

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART ONE*

Getting in on God's Kingdom

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 1

I looked forward to studying the Book of Acts, and felt a very specific promise given to me from the Lord that I was exhilarated about; the promise having to do with getting understanding that will help us individually come to a renewed place of relationship and ministry empowerment in the Lord as we study how the Early Church sought after and responded to what God was saying—and how amazing things happened. I look forward to breakthroughs in our personal lives and in the lives of others as we ask God what this study might mean for us today.

I. God's Promise for Us**A. The Purpose of this Series.**

1. To revitalize our relationship with the Lord—and for increased ministry for the sake of others.
2. To learn how the Early Church sought to respond to what God was saying to them.
 - a. Early believers expressed the truths of their new life with Jesus to those around them.
 - b. Amazing things occurred in their own lives, and in the lives of others through their faith.
 - c. The themes brought up in this narrative bring renewed understanding of what the Early Church understood, and how the Holy Spirit used them to literally turn the world upside-down.

B. The Significance for Us Today.

1. Though full of extraordinary occurrences in ordinary circumstances, Acts was written as a foundation of normative experience for believers for all times.

- a. It is a mistake to imagine that miraculous and unbelievable breakthroughs can't also happen today.
- b. Important to focus on biblical details to understand what it is the Lord wants to offer us today.

II. Acts Chapter 1:1-8

A. Overview of Acts.

1. This Book could also be entitled *The Acts of the Holy Spirit Working Through the Lives of The Apostles*.
2. Acts references the Gospel of Luke 1:1-4—a scientific and precise accounting of happenings of the time.
3. It relates how those who formed the Early Church sought to respond to what God was to speaking them, and how they expressed this in the lives of others.

B. Luke, the Author of this Book.

1. Luke was a physician, a scientific person with a very practical and scientific approach.
2. He gave a very factual, detailed account; he was very linear.

C. A Clear Understanding of Details.

1. God wants us to learn the exact truth about what we've been taught.
 - a. People often have a romanticized vision of having a more effective ministry if the culture and land is new and unfamiliar.
 - b. God wants to use us exactly where we are and in a setting, that to us, might not seem romantic or exciting at all.
2. God wants us to know the exact truth about the things we've been taught.
 - a. "...Having investigated everything carefully from the very beginning...that you might know the exact truth about what you've been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)

- b. We often grasp a “key to the Kingdom,” or truth, that is vivid in the beginning, but lose track of the precision of the truth, and we become generalists.
- c. Our vision can become blurred.

III. The Kingdom of God and Repentance.

A. The Story of Jonah.

1. God spoke to Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim the truth of God. (Jonah 1:2)
2. Instead of obeying God, Jonah ran away and boarded a ship away from Nineveh. God got his attention by having him swallowed by a great fish. (Jonah 1:3, 17)
3. When Jonah finally spoke God’s truths to Nineveh, the people repented God didn’t bring His judgment upon them. (Jonah 3:10)
4. Jonah got mad and questioned God (Jonah 4:1). He missed the point that God is motivated by His mercy and desire that others come to repentance.

B. Repentance is the Beginning of the *Good News*.

1. Repenting is not merely a change in behavior from immoral to moral, but also a change of thinking.
 - a. It is acknowledging that our ways of thinking, understanding and doing aren’t working, and that we’re ready to exchange our ways for God’s ways.
 - b. When we are eager to repent, we are eager to have our thinking being aligned with the Lord’s.
2. Things of the Kingdom are counter-intuitive.
 - a. “Don’t fight back, but turn the other cheek.”
 - b. Our minds and hearts are full of our own way of thinking and we need to replace them with His Kingdom truths.

C. Looking for God’s Intervention—the Kingdom of God.

1. Mark 10:17-27—Jesus says that it’s hard for those who are wealthy to enter into the kingdom of God.
 - a. Referring to the ‘kingdom of God’ is not just talking about heaven, but of a dominion and authority brought to bear upon this life.
 - b. It is the sway and rulership of God to step into any circumstance—God’s Kingdom truths can set us free from the rule of sinful forces in our lives; we no longer have to live under the weight of our own bad choices or things done to us.
 - c. This power can change our lives and the lives of others; it is a dynamic and a power that we are privileged to have access to.
2. A lifestyle of repentance gives God room to intervene in our circumstances. Our lives can become as God wants, instead of being limited to how life’s natural course would cause them to be.
3. We can’t forgive our own sins, but Jesus can and wants to change and fix those things that need fixing.
4. We always come up short, but we can pray, “...Not as I will, but as Your will.” (Matthew 26:39)

D. Generosity and Giving.

1. Two important truths:
 - a. Remember when you tithe you’re not giving, you’re returning to God what is His. It’s like returning a casserole dish back to its original owner after you’ve eaten the casserole.
 - b. The principle of giving is to give out of need, not out of abundance (counter-intuitive).
2. Giving—this is an old truth, yet it brings fresh conviction.
3. Things of the Kingdom are often things that don’t make sense, but produce fruit.
4. Anything of any significance we are going to learn in the Kingdom will always come after a willingness to change our way of thinking.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART TWO

Some Things of the Kingdom

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 1:1-8

The *kingdom of God* is the way that things end up getting done on the earth. It is a government. In a word, it is kind of an economy, a force that goes way beyond anything the world understands, and it is a way of having things happen that is open to you and me as we receive salvation, and become part of His Kingdom.

I. The Kingdom of God**A. Jesus Said Regularly to His Disciples, “Repent, For the Kingdom of God is at Hand.”
(Matthew 4:17)**

1. When we welcome the kingdom of God it is the power, an authority of God that we invite into our lives.
2. Ask Him to “override” the way that natural things have gone.
3. We have to *repent* to embrace Kingdom-thinking as things of the Kingdom are counter-intuitive—not the way we normally think.
 - a. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)
 - b. If you want to be great in the Kingdom and grow in stature and wisdom, serve people who can’t say thank you for your help.
 - c. The Pharisees wanted a physical sign, but Jesus said that His Kingdom was not of this world.
4. The Lord doesn’t use natural forces of this world—He does extraordinary things; He turned five loaves and two fishes into an entire banquet. (Matthew 14:13-21)

- a. “Lord, give us wisdom to know what to do with what we have, rather always wanting more.”

B. Disciples React to this Concept.

1. They were confused.
2. They were looking for a government to change things (Acts 1: 6).
3. It is not for us to know the date and the time Jesus will return. (Acts 1:7-8)

II. The Kingdom of God Is at Hand

A. We Have Available, by the Power of The Holy Spirit, Insight, Counsel, Understanding, and Scripture from the Word of God.

B. Listen to What the Lord is Saying.

1. “Seek first the Kingdom, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:32-24)
2. Simple points of obedience make all the difference.
 - a. Walk in submission.
 - b. Spiritual solutions should be the first step.
 - c. “Lord, how are You directing our prayers?” Prayer is more exciting with the Lord’s revelation.
3. Desperation can help us seek Him. (Matthew 5:3,6)

C. God Wants to Give Us the “Keys of the Kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

1. Be led by His Spirit—we become a witness for Christ, and live lives of authority and empowerment through His Spirit.
 - a. You must be born again to see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)
 - b. We will hear His voice—a “quickenings” of the Holy Spirit.

- c. Tough times might mean we are about to have Kingdom intervention.
 - d. Our lives can be a testimony of abundance, instead of just getting by.
2. He invites us to have purpose and belonging in His Kingdom.
- a. We don't have to be on our own anymore.
 - b. We are granted power to deal with invisible forces. (Luke 11:2)
 - c. We can set things free, or bind them up in Jesus Name. (Matthew 18:18)
 - d. He wants to give us gifts to be used for the sake of others. (Acts 4:31)

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART THREE

The Second Coming of Jesus

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 1:9-11

“And after Jesus had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’”

I. The Second Coming of Jesus

A. Helpful Understandings, Doctrines, and Issues the Church in Acts were Facing Over a 40-Year-Period that Might Benefit Us Today.

1. Assurance that as Jesus departs into the spiritual world, He will also come again and reappear the same way He left (Matthew 24:27; Acts 1:9).
2. He left instructions to us as He departed (Acts 1:7-8).

II. What are the Biblical Indications of His Arrival (Mark 13)?

A. Greek Language: Two Words for Time.

1. Chronological time; day by day, minute by minute.
2. Kyros: when things are the way they are supposed to be; when they're ripe, they're ripe. God's dealings are "Kyros."
3. "Parousia" is the Greek word for "coming."

- a. An “arriving,” but already being here (“check’s in the mail”— consider it done!).
- b. We don’t just hope for His coming, we believe He’s as good as on His way!

B. No One Knows the Exact Time, Day or Hour of His Coming. (Matthew 24:36-39)

1. Picture the Expression “Being Snatched.”
2. No One Knows the Exact Time of the Rapture—Except Rapture and Persecution Go Together.

III. The Millennium (Revelation 20:4)

- A. Thousand-Year Reign of Jesus on the Earth.
- B. Collective Martyrs Through the Centuries Have Died for Jesus Christ.
- C. Another Group of the 144,000—Possibly Jewish Believers that Don’t Receive the Mark of the Beast. (Revelation 7:4)

IV. Judgment Day

- A. Two Groups:
 1. Either you live in the New Jerusalem, a place called Heaven... (Revelation 3:12)
 - a. Receive Jesus as your Savior.
 - b. Your name is written in the Book of Life.
 2. Or, you’re going to spend eternity in what is called the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:15)
- B. There Will Be All Sorts of False Teachers and False Prophets Claiming to be the Spirit of Christ Or the Messiah Before the Judgment Day. (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22)

V. Maranatha

- A. Implications for His Arrival—for Those Who Do Not Know the Lord.

1. It is the most important question that any person can be asked, “Are you ready for Jesus to come back?” (Matthew 24:36-39)
2. Scriptures like this are not intended for Christians, but for people who don’t yet know the Lord as their Savior.

B. Implications for His Arrival—for Those Who Know Him as Their Savior.

1. “Lord, come quickly.” The Early Church desired the awareness, “Lord, make us freshly aware of the fact that You are coming, and what then would I do?”
2. We too should have that awareness and desire for the world around us who are lost.
3. As the Lord comes on that terrible day, and people are running to hide, we can look to the Lord who is coming to receive us!
4. It will be the first time that you will really see Him as He really is.
 - a. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” (1 John 3:2)
 - b. You will be flooded with awareness’ and understandings of truths— realities about Jesus, things He has done, what the Cross cost Him—and you will be instantly aware and awestruck at what is true of Him.
5. This is not a moment for you and I to be afraid, but instead say, “Maranatha! Come Quickly, Lord Jesus!”

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART FOUR

Spiritual Leadership

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 1:12-14

Our study continues with a systematic walk through the Book of Acts as historic events take the believers at this time through doctrinal and practical firsts. Not only are we interested in the historical events that transpired, the miraculous things that occurred, but since the Book of Acts details the very beginning of the Church having just experienced Jesus and His ascension into heaven, now, the Church is going to be fulfilling the assignment that Jesus gave them to *go make disciples in all the earth (Matthew 28:19)*.

I. Early Record of the Early Church and What It Experienced**A. Everything Was New.**

1. The Church had just experienced Jesus' ascension into heaven and now we see people begin to fulfill the assignment Jesus gave them. (The Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20)
2. The study of the Early Church is helpful in our understanding: both doctrinally, and in a very practical manner.
 - a. They were new believers that did not know how everything worked.
 - b. It is helpful for us today to see how things transpired as they took one step at a time, feeling their way along.

B. Promise of the Holy Spirit.

1. Jesus spoke of the promise of the Holy Spirit. (John 14:16-17; Acts 1:4-5)
2. A whole new dimension opened up to them when they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:1-4)

C. What is Happening in this Text in Acts Is Important in Our Bible Study:

1. Jesus is resurrected and spends 40 days with the disciples, telling them about the kingdom of God.
2. After Jesus ascends to Heaven, they are still looking up, amazed and dumb-founded.
3. An angel comes to reassure and encourage them to go about the job Jesus gave them. (Acts 1:4-5; 1:7-8)

II. Led by God

A. God Uses His Word.

1. Peter remembers prophetic messages in the Book of Psalms.
2. This is a clue for us today—God leads by Scripture.

B. Pray Often and Earnestly.

1. As we read Scripture, the Lord will open up His word as we pray.
2. God will show you the next step as you follow Him.

C. Listening to the Holy Spirit.

1. Peter was obedient to tiny promptings.
2. “Lord, we don’t know who is supposed to fulfill this spot, but You know who was made to be assigned for this job.”

III. We All Have an Assignment

D. The Bible Says God Has a Plan for Your Life.

1. Be careful that you fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:5)
2. We live out our role, assignment or calling—imperfectly.

- a. We don't always make the right choices.
- b. Judas turned away from what God had for him. (Acts 1:16)
 - i) We can all be vulnerable, susceptible to corruption and wrongness, as is the other person.

E. People Put Limits on Themselves—Not God.

- 1. Fewer people aspire to leadership—there should be more.
- 2. Most people think, “I could never be a spiritual leader”—they feel inadequate.

IV. Nature of Spiritual Leadership

A. Leadership Is for Everyone.

B. Develop and Grow Attitude: “As Much as I Can, I Will Go for It.”

- 1. Popular Hollywood-style leader is not the biblical notion of a spiritual leader.
- 2. God chooses the Gideon-type people.

C. One Generation Declares the Praises of God to the Next Generation. (Psalm 145:4)

- 1. There is a constant growing-up.
- 2. An assignment of one leader, who collects people, may not be the ones to actually disciple or nurture, or be the one who ultimately gets to build.
 - a. Moses and Joshua.
 - i) As God was with Moses, in exactly the same way, He would be there with Joshua.
 - ii) The Lord spoke to Joshua saying, “Be strong and courageous!” He asked him to follow His simple instructions, and He promised to accomplish things for him as He did Moses.

3. God wants to give you the privilege of mentoring someone else, as you have been mentored.

D. There will always be a plan in God's heart to include, and raise up others.

1. Everyone is uniquely gifted.
2. God doesn't want to do the work that He has to do without us.
3. It is a privilege to be used in the kingdom of God.
4. Being a leader is for everyone.
 - a. Doesn't work if you're someone who just stands still and thinks about what others can do.
 - b. Being a leader is like a water drop on your windshield that begins trickling down, and as it gains momentum it brings a whole bunch of other water drops along with it.

E. Prophetic Word He Has Been Using Thus Far Basically Is:

1. You were formerly rejected, not sought after, but now everything begins to change and you start being *sought after*. (Isaiah 52; 62:12)
2. God will take everything in your life, all the components of who you are, and raise them up a notch—you become extraordinary compared to who you were.
3. "Go and make disciples," like a family member—nurture, love and develop them. (Matthew 28:19)

V. Aspiring to the Work of An Overseer (1 Timothy 3)

- A. It's a Fine Work.
- B. Westernized Notion Says There Are Only Few People Who Can Be Leaders.
- C. Qualifications Don't Includes a Booming Voice or "Just Because You're Good at Something You Can Lead.'

1. The story of the little boy and fishes: Jesus was able to do much with little. (John 6:9-13)
2. "Lord whatever You can use me for."
3. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than men..." (Colossians 3:23)

D. Leadership in The Kingdom Is Progressive.

1. It's a little bit at a time.
2. If you're faithful with little, God makes you master of more. (Luke 16:10)

VI. What Do We Know About Leadership and Authority from the Word of God?

A. The Greek Word to Minister is "Diakonia."

1. Means a flight attendant, someone who attends to and really looks to make sure everything is fine, comfortable, happier—some way being a blessing to someone.
2. It's just giving what is ordered. Or like an errand runner, "Can I do something for you?"

B. Mark, Chapter 10.

1. Those recognized as ruler of the gentiles, lord it over them, dominate and exercise their will and authority or manipulate. (Mark 10:42)
2. Jesus contrasts this by saying, "...Whoever wishes to become great among you, shall be slave [servant] of all." (Mark 10:44)
3. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

VII. Mantle of Authority

A. Comes with Simply Being a Good Caregiver for the Sake of Others.

B. God Capacitates You with Extra Insight for the Sake of People You Have Taken a Measure of Responsibility for.

1. Authority or insight, expertise and facility is awareness, perception and know-how in the things of the Kingdom.
2. It's designed to 'do people good.'
3. Leaders are not infallible.
 - a. A spiritual leader can be wrong.
 - b. It can be dangerous to make the statement "just submit."
 - i) The word 'submit' means to "give it a try or give it the benefit of the doubt."
4. The whole reason to talk to somebody and ask for counsel is because you have exhausted your own ideas and resources.

C. A Good Litmus Test for Being a Good Leader.

1. They want to build-up other people.
2. When you are around someone who truly has authority, you are enlarged and increased as opposed to feeling small.
3. A leader is a person who can say, "I'd like to help somebody get a little further in their walk with God, and I'd like to know a little more as to how to help them do that."

The truth of the matter is that God doesn't need a single one of us to do any job. But because He wants us to feel His favor, He wants us to feel that we belong—He invites people like you and me to be leaders.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART FIVE***Practical Help for Praying in the Spirit**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 2:1-12

There are so many truths, so many wonderful things to discover about the kingdom of God. As we go through the Book of Acts we're going to discover a lot of things that are going to be helpful as we take our assignment to *go and make disciples* very seriously, and as we launch ourselves out into the world.

Jesus spent a great deal of time talking to His disciples about things concerning the kingdom of God. Often the Lord promises to do something and then His first instruction to us is to wait. When Jesus left the disciples, He told them to wait in Jerusalem, for the gift His Father promised (Acts 1:4). The disciples followed this instruction, which takes us to Chapter 2 in the Book of Acts.

I. The Day of Pentecost**A. The Holy Spirit Descends on the Disciples Gathered in the Upper Room. (Acts 2:4)**

1. The disciples start speaking in languages they have never heard or learned, declaring the things of God. (Acts 2:4)
2. People from other regions gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost hear these men speaking in their native tongues. (Acts 2:6)
 - a. The people who heard them were astonished because they knew these men were Galileans, Jews who would not have any reason to know the languages they were speaking.
3. It is described that a “sound of a rushing wind” is heard during this time. (Acts 2:2)
4. The baptizing, or filling of the Holy Spirit had been prophesied from the beginning.

- a. This experience, or the exercise of the spiritual language and being filled with the Holy Spirit is one of the most helpful and most powerful Kingdom tools that is available to us.

II. Praying in Tongues (Spiritual Languages)

A. Two of the Most Edifying Exercises for a Believer:

1. Reading the Bible, meditating on the word—hiding Scripture in our hearts.
2. Exercising the capability of praying in the Spirit.

B. Understanding This Occurrence.

1. When you are praying in the Spirit, you are actually speaking a true, existing language, though you do not understand it.
2. “Tongues” is just a word for “languages”; they are interchangeable.
3. “Spiritual language” can also be called “heavenly language.”
4. Our faith is not only there to take us to Heaven, but our faith is to enable us to access another dimension so that we can learn how to speak and do things that God Himself wants to instruct and teach us.
5. One of the reasons this should be such a vital part of every believer’s life is because it is the most obvious example of the miraculous taking place in our personal life.
6. We, as believers tend to draw back from anything that is unknown, that we can’t control, or that seems out of the ordinary.
 - a. There is a point when we have to decide to step into the arena of the invisible that God invites us into.
 - b. This is not an unsafe place, not something bizarre that happens to us, or through us. But it is something that goes beyond what the natural mind can understand.
7. This is not a merit badge that you earn; it is not an indication of how “spiritual” you are. No matter how far afield you get, you can still pray in the Spirit.

- a. When you're praying in the Spirit, you don't know what you're praying and He can help you pray as you should be praying.
- b. Praying in the Spirit is not a question of worthiness because when we are at our most unworthy place, there is no greater rescue or securing than praying in the Spirit according to the will and the power of God.

C. Four Points That Hinder in Praying in the Spirit.

1. Our own fears or learned traditions can hinder us.
 - a. Some traditions that we grew up with in church, or in our family never taught us about the possibility of praying in the Spirit—so it is unknown and we don't understand it.
 - b. We can simply pray to the Lord: "I don't really understand this, but I really want to experience the overflow of life that you have for me. I want to be someone who enjoys the privilege of praying in a language that I've not learned so that I can help get unstuck in my life."
2. You've become discouraged because you have prayed at one point to be filled with the Spirit and didn't start praying in the Spirit in that moment.
 - a. This is very common for many people because they are usually trying too hard, straining to get this language out and instead become nervous and tense.
 - b. The Lord never meant for it to be something that you have to try so hard at. It is a gift He gives that should be normal and easy.
3. Another reason people don't experience the release of their prayer language is because they're expecting their mouth to move of its own accord.
 - a. Praying in the Spirit is something you choose to be a part of; it is not something that overtakes your body.
 - b. When you pray in the Spirit you are in control of your mouth, whether you speak or not.
4. Another common hindrance is that people will think they have to pray in these jumbles of words without enunciation or any movement of their mouth in the way of normal speech.

- a. Your body still works the same way when you speak in English as when you speak in your heavenly language.
- b. You actually have to speak, but what you speak is up to the Spirit. The Bible says, “And they began to speak other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:4)

D. Ways That the Spirit Enables Us to Pray in A Heavenly Language.

1. For some, they see words in their mind’s eye.
 - a. You might see in your mind, letters all put together in strange syllables that make no sense.
 - b. It will be this nonsense word or phrase in your mind that you have the desire to speak.
 - c. When you see these, pray them out.
2. Others hear the sounds in their mind.
 - a. You have an incredible desire as you hear these words to speak them out.
 - b. You may be flooded by doubt thinking you made up these words, but just speak out what you hear.
3. And for others, the only way they get their spiritual language is to actually decide to speak without hearing or knowing anything—but making sure not to speak in their natural tongue.
 - a. Just speak out. Have the faith that words will come.

E. Developing Your Spiritual Language.

1. Sometimes people get stuck with only a few words and wonder why they don’t have more.
 - a. The simple answer for this is because of your mind likes to be in control. It is difficult for your mind to comprehend this, or let go of control because it doesn’t know the language or understand it.

- b. When we pray in a spiritual language, we are praying out of our spirit; what we are saying is not controlled by our natural thoughts.
2. When you get stuck you're going to have to take that next plunge and not pray according to what you've already heard, but pray according to what God puts on your spirit, and just keep praying.
 - a. We can inadvertently pray with our mind the language that we've already heard and spoken.
3. Even though you might pray regularly in the Spirit, don't forget that those faint promptings from the Lord are really a way that He might train you for the future as to how to speak to people and do things in a way that really affects their life.
 - a. Learning to hear the Lord through this process can be a gateway through which we can begin to function in the spiritual gifts like prophecy and words of wisdom or knowledge.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART SIX

The Church Goes Public (Part One)

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 2:14-41

The Book of Acts, named for *the activities*—the *ministry*, *behavior* and *the carrying out*. These would all be similar words for the acts of the early Church. After Jesus was raised from the dead, as the Bible tells us, He was with the disciples for forty days talking to them about things concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus told His disciples to go to Jerusalem and be sure that they waited there until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, because the assignment that He had given them—to make disciples of all nations—was fundamentally, a very, very spiritual activity.

I. The Church Goes Public: Engaging in a Spiritual Activity**A. This Church Proclaims the Wonderful News of Jesus Christ as Their Savior.**

1. This all takes place after Jesus has said spoken about the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20)
2. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself.” (John 12:32)

B. We Get Understanding Here That All Effective Evangelism and Ministry Comes on the Heels of:

1. Jesus ascending to the highest and most exalted place in the universe.
2. The disciples have just received scriptural prompting and direction.

II. What Else Can We Learn About Sharing the Life of the Lord?

- A. People Respond to Spiritual Things on the Basis of What They’re Previous Experience Has Been.
- B. Don’t Expect People to Make Huge Changes all at Once.

1. Christians can have a tendency to be moralistic or legalistic.
2. Remember how long it took you to change—don't expect people to change overnight.
3. Jesus didn't come with a list of things to do, but for the purpose of rescuing people who are really stuck.
4. Very likely, people you are sharing with have had a negative experience with authority figures.
 - a. Take time to show them how they are loved and valued.
 - b. We want to live lives where everything we are, everything we do, everything we say speaks of the Lord.
 - c. We want people to experience Jesus as *Rescuer*, and *Redeemer*.

C. We Want to Be Refreshed When Talking About the Kingdom to Others.

1. We don't want to be religious, just talking about morals, but with sincerity and goodness, share the wonderful promise God has for each of us.
 - a. Sincere, religious people can try to tell people just how to live better.
 - i) It's easy for us, as people to say, "I just want to get better, take care of things on my own."
 - ii) Pride gets in the way of receiving the gift Jesus wants to give.
 - b. It's not about being good, but about being forgiven: Jesus died on the Cross—payment in full for our sins.
2. Keep it simple.
 - a. Remember, the people in Acts were everyday normal people. Jesus spoke in a language everyone could relate to.
 - b. Try to avoid religious sounding jargon and clichés—these tend to be more exclusive than inclusive.

3. Testimonies, like VBS personal stories, are non-threatening and very inspiring.
 - a. Don't be afraid to give the Lord credit for what He has done in your life.
 - b. If God is in our life; He is alive and active.
 - i) We should, and others could, be hearing this on a regular basis.
 - ii) How encouraging it is for others, as we become a reflection of His mercy, His praise.
4. Scripture says that the people were bewildered, amazed and perplexed that these Galilean people could speak with wisdom and understanding.
 - a. This is a secret to sharing life in God—people end up being confounded by your wisdom as you grow in the Lord.
5. We are not supposed to get into debates with people—this is not helpful.
6. The word of God is totally alive—there's a power in speaking God's words and truth.
 - a. There is wisdom in His words, like when it says that it's better to forgive than to hold a grudge. (Colossians 3:13)
 - b. Know that His word has the power to work in our life.
7. Follow Jesus; let Him be our example of how to be for others.
8. Jesus is for everyone.
 - a. Be welcoming—not angry.
 - b. Parable of the wedding invitation; everyone invited was too busy to attend so the bride's father sent an invitation to everyone. (Matthew 22:1-14) It's a decision people are given.
 - c. The Bible is not a respecter of persons—His invitation is extended to everyone.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART SEVEN***The Church Goes Public (Part Two)**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 2:24-32

The angle that we're taking on this wonderful Book is not just an historical approach, but a particular take that it is a really great road map for those of us who are alive today as to how we can individually carry out the assignment that had been given to the Church to go into all the world and make disciples of all people. Since the Early Church didn't have a script and didn't know exactly what they were supposed to do, they had to 'wait' on the Lord. As different things happened, they developed different responses to those things—so in the same way, we can look at the kinds of things they did and the experiences they had, and we can glean very useful bits of information for us today.

I. The Beginning Account of Making Disciples**A. The Book of Acts is a Historical Account and a Road Map for Our Faith Today.**

1. We can begin to understand how people like us can to carry out *The Great Commission*.
2. Peter, a witness and someone who spent a lot of time with Jesus, explains helpful information about the Lord to people who don't yet know who Jesus was, and for those who knew Him as Savior.

B. Being Fruitful in Sharing Jesus With Other People.

1. Remember where people are coming from.
 - a. People tend to have a natural response to spiritual things.
 - b. Approach people from their vantage point, what they have understood and feel—don't just choke them with words.
2. God is interested in intervening on behalf of people to accomplish something for them.

- a. The message of the Gospel is that everyone is welcome.
 - b. Be careful of your tone. It can communicate negative understandings—or it can be an expression of love and great recovery for the sake of others.
3. Communicate who Jesus is.
- a. Jesus really is the Savior.
 - i) He paid the penalty for our sins and willingly died to substitute Himself for the punishment that should have otherwise been ours.
 - ii) Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.
 - b. Jesus is not an adversary.
 - c. Jesus is every good thing that God wants to accomplish in everyone's life.

C. We Want Others to be Refreshed When Talking About the Kingdom.

1. We don't want to be religious, just talking about morals, but with sincerity and goodness, share the wonderful promise God has for each of us.
2. Acts 2:24, Peter is saying, "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."
 - a. Jesus had no sin in Him.
 - b. He was able to slip right up and out of death, and thereby spoke great promise for each and every one of us today.
3. Being a *witness* is primarily centered on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.
 - a. Acts 2:32 says, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses."

II. Death Is the Biggest Issue Facing Everyone

- A. Death is Always Wrong; It Is Untimely, Tragic and We Are Left with the Big Question, "Why?"

- B. We All Experience the Loss of Loved Ones, Relatives, or Encounter Death in Some Manner or Another.
- C. Everyone Is Interested in What Is Going to Happen to Them After They Die.
- D. It's Helpful and Fruitful to Aim a Little Bit Closer to Talking About Death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. If you want to know how a person is going to be saved, there are really only two conditions, mentioned in this scripture in Romans 10:9:
 - a. "...If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved..." He is the One who has made everything, He's the final authority.
 - 2. Don't skirt the issue—it's critical.
 - a. It is so important to tell people that Jesus has died for our sins and He has risen from the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) I shared this for people how to get saved.
 - b. The message of the Gospel is that we can be forgiven. (Mark 3:28)
 - c. Scripture does nothing to just talk about being good;
 - i) "...If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is vain." (1 Corinthians 15:14)
 - ii) "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:16-19)
- E. Jesus Is Very Interested in Bringing Comfort to People.
 - 1. He is the God of all comfort and the *Father of mercies and God of all comfort*. (2 Corinthians 1:3)
 - 2. Jesus was well acquainted with grief and sorrows. (Isaiah 53:3)
 - 3. Jesus was always able to come to the aid of those distressed with any turmoil in their life.

- a. God is not only interested in the death of a loved one who dies, but for those left behind.
- b. Many activities people engage in after the death of a loved one are really about trying to resolve how a terrible thing like this could happen, and;
 - i) It's good to include and bring the discussion back to the love of God.
 - ii) God is interested in bringing comfort and spending eternity with all people—He is so in love with us and sees each one of us as being unique.

III. People Can Be Subjected to Different Ideologies and Philosophies.

A. Paul Shares a Simple Message to All People.

1. In Colossians 2, Paul shares simple truths with people who were also engaged in 'new age' philosophies, like today.
2. Paul says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." (Colossians 2:8)
 - a. When Paul speaks here of "empty deception" he doesn't mean that it doesn't offer people anything.
 - b. A great many religious ideas and philosophical notions will do something for people in terms of making them happier or healthier—but they do nothing for someone once that person dies.
 - c. He is saying to be careful that you don't get pulled into the empty deception according to traditions or principles of this world.

B. People Can Give Well-Intended but Unhelpful Instruction.

1. Bring it back to Jesus.
 - a. God has been suffering the loss of your loved one, virtually for an eternity, and now, ultimately, that grief and emptiness, that pang in the heart of God is being answered, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones"—the homecoming of His children. (Psalm 116:15)

- b. The Lord can rescue us so that never, ever again do we have to go through being separated from Him.
- 2. Share out of the understanding that it is all about love; it is not just about being good or sincere or about being happy, but about God's desperate love for us.
 - a. Take care of the tone of your voice—don't sternly share the Bible.
 - b. Share out of a pure heart—not so we can notch another mark on our belt.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART EIGHT*

Sharing Your Faith

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS 2:36-40

We have been studying the first recorded public presentation of the Gospel by a man named Peter, who for the past three and a half years been a disciple of Jesus, and now he is fulfilling *The Great Commission*. It has been given to every believer that we should go make disciples, sharing the *good news* of Jesus—God’s longing and desire to intervene on their behalf to do good to all—to rescue, recover and bring healing and life to every person.

I. Understanding God and His Ways**A. Reading Scripture Thoroughly Allows Us to Understand God’s Plans and Purposes.**

1. Many people often misinterpret the Bible for lack of reading the whole text and conclude God is less than a loving, merciful Father.
2. When we speak to our friends, co-workers and neighbors, recognize that they may have concluded that God may is at best be a neutral, distant force who is not to be messed with.
3. People may miss the main point that...
 - a. Much like a doctor uses chemotherapy or radiation to fight cancer so the body can become healthy again, God had to take measures to save humanity from the cancer of sin.
 - b. Scripture points to a loving Father God who speaks in the same way a loving father stoops down to talk to a three-year-old in a language that he or she can understand.

II. God Loves Humanity So Much They He Was Willing to Give His Only Son, Jesus...**A. To Whom One Day Every Knee Will Bow.**

1. No one will be forced to bow, no matter how wicked, instantly every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

B. We Who Have the Privilege of Naming Him as Lord—the Rescuer, Redeemer, Healer and Savior—have the Most Important Things to Communicate to Others:

1. God is ‘really interested’ in you.
2. Convince people how good God is instead of telling them about a God who just wants them to stop doing all the bad things they are doing.
3. It is important to present simple truths in a way that will bring people to a place of great rescue.

III. The Bible Says It’s the Work of the Holy Spirit Who Brings Conviction

A. Our Assignment Is to Tell the Good News of Forgiveness for Things People Feel Convicted.

1. We don’t win the lost and broken world who fears God in not a good way—by coming at them with moralistic truism as opposed to sharing the wonderful news that God is *good* and *interested in them*.
2. We don’t try to get people convicted and hope somebody tells them there is forgiveness in the future.

IV. What Did Jesus Accomplished on the Cross?

A. Jesus Removes our sin and guilt and decrees against Us.

1. Colossians 2:14 says, “...Having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”
2. He removes our guilt for past and future, and the guilt of the world for all-time. It’s staggering what Jesus endured for our sakes—the weight of it!

B. He Sacrificed His Life That We Might Live, and Have Life Abundantly. (1 John 3:16; John 10:10)

1. In the face of financial disaster, or broken friendship, or whatever it is, there's still the promise of resurrection.
2. The Lord loves to be invited to freshly come in and cover over and give us another life after death.
3. If we speak this language, we will offer great hope to others.

C. The Power of the Cross Disarms Spiritual Rulers and Authorities. (Colossians 2:15)

1. The imagery when Jesus rose from the dead was that He made a public spectacle of all demonic forces and powers that sought to keep Him from rising from the dead.
2. When He defeated His enemies, He got right up and was raised from the dead. What that means is we have the courage to stand against any force or power that otherwise keeps us down and overwhelms us.
3. Don't be ashamed of the *testimony of the Lord*.
 - a. 2 Timothy 1:8-10 says, "Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works...of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..."
 - b. If you believe you have courage today, then you will have tremendous courage to talk to your friends and neighbors, instead of being intimidated.
 - c. There is nothing more spiritual than sharing the message of Jesus Christ with another person.
 - i) The reason why many people back away from sharing the Lord, is they don't realize how profoundly spiritual it is.
 - ii) It's a lie when you believe that you are not gifted with sharing the message of Jesus Christ.
 - a) It's an accusation and an assault.

- b) Don't back down and believe the enemy, but believe sharing Jesus and your testimony is the most spiritual thing you can do.

v. How Do You Answer the Question: What Must You Do to Be Saved?

A. Don't Skirt the Answer—Be Direct.

B. First and Foremost, Accept the Truth About Jesus:

1. He Is the only begotten Son of God.
2. He came to the earth, died to forgive our sins and rose again from the dead.

C. Repent—Turn Around, Come to a Different Conclusion.

1. People think they can be good on their own.
2. When you repent, you recognize that nothing you have been doing can make it on its own. You need a Savior—you need to be forgiven.

D. Jesus Says Get Baptized.

1. Receive the Holy Spirit, our Hope of Glory.
2. Jesus is at the Right Hand of God. When we say "Lord come into my heart," the Holy Spirit of God comes into our hearts. This is what seals our redemption.

The more you explain what Jesus has done in the context of what He wants to do for someone, it's far more likely they will want to receive Him as their Savior.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART NINE

A Changed Lifestyle

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 2:42-47

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have a need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

As we continue to work our way through the Book of Acts we do so with an eye toward learning some lessons on what we might do in our life today, and better fulfill the commission and assignment that Jesus gave to His Church—which was to go into all the world and really make a difference by how we speak into the people’s lives, a difference by the things we do, welcoming the power and intervention of God to break in on people’s tragic and difficult situation. Since the Church didn’t have a New Testament to read, they were relying completely upon the leading and prompting of the Lord.

I. The Early Church’s Reliance on the Lord Strengthened Their Faith and Changed Lives**A. Peter’s Wonderful Response to ‘What Must We Be in Order to be Saved from All the Downfall in Life Around Us.’**

1. This was a very simple statement that *they should believe in the Lord.* (Acts 2:22-36)
2. The result of this marvelous declaration was that many people got saved.

II. What Can We Learn from the Early Church?

A. The Response of These People as They First Opened Their Hearts to the Lord.

1. People responded with excitement and zeal, having so recently received the Lord into their lives.
2. People believed and expected miraculous intervention of the Lord.
3. People were serious, earnest and focused on giving themselves to the apostles' teachings.
 - a. When we experience freshly, the salvation from the Lord, we are excited, and can't get enough of Him.
 - b. These people in the Book of Acts had their entire worldview turned upside down—they too, were like infants just starting out.
4. The people were being "led by the Spirit."
5. The Book of Acts spans a forty-year-period of time—not everything was instant, but happened over a long period of time.
6. "Lord, is there anything You might want to be saying to me—based on what You were saying to those people way back then?"

B. The Church Experienced Fellowship.

1. Koinonia = Fellowship, meaning linking my future and my well-being and life with other people.
2. It's the kind of fellowship that parents try to teach their children—*don't be selfish, share*—that we are all in this together.
3. The contribution that each one makes helps build the whole Body up in love.
4. Mission teams at church often experience deeper relationships as people work together for the Kingdom.
 - a. People experience excitement and linking up with other people, and relationships grow deeper.
 - b. There is a sense of well-being with other people.

5. Fellowship is hugely spiritual and designed by God to bring great, great blessing.
6. They went house to house, eating together and breaking bread.
 - a. They learned the principle of generosity.
 - i) When you share food, it multiplies—like *the loaves and fishes*. (John 6:9)
 - b. They had fun—learned the thrill of welcoming, embracing people and inviting them into their world.
 - i) Acts 2:44-45 it says, “And all those who had believed were together and they had all things in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have a need.”
 - ii) The Bible says, “...It is more blessed to give than receive.” (Acts 20:35)

C. The Church Devoted Themselves to Prayer.

1. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)
2. Prayer is so much about seeking God’s counsel—gaining access to the insight that He has, getting direction and communicating with Him, talking back and forth.
3. They just experienced the Lord doing wonderful things, and are excited to ask Him what He wants to do next.
 - a. God says, “Ask what you will in My Name, and I will do exceedingly, abundantly beyond anything that you can ask or imagine.” (Ephesians 3:20 paraphrased)
 - b. There are all kinds of miracles, signs and healings, deliverances, provision, and people experiencing amazing recovery. This put the fear of God in people and it was a radical change in the lifestyle of the people who had come to believe in Christ. (Refer to Acts 2:43)

D. “The Lord’s Table”—The Church Takes Communion Together.

1. We are all partakers of this fellowship—sharing and partaking in what Jesus has done.

- a. Every single person in the world needs forgiveness.
2. Jesus never only thought of Himself.
 - a. The Bible says, “Have this attitude in yourself, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5-6)
 - b. Jesus took the form of a bondservant, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be held onto, but He emptied Himself, poured out everything He had, came to pay an incredible price of His life so that you and I can be forgiven. (Philippians 2:6-7)
3. We have fellowship with Jesus, because of what He made possible for us, so our need was met.

“Thank you Lord, for Your provision, distributed to us according to our need.”

III. The Prophetic Picture the Lord Gave Pastor Daniel After Being Filled with the Spirit

A. Progress in the Lord.

1. Picture of two high-rise buildings; one with 1-30 floors, and one with 31-60 or 80 floors. To climb to higher floors, you have to leave the first building and go to the other.
2. To enter the second building meant going back down to the lobby again—start at the beginning.

B. This Picture that God Gave Daniel Is Significant Today and We Understand How It Relates to People of Acts.

1. The passion, excitement of starting all over again is what was developing these people who continually devoting themselves to the truths and understands of what the apostles were giving.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART TEN

Hints for Understanding ‘Difficult’ Bible Passages

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTERS 4:32-5:12

The disciples and new believers continue to lay the groundwork for the emerging Church. The Lord leads them through passages of Scripture and by promptings from the Holy Spirit. As they walk in obedience, a season of unprecedented revival, mass deliverance and healing occurs—as well as crosscurrents of evil, persecution and death. Although the apostles and believers don’t know all that is happening, they hold steadfast to what the Lord has spoken to them and continue to move forward.

I. True Fellowship**A. Being of One Heart and One Soul, Sharing All Things as Common Property. (Acts 4:32)**

1. Having a sense that ‘we are in this together.’
2. The Early Church was not a commune that shared literal common property, but a mentality of amazing selflessness that people chose, at times, to sacrifice their abundance for the sake of a need in the community.

B. Letting No Need Go Unmet. (Acts 4:34)

1. If you have the ability and the resource to meet someone’s need, that is an exciting, wonderful, miraculous thing to participate in.
2. A need isn’t necessary monetary. It can be a need for counsel, a need for prayer, a need for correct teaching, a need for prophecy. Anything lacking in someone could be filled by another’s abundance.

C. True Fellowship Provides a Witness for the Gospel.

1. The fellowship of the Early Church believers created awe, wonder and fear in the communities around them.

2. People in the communities of the Early Church started giving their hearts to the Lord because they saw things going on that pointed to the reality of the invisible dimension, the truth and reality of God and the message of Jesus Christ.

D. Barnabus' Example. (Acts 4:36-37)

1. Barnabus sold a field he owned and gave the proceeds to the church.
2. Barnabus was motivated out of love, his sacrifice was a very spiritual thing.
3. Barnabus laid the money at the apostles' feet. It was his issue to bring an offering, but not his to distribute the offering.

II. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

A. The Heart Behind the Gift.

1. Ananias and Sapphira saw the great regard Barnabus received after giving his gift, and they wanted that for themselves.
 - a. Their plan all along was to convince people that their gift was pure and selfless, when they were actually trying to gain praise and approval for themselves.
 - b. They were not sincere in doing good through this gift and it was not their sin or waywardness that caused them to make a mistake. They did this with a full knowledge of what they were doing.
2. They did not believe that there was any spiritual dynamic behind giving.
 - a. "You have not lied to men, but to God." (Acts 5:4b) They had no belief in God or concern for disappointing Him through their actions.
 - b. They thought they could apply the spiritual dynamic through natural means and fool people into thinking they were something that they were not.

B. Peter Corrects Their Actions. (Acts 5:3-4)

1. Peter makes it clear that it was never about everybody having to give everything they had.

- a. Gifts were not about the amount of money, or even about giving any money at all.
 - b. Ananias and Sapphira were giving to benefit themselves, not to benefit the church.
2. No one told Ananias and Sapphira they had to give anything at all.
 - a. The property they sold belonged solely to them and no one asked them to sell it.
(Acts 5:4) Even after selling the property, no one asked them to give any of the profit.

C. The Fate of Ananias and Sapphira.

1. Both Ananias and Sapphira fall down dead after the truth of their actions was revealed.
(Acts 5:5,10)
 - a. There isn't a full explanation as to how they died, but the reason was because they tried to move spiritual things without a belief in, a trust in or an acknowledgement of God.
 - b. We can be defensive about the death of Ananias and Sapphira and think that we love them more or have more grace for them than God. The truth is God knows Ananias and Sapphira better than we ever could, and loves them more than we ever could.
2. This Church was a fledgling congregation still beginning to emerge. They could not afford to have the truth of God diluted or the believers defrauded.
 - a. There was pressure from the outside trying to squelch the truth of the Lord.
 - b. There was pressure from the inside trying to distort the truth of God.

III. The Reality of the Kingdom in Acts 5

A. God Makes Things Happen in the Spiritual Dimension.

1. If you walk with the Lord long enough, you will go through times that are so amazing in the overflow of the miraculous.
 - a. At this time in the history of the Church great miracles were happening and multitudes were being saved.

- b. There have been many times throughout history where deliverances, miracles, salvations and baptisms of the Holy Spirit were innumerable like they were at that time of the Early Church.
 - 2. Whenever you find a lot of Kingdom dynamics happening, you also find there are a lot of severe judgments.
 - a. Jesus told us that He brought a sword and his very existence sets one member of a family against another. (Matthew 10:34-36)
 - b. Part of the mercy of God can be to end the physical life of a person in order for them to retain their salvation before losing their soul to the sin in their life.
- B. The Purpose of Severe Judgments.
 - 1. The purpose of Ananias and Sapphira's deaths was not to show that people who lie are killed.
 - 2. Ananias and Sapphira died so that the truth was maintained and that apart from His Spirit, we can do nothing.
 - 3. The kingdom of God is not a game; it is very real. It cannot be bought and it cannot be faked.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART ELEVEN

Rescue from Tight Places

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 5:17-42

The level of healing and deliverance continues to amaze everyone as the disciples bring the good news to the world. Signs and wonders abound. Multitudes are being saved. But the same message of life that is welcomed by the common people is also being frowned on by the religious and civil rulers of the times—whose vain attempt to eliminate Jesus succeeded only in the flesh. His triumphant resurrection and return in the Spirit has them angry and jealous. Seeing their control slipping away, they turn their anger towards the disciples and begin persecuting them more seriously. Yet no matter what happens to them, the disciples continue preaching and teaching. In the following passage Peter unequivocally explains why.

I. The Disciples are Teaching the Message of the Kingdom**A. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Other Religious Leaders Oppose the Disciples' Teaching.**

1. The Religious leaders and authorities are jealous because they feel like their place is being removed from the people and they don't have control over what the disciples choose to teach.
2. The disciples are teaching in a way that the people can understand, and it builds them up, versus the teaching of the other religious leaders who only shared their knowledge, quoted sources and looked down on those under them.

B. The Disciples Bring a Message of Life.

1. This message of life was not just one of eternal life, but of an abundant life that we can have right now. It's a promise that Jesus will bring reconciliation and restoration to the ravaged places in our lives.
2. They taught that with God we can have satisfaction and a sense of purpose, belonging and meaning in our lives.

C. The Disciples Are Arrested.

1. The religious leaders ordered the disciples to stop preaching. When the disciples did not stop, they were thrown into jail.

II. The Disciples Are Miraculously Freed from Prison (Acts 5:19)

A. An Angel Appears to the Disciples and Tells Them to Continue Preaching the Full Message of This New Life. (Acts 5:19-20)

1. The angel did not tell them to run after he released them. The Lord had the authority in this situation and could intervene at any time, and in any way, that He wanted to.
2. Just as the angel went into the dark prison to free the disciples, as ministers of the Gospel we are called to go into the dark places to bring freedom to the captives.

B. The Disciples Return to the Temple Square and Continue Preaching. (Acts 5:21)

1. The religious leaders gathered their council and sent for the prisoners only to find that they were gone. The doors of the prison were still locked and the guards had not seen them leave. (Acts 5:21-23)
2. The religious leaders find out the disciples are preaching in the temple square and send military officers to arrest them and bring them before the council. (Acts 5:22-26)

C. The Disciples Are Brought Before the Council. (Acts 5:27)

1. The council's response to the Disciples Teaching:
 - a. The disciples had been given strict orders not to teach in Jesus' Name, so the council reprimands the disciples for disobeying those orders. (Acts 5:28a)
 - b. "...Yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's [Jesus'] blood upon us." (Acts 5:28b)

III. Peter's Response to the Council (Acts 5:29-32)

A. Peter Declares, "We Must Obey God Rather Than Men!" (Acts 5:29)

1. To 'obey the Lord' means to pay very close attention to, to listen, to treasure, to guard His words, to recognize that there's something in what He's saying to you.

2. The word 'obey' also means to go along with a law or an order that has been given to you by a leader.

B. Peter Tells the Council They Took Part in the Death of Jesus. (Acts 5:30)

1. It is not just this council, but also every person in every generation, that needs to hear that they had a part in killing Jesus because every person has a part in sin.
2. But God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His *right hand*. (Acts 5:31)

C. Psalm 110 (Explains the Meaning of Jesus Being at the "Right Hand" of God).

1. Peter is saying to the council that Jesus, as the Messiah, will be raised to the right hand of God, and if they choose to be enemies of Jesus then they will be made a footstool for Jesus' feet.
2. "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My *right hand* until I make your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" (Psalm 110:1)
3. The Name of Jesus Is Above All Rule and Authority and Power and Dominion in this World. (Ephesians 1:20-21)
 - a. Every other force and power in this world must come under Him.
4. "Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power..." (Psalm 110:3a)
 - a. Peter is also saying that the people will willingly follow Jesus and go against the teachings of the enemies of Jesus, not because they have to but because this is the most wonderful news they've heard.
5. "The Lord had sworn and will not change His mind. 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" (Psalm 110:4)
 - a. Melchizedek was a high priest without a lineage or a history who is mentioned in the Old and New Testament. Abraham gives tithe to him after a battle and Melchizedek gives him back bread and wine—which sets up what Jesus will do for us, giving us bread and wine. (Genesis 14:17-20)
6. "The Lord is at your right hand; He will shatter kings on the day of His wrath." (Psalm 110:5)

- a. The Messiah was to come from the order of Melchizedek, and the council would have known this and realized that Peter was claiming that Jesus was the Messiah.
- 7. Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt, but the appeal to God for a good conscience. (1 Peter 3:21-22)
 - a. It is an appeal to God to throw out my record of sins, not on the basis of how good I am, but on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice that cleared us of our sins.

IV. The Lord Wants to Bring Significant Rescue to Us

A. We Can Appeal to God to Clear Our Record of Sin.

- 1. You no longer have to be imprisoned because of the things you have done.

B. We Can Appeal to God to Free Us from Circumstances That Have Imprisoned Us.

- 1. We serve a God that who works miracles. The circumstance may seem so huge, but God is bigger, and He is able to free us from anything that tries to keep us stuck in tight places.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART TWELVE***Simon Gets Saved**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 8:1-22

Without the benefit of the written word, the disciples are learning step by step what the Lord would have them do as He guides them with scriptural prompting, some kind of (impossible to ignore) experience, or both. The Church is growing by leaps and bounds, and practical needs aren't always being met. Recognizing that God's purpose was not to exhaust a few people to meet the needs of all the others, seven men are placed in charge of the daily distribution of food. As they perform tasks willingly, many are hugely blessed and raised to great heights of ministry. Stephen, one of the seven, publicly performed many signs and wonders, but the crowd, instead of receiving the grace and wisdom of his preaching, ran him out of town and stoned him to death. At this time the believers were scattered through Judea and Samaria.

I. The Message of Jesus Christ is Spread**A. Active Persecution Begins Against the Early Church and Believers Are Scattered.**

1. Stephen is stoned to death. (Acts 7:54-8:1)
2. Many believers are imprisoned. Those who weren't arrested are scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria and began preaching the word of God wherever they went. (Acts 8:1,4)

B. Phillip Goes to Samaria to Preach the Gospel.

1. Multitudes of people are saved in Samaria through the witness of Phillip.
2. Many people are healed and freed of unclean spirits. (Acts 8:7)

C. The Lessons We Can Take from This Persecution.

1. Although terrible things are happening, people are ending up going to places they never would have thought to go on their own and spreading the Gospel.

2. God Himself would never cause this persecution. However, He can take this situation and redeem, rescue, and redo all of the ravages of life and cause them to ultimately turn out for good of the Kingdom and His purposes. (Romans 8:28)
3. The power of God and the truth of the Gospel are intended for very difficult times. It is in the difficult times of life when we have been shaken to the core find that our true hope is the Lord.

II. Simon the Sorcerer

A. Simon's History.

1. Simon was a man trafficking in the magic arts and the secret arts of the occult.
 - a. Simon's occultist activity was not just smoke and mirrors; it was very real and people were astonished by what he was doing through this "magic."
 - b. Through these activities, Simon was actually dealing with demonic forces and powers.
2. The dangers of occultist activity.
 - a. It tries to supplant your personality, or hijack the real you and impose upon your soul other attributes of other personalities.
 - b. It tries to bring you to a future other than the one God has for you.
3. Through the witness of Phillip, Simon receives salvation.

B. Simon Witnesses the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. Peter and John came to Samaria to pray for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit for He "had not yet fallen upon any of them." (Acts 8:16)
 - a. When Simon saw that there was a power that came upon a person by the laying on of hands, he offered Peter and John money so that he could exercise the same power. (Acts 8:18-19)
2. What Simon might have seen as evidence of the Holy Spirit.

- a. Speaking in *tongues* (unknown languages). (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6)
 - b. Receiving visions. (Acts 7:55)
 - c. Prophecy. (Acts 19:6)
 - d. A boldness to preach. (Acts 4:31)
3. Peter corrects Simon's thinking.
- a. Although Simon is saved, he still wanted to revert to his old way of thinking and living and he tries to buy the power of the Holy Spirit when it is meant to be a gift. (Acts 8:18-19)
 - b. Peter doesn't question the salvation of Simon because Simon acted in his old way of living; Peter corrects him so that Simon can have the opportunity to change. (Acts 8:20-23)
 - c. Through this example, we see that it is OK to be where we are today. We will eventually be changed.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART THIRTEEN***Radical Turnarounds**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 9:19-31

With nothing to guide them except the Lord's direct instruction through the Holy Spirit, the foundations for the Church are being built amidst growing persecution. One man in particular, the devout Jew, Saul of Tarsus, viewed the new believers as a huge threat; not just to Judaism, but to the entire nation. No one who named the Name of Jesus was safe from him; those not killed were thrown in jail as he sought to rid the world of these Christians as quickly as possible.

On his way to Damascus, armed with his zealous rage and letters from the ruling magistrates commissioning him to destroy the growing movement of Christianity, the Lord met Saul on the road in a fashion only He was capable of. A flash of lightning surrounded him, and a voice from nowhere asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?" Jesus (still invisible) introduced Himself, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," and told Saul to continue to Damascus where a man would pray for him. As Saul got up his eyes were open but he couldn't see, (and remained that way for three days).

The men traveling with Saul lead him by hand to Damascus. There was a man named Ananias in Damascus, and the Lord had given him a vision, speaking to him about this man Saul, the man who had persecuted the saints, telling him to go to this place where Saul would be. "So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized." (Acts 9:17-18).

I. Saul's (Paul's) Transformation**A. Saul's Transformation Caused Him to Make Disciples.**

1. Although he has just become a believer, Paul is already making disciples.

- a. It is a myth to think that you need to have been a Christian for a while before you are able to teach anyone anything.
2. Paul (previously Saul) spoke to people continually about what the Lord had done in his life.
 - a. This is how we make disciples; share about what the Lord has done in your life. The people who listen will come to regard what you're saying and want to follow after you because your testimony has been helpful in their life.
 - b. When people saw the radical transformation that took place in Saul's life, they believed what he was saying.
- B. Through His Transformation, Paul Experienced Persecution.
 1. People were angry at the fact that Paul was preaching that Jesus was the Messiah.
 2. Paul's life was in danger because of what he was preaching.
 3. The disciples decided to send Paul away to Tarsus in order to protect him.
- C. God Can Transform Your Life Too.
 1. Like Paul, we all have areas of our lives where we are going in the opposite direction than God would have us go.
 2. God, in His rich mercy, reached down, snatched up Saul (Paul) and turned him 180 degrees in the opposite direction. He can do that for us too!
 3. There is a lot to be said for obedience and giving it our best to do what is right, but God does not need our effort to do a radical transformation in our lives.
- D. Why Does God Bring this Kind of Deliverance?
 1. God brings deliverance in order that in us, who are the foremost sinners, Jesus might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.
 2. God doesn't come to the end of the story like we do, and give up. He is always there willing to embrace, love, forgive, and extend His great grace and mercy in our lives.

3. God says that He can do something that is so remarkable in our lives that when the people around us see the change He brings, they themselves will have hope that it is not too late for them either.

II. The Timeline After Paul's Conversion

A. Paul Is Converted on the Way to Damascus.

1. Ananias prays for him to regain his sight.
2. This is where he was let down in a basket to escape the plots to kill him.
3. Paul stayed in this area around Damascus for about three years.

B. Paul then Returned to Jerusalem.

1. Paul met with Peter and the other people discipling him.
2. Paul was only here for 15 days and had to leave because he had angered so many people and his life was threatened again.

C. The Disciples Send Paul to Caesarea and He Made His Way to Tarsus.

1. Paul stays in the region of Tarsus and Antioch for 14 years.

D. Paul Wasn't a "Public Figure" Until 17 Years After His Conversion.

1. This is not saying that every believer has to wait 17 years to do anything significant in the Kingdom.
2. This does show us that anyone who ultimately wants to be used in a significant manner by the Lord will encounter seasons of "desert times" or "alone times"—whether it is due to circumstances or just something happening inside of you—and by the sovereign work of God, you find yourself all alone, except for the Lord.
3. These seasons don't mean that you don't have friends, or not going to church, or you are completely isolated from everyone. It does, however mean that God is wants to get at the very deep issues in our lives and will use these seasons to build in us a very deep strength, reliant upon Him.

- a. Real strength is found in the midst of situations that aren't working. When it may seem that our lives are falling apart—finances aren't coming together, our bodies are betraying us, and things just aren't working out like we want—this is the time God draws us to a place with Him, where real growth and life begins to happen.
4. Very little Kingdom-stuff happens quickly—most of it is a long time in the desert. But what it is really all about is God strengthening and securing us for the future.

III. The Church Goes Through a New Season

A. The Church Experiences a Season of Peace.

1. The Church comes out of a time of great persecution and into a season of great peace.

B. God Has a Purpose in 'Seasons' We Go Through.

1. Seasons are all a part of God developing, growing and maturing us in Him.
2. We can always turn to Scripture to find examples of people going through seasons of change just as we do. We can be encouraged by their faith and development through these seasons and know that the Lord has that same good in mind for us.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART FOURTEEN***Peter's Ministry**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTERS 9:32-43; 10

God loves to use people—not extraordinary people, not even gifted people, just people willing to follow His instructions. People like us. He'll use zealots like Saul who persecuted the Early Church; Peter who faithfully followed whatever prompting he received; and, you and me, if we'll just say "yes" to the Lord. God's direction is seldom an easy read, but a willing heart will always allow the story to end with a testimony of His glory.

Paul, once known as Saul and now a wholehearted follower of the Lord, has taken the same "whiplash" to spread the Gospel that he earlier used against the Church. To keep him from getting killed, the disciples have sent him to Tarsus.

Peter follows the same route through Joppa and Caesarea, ministering to people over an indeterminate period of time. The Great Dispersion is over and the Church is enjoying a time of tranquility and growth.

I. A Season of Peace for the Church**A. Peter Ministers in Lydda.**

1. Peter prays for a paralytic named Aeneas and he is healed.
2. The people of who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

B. Healing.

1. One extreme view of healing says that God doesn't heal anyone anymore and He only did this in biblical times, but the truth is that God is still a God who heals.
 - b. The Bible says, "...He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

- c. We want to pray to see people recovered from the physical calamities and illnesses in their life.
- d. We don't understand always why it is that the Lord heals one person, but not another. Not everyone who is ill does is healed.
- e. The Lord can give us specific promptings to bring physical healing to someone. The Lord may already be doing healing in someone's life when He gives you this prompting and your prayer is may be the encouragement for the healing to take place.
 - i) Learning to differentiate between our own emotions that so much wants this person to be healed and a prompting of the Lord can be a challenge.
- f. Some people have the gift of healing as a gifting. Paul would just walk along a street and people would be healed. But for most people, it is going to be individually laying hands on people as we feel a prompting from the Lord.

C. The Story of Tabitha.

1. A disciple named Tabitha (in Greek it is translated, Dorcas) lived in Joppa. She was described as a woman "who was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did." (Acts 9:36)
 - a. "Kindness" is not just an emotion. When you describe someone as "kind" it also means that they do useful, practically helpful things for people.
2. The disciples hear that Peter was staying in Lydda, near Joppa, so they call for him after Tabitha fell ill and died.
 - a. Peter comes and sees all of Tabitha's friends crying and mourning over her death, and he asks them all to leave the room.
 - b. Peter did not send them out to perform some mysterious ritual healing. Peter knew that their mourning was not going to bring her back from the dead, only a revelation from the Lord, So, Peter sent them out and knelt to pray.
 - c. Nothing was recorded that Peter just went around indiscriminately raising people from the dead.

3. After Peter prays for Tabitha, she comes back to life. Then he brought her out and presented her alive to her friends. This miracle became known all over Joppa and many believed in the Lord. (Acts 9:42)
 - a. Notice that it says *many believed* and not *all*.
 - b. Many people have this idea that if only God would just prove His existence everyone would believe. Not all do.

II. Peter Goes to Cornelius

A. Cornelius Hears from the Lord.

1. An angel appears to Cornelius and tells him to send men to Joppa to find Peter and bring him back to his house. (Acts 10:3)
2. He did as he was told by the angel and sent men to Joppa to retrieve Peter.

B. Peter Receives a Vision from the Lord. (Acts 10:10)

1. Peter falls into a trance and a sheet comes down from heaven with all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds of the air.
2. The Lord tells Peter to “kill and eat,” but Peter replies “By no means, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” (Acts 10:13-14)
 - a. There were unclean animals among those in the sheet, and part of his religious mindset, part of his thinking as a good and sincere Jewish person was to avoid things that were “unholy” so that he would not profane himself.
 - b. But the voice replies to Peter, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Acts 10:15). This exchange happened three times before the object was taken back into the sky.
3. Peter was very perplexed after this vision.
 - a. This is often the case when we hear from the Lord. It can be confusing and we don’t know what to do.

- b. But as Peter did, we should follow this instruction and believe the Lord will lead us as we step forward.

C. Cornelius' Men Find Peter.

1. It was probably a difficult journey finding the house of Simon the Tanner when these men didn't know him. It is most likely they had to stop many times to ask for directions and find someone who knew him.
 - a. How many of us miss out on incredible journeys like this because we have to stop and ask for directions or instructions on our way?
 - b. When we serve a sovereign God, we can trust the fact that even if it is a bit of a hassle or a process to get us there, if we keep going and doing what God has called us to do, we will end up where we're supposed to be at the precise moment.
2. After Peter's vision, he heard the knock at the door downstairs and was called down to meet his guests and Cornelius explained to Peter why they were there.

D. Peter Shares the Gospel with Cornelius and His Family.

1. Peter returned with the men to Cornelius' house and upon arriving found that Cornelius had gathered all of his family.
2. Peter says to the family, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me." (Acts 10:28-29).
 - a. For the most part, we find ourselves in situations for which we have no preparation, no forethought ahead of time and here we are being expected to do something.
 - b. Preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season. (2 Timothy 4:2). You may not know what you are being asked to do ahead of time, so just be willing to do something.
3. Cornelius invites Peter to speak all that God has for them. (Acts 10:33)
 - a. Upon hearing this Peter does one of the most significant ministry things—he opens his mouth and begins speaking.

- b. We all want significant ministry to happen through us, and most often we aren't necessarily prepared. But if we just open our mouths and begin to speak we can trust that the Lord will speak through us what He wants to say.
 - c. Peter shared with Cornelius' family out of the context of what He has learned from the Lord.
 - i) This is how we disciple people, teaching them to obey what we ourselves have learned to obey.
 - ii) There is a reason we go through what we go through, and a reason why we get connected with who we get connected to.
4. The Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard what Peter was saying. (Acts 10:44).
- a. The Jews were amazed the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. (Acts 10:45)
 - b. They were hearing the speaking with tongues and praising God. (Acts 10:46)
 - c. Peter baptized in water saying, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" (Acts 10:47)
5. This changed the entire history of the Church—those formerly known as aliens Gentiles), far off from the promises of God are being grafted in to the nation of Israel that they could join God's chosen people.
- a. It took many small details and steps of obedience for this amazing event to happen.
 - b. Never imagine that in order to serve the great purposes of God, the thing that you have to do is something that has to appear great on the surface. God is the One who orchestrates it all and makes it all come together.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART FIFTEEN***Gates That Open...Or Not**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTERS 11:19-12:25

The Book of Acts is the story of individual men and women sharing the Gospel with only the benefit of Old Testament scriptures and God's direct prompts through the Holy Spirit. In order to fully grasp and appreciate this we need to examine in depth the details of each occurrence. Ordinary people are being used in specific, yet extraordinary ways, which is a message of hope for all of us. God's direction and Peter's faithfulness have just enabled the Church's biggest leap forward to date and he tells the rest of the church leaders what just happened in Caesarea; that God in His mercy has expanded His church—from all Jewish followers to include non-Jews as well.

- I. The Message of the Gospel Spreads as Those Who Had Been Scattered Continue to Preach
 - A. You Can End Up Being Sent Out into the World, Not Necessarily by Your Own choice.
 1. Jesus' mandate to us before His return to Heaven was to "Go into all the world..." (Mark 16:15). This could be literally translated "as you go into all the world proclaim the Gospel to all of creation."
 2. Not all of the situations, circumstances or places we end up in are by our choice.
 3. A far better question to ask than, "How come I ended up here?" is "Lord, now that I *am* here; is there anything that You might have for me to do?"
- II. The History of Antioch
 - A. Antioch Was the Third Largest City at This Time in History.
 1. It was the crossroads of several caravan routes first coming up from Egypt to Jerusalem and into Antioch, and routes also coming out of the East (the Parthenon Empire—or the northern part of India and China, as we know it today) into Antioch.

2. Its location was perfect—it was on the coast of the Mediterranean and a seaport that opened trade to many other places.

B. Antioch's Population Was Largely Jewish.

1. This fact is significant because the Jews have always dealt with persecution throughout their history. The enemy is a hater of God therefore he is a hater of God's people.
2. Antioch was a city that gave equal rights to citizenship and protection under the law, so this was a very significant draw for the Jewish people.

C. Two Things That the People of Antioch Were Known for:

1. They loved sarcastic, satirical humor.
 - a. They would always make sarcastic remarks about their rulers or give them nicknames.
 - b. It was here that Christians got their first nickname that was meant to be funny and pejorative and a ridicule to their way of living.
2. This city was the center of hedonism.
 - a. They worshiped many, many other gods and goddesses.
 - b. As an example of this hedonism, there was a park known as "Pleasure Park" where people could engage in sexual activities in public.

D. We are Supposed to be People Who Recognize that Dark and Evil Forces Cannot Stand up to Light.

1. When you bring a candle into a dark room, the darkness recedes. The Gospel is meant to go to places like this—it makes a beeline for a city like Antioch where there is so much of this wickedness and darkness to dispel.
2. The message of the Kingdom is designed to go to places where people don't believe—where people's lifestyles are opposite of what God wants them to be. (Matthew 5:14-16)

III. Protecting the Authenticity of the Gospel Being Preached

A. The Christian Leaders in Jerusalem Sent People to Different Regions to Make Sure the Message Being Preached Was the Genuine Word.

1. Because the Gospel was spreading so quickly by word of mouth there was a danger that it could end up getting distorted and become a false doctrine or false teaching.
2. News of salvations in Antioch reached the believers in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas, who was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith to Antioch to make sure it was true. (Acts 11:22-23)
3. The church in Jerusalem did not send Barnabas to tell the believers in Antioch that they were right or wrong based on what he saw; they wanted to make sure that the people didn't just think they knew God, but that they actually had a relationship with the God who came to grant them repentance and give them forgiveness.

B. Our Lives Should Show Evidence That We Have Relationship with The Lord.

1. Generally, you can tell if someone has a relationship with the Lord. There is a big difference in knowing what you know and knowing the One who has come into the world to forgive you.
2. Instead of trying to work up some kind of effort, energy or sincerity, we need to know the God who loves us—who is there for us, who has forgiven us and rescued us and gave us the incredible gift of change and repentance. When we live in this it will be evident to those around us.

IV. The Prophecy of Agabus (Acts 11:28)

A. Agabus Prophecies That There Will Be a Famine Over the Entire Known World. (Acts 11:28)

1. When the believers in Antioch heard this word, they asked themselves, "What could we do to be a blessing in the midst of something that is coming that might catch other people off guard?"
2. The preparation they had was not for themselves, but for the sake of other people.

B. When the Lord Speaks Something About Our Future It Does Not Cause Panic or Fear.

1. The vast majority of prophecies in the Bible are not predicted about future events as much as they are a disclosing of issues in people's hearts and what God is interested in doing with that person or for that person.
2. Most such words or prophecies that invoke fear are really more a manifestation of the spirit of divination than of a word from the Holy Spirit.

C. The Lord Promises Never to Leave Us or Forsake Us. (Joshua 1:5)

1. This is the God who says not to worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34) and who has not given us a spirit that made us a slave again to fear, but rather, we have received a spirit of adoption as sons [and daughters]... (Romans 8:15)
2. It is imperative that we have Scripture in our hearts in order to hold onto the truth when we are faced with lies of the enemy and false prophecies.

v. The Intersection of the Profound and Spiritual

A. Herod Agrippa Puts James to Death and Arrests Peter. (Acts 12:1-3)

1. Herod saw how the death of James pleased the Jews, and so to continue in their favor, he arrested Peter intending to put him to death in front of the people.
2. While in prison, the church was earnestly praying for Peter. (Acts 12:5)

B. Peter is Miraculously Freed from Prison by an Angel Sent by the Lord. (Acts 12:8-10)

1. The angel leads him out of the prison and they come to the first iron gate and the angel opens the gate and Peter walks into the street and the angel leaves him. (Vs. 9-10)

C. One Gate Miraculously Opened, Another Knocked and Opened by Human Hands.

1. Peter then went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, and comes to another gate where the servant of the house meets him and runs back into the house with joy to announce Peter's arrival. When they responded to Peter's knocking, and when they had opened the door, they were amazed. (Acts 12:12-16)

2. There is no way that we can ever figure out in God's grand scheme of things—why and how He intervenes sovereignly and supernaturally in one situation and not in another. We can only answer with the truth that we know God has a purpose and a plan and we know He is good and we know that we can put our trust in Him.
3. Every person has both the experience of God going before them and opening the gate and at other times finding themselves knocking at a gate because they're dealing with humans who forget to do things.
4. In this life, there is a blending of natural and supernatural—not all gates will open by themselves, sometimes you have to keep knocking.

D. The Death of Herod. (Acts 12:18-23)

1. After Peter leaves the region, Herod searches for Peter, but cannot find him and executes the guards that had been keeping watch the night Peter was released. (Acts 12:19)
2. After this commotion Herod stood before the people and gave a public address. The people cried out that Herod was a god after he spoke to them. "And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died." (Acts 12:21-23)

E. The Word of the Lord Continues to Spread.

1. Despite persecution, the message of the Gospel continues to grow and to multiply. (Acts 12:24)
2. Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem after their mission and take along with them John, who was also called Mark. (Acts 12:25)

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART SIXTEEN***One Piece at a Time**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 13:1-19

A misconception that many people have is that breakthroughs in the Kingdom are accomplished by really extraordinary, gifted or super spiritual saints that float around out there and all the rest of us are basically cannon fodder for the Kingdom. The pattern that we find in the Bible is not that there are any lead few who do the bulk of the work, but rather there are countless hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people who willingly say, “Lord, You can use me as You will” and step into what are seemingly little things, in the beginning, that ultimately become something quite extraordinary.

I. The Early Church Placed People in Specific Roles According to Their Gifts**A. Some Were Prophets and Teachers. (Acts 13:1)**

1. There was an awareness of one another’s gifts and callings in the Church.
2. Recognizing people’s individual giftings made them more useful in the Kingdom, making the Church more effective.

B. Extraordinary Roles Were Given to Ordinary People.

1. Paul refers to several people by name; looking at these names 2,000 years later, it’s easy to raise them to super-human status.
2. God uses everyday people to do His work in the lives of others.
 - a. People tend to have a hard time believing that people they know well can impact them spiritually or be used by God to help them. (John 1:46)
 - b. We don’t have to be extraordinary; we simply have to be willing to be used by Him. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

II. God Allows Us the Amazing Privilege of Ministering to Him (Acts 13:2)

A. Ministering = Bringing Blessing into Ones' Life:

1. Doing something for someone that they can't do for themselves.
2. An act that satisfies, secures, or meets a need.

B. God is Whole and Complete but Allows Himself to be Ministered to By Us.

1. One of the first things that Hebrew children learn is "Hear oh Israel! The Lord your God is one." Meaning He is complete, lacking nothing. (Mark 12:29)
2. It is extraordinary that God who lacks nothing allows Himself to be touchable, vulnerable and open to us.

C. Ministering to the Lord and to Others Has a Profound Effect.

1. It touches and blesses people in a way that words can't express.

III. Barnabas and Saul (Paul) are Sent Out from Their Church

A. People Are to Be Sent Out into Ministry. (Acts 13:3)

1. This is an important assignment of the Church.
2. Our mission is to "Love, Mend, Train, Send." We are not supposed to just collect people.
3. Jesus was a sending force in the lives of His disciples. He is our example.
 - a. "They fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3)
 - b. We are supposed to send people into ministry for the sake of others.

B. Paul and Barnabas Are Sent to Proclaim the Word of God in the Synagogue of the Jews with John Helping Them.

1. They encounter a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Serguis Paulus who was interested in hearing the word of God.
2. Paul, being filled with the Holy Spirit, was able to discern Elymas, the magician, who tried to turn people (and the proconsul) away from Christ.
 - a. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to have great boldness and confront the man.
 - b. His anger is against the darkness this man is proclaiming. He also sees the spiritual danger to the Proconsul.
 - c. The false prophet loses his sight. Paul says to him, “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” (Acts 13:11)
 - d. The Proconsul believed when he saw what happened and was amazed at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:12)
3. When filled with the Spirit people are able to do things they normally aren’t able to do.

IV. Paul's Strategy for Effective Evangelism

A. Paul Goes to Antioch (n Modern-Day Turkey), and Teaches in the Synagogue.

1. He went to the synagogues or other public places.
2. He knew people liked to hear from people from far off lands so he would wait until they would ask him to speak. He took full advantage and would go for it!
 - a. Seize the moment.
 - b. Be ready to make defense in season and out of season for the Gospel. (2 Timothy 4:2)
 - c. *God will 'open doors' for us.*
3. The single most, significant hallmark of our relationship with Jesus is found in our relationship with other people.
 - a. Paul was interested in people—how they were doing.
 - b. It was out of God's great love, concern, and compassion for people that motivated Him to do the most significant spiritual thing that has ever happened—sending His Son.
 - c. God Himself took the form of a bondservant.
 - d. Paul had something in his heart, a desire to do something for others—and went about doing it and brought someone else along with him.

B. Paul Teaches from the Old Testament About God's Inheritance to Israel.

1. Understanding why God had to destroy seven nations in Canaan to make way for Israel.
 - a. People see this and other Old Testament stories and come to the conclusion that God is "not loving"—but it is important to see why He had to do this.
 - b. He only destroyed very particular nations that history and archeology show were given to very evil abominable practices. In these nations sin was allowed to run rampant, even allowing infants to be sacrificed.

- c. God wanted to bless His people with the best possible inheritance:
 - i) An inheritance the other nations chose to forfeit.
 - ii) God invitation is for anyone who wants to be to be His child.
- 2. The inheritance God has for us is not instantaneous. (Acts 13:18-19)
 - a. He gave the land to the Israelites little by little.
 - b. “Order upon order, line on line.” (Isaiah 28:10)
 - c. For example—Joshua taking a day to walk the perimeter of Israel’s promised land, but 450 years to fill out the territory.
- 3. The Christian life is not a race.
 - a. We don’t look back over our Christian life and say, “Look how far I’ve come.”
 - b. We don’t learn important lessons just once and then move on—we often need to re-learn them over and over again.
 - i) Misunderstanding this concept often leads to discouragement.
 - c. If we “dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness” our inheritance will be ours. (Psalms 37:3)

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART SEVENTEEN*

Unusual Leading of The Lord

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTERS 15:36-16:13

Again, and again in the Book of Acts we find people who are responding to situations and circumstances and thereby end up having accomplished amazing things in the Name of the Lord. Jesus told us to “...Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark. 16:15). What He might have said was “as you are going into the world” or “wherever you find yourself” that is where you preach the *good news*. It is not about waiting for the Lord to send you to a certain place in order to start sharing the Gospel, but as we are living our normal lives we are to do this. And it is in the day to day living our lives that the Lord will whisper points of direction to steer us in certain directions.

I. How We Hear and Are Led by the Lord**A. Promptings of the Lord Are Born Out of Concern for Another Person or People.**

1. Paul feels that he and Barnabas should go back to all of the cities where they had preached the Gospel and see how people are doing (Acts 15:36).
 - a. Paul’s simple interest in and passion for these people prompted him to end up going on his next missionary journey and spreading the Gospel even further.
2. It was God, out of His great love, concern and compassion for the people of the world that motivated Him to do the most significant spiritual thing that has ever happened in the world—the sending of His Only Begotten Son.
3. God uses this prompting of love and concern to get us into people’s lives, into settings and circumstances that enable us to accomplish great things for the Lord in the lives of others.
 - a. Paul and Barnabas *want* to do ministry—they *want* to serve the Lord.

- b. They both have this on their heart to do and they were not told specifically by anyone to do this.
- B. The Simple Desire to Have Somebody with You While You Are Serving the Lord is a Huge Spiritual Prompting.
 1. Barnabas, after deciding what he and Paul are going to do, wants to take John Mark along with him. (Acts 15:37)
 - a. It is important to notice that Barnabas didn't consider taking John Mark along because of he had deserted them and had not gone to work with them.
 - b. A disagreement happened between them that separated them. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening churches. (Acts 15:38-41)
 2. There is a difference between a friend and a disciple.
 - a. Any person that you really pour your life into in a mentoring/discipling manner will become your friend, but any friends that you start with will almost never become your disciple.
- C. A Lot of Leading of the Lord Can Come Out of Disagreement You have with Another Person—Especially When You have been in Ministry Together.
 1. It is not as though Paul and Barnabas said hurtful things to one another, but that they had a completely different perspective on this.
 2. God calls us to spread out into the world, not to be collected out of the world and all huddled together.
 - a. As we saw earlier in Acts, persecution caused the Christians to spread out to regions that they would not have gone on their own accord.
 - b. No matter what relationships you give up in order to serve the purpose of God, there will be more relationships that come.
 - c. When two people who have walked in ministry together part ways and continue to live as they did when they were in ministry together, they find other ministry partners and the Gospel is multiplied.

II. God Draws Us to Specific People or Groups of People to Disciple

A. Paul Chooses Timothy as His Disciple. (Acts 16:3)

1. Paul had a greater purpose in mind than just bringing Timothy with him; his purpose was to raise Timothy up to lead.
2. Timothy is circumcised in order to join Paul.
 - a. Although we aren't required to be circumcised of the flesh, we are required to be circumcised of the heart.
 - b. If we are going to disciple people we need to be willing to point out the things in them that need to change in order to further their growth.

B. No One Feels A Qualification to Lead Another.

1. It is not about feeling qualified to lead someone; it is about understanding that we need to be willing to step out and *allow God to use us* to lead someone.
2. Paul understood that it was incumbent upon him to step in, speak things, do things and be willing to cut off the things that were hindering Timothy from greater things he could do for the Lord.
3. The basic instruction of leading someone is to take what we have learned, experienced and taught and teach that to someone else.

III. Paul's Vision of the Man from Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10)

A. Paul Is Headed to Mysia and Bithynia when the Spirit of Jesus Would Not Allow Them to Enter. (Acts 16:7)

1. If you walk with the Lord long enough there will be times that you're doing something and suddenly you just know that the season is over. Not because you're tired, discouraged or frustrated, but because the Lord is asking you to be done or/and He has somewhere else for you.
2. Just as you can have a clear prompting from the Lord to do something, you can also have a clear prompting *not* to do something.

B. What We Do Where We Are Is What We Will Do Where We Go.

1. The only reason you would be called somewhere specifically is to share the Gospel with the people who are there. If you aren't doing that where you already are, then you won't do it where you are "called" to.
2. The importance does not lie in where you are, but in what you are doing—wherever that may be.
3. If you want to have an exciting life where you end up with many testimonies of "You will not believe what God did!" then step out and share the *good news* right where you are, right now.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART EIGHTEEN***Three Salvation Stories**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 16:14-34

Paul, now joined by his friend Silas, sets out to bring the *good news* to the area of what is now known as northern Greece and Turkey. As the Gospel begins to spread into the far reaches of the world, we begin to encounter many different kinds of people; different in terms of their race, their culture, their occupation, their religious background, their age, their gender, etc. In this particular segment of Acts, we see three very different examples of how salvation came to real people through Paul, now many years and hundreds of miles from where he was first converted on the road to Damascus. One thing that each of these stories has in common is that it is apparent that Paul and Silas carried the simple message of hope and forgiveness with them everywhere they went.

I. Lydia, a Merchant of Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15)**A. Paul and Silas Go to Philippi.**

1. Paul and Silas went to a place of prayer where the men usually met to pray, but find a group of woman instead.
 - a. They were looking for who was the most receptive.
 - b. It was not customary for Jewish men to speak with women.
2. Paul ends up sharing the Gospel with these women and Lydia opened her heart and believed.
 - a. Lydia had some kind of relationship with God. It is not known to what degree. She invited Paul into her home because she was hungry and wanted more.
 - b. Her excitement about her conversion was apparent. She highlights the difference between a new Christian and an older Christian.

B. Lydia Is Part of God's Bigger Plan.

1. Lydia was from a town where God had not permitted Paul to share the Gospel.
 - a. Lydia was a seller of purple fabric, a traveling merchant that would eventually return to her hometown located in this region that was off limits to Paul.
 - i) God was not being racist; He was propelling Paul to get him to the place where he needed to be.
2. Lydia's Conversion Affected Those Around Her.
 - a. Lydia's conversion enables her to reach her entire household.
 - b. Later Lydia ends up being commissioned as a minister and evangelist to her own people and spreads the word.

C. Paul Is an Example to Us of How to Share the Gospel.

1. God uses people who spread the word rapidly among their own people.
2. Paul did not debate or take an adversarial position with her. He simply spoke what was true of God.
 - a. Sometimes Christians come on too strong or too fast with people and try to force the truth on them.
 - b. We need not be quick to draw a line with people who are on an honest journey trying to understand, but are still not there yet.
3. Paul used simple words that were powerful, not because they were persuasive, but because they were the truth.
4. Speak gently to people and ask God to open their hearts.

II. The Slave Girl with a Spirit of Divination (Acts 16:16-23)

A. Paul and Silas Encounter This Slave Girl on Their Way to the Place of Prayer.

1. The Slave Girl was possessed by a demonic spirit by whom she predicted the future and made money for her handlers through her fortune telling.
2. This girl was not the sort that you would pick out of society, but was a perfect candidate for the Early Church. Most Christian converts were not upper class citizens and neither was this girl. They were just ordinary people.
3. Because she was a slave, she did not have control over her own life.
 - a. People in the world are much less the masters of their lives than they realize.
 - b. Most people are controlled by the hurts and fears they have experienced and act out of those.

B. The Slave Girl Becomes a Hindrance to Paul's and Silas' Ministry.

1. She followed them for days yelling, "These men are bondservants of the most-high God..." (Vs.17)
 - a. She spoke the truth but it came off sounding wrong and strange.
 - b. It was not the Holy Spirit speaking; it was a demonic spirit.
2. The Spirit of Divination.
 - a. This spirit is religious and controlling.
 - b. It attempts to determine what your ultimate destiny or future will be and tried to get you to trust in that rather than in God.
 - c. People dismissed the truth of the Gospel.
 - d. Her yelling made the message of the Lord no longer appealing to those who were hearing it.
 - e. No matter how right the message is, if it comes off with a religious tone it will turn people away.
 - f. The spirit of divination says "I know where I'm going; I've got it all mapped out.

- g. Many religious people are plagued by the spirit of divination.
 - h. It's an odd, wrong, exclusive spirit.
 - i. People who struggle with this put many people off the truth of the Gospel.
3. Paul commanded the spirit to come out of her.
- a. The spirit came out and the girl lost per power of fortune telling.
 - b. The girl comes to know the Lord through this experience.
 - c. She is now longer able to make money for her masters, so they get angry and have Paul and Silas stripped, beaten, and thrown in jail.

III. The Jailer Commanded to guard Paul and Silas (Acts 16:23-34)

A. Paul and Silas are sent to the inner jail where the worst criminals are kept.

- 1. Paul and Silas begin to sing praises to God.
 - a. The prisoners listen to them sing.
 - b. People who don't know the Lord don't like religiousness and weirdness, but are intrigued to hear people celebrate and worship the Lord.
- 2. The Lord rescues Paul and Silas from the prison.
 - a. There is a huge earthquake that shakes the prison doors open and the chains fall off all the prisoners.
 - b. The jailer seeing the gates of the prison open raises his sword to kill himself, but Paul stops him and assures him that all the prisoners are there.

B. The Jailer Is Saved.

- 1. The Jailer falls at Paul's feet and asks "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30)

- a. Paul simply replies, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)
2. The Jailer rejoices because he thought his life was finished, but it had actually just begun.
3. The jailor frees Paul and Silas and washes their wounds.
4. Immediately he was baptized and all his household.
 - a. It's a *symbolic* washing away of sin.
 - b. We learn there's no right or wrong way to baptize.
5. The jailor washed their wounds and feeds them. He stops thinking of himself and starts thinking of others.

IV. The Message of the Gospel Is One of Such Hope.

A. It Is a Simple Message.

1. We don't need to rattle theology.
2. The message comes with no requirements. "Freely you received..." (Matthew 10:8)

B. The Message of Forgiveness Should Never Be Confused with the Message of Growth, Maturity and Development.

1. We should never put up a bar and say that if someone were really saved they would measure up to certain standards.
2. Salvation is a great message. It applies to anyone and everyone. All they have to do to be saved is believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.
3. Growth, maturity and development come along the way in our walk with the Lord.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART NINETEEN*

A ‘New’ Good in the Marketplace

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 17:1-32

The paradigm of the people born in the last twenty years is very different than the thoughts of the people born fifty or more years ago. It can difficult for people, so convinced of their own thoughts, to believe there’s another way to view the world. In the pagan world of Jesus’ time, the Church had to be innovative in how they shared the message of the Gospel so that it would be relevant and understandable to the people of that time. We are faced with exactly the same dilemma today. Many times, we mistake the means of presenting the message with the message itself. We are to teach people to look to Jesus as their ultimate authority, having the final word on every matter in the physical and spiritual world. We are to share with them the things that He taught us, and to pay close attention to His words, just like we are to.

We want to see what the Early Church did, and what was behind what they did, yet still act appropriately according to our paradigms. Paul walked or took slow vessels city to city. It’s silly for us to travel that way but we can be just as intentional in sharing the *good news*. In Paul’s day, it was customary to openly discuss new ideas in public places—like synagogues and marketplaces where people congregated—but most of those places are now gone. It would be impossible to replicate his journey with the same miraculous results. That was then, this is now. If we try to go back and forth in little boats, we know it would be a waste of time. Yet often the Church today, rather than attempting to capture the heart of God, tries to cram the hugeness of the Gospel into tiny little spiritual vessels and repeat the methodology that worked in the past, but fails dismally in the present.

- I. Just as in Our Lives, the Apostles Had Many Inactive Times Between the Miraculous Times
 - A. Paul and Silas Traveled Many Long Distances Between the Cities They Visited.
 1. Nothing happened in those cities in between, no miracles of note, nothing particularly significant. Paul went and passed right through them.
 2. The Christian life has moments and time periods where exciting things are happening, and in between those times are days or weeks that feel inactive and boring.

B. We Can't Forget that the Book of Acts Spanned Over 40 Years.

1. Because it is the miraculous events that are recorded, we could make the mistake of comparing our lives to these events and feel as if there is nothing exciting happening in our lives.
2. Just as the Apostles did, we have to go through the process of going to several places. It can be a hassle to go from a point of ministry to the next point of ministry.
3. The real-life qualities of what Paul and Peter had to go through—multiple donkey rides, boat rides, staying at inns—aren't recorded, and it can be easy for us to forget to give an account for that in our understanding of ministry.

II. Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

A. Paul's Pattern Was to Go to The Synagogues in Each City He Visited. (Acts 17:2)

1. Paul would go to the Jewish Synagogues in order to relate to the people. He would examine Scripture with them and share the truth from the word of God.
2. Ultimately, what he was doing through this was capitalizing on what they already believed, but posing questions and suggesting things that could get them to reconsider their conclusions about God.

B. Paul Preached the Ministry of Reconciliation.

1. Like today, the people of the time had a skewed image of who God really is. Paul used Scripture to challenge that view.
2. The ministry of reconciliation is getting people who are alienated from God back into relationship with Him.
 - a. God wants to be reconciled to those who are at a distance from Him. It is our privilege to be able to preach this to people.
3. So many times, Christians preach the ministry of isolation rather than reconciliation.
 - a. Paul on the other hand was so embracing! He took any opportunity he could to tell people how much God loved them.

- b. Paul did not preach a standard of “goodness.” It was not a matter of being right, or being wrong. Instead he preached that no one could be good enough to save themselves, which is why Jesus was sacrificed on our behalf.

C. Moralistic Orientation Versus Righteous Orientation.

1. When you preach a moralistic orientation, you create a standard of good that has to be reached by doing what you *should* do, and not doing what you *shouldn't* do.
2. A righteous orientation defines “good” as someone wanting to bless others, secure others, love others, and wanting to be for people regardless of what it is that they’re doing right or wrong.

III. Paul in Berea (Acts 17:10-15)

A. Paul Goes Again to the Synagogue in Berea.

1. Unlike in Thessalonica, many of the Jews at the Synagogue in Berea pay attention to Paul and believe what he is saying.
 - a. This is a lesson to us that its only after we continue to talk to many people over a period of time do we ultimately see the kind of fruit that we’re hoping for.
 - b. We can’t decide, or predict, who will receive the Gospel well and who will not. We can only decide to obediently preach it.
2. The Bereans were of “more-noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examined the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)
 - a. We have to be careful today, that in our eagerness to make the Bible relatable to this generation, we don’t avoid speaking directly from the word of God.
 - b. We also should be careful not to isolate and confuse people by only spouting verses that would not make any sense to them or speak only in the jargon of our church culture.
 - c. Instead we need to find a balance where we take the truth of the word of God that we have learned and speak it to people in a way they’ll understand, but yet doesn’t dilute the message.

IV. Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16-34)

A. Paul Originally Came to Athens to Seek Refuge from Persecution. (Acts 17:13-15)

1. Paul didn't originally intend to go to Athens, but He was sent there by fellow believers concerned for his life.
2. As Paul waited in Athens he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols and false gods, and his spirit was stirred within him to preach the truth of the Gospel.

B. As was His Custom, Paul Went to the Synagogue to Reason with the Jews and God-Fearing Gentiles. (Acts 17:17)

1. Paul responded to the provocation in his spirit not in anger, but in a motivation to rescue the people trapped in idolatry.
2. Paul did not stand up and speak against the ills of the society in Athens; he didn't view the people as enemies, he chose to all the more preach the Gospel to them.

C. Paul Presented the Gospel in a Way They Could Understand.

1. Paul stepped into the philosophical realm that was present in this society for the sake of winning people whose only religion is based in philosophy.

D. The Stoic Philosophers and the Epicurean Philosophers of Athens.

1. Stoic Philosophers.
 - a. Their beliefs were a continuation of several centuries of Greek thought where they believed there was a central governing and unifying principle that tied together all of the particulars of the cosmos called "The Logos."
 - b. Basically, they would attempt to align themselves with "The Logos" by avoiding the distraction of the external world—whether that be pain or pleasure.
 - c. They were very self-disciplined in their thinking and this self-discipline and duty were the earmarks of the Stoics because they were finding the inner guidance of the entire world.
2. Epicurean Philosophers.

- a. The Epicureans felt that the secret to happiness was having no worry about either fear or pain.
- b. They believed that fear and pain were the result of someone being involved in too many things. So, the best thing to do was to isolate yourself with a small circle of friends and not get involved in anything that was too difficult.
- c. They ultimately believed that the reason people were tormented was because they were afraid of dying and facing some type of judgment. One of the primary tenants of Epicureanism was when you are dead, you are dead. There is no thought, no feelings, nothing to fear—you are nothing after you die.

E. Paul Was Not Intimidated by the Philosophies of the Day.

1. Paul begins by speaking in a language these philosophers would understand.
 - a. At this time, Athens had been experiencing a great plague. People were offering sacrifices to any god that they could, and an altar was built with the inscription “To An Unknown God.” (Acts 17:23)
 - b. The Athenians built this altar to try to appeal to other gods that may be out there, whose names they didn’t know. And although Paul considered this altar just another pagan cult, he uses this altar as a point of reference for the people to understand the Gospel. (Acts 17:23-31)
2. Paul presents the truth of who God is on the basis of how he knows Him.
 - a. Every person has a deep longing in their heart to get connected with the God they know exists.
 - b. Even if people say they don’t believe in Him, its only because they blame Him for the disappointments in their life and ultimately decide they don’t want to believe in a God like that.

F. Paul Was Not Against the Society or the People of Athens.

1. Paul did not measure his spirituality on his ability to define who was wrong, rather he measured it by his versatility to be able to describe the goodness of God to every single person regardless of their background.

2. Paul quoted the philosophers, poets, authors and musicians of that day and used it as a vehicle to express the truth of the Kingdom.

G. Paul Did Not Defend Himself Against the Culture Around Him.

1. We can cease to be afraid of that godless society and recognize that we are called as light into darkness.
2. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)
3. We are called to infect the culture around us with the love and life of Jesus who came into the darkness of this world and infused it with His light.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART TWENTY***Staying Fresh and Moving On**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 18:1-21

As we continue through the Book of Acts what we are finding is this theme that God, who is an extraordinary God, loves to make use and include ordinary people in His great purposes for the lives of people. As we follow the stories through this book we will continually find that wherever there is an amazing thing that God does, there is some ordinary person who is nearby when it happens. As we're reading along about all the wonderful things that are developing, we are seeing patterns of behavior and approaches to ministry that we could extrapolate for more effective outreach in our ministry.

I. Some Important History of Corinth**A. There Was a Narrow Isthmus of Land that Separated the Northern Part of Greece From the Southern Part of Greece.**

1. Ships used this Isthmus to get their boats from the northern part of Greece to the southern part of Greece because it would cut off a lot of sailing time.
2. It took three days for a boat to be dragged through the isthmus.
3. The sailors would get off the boat so it would be lighter to pull through the isthmus.

B. Corinth Was Known as the City of 10,000 Prostitutes.

1. Since there was always a large number of sailors passing through Corinth and the small city of Cenchrea, also on the Isthmus, it became a center for prostitution.
2. Almost all of the permanent residents of Cenchrea were women—and most of them prostitutes.

3. Prostitutes cut their hair short as a sign they were a prostitute. If they had their head covered it meant they weren't available. But when they took their head covering off, it would reveal their signature haircut and men would know they were available.
 - a. For this reason, Paul instructed the women in the church of Corinth to cover their heads so as to be helpful to the men in the church and not lead them astray in their thoughts. (1 Corinthians 11:5)

II. Paul Goes to Corinth (Acts 18:1-4)

A. Paul Does Not Avoid This City Despite its Reputation.

1. Paul happens to be on his way and this happens to be a primary port city through where he is going.

B. Paul Meets Priscilla and Aquila When He Arrives.

1. Paul is new to Corinth and meets Priscilla and Aquila, who are also new to Corinth.
 - a. This is a good instructive piece of information. When we're trying to find a way to reach out to neighbors and friends and talk to people about the Lord, the most receptive group of people would be those who have recently move into the community.
 - b. Paul was very strategic about this and used it as a point of affinity with Priscilla and Aquila.
2. Priscilla and Aquila are both tentmakers, like Paul is.
 - a. There is a lot of mileage to be had in relating to people—not to try and trick people, but to lower the bar of resistance to any cultural weirdness that someone may have in how they view God.
 - b. Paul used his everyday life as a tentmaker to further the Gospel. Don't separate your "everyday life" and your "church life." There should be a fluidity between the two—ministry should be what we live, not what we do.

C. Timothy and Silas Join Paul in Corinth. (Acts 18:5)

1. Timothy and Silas find employment so that Paul can stop making tents and devote all of his time to ministry.
 - a. Paul didn't get to work in "full-time ministry" when he started.
 - b. Many people who want to plant church try to start out doing only ministry, but that's not the pattern of Scripture. Most often, it is that you start as a tentmaker and eventually God comes along and supports you.
2. The very most significant way for a person to be trained for future spiritual ministry is to get involved in the logistical side that releases other people's obvious ministry.
 - a. Like in the story of when Moses has to keep his hands raised in order for the Israelites to defeat the Amalekites, Moses' hands got tired so Aaron and Hur held his arms up to support him. (Exodus 17:8-15)
 - b. Also, in the Book of Acts when the church had grown so quickly that the widows weren't getting the good they were supposed to get, the church put together a group of people to focus on filling this need. (Acts 6:1-7)
 - c. Ministry is serving people, and the lower you can get to release other people, the better.

III. A Transition Takes Place in Paul's Ministry and He Is Called to the Gentiles

A. God Was Slowly Revealing to Paul that He Is Being Called to the Gentiles.

1. Up until this point Paul's pattern had been to go to the synagogues in the cities he came to and reason with the Jews.
2. Paul's track record shows about as many Gentile conversions as Jewish, but up to this time he continues in his patterns of reasoning with the Jews in the synagogues. (Acts 18:4)

B. The Reaction of the Jews in Corinth.

1. When Paul was preaching at the synagogue in Corinth the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive. Paul shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles. (Acts 18:6)

2. Paul is saying that he has done everything he can to give them a chance at repentance, but now there is nothing left for him to do so his time would be spent better elsewhere.
3. Paul leaves this synagogue and goes next door to the house of Titius Justus, a Gentile, and as a confirmation Paul leads him to the Lord. (Acts 18:7-8)

IV. Embracing the New Seasons God Brings into Our Lives.

A. Just as God Brought New Opportunities for Paul and the Early Church, He Will Place Opportunities to Us.

1. These new opportunities will often be out of our comfort zone or seem impossible to do.
2. If we take that next step, then the exponential measure of ministry that will happen in us and through us will be glorious.
3. God wants to add to us—to develop us so that we’re always stepping into something new. New seasons bring us refreshment.

B. One of the Nicest Things God Does Is Not to Reveal His will for Our Lives so We Can Experience that Newness and Freshness.

1. The whole point of the willingness to turn away from the old season and step into the new one is not because it is bad, but because you want to be someone who makes use of the things that God has arranged in your life.

C. If We’re Going to Start Something, We’re Also Going to Have to End Something.

1. Paul stayed for “many days” in Corinth before moving onto Ephesus. (Acts 18:18-19). The Christian life doesn’t work by trying to always keep everyone together. Paul traveled throughout the whole region.
 - a. When we look through Scripture, there is not a huge premium on keeping people together indefinitely.
 - b. There is a premium on people engaged in conversation with others who are around them.

2. If we can combine an understanding of stepping into new things with an understanding of serving and doing things for others to raise them up and enable them to do more ministry, then we find the wonderful calling God has put on our lives.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART TWENTY-ONE***Growing Little by Little**

By: Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 18:24-19:20

Life in God is something that's done a little bit at a time. It is truly more of a journey than a series of markers or goals to meet along the way. It's not an obstacle course, but a journey to be enjoyed—a process of a little here and a little there.

Both, as societies and as individuals, we are all at different places in any era or moment in time. As Christians, the best way we can bring others closer to the Lord's ways is to speak into their lives where they are, rather than preach to them about where they should be. And we can ask, "How can I help you" or "Is there some place in your life where I can be of assistance?"

I. God Uses Ordinary People to Do Extraordinary Things

- A. Early Christians Followed Scripture from the Old Testament to Guide Their Course.
- B. The Lord Often Redirected Their Steps in Their Outreach Efforts. They Continued to 'Go for It.'

II. Each Era of History Has Its Own Mindset or Paradigm

- A. The 1st Century Mediterranean World Was Wildly Pagan and Diverse.
- B. The Message of Jesus Needed to be Communicated Clearly Across Greatly Diverse Backgrounds.
 - 1. They would always reference back to what Jesus did on the Cross.
 - 2. They would find a way to reach into the life circumstances of the people by finding something they could relate to.
 - 3. How you think often acts as a filter over your reading the word of God.

C. We Are Transitioning Out of the Modern Era, into the Post-Modern Era.

1. The Modernist loves to define boundaries and categorize things.
2. The Post-Modernist is not concerned with categories. Things are more blurred together.
3. The Modernist wants to know what has been accomplished. The tragedy of the Modernist mind set is that it wants to remove all the wonder.
4. The Post-Modernist enjoys the journey.

III. We Sometimes Impose Goals on People

- A. We Want to mark Their Progress. That Is What the Pharisees Did.
- B. This Is Not What God Intended and Not What You See in the Early Church. The Early Church Wanted to Assist and Bless People.

IV. How the Early Church Worked

A. The Church Was Known As “The Way.”

1. Not everyone had to have the same doctrinal beliefs. The Church was more interested in explaining the way of God more accurately than drawing lines of differentiation.
2. Some had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit but were baptized in the Name of Jesus and when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them. (Acts 4:6)
3. Some engaged in occultic practices came confessing and disclosing their practices and brought their books and burnt them in front of everyone. (Acts 19:18-19)

B. The Church Wanted to Strengthen Disciples and Lead Each Believer Ahead in Their Walk with the Lord.

v. The Story of Apollos (Acts 18:24-28)

A. Apollos Was Mighty in the Scriptures and a Very Eloquent, Educated Man.

B. On His Way to Corinth, He Meets a Couple, Priscilla and Aquila, Who Were Tentmakers.

1. The couple had been ministered to by Paul
2. In a humble way, they were able to give Apollos a fresh understanding to take with him to Corinth.

VI. The Disciples Who Were Not Yet Baptized in the Spirit (Acts 19:1-7)

A. Paul Meets Some Disciples on the Road Who Didn't Know the Holy Spirit or Jesus, But Were Doing What They Knew to Follow After What They Understood.

1. Upon hearing Paul say, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus" they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus.
2. This was the beginning place for them.

B. Paul Did Not Reproach Them. He Asked What Their Understanding Was.

1. He didn't grill them or deal with shame or guilt but shared the good news with them.
2. When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. (Acts 19:6)

VII. The Good News of the Bible

A. The Lord Wants to Empower Us to Overcome that which We Cannot Do on Our Own.

B. We Are Not the Keepers of Doctrine, but Fishers of Men.

C. Our Interest Must Always Be to Share the Good News.

1. How often do we lose people because we raise the bar too high?
2. There is a point where we must bring people in relationship with Jesus.

D. The Location of our Work Is Not Important.

1. When Paul wanted to minister to Gentiles, he found another place to talk, which was secular.
2. Paul would go anywhere.
3. The goal is to understand the culture of the people so the word of God can be related to in a meaningful way.

VIII. The Spiritual Dimension of Christian Practices

A. Where is the Spiritual Dynamic in These Practices?

1. Extraordinary miracles were being performed by Paul, sometimes using articles of his clothing; the laying on of hands; kneeling in humility and lifting hands to the Lord.
2. The spiritual dynamic is in creating connection, linking people together, so that Kingdom life is passed along.
3. The greatness of the power does not reside in the vessel, but is always unto the Lord.

B. There is Power in the Name of Jesus.

1. A name carries all the dynamic and power of that being.
2. The Bible says Jesus' Name is above all names.
3. Deliverance and prayer have power because they are performed in the Name of Jesus. He brings wonderful rescue and deliverance.
4. Demons know the power and significance in the Name of Jesus.
5. You can call upon the Name of the Lord even if you don't know Him. (Romans 10:13)

C. Trying to Cast out Demons without Belief in the Lord.

1. The seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest tried to cast out demons seeing what Paul had done in Jesus' Name.
2. The demons defied them because they knew the exorcists were unbelievers.

3. But many were turning from occult practices to the Lord and “the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” (Acts 19:18-20)
4. If you have been involved in occult influences that you may or may not be aware of you can receive prayer to recover you from harmful influences.

IX. We are All in Process

A. Believers are Always in a Process of Growth.

1. Continue to come to the Lord and ask Him to show you the things that need to change.
2. He is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23-24)

B. There is No Particular Step-by-Step Process. Our God is a God Who Gently Moves Us Along.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—*PART TWENTY-TWO***The Impact of No-Account Living**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 20:17-36

Paul is a trans-local apostolic minister, one who goes from congregation to congregation to create a foundation of new concepts and understandings that others who came after can build upon. Paul agonizes as he goes from place to place, knowing that he has an initial relationship with people there, but won't get to enjoy a long-term relationship with anyone. He calls together the elders of the church of Ephesus, whom he loves dearly, to give them a declaration about his own life and the nature of his ministry.

The Bible says he served the Lord “with all humility and tears and with tears and trials.” He must make the decision to leave these people because he knows what his assignment is. He considers his life of ‘no account.’

His thoughts are always, “What does this mean for someone else?” He understands he is a vessel, a messenger and a courier. It is only in this way, he says, that he can claim the fullest inheritance in the Kingdom for others.

I. God's Calling on Our Lives**A. He Calls Us to a New Level.**

1. Adjustments to our attitudes and thinking.
2. Coming to new conclusions.
3. Transformation and repentance.

B. The Lord Will Make Our Lives Count Like Never Before if We live a Life of No Account to Ourselves for the Sake of Others.

II. The Nature of Paul's Ministry

A. He Lived Completely in Their Midst—His Life was Open to Everyone.

1. There was no separation between his public ministry and his private life.

B. Paul Understood that Real Ministry Entailed Tears and Trials. (Acts 20:19)

1. Ministry involves a lot of pain and inevitable disappointments. It's part of dealing with human beings.
2. I try to remember I have caused more tears in my own life than others have.
3. Somehow God is able to do incredible work within all of this.

C. Paul Didn't Shrink Back from Saying What was Profitable for Others.

1. Ministry requires that we must often tell people something unpleasant because it will bring advantages to their lives.
2. We are always tempted to avoid unpleasant subjects.
3. Paul overcame that temptation because he loved them more than his own comfort.

D. Paul Took Every Opportunity to Minister.

1. He was always looking for the moment to share.
2. He taught one-on-one or in large groups with the same passion.

E. Paul Believed His Life Was of No Account.

1. It was never about his personal comfort. His comfort wasn't the issue.
 - a. He had no idea what was waiting.
 - b. He knew it would involve pain, tears and trials, but that didn't matter.
 - c. His sole purpose was to help others.

2. Paul knew he was a vessel, a messenger and a courier.
 - a. He offered himself to be filled up by the Lord and poured out for the sake of others
 - b. His only desire was to finish the course God set before him.
 - c. He had no sense of self-importance.

III. Paul Wanted to Stretch to the Full Borders of His Inheritance

- A. The Less Paul Thought of Himself the More He Moved Further into His Fullest Ministry.
 1. Thinking of himself was like sacrificing something that belonged to others and would keep him from his full inheritance.
 2. The more he stretched, the further he went.
 3. Paul's example is an encouragement to us—we too can reach the fullness of our inheritance.

IV. The Promised Land and the Kingdom of God

- A. The Kingdom of God Is Not Just About Heaven, but also About the Rulership, Dominion and Authority of God Given to Us on Earth.
 1. The authority available to us can make a difference in the world.
 2. We are to act as watchmen to signal danger or victory at hand.
 3. We use this authority to encourage others.
- B. This Authority Is Ushered in Through Repentance and Is for Breakthrough in Others.

V. Paul's Instructions to the Elders.

- A. Guard the Flock.
 1. Keep them safe.

2. Beware of false teachers.
 - a. Be attuned to what may be lurking behind 'motives.'
 - b. There's a difference between unintentional bad advice and deliberately leading people astray.
3. Embrace, love and understand your flock.

B. Shepherd the Flock.

1. Feed them and lead them.
2. Admonish people—we all need to be reminded of things.
3. Stay in the word to be strengthened in the Lord and receive all that God has given to you.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH — *PART TWENTY-THREE***The Church of Many Ones**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 21:1-40

When we focus on Peter and Paul's significant characters, we might believe there is nothing for us to do except be spectators. Yet, there are stories of countless people who come from every nationality or location, and who have many giftings or assignments in the Lord. Each of them, in doing what the Lord has commanded, enabled the Gospel to be spread to the entire region of the Mediterranean with a significantly diverse culture. It is very instructive for us to see these many, many different characters and how it was that God used them in the whole scheme of things.

- I. How We Live and Function in the Kingdom of God Is Not a Consequence of Our Ideas or Thoughts
 - A. We Really Must Follow the Pattern of the Lord.
 - B. His Ways Are Not Our Ways, and His Thoughts Are Not Our Thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)
 - C. We are Encouraged to Let Go of Our Own Ways and Grab Hold of His Ways as They Are Better.
- II. Ministry Gift-Mixes
 - A. Each of Us Have Been Given Unique Ministry Gifts.
 - B. The More You Understand Your Ministry Gifts, Will Help You Understand How You're to Function in Ministry.
 - C. Understand That Not Everyone Is Exactly Like You.

D. You Experience Joy and Fulfilment When You Begin to Function in Your Gift-Mix.

III. Paul Had Specific Patterns He Followed

A. Not Regimented or Structured Visits.

B. He Looks for Believers Wherever He Goes.

C. He Spends Whatever Time He Has Ministering to People.

1. Most of these people live their lives in community speaking to neighbors and friends.

IV. The Ministry of Phillip the Evangelist

A. Phillip Was One of the Original Seven Chosen to Oversee the Needs of Widows and Children.

B. Phillip, the Evangelist, Was “Transported” to Different Places by the Lord.

C. Evangelists Often Find Themselves “Transported,” Either in Conversation or Location.

V. Prophetic Ministries

A. Phillip’s Four Teenage Daughters.

1. They were already developing a prophetic ministry.

2. They were known to be prophetic by people of the region.

B. Phillip’s Daughter, Agabus the Prophet, Affirms the Danger Awaiting Paul in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:10-11)

1. Agabus the prophet binds Paul’s hands and feet. This was part of the prophecy—if Paul goes to Jerusalem, something bad will happen. This is different from don’t go to Jerusalem.

2. But God had called Paul to go to Jerusalem but people began begging him not to go. Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 21:12-13)
3. Paul goes because nothing matters to him except what Jesus has asked him to do.

C. The Qualities of Prophetic Ministry.

1. Often prophets live out and manifest the message.
2. It is frequently for the sake of another—it’s called sympathetic discernment.

VI. Paul Arrives in Jerusalem

- A. Paul, Peter and the Elders Understood the Message Was to Go to All Peoples Regardless of Religious Background.
- B. Paul Had a Ministry to also Reach Out to the Gentiles.
- C. Peter and the Church in Jerusalem Still Ministered Mostly to the Jews.
1. The Jews wanted to live according to the old customs.
 2. The new Jewish believers were indignant about Paul’s teachings.
- D. The Message Really Is That Jesus Has Come to Offer Forgiveness and Rescue to Anyone Who Calls Upon the Name of the Lord.
1. Sincere believers may be sitting right next to each other and have totally different beliefs and can become intolerant of each other.
 2. The real issue is can we find ways to identify with each other.
- E. Peter’s Plan for Paul to Go Through a Purification Ritual for the Jews.
1. Paul and others cleanse themselves in a sacramental manner.
 2. It does not work, and Paul is dragged out of the temple.

3. He is confused with an Egyptian who had stirred up a revolt, but clears himself with the Roman commander. (Acts 21:38)
4. He again begins to speak to the Romans and Greeks, but in the Hebrew dialect. (Acts 21:40)

VII. What Is Evident

- A. We can do nothing apart from the Grace and Mercy of God.
- B. We Will Always Fall Short of What is True of God in Our Own Work and Abilities.
- C. We Are All Saved in the Name of Jesus our Lord.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH — PART TWENTY-FOUR**A Good Witness**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTERS 21:29-23:11

As Acts draws to a close we see Paul continuing with the same patterns and principles he has employed from the beginning. He finds common ground to communicate with his intended audience and effectively helps turn the belief systems of the known world upside down. The society into which the Gospel was born is much like ours today—a tangle of nationalities, religions, social ranks, beliefs and perspectives.

After his conversion on the road to Damascus, the Lord made it clear to Paul that His message of salvation was for everyone—an offering to all populations and sub-populations, Jew and Gentile alike. With tireless obedience, Paul has led multitudes to Jesus but he has also enraged the Jewish believers who believe that he's preaching heresy. That Messiah was no longer exclusively theirs was a revolutionary thinking, unwelcome to the point of violence.

Outside hostility and national adversity had given these people a worldview of privileged entitlement and in a certain sense it was true. They were chosen by God to be a light to the nations. His intent was for them to model what life could be like when God was the center. But somewhere this had all gotten lost and they'd become a people with an inflated sense of self-righteousness.

i. The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-49)**A. The Jews Are Infuriated When Paul Shares with Them that the Gospel Is Given to the Gentiles as Well. (Acts 21:29)**

1. When we become people, who have an understanding between right and wrong, it can be easy to use that understanding as a way to judge others rather than as a way to model our lives.

2. When we live our lives according to the patterns of the truth and goodness and bounty that are found in the word of God, the *good news* begins to manifest in more and more of our life and people can begin to see that.

B. The Jews Had Become an Exclusive, Self-Righteous Group.

1. National adversity, as well as the hostility directed toward the Jews by other nations had created for them a worldview wherein they were privileged to know the truths of God and understand the things of the Kingdom.
 - a. They were a chosen people by God not because they were special or gifted.
 - b. They were chosen by God to communicate hope and promise to the rest of humanity.
2. There is a tension in our spiritual lives, the more that we grow in the Lord and learn new truths, the wider the gap can become between life as we live it and life lived by those who do not know or believe what we know and believe.
 - a. This spirit of legalism takes that understanding of right and wrong and turns it into a self-righteous exclusivity denying hope to the very ones who ought to be receiving it from us.
 - b. Everything we come to know in the Lord should cause us to be more and more willing to extend our hand to someone than to point our finger at them.

II. Paul Defends Himself Against the Jews. (Acts 22:1-21)

A. After a Mob of Angry Jews Drags Paul Into the Street and Beats Him, He Speaks to Them About His Conversion and His Call to the Gentiles.

1. Paul addresses them in the Hebrew Dialect.
 - a. Paul is speaking to them in a normal language that they would understand. He doesn't use any spiritual jargon that may confuse them.
2. Paul talks about his former life, emphasizing the similarities he had with the mob.
 - a. Paul understood that the mob had beat him up because they were so zealous for God and thought he was distorting things.

3. Paul talks about how he used to view God, versus how he now views God.
 - a. This is a very simple, yet effective line of discussion to talk to people about life in God. But don't make your life more than it is, just be honest about what you used to think and how you used to be like.
4. Paul goes on to talk about his conversion experience.
 - a. Anyone who is "converted" has had an experience with God where He made Himself known.
 - b. Conversion stories are potent and powerful. They are useful in bringing others to salvation.

III. Paul Shares with the Jews About His Call to Bring the Gospel to the Gentiles

A. The Jews Are Enraged When Paul Claims That the Gospel Is Also for the Gentiles.

1. The Jews begin throwing off their cloaks, kicking up dust and throwing things at Paul. (Acts 22:23)
2. The guards arrest Paul with the intent of flogging him until he reveals to them why the Jews would be so angry at what he said. (Acts 22:25)

B. Paul Claims His Roman Citizenship. (Acts 22:28)

1. Just as Paul is about to be flogged, he asks the guards whether it is right to flog a Roman Citizen who has not yet been condemned.
2. When the guards found out that Paul was indeed a Roman citizen, they immediately unchained him but the commander kept him in custody to stand trial with the Chief Priests and Council in order to find out what they were so angry about.

C. Paul is Brought Before the Council and Chief Priests. (Acts 23:1-10)

1. Paul stands before the Council and pleads his case. Knowing that the Sadducees and the Pharisees don't agree on the topic of the resurrection of the dead, Paul plays to that fact.

- a. Sadducees do not believe in any spiritual power or no life after death, while the Pharisees believe in all kinds of spiritual things.
 - b. It is important to remember that a crowd is never of one group, and a person is never of one group. We need to be careful to make sure we are relating to people individually because everyone has different pasts, different experiences and different needs.
2. The commander feared that the chief priests and council would kill Paul, so he sends soldiers to take Paul back to the prison.
- D. The Lord Sends Paul to Rome. (Acts 23:11)
1. After Paul was brought back to prison he receives a vision from the Lord that he is to go to Rome and do what he has done in Jerusalem.
 2. Paul was a man who lived by obedience and he chose to obey the Lord.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART TWENTY-FIVE

Chapters 23-26

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTERS 23—26

The Bible has the power to reach into the depths of our psyche, mind and emotions to the place where the soul and spirit come together (Proverbs 20:27). The study of the Bible will touch experiences, memories, and conclusions we've come to in our lives which often steer us in the wrong direction. In spite of this, many of these experiences some of His seeds still are deposited that the Lord wants to water (Matthew 13:31-32). No matter how we've been measured or evaluated, only the Bible can be the mirror of who we truly are and even passages that seem more like historical narrative have much to teach.

The Book of Acts begins with the story of a small group of confused disciples not knowing what to do next. It continues with these same disciples explosively spreading the *good news* throughout the known world, and then filters down to the story of the apostle Paul telling the wonderful news to anyone and everyone no matter the circumstances. Paul is now in Jerusalem. He's been recognized, beaten, jailed, tied and prepared for torture, dragged before a council of elders, placed under house arrest, plotted against by a group of people who hate him and vow to not rest until he's dead and then he's moved to a new trial venue where he continues with his mission.

I. The Plot to Kill Paul (Acts 23:12-22)**A. While Paul Is on House Arrest, a Group of Men Swear a Vow Not to Eat or Drink Until He Is Dead.**

1. These men go to the chief priests and council and tell them about a plan to kill Paul. (Vs. 23:14)
2. While the men were explaining the plot to kill Paul, Paul's nephew overheard them and went to the commander and told him this. (Vs. 23:16-22)

3. The commander realizes that it would get too messy if Paul was killed under his jurisdiction, so he finds a way to get Paul out of that region.

II. Paul Is Sent to the Governor Felix (Acts 23:23-35)

A. The commander sends Paul to the Governor Felix With a Letter Explaining His Appearance.

1. The commander's concern was more in favor of saving himself than of saving Paul. He wanted to wash his hands of a potential mess that could ruin his political career.

B. Governor Felix Gives Paul a Hearing. (Acts 24:1-21)

1. The High Priest, Ananias, some elders, and an attorney named Tertullus come to Paul's hearing with his accusers there. The Governor hears their side of the story then turned his attention to Paul.
2. Paul *cheerfully* makes his defense and shares his hope in the Lord.
 - a. Paul, even being on trial for his life, always turns things back around to the message of the Gospel.
 - b. Paul preaches about his belief in the resurrection of the dead; that every single person will die and be resurrected as it were—meaning they will enter into an afterlife.
3. Felix dismisses Paul after he begins speaking about the resurrection of the dead. He tells him that he will make his decision when the commander comes.

C. Felix and Drusilla, the Wife of Felix, Hear Paul. (Acts 24:24-25)

1. As Paul started discussing righteousness, self-control and judgment-to-come, Felix became afraid and sent Paul away.
 - a. Most everyone is comfortable talking about religion in the metaphysical arena, but once it becomes something that is pertaining to someone as an individual, most back away from the conversation.

D. Paul Remained on House Arrest for Two Years Under the Governor Felix. (Acts 24:26-27)

1. Felix often called for Paul to come to speak to him about righteousness, etc. again, probably hoping to receive a bribe from Paul.
2. We often want God to take a snapshot and show us right away what will happen, but like Paul we most often wait a lot longer than we would choose to.

III. Festus Relieves Felix as Governor and Paul Is Placed on Trial Again (Acts 25:1-12)

A. Being New to His Post, Festus Wanted to Gain Favor with the Jews and Agreed to Hear the Charges Against Paul.

1. Paul defends himself against the charges and appeals to Caesar.
 - a. If Paul hadn't appealed to Caesar, he most likely would have been set free.
 - b. Whether it was the foolishness of Paul that appealed to Caesar, or the sovereignty of God working out all things for good, we won't know.

B. Paul Brought Before King Agrippa and Bernice.

1. Paul Speaks to King Agrippa.
 - a. Despite the fact that King Agrippa and Bernice are brother and sister, and also in a relationship together, Paul still speaks to them with the same dignity and same even tone he has given all of the previous governors.
 - b. Where would we ever imagine as believers that we should decide ahead of time based on someone's lifestyle or choices that they are beyond being able to hear about the Gospel.
 - c. The truth is that for the most part, the people we would consider the most wayward are the ones most perceptive to the Gospel because they realize their need for it.
2. Paul tells Agrippa his conversion story. (Acts 26:1-18)
 - a. Paul tells this story for a third time, and adds another line where the Lord says, "Saul [Paul], Why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." (Acts 26:14)

- b. “And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’” (Vs. 26:15)
- 3. King Agrippa replies to Paul’s defense, “In such a short time you will persuade me to be a Christian.” (Acts 26:28)
- 4. Paul replies to Agrippa and says that he would hope that everyone hearing him would become like him except for the chains he wears, whether it be a short time, or a long time. (Acts 26:29)
 - a. Paul didn’t think about his chains, or the amount of time he would be in them, he only thought about what it might mean for the sake of another person.
 - b. Paul would sacrifice anything in order for another to experience the Gospel as he had experienced it.

ACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH—PART TWENTY-SIX

Conclusion—Acts of the Early Church

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

ACTS CHAPTER 28

As Acts draws to a close, we find Paul just released from several years of house arrest due to riots that resulted from his teachings. After a grueling voyage including terrifying storms and even shipwreck, he finally arrives in Rome. The approximately forty-year span narrated in Acts is almost over. Though centered on key figures such as Peter and Paul, the Book of Acts is primarily a book of ordinary human beings doing extraordinary things. These diverse people of all shapes and sizes, philosophical and economic background, age and gender, shared one key quality—their desire to do what God asked of them.

To all appearances, their lives and stories give no indication of people predestined to turn the world upside-down. But through them and because of their love of Jesus and obedience to Him, the Book of Acts becomes what it is—a book of lessons, patterns and principles applicable for all people at all times. Thanks to them, and their consistent application of four basic principles, Jesus and His Kingdom were given to all mankind.

I. Jesus Commanded Us To “Go Therefore and Make Disciples” (Matthew 28:19)

A. The Meaning of “Go.”

1. The original meaning of “go” is difficult to translate because it involves not only an intention to get up and go, set your sights on something, but it also could be said “as you are going about.”
2. “Go” does not imply that we must receive the direction from God before we go. It does not mean that we can only make disciples if we go somewhere or are sent somewhere. When Jesus said “go” He meant for us to go out among the world, wherever you find yourself, and make disciples.

B. It Isn't About What You Have, It's About What You Have Been Given.

1. When Peter and John were walking by the temple one day a beggar asked them for money. But Peter responds, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" (Acts 3:6).
 - a. Most of us feel like we don't have what we need when people ask things or expect things of us. What we have is what we've been given in God.
 - b. Most of the time what people need or want has nothing to do with what they really need or want.
2. We need the dynamic of the Holy Spirit who is prompting us and leading us.
 - a. When Jesus told His disciples to go and make disciples, He started them in Jerusalem—then Judea, then Samaria, and then the ends of the earth. He had them wait in Jerusalem until they received what they needed there before they moved onto the next place.
 - b. Jesus didn't tell the disciples to hurry and get out there; He had them stay in Jerusalem until they were empowered and lead and filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 24:49)

C. We Need to Have a Constant Attitude of Servanthood.

1. Jesus said that "...Whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 20:26)
 - a. Jesus didn't mean "great" in the eyes of the world, but rather "great" in the eyes of the Kingdom.
2. Serving is the quickest and surest way to grow and develop someone in God.
 - a. If you want to mature or grow in substance—if you want to gain spiritual girth in the Kingdom of God make yourself a servant, but not just where it is comfortable—be a servant of all.
3. Be an intentional person who is looking for every opportunity to speak or do something that will draw someone closer to God.

II. Welcome Everyone

A. The Gospel Is Indiscriminate.

1. The Message of the *good news* goes to every background, every religious persuasion, every ethnic group, and every native tongue.
 - a. We can often make our own decisions ahead of time about who we think is going to be open to the Gospel.
 - b. At Pentecost, the believers filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in languages that *every* person who heard could understand.
 - c. In Peter's vision, God told him never to call unclean what He has made clean. (Acts 10:15)
2. Many of the early converts were considered marginal or outcasts.
 - a. Phillip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch—a man of a different race, very wealthy, considered unclean for the temple because he was a eunuch. (Acts 8:27)
 - b. Lydia was a woman and not someone that Paul had sought out. (Acts 16:14)
 - c. The woman fortuneteller was delivered. (Acts 16:16-18)
 - d. The jailor in Philippi was going to commit suicide but instead was converted, along with his whole family. (Acts 16:25-34)
 - e. Pheobe was a woman pastor who ministered to prostitutes in Cenchrea. (Romans 16:1-2)

III. Talk About the Kingdom

B. The Kingdom Is About the Incredible Rulership and Dominion of God.

1. Long ago Adam and Eve handed over the rulership of this planet and gave it to the 'enemy.' We abdicated our responsibility.
2. The kingdom of God is an invasion, where the power and dynamic of the Lord penetrates into the way the world says things have to be.

C. After Jesus Was Resurrected He Spoke of the Kingdom for Forty Days.

1. God's ways are very different than ours. He does not think like we think.
2. God's ways are designed to navigate this broken planet so that the greatest amount of blessing will come to you and will come to the people that are around you.

D. If You Function According to the Kingdom You Will Experience Great Blessing and Great Good.

1. How differently are we living? Do we stand out from the world?
2. Everything we have comes from God. He is the One who gave it and He is going to give more. We don't need to hold to what we have if it is promised that we will always be taken care of. (Matthew 6:25-34)

IV. Persuade People of Jesus

A. All Throughout the Book of Acts They Preach the Name of Jesus.

1. The disciples and apostles didn't preach morality, they didn't preach politics, they didn't preach judgment, they preached Jesus.
2. Paul spoke continuously of Jesus and in Acts 28 it says of his two years in Rome, "...he was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. (Acts 28:30-31)

B. God Made Jesus Lord and Messiah.

1. God will inscribe His ways on our hearts.
 2. God will show us what ways are good to go and what ways are not good to go.
- C. There Is a Right and a Wrong.
1. Not everything is relative; there are definite rights and wrongs but at the same time, no matter how far we have gotten off track, no matter how lost we've ever been, no matter how we violate the purposes of God, we will still have a Savior.
 2. We can on the one hand experience Jesus as our Lord saying "this is the way walk in it" and we can experience Jesus as our Savior who says "don't do that" but who also says "I forgive you."
- D. We Need to Be Balanced in What We Teach, and Jesus Is That Balance.
1. If we only preach forgiveness we are missing something, and if we only preach morality we are missing something.
 2. Preaching Jesus is the only way to really get the true message of the Kingdom across to people because there is no other name by which we are saved.
 3. The secret to incredible, dynamic, spiritual transformation in the lives of people around us is very simple: talk about Jesus and talk about what Jesus is doing in your life.