

# **Running The Race**

## **A Bible Study Of The Life Of Paul**

**Kay Daigle**



*Copyright ©2020 by Beyond Ordinary Women Ministries*

### **Cover Art**

Our beautiful cover was painted by Sandy Sparks ([sandysparksart.com](http://sandysparksart.com)) ©2020. Thank you, Sandy, for so graciously sharing your time and talent to paint a picture that so well represents the theme of this study.

### **Appreciation**

I'm so grateful for Irish Kinney and Evelyn Babcock whose input on the consistency of the message and their eye for detail were essential to the editing process.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the women who generously wrote and shared their stories to flesh out the lessons from Paul's life for today's readers.

## Bible Translations Quoted

*The Scriptures quoted are from the NET Bible® <http://netbible.com>. Copyright ©1996, 2019 unless otherwise noted. Used with permission from Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. All rights reserved.*

*Scripture quotations from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

*Scripture taken from THE MESSAGE (designated MSG). Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.*

*Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible® (designated NASB). Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.*

*Quotations from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT) New Living Translation copyright © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.*



## Table Of Contents

<b>Running The Race A Bible Study Of The Life Of Paul.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>What to Know About This Study Guide.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Week One: A Surprising Runner .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Week Two: A Unique Race .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Week Three: A Bold Runner .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Week Four: Paced By The Spirit.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Week Five: Focused On The Goal .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Week Six: Running In Community .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Week Seven: Using Hardships As Opportunities.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Week Eight: Invested .....</b>	<b>44</b>

**Week Nine: Passing The Baton ..... 48**

**Appendix ..... 52**

**Paul’s Final Journeys (Maps of 3rd trip & Journey to Rome) ..... 52**

**Kingdom Prayers..... 53**

**Journaling 101 ..... 54**

**Tips For Leaders ..... 58**

**Works Cited ..... 61**

**Resources For Leaders..... 62**

# **What to Know About This Study Guide**

## **Its Format**

This study is written with few questions, but they're thought-provoking questions. It requires listening to God through his Word, being directed by open questions, and responding to what you've read and heard by writing down your thoughts.

Each week's study has three parts to make it easy to split it up or do at once, depending on your preference.

See *beyondordinarywomen.org* for previews of other studies or information about group purchases.

## **Simple Doesn't Equate To Shallow.**

This study demands your involvement. Although the layout is simple, how deeply you go depends on you. As you spend time talking to God and journaling your thoughts, he may lead you to other cross-references, but he will certainly give you insights into the verses. Don't stop with initial surface answers, but ask God to clarify and guide. The time you spend in the scriptures with God gives him space to speak. Listen well, note your thoughts (simple journaling) share them with your small group, and glean from one another's insights.

## **Studying Through Three Sections A Week**

If you like doing a little study at a time, each week's lesson is set up in three parts, but feel free to go through it in any way that works best for you. If you prefer daily time in the Word, consider spending two days on each part, writing on the optional starred section the second day. You may be amazed at what you see by reading the same passage twice. If you prefer to do the entire study in one sitting, you may want to read all the passages first and then answer the questions at the end. Of course, it's great to be in God's Word each day, but you may have other ways of doing that. Stick to what works for your schedule.

## **Additional Reading And Background Information**

The lesson provides background information pertinent to your understanding. Feel free to do your own research when you have interest or questions, but the group conversation will be focused on the passages studied by everyone.

\*\*\* Three asterisks identifies optional verses or suggested study for those with time and interest. The additional reading will help you wrestle with deeper insights into the passages.

## **Soul Food**

The verses that begin each week's lesson are great choices for memorization and/or discussion.

### **What You Need**

- A quiet place, if possible.
- A Bible that you can understand. If you don't have one, ask your group leader for suggestions, or email us at [info@beyondordinarywomen.org](mailto:info@beyondordinarywomen.org). Modern versions are available as downloads, through Bible apps, or in print at any bookstore. (We are using the NET Bible at [lumina.bible.org](http://lumina.bible.org), a free online Bible translation with study helps.)
- A notebook, laptop, or tablet to use to record your insights and answers which can easily be taken to your group meetings. If you're using a printed copy of this study, add a piece of paper after each lesson. (See Journaling 101 in the Appendix.)
- The commitment to listen to God and write out what you hear as you read and pray.
- Someone, or even better a group, to discuss this with you and provide support, encouragement, and spiritual challenge.

### **Best Practices For Group Get-Togethers (For More Detail See The Appendix & Leader Videos.)**

Plan a regular place, time, and leader. The leader should—

- read the section “Tips for Leaders” in the Appendix.
- watch BOW's free, short videos: “Tips for Leading a Journaling Study” (<https://vimeo.com/album/4256789>) and the series Listening Well (<https://vimeo.com/album/4065298>). If your group includes Millennials, watch the series “Millennials: The Good, the Bad, and the Ministry” at <https://vimeo.com/album/5118401>.
- start on time, not waiting for late arrivals.
- move the group along, being sensitive to God's Spirit.
- encourage everyone to share without forcing it.
- be a great encourager.
- avoid dominating the conversation.
- keep the focus on the women, not herself and her own thoughts.
- provide time for the group to think and share from their journals.
- contact absent group members to encourage them.

- email the group weekly to remind them of the upcoming meeting, and share her excitement.

As a group—

- come prepared and on time with your study, notebook (journal), and Bible.
- share freely and honestly.
- encourage one another.
- don't interrupt the speaker.
- love one another.
- don't try to fix the other members of your group or their problems by giving advice.
- pray for one another and entrust each other and your problems to God.
- be honest and vulnerable, but wise in how much detail you share personally.
- stay in touch with each other between meetings for support and encouragement.

### **If Your Group Meets Within A Larger Group In A Church Setting**

- Look for a woman gifted in teaching God's Word to teach a short lesson after the small group discussion. Watch BOW's short, free video "Why Use Live Teachers, not Video?" at <https://vimeo.com/209323216>. (For help in preparing to teach, see our collection of videos at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/bible-teaching/> or contact us at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/contact-alternative/>.)
- Because the discussion isn't about the teacher's comments but focuses on the members' personal study, the discussion should precede the teaching time.
- The teacher may spend 15-25 minutes adding to the background of the lesson, beginning and ending within the allotted time frame. The majority of the time together should be invested in small groups.
- The teacher's role is to clarify and extend what the group has studied, not to retell what they have discussed.

### **Stories**

Each week's study includes a true story that relates to the lesson. Some of our studies have such stories on video, but this study includes them in written form at the end of the lessons. The names have been changed in some cases to protect those involved.

## **Introduction**

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1

Do you not know that all the runners in a stadium compete, but only one receives the prize? So run to win. Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Lessons from Paul—there's so much to learn!

What's your impression of the Apostle to the Gentiles? Positive? Negative? Perhaps you think of him as stern and strong, a force to be reckoned with.

When I taught an earlier edition of this study in 2009, a number of people in that group told me that their attitudes toward Paul changed from negative to positive as we dug into his life. It made me sad that somewhere along the way the church has missed teaching the breadth and depth of the great apostle, a true giant of the faith.

I've been revising this study as the world deals with COVID-19 and now the United States struggles with racial tension after the unjust death of George Floyd.

The pandemic has been a challenging time that requires many people, perhaps for the first time, to really face their mortality. It may bring opportunities to share the gospel with both our actions and our words. There's much Paul can teach us about meeting any challenge by living with a focus on God's kingdom.

Our racial injustices draw me to Paul's example of speaking boldly for gospel truth by not allowing division within the church between Jew and Greek.

Through this study of Paul's life, I pray that we will be overwhelmed by the gospel message and the God whom Paul faithfully served.

Kay Daigle  
June 2020

## *Running the Race*

### **Week One: A Surprising Runner**

#### **Soul Food**

Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14b-17 NLT

To be frank, I'm not a runner, and I have no desire to begin running. But I want to understand it since the apostle Paul often pictures the Christian life as a race, using athletic terminology to represent what it looks like to follow Jesus.

Because considering the lives of other Christians can help us learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, we'll watch Paul run for the next few weeks. Our purpose isn't to learn ABOUT Paul but to learn FROM him about Jesus and how to faithfully follow him.

It's usually best to start a story from the beginning. How did Paul get into this race? That's our topic this week. Even if you're familiar with his story, consider it from the perspective of those who knew him before he encountered Jesus. What a surprise to them that Paul was now running after Jesus!

#### **Part One Study**

Who was Paul? What do we know about his background?

The Hebrew name Saul is used in the early chapters of Acts for the apostle we call Paul. Luke, the historian who wrote the book of Acts, refers to him as "Saul, who was also called Paul" (Acts 13:9). Being of the Jewish tribe of Benjamin, his parents named their son after King Saul, the tribe's most well-known member. Saul was his Hebrew name while Paul was likely his Roman ancestral name.<sup>1</sup> Luke began calling him Paul when his ministry focus turned to the Gentile world.

Although he was a Jew, Paul was of the diaspora, those born outside of Israel, as he identified himself to a crowd in Jerusalem: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of

---

<sup>1</sup> David B. Capes, Rodney Reeves, E. Randolph Richards, *Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to His World, Letters, and Theology, 2nd Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 41.

the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day” (Acts 22:3 ESV). In Acts 16:37 Paul identifies himself as a Roman citizen. “Roman citizenship in the provinces in this period was a mark of high status (especially because Paul’s family was from Tarsus, not a Roman colony, and thus must have received it for special service or as freedpersons of a well-to-do Roman.)”<sup>2</sup>

Tarsus was located in the southeast corner of modern Turkey. With that background, Paul “is thus completely at home in the worlds of both Jewish story and non-Jewish philosophy,”<sup>3</sup> making him God’s perfect choice as his witness to the Gentile (non-Jew) world.

Keep that culture in mind as we consider what else we learn about Paul’s background.

### **Read Philippians 3:5-7 And Comment On These Questions:**

- In that day “a person’s identity was wrapped up in the reputation of his or her family, community, and people group.” Honor from one’s social group defined success.<sup>4</sup> Why would Paul’s background impress his social group?
- What in your background—family, hometown, education, etc. tempts you to hold on to your “resume” rather than trust God alone?
- What positives in your life have you or would you have to leave behind to fully follow Jesus? Any thoughts about what that would look like?

\*\*\* Research Gamaliel, Tarsus, and/or the Pharisees, recording your thoughts.

## **Part Two Study**

We’ll start this section by reading the first biblical mention of Saul. What seems like only a passing remark at the end of the story of Stephen in Acts 7:58 becomes extremely relevant once Luke begins to focus on Paul’s story later in Acts.

*Read Acts 6:8-7:2a; 7:51-8:3. Read Also Paul’s Description Of Himself In Acts 22:1-5 And Galatians 1:13-14 As You Consider This Question:*

- Considering Saul’s background and actions, what is most interesting or noticeable to you about him from these passages?

Paul repeats the word zeal or zealous to describe what led him to persecute the church in Acts 22, Galatians and Philippians, (yesterday’s reading). In our day the word means “PASSION, ardor, love, fervor, fire, avidity, devotion, enthusiasm, eagerness, keenness, appetite, relish, gusto, vigor, energy, intensity; fanaticism.”<sup>5</sup> I generally think

---

<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 370.

<sup>3</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Capes, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Apple Dictionary version 2.3.0

of it as passionate devotion, but zeal in Israelite tradition involved “actual violence, not just strong emotion.”<sup>6</sup>

N.T. Wright comments: “. . . one of the solid things that we know about young Saul—[he] followed the ancient tradition of ‘zeal.’ Violence would be necessary to root out wickedness from Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

The Israelite tradition of zeal began with Phinehas, Aaron’s son, whose zealous actions in killing a couple guilty of sexual immorality stopped a plague in Israel’s camp. The other Old Testament zealot was the prophet Elijah. Wright says about his story, “Most of the Israelites had started to worship Baal, a Canaanite fertility god. . . . Step forward the prophet Elijah. He lured the Baal worshippers into a contest that Israel’s God won, and he had the whole lot killed. Once again, great zeal and a great victory.”<sup>8</sup>

\*\*\* Read about Phinehas, “the hero of zeal”<sup>9</sup> in Numbers 25:1-13, and note God’s comments about his zeal. If time permits, check out Elijah’s victory in 1 Kings 18:20-40. Journal your thoughts.

With all that in mind, write down your thoughts on these questions:

- Obviously zeal for God was considered positive. What motivates such strong emotions? Consider how you confront the idolatry in your own heart and that common to your church culture. What would it look like if you were motivated as Paul was?
- What is God saying to you today?

### **Part Three Study**

- Acts picks up Paul’s story again three or four years after Jesus’s resurrection (about A.D. 34). Read Acts 9:1-19a, and respond to these questions:
- In light of what you’ve previously read about Paul, what does this story reveal about God— his character and/or his actions?
- Meditate on this week’s Soul Food, our verses for this week (2 Corinthians 5:14-17), and write down your thoughts and any parallels you see between your story and Saul’s.
- How do you sense God encouraging you through this story as you look at your own failures and mistakes?

\*\*\* Read one or both of Paul’s own accounts of this event in Acts 22:3-16 and Acts 26:4-23. Journal any additional insights that you gain.

---

<sup>6</sup> Wright, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, 31.

Are you a Christ-follower? If not, God is reaching out to you in his great love. The journey to faith is different for each of us. Some of us, like Saul, are religious and believe that we're serving God. And yet we don't believe that Jesus is God himself who became man so he could die and bring us to God, proving his divinity by his resurrection. Maybe you're sensing that Jesus is who he claimed to be and that he wants you to follow him. He greatly desires that you turn from seeking life apart from him, going your own way instead of God's. Jesus died to reconcile you to the great Creator God who loves you and wants you to come home to him where true life and peace await.

Talk to God about it, contact your small group leader, or email me at [kay@beyondordinarywomen.org](mailto:kay@beyondordinarywomen.org).

Each week we share a true story that connects to the week's study. This one is from Kay H.

### **A Runner's Story: Kay H**

Who was it who said, "Our part is to run away from God as far and as fast as we can and God's part is to come after us and save us," or something like that? Well, that's what I was doing and that's what God did. It's surprising that God chose me because before he did I didn't know anything about him and I really wasn't making any effort to find out.

At the time I left home for college I had been to church only a handful of times in my life. I had never even read, much less studied the Bible. My thoughts about God and religion were purely philosophical. I had never heard the gospel, at least that I can remember. I definitely had no understanding of what a "personal relationship with God" meant. In fact, I really had no interest in God at all. Never mind—he was interested in me anyway.

At school I was suddenly surrounded by people who had something I didn't—a relationship with God that was real and personal, based on knowing him from the Bible and a belief in his Son Jesus who died to take away their sin and rose again to eternal life. At first when they tried to talk to me about it, I either ridiculed them or just literally shut the door in their faces. I argued and debated, and I thought I had all the right intellectual answers based on good reason and logic.

My testimony could be something like Paul's: I thought I was pretty smart. In a worldly sense most people might have agreed with me. But God wasn't impressed. He knew my reasoning and logic couldn't come close to his wisdom. Now I see that what was once my greatest source of pride and accomplishment actually caused me the greatest sense of shame and humility. But thanks be to God, he hadn't given up on me and his grace was bigger than my sinfulness, pride and stupidity.

Despite my stubbornness and refusal to listen to most of the people who tried to talk to me, God was breaking down my resistance and beginning to speak to me through a few individuals. Through their prayers with and

for me (which I met at first with “Sure you can pray for me. I don’t think it will do any good, but if it makes you happy knock yourself out.”), kindness, and even time talking to me about what the Bible really says, God eventually showed me that he’s real, and it doesn’t matter what I or anyone else thinks about him. He also showed me that I’m a sinner and his Son Jesus is the only one who is uniquely qualified to take away my sin, and that he did. It surprised a lot of people when I stood up at a campus evangelistic meeting and declared my faith in Jesus Christ, but it didn’t surprise God. He had plans for me.

Would anybody from my past be surprised to see me following Christ and spending my time and energy on his activities rather than the things that motivated me before? Yes, pretty much everyone who ever knew me would be! That fact has caused some painful conversations over the years, but it’s also created some great opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reality of 2 Corinthians 5:17: “So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away —look, what is new has come!”

## *Running the Race*

### **Week Two: A Unique Race**

#### **Soul Food**

Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others.

Paul in Galatians 6:4 MSG

The Christian race isn't a sprint nor is it a competition. Rather we run a great endurance race together in community that requires perseverance and faithfulness to finish well.

God designed each of us for a particular race. Some of our races are more visible while others involve more difficult obstacles. Just as God creates us with certain physical attributes, he also gives us spiritual gifts that fit his purposes for us as individuals. As Jesus's disciples, we're designed by God to fill particular places of service. Each of us runs a unique race, so comparisons with others take the focus off the goal.

This week we'll consider Paul's race. Although we don't have the same call from God as Paul, we can learn how to run and finish well from him.

Consider memorizing your Soul Food verse. It's a message we often need to remember.

#### **Part One Study**

When Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he already fervently loved God, but that encounter caused him to understand the fullness of what that meant. He recognized that Jesus was one with the God he had always served. His path was no longer persecuting followers of Jesus but making them.

From last week's study we saw that the Lord described Paul to Ananias as ". . . my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:15–16). Years later Paul quoted Ananias's words about him: "The God of our ancestors has already chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear a command from his mouth, because you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14–15).

We'll eventually read about these other occasions when Paul shared his story. At one point he spoke before Governor Festus, the Jewish King Agrippa and his sister Bernice, sharing with them some of Jesus' words on the Damascus road: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason, to designate you in advance as a servant and witness to the things you have seen and to the things in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that

they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:15b-18).

**From What You’ve Read Today, State In One Sentence God’s Purposes For Paul’s Life.**

So what happened then? How did Paul begin fulfilling that call on his life? Below is a chart outlining what Paul did in the years immediately after he began following Jesus.

**As you go through the chart on the next page, read as many of the verses as you can. Before that, however, read the Part One questions on page 22 so you have them in mind as you read.**

### Paul’s Early Travels

This chart adopts the chronology found in *Rediscovering Paul*.<sup>10</sup>

Bible passage	Location	What happened there?	Dates
Acts 9:1-19b (You read this in Week One)	Trip to and time in Damascus	Jesus revealed himself to Saul & called him to obey. After Ananias laid hands on him, Paul regained his sight and was baptized. Soon left for Arabia.	Total 3 years A.D. 34-37
Galatians 1:17	Arabia	Paul spent time in Arabia.	
Galatians 1:17; Acts 9:19b-25*	Damascus	Paul proclaimed Jesus in synagogues, amazing everyone and confounding them by proving Jesus was the Messiah. Some Jews plotted to kill him, but Paul escaped in a basket over the city wall.	
Galatians 1:18-20; Acts 9:26-30	Jerusalem	Paul met with Cephas (Peter) for 15 days, seeing only him and James, the brother of Jesus. Hellenists tried to kill him so he returned to Tarsus.	A.D. 37
Gal. 1:21 & possibly 2 Cor. 11:23-27	Syria & Tarsus in Cilicia	Preaching	A.D. 37-46
Acts 11:25-26	Antioch	Barnabas, having been sent to Antioch by the church leaders to check out the new church there, went to Tarsus and got Saul. They taught great numbers of people there.	A.D. 47

---

<sup>10</sup> Capes, 78–79.

Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 11:27-30**	Jerusalem	2nd visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas & Titus taking a gift to church for famine relief. Paul checked out the accuracy of his gospel presentation with church leaders. James, Cephas, and John approved & agreed Paul would go to the Gentiles while they went to Jews.	A.D. 48 (based on 14 yrs. from Paul's conversion)
Acts 12:25	Antioch	Return to Antioch with John Mark	A.D. 48

\*Some scholars place Acts 9:19b-22 (Paul's time teaching in Damascus) after the trip to Arabia and some place it before. Luke, the author of Acts, simply skips the Arabian stay, forcing speculation as to the specific chronology since he spent time in Damascus both before and after Arabia.

\*\*There is debate as to whether Galatians describes Paul's visit to Jerusalem in Acts 11 or the one in Acts 15.

### **Now Record Your Insights Into Paul's Early Days Of Following Jesus With These Questions In Mind:**

- What insights do you have into the man Saul as he grew as a disciple and witness for Christ?
- Describe the reactions to Saul from the various people he encountered after his life changed. How do you think you would have reacted and why?
- What do these passages reveal about God?

\*\*\* Consider what you've learned about Barnabas from the verses in the chart and also in Acts 4:32-37. Do you need a Barnabas in your life who believes in you and encourages you? If so, where can you put yourself with strong Christian women who've walked with God longer than you have? Once you connect with someone, ask her to coffee to simply talk and ask questions about her life and her walk with Christ. If you want to meet further, ask her if she would meet with you periodically. OR perhaps YOU need to be a Barnabas for a younger believer. Look for women who need to be encouraged to recognize and respond to opportunities to serve God.

## **Part Two Study**

Today we'll read an incident in Acts 11 which begins when Saul is in Tarsus in Cilicia, as noted on the chart on Part One. Then we'll read in Acts 13, which occurs after the dates on the chart.

Read Acts 11:19-26 and Acts 13:1-4 (c. A.D. 48). Then journal your thoughts on these questions:

- What impresses you about the church in Antioch?
- How did God use this church in connection with his purposes for Paul?
- What does this story reveal about God?

- What is God saying to you from Paul's story?

In our individualistic society, it seems reasonable to push for what we believe is God's agenda for us rather than wait on God's Spirit to confirm his will for us through the church body. When God is ready to send his people forward, you can bet that he can and will. He is sovereign over all.

\*\*\*Read the story in John 21:15-23. What is Jesus' answer to our tendency to compete with others in the race of the Christian life?

### Part Three Study

Today we'll investigate Paul's unique race further. Paul is called an apostle. The word apostle is the Greek word *apostolos*, from the verb meaning to send. It means one sent, an ambassador. "It designates the office as instituted by Christ to witness of Him before the world."<sup>11</sup>

Read these passages and then comment on the questions below: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, 9:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:18b-20; Colossians 1:25-29; 2 Timothy 1:8-12.

- What is the common thread in what Paul says about his ministry? Why do you think he emphasized this in his letters to various churches?
- How does that relate to the ways Paul adjusted his life in order to follow God's plans for him?
- What is God saying to you from these verses today?

Despite having grown up in the church, I was clueless that God prepared each Christian for a unique race which requires his/her God-given gifting. Once I realized that God expected me to use my gifts, I needed direction as to what they were. My Bible teacher suggested that God would give me a desire to do the work for which I was gifted. At that time the only thing that sounded remotely interesting to me was teaching the Bible because I had been greatly influenced by a former teacher, so I asked God for an opportunity to use that gift if I had it. The next morning the leader of our small group Bible study asked me to step in and lead at the last minute because she woke up very sick. I was scared to death, but I couldn't say no when I'd prayed for a chance to do that very thing. To my surprise, teaching the Bible gave me energy and excitement, and despite me, God used me. Before I had that teaching opportunity, I had served in other ways, but my efforts were unsuccessful and totally tired me out—good clues I didn't have the needed gifts.

Clearly, Paul's call was more specific than most of us experience because Christ personally identified his ministry. We, however, often have to eliminate and try out possible gifts to be sure.

- What do you know about your spiritual gifts and the strengths that God has given you? Plan to share that with your group. How do you need to adjust your life to use

---

<sup>11</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 238.

those gifts and follow him? If you don't know, ask your group for suggestions of where to start.

God's kingdom work depends on all of us doing our part. As we work together in our various areas of gifting, the Holy Spirit works through us and God receives the glory. You are essential to the work of God in this world. Discover your gifting, learn from those who have that gift, and serve.

\*\*\* Read the New Testament passages on spiritual gifts: Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:4-16; 1 Peter 4:1-11. Ask for input from several believers who are knowledgeable about spiritual gifts as to how they see you gifted, OR volunteer in an area of interest and ask for input about how it went. How did you feel about serving in that way? Find out how others think it went. Feel free to **contact us at BOW**<sup>12</sup> for help discovering how God has made and called you.

**This week's story is from Jana who discovered the passion that helps her fulfill God's calling.**

### **A Runner's Story: Jana**

I've always had an affinity for working with women and children. They're whom I'm most comfortable around and seem to relate to the best. I really became aware of this when I started traveling, both for fun and on mission trips.

On my mission trip to Africa, I ended up helping with the nightly service for children. I so enjoyed interacting with them, playing games with them, and teaching them how much God loved them.

On my trip to China, I went for the purpose of determining how best our church could help with children's ministries. I ended up having lots of encounters with the mothers and other women there and had the opportunity to encourage them and see the challenges they were dealing with. This inspired me to try and connect them with resources here that would help them with studying God's word and receiving training on how to teach and lead women.

These encounters helped me realize how much the women and children here at home also need training, encouragement and love. They inspired me to seek ways of helping here at home. Wherever God leads, I hope to have more opportunities to serve women and children.

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/contact-alternative/>

## *Running the Race*

### **Week Three: A Bold Runner**

#### **Soul Food**

Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Courage requires overcoming fear—fear of others, fear of loss, fear of all sorts of consequences. Out of self-protection, we often shy away from speaking truth. As Christians, we're called to be bold because we trust in God—not that he'll protect us from all harm but that he'll go with us through any hard consequences and reward us in the end for being bold in the face of suffering for Christ.

I can't think of any biblical character, except Jesus of course, who better exhibits this kind of courage over the course of many years than Paul, as we'll see. This week's study focuses on that aspect of his character.

#### **Part One Study**

Last week we read that the Spirit told the church leaders to send Paul and Barnabas out on God's work (Acts 13:2). We'll see today that they took with them a young man, John Mark (Acts 12:25; 13:5) the author of the gospel of Mark, on what we now call Paul's first missionary journey. You might want to download a good online map of Paul's trip or look in the back of your Bible if you like visuals. (I found **this free map**<sup>13</sup> easy to understand.)

As you read the stories, notice Paul's boldness—a necessity when spreading a revolutionary message. In a world that called Caesar Lord (Greek *Kyrios*), the gospel called people ruled by Rome to embrace Jesus as the one and only Lord (also *Kyrios*), serving him alone. As N.T. Wright says, "Paul's 'missionary' journeys . . . were aimed at the establishment of a new kind of kingdom on earth as in heaven. A kingdom with Jesus as king. The kingdom—Paul was quite emphatic about this— that Israel's God had always intended to set up."<sup>14</sup>

The last page of this lesson (p. 30) provides a chart listing the places Paul visited on this first journey

---

<sup>13</sup>

[https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/pauls\\_first\\_missionary\\_journey1.jpg](https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/pauls_first_missionary_journey1.jpg)

<sup>14</sup> Wright, 106-107.

—for those of you who like keeping track of such things. As you read about this mission trip, fill in the chart as you go.

**Read Acts 13:4-14:28, And Write Your Insights Into These Questions:**

- How do you see Paul’s boldness on this journey?
- What do you learn about Paul and Barnabas’s strategy from this first missionary journey?
- What do you learn about God from these stories?
- What is God saying to you from these stories?

\*\*\* Read from Bible study sources and commentaries about the places and/or events that interest you from this reading.<sup>15</sup>

## **Part Two Study**

We ended Part One with Paul and Barnabas back in Antioch where their first mission trip began. “And they remained no little time with the disciples” (Acts 14:28 ESV). It was likely during this furlough that Paul wrote the first of his thirteen epistles in our Scriptures, the letter to the Galatians, a region where he had planted churches on his previous trip.

From the outset of Paul’s ministry, he met Jewish opposition, as we’ve already seen. But resistance also arose from Jews who, like Paul, now followed Jesus. Their transition from the Law of Moses (given only to Israel) to the church (comprised of Jew and Gentile) was a hard one.

Wright explains: “It wasn’t simply that the idea of the One God becoming human was a shock to the system ... It was, just as much, that the implications of all this for the ancestral way of life were either not clear or all too disturbingly clear. Paul’s own question, what it would look like if the One God created a new single family of ‘brothers and sisters’ in the Messiah, had potentially revolutionary answers. And traditional societies do not welcome revolution.”<sup>16</sup>

Many of these Jewish believers insisted that it was necessary for Gentile believers to follow the law of Moses by being circumcised. Paul’s letter to the Galatians indicates that such men had arrived in Galatia after his visit there, convincing the new believers that they must be circumcised. The authors of *Rediscovering Paul* point out the seriousness of the issue: “For Paul himself ... the question of law was not merely academic. It threatened to divide the body of Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

\*\*\*God’s covenant with Abraham required men to be circumcised to be members of God’s covenant people. Read Genesis 17:9-14 where God initiated the covenant of

---

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Thomas Constable’s free notes can be found at <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Wright, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Capes, 140.

circumcision. Read Exodus 4:18-20, 24-26 for a strange story that emphasizes how strongly God felt about its necessity. Journal your thoughts.

**Read Galatians 5:1-6 First, And Then Read Galatians 2:11-14, Filling In The Chart On P. 30 And Journaling About The Questions Below:**

- What was Paul's stand on the need to circumcise Gentiles who followed Jesus? What do you find in Paul's language that suggests the importance Paul gave to this issue?
- Imagine Paul publicly calling out Cephas (Peter), an apostle who walked with Christ long before Paul did. What do you think you would have done if you had seen Peter and other leaders pleasing a group of Jewish Christians by refusing to eat with Gentile Christians (likely because of the Law's dietary restrictions)? Why? Consider what message their actions sent about the church to Gentiles and why this rebuke was a public one. Journal your thoughts.
- Read Acts 16:1-3. (We'll reread these verses next week as we look at Paul's second journey.) Read also Galatians 2:1-5, contrasting how Paul treated the issue of circumcision differently with Timothy and Titus. Consider what made their situations different. **Note:** Although by the 2nd Century A.D. Jewish law decreed that a child with a Gentile dad and Jewish mom was considered Jewish, he still had to be circumcised.<sup>18</sup>
- How, where and/or with whom is God asking you to be more bold?

The church today is divided on many issues. Some of them are gospel issues while others are secondary. Racial unity takes on added importance when viewed as a gospel issue in light of Paul's message in Galatians. (BOW's conversation on the subject "Leading Toward Racial Reconciliation —It's a Gospel Issue" is available on **video** or **podcast**.)<sup>19</sup>

When is it right to take a strong stand and when do we simply live in peace? Paul's position provides guidance regarding divisions that undermine the gospel that says all are sinners and all Christians are one in Christ. But many issues aren't as central. You might watch BOW's free video "Choosing Trustworthy Resources 3--Determining the Central Truths of our Faith"<sup>20</sup> for helpful guidelines. (The whole series is available on video or podcast.)

### **Part Three Study**

After Paul completed his first missionary journey, he spent some time in Antioch and then went down to Jerusalem for an important meeting (c. A.D. 49) purposed to deal

---

<sup>18</sup> Keener, 366.

<sup>19</sup> <https://vimeo.com/album/4826757> for video or <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/racial-reconciliation-a-gospel-issue/> for podcast

<sup>20</sup> <https://vimeo.com/261199690> or link to <https://vimeo.com/album/5065391> to watch the entire video series or listen to the podcasts at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/bow-podcast-episodes/>

with the kinds of theological issues we've already seen arise because of Gentile believers (Acts 15:1-6). We now call it the Jerusalem Council. Keep in mind that the early church was made up of Jews and Jewish proselytes for several years (before Acts 10 when Peter shared the gospel with the Gentiles), so including Gentiles involved questions that the church had not previously dealt with.

\*\*\* Read Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-35. Journal anything you find significant about the issues that Paul boldly stood for in his letter to the Galatians. What do you learn from the leaders of this meeting?

**Now Read Passages From Paul's Writings That Help Us Understand His Courage Or Boldness In The Midst Of Many Difficult Hardships. Write Your Thoughts From The Questions Below On These Verses: Romans 1:15-17; 15:14-22; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, 14-16; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 3:11-12; 4:7-18 (Including Our Week's Verses); 2 Timothy 4:14-18.**

- From the hints in these passages from Paul's letters, how would you describe what motivated Paul's boldness?
- What do you sense in these passages about what made it hard for Paul to courageously keep going at times?
- What is God saying to you this week about your own boldness? If you feel you have failed to be bold, ask God for forgiveness and the faith to trust him when you should be bold.

**This week's story is from Dr. Sandra Glahn, Professor at Dallas Seminary.<sup>21</sup> I asked her to write it because I so admire her bold, yet gracious way of standing for truth.**

### **A Runner's Story: Sandra Glahn**

My husband and I endured years of infertility that included multiple pregnancy losses, failed adoptions, and an emergency surgery for an ectopic pregnancy. And all that heartbreak spanned a decade before we finally had the successful adoption of our daughter.

Along the way, our spiritual journey resulted in a public ministry. It started when I attended an informal support group for fertility patients. Among these friends I found that when I shared my own heartache with strangers of other faiths or no faith, we often transitioned naturally into discussions about life's big questions. Why am I here? Is there a God? Does he have a plan? And much as my heart was breaking, I found God always carried me. So, in speaking with those who walked alone, part of me wanted to tell of my hope. And doors opened for me to share with a broader audience. But a big part of me just wanted to keep my journey to myself.

---

<sup>21</sup> Sandra Glahn's complete bio is on our website. Her blog at [aspire2.com](http://aspire2.com) covers many of the issues she mentions in this story.

A story God used to change my heart was the one in the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus heals a woman with a twelve-year menstrual issue (Mark 5:25–34). Rather than allowing her to slip away into the crowd without telling anyone about the goodness of God, Jesus calls out and asks who touched him. Busted. She comes and falls at his feet and tells him everything—her whole menstrual history and how he fixed it—right there in front of God and everybody. Why would he require that? So that everyone present might know he is God. And he is good.

Revisiting that story moved me toward more boldness. So, I began to share more. And to my pleasant surprise, I found that my openness contributed both to others’ healing and also to my own as I saw God using me.

Decades later, that experience has spilled over into other areas. For example, my infertility journey led me to explore lots of questions about God’s design for men and women. Is motherhood actually a woman’s ultimate calling? Did God make men to lead and women to follow? Can we take verses with commands to wives and husbands and assume from them something innate about men and women? Does a closed womb mean God’s disfavor? So. Many. Questions. And in answering them, I’ve had to relook at the Bible but also at influences of culture, including my evangelical Christian subculture. Consequently, as I’ve gone public with what I’ve learned, I’ve had thousands of conversations with men and women about “the role of women.” Sometimes that topic makes people angry. People sometimes make assumptions about my motives. And my character. But I try to share freely. Because after many conversations on this topic, other people make statements like, “I finally feel like I have wings,” and “So God doesn’t like men better than women” or “So I don’t have to be an Alpha Male to be a good man?”

Jesus was full of grace and truth. And I need both. I try to listen. And I seek to discern how much information my conversation partner actually wants. But ultimately love compels me to share—not abrasively—but boldly. Gently. With grace. I don’t always get it right. But I have a great model in Christ. And I sense him urging me to share with the crowd—because he and his word have always been faithful. And that is really great news.

### **Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Link To Map)<sup>22</sup>**

Place Visited	Acts	Notes/Outcome of the visit
---------------	------	----------------------------

Seleucia	13:4	
Salamis on Cyprus	13:5	
Paphos on Cyprus	13:6-12	
Perga in Pamphylia	13:13	
Pisidian Antioch	13:14-52	
Iconium	13:51, 14:1-6	
Lystra	14:6-20	
Derbe	14:20-21 a	
Lystra, Iconium & Pisidian Antioch	14:21b-2 3	
Perga in Pamphylia	14:24-25	
Attalia	14:25	

## *Running the Race*

### **Week Four: Paced By The Spirit**

#### **Soul Food**

And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Describing Paul and his companions in Acts 16:7 ESV

Although I have absolutely no experience with long distance races myself, I do have a daughter who has run in two marathons and several half marathons, which gives me some experience by osmosis or something. I do know that it's wise to run with a group progressing at the same pace. If a runner starts too fast, she grows so tired that she may not complete the race. If she runs too slowly, her time won't be her best. As I watched my daughter run the Chicago marathon, I noticed certain runners holding signs with a pace time so that anyone wishing to run at that speed could run with them.

As one running in God's race, Paul was paced by the Spirit. We, too, must learn to listen and follow the leading of the Spirit in our lives so that we complete the race well without burning out or failing to finish the unique work God has given each of us.

After the Jerusalem Council ended, Paul returned to Antioch from where he soon left on a second missionary journey, which likely occurred about A.D. 50-52. You'll find a chart of the second journey at the end of this lesson to make notes on his travels as you read.

As we follow this part of Paul's journeys, keep in mind our focus this week—to consider how God's Spirit paced and led him.

#### **Part One Study**

Before reading about Paul's second trip, let's look at how God led the first trip. Luke doesn't provide a lot of information about what Paul and his companions were thinking or praying as they moved from city to city, but let's use the information we have to at least consider God's pacing.

**Review Paul's First Journey (Last Week's Lesson), Either Using The Chart On P. 30 Or With A Quick Review Of Acts 13:4-14:28, Focusing On What Caused Them To Move From Place To Place. Keep These In Mind As You Read Today's Stories.**

Now we'll turn to Paul's second journey. Here's a free map of this second journey<sup>23</sup> to help. Record your insights into this second journey on the chart at the end of this week's study on p. 36 as you go.

**As You Read Acts 15:36–16:5, Journal Your Thoughts On The Following Questions In Light Of Your Review Of The First Journey As Well As This Part Of The Second. (We’re Saving The Paul/Barnabas Dispute For Another Lesson.)**

- What events, etc. do you note that pushed Paul and his companions on from city to city? Look for the big picture, i.e. patterns. What would you say is God’s part in this?

Acts 15:36 says that Paul suggested this second trip as a follow-up visit to the churches that he and Barnabas had planted on the previous trip, and Paul and his new mission partner Silas did return to Syria, Cilicia and southern Galatia, strengthening the disciples, as planned. Meanwhile Barnabas and Mark visited the churches in Cyprus, which was Barnabas’s home.

Now where?

**Read Acts 16:6-12.**

In two short verses (Acts 16:6–7), Luke describes why Paul’s travels may have felt aimless after they left the church plants in southern Galatia. The scriptures suggest that no ministry took place during that time (Acts 16:5-12).

A trip which takes us only a few seconds to read, involved hundreds of miles of travel from southern Galatia and an unknown amount of time before Paul and his companions arrived in Troas (the area of ancient Troy)<sup>24</sup> on the coast of the Hellespont, the four-mile-wide waterway separating Europe and Asia, where the travelers finally received direction about their next destination.

A possibility to consider: “Paul left the familiar region . . . , crossing the Aegean Sea, only after a vision from God (Acts 16:9-10). Perhaps it was never Paul’s intention to take the gospel beyond . . . Asia Minor. This seems implied by Acts 16:6-7.”<sup>25</sup>

**Write Down Your Thoughts On These Questions In Light Of The Verses And Information:**

- What do you understand about the importance of discerning the voice of the Spirit from these verses?
- Describe the ways God has guided you. In light of that, which of Paul’s stories do you most relate to and why?
- What is God saying to you through Acts today?

\*\*\* Read from additional sources about what you’ve read today.

## **Part Two Study**

In your reading in Part One you may have noticed that in Acts 16:10, where the travelers booked their trip to Macedonia, the northern area of Greece, the pronouns change from “they” to “we.” Most scholars see this as an indication that Luke, author of

---

<sup>24</sup> Wright, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Capes, 124.

Acts, joined Paul and his party at this point. As you read the rest of Acts, look for Luke's presence by noting his pronouns.

As you read the stories that comprise the rest of the second journey, keep noting how often Paul faced persecution and opposition. (You may want to highlight every place he met that kind of trouble on the chart at the end of the lesson.)

**As You Read Acts 16:11-18:22, The Rest Of The Second Journey, Make Notes On The Chart On P. 36, And Record Your Thoughts On The Questions Below The Note:**

Note: In Philippi we see the first record of Paul spending time in prison. N.T. Wright helps us understand what that involved: "In Paul's world, unlike ours, prison was not a 'sentence' in itself. It was where magistrates put people while they decide what to do with them. No provision was made for the prisoner's welfare. They had to rely on friends or family to bring them food and other necessities."<sup>26</sup>

- What do these stories reveal about God in general and his guidance specifically?
- Meditate on the opposition and persecution that Paul endured throughout this second journey. What do you learn from Paul's attitude?
- What is God saying to you today?

\*\*\* Our reading in Acts introduces a couple of great Christian women, Lydia and Priscilla. In BOW's series of three free videos/podcasts, "You ARE On God's Team,"<sup>27</sup> Claudia McGuire encourages Christian women through both of their stories: Lydia's story: "God Uses Your Availability"<sup>28</sup> and Priscilla's story: "God Uses Your Gifts."<sup>29</sup> Watch the series or one or both of the individual stories, and journal about how God is speaking to you.

### **Part Three Study**

We saw in the scriptures in Part Two that after Paul arrived in Macedonia, he visited Philippi before heading to Thessalonica, where he spent only a short few weeks (Acts 17:1-10). Paul went on from there to Berea, Athens and then Corinth. It was during his time in Corinth when Paul likely wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians, saying, "But when we were separated from you, brothers and sisters, for a short time (in presence, not in affection) we became all the more fervent in our great desire to see you in person. For we wanted to come to you (I, Paul, in fact tried again and again) but Satan thwarted us" (1 Thess. 2:17-18).

Even though Paul recognized that Satan was at work preventing him from returning where he wanted to go, he didn't let it stop him from doing the work that was in

---

<sup>26</sup> Wright, 182.

<sup>27</sup> <https://vimeo.com/showcase/5374540>

<sup>28</sup> <https://vimeo.com/286724024>

<sup>29</sup> <https://vimeo.com/286769436>

front of him, from doing what he could do. Satan's efforts didn't dissuade him or depress him. In fact, Satan is rarely mentioned in Paul's letters and is never his focus.

Some Christians credit Satan whenever things go wrong. After all, it couldn't possibly be God's will or plan for his work to fail or circumstances to be difficult, or could it?

Consider these first two journeys. Yes, Satan stopped Paul's plans at times, but so did the Spirit. We don't always know who's behind a closed door, but we do know that God is in control, even when it's Satan, and so Paul kept doing God's work, not allowing Satan to stop him completely. Since God is in charge, we accept Satan's attempts to stop us as God's opportunities for us to keep trusting and serving where we can. Often, Satan's real target is our faith. He wants to make us depressed, question God's presence or quit the race. We must be alert to what he's trying to do in us and entrust the closed door to God.

**As You Consider God's Sovereignty Over Paul's Travels, Read These Verses And Write Your Thoughts On The Questions: 1 Samuel 2:4-10 (Hannah's Prayer); Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Dan. 4:17, 34-35.**

- What do these verses reveal about God's rule and Satan's power?
- How do you generally respond when good ideas and good works don't work out? Why?
- Read Genesis 50:19-21, Joseph's words to his brothers who sold him into slavery. Note your thoughts about how Paul's story involves the same principle.

\*\*\* Read John 19:6-11, and note the last conversation between Pilate and Jesus. Write down your insights into Jesus' words in v. 11 and the opposition and persecution we've seen in Paul's story.

I love this prayer from John Baillie:

Thank you for every indication of your Spirit leading me, and for the things that seem like chance or coincidence at the time, but later appear to me as part of your gracious plan for my spiritual growth. Help me to follow where you lead and never quench this light that you have ignited within me, rather let me grow daily in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus my Lord.<sup>30</sup>

**Sometimes it's hard to see what God is doing when circumstances change and we face difficulties. Although unable to understand at the time, Ann can now look back at hurtful circumstances and recognize that God was at work for her good.**

---

<sup>30</sup> John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer*, rev. Susanna Wright (New York: Scribner, 2014), 41.

## **A Runner's Story: Ann**

I am from a small town in Texas and grew up with the notion that you graduated from high school and maybe went to college. Then you got married. I had dated the same guy all through high school and for two years in college, so I assumed that we would get married eventually. I was deeply hurt when he announced after our sophomore year that we should date other people over the summer. He had gotten a job in the city where we attended college, and I was going back to our home town. I was still hoping that after the summer, we would get back together. After all, we had dated for six years.

In late July I received a "Dear Ann" letter stating that he had met someone else and that they would be getting married in August! To say the least, I was devastated. I returned all of his personal items that I still had and burned his pictures, but my heart was truly broken. How could God have allowed this to happen? He had completely closed the door on that relationship.

I returned to college that fall and tried to get on with my life. I dated several people and eventually met a special person. We dated for two years and were married. Eventually we moved to Dallas for his job and to raise our family. Shortly after moving to Dallas, I was invited by an acquaintance to a Christian Women's Luncheon where women shared their testimonies about how trusting Christ as their Savior had changed their lives. One of those who gave her testimony was the wife of my husband's cousin. My acquaintance soon became my friend and mentor who led me to the Lord. We signed our children up for five day clubs and vacation Bible schools at several churches the next summer. We signed the kids up for Five-Day Clubs and vacation Bible schools. Our children trusted Christ, and eventually our husbands joined the family of God. Though our paths seldom cross now, she was one of the tools God used to lead me to Christ.

It has been many years since God intervened and put me on the path that eventually led me to Him through his son, Jesus Christ. He knew all along what his plans for me were, and what it would take to get me where he wanted me to be. I am thankful that He changed the direction of my life so many years ago.

## Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Link To Map)<sup>31</sup>

Place Visited	Acts	Notes
Syria & Cilicia (regions), Derbe & Lystra	15:41-16:5	
Phrygia (area in Galatia) & Galatia	16:6	
Mysia (region)	16:7-8	
Troas	16:8-11	
Philippi	16:12-40	
Thessalonica	17:1-10a	
Berea	17:10-14	
Athens	17:15-34	
Corinth	18:1-18	Likely writes 1 & 2 Thessalonians
Cenchrea	18:18	
Ephesus	18:19-21	
Caesarea & Jerusalem (church was "up in" Jerusalem)	18:22	

Antioch	18:22	
---------	-------	--

## *Running the Race*

### **Week Five: Focused On The Goal**

#### **Soul Food**

What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be tied up, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul to his friends in Acts 21:13

As I write this in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, I just read about Rebecca, a nurse who works in the Covid-19 unit at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, who “has moved into an RV and hasn’t seen her 7-month-old daughter in more than 5 weeks Rebecca is crystal clear about why she’s making the sacrifice: ‘I’m temporarily stepping out of my day-to-day life as mom so that I can play a part in making it possible for someone to keep their mom—or to help someone say goodbye to their mom.’”<sup>32</sup>

Just like a successful runner, Rebecca has her eye on a great purpose, a goal, that requires sacrifice to achieve.

So far we’ve watched Paul willingly face opposition and persecution because of a bigger purpose, a greater goal than his own comfort, safety, peace and freedom. That’s our theme for this week’s lesson.

#### **Part One Study**

We previously read about Paul’s visit to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). After only three weeks he was forced out of the city (Acts 17:2,10). His concern about the welfare of the baby Christians that made up the new church motivated him to follow up with a letter, likely written when he was in Athens or Corinth. (See Acts 18:1 and/or the chart of the second journey on the previous page.) FYI: After receiving the report that they were flourishing in the faith, he quickly followed up with a second letter from Corinth.

#### **Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-3:10, And Record Your Thoughts About These Questions:**

- What do you learn in these verses about Paul’s motivation(s) or goals?
- A letter is obviously far more personal than Acts, an historical book. What insights do you have about the person Paul that Acts doesn’t reveal?
- Is there someone you sense God’s Spirit nudging you to check up on today? If you contact anyone, share the outcome with your small group. (You don’t need to share any names.)

---

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/commentary/2020/05/15/were-in-here-fighting-5-nurses-take-us-inside-the-coronavirus-unit-at-parkland-hospital-in-dallas/>

\*\*\* We're skipping some verses on Paul's third journey. If you want to read them all, begin today with Acts 18:23-19:1, following the chart in the Appendix "Paul's Final Journeys." We'll pick up from there in Part Two's starred assignment.

## Part Two Study

Today we jump into Luke's account of Paul's third mission trip at the point when he arrives in Ephesus and follow him until his arrival in Jerusalem. (See the online map.)<sup>33</sup> As you read, think about Paul—a real person traveling by foot to places he'd never been, going on despite all the opposition and persecution he's already faced on two previous journeys. Keep that in mind as you consider the hardships and persecution he encountered on this journey.

**Read Acts 19:1-10, 23-41; 20:1-6, 17-38; 21:1-15, Or Do The Starred Reading Covering All The Verses. Journal About All The Questions Below The Starred Assignment As You Do Your Reading. Note That Our Soul Food Verse Is In Acts 21:13. (Keep Notes On The Chart "Paul's Final Journeys" In The Appendix P. 61.)**

\*\*\*\* Read the entire story of Paul's third journey, beginning at 19:1 and reading all the way through Acts 21:15. Write notes on the chart in the Appendix.

- What do you learn from Paul about sacrifice for a great goal from these stories?
- What can you add to what you've already learned about Paul's heart for the church?
- Read about at least one of the miracles connected to Paul during this trip: Acts 19:11-12, Acts 19:13-20 or Acts 20:7-12. (Also note 2 Corinthians 12:11b-12.) What questions or thoughts do you have about what happened? What do these stories reveal about God?
- What is God saying to you today in light of Paul's stories?

If you're wondering, as I do, about the comments the disciples in Tyre made to Paul (Acts 21:4), here are Dr. Thomas Constable's thoughts:<sup>34</sup>

There is ample evidence in the text that Paul was not disobedient to God in going on to Jerusalem (cf. 9:16; 19:21; 20:22-24; 21:14; 23:1, 11). Nevertheless, some students of Scripture have criticized Paul for proceeding. It seems probable that one or more prophets in the church at Tyre also foretold His arrest in Jerusalem (20:23), and that they, anxious about his safety, urged him not to proceed.

Paul, however, regarded it not as a prohibition but a divine forewarning so that he would be spiritually prepared for what would happen.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/paul's\\_third\\_journey\\_map.htm](https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/paul's_third_journey_map.htm)

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Acts 2020 Edition," 422. Accessed at <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf>

“Duty called louder than warning to Paul even if both were the calls of God.”<sup>36</sup>

Add any additional thoughts to your journal about this quote about Paul and his goal/motivation.

### Part Three Study

We have two letters to the Corinthians while on this third trip, and there appears to be a lost letter to them written between those two. 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus (Acts 19:1-20:1), and 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2). (See the chart “Paul’s Final Journeys” on p. 61 in the Appendix for dates.) The Corinthian church was divided, and Paul was so concerned that he not only wrote these letters, but he also apparently took a couple of short trips to follow up while still based in Europe. Let’s see what we learn about Paul’s focus from these letters and also from the letter he wrote to the Philippians from prison about ten years later.

\*\*\* Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:4 which describes the problems in the church in Corinth. Journal about the ways these quarrels had affected the Corinthians and their own races.

**Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-15; 4:1-4; 2 Corinthians 1:8–10; 4:7-12, 16-18; 5:9-11; Philippians 3:7-14. Meditate On These Verses And Then Journal As You Consider These Questions:**

- Which verses are most meaningful to you at this point in your life? Why?
- In Paul’s last letter, he calls on his mentee Timothy to “be self-controlled in all things, endure hardship, do an evangelist’s work, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). In what situations have you seen Paul exhibit these values through the stories so far?
- We aren’t all called to be evangelists, as Paul and Timothy were, but we are all called to love God and others by sharing the gospel as we serve in our homes, workplaces and communities, and by embodying the love of Christ through our sacrificial lives. What has God been saying to you about your own life focus and goals through Paul’s example?

### My Story

Thirty years ago I faced the most difficult and discouraging situation of my life. I had been teaching the Bible and serving as a lay leader in my church for years. Previously I had dealt with disappointments, but never before had I been so wounded by people that I almost quit.

---

<sup>35</sup> Quotation from Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome. New Testament Studies series. Brethren Missionary Herald*, 1972; reprint ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House and BMH Books, 1985) 159.

<sup>36</sup> Quotation from Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931) 3:360.

I answered the phone one night to hear a couple in our church (whom I'd known for years) assail my character for an hour based on what they said they knew about my motives—none of which had ever entered my mind. Although I wasn't surprised by their attack because of past experience with them, it still hurt, and it hurt badly that anyone would ascribe such motives to me. Because, as they put it, they “needed to warn others about me,” they slandered me. I felt that they had compromised my ministry. I couldn't quit thinking that God would be better off without me impeding his work.

What do you do in that case? I spent lots of time with God and his Word. I sensed his Spirit reminding me of several truths: he had called me to use the gifts that he had given me, so I was responsible to do so; he was greater than the slander and in control; and serving others isn't about my glory but God's. Over time the opposition and criticism that hurt so badly became the catalyst for redirecting me to ministry on two church staffs and teaching me much about myself and how to persevere.

God used his Word and his people to remind me that my gifts and ministry are his, not mine. And that truth means that giving up isn't an option for those whose goal is to please the Lord.

## *Running the Race*

### **Week Six: Running In Community**

#### **Soul Food**

And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient toward all.

Thessalonians 5:14

My daughter was a swimmer through high school, but after college, she took up running. After several years working out in other ways, she's been running again this past year, having moved to a new city where she met other runners. In fact, they had great plans for a girls-only weekend away to run in a half-marathon, but Covid-19 interrupted. So one day she just ran that distance on her own, but a few days later her friends decided they wanted to do it too. She was amazed at how much easier and faster it was running with a group rather than alone.

The race of the Christian life is designed to be run in community. We're there to encourage and care for runners around us. That's part of everyone's race! We keep each other going when life gets hard and we feel like quitting the race.

What is it about the church's purpose that requires us to gather and build into each other's lives? Paul wrote Timothy describing the church in three ways: "the household of God . . . the church [*ekklesiā*, meaning called out ones, i.e., those called to gather]<sup>37</sup> of the living God, the support and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). As a household, we're family, called brothers and sisters. We gather not only to preach and teach the truth but also to obey the commands to "admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient toward all" (1 Thessalonians 5:14)—this week's Soul Food.

We've already focused on Paul as a bold runner who stood for the gospel truth, even when it was unpopular or led to opposition or persecution.

This week's lesson centers on how Paul lived out what it means for the church to be family as we run the race together.

#### **Part One Study**

As we reflect on how Paul ran in community, we'll pause where we left him last week arriving in Jerusalem at the end of his third journey and pick up the story there next week. This week we'll reflect on what we've already seen these past few weeks and look for insights from his letters about his community.

First, let's think about how others ministered with and to Paul.

Let's start with Paul's partner on his first mission team. Barnabas's name means "Son of Encouragement" and was given to him by the Apostles to reflect who he was

---

<sup>37</sup> Strong's entry #1577 at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

(Acts 4:36). We saw early examples of that when he interceded for Paul with the Apostles and then later searched for him to recruit him to aide the work of the church in Antioch. I suspect that encouragement came in handy when they encountered opposition and persecution.

That initial trip included a young John Mark, who deserted Paul and Barnabas and went home. So when Paul was ready to make a second trip to check on and encourage the church plants, “Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. They had a sharp disagreement, so they parted company. Barnabas took along Mark and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and set out, commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters” (Acts 15:37-40). Between the two teams they then visited all the areas where they’d previously ministered.

I don’t have to tell you that a sharp disagreement doesn’t reflect God’s character. But we all know that it’s not uncommon for Christian leaders to get angry at each other when each person holds his own perspective as the right one. (And this sadly doesn’t apply just to leaders.)

So here’s a great encourager longing to give John Mark a second chance.

On the other hand there’s Paul whose call was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Being focused on the work before him, he felt that Mark had proven that he wasn’t up to the challenge, making him a liability to the work. So they disagreed to the point that they had a heated argument over it.

Sometimes that’s what happens in families and churches because we’re all sinners. We see issues through the lenses of our personalities and giftedness and fail to seek God’s wisdom and pursue peace. In this case, thankfully, God brought good from it: the split led to two mission teams rather than one, Barnabas mentored Mark who matured and even wrote a gospel, and eventually Mark and Paul worked together again (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11).

Who were Paul’s companions on his second journey? Because of the break-up of the original team, Paul set out with Silas, a prophet (Acts 15:32) and one of the “leading men among the brothers” who had been entrusted by the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch (Acts 15:22). As Paul and Silas revisited churches and traveled to new cities, the team added Timothy, Luke, Priscilla and Aquila for various legs of the trip.

When Luke wrote about Paul’s third trip, he threw in the names of several others who traveled along parts of the journey: Erastus, Gaius, Aristarchus, Sopater, Secundus, Tychicus and Trophimus. Paul’s letters indicate that there were countless others who supported him in the cities where he stayed and many who even went on the road with him. In fact, you’ll notice other names as we read from his letters.

Growing up I pictured Paul and Barnabas and then Paul and Silas alone or with one or maybe two others periodically, but the details in Acts tell us that there was usually a group surrounding Paul. These companions included other Christian leaders and some disciples—all working together to support Paul and his call to share the gospel with the Gentile world.

**Meditate On What You've Just Read, The Notes On Your Charts And These Verses, Recording Your Insights Into The Questions That Follow: Romans 16 (Particularly Noting The Large Number Of Women); 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10; 2 Corinthians 7:5-7; 8:16-24; Philippians 2:19-26; 4:14-19. (To Date These Letters, See The Chart "Paul's Final Journeys" In The Appendix On P. 61.)**

- How can you use or adapt ways that Paul's co-laborers and brothers and sisters in the churches encouraged and ministered to him to support those in your church community?
- What is God saying to you through Paul and Barnabas's disagreement?
- Do you have close companions to run with you as you follow God? An encourager? A fellow worker with gifting and ministry similar to yours who provides practical wisdom? Do you need a helper? Without giving names, share how their presence in your life affects your attitude and service. If you can't think of any person(s) in any of these categories, reach out to someone who might fill that gap, or become that person for someone else.

\*\*\* Look at the last chapters in two or three of Paul's epistles (You've already looked at Romans), and note his comments as he greeted people who ministered to him. Or take the names of those we've already listed as part of his traveling group and use your Bible app, concordance or marginal cross references to learn more about them.

## **Part Two Study**

Because of Paul's calling to share the gospel with the Gentiles, he never stayed in any one place permanently, so his letters and visits were his primary methods to support the truth and exhort his brothers and sisters in the churches he had planted as they gathered as God's family.

He often wrote them about how to love one another, living out what it means to be God's family.

We only have time to read excerpts from Paul's letters to get a flavor of what he stressed. As you read, think about your responsibility to your own church. In our day many people think of church as a place to go, sings songs of praise and get fed God's Word—a passive experience. But it's essential to invest in other believers and allow them to speak into our lives because we're family—we're supposed to be there for one another. We're unified in Christ, dependent on one another, never to be isolated.

**Read Romans 15:1-6; 1 Corinthians 10:23, 31-33; Ephesians 5:1-2, 19-21; 6:18; Philippians 2:3-11, And Comment On These Questions:**

- How would you express what's at the heart of the church in community? What's most important for us to keep in mind?
- If you lived out your previous answer, what would change about your church experience?
- What is God saying to you as you meditate on Paul's exhortations?

\*\*\* Loving also involves admonishing brothers and sisters for the purpose of restoration and healing. God has entrusted us with each other's care, which makes us responsible to speak the truth in love. We saw Paul reprimand the whole church in Galatia for the false doctrine that they had accepted and Peter for going along with the idea of separating Jew and Gentile at meals. Read these verses, and journal your thoughts: Jesus' words in Matthew 7:1-5; 18:15-20; Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; commands for the church in Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:15-16, 25; 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (our Soul Food).

### Part Three Study

An important aspect of running together is supporting one another in prayer, so today we'll look at Paul's prayers as patterns for our own.

**Meditate On Paul's Prayers: Romans 1:8-12; Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-20; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. Then Journal Your Thoughts Based On These Questions:**

- How would you describe Paul's prayer life from reading his prayers?
- Reread each of these prayers, asking God to identify someone to pray for with each prayer.
- Jesus provided a model prayer for us that we call The Lord's Prayer. Read it in Matthew 7:9-13. How do Paul's prayers connect with how Jesus taught his disciples to pray?
- What is God saying to you about your prayer life?

\*\*\* Prayer is reciprocal among the family of believers. Paul prayed for the churches and asked them to pray for him. Read his requests and write down what you learn from his example: Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:18b-20; Colossians 4:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.

I've often called Paul's prayers "kingdom prayers" because they focus on the big issues of extending God's kingdom: God's glory, believers' maturity and walk with God, unity among the churches, spiritual growth and perseverance in the midst of hard circumstances. That doesn't mean that we aren't supposed to pray specific prayers for things like healing and provision, but it does mean that we recognize God's primary concern is that we bring him glory and mature spiritually. Those bigger picture prayers should always be part of what we pray for others and request for ourselves.

At one point years ago a friend's husband, who was in business for himself, was struggling to get enough customers, so the friend asked our group to pray for more business. As I began to pray as she requested, I had the thought that my prayers may be cancelling each other out—so to speak—because this man wasn't a Christian and I was also praying for his salvation. What if a financial struggle was exactly what God needed to turn this man's eyes toward him?

It was then that Paul's prayers resounded with me. Instead of my usual prayers telling God how to fix situations the way I or my friends wanted, I turned such prayers into pleas for him to use whatever was happening for the benefit of his kingdom in the

larger world and in the life of the one for whom I was praying. Paul's prayers are perfect models of what to pray to align our requests with God's will. (You can find a handout on kingdom prayers in the Appendix.)

### **A Runner's Story: My Story**

My life has been enriched over the years by Christian community everywhere that God has placed my family. My strongest friendships are based on our common bonds in Christ and the work that he has called us to do in the church. Our church community supported us in so many ways when my husband was hospitalized for a month with an eye infection years ago. Friends brought Bible verses on cards to the hospital and delicious food to our house. A group of men from the church surrounded him in prayer one evening. Their actions weren't simply helpful, but they gave me great encouragement at a hard time.

My small groups in our women's Bible studies have helped bond me to other people in our churches when we were new and without friends. My relationships with the women enlarged our circle of friends as a family when we went out of our way to get together with them as families.

From such connections I still have dear friends nearby who worshipped with us in the same church and built close relationships as we raised our families. We are still there for each other many years later.

But one person or one group doesn't always fill out the whole picture of what community is. In my case God in his providence also placed me in a small group of women in ministry when I was doing it full-time that have been crucial in my own growth and spiritual health. We challenge one another in ministry, soul care and serving others. We read articles and books and have great conversations critiquing them and expanding our understanding of the greatness our God and his power.

I'm so grateful for the many people who have been community for me over so many years.

## **Week Seven: Using Hardships As Opportunities**

### **Soul Food**

God's servant must not be argumentative, but a gentle listener and a teacher who keeps cool, working firmly but patiently with those who refuse to obey. You never know how or when God might sober them up with a change of heart and a turning to the truth.

Timothy 2:24-25 MSG

This pandemic of 2020 sent tens of millions of people home so we wouldn't spread the virus at work, retail, gyms, entertainment centers, schools and churches. An unexpected consequence has been the increased usage of outdoor space where people walk, run, cycle or simply sit and enjoy the beauty of God's creation. My husband and I have had opportunities to speak with some neighbors whom we've never met before—at a safe distance, of course.

We make a choice when we confront hardships—we can get into a funk over them or look in faith for opportunities that God brings through them. (Of course we're to mourn over what we lose, our sins and those of the church. I don't want to minimize those responses, but I'm highlighting what God can do in the midst of our difficulties.)

We've seen Paul's race involve opposition at every turn from both Jews and Gentiles. From the time Paul embraced Jesus as the Messiah, many of his fellow Jews consistently resisted him and his message. In addition, Roman officials persecuted him for preaching Jesus is Lord, likely considering it sedition against Caesar and/or a threat to the Roman gods. Although discouragement could have sidetracked him, Paul continued running, loving those who opposed him and taking every opportunity to share God's message with them.

This week's lesson follows Paul through the rest of Acts, returning to the chronological story at the point of Paul's arrival in Jerusalem at the completion of his third missionary journey. Pay attention to his responses as he faced hardships of many kinds.

### **Part One Study**

Although there's a long section to read, try to read it slowly, picturing the scenes and considering what Paul was going through. Note that Luke must have accompanied Paul, as he uses the plural pronouns us and we. Remember to make notes on the chart you've partially completed, "Paul's Final Journeys" found in the Appendix on p. 61.

**Read Acts 21:15-23:35.**

The Roman commander in Jerusalem was frightened to hear that Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29). Dr. Darrell Bock explains: "The beating in Acts 22 is known as a flagellatio, since whips (flagella) would be used. ... The flagella were used

on noncitizens and slaves.” He also quotes Cicero saying that “to bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Now Journal Your Thoughts On These Questions:**

- What scene most stood out to you and why?
- How would you describe Paul’s responses to those who attacked him—groups and individuals? Compare your answer to Paul’s exhortation to Timothy, our Soul Food for this week.
- How do you see God at work to protect Paul?

Imagine the night Paul was whisked away from Jerusalem with a group of Romans who accompanied him: When “forty Torah-zealous Jews swore a solemn oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul .... The tribune ... ordered two centurions with a hundred soldiers each, seventy horsemen, and an additional two-hundred light-armed guards to take Paul to Caesarea, the best part of a hundred miles away.”<sup>39</sup>

\*\*\* Although Paul had insisted to the prophets who warned him of prison in Jerusalem that it was what he was meant to do, he still did all he could to avoid being arrested. Record your thoughts about that. What practical wisdom do you see Paul employ as he attempted to avoid/ end the conflict he faced in Jerusalem?

## **Part Two Study**

This section’s reading describes the major events that occurred while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, home to the Roman provincial governor.

Who’s who in this story?

Felix was governor of Judea from A.D. 52-59.<sup>40</sup> Acts 24:27 tells us that he kept Paul in prison for two years before Felix was replaced by Festus, known historically as a fair governor.<sup>41</sup>

King Herod Agrippa II appears in our reading also. He was the son of Herod Agrippa I who killed the Apostle James, brother of John (Acts 12:1-2). Agrippa II’s great-grandfather was Herod the Great, the Jewish ruler who met the Magi and killed babies in Bethlehem in an effort to destroy the King of the Jews who was born there (Matthew 2:1). Also mentioned in the story are his two sisters Drusilla, Felix’s wife, and Bernice, his companion.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Bock, 664.

<sup>39</sup> Wright, 360.

<sup>40</sup> *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), Note on Acts 23:24, 2136.

<sup>41</sup> Keener, 397.

<sup>42</sup> Keener, 397-398.

**Read Acts 23:33-26:32, Noting Major Events In Caesarea On Your Chart In The Appendix And Journaling Your Thoughts In Light Of The Questions That Follow:**

- How did Paul use his imprisonment in Caesarea as an opportunity?
- How would you describe the simplicity of the way Paul defends himself before these powerful people?
- Reread Acts 9:15-16, the Lord's words to Ananias concerning Paul's call. How did events in Caesarea fulfill those words? What does this tell you about God? And about Paul's insistence to go to Jerusalem?
- What is God saying to you through Paul's story?

\*\*\* Compare the charges against Paul in Acts 24:5-6 with those against Jesus in Luke 23:1-2, 5. Why do you think the Jews would bring similar trumped-up charges as they argued before the Romans? As you consider Paul's defense, what arguments does he include that might be more helpful before secular Roman rulers than before the Jews in Jerusalem?

### **Part Three Study**

As you'll read, after Agrippa, Bernice and Festus heard Paul tell his story, arrangements were made for Paul, along with Luke and Aristarchus, to sail to Rome. Use this free online map<sup>43</sup> to follow their journey from Jerusalem to Rome. Add notes on your chart in the Appendix as you go through the story.

**Read Through To The End Of The Book (Acts 27-28).**

Sometimes I miss something that should be so obvious and need a commentator to point it out. N.T. Wright mentions the story in Malta, saying, "It explains what otherwise might be puzzling, namely, how the whole party, presumably now without money or other means to rent accommodation, was able to last through the winter months of 59/60 before it was once again possible to sail."<sup>44</sup> I wonder if they gave them enough provisions for the time in Rome as well.

**In Light Of These Questions, Write Down Your Insights From The Passage You Read.**

- In what ways did God encourage Paul along the way? What does this tell you about God?
- How did Paul continue to take advantage of the opportunities he had during his travel to and stay in Rome?
- What is God saying to you from Paul's story?

---

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/paul's\\_journey\\_to\\_rome\\_map.htm](https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/paul's_journey_to_rome_map.htm)

<sup>44</sup> Wright, 383.

You've likely noticed on the chart "Paul's Final Journeys" other events not mentioned in Acts. As scholars through the years have pieced together a timeline of his life from their study of Acts and his epistles, comparing events and people with known historical dates and figures, many of them have been convinced that Paul was released in Rome and continued traveling. One reason for that is because the description of Paul's time in custody in Rome doesn't jibe with that of his imprisonment in 2 Timothy, written just before his death. Our chart uses what many scholars believe is a best guess about the end of Paul's life.

\*\*\* Compare Paul's situation in Acts 28:16-17, 23, 30-31 with his descriptions of his circumstances in 2 Timothy 1:8, 15-18; 2:8-9; 4:9-18. Write down your insights into the differences in these imprisonments and your thoughts about the character of Paul.

### **A Runner's Story: You**

Yes—your story!

If you're a follower of Jesus, you have a faith story just as Paul did. Most of our stories aren't quite as dramatic as his, but they belong to us and reveal the way that God intervened in our lives to bring us to faith and more maturity. Be prepared to share a short version of your story with your small group this week.

If you haven't ever written out the story of God's work in your life, consider watching this series of three free videos<sup>45</sup> or listen to the conversation on the BOW podcast<sup>46</sup> by searching for "Sharing Your Faith Story" with speaker Donna Skell of Roaring Lambs Ministry. Donna provides an easy outline mixed with lots of encouragement.

---

<sup>45</sup> <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/godly-living/#sharing-your-faith-story>

<sup>46</sup> <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/bow-podcast-episodes/>

## **Week Eight: Invested**

### **Soul Food**

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

[Christ] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul in Colossians 1:24, 28-29 ESV

To run well requires the runner's investment in time, energy and money, and that involves sacrifices.

A great runner needs the appropriate clothing for the climate and the right pair of shoes, which quickly wear out and need replacing. Even the leisurely walks I take with my husband and dog require shoes that fit my feet and gait, so I don't get plantar fasciitis as I did by doing too much walking barefoot on a beach vacation. All such equipment costs the runner who wants to run her best.

Anytime we choose to invest in one thing, we sacrifice something else. Parents give up freedom in order to invest in their children. Premiere athletes leave family behind to get the best coaching.

Generosity means sacrificing personal wants for others.

Paul was all in to follow Christ and earn his reward in the end, as seen in our Soul Food verses above. This week we'll look at how that required an investment in people and churches that required sacrifice.

### **Part One Study**

We've followed Paul on his early years as a follower of Jesus, three mission trips and through years of imprisonment. Our attention now turns to Paul's epistles or letters. Let's check out their possible timing so we put their messages in context of the events we've already studied in Acts.

In Week Three we saw that Galatians was written between Paul's first and second journeys while he was back at his home base in Antioch. On his second mission trip he wrote two letters to the Thessalonians. (See the chart on p. 36.) Both 1 and 2 Corinthians as well as Romans appear to be written on his third journey. (See the chart in the Appendix on p. 61.)

The third trip ended in Jerusalem and Paul's arrest. He likely penned the so-called prison epistles while under guard in Rome. Philippians fits the descriptions in Acts;

Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon possibly came from that same period. If not, Paul wrote them while imprisoned in Caesarea.<sup>47</sup>

Paul's last three letters were addressed to individuals. He likely wrote Titus and 1 Timothy after being released from the Roman imprisonment described at the end of Acts and 2 Timothy during a final Roman imprisonment, as noted on the chart of his final journeys. Luke didn't include any information in Acts on events after the first Roman imprisonment.

Let's see what we learn about Paul's investment in others from these letters.

### **We'll Start By Reading 1 Corinthians 9:11-27; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; 12:14-15a.**

- What do you see about Paul's sacrifice to reach people with the gospel?

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written in part to respond to questions they had asked. (See 7:1.) One area of confusion was whether a Christian could eat meat sacrificed to idols. Although Paul's specific answer may not affect us today, through it we learn a lot about Paul's attitude about the concerns of others.

### **Read Paul's Reply In 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 And 10:23-33, And Write Down Your Thoughts About These Questions, Keeping In Mind How His Answer Involves Investing In People.**

- How does Paul's answer guide you as you invest in other church members?
- What do these passages reveal about God?
- Have you sacrificed your own rights to love your neighbors? Explain. If not, is there a right you should give up to love them as Christ loved us?

Being in the midst of a pandemic where the use of face masks has been recommended by medical experts, I was reminded how pertinent the biblical principles on our freedoms can be to our decisions.

\*\*\* Read Romans 14:1-15:3 in light of Paul's response about eating meat offered to idols, and journal your thoughts about investing in other believers.

## **Part Two Study**

We focus today on the ways that Paul invested in the churches he planted. Although I'm guessing most of us aren't church planters, we are called to invest in our fellow believers in our churches. As you read, consider what you learn from Paul's example.

Although we'll read verses from many different letters, it's not really a lot of reading.

---

<sup>47</sup> Capes, 264-265.

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21; 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 7:2-13; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 1:7-8; Colossians 1:24, 28-29 (This Week's Soul Food); 2:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-12; 3:1-10. Journal Your Insights In Light Of These Questions:**

- What is your impression of Paul's investment in the lives of the people in these churches?
- What most stands out to you about Paul's investment? Why?
- What is God saying to you today about your own investment in the race?

\*\*\* Compare Paul's comments in Philippians 2:3-11 with what you learn about him in this section's reading.

I think this comment from *Rediscovering Paul* describes well what we've read about Paul in this section: "Paul loved to think of himself as the father of his converts, he did not refer to them as his disciples; they were his children."<sup>48</sup>

Although I can't be a father, I've felt the emotions that Paul describes as a mother. Paul's use of the term father in relationship with his disciples helps us recognize the responsibilities and deep connection we should have with those whom we spiritually parent.

### **Part Three Study**

Paul's willingness to invest heavily in churches even after he left them behind physically grows from attitudes deeply embedded in his heart. We're going to read about those today.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-10; 2 Corinthians 3:4-6; 12:1-10; Galatians 2:20; 6:14; Ephesians 3:8-13; 1 Timothy 1:12-17, And Note Your Responses To These Questions:**

- How did Paul describe himself? How do you see that attitude motivate his investment in the churches?
- What do you learn about God from these passages?
- What is God saying to about your attitude?

Christians are new creations made by God. We're forgiven and accepted by the Father, as Paul taught so well. And yet Paul continued to describe himself as an unworthy sinner. He recognized that God could use him despite his past, and yet that past led him to great dependence on God.

\*\*\* Comment on Paul's continued mention of his history in light of Jesus' words in the story in Luke 7:36-50.

Father God, humble us by reminding us of our failures and your marvelous grace. Use the past to motivate us to invest in others, always depending on your power to run the race you've given us.

---

<sup>48</sup> Capes, 44.

This week's story features a woman who was once unconcerned and reluctant to invest her time and efforts in a mission trip but who eventually invested heavily in loving and caring for the people she met.

### **A Runner's Story: Irish**

For years I heard testimonies in church from people who had traveled to far-away countries to share the gospel and teach God's Word. I even had close friends who went on mission trips. Their commitment and experiences were inspirational, but never once did I consider going myself. In fact, I think I laughed when anyone suggested that I should go too. My heart was hard, and I had no interest.

So, God began the process of softening my heart, repeatedly exposing me to the lives of women who were completely sold out to God. His message to me was inescapable, and eventually I began to pray, "God, show me what you want me to do. I'll do anything." Soon after I began praying that way, I had a dream in which God made it clear that I too was to go to a far-away country and share the gospel. I was shocked but also excited about the next step. Since I had received repeated invitations from a mission organization to join them in their work in Tanzania, I accepted their invitation. After months of preparation, I was ready to serve with a team that would plant 20 churches in remote villages.

In Tanzania I shared the gospel in huts, in fields, in marketplaces and even in schools. I spoke with men, women and children who had a variety of responses to me—curiosity, skepticism, hostility and even fear. Time after time and in every situation, God gave me the words to speak and the courage to speak them. The people I spoke to looked different from me and lived differently from me, but they were just like me . . . in need of a Savior. Those moments when they recognized their need and said yes to Jesus were worth every fear, discomfort and inconvenience that I experienced.

I returned to plant churches in Tanzania seven more times, sharing the gospel and teaching God's Word. On each of those trips, I was able to revisit many of the churches that our team had planted on previous trips. These were times of amazement, encouragement and celebration as we learned what God had done among them since our time together. To this day because of technology, I continue to hear from many of the believers that I served with who share with me how God is growing His church in places I've never heard of and will never see.

"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11 NASB).

## **Week Nine: Passing The Baton**

### **Soul Food**

And what you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.

2 Timothy 2:2

We've focused on a long-distance race as an illustration of the Christian life. But there's another type of race that also has a great parallel—the relay. Its success depends on each runner passing the baton well, ensuring that the succeeding racer has the baton. As we consider our present era between Jesus' first coming and his return, we realize that the continuation of the faith depends on how well the next generation takes hold of it. We're responsible to pass it on to those who follow us, who then pass it on to believers younger than they are.

Paul's life story reveals his whole-hearted investment to raise up a new generation of faithful Christ-followers and encourage them to do the same—as he tells Timothy in this week's Soul Food verse. That's our focus for this final week's study.

### **Part One Study**

From the time Paul began his first mission trip, he trained younger men—whom we might call apprentices, protégées or mentees today. In that day those who learned under a teacher or rabbi were his disciples.

As you know, Paul and Barnabas took a young man named John Mark with them on their initial journey (Acts 13:5), but Paul refused to allow him on the next trip because he had abandoned them and had left for home in the middle of their travels (Acts 13:13; 15:37-39). After Paul's ensuing disagreement with Barnabas over it, he left instead with Silas. Together they picked up Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) and later Luke along the way.

Paul's letters name many others who worked and/or traveled with him, as we saw in week six's study. Because it's most likely that the great majority of these leaders came to faith under Paul's preaching, we can safely assume that they all matured under his teaching—in person and/or by letter.

Paul disciplined whole congregations and mentored future church leaders. Among the latter were Titus and Timothy, younger men whom Paul sent out to report on and then pastor church plants. Paul continued mentoring them as church leaders by writing them personal letters. If our timeline is correct, he likely wrote his first letter to Timothy and the one to Titus at some point after his release from the Roman imprisonment described at the end of Acts. (He also wrote Philemon during this time frame, but with a different purpose.) Paul's final epistle was his second to Timothy, written while he was imprisoned in Rome not long before his execution.

The book of 2 Timothy is one of my favorites because it feels so personal and reveals so much about Paul. It touches on almost everything that we've camped on these past few weeks: Paul's call, boldness, focus, sacrifice, dependence on the Spirit, investment in the church as community and perseverance through hardships and persecution.

It's the perfect book to end our study because it's the end of Paul's race and summarizes so much of his passion. His job of passing on the gospel and entrusting it to the next generation was complete.

Although you're likely not a pastor, this epistle speaking to a pastor applies to us all. Principles of mentoring work in any situation—with our children, grandchildren or younger believers facing the same life challenges that we've faced. And Paul's message about the gospel speaks to everyone.

That's why we're going to read the whole letter.

**Read The Questions Below So You Have Them In Mind, And Then Read 2 Timothy 1-2, Journaling Your Thoughts.**

- What stands out to you about Paul and Timothy's relationship? Why?
- What truths about God does Paul use to encourage Timothy in a time of extreme persecution? How do those truths encourage you where you are today? Why?
- What encouragement or challenge from Paul to Timothy concerning the gospel or your faith speaks to you today? Why?

\*\*\* If an older or more mature believer has built into your faith and spiritual growth, write or call her, thanking her for specific ways she's invested in your life.

## **Part Two Study**

This section will complete our quick study through 2 Timothy. Then we'll celebrate what God has done through the study of his Word.

**Read 2 Timothy 3-4, And Write Down Your Thoughts On These Questions:**

- Often people want others to focus only on the bright side of things, but Paul doesn't. Why might Paul have thought it wise to mention potential hardships to his protégée?
- What does Paul teach you about the Christian life as he speaks to Timothy?
- What is God saying to you from his Word?

\*\*\* Read and comment on these few verses in Paul's letter to Titus as he exhorts him in his work in the church in Crete: Titus 1:4-5; 2:1, 7, 11-14; 3:1-10. What stands out to you?

Before we move to the third part of this week's study and leave our focus on passing the baton behind, here's a final story from a woman who benefitted from the investment of an older, more mature believer and then became a mentor to others.

## **A Runner's Story: Bob Ann**

Early in my Christian life, Martha Binion, who had been instrumental in my salvation, encouraged me to read the Bible daily and to memorize scripture. She mentored many women individually and in small groups. She had a strong walk with the Lord which she developed through daily Bible reading, praying and memorizing in an organized way. I could see that she was modeling what she was asking me to do, and I admired what I saw in her.

She introduced me to an organization called Bible Memory Association which sent me a little booklet of verses to memorize each week; there was also a plan for children which both of my girls took part in. We were required to say five verses each week to someone, and we chose a neighbor. We were given small rewards by the organization as an incentive, which was quite appealing to the children. This was an excellent way to get the Good News into the neighborhood.

Martha met with me and a friend weekly. We went through a series of small books about basic Christianity. Later she led a Bible study at my house which was attended by some of my neighbors. Some years later she asked me to lead a Bible study. She really took a risk trusting me to teach women who were older and much more spiritually mature than I was, but it proved to be an enormous time of growth for me.

Later I met a young woman named Cindy at a women's retreat who asked me to meet with her a few times but our meeting actually continued for years. She was going through some difficult things which were way beyond my experience, but I basically just listened to her, prayed with her, and encouraged her to study the Bible with me. Meeting with Cindy was a first step to meeting with many others.

I don't know exactly how God has used me in their lives, but I do know that I have grown spiritually and gained friends that I never would have had otherwise. I've met women at various times—before work, during lunch, and early on Saturday mornings. Together we've gone through structured Bible studies or books of the Bible, or other times we've just talked about what's going on in our lives and what we've seen God doing.

I never thought of myself as a mentor. I was just a person spending time with someone!

## **Part Three Study**

Your final assignment is a quick review of what God has taught you from Paul's life before we end our study together.

## **Review The Lessons In This Study Or The Journal You've Kept, And Respond To These Questions:**

- What have you learned from the life of Paul that was most personally meaningful to you? Why did it impact you?
- What do you think at this point about Paul as a person and as God's vessel? Why? Have your thoughts or feelings about him changed? If so, how?
- If persecution ever lies ahead of you, what will you remember from Paul's example?
- What specific change will you make in response to what you've sensed is God's voice guiding or convicting you? Write it as your prayer.

I love these words from the conclusion of *Rediscovering Paul*:

Paul was a disruptive force in his world. Many in society didn't like him and many in the church didn't either. He pushed the church beyond the known and perhaps comfortable constraints of Palestinian Jewish Christianity. If we're not careful he might push us beyond our comfortable Western churches as well. Paul stood for the gospel even if it meant standing up to Peter . . . (Gal. 2:11). He stood firm to the end even as an executioner's blade removed his head. . . .

Rediscovering Paul is not easy; but it is a journey worth taking. Perhaps the goal is too ambitious, maybe the best we can hope for is to have a better handle on Paul and his message. Nonetheless, you are ready for the next step: Imitate Paul.<sup>49</sup>

May the Lord give each of us grace to be as bold and invested as Paul was, persevering by the power of the Spirit to the end of the race.

---

<sup>49</sup> Capes, 413-414.

## Appendix

### Paul's Final Journeys<sup>50</sup> (Maps of 3rd trip<sup>51</sup> & Journey to Rome<sup>52</sup>)

Place	Date	Notes
Galatia & Phrygia region (Acts 18:23)	c. A.D. 52 or 53	
Ephesus Acts 19:1-20:1  (While in Ephesus made painful, short visit to Corinth & back 2 Cor. 2:1)	A.D. 52-55	Writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8-9) & “tearful severe” lost letter to Corinthians
Macedonia Acts 20:1-2	A.D. 55-56	Writes 2 Corinthians
Greece—specifically Corinth Acts 20:2-3	A.D. 57	Writes Romans (Rom. 15:25-27; cf. 1 Cor. 16:3-5)
Travels to Jerusalem Acts 20:3-21:14	A.D. 57	
Jerusalem (End of 3rd Journey) Acts 21:15–23:32	A.D. 57	

---

<sup>50</sup> Dates based on chart “Major Events in the Life of Paul” in *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2100.

<sup>51</sup>

[https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/pauls\\_third\\_missionary\\_journey1.jpeg](https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/pauls_third_missionary_journey1.jpeg)

<sup>52</sup>

[https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/pauls\\_voyage\\_to\\_rome\\_map1.jpg](https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/pauls_voyage_to_rome_map1.jpg)

Caesarea Acts 23:33-26:32	A.D. 57-59	
Trip to Rome Acts 27:1-28:14	A.D. 59	

## Kingdom Prayers

Focus your prayers on the bigger issues of the kingdom, knowing the coming of the kingdom is the will of God for the those in your group and their families—"Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Study the prayers of the New Testament and see how they involved kingdom issues: character-building in those who suffered, the glory of God in the midst of persecution, and the knowledge of Jesus in the world. Of course, pray specifically as well for healing, provision, etc. but always focus on kingdom prayers.

### Examples Of Kingdom Prayers:

Pray in this way, using these verses:

- for \_\_\_\_ to seek first God's kingdom in her life. FYI: If there are monetary or physical needs involved, this is a condition necessary for God's promise to supply to kick in. (Matthew 6:33-34)
- for God to use this difficulty to produce endurance, completion, and blessing. (James 1:2-4, 12)
- for \_\_\_\_ to trust that God gives good gifts, realizing that his gifts are better than those she wants. (James 1:17-18; 4:3)
- for God to give \_\_\_\_ wisdom and the revelation of him in the midst of this time. (Ephesians 1:17-21)
- for \_\_\_\_ to walk worthy and to show forth these qualities to others with whom she is having difficulty. (Ephesians 4:1-3)
- for God to fill \_\_\_\_ with the knowledge of His will that she may walk worthy. (Colossians 1:9-12)
- for God to give \_\_\_\_ the grace to set her mind on the things above rather than the circumstances. (Colossians 3:1-4)
- for \_\_\_\_ to trust that God is at work in the midst of these difficulties for her good, not for her destruction. Pray that God will use this time to mold her more into the image of Jesus. (Romans 8:28-29)

And pray for God's kingdom to come in your own heart and life, too.

# **Journaling 101**

## **What Does It Mean To Journal?**

It's NOT drawing and coloring. (I call that drawing and coloring.) Journaling is recording your thoughts. That's it. Nothing special or difficult. When we journal, we simply write down how we interacted with God's Word. We pen our thoughts and impressions as we read and ask God for insights. (See p. 67 for a sample journal entry.)

I learned late to journal. I began because I had a hard time concentrating during what was supposed to be my time with God. Do you relate? Instead of focusing on the verses that I was reading or the prayers that I needed to say, my mind was wandering to my to-do list, my conversation with a friend, a problem I had to handle, or any number of other things. Once I lost focus, it was difficult to get it back.

My goals were worthy, but I was struggling with how to get there.

So I began writing out my prayers. I wrote out word for word what I wanted to pray, as well as the thoughts that came to me while I wrote, believing that it was highly possible that God was guiding those. I began my time with God by reading some scriptures and usually a short devotional, and then I began to write.

Easy journaling.

## **Why Journal?**

The term Bible study can be scary. We often think that God's Word is hard to understand, requiring a great deal of intelligence and/or education to navigate, so we stay away from anything other than a favorite verse or two scattered throughout its pages.

We forget that God wants us to know him. We do that through the pages of his Word, his revelation of himself to ordinary people like you and me. Remember this is his story, not the story of people. God is the main character. People are in the story as they interact with him and his work on earth in reconciling them to himself and restoring creation to its perfection.

If we replace time listening and seeking God with a "study" that tells us what to think and believe (true of some but not all studies), we bypass the relationship and knowledge that God gives us directly when we go to his Word instead of to other people to be spiritually nourished.

Imagine sitting down with the author of a book you love rather than going to a book review of it. That's the opportunity you have with God. He has made himself available to those who seek him through the Scriptures. But there's a caution here—he doesn't tell us everything because he is so beyond us—incomprehensible. But he does unfold truth, insight, encouragement, challenge, and conviction into our hearts when we seek him. In the end there is a certain amount of mystery that we must learn to live with when we approach God. We are mere humans after all.

Throughout this study, I have kept my thoughts, insights, and guidance to a minimum so that you can talk about the scriptures with the true Teacher.

Journaling with only general questions to guide you allows your study to be what you make it.

This is your study. Your time. Your relationship with God. Your journal is your own. Use it in your own way that works for you.

### **How Much Time Do I Need To Spend Journaling?**

Is your time scattered and often absent? Read the story once in the morning, maybe to your kids, with your roommate or husband during breakfast, or alone as you enjoy an early cup of coffee before work. Think about it as you drive carpool, eat lunch at work, or make your commute. Write in your journal at lunch or before you head to bed in the evening, noting the insights that occurred to you during the day.

Do you want a deep study? Spend time every day reading and rereading the stories of the week. Ask God for insights and applications. Since each week's study has three sections, spend two days on each section. Read the verses again the second day, and ask God for new insights. Read some of the cross references in the margins of your Bible. With your journal beside you, note all of your thoughts as they come. You may be very surprised at how often your mind goes in a new direction.

Make the schedule your own. Spend little or much time on it. It is your record of how you and God interact as you read his Word.

### **Do I Have To Use The Questions In The Lesson?**

Absolutely not. They are merely there to launch your thinking, not to determine the path of your thoughts. The questions are to help, not hinder. If something else is on your mind when you begin journaling, skip them entirely. Listen to God's Spirit as he gives you insight into the scriptures you read.

### **What If I'm Stuck And Can't Think Of Anything To Write?**

Here are some general questions that you can use with any passage as you begin to journal:

- What do I like about this passage? Why?
- What do I not like about this story? Why?
- What do I learn about God and his purposes in this section of Scripture?
- What do I learn about people in general from the prophet's message? In other words, what lessons about people do I learn?
- What is God telling me to do from what he revealed? How and when will I do it?

If you're a seasoned student of the Bible, you may want to look for other stories or verses that relate to what you read and journal about how they connect to each other and to you. Use the cross- references in your Bible to help you.

## What Kinds Of Things Should I Write?

What follows is a journal entry that I wrote from a Bible story that is not part of this study. Just so you don't think this is too hard, you need to know that I added paragraphs so it would be easier for you to read. I don't write in my journal that way. Because I write only for me, not an audience, I normally abbreviate a number of words and phrases that are common in my journal, but I have written them out for you so they make sense.

I also deleted the names of people that I'm praying for, but I left the prayer itself so you could see how the story became the basis of my prayer, which included confession and intercession. I don't normally pray through a format like PRAY (praise, repent, ask, and yield), but over a few days of journaling as I read the Word, God leads me to all kinds of prayers. You can journal with that kind of format for your prayers if you prefer.

June 17

Mark 4:35-41

Although I've heard, read, and taught this story many times, it still overwhelms me. God, you are so great and powerful! Why do I doubt that you can handle my small problems when Jesus speaks and immediately the wind and the waves obey? Why do I make you too small to handle problems faced by people I love? Why do I wonder deep in my heart if you care when I'm struggling? I'm just like the disciples, ridiculously asking, "Don't you care?"

I am amazed that as the boat was filling with water and winds were whipping around, Jesus was lying in the boat asleep with his head on a cushion, perfectly at peace. They had to wake him up! That's a deep and restful sleep! You know how storms wake me up pretty quickly.

Jesus pointed to the disciples' fear, suggesting it was caused by lack of faith. Father God, forgive me for making you too small in my imagination, so small that you lack the power to keep me despite the storms that swirl around me. Forgive my fear that comes from lack of faith. Forgive me for fearing that you won't take care of those whom I love. Forgive me for fearing for my grandchildren's future. Forgive my lack of faith.

You sent your followers straight into the storm, and they learned about your great power. I know your power and protection because of previous storms. Help me remember them when I'm caught up in a new sudden storm.

I lift up my friends and family who are now in storms \_\_\_\_ Give them grace and faith. Make them stronger in faith. Help them persevere and bring you glory. Bring comfort to \_\_\_\_ In the storms' wake, I pray they all know your power and grace in a deeper way. Amen.

## **You Can Do It!**

Let me simply encourage you—you can do this. It allows God to move in your heart and mind in a way that specific questions may not allow for. Just read the verses, and write down what God brings to your mind. Refer back to the questions in the study, answering those that you want to answer and thinking about the others. Some wonderful insight may come to mind if you do.

I am praying that God will so encourage and speak to you through this format that you will continue to journal, never settling for fill-in-the blank Bible studies. (And I know God uses them in a mighty way sometimes, but consider journaling through the verses instead.)

# **Tips For Leaders**

## **1. Listen To God**

It seems simple, but it can be oh, so difficult, to listen to God as you lead a group. Our fears tell us not to sit in silence. Our hearts suggest that we should give solutions or even verses to fix problems or questions. The clock indicates that we should cut others off as quickly as possible. And I have been there and done them all!

If we as leaders come to the group time doing what feels comfortable, we may miss the fullness of what God wants to do. So pray well before you go. Pray as you lead the group time. Don't speak in response to the comments of others until you are sensitive to the movement of the Spirit as to what to say, if anything.

And what may be even more difficult is to encourage the same kinds of listening skills with the others in the group. Listening to God before answering someone's comments or intervening in what God may want to say to her about her problems is very difficult. I feel that way and likely you do too:) Many in the group will struggle, but we can all improve if you remind yourself and the group each week to pause and listen to God before speaking.

**Watch our BOW videos on listening as a small group leader at <https://vimeo.com/album/4065298> for additional help.**

## **2. Keep Discipleship Goals In Mind**

### **Goal #1: Encourage Your Group In Personal Learning**

If you want the group to be in the Word for themselves, start the discussion by letting them share what excited them. Stay away from your own thoughts and listen to them. To involve them, ask very general open questions, such as those in the lesson. Choose questions from the lesson; use some from the list given on p. 70 (#3 Ask Open Questions), or write your own questions.

Because the group will journal as they study, see which way the discussion goes before inserting your own direction to the lesson. That said, don't let it linger on speculation about things the Bible doesn't reveal. It's okay for a few minutes, but refocus the conversation to what God has made clear, not what he chose not to tell us.

## **Goal #2: Set Discipleship Goals For Each Lesson**

What do you want to accomplish in your discussion? If you randomly ask questions, you may enjoy a good discussion, but it may not move the group closer to Jesus. Your goal should not be simply getting people to talk but to encourage spiritual growth in the group.

See yourself as the leader, not a teacher or a facilitator. What is your goal? What do you want the group to leave with that will help them grow as believers? It could be a deeper faith through a better understanding of who God is and how he works. It could be a principle that helps them live out genuine faith in a culture that is looking for what is real.

For most lessons, consider these questions as you review the lesson:

- What do those in your group need to know about God from this lesson?
- What does the lesson reveal about real faith?
- How does the story and/or verses fit with the big story gospel of Paradise, Ruin, Reconciliation, and Consummation?
- What principles from the lesson need to be obeyed? What application do you want them to prayerfully consider—a way of believing about God that intersects with real life or types of actions to take?

Wait to discuss these areas by providing opportunity for the group to bring up the topic before you simply move toward your goals. Make sure you listen first. Many of the questions you want to ask will come up more naturally from within the group. If no one brings it up, then do so with a question to the group.

You don't necessarily have to write your own questions. Use those within the lesson to launch into an area you want to cover. The lesson questions are open-ended and broad. You can have a great discussion using them. If you listen well, you can follow up with a question that clarifies or expands on their comments to move them further toward your goals.

If you want to write a few questions to summarize the material covered rather than going through those in the lesson, write open questions from the material they studied and read. Or use some of the questions in the next section.

## **3. Ask Open Questions**

You may be used to reading a set of questions to the group and having them read back their answers. I have written many Bible studies that have that type of structure. It's easy for the leader to follow and makes it simple for the group to provide answers.

Instead, this study is based on journaling, which isn't comprised of answers to a number of very specific questions but rather uses open questions, meaning not yes/no or narrow answers. (See BOW's free downloadable resource at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Asking-Open-Questions.pdf>.)

When the lesson is comprised of one long story or section, it will likely work best to let the group know that they can talk about any part of the lesson instead of a specific section of the story. Your questions should allow a response on anything they want to discuss from the lesson. It's alright if no one brings up a certain section of the story at all.

Allow the Holy Spirit to use the discussion to take the group where he wants it to go, but also keep in mind your goals and move them into those topics if they don't go there themselves.

Here are examples of open questions that you might use:

- What verses were most significant to you and why?
- How did God surprise you through these verses?
- How did you relate to the prophet and why?
- What feelings did you have about the prophet's message and why?
- How did God reveal himself to you through your reading?
- How do you see the prophet's message intersect with God's big gospel story of Paradise, Ruin, Reconciliation, & Consummation?
- What excites you about this book?
- Was there anything in this book that seemed new to you?
- What confused you about this prophet's message?
- What did God say to you this week about yourself?
- What is God asking you to do in response to this week's study?

These questions are all very general and open. As you work toward your goals, your questions may be more specific. What often happens, however, is that some of the questions you have prepared will be answered before you ask them. So be aware enough to skip as needed.

A quiet group or a group that is new to one another may not talk quite as readily. Allow them a time of silence to consider their answers before rewording it or sharing your own answer. The Holy Spirit will lead you.

We love your questions or feedback. Contact me at [kay@beyondordinarywomen.org](mailto:kay@beyondordinarywomen.org).

**For additional help go to [beyondordinarywomen.org](http://beyondordinarywomen.org) at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/leading-small-groups/> and watch our free short 5 - 10 minute training videos for small group leaders.**

## Works Cited

- Baillie, John. *A Diary of Private Prayer*, rev. Susanna Wright. New York: Scribner, 2014.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academics, 2007.
- Capes, David B., Rodney Reeves, and E. Randolph Richards. *Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to His World, Letters, and Theology*, 2nd Edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2017.
- Constable, Thomas L. "Notes on Acts 2020 Edition." Accessed at <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf>
- ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* at <http://net.bible.org>.
- Wright, N.T. *Paul: A Biography*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018.
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992.

## Resources For Leaders

I know how it feels to be a leader with little experience and no training. I learned by trial and error—mostly error. That is why I have spent so much time preparing training for leaders.

BOW wants to help you with your role as a small group leader if you feel inadequate or just want more training. I never quit learning as a leader.

### **Beyond Ordinary Women Ministries Resources (Beyondordinarywomen.Org)**

#### *Free Training Videos, Podcasts & Articles*

At BOW we plan to continually add to our articles and video training library. So rather than provide a specific list, I encourage you to look over our resources for leading small groups at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/leading-small-groups/> and watch some of our free video training for your area of need. You can also browse our blog at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/blog-standard/> by topic to find posts of interest.

If you will have a live teacher who wants help with preparing and teaching, go to our videos for teachers at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/bible-teaching/>

#### *Monthly Newsletters*

Our monthly newsletter will connect you to our latest articles and provide an encouraging message for you as a leader. Just sign up at the bottom of our home page at **beyondordinarywomen.org** or email me at [kay@beyondordinarywomen.org](mailto:kay@beyondordinarywomen.org).

#### *Personal Contact*

We are always happy to answer your questions, so contact me at [kay@beyondordinarywomen.org](mailto:kay@beyondordinarywomen.org) to set up a time to talk.

