situation, but instead he had faith that God was in control, and God's glory was going to be shown in this situation. Ask God to open your eyes to the work that he's asking you to be part of in the situation that you're in now.

For your Five

Your five might have preconceptions about what Christianity is like. Ask God to break through those preconceptions in each of your friend's lives. Ask Him to show them Jesus' true power and authority.

For Our Church

Pray that our church never loses sight that Jesus is the one to lead us. Let our church eagerly take up the challenges and opportunities around us.

Acts 28:11-22

11 After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. **12** Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. **13** And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli.

14 There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. **15** And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. **16** And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

17 After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. **18** When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. **19** But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. **20** For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." **21** And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. **22** But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

// God's plans are
greater than ours //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v13 "a south wind sprang up" - what a coincidence! A south wind blew the ship so that it arrived in Puteoli. And in Puteoli there happened to be some Christian brothers there. God uses this to bring Paul into fellowship with believers. God doesn't take them straight to Rome, but puts Paul just far enough to give him time meet up with the growing number of Christians in and around Rome.
- v15 Puteoli was a major port that took road traffic directly to Rome. It's for this reason that Luke writes that they had essentially come to Rome. Paul would be travelling on road from Puteoli to Rome itself.
- v15 "On seeing them, Paul thanks God and took courage." What is Paul thanking God for? Probably for the faith of the believers in Rome - but also for letting Paul share in fellowship with them. By meeting with these believers Paul takes courage. He faces an uncertain future, but is encouraged by the faith and fellowship of the other believers.
- v.21 Amazingly, Paul ends up arriving there, and there are no accusations or information presented to the local officials. Instead they eagerly desire to hear about Christianity! God works in amazing ways.

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

God's plans are greater than ours. Submit your life to His plan today and discover the freedom that comes with trusting in Him.

For your Five

When you spend time with your five this week, pray that God lets those times of conversation be extra special - so they have a taste of what it's like to have fellowship with believers.

For Our Church

Remember the brothers and sisters that we support as missionaries. Spend time praying for them or write them a note of encouragement, so that they will thank God and take courage in their situations.

Acts 28:23-31

23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. **24** And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. **25** And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

26

"Go to this people, and say,
"You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."

27

For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.'

28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, **31** proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

// His legacy is reflected in his love of Jesus and the desire for those to know Jesus as Lord. What's your legacy? What are you living for? //

POINTS OF INTEREST

- v24 some will believe, and others won't. Even if Paul, such a great explainer, couldn't convert everyone, we shouldn't be discouraged either. Continue to speak the truth about Jesus.
- v28 We know that Salvation is for all - and be encouraged because we know that people's hearts will respond.
- v30 Paul continued to preach the kingdom of God even whilst he was under house arrest in Rome.

As we come to the final day of the 60 days of impact, we see Paul's story end here with him continuing to proclaim the kingdom of God. His legacy is reflected in his love of Jesus and the desire for those to know Jesus as Lord. What's your legacy? What are you living for? I hope these 60 days of impact have made an impact in your life, the life of your five, and in our church.

If you have stories to share about what God has done, please write them down and share them with others. And I'd love to hear them too. You can email them to me, Bert Han, berthan@gmail.com

submitted by Bert Han

PRAYING IN FAITH

For Yourself

Pray that the impact that God has made in your heart continues to spur you on in proclaiming God's kingdom with all boldness and without hindrance.

For your Five

Pray that your five continue to be impacted by Jesus, and by your testimony about Him.

For Our Church

Pray that our church discovers it's role in proclaiming the greatest impact the world has ever known - the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to save us and bring us salvation.



This project turned out to be much more complicated than we initially anticipated. And it took the hard work of many people to get it finished.

A big, heartfelt thanks to all our wonderful translators:

Yinghong Shang, Cher Hui, Li Qiang, Pearl Han, Mei Chan, Chen Jing Peng, Lianying Chen, Kay Lau, Sarah Kho, Phoenix Chan, Junny Chan, Donald Fu, Hoi Fei, Scott Chung, Tessa Lo, Sandy Yap, PeiJing and Alex Chow's students(!).

A special thank you to Perkin Kwan who helped with a large part of the translation, often suffering last minute emails and pleading to translate "just one more."

Thanks to Mandy Wong for the logo design.

And a very, super special thank you to Ansy Wong, who coordinated the project, liaising with the writers and translators. And for doing the design and layout of all three documents.

We hope you have been impacted by God through these 60 days. Let's continue to live Life Alive.

