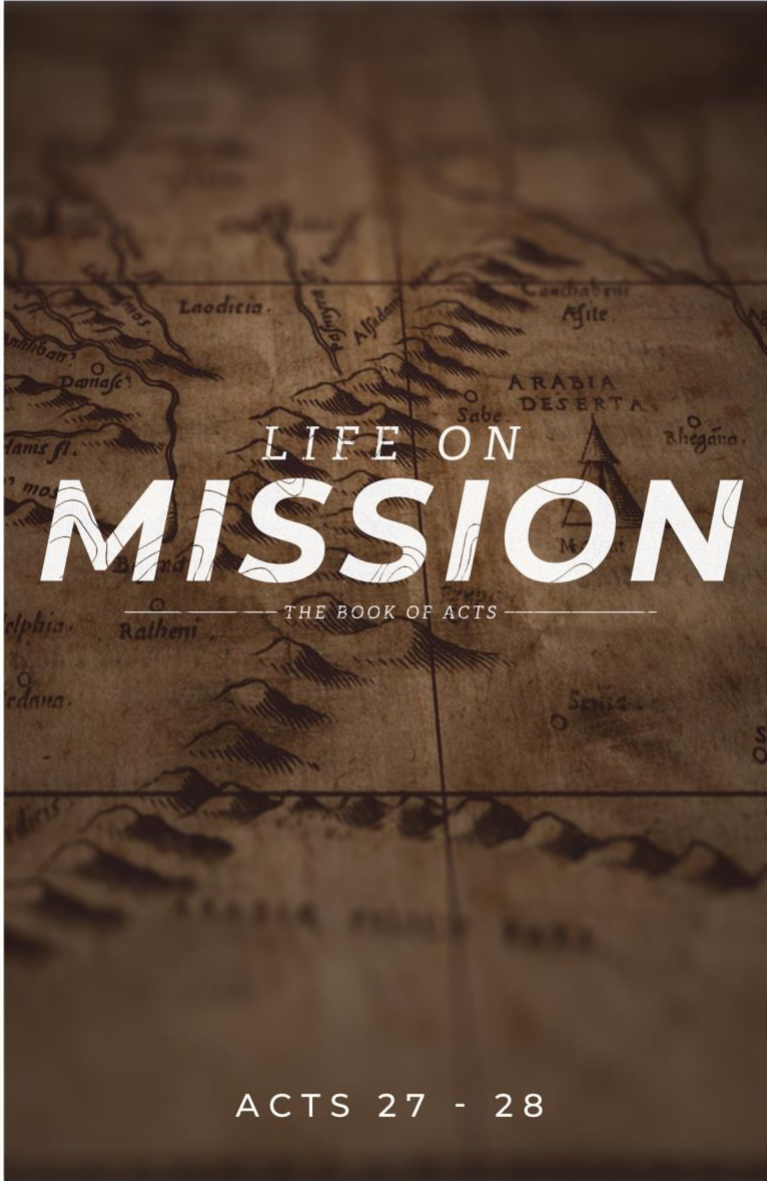




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 11 - 14

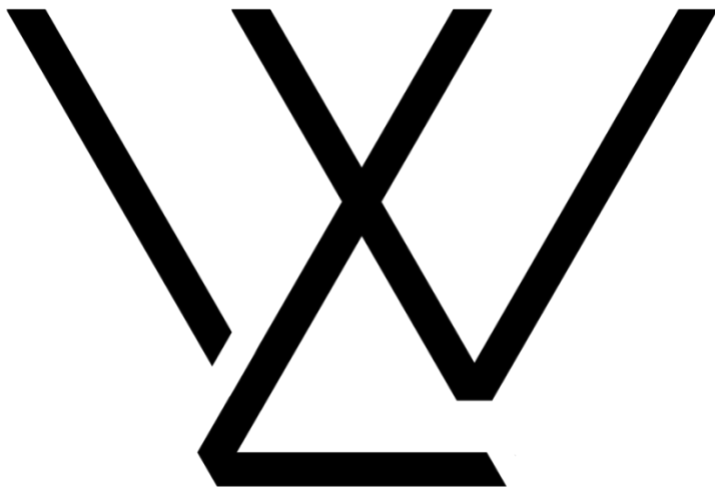


LIFE ON  
**MISSION**

— THE BOOK OF ACTS —

ACTS 27 - 28





**Word to Life's** are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

#### **Contributors**

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— **WEEK 11** —

- OCT. 31
- NOV. 1
- NOV. 2
- NOV. 3
- NOV. 4

— **WEEK 12** —

- NOV. 7
- NOV. 8
- NOV. 9
- NOV. 10
- NOV. 11

— **WEEK 13** —

- NOV. 14
- NOV. 15
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— **WEEK 14** —

- NOV. 21
- NOV. 22
- NOV. 23
- NOV. 24
- NOV. 25



## Week 11: Acts 27:1-26

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ:** Acts 27:1-26

#### **EXPLORE:**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Acts 27:1-26 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity:** Days 2-4 of this week's Word to Life Study will unpack one central theme that is visible in Acts 27:1-26.
  - Before you have completed those days, write down a central theme you notice in the biblical text. After participating in Days 2-4, revisit and revise your central theme as necessary.
    - Theme before reading Week 11 | Days 2-4:
  
    - Theme after reading Week 11 | Days 2-4:
  
- **Question:** What do you notice about the way that Paul was treated in vv. 1-3? Why might that detail be significant based upon what we have previously studied in Acts?

- **Activity:** Paul comes to different conclusions in v. 10 and vv. 21-24. Read the two sections of verses and summarize what Paul expects will take place.
  
- **Question:** Acts 27:25-26 communicate both hope in God and realism about the difficulty they are going to face. How have you managed to balance hope and realism?
  
- **Question:** The angel reassured Paul at an otherwise difficult time. How could your life demonstrate a deeper sense of trust in God in the complicated circumstances of life?



## **Week 11: Acts 27:1-26**

### **Day 2: The Silver Lining on a Dark Cloud**

**READ: Acts 27:1-26 (Focused on vv. 1-8)**

#### **EXPLORE:**

There is no doubt that you have heard the expression “Look for the silver lining” at some point in your life. Much like a dark cloud which possesses shimmering edges reminding those below of the sun that lurks behind, the idea of looking for a silver lining encourages people to view their situation in life with a certain sense of optimism. It is a reminder that there are often blessings which can be found in an otherwise complicated situation. This truth was certainly the case for the apostle Paul on more than one occasion.

When Paul was being transported to Rome as a prisoner, he experienced a “silver lining” moment amidst a challenging voyage. In Acts 27:3 we are told that when the travelers landed at Sidon, a centurion named Julius allowed Paul to travel to see his friends in the nearby vicinity. Specifically, we are told that it was the kindness of Julius that allowed Paul to be cared for by those in Sidon.

The Greek word that was used to describe Julius’s action was *philanthropos* from which we get the English word philanthropy. It is the only time in the New Testament in which this word for kindness is utilized. The centurion’s kindness toward Paul indicated a level of trust and a certain level of esteem for him as a Roman citizen. This trust between Paul and the centurion will prove to be more valuable and even lifesaving in the difficulties the travelers will endure in their later travels.

Almost certainly, when Paul was released to the care of his “friends,” Luke is indicating that the Christian community

extended a much-needed hospitality toward the weary apostle. In fact, there is good evidence to believe that early Christians consistently referred to each other using the designation of friend (*philos*) in the first century and beyond. In short, Paul was kindly extended a moment of friendship and provision amidst a treacherous trip. He experienced a silver lining on a dark cloud.

Much like Paul, the church today has been given a constant and glorious invitation to look for the silver lining. When obedience to Christ and His kingdom is our mission in this world, we can resist the extremes of despair and baseless optimism. Like Paul and ultimately like Christ, conformity to gospel-saturated obedience will enable us to rightly balance success and failure in the light of eternity. Fundamentally, Christians who look for the silver lining are not participating in mere wishful thinking. They are allowing the Holy Spirit to powerfully remind them of the sustaining grace of God which eclipses both struggle and circumstance.

**BIG IDEA: Because of God's sustaining grace, Christians can see the silver lining amidst seemingly hopeless situations.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Like Paul, have you ever experienced a situation in which Christian friendship became a silver lining on an otherwise dark cloud?
  
- **Questions:** Why is it sometimes challenging to see the silver lining in a dark situation?

## **Week 11: Acts 27:1-26**

### **Day 3: Hopeful and Helpful**

**READ: Acts 27:1-26 (Focused on vv. 9-26)**

#### **EXPLORE:**

No matter how creative, immersive, or intentional your study of Acts 27 might be, it will always remain a challenge to get a clear picture of just how intense the travels of Paul and the others on the boat must have been. Step-by-step the biblical text walks us through the harrowing details of a ship which was bound for disaster and the drama that swirled all around. Paul was commissioned to bring the gospel to Rome, but his transportation was questionable at best.

This text introduces us once again to the difficult space that exists between the promises of God and their eventual fulfillment.

In our reading and study Acts 27, we ought to be reminded of another infamously treacherous sea voyage that took place in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is no other than the story of the reluctant prophet named Jonah. After having been commanded by God to minister in the ancient city of Nineveh, Jonah chose to flee and directly disobey the Lord. In a rather unsurprising turn of events, Jonah's ability to flee God's decree did not go smoothly. In the moments leading up to the notorious fish that swallowed Jonah and returned him to God's mission days later, the reluctant prophet found himself amidst an incredible storm alongside his fellow travelers.

Both Acts 27 and Jonah 1 tell the story of a messenger sent by God, but they could not be more juxtaposed. Unlike Jonah, Paul was not having trouble because of his own wrongdoing, but the stubbornness of those around him.

We ought to remember that Jonah's presence on the ship and his foolishness threatened the well-being of those around him. Paul's presence and his wisdom guided the ship when all hope seemed to be lost. Jonah's story reminds us that there can be proverbial storms we encounter which are directly connected to our own disobedience and stubbornness. In contrast, Paul's story reminds us that sometimes the storms we encounter are the result of others wrongdoing.

Despite the foolishness of Paul's traveling companions, God's plan and purposes for the apostle would not fail. Paul knew this to be true and his assurance enabled him to lead well even as he was surrounded by foolishness. An assurance in God's purposes ought to function the same for us as Christ-followers today.

**BIG IDEA: Like Paul, we ought to remain hopeful in God and helpful to those who are foolish.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In your opinion is possible to be hopeful in the promises of God and yet be unhelpful to those who are foolish. Why or why not?
- **Question:** What has aided in your ability to stay hopeful and helpful toward others?
- **Optional Question:** Sometimes the proverbial storms we experience in life are "of our own doing" and other times we experience chaos because of the foolishness of others. Do you think that most people struggle to discern who is at fault in a certain scenario? Why or why not?

## **Week 11: Acts 27:1-26**

### **Day 4: Shifting Perspectives**

#### **READ: Acts 27:20-26**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Every time I (Stephen) read Acts 27:25-26 it makes me laugh. I am certain that there was nothing humorous in the immediate context, but the mixture of unrelenting hope and sober realism in Paul's words are always astounding to me. Let me briefly highlight Paul's words and why they are so significant for us today.

After rallying the traveling companions to maintain hope, resist fear, and be filled with faith in the Lord, Paul soberly announces that there is good news.<sup>1</sup> Instead of losing their boat and their lives, they are merely going to shipwreck instead.<sup>2</sup> To put it in modern vernacular, Paul said, "Don't worry everyone. God is going to be gracious to us. We are not going to die! We are merely going to crash, swim to an island, and get stranded there for some time. God is gracious!"

We need to remember that the words spoken by Paul were not his own, but that of an angel of God who had visited him in the night. Previously, Paul had cautioned against the danger of their voyage and mentioned the loss of life for those who were on board.<sup>3</sup> With the word of the angel and the grace of God in his mind, however, Paul was able to look at the shipwreck with a unique sense of optimism. In a statement of both realism and hope, Paul received the loss of the boat with gratitude. A shipwreck was profoundly good news when the alternative was

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 27:25 for reference.

<sup>2</sup> See Acts 27:26 for reference.

<sup>3</sup> See Acts 27:10 for reference.

death for so many of the travelers on board. The loss of the boat pales in comparison to the loss of life.

With a change in perspective and an awareness of God's graciousness, Paul was able to see even a shipwreck as an example of the Lord's kindness. Certainly, it could have seemed ideal to not crash at all, but we need to be reminded that even the seemingly undesirable events in missional living are useful in the hand of an almighty God. In this text we are reminded that God's promises on the life of Paul were graciously extended to others around him so that God's kindness would be lavishly extended to his fellow voyagers. Sometimes, like Paul, our calling amidst the difficulties of life is to have a fundamentally life-altering perspective change and invite others to do likewise.

I wonder how the church might be different if the promises and providential care of God were allowed to speak into the seemingly undesirable moments that often accompany a life of obedience. May we be a people that can resist fear, keep courage, and be filled with faith even and especially in the shipwreck scenarios of life.

**BIG IDEA: In view of what God had saved the travelers from, Paul was able to be grateful amidst a shipwreck.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How or when have you experienced a perspective change that altered your view of difficulty?

## **Week 11: Acts 27:1-26**

### **Day 5: Courage in the Storm**

**READ TOGETHER: Romans 8:35-39, Mark 4:35-41**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

#### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Many of us are familiar with dangerous storms. Living in the South, we must always be prepared for hurricane season. We know how deadly they can be and how much destruction they can bring. On his way to Rome, the apostle Paul must go through a destructive storm. We see him have faith and take courage during the storm and lead others to do the same.

Paul has been in Roman custody for over two years now and his appeal to Caesar has finally been granted. He must now set sail for Rome from Caesarea. He is sent under the command of a centurion named Julius. Julius treats Paul kindly on the voyage as he allows him to visit with friends and be cared for.

However, as the journey became dangerous, Julius paid more attention to the pilot and owner of the ship than to Paul. Paul tried to warn Julius and the crew that the voyage would end in disaster and would cost them their lives. After many days under the storm all hope of being saved was abandoned.

But it was at this time that Paul stepped up and instilled faith and courage. He basically told the crew "I told you so." He

simultaneously warned them and told them they should take heart. He promised them that they would not lose their life because an angel of the Lord visited him and promised the preservation of the whole crew.

The angel said to Paul that God has granted you all those who sail with you. This means Paul prayed fervently for the protection of the entire crew. He could have been angry and bitter that the centurion didn't heed his initial advice, but instead he had compassion on him and everyone on the boat. God heard his prayers and delivered all of them from the violent storm. We may find ourselves in the storms of life from time to time, but we must remember like Paul that God is in control of all things and that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. If we remember these things, we also can have courage during the proverbial storms of life.

**BIG IDEA: We can have courage in the storms of life when we have faith in the promises of God.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** Why do you think the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and owner of the ship than Paul?
  
- **Activity:** Write down a list of other storms in the Bible that God delivered his people from.



## Week 12: Acts 27:27-44

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

READ: Acts 27:27-44

#### EXPLORE:

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 27:27-44 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity**: The story that unfolds in this week's Word to Life study provides a full range of human responses to stress and uncertainty. Spend some time listing as many responses as you can see and write about your typical reaction to stress.
- **Question**: Do you think it was a difficult decision for the soldiers to listen to Paul and cut the lifeboat loose in v. 32?

- **Question:** Paul and his traveling companions ate, gave thanks, and were encouraged before they were safely ashore. What do you think their example shows us about godly gratitude in connection with God's deliverance?
  
- **Question:** Summarize the events of vv. 39-44 in your own words and compare them to what Paul promised in vv. 24 and 34.

## **Week 12: Acts 27:27-44**

### **Day 2: Expected Obedience**

**READ: Acts 27:27-44**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Last week we studied the first part of Paul's treacherous voyage toward Rome in Acts 27:1-26. The final word of that section of Scripture was an assurance that God would spare the travelers' lives and they would merely run aground on some island. God would protect them even as they experienced a very dangerous environment. In the biblical text we are unpacking this week, the word of the angel through Paul began to unfold.

Paul's prophecy of running aground soon began to materialize for the sailors and their ship. They had been adrift in the open sea for two weeks, being blown mercilessly by gale-force winds, and they were understandably concerned. In a moment of desperation, some of the sailors let a lifeboat down in a futile attempt to escape danger.<sup>4</sup> Paul told the centurion, however, that the sailors' desire to flee endangered everyone onboard.<sup>5</sup> Because the centurion and the soldiers continued to trust Paul, they cut the lifeboat loose. The sailors' desperation had eclipsed their trust in God's protection as prophesied by Paul, and the results were almost catastrophic.

It is here that we encounter a crucial theme that unites this narrative: obedience is the only right and fitting response to the God who has promised protection. Unlike earlier portions of the story in which Paul's traveling companions did not trust godly counsel, they were now willing to obey when it seemed unconventional. At Paul's word they cut the lifeboat loose, and at

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<sup>4</sup> See Acts 27:30 for reference.

<sup>5</sup> See Acts 27:31.

Paul's word they began to eat and regain their strength. They were protected by God as they obeyed the word He had spoken and continued to speak through the apostle Paul.

Sometimes, Christians are guilty of undervaluing the significance and role of obedience in the life of faith. We say we trust in God's promises, but we do not rightly view obedience as the only fitting response to that which God has spoken. To be clear, God did not protect the travelers because they were awesome. Out of His own goodness and grace, God chose to protect those on the ship. They did not *earn* God's favor, but Paul made it clear that their disobedience would certainly place them outside of His situational protection. The travelers were not protected because of their perfect obedience, but obedience was and is the expected result in the life of one who has been saved by God. Disobedience always has consequences; obedience is always the right response.

**BIG IDEA: Obedience is the only fitting response to the God who has promised His gracious protection.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Do you think that many Christians undervalue the significance of obedience? Why or why not?
  
- **Question:** The travelers weren't promised protection because of their previous obedience, but they were told that they could lose protection if they disobeyed. How would you explain the relationship between God's protection and human obedience in your own words?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Acts 27:23-25 and Acts 27:30-31 for reference.

## Week 12: Acts 27:27-44

### Day 3: Recalibrating Success

#### READ: Acts 27:27-44

#### EXPLORE:

*<sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.*

There is no doubt that Paul's experience as a missionary was far from easy. The shipwreck story and the events that follow on Malta and beyond continually testify to that fact. From the moment the ship was broken and rendered immovable, the situation went from bad to worse. The soldiers expressed a desire to simply kill the prisoners so that none would escape. Unsurprisingly, God's plan was not thwarted by a shipwreck, and it would not be foiled because of violent threats. The hope of God's mission to send His witnesses "to the ends of the earth"<sup>7</sup> lived on.

Acts 27 provides us with another opportunity to reflect upon the ministry of the apostle Paul. He was put on trial unjustly, chased from cities, beaten, and imprisoned. A plot was made against his life, he was not believed, he was called crazy, and he was misunderstood. He was stuck in a storm, shipwrecked, and now on the cusp of being stranded on Malta.

From an onlooker's perspective, it might have been a challenge to see how Paul's missionary work had been a success. Some might have even inappropriately believed that Paul was outside of God's will because he experienced so much resistance and difficulty. According to most discernable metrics, Paul's life and ministry had been wrought with disappointment, detours, and danger. And yet,

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<sup>7</sup> See Acts 1:8 for reference.

the narrative of Acts paints the ministry of Paul as one which was deeply honoring to the Lord and formational in the Church. His difficulty was not coming because he was outside of God's will, but because he was living inside it!

Sometimes difficulty and ease are given too much weight in church life. We label something as God-honoring because it immediately yields results, or we label something as broken if it does not immediately lead to progress. We often allow our desire for immediate gratification to overshadow what is truly godly. In fairness, we ought to be interested in results. The Church ought to deeply care about progress and the experience of fruitfulness in life and ministry. However, we should not allow our desire for results to transcend our obedience to the God who makes all growth possible.

The fact that Paul was experiencing resistance did not mean he was wrong, but that he was involved in an eternally significant work! As a people who are seeking, by God's grace and through His Holy Spirit, to join Jesus in His mission to the world, let's recalibrate ourselves to our Heavenly Father's heart and not trust only our metrics for success.

**BIG IDEA: Sometimes God-honoring obedience results in difficulty and a lack of progress. We need to recalibrate our understanding of success to match God's heart for obedience.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Have you ever participated in something God-honoring that was seemingly unsuccessful? Explain your experience.
- **Question:** Do you think it was difficult for Paul to stay positive amidst his difficulties? Why or why not? Work to use Scripture to defend your answer.

## **Week 12: Acts 27:27-44**

**Day 4: “I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told...”**

**READ: Acts 27:27-44**

### **EXPLORE:**

The Word of the Lord came to Paul many times in his journey of faith. Not too long ago, we read in Acts 23:11 which stated, *“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.’”* As it providentially came to pass, Paul, along with Luke, Aristarchus, and 273 others, boarded a cargo ship to Italy. Coasting along, despite the great difficulty with the winds and the lateness of the year, they arrived safely in Fair Havens. Having not heeded Paul’s warning to harbor or his prophecy about their risks to cargo and life, the centurion was persuaded to sail to the more desirable Phoenix instead.

Suddenly, along the way, there arose a great storm and a tempest wind that violently tossed their ship so fiercely that there was no hope remaining of lives being spared. It seemed that, just as Paul had warned, this course of action would end in sure destruction for every soul on board. As the hurricane force wind was carrying them at its will, the men had no appetite for food for many days, no doubt being terribly fearful and seasick, and now weak.

We are told that Paul, full of faith, stood up amid them and said, *“You should have listened to me and not tried to sail from Crete and suffer this loss. But be of good cheer, for though the ship will be wrecked, there will be no loss of life. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to Whom I belong and Whom I worship, 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.’ So, take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island.”* And so it happened just as God said it would; they ran safely aground on the island called Malta, not losing one soul.

The Lord does not always deliver us from the storms of life, nor does He always promise to do so. Sometimes we experience great life-threatening circumstances that are outside of our control. Just as Paul and his traveling companions did not see the sun or stars for many days, sometimes in life we also see nothing but darkness all around. Often, we cannot account for the purpose of the trials we are experiencing, and everything can appear to be hopeless. The men in Luke’s account seem to have given up all hope of surviving and thought they surely would experience the same fate as that of their ship: destruction. But God the Lord appeared to Paul to shine His light into their darkness and bring hope. God has said *“He is the Lord who goes before you. He will never leave you or forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged.”*<sup>8</sup> *“I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.”*<sup>9</sup> (Isaiah 49:16).

The promise God makes to us is hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Although we are not immune from the storms and hardships of life, He will always be with us. Oftentimes, just like with Paul, the purpose of a shipwrecked life is not revealed until the “next chapter.” Through temporal hardships God often works for His greatest glory and our highest good.

**BIG IDEA: Faith in the word and work of God is our anchor during the storms of life.**

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<sup>8</sup> See Deuteronomy 31:8 for reference.

<sup>9</sup> See Isaiah 49:16 for reference.



**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Read and reflect upon the hymn below.<sup>10</sup>

*Will your anchor hold in the storms of life when the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, will your anchor drift, or firm remain? We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll; Fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love! It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand, for tis well secured by the Savior's hand; and the cables passed from His heart to mine, can defy the blast, through strength divine. It will firmly hold in the straits of fear, when the breakers have told the reef is near; though the tempest rave and the wild winds blow, not an angry wave shall our bark overflow. It will surely hold in the floods of death, when the waters cold chill our latest breath; on the rising tide it can never fail, while our hopes abide within the veil.*

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<sup>10</sup> WE HAVE AN ANCHOR by Priscilla Owens.



## **Week 12: Acts 27:27-44**

### **Day 5: Safe and Sound**

**READ TOGETHER: Matthew 14:22-33, Psalm 121**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Have you ever been on an airplane with a lot of turbulence? It is a fearful feeling. It's hard to wait for it to stop and for the plane to finally land. Paul's journey to Rome had a lot of turbulence from the storm and, metaphorically, from people. Nonetheless, God made sure they landed safe and sound just as He had promised.

Paul had prophesied that all the lives on the ship would be spared, but the journey still came with a lot of difficulty. For fourteen days they were being driven about at sea by tempestuous winds, waiting for any sight of land. On the fourteenth night they suspected they were near land, so they set anchor and prayed for day to come. It is amazing how their waiting turned to prayer. They went from dismissing the words of Paul in the beginning to now praying to the God of Paul. The Lord was using His storm and this voyage to Rome to impact the lives of all the men on board.

As the fifteenth day was about to dawn, Paul urged all of them to have something to eat. Because they had been stranded out at sea and didn't know how long they would be there, they decided to preserve their food by not eating. Now it was time to eat as they were about to reach land. Eating itself was an act of faith for

these men. They were trusting God and the words of Paul that they would soon reach land safely.

When it was finally day and they could see, they planned to run the ship ashore on a beach. But striking a reef before they reached land, the ship began to break up and be destroyed, just as Paul had prophesied. The soldiers on the ship planned to kill all the prisoners so that none of them would try to swim away and escape. But the centurion would not allow the soldiers to carry out their plan because he wanted Paul to live. All on board eventually made it to land safely. God was faithful to keep his promise of all lives being saved.

We, too, will experience turbulence in the journey of our lives, but, by grace through faith, God will bring us to Himself safe and sound just as He has promised.

**BIG IDEA: The promises of the Lord remain true and sure, even in seasons of difficulty.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** In this story would you have been more afraid of the storm or the soldiers who want to kill you?
  
- **Activity:** Make a list of some Bible stories where God delivers somebody from the hands of enemies.

## Week 13: Acts 28:1-10

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ:** Acts 28:1-10

#### **EXPLORE:**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Acts 28:1-10 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity:** Summarize the rapidly changing flow of events in Acts 28:1-10.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** The Maltese people improperly labeled Paul with two different extremes. What were the two improper labels given to Paul in this biblical text? In what way or ways have you been labeled inaccurately one way or the other?

- **Question:** Consider God's plan for Paul in the snake bite. Have you ever considered how the difficult experiences you face might bring God glory and advance the gospel? If so, how? If no, why not?
  
- **Activity:** Spend some time listing and praying through difficulties you are experiencing in life right now and how you might learn to trust and rely upon God more. Invite a trusted friend or mentor to pray through these things with you!

## Week 13: Acts 28:1-10

### Day 2: The Pendulum of Popular Opinion

**READ:** Acts 28:1-10

#### **EXPLORE:**

Notice how quickly popular opinion swings from one false extreme to the other. In Acts 28, the islanders swung from having “no doubt” that Paul was a murderer to assuming that he was a god. The idea of a pendulum swing in popular opinions is nothing new in the Scriptures. The Old Testament repeatedly tells the story of how Israel continually undulated from trusting God to doubting him. The reality is that humanity is often fickle and unbelieving.

Popular opinion is like a storm with winds and waves crashing this way and that. Christians who have been saved by Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit should not function that way. Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus, saying, *“No longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”*<sup>11</sup> Instead of functioning according to the fickleness of popular opinion, our foundation ought to be God’s Word. Jesus spoke to this truth when He said, *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”*<sup>12</sup>

With God’s Word as our foundation and obedience as our response, we are prepared to stand resolute when the pendulum of popular opinion rapidly sways back and forth. We need to remember how consistently popular beliefs change, but the truth of God’s word is unchanging. Let your belief system be shaped by the eternal, unchanging, inerrant word of God, not by the ever-changing teachings of humanity.

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<sup>11</sup> See Ephesians 4:14 for reference.

<sup>12</sup> See Matthew 7:24-25 for reference.

Ultimately, when popular opinion shifts rapidly, we ought to be reminded of God’s good design for our satisfaction, approval, and fulfillment. The truth is that we allow ourselves to dwell upon the gospel and abide in Christ, our desperate need for the approval of others will fade away as we learn to rely upon God.

If the gospel rules in your heart and reminds you that an all-powerful, loving, and unchanging Creator has called you His own in Christ, the cravings for human approval will be put in the proper place. Jesus warned His disciples to this end, saying *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”*<sup>13</sup> An unhealthy habit of worrying about what others think of you is often rooted in a lacking understanding and appreciation of God’s love for us in Christ Jesus.

**BIG IDEAS: Build your worldview on God’s word rather than popular opinion. In this way, your approval and identity will be secure in God’s love for you.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Describe a destructive belief that was popular in the past but is now discredited. Describe another destructive belief that is popular today.
  
- **Questions:** Are you more concerned with what people think about you, or with pleasing your Father in Heaven? How does it show?
  
- **Activity:** Spend time in prayer.

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<sup>13</sup> See Matthew 6:1 for reference.



## Week 13: Acts 28:1-10

### Day 3: Something Good from a Shipwreck

READ: Acts 28:1-10

#### EXPLORE:

I (Stephen) will never forget the first time I traveled to West Palm Beach, Florida to visit what would soon become my home for college, seminary, and my early career. Having been born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, it goes without saying that I experienced a wonderful form of culture shock. I certainly missed home in many ways, but it was hard to describe the beauty of sunny West Palm Beach. It has been over a decade since I first moved to South Florida, but I can still remember riding past rows of palm trees with my flip phone in hand out of the car window filming everything around me.

Looking at the palm trees, all I could see was beauty... understandably so. What I didn't know then that I know now is that a great deal of the beauty on Palm Beach Island came in the aftermath of a shipwreck story.

“When the first settlers arrived in what was to become Palm Beach, the entire area was known as ‘Lake Worth’, named for Major General William Jenkins Worth who fought in the Second Seminole War. Pioneers struggled to clear land for their houses and to make room for their crops. The first of the permanent pioneers arrived in 1872. According to early settler accounts, Palm Beach received its name from a shipwreck named the “Providencia.” The ship washed ashore in January 1878 with a load of coconuts bound from Havana to Barcelona. Early settlers lost no time claiming salvage and planting the coconuts, which were not native to South Florida, in an effort to launch a commercial coconut industry.”<sup>14</sup> The story of the

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<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.townofpalmbeach.com/343/History-of-Palm-Beach> for this excerpt and a full reference to this story.

Providencia serves as a reminder of the beauty that can come on the other side of tragedy.

I love the story of the Providencia, but I love the story of what God did on the island of Malta even more! For Paul and his traveling companions, the shipwreck must have seemed to be a setback at first. Little did they know that what appeared to be a detour was truly a gospel destination. God had set His sights on a gospel movement on an island after a shipwreck and a snake bite. Scripture displays a powerful and undeniable track record of how God delights in turning seemingly hopeless situations into profound moments of spiritual fruitfulness. In fact, the Maltese Church has had a strongly Christian influence since the time of Paul.

It is often precisely in the moments that we feel most helpless that God puts His goodness on full display. As on the island of Malta, God's provision could show up in a miraculous move of God or a seemingly simple act of hospitality. As with the believers in Sidon, hospitality and God's consistent provision continually mark Paul's ministry.

**BIG IDEA: God delights in redeeming the "shipwreck moments" in life.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Do you think it is possible to focus so much on the shipwreck-type scenarios in life that we miss the unique blessings that can sometimes unfold on the other side?
- **Question:** Paul experienced God at work not only through miracles, but through hospitality. In what ways could you best demonstrate hospitality and/or receive hospitality in the "shipwreck situations" of life?

## **Week 13: Acts 28:1-10**

### **Day 4: A Rally Cry for Missional Living**

**READ: Acts 28:1-10**

#### **EXPLORE:**

“You are either a missionary or you are still the mission field.” This quote has resonated throughout the past century of the church, and it has found its home in the heart of those who desire not to waste their life, but to spend it for the sake of the gospel. It is true. Those who have been truly changed by the grace of God will be involved in helping others come to know and experience that very same grace. Something is critically wrong with your understanding of the gospel, your compassion for others, or both, if you claim to follow Jesus, but remain disinterested in helping others do likewise.

Acts 28:1-10 is the rallying cry for missional living amidst the inconvenience of life. Undoubtedly, the apostle Paul was one of the greatest church planters in all Christian history. He did not predicate his preaching on wisdom and eloquence, but he certainly was wise and articulate. He had traveled widely, persevered greatly, and was now stranded on Malta ultimately headed to Rome. Paul’s example on Malta is a powerful reminder that our future-oriented hope in God’s ultimate plan must have everyday implications for each aspect of our lives. Paul did not struggle to the shore of Malta only to sit and sulk in the sand. Paul refused to waste time. As we will find, Paul experienced the full range of the human experience and continued to persevere in ministry.

First, Paul endured physical difficulty on Malta. He not only experienced the physical fatigue of a shipwreck, he also endured biting cold and enduring rain that later necessitated a fire. To make matters worse, he was brought into close contact with a

poisonous viper. Nonetheless, he continued to live on mission in a time of supposed waiting. How often have we stepped out of God-honoring, missional living and claimed physical difficulty as the excuse?

Second, Paul endured emotional difficulty on Malta. Even though he encountered an unusual hospitality and general kindness amongst the Maltese people, they did immediately assume the worst when he was bitten by a snake. We need to remember that Paul was falsely labeled a murderer destined for judgment by the supposed goddess of judgment. False labels are often attached to the difficult situations we encounter in life. Paul encountered emotional difficulty, but it did not stop him from serving the Lord. How often have we pointed to emotional difficulty in life as a seemingly fitting excuse for why we have given up on missional living in this world?

Finally, Paul endured spiritual difficulty on Malta. After assuming he was a murderer, the Maltese people immediately moved to idolatry. They thought Paul was a god. Moreover, Paul encountered widespread illness when he stayed in the house of Publius. We need to notice that Publius's hospitality was not merely a kind act, it opened up a door for continued, miraculous ministry. It may well be that Paul encountered what was known as the "Malta Fever." It was likely caused by a microbe found in goat's milk which was common at this point in history. Paul experienced a physically and spiritually difficult situation in this illness and responded in prayer and laying his hands on those in need.<sup>15</sup> The immense physical need gave space for the great spiritual need to be met by a missionary in a season of unwasted waiting. How often have we allowed the spiritual difficulty in the climate around us to surpass our eagerness for missional living?

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<sup>15</sup> This is the only occurrence in the book of Acts when both prayer and the laying on of hands accompanies healing.

Do you want to know how to take advantage of what God wants you to do when you are seemingly stuck in a detour? Pray now that God would transform your perception of physical, emotional, and spiritual difficulties that you have been assuming are too big for God. Ask that God would have full control of your heart, your mind, and your life for His glory.

**BIG IDEA: A commitment to missional living ought to transcend the difficulty that we experience.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Spend time in prayer and in missional living today. Write down some areas that you have been falsely assuming are too big or too challenging for God to use for His glory. Pray that God would increase your trust in Him and your willingness to do His will!



## **Week 13: Acts 28:1-10**

### **Day 5: Hospitable Hosts**

**READ TOGETHER: 2 Kings 4:8-17, Luke 10:25-37, Romans 12:13**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

One of my (Sabino's) favorite Christian books is "The Gospel Comes with a House Key" by Rosaria Butterfield. It is a book on Christian hospitality. Rosaria came to faith through the ministry of hospitality and now she uses her home to help point others to Christ also. The apostle Paul also experienced unusual hospitality after landing safely on the island of Malta.

The islanders kindled a fire for the voyagers because it had begun to rain and was cold. Kindness to Paul has been a recurrent theme in this section of the book of Acts. Even though Paul was a prisoner, God had been faithful to show His kindness to him through others. While on the island, Paul was bitten by a snake with no ill consequences and the islanders went from thinking Paul must have been a murderer to believing Paul must have been a god. We can see their superstition and their need for the gospel message. The shipwreck on Malta was no mere coincidence, but a part of God's sovereign plan to bring the gospel message to them through the apostle Paul.

The chief of the island, Publius, treated the voyagers hospitably for three days. In return for this kindness, Paul visited and healed

Publius' father who lay sick with fever and dysentery. This healing led to others on the island with diseases coming to Paul to be healed. We can be sure that Paul not only healed people in Malta, but also shared the gospel. Due to Paul's ministry, the people honored the voyagers greatly and supplied their ship well with whatever they needed.

This story, although seemingly unfortunate, tells of chain reaction of kindness and hospitality. Truly, we never know how obedience to God's command of hospitality will lead to greater blessings for our lives and the lives of others. May we, by God's grace, be hospitable hosts to our neighbors and the people of God!

**BIG IDEA: Showing hospitality builds bridges to great blessing.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Invite a neighbor or church family over to the house for a meal or dessert and demonstrate hospitality.

**Week 14: Acts 28:11-31**

**Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text**

**READ: Acts 28:11-31**

**EXPLORE:**

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 28:11-31 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity:** Summarize the events of Acts 28:11-31 in your own words. In your opinion, how is this conclusion fitting for the purpose of Acts?



- **Question:** Throughout our Word to Life Studies, we have continually reminded ourselves of the commission given in Acts 1:8. Why do you think it is important to keep this verse in mind in our study of Acts 28?
  
- **Question:** Read Isaiah 6:1-10 and take some notes. Why do you think Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, chose to include this Hebrew Scripture in the conclusion of Acts.
  
- **Activity:** What do each of the following passages have in common? Read Acts 1:3, 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 28:23, and 28:31 and write down your observations.

- **Question:** If you have been with us for our entire Word to Life study of Acts, you will have completed 380 studies. What stands out to you about your experience studying God's Word in this way.

## Week 14: Acts 28:11-31

### Day 2: What should we do with the ending of Acts?

#### READ: Acts 28:11-31

#### EXPLORE:

Have you ever experienced a book or a movie that ended on a cliffhanger? Maybe the plot was just beginning to be resolved when suddenly the credits rolled, the chapter closed, and the conclusion was left open-ended. It is possible that you enjoy cliffhangers or that they drive you crazy. Regardless, they are often a reality in both literature and cinema. In a certain sense, the conclusion of Acts should strike the reader today as a bit of a cliffhanger. Here is why...

The last section of Acts<sup>16</sup> had been creating a sense of anticipation for Paul's presentation of the gospel message before Caesar in Rome. Finally, in long-awaited fashion, we read the phrase, "*And so we came to Rome.*"<sup>17</sup> We might be tempted to think that the mission was accomplished, the tension was resolved, and Paul would quickly step before Caesar to present his case for the gospel. It is not quite that simple, however. If we were waiting for Acts to give us an incredible speech by the apostle before Caesar, we would be sincerely disappointed. Thankfully, a quick survey of biblical scholarship and church history ought to help us sort through this seemingly odd conclusion to Acts.

It is important to note that biblical scholars have various opinions about what happened to Paul after the conclusion of Acts. Some scholars believe that Luke wrote and distributed Acts during Paul's imprisonment in Rome. For this reason, the book could not have concluded any differently. The problem with this perspective

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<sup>16</sup> Most scholars consider Acts 21-28 to be the final section.

<sup>17</sup> See Acts 28:14 for reference.

is that it would result in the dating of Acts that is far too early. Although it is highly unlikely, other scholars believe that Luke was intending to write a third volume which would have picked up the story of Paul later. Finally, some scholars have postulated that Paul received an unfavorable verdict and was killed before seeing Caesar in Rome. Based upon what we have read and studied thus far, this conclusion seems equally as unlikely. To get a clearer picture, we need to look through the lens of early church history.

Because of Paul's travels and influence, his situation was probably well-known amongst the church. There is good reason to believe that Luke did not need to conclude Paul's story in view of widespread familiarity. Third century Christian thinker, Eusebius, wrote about Paul who was released after making a gospel defense before Caesar and went on preaching before later being martyred under the tyrannical reign of Nero. This timeline fits well with other biblical materials and amongst other early church fathers.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, the construction, dating, and content of the pastoral epistles seem to indicate the theory supported by Eusebius.<sup>19</sup> In view of the evidence, it is most likely that Paul both testified before Caesar and was later martyred for his faith after release. However, this does not fully answer the question, "Why didn't Luke include Paul's interaction with Caesar in Rome?"

Plainly, it is good to admit that some things remain a mystery. What might be unclear to us as contemporary readers of Scripture might have been plain to the ancient audiences. Fundamentally, it is important to remember that Acts is not the story of Paul, Peter, or any other human for that matter. Acts is fundamentally the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ taking root in the early church through the power of the Holy Spirit. As such, Paul's story can end

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<sup>18</sup> Most likely Paul was imprisoned after arriving in Rome somewhere around 59-62 AD and was later martyred in 64-65 AD.

<sup>19</sup> See I Timothy, II Timothy, and Titus for reference to the pastoral epistles.

as a partial cliffhanger and the necessary story will still be intact. Paul is not the main character. God is.

**BIG IDEA: Paul is not the main character of Acts. God is. The conclusion in Rome gives us yet another chance to reflect on that truth anew.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Does Acts 28:30-31 feel like a cliffhanger to you? Why or why not?
  
- **Question:** Would you describe yourself as comfortable with mystery in the biblical text? Why or why not?
  
- **Question:** Do you wish that Luke would have concluded Acts with Paul's defense before Caesar in Rome? Why or why not?



## **Week 14: Acts 28:11-31**

### **Day 3: Don't Miss It!**

**READ: Read Acts 28:11-31**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Some years ago, I (Lucas) was at a friend's wedding reception when I received a tough truth from one of their family members. He was a young cousin whom I had come to know. What he lacked in diplomacy and tact, he made up for by being truthful and direct. I appreciated this quality about him. The music at the reception was loud, so we had to lean in close to talk to one another. In the middle of our conversation, he paused, looked at me and said, "Lucas, can I be frank with you?" Thinking he was on the verge of sharing something personal, I said, "Of course you can." He quickly replied, "Your breath is offensive. Would you like a mint?" Although the truth was tough to hear, I was thankful he told me. I was also thankful he offered me a mint!

This week's passage contains a tough truth spoken to the unbelieving Jews in Rome and directed at the nation of Israel. The closing verses of the book of Acts tell us that when Paul arrived at Rome, he followed his normal procedure of gathering his fellow Jews together to proclaim to them the good news that the long-awaited Savior had come. Paul spent all day with them, showing from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah that the nation of Israel was promised thousands of years before. Verse 24 tells us that *"some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved."*

As a result of the response of those who didn't believe, the Holy Spirit used Paul to highlight the tough truth He had spoken to Israel through the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before<sup>20</sup>. *"Go to this people, and say, 'You will indeed hear but never*

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<sup>20</sup> See Isaiah 6:9-10 for reference.

*understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” 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.’<sup>21</sup>*

Long ago, God had chosen Israel as the nation to represent Him and proclaim salvation. Time and again, they had chosen to reject Him. Much of the Old Testament captures the cycles of God’s call to represent Him, a prophet delivering the tough truth that they had failed, and a call to repent and focus on Him.

While individual Jews indeed came to faith in Christ, the nation as a whole chose to reject the Savior and, in turn, their position as God’s ambassadors. They had become more focused on their own expectations than dying to themselves and serving God. Paul was greatly grieved by Israel’s rejection of Christ<sup>22</sup>. In verse 28, Paul points out to them the reality that God was now bringing in others to represent Him and share the news of the Savior that has come. If you have put your trust in Jesus, the Savior, you have been given the wonderful opportunity and responsibility to be one of His ambassadors and to tell others about Him. How will you respond?

**BIG IDEA: Due to Israel’s continued rejection, God took away the privilege of being His ambassador.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What are the tough truths about your personal obedience to God that need to be confronted?

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<sup>21</sup> See Acts 28:26-27 for reference.

<sup>22</sup> See Romans 9:1-5 for reference.



- **Activity:** Spend time considering verses 26 and 27. What do you think the significance is of mentioning the ears, eyes, and heart?
  
- **Activity:** The last verse of Acts describes Paul's actions while a prisoner. How do they compare to the actions you take every day in your life?



## Week 14: Acts 28:11-31

### Day 4: Contained and Contagious: The Gospel Continues Onward!

**READ: Acts 28:30-31**

#### **EXPLORE:**

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

It could be fair to conclude that the “*kingdom of God*” is the most pronounced theme in the gospel account written by Luke. Luke directly references the kingdom of God thirty-eight times in his writings. We should not be surprised that the kingdom of God bookends Acts.

It is important to remember that when Jesus appeared to his followers after the resurrection, Luke records Him speaking about the kingdom of God. Although His followers still thought he was speaking about Israel’s return to political power,<sup>23</sup> Jesus continued to unfold His kingdom through the Holy Spirit in the church throughout the book of Acts and beyond. In the truest sense, the good news about how Jesus was unfolding the kingdom of God on earth is the epicenter of Luke’s writing both in the gospel account and in his history of the early church.<sup>24</sup>

It is fitting that as Acts concludes we see the apostle Paul boldly and powerfully proclaiming the kingdom of God.<sup>25</sup> Through the promised Messiah, God had restored a kingdom which was open

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<sup>23</sup> See Acts 1:6 for reference.

<sup>24</sup> Read Acts 1:3, 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 28:23, and 28:31 for reference.

<sup>25</sup> See Acts 28:31 for reference.

to all who would repent and believe, whether Jew or Greek. Paul communicated the same message that was perfectly embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. This is the beauty of the gospel in and through the life of the early church.

As in the life of the apostle Paul, the triumph of the kingdom of God simultaneously resides within the bearer of the gospel, and it surpasses them altogether. Communicators of the God's kingdom may be imprisoned, chased, misunderstood, reviled, and beaten, but the gospel remains unfettered, triumphant, unrivaled, and supreme. Acts tells the beautiful story of how God's kingdom is in breaking into the hearts and lives of those who would repent of sin and believe on Christ for their salvation. This, my friends, is a beautiful story. It is a powerful story. It is a story that, by God's grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives, becomes our story as well.

Even when the gospel seemed to be contained, the power of what had been accomplished in Christ was truly contagious. As history continues to unfold, the church will continue to advance forward. This is a beautiful story to which we belong and within which we have a role to play!

**BIG IDEA: Even when the gospel seems contained, it is still contagious!**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** The final words of Acts are not fundamentally about Paul, but about the gospel. How do you think we can rightly value and respect a life like Paul's without making him the center of a book about God?

## **Week 14: Acts 28:11-30**

### **Day 5: Ministering Under House Arrest**

**READ TOGETHER: Acts 13:44-47, Romans 15:14-21**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

I (Sabino) have never been under house arrest, but I have always wondered what it would be like. Would I eat a lot of junk food and consume a lot of entertainment or would I read a lot of books and be highly productive? Probably a bit of both if I am being honest. But what we see here in our passage is Paul ministering under house arrest like it was his plan all along.

After a long journey and multiple years in custody Paul finally arrives in Rome. He will eventually get the opportunity to give his defense before Caesar, but until that time he will utilize his free time for gospel proclamation. The first thing he does is call the elders of the Jews for a meeting. I love his heart for the Jews wherever he went. Paul always gave the Jews the first opportunity to respond to the gospel.

The elders of the Jews appointed a day to gather and hear Paul's message that many people had spoken against. Honorably the elders are willing to give the gospel message a fair hearing. So, on the appointed day, from morning till evening Paul expounded the Scriptures to them to try and convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. His efforts resulted in some believing and other

disbelieving. Their unbelief led to a rebuke from Paul, and he informed them that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen.

For the next two years Paul welcomed anyone who came to him seeking the gospel message. He was able to teach the faith with all boldness and without hindrance. God had sovereignly placed Paul under house arrest by the Romans. This meant that none of the unbelieving Jews could attack Paul since he was protected by the Romans. I want you to notice something cool and surprising. House arrest became the safest place Paul had ever done gospel ministry.

The book of Acts is filled with gospel proclamation, and it is fitting that it ends with gospel proclamation. The gospels also end with a call to the Great Commission. May our lives take up this challenge, follow this example, and be filled with Spirit empowered gospel proclamation. May God use His Church to take His gospel to the ends of the earth!

**BIG IDEA: Under house arrest Paul utilizes his home to become a gospel outpost and beacon of light.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** Why do you think Paul always started gospel proclamation to the Jews first?
- **Activity:** Spend time praying that God would make our church into a bold Spirit empowered gospel proclaiming church. Spend time praying that God would use our church to continue the work that takes place in the book of Acts.





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