

Pulpit Outlines Series

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52 Sermons From the Book of Acts

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1. THE INFANT CHURCH

Acts 1

ILLUSTRATION:

¹Since 1995 when Toy Story was released, Pixar has created 11 feature films, all of which have become a huge international success. From its beginnings as a production company, Pixar has focused on the crucial value of teamwork and collaboration. Originally, the company planned to build three separate buildings with separate office spaces for the animators, computer programmers, and management. But Steve Jobs scrapped that plan and instead moved everyone into an old Del Monte canning factory that had one huge room with an atrium in the center. Jobs wanted to create a space where people throughout the company could bump into each other, deepen relationships, and share ideas.

But Jobs took it one step further: he moved everything—including mailboxes, meeting rooms, a coffee bar, and even the bathrooms—into the center of the atrium so people would be forced to interact. Initially, some of the employees complained that it was a waste of time to walk to the atrium every time they had to go to the bathroom or grab a cup of coffee. But Jobs kept telling Pixar employees, "Everybody has to run into each other." A Pixar producer called it "smooshing," and he added, "If I don't see lots of smooshing, I get worried."

Brad Bird, the director of The Incredibles and Ratatouille, eventually caught the vision for teamwork. Bird said, "The atrium initially might seem like a waste of space ... But Steve [Jobs] realized that when people run into each other, when they make eye contact, things happen. So he made it impossible for you not to run into the rest of the company." It's no surprise, then, that the Latin motto for Pixar says it all: Alienus Non Diutius, or "alone no longer."

1. THEY WERE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE RISEN LORD

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. – Acts 1:3-4

¹ Jonah Lehrer, *Imagine: How Creativity Works* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), pp. 144-152

2. THEY RECEIVED THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. – Acts 1:5

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. – Acts 19:2

3. THEY WERE OBEDIENT TO HIS WORD

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. – Acts 1:12-13

4. THEY WERE UNITED IN SPIRIT

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. – Acts 1:14

5. THEY HONORED THE SCRIPTURES

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. – Acts 1:15-20

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. –2 Timothy 3:16

6. THEY WENT TO THE LORD IN PRAYER

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen. – Acts 1:21-24

2. THE ASCENDED LORD

Acts 1:4-11; Luke 24:50-53

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. – Luke 24:50-53

ILLUSTRATION:

²One of my most unforgettable moments happened when I was about ten years old. My father served our country during World War II in a plant in our hometown, building all sorts of interesting equipment for the massive tanks, fighter planes, and bombers that defended us in lands far away. Dad worked too long and too hard. As a result he suffered a physical breakdown. And on its heels came an emotional trauma that puzzled everyone, including the doctors.

I was convinced in my heart that my dad was going to die. He may have had such thoughts too, because one night he called me into his room for a somber father-son talk I remember leaning hard against his bed, listening carefully to a voice that was hardly more than a whisper. I thought I was hearing him for the last time. He gave me counsel on life—how I should live, how I should conduct myself as his son. The counsel wasn't long, and then I left and went across the hall to the room that I shared with my older brother. All alone, I lay across my bed and sobbed, convinced that I would never see my dad alive again.

That scene still haunts me. Even though my dad recovered to live ... I still remember the night he talked to me. Something very significant is wrapped up in our final words. Consider the night in Jerusalem when the Lord and his disciples gathered for ... what we call "The Last Supper." Less than twelve hours after [that meal], Jesus was nailed to a cross; a few hours later, he was dead. Jesus understood the significance of those moments and the importance of his last counsel. And so he gave them exactly what they would need to carry them through the rest of their days.

1. BROUGHT THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

² Chuck Swindoll, *Embraced By the Spirit* (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 11-12

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. – Acts 1:5-8

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. – John 16:7

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. – Acts 2:4

2. ENCOURAGED WITNESSING FOR CHRIST

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. – Acts 1:8

Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. – Acts 5:28

3. FOCUSED ON THE HOPE OF HIS COMING AGAIN

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. – 1 Thessalonians 4:16

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. – 1 John 3:3

3. THE EMPOWERED CHURCH

Acts 2:1-13

ILLUSTRATION:

³One of the more humorous quirks of scientific history is the debate over who should get the credit for discovering oxygen. Joseph Priestley, an English scientist and clergyman, is often given that honor because he was the first to publish his findings, doing so in 1774. Interestingly, Priestley originally called the gas, "dephlogisticated air."

However, in 1772, two years prior to Priestly's find, a Swedish chemist named Carl Scheele independently discovered the gas that is vital to human existence. Strangely enough, the term oxygen didn't actually come into use until 1775, when yet another chemist, Frenchman Antoine Lavoisier, discovered and named the gas we breathe. Lavoisier was the first to recognize oxygen as one of our natural elements.

Regardless of who gets the credit, it's odd to think of a human being "discovering" oxygen. Does a fish discover water? The truth is that oxygen literally surrounds us every day, and even if we choose to call it "dephlogisticated air," we can't live without it. The same is true of the Holy Spirit.

1. THE TIME OF THE BLESSING

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. – Acts 2:1

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. – Leviticus 23:15-16

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. – Galatians 4:4

2. THE MEANS OF THE BLESSING

³ "Discovery of Oxygen," <http://www.juliantrubin.com>

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. – Acts 2:2-3

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. – John 3:8

3. THE EFFECTS OF THE BLESSING

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. – Acts 2:3-4

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. – Matthew 11:25

And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. – Acts 2:7-13

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) – 2 Corinthians 10:4

4. THE WITNESSING CHURCH – PART 1

Acts 2:14-23

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴In 1900 Korea had no Protestant church. Today, there are over 7,000 churches in just the city of Seoul, South Korea.

At the end of the 19th century, the southern portion of Africa was only 3 percent Christian. Today, 63 percent of the population is Christian, while membership in the churches in Africa is increasing by 34,000 people per day.

In India, 14 million of the 140 million members of the "untouchable" caste have become Christians.

More people in the Islamic world have come to Christ in the last 25 years than in the entire history of Christian missions.

In Islamic Indonesia, the percentage of Christians is now so high (around 15 percent) that the Muslim government will no longer print statistics.

In China, it is estimated that there are now more self-avowed disciples of Jesus than members of the Communist party. Even the most conservative estimates suggest that China will soon have more Christians than any country.

Across the planet, followers of Jesus are increasing by more than 80,000 per day.

510 new churches form every day.

The irony is that, except for the Middle East (where Christianity was born) and Europe and America (to whose civilization it gave birth), Christianity is expanding everywhere today.

PETER TESTIFIED...

1. TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF HIS BRETHREN

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.
– Acts 2:15

⁴ Daniel Meyer, *Witness Essentials* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), pp. 32-33

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. – 1 Corinthians 2:14

2. TO THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. – Acts 2:16-21

3. TO THE DIVINE APPROVAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. – Acts 2:22

If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. – John 15:24

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. – John 14:10-11

4. TO THE GUILT OF REJECTING CHRIST

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. – Acts 2:23

And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! – Luke 22:22

5. THE WITNESSING CHURCH – PART 2

Acts 2:24-36

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵The following statistics represent some of the challenges facing the church in the unfinished task of world evangelism:

- As of April 2012, there were approximately 7 billion people on Earth.
- Approximately 750 million (or about 11 percent) of those are willing to claim Jesus as personal Lord and Savior.
- About 2.6 billion people (or 38 percent of the world's population) have heard the gospel but have not accepted Christ yet.
- At present, just over 50 percent of the world's population (or 3.5 billion people) have not heard the gospel and most of them do not have a realistic opportunity to hear the gospel.
- Here's another way to look at the challenge of world evangelism: Of the 11,646 distinct people groups on the planet, 6,734 people groups (roughly 60 percent) contain between zero and two percent evangelical Christians. Many of these 6,734 people groups have no churches, no Bibles, no Christian literature, and no mission agencies who are seeking to share the gospel with them.

PETER TESTIFIED...

1. TO THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. – Acts 2:24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. – John 5:24-25

Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. – 2 Corinthians 4:14

⁵ Ronnie Floyd, *Our Last Great Hope* (Thomas Nelson, 2011), pp. 62-64

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. – 1 Peter 1:3

2. TO THE INSPIRATION OF DAVID

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. – Acts 2:25

I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. – Psalm 16:8

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. – Acts 2:30

3. TO THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. – Acts 2:33-36

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. – John 1:12

6. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 2:37-47

ILLUSTRATION:

⁶"My hearing [the good news of Jesus] gave me a heart wound. By God's blessing, my old foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me."

– Nathan Cole, a Connecticut farmer converted to Jesus Christ in the 1740s, describing what happened to him under the preaching of George Whitefield.

1. IT BRINGS DEEP CONVICTION

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? – Acts 2:37

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. – Zechariah 12:10

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. – John 16:8

2. IT RESULTS IN OPEN CONFESSION

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? – Acts 2:37

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. – Acts 9:6

And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? – Acts 16:30

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 John 1:9

⁶ Quoted in Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), p. 37

3. IT GIVES PLAIN DIRECTIONS

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. – Acts 2:38-40

4. IT RECEIVES JOYFUL RECEPTION

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. – Acts 2:41

5. IT PROMOTES STEADY PROGRESSION

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. – Acts 2:42

6. IT DRAWS ENTHUSIASTIC COOPERATION

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. – Acts 2:44-45

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. – Ephesians 5:2

7. IT ACHIEVES GREAT JUBILATION

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. – Acts 2:46-47

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. – Acts 10:43

7. A WORK OF POWER

Acts 3:1-26

ILLUSTRATION:

⁷In 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first people to ascend the 29,035-foot peak of Mount Everest. They were not the last. In the 1990s, Nepal lifted its once tight restrictions on climbing the legendary mountain in order to boost tourist dollars. As of 2006, more than 2,700 people have reached the summit of the world's tallest mountain, many paying over \$60,000 for the experience.

One result of this commercial influx has been the erosion of the traditional moral code of mountaineering. In the rush to the top, amateurs who have paid a fortune for the bragging rights will do anything it takes to get to the summit, including abandoning other climbers.

David Sharp became a casualty of this modern mentality in March of 2006. The 34-year-old engineer from Cleveland did manage to reach the summit on his own. However, he ran out of oxygen on the way back down—984 feet from the top. As he lay dying, 40 climbers passed him by, too eager to achieve their own goals to take a chance on using up their oxygen on someone else. As a result, David Sharp froze to death.

According to Ed Viestrus, who has scaled all 14 of the world's 8,000 meter peaks, Sharp's death is not unique. "Passing people who are dying is not uncommon. Unfortunately, there are those who say: 'It's not my problem. I've spent all this money, and I'm going to the summit.'" This attitude has produced disgust in many climbers, including Sir Edmund Hillary. "On my expedition," he said, "there was no way you'd have left a man under a rock to die."

1. A PICTURE OF NEED

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. – Acts 3:2-3

2. A WORK OF FAITH

⁷ "The Crowd on Mount Everest," *The Week* (6-30-06), p. 13

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. – Acts 3:4-6

3. A MIRACLE OF GRACE

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. – Acts 3:7-9

And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. – Acts 3:16

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. – Isaiah 35:6

4. AN AWAKENING OF WONDER

And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? – Acts 3:11-12

5. A CHARGE OF GUILT

The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. – Acts 3:13-16

6. AN OFFER OF MERCY

And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. – Acts 3:17-21

7. A WORD OF WARNING

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. – Acts 3:22-23

He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me. – Luke 10:16

8. THE CHALLENGE AND THE DEFENSE

Acts 4:5-23

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. –
1 Corinthians 15:14

ILLUSTRATION:

⁸In his book *The Jesus Revolution*, pastor and author Leith Anderson shares a story about the tension that sometimes comes between obeying God and obeying the law of the land. A number of years ago, he and three others were traveling to a Communist country where Christians were regularly being persecuted. They did not have a direct flight to their destination, so they had to stay in a neighboring country for one evening. That night, while having dinner with a few fellow Christians in that country, Anderson and his companions were approached about smuggling in some Bibles for the underground church. Anderson immediately refused to do so, pointing out that it was illegal. The Christians in that country would not take no for an answer, though. They told Anderson they would return in the morning with the Bibles and that Anderson's group should "ask God what they should do." Anderson writes about the tough decisions that would follow:

Overnight, I made a decision. A Bible or two might be risky, but not impossible. However, I wasn't prepared for the following morning's delivery. It was a small library of Bibles, books about Christianity, study tools, and videos.

I truly can't explain why we did what we did. We divided up the Bibles, books, and videos among the four of us and loaded up every available space in our suitcases, carry-on bags, and purses. It was not a comfortable experience. When nearing our destination, the flight attendants distributed customs forms representing our names, passport numbers, and the answers to pointed questions. Were we bringing guns, narcotics, or literature into the country? The four of us sat paralyzed over what to write. If we said we were not bringing literature, we were lying. If we checked that we were bringing books and Bibles, we were in serious trouble. ...

It was one of those moments when the Holy Spirit gave a simple solution that we would not have thought about ourselves. We didn't answer the question. We left it blank. I can't say that we were confident in our choice, but that's what we did. As we passed through immigration surrounded by armed guards and immigration

⁸ Leith Anderson, *The Jesus Revolution* (Abingdon Press, 2009), pp. 33–34

officers, our forms were carefully scrutinized and all four of us were waved through.

What I next remember is the secret night meeting when we turned over the Bibles and literature to Christians from the underground church. Their faces still remain with me all my life.

You may want to criticize my lack of courage or condemn my actions as dishonest. For me, I was suddenly in the sandals of Peter and John who said, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

1. THE CHALLENGE

And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? – Acts 4:5-7

2. THE DEFENSE

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. – Acts 4:8-12

3. THE RESULTS

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. – Acts 4:13-14

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God

hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.
– 1 Corinthians 1:27

But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. – 1 Corinthians 4:19

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. – Acts 4:15-18

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. – Acts 4:19-23

9. THE APPEAL TO GOD

Acts 4:23-31

ILLUSTRATION:

⁹In his talk entitled "The Sense of an Ending," Jeremy Begbie tells a story about attending a worship service in a poor South African township.

I was told, immediately before the service, that a house around the corner had just been burned to the ground because the man who lived there was a suspected thief. A week before that, a tornado had cut through the township, ripping apart fifty homes; five people had been killed. And then I was told that the very night before, a gang hounded down a fourteen-year-old, a member of the church's Sunday school, and stabbed him to death.

The pastor began his opening prayer: "Lord, you are the Creator and the Sovereign, but why did the wind come like a snake and tear our roofs off? Why did a mob cut short the life of one of our own children, when he had everything to live for? Over and over again, Lord, we are in the midst of death."

As he spoke, the congregation responded with a dreadful sighing and groaning. And then, once he finished his prayer, very slowly, the whole congregation began to sing, at first very quietly, then louder. They sang and they sang, song after song of praise—praise to a God who in Jesus had plunged into the very worst to give us a promise of an ending beyond all imagining. The singing gave the congregation a foretaste of the end.

Christian hope isn't about looking around at the state of things now and trying to imagine where it's all going. It's not about trying to calculate the future from the present. It's about breathing now the fresh air of the ending, tasting the spices and sipping the wine of the feast to come.

1. IT WAS UNITED

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is. – Acts 4:24

⁹ Dallas Willard, editor, *A Place for Truth* (InterVarsity Press, 2010)

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. – Matthew 18:19

2. IT WAS BELIEVING

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is. – Acts 4:23-24

3. IT WAS SCRIPTURAL

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. – Acts 4:25-28

4. IT WAS DEFINITE

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word. – Acts 4:29

Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. – Acts 14:3

5. IT WAS CHRIST-HONORING

By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. – Acts 4:30

6. IT WAS ANSWERED

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. – Acts 4:31

*The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. –
Jeremiah 23:28*

10. TESTING TIMES

Acts 4:32-37; Acts 5:1-11

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁰After being included in Oprah Winfrey's famous book club, James Frey's memoir, *A Million Little Pieces* quickly sold over 3.5 million copies. Controversy erupted, however, when members of the press began to question whether or not the stories contained in Frey's book were actually true.

On January 11, 2005, Oprah Winfrey herself called in to CNN's "Larry King Live." She defended the book, and its author, stating that the controversy over his truthfulness was "much ado about nothing." She claimed that Frey's writing was the "essential truth" of his life.

She went on to say: "Although some of the facts have been questioned...the underlying message of redemption in James Frey's memoir still resonates with me. And I know that it resonates with millions of other people who have read this book and will continue to read this book...it's irrelevant discussing, you know, what happened or did not happen to the police."

Reversing herself several weeks later, after new information had come out confirming Frey's dishonesty, Oprah apologized on her own show. "I regret that phone call," she said. "I made a mistake and I left the impression that the truth does not matter. And I am deeply sorry about that, because that is not what I believe. To everyone who has challenged me on this issue of truth, you are absolutely right."

1. HUMAN DECEITFULNESS

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. – Acts 5:1-2

2. SATANIC INFLUENCE

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? – Acts 5:3

¹⁰ Edward Wyatt, "Live on 'Oprah,' a Memoirist Is Kicked Out of the Book Club," *nytimes.com* (1-27-06)

3. UNEXPECTED DETECTION

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. – Acts 5:3-4

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. – 1 John 4:1

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. – Matthew 22:12

4. DIVINE JUDGMENT

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. – Acts 5:5-6

5. FATAL DISAPPOINTMENT

And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. – Acts 5:7-11

11. APOSTOLIC BOLDNESS

Acts 5:17-42

ILLUSTRATION:

¹¹Many years ago I was walking in Newport Beach, a beach in Southern California, with two friends. Two of us were on staff together at a church, and one was an elder at the same church. We walked past a bar where a fight had been going on inside. The fight had spilled out into the street, just like in an old western. Several guys were beating up on another guy, and he was bleeding from the forehead. We knew we had to do something, so we went over to break up the fight. ... I don't think we were very intimidating. All we did was walk over and say, "Hey, you guys, cut that out!" It didn't do much good.

Then all of a sudden they looked at us with fear in their eyes. The guys who had been beating up on the one guy stopped and started to slink away. I didn't know why until we turned and looked behind us. Out of the bar had come the biggest man I think I've ever seen. He was something like six feet, seven inches, maybe 300 pounds, maybe 2 percent body fat. Just *huge*. We called him "Bubba" (not to his face, but afterwards, when we talked about him).

Bubba didn't say a word. He just stood there and flexed. You could tell he was hoping they would try and have a go at him. All of a sudden my attitude was transformed, and I said to those guys, "You better not let us catch you coming around here again!" I was a different person because I had great, big Bubba. I was ready to confront with resolve and firmness. I was released from anxiety and fear. I was filled with boldness and confidence. I was ready to help somebody that needed helping. I was ready to serve where serving was required. Why? Because I had a great, big Bubba. I was convinced that I was not alone. I was safe.

If I were convinced that Bubba were with me 24 hours a day, I would have a fundamentally different approach to my life. If I knew Bubba was behind me all day long, you wouldn't want to mess with me. But he's not. I can't count on Bubba.

Again and again, the writers of Scripture pose this question for us: How big is your God? Again and again we are reminded that One who is greater than Bubba has come, and you don't have to wonder whether or not he'll show up. He's always

¹¹ John Ortberg, in the sermon *Big God/Little God*

there. You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to live your life in hiding. You have a great, big God, and he's called you to do something, so get on with it!

1. THEY SUFFERED FOR JESUS

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. – Acts 5:17-18

But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. – Luke 21:12

Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. – Acts 5:28

2. THEY WERE ENCOURAGED BY JESUS

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. – Acts 5:19-20

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. – 1 John 5:11

3. THEY WERE DEVOTED TO JESUS

And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. – Acts 5:21-25

4. THEY WERE FEARLESS FOR JESUS

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. – Acts 5:29-32

5. THEY WERE JOYFUL IN JESUS

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. – Acts 5:41-42

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:10

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. – 1 Peter 4:13-16

12. SERVING AND SHINING

Acts 6:1-15

ILLUSTRATION:

¹²I surveyed my church to see if people saw a relationship between ministering to others and spiritual growth.

When asked, "To what extent has your ministry or service to others affected your spiritual growth?," 92 percent answered positively. None responded that ministry had a negative effect on their spiritual growth.

Sixty-three percent indicated that service was equally significant in their spiritual growth compared to other spiritual disciplines, such as Bible study and prayer.

Twenty-four percent responded that ministry or service to others had been "a more significant factor" to their spiritual growth than Bible study or prayer.

Over half (58 percent) of those who were not actively ministering to others felt either "not satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their level of spiritual growth.

1. A NEW TRIAL

1) The Complaint.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. – Acts 6:1

2) The Remedy.

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. – Acts 6:2-4

¹² Eric Swanson *What You Get from Giving* (Leadership Journal, Spring 2003), p. 37

3) The Results.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. – Acts 6:5-7

2. A NEW TESTIMONY

1) See Him Serving.

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. – Acts 6:8

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. – Acts 1:8

2) See Him Suffering.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. – Acts 6:9-14

Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death. – Matthew 26:59

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. – Luke 21:15

3) See Him Shining.

And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. – Acts 6:15

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. – 2 Corinthians 3:18

13. A GODLY MAN'S CHARACTER

Acts 7:51-60

ILLUSTRATION:

¹³A few years ago, a missionary came to our church and told a beautiful story about sharing the gospel with a remote tribe in Papua New Guinea. At the end of the story this missionary said, "I should really give the credit to Vaughn, my former youth pastor who loved me and inspired me to live for Christ and share the gospel with others." The next week another guy came to our church and he challenged us to start sponsoring kids living in poverty. The second speaker also concluded by saying, "I'm involved in this ministry because of my youth pastor, a guy named Vaughn." I found out those guys were from the same youth group!

Then the next week another speaker named Dan told us about his ministry at a rescue mission in the inner city of L.A. After Dan's talk, I casually mentioned, "It was so weird: the last two weeks both of our speakers mentioned how much impact their youth pastor, Vaughn, had on them." Dan looked surprised and then he told me, "I know Vaughn. He's a pastor in San Diego now, and he takes people into the dumps in Tijuana where kids are picking through the garbage. I was just with Vaughn in Tijuana. We would walk in the city, and these kids would run up to him, and he would show such deep love and affection for them. He'd hug them and have gifts and food for them. He'd figure out how to get them showers. Francis, it was eerie: the whole time I was walking with Vaughn, I kept thinking, *If Jesus was on earth, I think this is what it would feel like to walk with him.* He just loved everyone he ran into, and he would tell them about God. People were just drawn to his love and affection." And then Dan said this, "The day I spent with Vaughn was the closest thing I've ever experienced to walking with Jesus."

Hearing this made me think, Would anyone in their right mind say that about me? *Would anyone say that about you?* ... As I thought about all this, I prayed, "Lord, that's what I want. I don't want to be the best speaker in the world. That doesn't matter. I don't want to be the most intelligent person on the planet. That's not what I want to be known for. I want to be known for someone saying, "Wow, he's a lot like Jesus."

1. STEPHEN'S KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE

¹³ Francis Chan, Sermon – "Think Hard, Stay Humble"

(Acts 7:1-50)

2. STEPHEN'S FAITHFULNESS

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. – Acts 7:51-54

3. STEPHEN'S VISION

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. – Acts 7:55-56

He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. – John 16:14

4. STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. – Acts 7:57-59

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. – Acts 9:

5. STEPHEN'S MERCIFULNESS

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. – Acts 7:60

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. – Luke 23:34a

14. THE NEED OF THE CHURCH AND THE CITY

Acts 8:1-25

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁴Rev. Thomas Tewell writes: My friend Dr. Tad Stewart took a church in Teheran, Iran. He and his family were there during revolution and revolt and riot. The government under the ayatollah closed his small, struggling Presbyterian Church. There were very few members, but the government came in and burned all the Bibles and Sunday school curriculum. Then they took a big padlock and locked the door of the church. They wiped their hands and said, "Aha! We have closed Christianity in Iran."

Tad Stewart and his wife opened their small home on Sunday mornings for people to come for worship. Nobody dared to say where they were going, and they came early in the morning while it was still dark. But church attendance grew until it doubled, and then tripled.

People smuggled in Bibles as if they were pure gold. Tad said that when he opened the Bible and read it, you could have heard a pin drop. Suddenly electricity and faith broke out in that church, and soon that church made an impact all over the city of Teheran, all over the nation of Iran, and even over that part of the Middle East.

TO RECOGNIZE THAT:

1. PERSECUTION SOMETIMES LEADS TO MISSIONARY WORK

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. – Acts 8:1-5

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh

¹⁴ Thomas K. Tewell, *Preaching Today* #171

patience. – Romans 5:3

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. – Matthew 5:11-12

2. THE GREAT NEED OF A CITY IS CHRIST

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. – Acts 8:5-11

3. ALL BELIEVERS SHOULD RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. – Acts 8:14-17

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples. – Acts 19:1

4. THE POWER OF GOD CANNOT BE PURCHASED

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart

is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. – Acts 8:18-25

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. – Isaiah 40:29-31

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? – Luke 11:13

15. CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUL-WINNING

Acts 8:26-40

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁵A 2011 article in Time reported that our emergency response system, or 911, is quickly becoming outdated and must be retooled in order to reach people in need. The 911 service was created in 1968 to find and rescue people who were injured or dying. The ability for emergency workers to respond was based on the landline telephone network, which immediately gave operators the location of people in need.

However, with the widespread use of cell phones and other phone services, landline phones are becoming obsolete and may someday disappear altogether. While the name of the primary cell phone customer appears, their location could be anywhere. Panicked or injured callers sometimes don't know where they are. So on top of being hurt or endangered, they're also lost and disoriented. If the emergency is in a multi-storied building, the response crew must determine how to pick the right floor.

Time warned: "Such gaps leave us with a patchy emergency infrastructure that has become progressively less able to find people in need." Call centers are upgrading and diversifying their technology, but in the end the advanced technology can't always reach people in crisis. The article pointed to our best resource: "Emergencies are best served by smart *people*." In other words, the 911 operators must think creatively and quickly to find lost callers and then to send the help that the caller needs.

The purpose of 911 has not changed. People still find themselves injured, lost, or in danger, and in need of rescue. But now more than ever, the rescue operation depends not just on programs or technology, but on committed, compassionate people.

1. ANXIETY OF SOUL

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in

¹⁵ Christine Kenneally, "How to Fix 911," Time (4-11-11)

his chariot read Esaias the prophet. – Acts 8:27-28

*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.
– Jeremiah 29:13*

2. OBEDIENCE TO GOD

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship. – Acts 8:26-27

3. COMPASSION FOR SOULS

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? – Acts 8:29-30

4. FAITHFULNESS TO THE BIBLE

The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. – Acts 8:32-35

5. READINESS TO CONFESS

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. – Acts 8:36-38

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the

heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. – Romans 10:9-10

6. HAPPINESS IN CHRIST

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea. – Acts 8:39-40

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. – Romans 5:1-2

16. SAUL'S CONVERSION

Acts 9:1-19

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁶Kim Shin Jo, a gentle pastor from South Korea, used to be a trained killer.

In January of 1968, Jo and a team of assassins descended from North Korea, slipping through the woods in a daring attempt to kill the president of South Korea. The team of 31 commandos made it to within a few hundred meters of the president's residence before they were intercepted. A fierce battle ensued, killing 30 South Koreans. All of the North Korean soldiers were killed, except one who escaped and Kim Shin Jo, who was captured.

After months of interrogation, and through a surprising friendship with a South Korean army general, Kim Shin Jo's hard heart started to soften. Later he would confess, "I tried to kill the president. I was the enemy. But the South Korean people showed me sympathy and forgiveness. I was touched and moved."

The South Korean government eventually released Kim Shin Jo. Over the next three decades he worked for the military, became a citizen, and then married and raised a family. Finally, he became a church minister.

Today Jo's life serves as a symbol of redemption for the entire country of South Korea. Reflecting on the day of his arrest, Kim Shin Jo commented, "On that day, Kim Shin Jo died. I was reborn. I got my second chance. And I'm thankful for that."

Kim Shin Jo found a new birth and God's grace through the power of Christ. But his encounter with Christ came through the unexpected, surprising love of other people. Despite his betrayals and sins, an army officer accepted him, befriended him, and believed in him. At one time he was the enemy of the South Korean people, but in the spirit of Jesus Christ, they surprised him with the startling gifts of belonging, forgiveness and even citizenship.

In the same way, the church is called to extend the gift of acceptance so others will find Christ's "second chance." God unleashes tremendous power for good when his

¹⁶ "South Korean pastor is also a trained killer," *CNN Religion*

people surprise the world, especially unlovable people and even our enemies, with unconditional love, friendship and forgiveness.

1. SAUL THE REBEL

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest. – Acts 9:1

2. SAUL THE QUESTIONED

And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? – Acts 9:2-4

For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. – John 3:20

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12

3. SAUL THE CONVICTED

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. – Acts 9:5

4. SAUL THE CONVERT

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. – Acts 9:6-8

5. SAUL THE WORSHIPPER

And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. – Acts 9:11-14

6. SAUL THE WITNESS

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. – Acts 9:15-19

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. – 1 Timothy 1:16

17. SAUL'S TESTIMONY

Acts 9:20-31

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁷The city of Cairo has its own unique version of poverty called Garbage City Each morning at dawn some seven thousand garbage collectors on horse-carts leave for Cairo, where they collect the garbage left behind by the city's seven million citizens. After their day's work they return to Garbage City, bringing the trash back to their homes, sorting out what's useful In Muslim countries there are certain religious restrictions on sifting through refuse, so the inhabitants of Garbage City are either nonreligious or from some Christian heritage These are the poorest of the poor—outcasts among outcasts.

In 1972, a young Egyptian businessman lost his wristwatch, valued at roughly \$11,000. As you can imagine, it would have been unthinkable to have a valuable timepiece returned by a member of Garbage City. Yet an old garbage man dressed in rags, found the man's name on the watch and returned it, saying, "My Christ told me to be honest until death."

Because of the garbage man's act of obedience, the Egyptian businessman later told a reporter, "I didn't know Christ at the time, but I told [the garbage man] that I saw Christ in him. I told [him], 'Because of what you have done and your great example, I will worship the Christ you are worshipping.'"

The [businessman], true to his word, studied the Bible and grew in his faith. Soon he and his wife began ministering to Egypt's physically and spiritually poor. In 1978, he was ordained by the Coptic Orthodox Church and now leads [a church that meets] outside Garbage City.

1. A COURAGEOUS STAND

And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. – Acts 9:20

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. – Romans 1:16

¹⁷ Rick James, *A Million Ways to Die* (David C. Cook, 2010), pp. 14-15

2. A SUGGESTIVE QUESTION

But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. – Acts 9:21-22

3. A VIGILANT ENEMY

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. – Acts 9:23-25

4. A CONFESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. – Acts 9:26

5. A BROTHERLY ACT

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. – Acts 9:27-28

6. A CONFIRMING TESTIMONY

And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. – Acts 9:29-30

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. – Galatians 1:15-16

7. A GRAND RESULT

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. – Acts 9:31

18. THE VICTORY OF FAITH

Acts 9:32-43

And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. – Acts 9:32-33

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁸A 2012 article about Americans' belief in miracles summarized the following statistics gathered from recent surveys:

- 55 percent of Americans are "certain" that miracles happen (a 20 percent increase from 1991)
- 80 percent believe that miracles "certainly" or "probably" occur.
- 42 percent of Americans with no religious affiliation believe in miracles (compared to 32 percent from 20 years ago). In other words, *the strongest gains in openness to miracles were reported by those who attend services infrequently.*
- 23 percent of respondents said they had witnessed a miraculous physical healing and 16 percent said they had received a miraculous healing.
- 75 percent of respondents said they had prayed to God to receive healing from an illness or injury; nearly 85 percent had prayed for someone else's healing.

The author of the article concluded that the increasing openness to miracles "is not being driven by any one generation, but seems to be more of a cultural shift There's still a profound interest in spiritual things [As Americans in general] we are not in this uniform march toward secularism."

1. WHY PETER WENT

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. – Acts 9:36-38

¹⁸ David Briggs, "Belief in miracles climbs in the age of Oprah," Association of Religion Data Archives (10-27-12)

2. WHAT PETER SAW

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. – Acts 9:39

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. – 1 Corinthians 3:11-14

3. WHAT PETER DID

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. – Acts 9:40-43

19. CORNELIUS THE PETITIONER

Acts 10:1-8

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁹At 84, Tom White has almost achieved his life's goal—to give away his entire fortune. White is a Boston businessman who has given away \$75 million. When people ask him "why," he responds with "give me three reasons I shouldn't," and then proceeds to give three reasons he should: "I can't take it with me, my kids are okay, and my wife's taken care of." He'll also tell you, "I'm motivated a lot by what Jesus wants me to do...and I think he wants me to help make the world a better place."

Tom White has been on the boards of Harvard Divinity School, Boston College, the JFK Library, and the New England Patriots (his company built Foxboro Stadium). But his proudest relationship is with the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Haiti. He's involved in health and justice projects there. When his alma mater, Harvard University, calls for a donation, he says, "For God's sake, you've got \$15 billion over there, and I've got people over here starving to death. You tell me what should I do." Then with a chuckle he adds, "I still give \$1,000 a year so my classmates will talk to me."

Tom White's one regret? "I'm sorry I don't have more money to give away."

1. HIS CHARACTER

A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. – Acts 10:2

2. HIS VISION

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon,

¹⁹ *Boston Globe* (3-23-04)

whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. – Acts 10:1-6

3. HIS OBEDIENCE

And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. – Acts 10:7-8

20. PETER THE PREACHER

Acts 10:5-43

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁰We have a sterling silver tea set at home that a family member gave us as a reminder of her love for us. It's quite old and beautifully made, and it sits on a stand in our dining room. There's only one problem: we can't use it. Before she gave it to us, she had it chemically coated so that it wouldn't tarnish. Hot water will ruin the finish.

God's not looking for sterling silver tea sets. He's looking for rough-and-tumble clay pots—the kind that can be used every day. He's looking for the kind of pots that don't need to be tucked away in a china closet, but can be sent out into a crash-bang world, carrying within them the life of Christ. The church was never meant to be a china cabinet, where precious pieces could be safely stowed out of harm's way. The church was meant to be a working kitchen, where well-worn pots are filled again and again to dispense their life-giving contents to a thirsty world.

1. HIS CALL TO CAESAREA

And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. – Acts 10:5

2. HIS LOVE OF PRAYER

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance. – Acts 10:9-10

3. HIS STRANGE PREPARATION

And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

²⁰ Bryan Wilkerson, "Unbreakable?" Preaching Today

And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. – Acts 10:11-23

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. – Acts 10:42-43

21. THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

Acts 10:38-44

ILLUSTRATION:

²¹An evangelist is a person with a special gift and a special calling from the Holy Spirit to announce the good news of the gospel. You're an announcer, a proclaimer, an ambassador. And it's a gift from God. You can't manufacture it, you can't organize it, you can't manipulate it.

I study and read and prepare all the time, but my gift seems to be from the Lord in giving an appeal to get people to make a decision for Christ. Something happens I cannot explain. I have never given an invitation in my whole life when no one came.

We are not saved by our view of the Bible. We are saved by our view of Jesus Christ and our acceptance or rejection of him and the life we live after we come to Christ.

1. JESUS THE ANOINTED ONE

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. – Acts 10:38

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. – Matthew 3:16

2. JESUS THE COMPASSIONATE ONE

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. – Acts 10:38

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty

²¹ Billy Graham from *A Prophet With Honor (Morrow)*. *Christian Reader*, Vol. 32, no. 2.

them that are bruised. – Luke 4:18

3. JESUS THE MIGHTY ONE

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. – Acts 10:38

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. – 1 John 3:8

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. – John 14:10

4. JESUS THE SUFFERING ONE

And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. – Acts 10:39

5. JESUS THE RISEN ONE

Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. – Acts 10:41

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. – Acts 2:24

6. JESUS THE EXALTED ONE

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. – Acts 10:42

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when

the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. – John 5:22-27

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. – 2 Corinthians 5:10

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. – Revelation 20:11-15

7. JESUS THE SAVING ONE

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. – Acts 10:43

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are. – Luke 13:24-25

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. – Acts 10:44-48

22. PETER'S TESTIMONY

Acts 11:1-18

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. – Acts 11:1-3

ILLUSTRATION:

²²When an abstract concept says, for example, "You shall honor your father and mother," it's clear that's what you're supposed to do. But then I apply it to my aging parents. When my father came to live with us, he lost touch with reality, and we had to put him in the nursing home. I hated to do it, because he didn't like to be there. But when my wife's mother came to the end of her life, we kept her in our home, and my wife took care of her.

It is very easy to come to the conclusion that if you are going to honor your parents, then you must keep them in your home when they get old. But there was a different situation—our kids were grown when Bonnie's mother was ill. In both cases I was trying to honor my parents.

Legalism is when the application of a principle is given all the force of the principle itself.

1. A SPIRIT OF PRAYER

But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me. – Acts 11:4-5

2. A HEAVENLY VISION

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me. – Acts 11:5

²² *Expository Preaching in a Narrative World: An Interview with Haddon Robinson, Michael Duduit, editor, Preaching Magazine, (July/August 2001)*

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. – Isaiah 40:31

3. A DEFINITE COMMISSION

And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. – Acts 11:12

How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. – 2 Corinthians 12:4

4. A SPECIAL PREPARATION

And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. – Acts 11:13-14

5. A DIVINE MANIFESTATION

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. – Acts 11:15-16

6. A SILENCING QUESTION

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. – Acts 11:17-18

23. THE REVIVAL IN ANTIOCH

Acts 11:19-23

ILLUSTRATION:

²³There was a man named Jeremiah Lanphier who lived in New York City during the 1850s. Those were years of tension, when the shadow of war loomed over America. There were strikes, depressions, tailing banks, long jobless lines, and an air of simmering violence. In this setting, Lanphier accepted a calling as a full-time city evangelist. He walked the streets, knocked on doors, put up posters, and prayed constantly—all to no visible result.

As his discouragement increased, Lanphier looked for some kind of new idea, some possibility for breakthrough. New York was a business town; maybe the men would come to a luncheon. So he nailed up his signs, calling for a noon lunch in the Old Dutch Church on Fulton Street. When the hour came, he sat and waited until finally a single visitor arrived. Several minutes later, a couple of stragglers peeked through the door. The handful of them had a nice meal.

Lanphier gave his idea another go on the following week. Twenty men attended; at least it was a start. But then forty came on the third week. The men were getting to know each other by this time, and one of them suggested he'd be willing to come for food and prayer every day. Lanphier thought that was a good sign, and he ramped up his efforts for a daily meal and prayer time.

Before long, the building was overflowing. The luncheon had to move again and again, so high was the demand. The most intriguing element of the "Fulton Street Revival," as they called the phenomenon, was the ripple effect. Offices began closing for prayer at noon Fulton Street was the talk of the town, with men telegraphing prayer news back and forth between New York City and other cities—yes, other cities had started their own franchises; other godly meetings were launching in New York.

The center of the meeting was prayer, and it was okay to come late or leave early, as needed Men stood and shared testimonies. This was not a place for the well-known preachers of the day—this was about the working class, businessmen who wanted to share the things of God.

²³ Ronnie Floyd, *Our Last Great Hope* (Thomas Nelson, 2011), pp. 167-169

Some historians went so far as to refer to the Fulton Street Revival as the Third Great Awakening, because it lasted for two years and saw as many as one million decisions for Christ. Given the influence of New York City, no one could estimate the national and international impact that spread out from Jeremiah Lanphier's simple lunch breaks. It is well known, however, that great funds were raised for fulfilling the Great Commission.

1. THE ORIGIN OF IT

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. – Acts 11:19

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. – Philippians 1:12

2. THE MEANS OF IT

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. – Acts 11:19-20

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. – 1 Thessalonians 1:5

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. – 1 Corinthians 3:9

3. THE RESULTS OF IT.

And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. – Acts 11:21-23

24. A MAN NAMED BARNABAS

Acts 11:24-26

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁴"Barnabas" was actually his nickname, given him by the apostles. It meant "Son of Encouragement," and it was most appropriate.

He was actually born Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. He was probably one of many Jews who migrated back to Jerusalem, where he became one of the earliest converts to Christianity. He sold a field shortly afterwards and gave the money to the Jerusalem church.

Unlike most Christians, Barnabas believed Paul's conversion story, and he smoothed the way for the former persecutor to be accepted by the Jerusalem church.

Barnabas then went to pastor the growing church in Antioch, and Paul returned to Tarsus. Barnabas later invited Paul to come and co-pastor the Antioch church.

In 48, Barnabas set off with his cousin Mark and Paul to evangelize cities in Asia Minor. Though Mark deserted the party early on, Barnabas and Paul preached, performed miracles, and endured persecution together.

One early tradition, recorded by Clement of Alexandria, says Barnabas worked briefly with Jesus, being one of the 70 sent out to evangelize Palestine. Another tradition says he preached in Alexandria and Rome after leaving Paul, founded the church on Cyprus, and was finally stoned and then burned to death in about 61 in Syria. Though three early church works claim his name--The Epistle of Barnabas, the Gospel of Barnabas, and the Acts of Barnabas--none are considered to be written by him.

1. WHAT HE WAS

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. – Acts 11:24

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them

²⁴ "Paul and His Times," *Christian History*, no. 47.

how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. – Acts 9:27

2. WHAT HE SAW

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. – Acts 11:23

3. WHAT HE FELT

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. – Acts 11:23

4. WHAT HE DID

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. – Acts 11:25-26

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. – John 15:4

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. – 1 Corinthians 15:58

25. PERSECUTION AND DELIVERANCE

Acts 12:1-17

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁵After watching the Jesus film and listening to Christian radio, on July 15, 2001, Samuel (not his real name) took a monumental step for an Afghan and Muslim – he received Christ as his Lord and Savior. Soon thereafter, as Western aid workers were either arrested or expelled from Kabul, the Taliban came for him. They told Samuel he was guilty of "working for foreigners," which had been legal, and threw him in jail. For the next 14 days, they beat Samuel at least once a day with a five-foot steel cable. After the last of these sessions, he fell unconscious in his prison cell.

That night, Samuel had a dream. In it, a luminous man wearing bright white clothes appeared. The visitor, whom Samuel would later describe as having "very beautiful feet and shoulder-length hair," spoke kindly to him. Then he said, "Get up." In the dream, the visitor led Samuel out of the cell. Going to the front gate, the ex-Muslim met another man, who was wearing bright green (many Muslims associate green with God's blessing). This man led him out of the prison.

Then Samuel awoke, finding his cell door open. "He walked through it to find the front gate of the prison unguarded and open," a close Western associate says. "He walked out and into the night."

1. PETER'S PERILOUS CONDITION

And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. – Acts 12:4-5

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. – John 3:18

2. PETER'S FAITHFUL FRIENDS

²⁵ Stan Guthrie, "Doors Into Islam," *Christianity Today* (9-09-02), p. 35

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. – Acts 12:5

3. PETER'S PEACEFUL SUBMISSION

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. – Acts 12:6

4. PETER'S SUPERNATURAL DELIVERANCE

And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. – Acts 12:7

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. – 2 Corinthians 4:6

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. – Luke 4:18

5. PETER'S INSTANT OBEDIENCE

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. – Acts 12:8-9

6. PETER'S PERFECT ASSURANCE

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. – Acts 12:10-11

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. – Daniel 6:22

7. PETER'S JOYFUL TESTIMONY

And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. – Acts 12:12-17

26. THE CALL OF BARNABAS AND SAUL

Acts 13:1-12

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁶The rigors that SEALs go through begin on the day they walk into Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training in Coronado, Calif., universally recognized as the hardest military training in the world. BUD/S lasts a grueling six months. The classes include large contingents of high-school and college track and football stars, national-champion swimmers, and top-ranked wrestlers and boxers, but only 10-20 percent of the men who begin BUD/S usually manage to finish

What kind of man makes it through Hell Week? That's hard to say. But I do know—generally—who won't make it. There are a dozen types that fail: the weight-lifting meatheads who think that the size of their biceps is an indication of their strength ... the preening leaders who don't want to get dirty, and the look-at-me former athletes who have always been told they are stars In short, those who fail are the ones who focus on show.

Some men who seemed impossibly weak at the beginning of SEAL training—men who puked on runs and had trouble with pull-ups—made it. Some men who were skinny and short and whose teeth chattered just looking at the ocean also made it. Some men who were visibly afraid, sometimes to the point of shaking, made it too.

Almost all the men who survived possessed one common quality. Even in great pain, faced with the test of their lives, they had the ability to step outside of their own pain, put aside their own fear and ask: How can I help the guy next to me? They had more than the "fist" of courage and physical strength. They also had a heart large enough to think about others, to dedicate themselves to a higher purpose.

1. IT WAS A DIVINE CALL

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. – Acts 13:2

2. IT WAS A PERSONAL CALL

²⁶ Eric Greitens, "The SEAL Sensibility," *The Wall Street Journal* (5-7-11)

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. – Acts 13:2

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. – 1 Corinthians 12:11

And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. – Hebrews 5:4

3. IT WAS A CALL TO SEPARATION

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. – Acts 13:2

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. – 2 Peter 1:21

4. IT WAS A CALL TO WORK

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. – Acts 13:2

5. IT WAS A CALL WHICH MET WITH APPROVAL

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. – Acts 13:3

6. IT WAS A CALL FOLLOWED BY MIGHTY DEEDS

And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the

sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. – Acts 13:5-12

27. THE GOODNESS OF GOD AND ISRAEL

Acts 13:13-22

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁷In the summer of 2006, Jews for Jesus concluded a 66-month evangelistic campaign with a month-long New York finale. Two hundred missionaries worked the streets for JFJ's largest-ever campaign in New York, which boasts the largest Jewish population in the world outside of Israel. They distributed 1 million tracts and collected contact information for more than 5,000 people.

The members of Jews for Jesus, composed of evangelicals with Jewish lineage, began the campaign by sending the *Jesus* film in Yiddish to 80,000 Hasidic homes in the city. With a campaign budget of about \$1.5 million, JFJ also launched ads in newspapers, radio stations, and in the subway. Jews for Jesus also dispersed missionaries through all five city boroughs and sections of New Jersey. These missionaries tried to spark conversations by asking passersby who they thought Jesus was before explaining that they were both Jews and Christians.

"The bottom line is we're saying Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. What could be more Jewish?" David Brickner said. "My Jewish heritage is secondary to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah."

Happily, the evangelistic zeal of the organization paid off. "It's hot in the subways, on the streets; our feet are tired," said Brickner, executive director of Jews for Jesus. "But the response has been volcanic." In all, 157 Jews and 164 Gentiles became followers of Yeshua as of mid-July, most of them through street evangelism.

For follow-up, Jews for Jesus is working with a number of local evangelical churches, including Calvary Baptist Church, Brooklyn Tabernacle, and Christ Lutheran church. Christ Lutheran pastor Vernon Schultheis said the church allows JFJ to use building space to store supplies and eat. He isn't sure handing out tracts is the most effective evangelistic technique, but added it may be as good as any other since Jews are so difficult to evangelize.

"They take this very seriously," Schultheis said. "Anyone who takes a month out of their year to evangelize is to be respected."

²⁷ Sarah Pulliam, "'Volcanic' Response," *Christianity Today* (September 2006), p. 20

Jews for Jesus is not slowing down as an evangelistic organization, either. Next summer they plan to evangelize Israel in the name of Jesus Christ.

1. THEY WERE CHOSEN

The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. – Acts 13:17

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. – Deuteronomy 7:6

2. THEY WERE DELIVERED

The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. – Acts 13:17

3. THEY WERE PRESERVED

And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. – Acts 13:18

When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. – Psalm 95:9-10

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. – 2 Peter 3:9

4. THEY HAD A PLACE PREPARED FOR THEM

And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. – Acts 13:19

5. THEY HAD THEIR NEEDS SUPPLIED

And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty

years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. – Acts 13:20-22

28. THE GOODNESS OF GOD REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST

Acts 13:23-43

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁸For too long, we've called unbelievers to "invite Jesus into your life." Jesus doesn't want to be in your life. Your life's a wreck. Jesus calls you into his life. And his life isn't boring or purposeless or static. It's wild and exhilarating and unpredictable.

1. HE WAS GIVEN ACCORDING TO PROMISE

Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus. – Acts 13:23

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. – Isaiah 11:1

2. HE WAS HERALDED BY JOHN

When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose. – Acts 13:24-25

3. HE WAS CONDEMNED BY THE RULERS

Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. – Acts 13:26-29

4. HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

²⁸ Russell Moore, "A Purpose Driven Cosmos," *Christianity Today* (February 2012)

But God raised him from the dead. – Acts 13:30

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. – 1 John 1:1

5. HE WAS PREACHED BY EYEWITNESSES OF HIS RESURRECTION

And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. – Acts 13:31-37

6. HE IS NOW ABLE TO SAVE ALL WHO BELIEVE

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. – Acts 13:38-39

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. – Romans 3:28

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. – Ephesians 1:7

7. THE WARNING AGAINST DESPISING THIS GOODNESS

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. – Acts 13:40-41

29. RESULTS OF PAUL'S PREACHING

Acts 13:42-52

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁹There are people in the world around us who never open, who never read this Book. But they are reading us. Are they able to see God in our lives? Are they able to say of us to others, "That man--or that woman--reminds me of Christ"? Do we let our light so shine that men may see, not us, but our Father in heaven? This is the real test.

1. A DESIRE TO HEAR

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. – Acts 13:42-43

2. A GENERAL AWAKENING

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. – Acts 13:44

3. BITTER OPPOSITION

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. – Acts 13:45-46

4. JOY AMONG THE GENTILES

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. – Acts 13:48

²⁹ W. H. Griffith-Thomas in a sermon, "Knowing and Showing," from Keswick's Authentic Voice. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 5.

And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. – Romans 15:9-12

5. APPARENT DEFEAT

But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. – Acts 13:50

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28

6. GRACE TRIUMPHANT

But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost. – Acts 13:51-52

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. – Ephesians 1:13

30. MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

Acts 14:1-20

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. – Acts 14:1-3

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will. – Hebrews 2:4

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. – Mark 16:20

But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about. – Acts 14:4-6

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁰Following Sunday worship services on January 8, 2006, five young men attacked and threatened to kill a Protestant church leader in Turkey's fourth largest city. Kamil Kiroglu, 29, had just left his church in Adana when he was ambushed and beaten so severely that he fell unconscious twice.

"They were trying to force me to deny Jesus," Kiroglu said. "But each time they asked me to deny Jesus and become a Muslim, I was saying, 'Jesus is Lord.' The more I said, 'Jesus is Lord,' the more they beat me." One of the attackers pulled out a long butcher knife and threatened to kill Kiroglu if he did not deny his Christian faith and return to Islam. Kiroglu refused.

After the incident, he said, "I am praising God—not because he saved me from death, but because he helped me not to deny him in the shadow of death."

1. AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH

³⁰ *Compass Direct (January 2006)*

And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. – Acts 14:8-10

2. AN EXAMPLE OF FOLLY

And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. – Acts 14:11-13

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. – Jude v. 4

3. AN EXAMPLE OF FAITHFULNESS

Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. – Acts 14:14-18

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. – James 5:17

And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. – Acts 12:22-23

Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose

works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase. – Daniel 4:37

4. AN EXAMPLE OF AMBIGUITY

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. – Acts 14:19-20

31. LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Acts 14:19-28

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch. – Acts 14:21

ILLUSTRATION:

³¹Ramez Attalah, general director at The Bible Society of Egypt, attended an international conference (the Lausanne Conference) for Christian leaders in 1974. He was thrilled to be with top-notch leaders from around the globe—sharing and reading interesting papers on important subjects—but the most meaningful insight actually came to him on the flight home:

It was a long flight back to Canada, and I had many papers to go through. I had taken a lot of business cards from all sorts of [important global Christian leaders] that I had met. We all know we collect these cards, put them in our pockets, and often forget about them. As I looked through my cards from Lausanne, I noticed one that was not very well printed, and I looked at it carefully. I still get emotional when I remember this story. It broke me.

At Lausanne we had small groups every night. About ten of us met in our dormitory rooms to pray and share together. The first night we introduced ourselves: president of a seminary, pastor of a church with 2,000 people, and so on. Everybody was showing how great they were. I said I led the InterVarsity movement in the province of Quebec. It was actually a very small ministry, but it sounded good. One African man who was with us said, "I'm a pastor in Kenya." During the week we all listened to each other. I didn't pay much attention to the pastor from Kenya; I wanted to get close to the *important* people. But I was moved by the Kenyan pastor's stories of how God had touched him as a school teacher during the African revival and changed his life. I thought he was a deep man. I pictured him working in a humble little village in Africa.

But when I picked up that business card on the plane back to Canada I discovered that it said "Festo Olang, Archbishop of Kenya." Olang was a man who could pull rank on anybody in our group. He was a bigwig. But we didn't know it, and he didn't tell us. He did not use his position to secure his identity. He was a simple pastor who loved Jesus. I am still moved to the core when I remember this incident

³¹ Ramez Attalah, "Lausanne: A Personal Narrative"

thirty-two years later. I said to myself on the plane, that's the kind of leader I want to be. That's leadership, Jesus-style.

1. THEY CONFIRMED THE SOULS OF THE DISCIPLES

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. – Acts 14:22

2. THEY EXHORTED THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. – Acts 14:22

3. THEY ORDAINED ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. – Acts 14:23

4. THEY COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. – Acts 14:23

5. THEY PREACHED THE WORD

And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia. – Acts 14:25

6. THEY REPORTED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. – Acts 14:27

32. GRACE OR WORKS?

Acts 15:1-35

ILLUSTRATION:

³²Some years ago I met with a woman who began coming to church at Redeemer and had never before heard a distinction drawn between the gospel and religion [i.e. the distinction between grace and what is often a works-based righteousness]. She had always heard that God accepts us only if we are good enough. She said that the new message was scary. I asked why it was scary and she replied: *If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with "rights"—I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by grace—then there's nothing he cannot ask of me.*"

She understood the dynamic of grace and gratitude. If when you have lost all fear of punishment you also lose all incentive to live a good, unselfish life, then the only incentive you ever had to live a decent life was fear. This woman could see immediately that the wonderful-beyond-belief teaching of salvation by sheer grace had an edge to it. She knew that if she was a sinner saved by grace, she was (if anything) more subject to the sovereign Lordship of God. She knew that if Jesus really had done all this for her, she would not be her own. She would joyfully, gratefully belong to Jesus, who provided all this for her at infinite cost to himself.

1. THE CAUSE OF THE DISPUTE

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. – Acts 15:1-2

2. THE CONFERENCE AT JERUSALEM

Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. – Acts 15:12

³² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 189-190

Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. – Acts 15:14-17

But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. – Acts 15:20

3. THE REASONABLE RESULTS

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things. – Acts 15:28

33. GOD'S STRATEGY FOR SUCCESSFUL SERVICE

Acts 16:1-15

ILLUSTRATION:

³³Most people haven't heard of the pro football running back named Tony Richardson. That's because his primary role involves helping other running backs succeed: he blocks so they can run. Over the span of seventeen pro football seasons, teams have often paired Richardson with some of the best backs in pro football. In 2001 he was slated to be the main running back, but instead he went to his teammate Priest Holmes and told him, "It's time for me to step out of the way. You need to be getting the ball. And I'm going to do everything I can to help you." Holmes went on to lead the league in rushing, but Richardson never grew envious or resentful. As Holmes would report, "He used to call me up and say, "I just saw you on SportsCenter! He was happier for me than I was for myself."

All of the running backs that Richardson helped succeed contend that his influence went beyond blocking for them. He would constantly talk to them through the game, advising, pushing, encouraging, and inspiring them. In a recent interview, Tony Richardson said, "I can't explain it, but it just means more to me to help someone else achieve glory. There's something about it that feels right to me."

1. TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. – Acts 16:1-3

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. – 2 Timothy 2:2

2. STRENGTHEN THE FAITH OF EXISTING CHRISTIANS

³³ Joe Posnanski, "Made to Last," *Sports Illustrated* (August 23, 2010), pp. 49-51

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. – Acts 16:4-5

3. FOLLOW THE LEADERSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. – Acts 16:6-8

34. THE CRY FOR HELP

Acts 16:9-15

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁴When William Carey, the "father of modern missions," first tried to convince fellow Baptists that the Great Commission required them (not just the early disciples) to go out into all the world and make disciples, he was met with fierce resistance. At one meeting, an older pastor interrupted Carey's impassioned pleas, saying, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine."

So anxious was the man to protect the sovereignty of God, he failed to appreciate one fact repeated time and again throughout the history of the church: When God pleases to do anything on earth, he uses your aid and mine; he uses people.

Thankfully, William Carey would have none of this man's bad theology, and he ended up going to India as a missionary, and as a result, inspired hundreds and thousands of other 19th-century British and American Christians to do the same. Today, millions in China, Africa, and Latin America claim Jesus as their Lord because God used some person, missionary or friend, to bring them the good news of Jesus Christ.

1. THE NEW CALL

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. – Acts 16:9

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! – Romans 10:14-15

2. THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into

³⁴ Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Zondervan, 1983), p.115

Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. – Acts 16:10

3. THE BLESSED RESULTS

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. – Acts 16:13-15

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. – 2 Corinthians 4:6

35. THE JAILOR'S CONVERSION

Acts 16:16-40

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁵Less than a week before Martin Burnham's abduction by Muslim guerrillas on the Philippine island of Palawan in May 2001, the New Tribes missionary gave the devotional at a Wednesday evening service at Rose Hill Bible Church in his small hometown outside Wichita, Kansas.

Some of Burnham's last words in the United States were also the last words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John, said Ralph Burnham, Martin's uncle, during yesterday morning's service at the church. "His very last words were, 'Follow thou me,'" Ralph Burnham said, his voice choking up. "Martin not only spoke of following him, but he took on that responsibility. Of course, at that time neither he nor any of us expected how far he was going to be required to go to. But he was willing to go."

Martin Burnham, 42, kept that attitude throughout the 376 days he and his wife, Gracia, 43, were held captive by the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group.

Just before a Philippine military raid on the kidnappers that led to Martin's death and Gracia's freedom, the two huddled together in a hammock under a makeshift tent.

"Martin and Gracia had really been thinking that there would be a chance that they would not make it out alive," said Martin's brother, Doug, relying on a phone conversation with Gracia. "Martin said to Gracia, 'The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness. Let's go out all the way. Let's serve him all the way with gladness.'"

The two then prayed in their hammock, recited Scripture verses to each other, and sang. They laid down to rest. Then the rescue assault began and bullets began to fly, puncturing Gracia's leg and Martin's chest.

1. A PICTURE OF DEMONIC POSSESSION

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The

³⁵ Ted Olsen, "Martin Burnham Went Out Serving With Gladness" *ChristianityToday.com* (6-10-02)

same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. – Acts 16:16-17

2. A PICTURE OF SELFISHNESS AND CRUELTY

And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. – Acts 16:19-24

3. A PICTURE OF HEAVEN-BORN HAPPINESS

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. – Acts 16:25

4. A PICTURE OF DIVINE INTERVENTION

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. – Acts 16:26

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. – Matthew 5:44

5. A PICTURE OF SUDDEN CONVERSION

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. – Acts 16:27-31

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. – John 3:16

6. A PICTURE OF JOYFUL FELLOWSHIP

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. – Acts 16:32-34

36. MISSION TO THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1-9

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁶“It has been my earnest endeavor ever since I have preached the Word, never to keep back a single doctrine which I believe to be taught of God. It is time that we have done with the old and rusty systems that have so long curbed the freeness of religious speech. The Arminian trembles to go an inch beyond Arminius or Wesley, and many a Calvinist refers to John Gill or John Calvin as any ultimate authority. It is time that the systems were broken up, and that there was sufficient grace in all our hearts to believe everything taught in God's Word, whether it was taught by either of these men or not If God teaches it, it is enough. If it is not in the Word, away with it! Away with it! But if it be in the Word, agreeable or disagreeable, systematic or disorderly, I believe it.”

1. WHERE THEY WENT

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures. – Acts 17:1-2

2. WHAT THEY DID

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. – Acts 17:2-3

3. HOW THEY SUCCEEDED

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying,

³⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Christian History Issue 25*, p28

These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. – Acts 17:4-9

37. MISSION TO BEREA

Acts 17:10-12

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁷Two weeks after 9/11, I was in Queens, New York, training church planters. Every night I walked down to a local Irish Pub to eat dinner with some friends. A waitress named Fiona not only served us well, but seemed curious about our faith and what we were teaching pastors. Each evening our conversation deepened. "So, why would you help pastors lead their churches if churches really don't do much good?" she asked.

Knowing that one-third of her Irish friends in the 1980s and 1990s were sexually abused in the Catholic school system, and that two of her friends were killed in "Protestant/Catholic" fights, gave me ample reason not to judge her criticism of organized religion. What could I say? How could I explain my love for Jesus without bringing the church into it?

I simply talked with her about the Kingdom. "Fiona, Jesus came to offer an alternative way of life from all the exclusive, religious, sectarian, and sinful ways people live. He called it the Kingdom, and it was huge for people back in the day and also for anyone looking for the real God."

"I've never heard about the Kingdom," she said. "Tell me more."

My final night in town, as I came in to say goodbye before flying back to Oregon, I heard Fiona yell over a crowded room, "That's the guy I was telling you about! You've got to hear how he talks about God!" As the bar room split and she called her friends over, she looked at me and said, "Tell them what you told me—you know, all that stuff about the Kingdom!"

That night everything changed for me. I started an entirely new spiritual journey that pulled me out of my jaded, consumeristic Christianity. What happened next? We simply grabbed a few friends and started a community that [was committed to] living out and inviting others into Kingdom ways of life. Before we knew it, a church was started without us even trying.

1. THE PEOPLE HAD NOBLE HEARTS.

³⁷ Hugh Halter, "Making the Kingdom Tangible," *Shapevine.com* newsletter (1-12-10)

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. – Acts 17:10-11

2. THE PEOPLE HAD OPEN HEARTS

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. – Acts 17:11

3. THE PEOPLE HAD HONEST HEARTS

Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. – Acts 17:12

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. – Luke 8:15

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. – John 7:17

38. PAUL THE PREACHER

Acts 17:15-34

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁸God alone, who has told us that this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations, will know when that objective has been accomplished. But I do not need to know. I know only one thing: Christ has not yet returned; therefore, the task is not yet done. When it is done, Christ will come. Our responsibility is not to insist on defining the terms of our task; our responsibility is to complete it. So long as Christ does not return, our work is not done. Let us get busy and complete our mission!

1. THE PREPARATION

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. – Acts 17:16

2. THE PULPIT

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. – Acts 17:22

3. THE AUDIENCE

(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. – Acts 17:21-22

4. THE SERMON

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. – Galatians 6:14

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the

³⁸ George Ladd, in the sermon "A Motive for Mission."

times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. – Acts 17:25-31

5. THE RESULTS

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. – Acts 17:32-33

39. PAUL AT CORINTH

Acts 18:1-17

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁹What the Roman emperor Claudius meant for evil turned out for good for Priscilla and Aquila. They were living in Rome in 49 when Claudius expelled all the Jews because of a riot over a certain "Chrestus," probably an allusion to Jewish arguments over Christ. Jewish Christians like Priscilla and Aquila were also forced to leave.

So the couple moved to Corinth, where they set up their tentmaking business. When Paul arrived, Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to him and invited him to work with them. The trio later worked and ministered together in Ephesus, which may be where Priscilla and Aquila "risked their necks" for Paul, possibly when he "fought with beasts at Ephesus." Priscilla is sometimes pictured with two lions who refuse to attack her, lending credence to this tradition.

When Claudius died in 55, Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome and again hosted a church in their home, to whom Paul sent greetings in his letter to the Romans. A tradition of the sixth century claims that the Roman church "Prisca" on the Aventine Hill stands over their original house-church.

1. AS A TENTMAKER

And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. – Acts 18:3

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you. – 2 Thessalonians 3:8

2. AS A REASONER

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. – Acts 18:4

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned

³⁹ "Paul and His Times," *Christian History*, no. 47.

with them out of the scriptures. – Acts 17:2

3. AS A WITNESS

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. – Acts 18:5

To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. – Galatians 1:16

4. AS A TRUTH-TELLER

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. – Acts 18:6

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. – Ezekiel 3:18-19

5. AS A SOUL-WINNER

And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. – Acts 18:7-8

6. AS ONE BELOVED BY GOD

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. – Acts 18:9-10

7. AS ONE DESPISED BY MEN

And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow

persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. – Acts 18:12-17

40. PAUL AT EPHESUS

Acts 19:1-41

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁰In August 2009, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey to "explore the complexity of faith in the modern world and the overlap between religions and other supernatural beliefs." The results showed a considerable overlap in beliefs and a loss of denominational loyalty. A quarter of those surveyed said they were only able to find spiritual fulfillment by attending the services of several denominations.

Sixty-five percent showed evidence of adhering to contradictory religious beliefs. In addition to believing the message of the Bible, they believed in reincarnation, astrology, séances, ghosts, psychics, the power of the evil eye, and yoga as a religion.

Alan Cooperman, a member of the Pew Forum research team, concluded: "Mixing and matching practices and beliefs is much more the norm than the exception." Scott Thumma, a professor of sociology of religion at the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, said, "Today, the individual rarely finds all their spiritual needs in one congregation or one religion."

1. THE SPIRIT

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve. – Acts 19:1-7

2. THE SPEAKING

⁴⁰ "Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths," pewforum.org (12-9-09)

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. – Acts 19:8-10

3. THE SUPERNATURAL

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. – Acts 19:11-20

4. THE SELFISHNESS

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to

be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. – Acts 19:21-27

5. THE STIR

And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly. – Acts 19:28-41

41. A MIDNIGHT MEETING

Acts 20:2-12

And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.
– Acts 20:2-3

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴¹Elliot Huck, a 14-year-old from Bloomington, Indiana, decided to skip a preliminary to the National Spelling Bee. Though he placed 45th out of more than 250 spellers in last year's competition and was a favored to go again, he felt convicted to stay home this time around. More precisely, he felt convicted to stay in church. The 2007 Bloomington *Herald-Times* championship was held on March 4, 2007—a Sunday. In Huck's eyes, the competition conflicted with his view of the biblical commandment to rest on the Sabbath.

"I always try to glorify God with what I do in the spelling bee because he is the one who gave me the talent for spelling," said Elliot. "Now I think I'm going to not spell and try to give glory to God in that."

It certainly wasn't an easy choice for Elliot. He loved his time in Washington D.C. at last year's competition and was looking forward to more of the same. Even so, the expert speller concluded, "I have just accepted that God knows what's best, and I'm just going to do what he says."

1. THE SPEAKER

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. – Acts 20:7

2. THE TIME

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. – Acts 20:7

⁴¹ Robert King, "Sunday Contest Spells the End for Student," *The Indianapolis Star* (2-22-07)

3. THE PLACE

And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. – Acts 20:8

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. – Acts 1:13

4. THE SPEECH

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. – Acts 20:7

When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. – Acts 20:11

5. THE INTERRUPTION

And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted. – Acts 20:9-12

42. A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Acts 20:13-27

And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. – Acts 20:13-14

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴²Earnest Shackleton led a daring expedition in 1914 to reach Antarctica. A year earlier, a lesser-known Canadian-led expedition headed in the other direction to explore the North Pole. Both ships, the *Karluk* in the north and the *Endurance* in the south, found themselves trapped by solid ice packs. Each crew was faced with a fight for survival. But the outcomes of the two expeditions couldn't have been more different.

In the north, the crew members from the *Karluk*, led by Vilhjalmur Stefansson, degenerated into a band of selfish, mean-spirited, cut-throat individualists, ending in the death of all 11 crew members. In the south, Shackleton's crew faced the same problems—cold, food shortages, stress, and anxiety—but his crew responded with teamwork, self-sacrifice, and astonishing good cheer.

In the end, each leader stayed true to his core leadership values. Stefansson valued success above caring for people. He consistently communicated his ultimate objective: getting to the North Pole. In Stefansson's words this meant "that even the lives of the [crew] are secondary to the accomplishment of the work!" To the very end, Stefansson denied that his drive for success led to a tragedy—for himself and his crew.

In sharp contrast, Shackleton's leadership focused on the value and dignity of his teammates. At one of the lowest points of his trip, Shackleton wrote, "The task was now to secure the safety of the party." The well-being of his team drove him to put others first. Shackleton even gave away his mittens and boots and volunteered for the longest night watches. By valuing each person, Shackleton forged a team that was willing to share their rations with each other, even on the brink of starvation. Through his example of sacrificial leadership, Shackleton was able to accomplish his ultimate objective: saving the lives of his crew members.

1. HE WAS HUMBLE

⁴² Dennis N. T. Perkins, *Leading at the Edge* (AMACOM, 2000), pp. xiii-xiv

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews. – Acts 20:19

Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. – Acts 20:34

2. HE WAS COMPASSIONATE

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews. – Acts 20:19

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. – Acts 20:31

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. – Philippians 3:18

3. HE WAS FAITHFUL

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. – Acts 20:20-21

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. – Acts 20:27

4. HE WAS SUBMISSIVE

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. – Acts 20:22-24

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28

5. HE WAS DEVOTED

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. – Acts 20:24

6. HE WAS COURAGEOUS

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. – Acts 20:27

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house. – Acts 20:20

43. FAITH AND FAILURE

Acts 21:1-36

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴³In his novel *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful*, Alan Paton tells the story of Robert Mansfield, the headmaster of a school in South Africa during the days of apartheid, a cruel system of racial segregation. When Mansfield's school was barred from competing against a black school, he finally took a stand against apartheid and resigned his post. A friend said to him, "You know you will be wounded. Do you know that?"

Mansfield replied, pointing to heaven, "When I go up there ... the Big Judge will say to me, 'Where are your wounds?' If I say I haven't any, he will say, 'Was there nothing to fight for?' I couldn't face that question."

1. HIS SORROWFUL PROSPECT

And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. – Acts 21:1-4

And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them. – Acts 21:20-23

And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. – Galatians 1:14

⁴³ Alan Paton, *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful* (Scribner, 1996), pp. 66-67

2. HIS FEARLESS FAITH

Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. – Acts 21:13

3. HIS POWERFUL TESTIMONY

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. – Acts 21:17-20

4. HIS COMPROMISING MEEKNESS

And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. – Acts 21:21-26

And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: And he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings, And a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin offering, and his

burnt offering: And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering. And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. – Numbers 6:13-18

5. HIS CONSPICUOUS FAILURE

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. – Acts 21:27-31

6. HIS RESCUE BY THE SOLDIERS

Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. – Acts 21:32-36

44. PAUL'S DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 22:1-21

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁴The greatest witness for Jesus Christ that I know anything about in the city of Dallas is not a preacher. He's an ophthalmologist. He was in the power structure of an evangelical church for twelve years and never led anybody to Jesus Christ. A group of college kids came along one day and said, "Hey, Doc, are you sharing your faith?"

The doctor said, "No, as a matter of fact, I'm not. I don't even know how to go about it."

They said, "We've got a little training program. How about getting involved in it?"

He said, "Count me in."

They taught him how to share his faith.

This guy leads people to Christ as if it's going out of style: I was way out in a remote section of India, and I use this story as an illustration, but I didn't use his name, figuring nobody knew Dr. Jack Cooper. When I finished, a doctor came up and said, "You were talking about Jack Cooper weren't you?"

I said, "How did you know?"

He said, "I went to medical school in Dallas. While I was there, I went to see Dr. Cooper about my eyes. He led me to Christ and disciplined me all the way through medical school."

Today that doctor is the only licensed neurosurgeon in that part of India. He has absolutely unbelievable impact for Jesus Christ. He will tell you it started in the office of a Dallas doctor who knew why he was here instead of in heaven.

1. AS A LEARNED JEW

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of

⁴⁴ Howard Hendricks, "Beyond the Bottom Line," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 101.

the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. – Acts 22:3

2. AS A ZEALOUS PERSECUTOR

And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. – Acts 22:4

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. – Acts 8:3

3. AS A CONQUERED FOE

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? – Acts 22:6-7

4. AS A HUMBLE INQUIRER

And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. – Acts 22:8-10

That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear. – Luke 1:74

5. AS A COMFORTED BELIEVER

And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. – Acts 22:11-13

6. AS AN INSTRUCTED DISCIPLE

And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his

will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. – Acts 22:14-16

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. – Galatians 1:12

7. AS A DIVINELY COMMISSIONED APOSTLE

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. – Acts 22:17-21

And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth. – Acts 9:11

Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. – Acts 9:30

45. A DAY OF TRIAL AND A NIGHT OF CHEER

Acts 23:1-24

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁵“Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.”

1. AN HONEST CONFESSION

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. – Acts 23:1

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. – Acts 24:16

2. A HOLY INDIGNATION

And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? – Acts 23:2-4

And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the LORD thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the LORD; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried. – Deuteronomy 21:5

3. A SKILLFUL ATTITUDE

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. – Acts 23:6

4. A DIVIDED JURY

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the

⁴⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *Leadership*, Vol. 10, no. 4.

Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. – Acts 23:7-10

5. A DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. – Acts 23:11

6. A DASTARDLY PLOT

And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. – Acts 23:12-15

Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. – Isaiah 8:10

7. AN UNEXPECTED DELIVERY

And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of

him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. – Acts 23:16-24

46. PAUL BEFORE FELIX

Acts 24:1-27

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁶In a moving tribute for the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, a local newspaper in Nebraska referred to an incident from World War II. In the spring of 1940, the German army was plowing through France despite the help from more than 300,000 British troops. (U.S. troops were not involved in this battle.) Finally, the Germans surrounded and trapped most of the Allied forces at Dunkirk, a town in northern France. It appeared that the Allied army would face annihilation or surrender. Eventually, through a miraculous outpouring of courage, the British managed to organize an amazing flotilla of hundreds of little ships that evacuated most of the Allied forces. But before the evacuation, at one point when everything looked utterly hopeless, allegedly a British officer sent the following message, condensed into three powerful words: "*But if not*" At the time it was a strong message of courage and of ultimate hope in the midst of trouble. The message conveyed that the British would stand defiantly against the Nazis and that God would provide a way through the dark night.

The Nebraska newspaper article went on to explain the background to the three-word message: "But if not" came straight from the King James Bible. As the prophet Daniel and his friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) faced the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3, they refused to go down in defeat. Instead, they declared their trust in God even if their mission failed. According to Daniel 3:17-18 they said, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. *But if not*, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

But if not ... words from God that still speak to our hearts today. *But if not ...* words of hope and courage when the world seems dark and hopeless. *But if not ...* words to live by; and for some, words to die by.

1. THE ACCUSATION

And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

⁴⁶ Gettner Simmons, "The Words Still Resound," *Omaha World-Herald* (4-24-11)

And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. – Acts 24:1-9

2. THE DEFENSE

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. – Acts 24:10-21

3. THE DEFERMENT

And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will

know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. – Acts 24:22-23

4. THE PRIVATE HEARING

He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. – Acts 24:26-27

47. PAUL'S APPEAL UNTO CAESAR

Acts 25:1-12

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁷Lock your doors at night. Get an alarm system. Save 10 percent and make sure your investment is insured Take your vitamins, minerals, omega-3s, ginkgo bilboa, and St. John's Wort. Eat lots of soluble fibers. Exercise. Get eight hours of sleep Go to church regularly, being certain to drive carefully both on the way there and on the way home (it's best if your car's the biggest, because then you're the safest). Don't go on mission trips to places where you might contract staph infection, malaria, intestinal parasites, or face a terrorist plot. Risky hobbies? Forget it. Read books instead Eat organic. Get a colonoscopy.

There, that should do it. Now you're safe, right? Well, not really. Pistol Pete Maravich, extraordinary athlete and specimen of fine health, died at the age of forty, while shooting hoops. He didn't smoke or drink. Meanwhile, the oldest woman on record, Jeanne Calment, who died at the age of 122, stopped smoking at 117 because her eyesight was so bad she could no longer see clearly enough to light her cigarettes

The safety-first posture is wrong on several levels. First, and most significantly, the good life is never defined by Jesus in terms of either length or comfort. To the contrary, Jesus says that those who seek to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their lives, spilling them out generously in service to others because of love for God and humanity, will find them.

1. A CUNNING PLOT

Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. – Acts 25:2-3

2. A REASONABLE PROPOSAL

But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. –

⁴⁷ Richard Dahlstrom, *The Colors of Hope* (Baker Books, 2011), pp. 128-128

Acts 25:4-5

3. A RENEWED CHARGE

And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. – Acts 25:6-7

4. A RENEWED DENIAL

While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. – Acts 25:8

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. – Acts 23:1

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. – Ephesians 2:2

5. A STRANGE REQUEST

But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? – Acts 25:9

6. A NEW WEAPON

Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go. – Acts 25:10-12

48. PAUL AS A WITNESS FOR GOD – PART 1

Acts 26:9-22

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁸A minister was in Italy, and there he saw the grave of a man who had died centuries before who was an unbeliever and completely against Christianity, but a little afraid of it too. So the man had a huge stone slab put over his grave so he would not have to be raised from the dead in case there is a resurrection from the dead. He had inscriptions put all over the slab saying, "I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don't believe in it." Evidently, when he was buried, an acorn must have fallen into the grave. So a hundred years later the acorn had grown up through the grave and split that slab. It was now a tall towering oak tree. The minister looked at it and asked, "If an acorn, which has power of biological life in it, can split a slab of that magnitude, what can the acorn of God's resurrection power do in a person's life?"

The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It's the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know him, the more you grow into the power of the resurrection.

1. HE IS A CHANGED MAN

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

⁴⁸ Tim Keller, *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross* (Crossway, 2009), p. 136

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. – Acts 26:9-15

2. HE IS AN EMPOWERED MAN

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. – Acts 26:16-18

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. – Acts 1:8

3. HE IS AN OBEDIENT MAN

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. – Acts 26:19

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. – Galatians 1:15-16

4. HE IS A DIVINELY ASSISTED MAN

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. – Acts 26:21-22

49. PAUL AS A WITNESS FOR GOD – PART 2

Acts 26:23-29

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁹I was traveling on a plane from San Francisco to Los Angeles a few years ago. I was sitting next to the window, reading a Christian book. The man next to me, obviously from the Eastern hemisphere, asked, "Are you a religious man?" "Well, yes," I said. "I am too," he responded. We began talking about religion. In the middle of the conversation I asked, "Can you give me a one-liner that captures the essence of your faith?" "Well, yes," he said. "We are all part of the problem, and we are all part of the solution."

We talked about his one-liner, a statement I felt was very helpful. After a while I said, "Would you like a one-liner that captures the Christian faith?"

"Sure," he responded.

"We are all part of the problem, but there is only one man who is the solution. His name is *Jesus*."

1. HE IS A DEVOTED MAN

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. – Acts 26:23

2. HE IS A MISUNDERSTOOD MAN

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. – Acts 26:24

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:18

And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? – John 10:20

3. HE IS A COURTEOUS MAN

⁴⁹ Robert Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?* (IVP, 2008), p. 26

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. – Acts 26:25

4. HE IS A FAITHFUL MAN

For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. – Acts 26:26-28

5. HE IS A SATISFIED MAN

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. – Acts 26:29

50. THE POWER OF FAITH

Acts 27:17-44

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵⁰My brothers and I had traveled to the western edge of Zimbabwe to raft the Zambezi River. We boarded our raft at the base of the Victoria Falls. Massive amounts of water spilled over the top of the giant falls and dropped almost a thousand feet; the roar was deafening. The falls are the largest in the world, more than a mile wide and three hundred feet high. Mist from the spray that fills the air like fog can be seen for fifty miles; the locals call it "Smoke That Thunders." The water from the falls rushes down the gorge in torrents, creating the world's largest rapids. In the United States, the highest-class rapid you are allowed to raft is a Class 5. The Zambezi's whitewater rapids can top 7 and 8

As I sat on the edge of the eight-person raft, all suited up in a tight, overstuffed jacket and a thick crash helmet, I felt like an overcautious tourist about to mount an overpowered moped in Honolulu or rent roller-blades on Huntington Beach. The Zambezi can't be that dangerous, can it?

But then our guide [said], "When the raft flips ..." There was no "If the raft flips" or "Or on the off chance we get flipped." But "When the raft flips." He went on, "... stay in the rough water. You will be tempted to swim toward the stagnate water at the edge of the banks. Don't do it. Because it is in the stagnate water that the crocs wait for you. They are large and hungry. Even when the raft flips, stay in the rough water."

Stagnancy will kill your spirit The church of tomorrow must resist stagnancy. God needs us out there in the rough waters, pouring our lives into people Live in the whitewater. Live where it's just a little bit uncertain and unsafe.

1. A PERILOUS POSITION

Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

⁵⁰ Palmer Chinchon, PhD, *True Religion* (David C. Cook, 2010), pp. 55-57

And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. – Acts 27:17-20

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. – Ephesians 2:12

2. A MERCIFUL REVELATION

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. – Acts 27:23-24

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. – James 5:16

3. A FAITHFUL PROCLAMATION

And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. – Acts 27:22-25

4. A NECESSARY CONDITION

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. – Acts 27:30-31

5. A COMPASSIONATE EXHORTATION

Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. – Acts 27:34

6. A WONDERFUL TRANSFORMATION

Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. – Acts 27:36

*He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.
– Psalm 40:2-3*

7. A PERFECTED SALVATION

And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. – Acts 27:44

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. – John 6:39

51. PAUL AMONG THE BARBARIANS

Acts 28:1-10

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵¹A missionary friend of mine once said, "Things were simple before I went to Africa. I knew what the African's problem was, and I knew the answer. When I got there and began to know him as a person, things were no longer simple."

1. UNEXPECTED KINDNESS

And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. – Acts 28:2

As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. – John 21:9

2. HUMBLE SERVICE

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. – Acts 28:3

3. ANOTHER TRIAL

And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. – Acts 28:3

4. FALSE JUDGMENT

And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. – Acts 28:4-6

⁵¹ Elisabeth Elliot in *The Liberty of Obedience*. Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 15.

5. GENEROSITY REWARDED

In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. – Acts 28:7

6. NEEDS SUPPLIED

Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. – Acts 28:10

52. PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ROME

Acts 28:11-31

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵²Late one night, Emanuel Lighe returned home to find police waiting for him. There was a death in the village, and Lighe's name topped the suspect list. Cuffed and detained, Lighe was questioned well into the night at the police station. He was refused the right to leave.

Hours turned into days; days dragged into weeks. Lighe remained at the police station, then was transferred to Prison Civile de Lomé, the main prison in the capital city of Togo in West Africa's Togolese Republic. He remained there for five years and four days.

Lighe was innocent.

Prison Civile de Lomé is a perilous place. Amnesty International cited the prison for its basic human rights violations. Built to house 500 inmates, the prison is packed with 1,800 inmates who live and sleep in one cramped, open-air yard. Infectious disease is rampant, and many prisoners die, often before they've served their sentences.

Lighe spent half a decade of his life in this [prison]—always hungry, always scared, always wondering how he, an innocent man, landed in this place.

"Life in prison is so difficult that it's hard to understand for outsiders: people get raped, beaten up. Money and possessions get stolen. There's a lot of violence and pressure," he says.

For years, members of the Bible Society of Togo ... have visited the prison, bringing food for the inmates and supplying them with another life-giving gift: the Bible.

For Lighe, the Bible became a source of life and hope. It inspired him daily to reach out to his fellow inmates, spreading God's Word through preaching and living out its message. Although Lighe struggled to understand why he was placed in prison, God began to teach him that his detainment had a purpose: He was there to minister to his fellow inmates.

⁵² Benjamin Leama, "Wrongfully Accused," *American Bible Society RecordOnline*

"I believe in God's power and God's Spirit, so I continued my work, because I am not ruled by man," says Lighe. With his purpose found and forged in the unlikeliest of places, Lighe thanked God for bringing him to prison.

After Lighe was released, he struggled to find work and was lost in the business of daily life. He knew something was missing, so he began to return to the prison regularly to visit friends and continue his ministry. Even though he's no longer a prisoner, Lighe commands the same respect among the inmates. Inside the walls he is the real, breathing picture of God's hope.

"A clear conscience fears no accusation," says Lighe. This message rings loudly through the Prison Civile de Lomé, a place transformed by men like Lighe and the powerful message he brings: there is true freedom in Christ.

1. THE CHEERING SALUTATION

And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. – Acts 28:15

That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. – Romans 1:12

2. THE PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE

And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. – Acts 28:16-22

3. THE STORY TOLD

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. – Acts 28:23

4. THE DIFFERENT RESULTS

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. – Acts 28:24

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. – Hebrews 4:2

5. THE FINAL MESSAGE

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. – Acts 28:25-29

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. – 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12

6. THE TWO YEARS' MINISTRY

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. – Acts 28:30-31