

# THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST

## “The Value of Knowing Christ”

by Daniel Ritchie

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One question has hung in the back of my mind for the first two decades of my life.

“Why?”

Especially in my teens, I probably asked God that question a thousand times at least. I was born without either one of my arms and have spent my life adapting to a world designed for people with two. I experienced lots of external struggles as I learned to accomplish daily tasks using my feet while also facing push-back and criticism from the outside world that simply could not understand my situation.

Before I was in a relationship with Christ, the question I asked God was, “Why don’t You love me?” I felt like the circumstances of my life filled with hardship was the picture of God’s lack of love for me. When I understood the gospel, the picture of God’s love for me could not have been clearer. As Romans 5:8 says that God shows His love for us in that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

### SHEPHERDED THROUGH PAIN

Once that “why” had been answered, a new question emerged: “Why do I have to suffer so much?” That question took a significantly longer time to answer. Yet, I am so grateful for a number of men who invested in me and discipled me through the years and were willing to shepherd me through my pain.

It was wild to watch how each of those men kept pointing me to the life of the apostle Paul. I began reading through the book of Acts and all that Paul encountered in both his story of salvation and the timeline of his ministry. I read through Romans, which God had already used in a significant way in my life to show His love for me. Then I slowly read through the litany of Paul’s letters, especially the ones that he wrote from prison.

### PAUL’S PAIN AND GOD’S POWER

There was a lot to learn from the life of Paul. I think the one clear thing that jumps off the pages of Scripture is the love that Paul had for both Jesus and His church. Yet, behind the backdrop of Paul’s love of Jesus is the fact that he had done so in the face of so much pain and affliction.

Paul told the Corinthian church of the incredible list of afflictions he endured for the name of Christ: beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, all sorts of dangers, and the anxiety of leading churches. On top of all of that, Paul dealt with something that he called a thorn in his flesh (see 2 Cor. 12:7). We don’t know exactly what Paul was dealing with, but we do know it tormented him so much that he pleaded with the Lord on three separate occasions to make the thorn go away (v. 8).

The Lord's reply to Paul answered my "why" when it came to my own suffering. God's message to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 was, "My grace is sufficient for you." Along with that, God's power is perfected in our weakness. In the times when Paul was at his most vulnerable were the times that Paul reflected the power of God the most in his life.

The power of God to redeem the dark parts of our lives doesn't end with simply removing our sin. The promise of Romans 8:28 is that "all things work together" for good. There is no asterisk when it comes to what exactly is covered by "all things." Good things, difficult things, scary things, sad things—all can be used by God for His purposes.

*We can keep going  
because we know He is  
redeeming the hardest  
parts of our lives.*

### **THE GOSPEL AND SUFFERING**

Even the gospel itself is intertwined with suffering and hardship. Man sinned, so toil and death came on the scene in Genesis 3. Jesus took on flesh to be a perfect sacrifice for the sin of man. That sacrifice on a brutal Roman cross was what gives man hope of restoration to a holy God. To be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, the only sinless person in the history of earth had to die the punishment we deserve.

The grace of Jesus going to the cross was not only the means of our salvation, but it also gave us a path to follow. Philippians 2 calls us to have the same mind Jesus had when He humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross for a bunch of rebels like you and me. Because of that sacrifice, Christ is exalted, giving Jesus the name above every name, that every knee would bow

and every tongue confess to Him, for the glory of God (vv. 9-11).

In the exaltation of Christ, we can have the endurance of Christ. Paul said later in Philippians 3:8 that he considered everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord.

We can keep going because Jesus is not going to leave us. We can keep going because we know He is redeeming the hardest parts of our lives. We can keep going because we know that He is worth it. We can keep going because we know we will see Him face to face—at the Father's side—in eternity.



# ENDURING WITH GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

## + SESSION OUTLINE

1. Following the Spirit requires holding an eternal perspective (Acts 20:22-24).
2. Following the Spirit requires trusting the Lord's will (Acts 21:10-14).
3. Following the Spirit requires proclaiming Jesus boldly (Acts 22:11-21).

Background Passage: Acts 20–22

## + WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Paul followed the Holy Spirit's guidance to return to Jerusalem and trusted in the Lord no matter the danger he faced.

## + HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Paul's confidence in the midst of trying circumstances came from his faith that the God of his fathers was the God who had revealed His glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that the faithfulness of God that was shown through the cross and resurrection of Jesus would sustain him through persecution and trial.

## + HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus endured opposition to bring about our salvation, we courageously testify to the gospel, even when the cost of telling the truth is high.

# GROUP TIME

**Group content** found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



## SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



## INTRODUCTION

**ASK:** As participants arrive, ask: **When have you stepped into a situation that caused you some panic?** (help keep this lighthearted at first by offering such answers as a big roller coaster, a scary movie, some extremely spicy hot wings, or hitting the skate park with your kids; you may then want to get into more serious answers such as a new job, a new home, a new baby, or some other life upheaval; wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

**TRANSITION:** Beginning today, we start the last leg of Paul's glorious life. We've been reading his story from the beginning, and we've traced his journeys. But Paul was stepping into a situation that was anything but peaceful. Maybe you've been there; we sometimes step into those situations that we're quite certain will be a disaster. Let's watch Paul's words and actions as he started down that last road.

**SUMMARIZE:** Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Paul performed mighty miracles and revealed God's power to the believers in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-20), but that led to unwanted attention and a riot. Paul encouraged the Ephesians and then made a three-month sweep through the churches in Macedonia, encouraging them as well (20:1-6). After sailing through the Mediterranean, hopping between islands, Paul chose to sail past Ephesus because he was hoping to return to Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (20:16).



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# POINT 1

## FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT REQUIRES HOLDING AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE (ACTS 20:22-24).

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **PACK ITEM 2: PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS MAP** to show where Ephesus is in the midst of Paul's third journey. Then use **PACK ITEM 3: PAUL'S MISSIONARY LIFE** to describe Paul's third missionary journey. Then briefly provide a summary of Paul's words to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:17-21 where Paul reminded these church leaders how he had lived, serving in humility, in suffering, in truth, and in faith. (Paul never asked other believers to step out in faith in a way he was not able to do himself.)

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 20:22-24** from his or her Bible.

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

**EXPLAIN:** Help your group understand Paul's words in **verses 22-23**, specifically the role of the Holy Spirit in his decision to go to Jerusalem as it relates to the Key Doctrine below. (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 58):

### **Key Doctrine #64: Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian:**

The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of salvation in bringing a person to faith in Christ and is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. He also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for the service of God's kingdom. He is the Comforter to the believer and aids us in properly interpreting the Bible.

- Paul knew that the threat of persecution would loom over him in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit warned him of it. The role of the Holy Spirit was essential for Paul, and he wanted the elders to realize that he did not follow his own path but one that was led by God.
- The Greek word translated “constrained” carries the idea of being bound, tied, fastened, or chained. It occurs forty-four times in the Bible in both literal and figurative instances (see Matt. 14:3; 16:19). Paul understood that if the Holy Spirit speaks and leads you somewhere, you obey.
- The Jews, especially those in Jerusalem, were against Jesus and thus, against Paul as he preached the gospel. Like Jesus coming to His own, Paul was also rejected (John 1:1). But Paul knew the risks and the dangers and understood that following Christ to the very end was of deeper value and worth.

### MILETUS

In Acts 20:17, Paul was in Miletus, a seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor, about 30 miles from Ephesus. He was near the end of his third missionary journey. Miletus served as the port for Ephesus. From there, Paul called the elders of the church of Ephesus to come to him so he could speak to them the words from Acts 20:18-35.



**ASK:** (DDG p. 58)

**How do you see the Holy Spirit active in the believer's life today?**

(the Holy Spirit compels us to talk to someone, when we feel that nudge to do so; the Holy Spirit warns us against bad actions or people who may tempt us toward sin; the Spirit calls us toward acts of ministry and roles to be used for God's purposes)

**ILLUSTRATE:** Display a \$20 bill and saying, "I know what this is worth: twenty dollars. There is value here; I wouldn't throw it in the trash can. Human life has value, too. Much more value. So what is Paul saying when he considers his life of no value in **verse 24**?" (compared to living for God's kingdom and mission, living for ourselves has no value; God's will should take highest priority in our lives; since God is good and sovereign over all things, we trust in His plans above our own)

**HIGHLIGHT:** Help learners consider carefully the significance of Paul's words in **verse 24** with this main idea (DDG p. 58):

Our value should be found in being God's children, with the purpose of testifying to Jesus.

- Paul carefully considered the value of his life when he lived for himself and gave it a number: zero. His entire identity was wrapped up in being used as a vessel for his Lord and Savior. (See Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6.)
- Using the imagery of running a race, Paul revealed why he was willing to go to Jerusalem: his course was not yet finished. He had been told by the Spirit that "imprisonment and afflictions" awaited him there (Acts 20:23), yet that is where the course led. Elite marathoners don't get to skip the hilly sections; the entire course must be traversed to complete it.
- Paul never forgot what happened to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Through Ananias, Paul's assignment had been given from God: "to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (v. 15). Paul never wavered from that calling.

**DISCUSS:** (DDG p. 58)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **In what ways has God called you to His service to testify to His grace?** (ministry roles in the church; leading a small group; having neighbors over to share life with; being intentional with speaking to others about Christ; answers may vary)

**TRANSITION:** Paul wasn't going into Jerusalem disillusioned; he fully expected trouble. But God was about to reveal more to him.

# POINT 2

## FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT REQUIRES TRUSTING THE LORD'S WILL (ACTS 21:10-14).

**SUMMARIZE:** Paul gave some encouragement and instructions to the Ephesian elders, prayed with them, and said goodbye with many tears. All of the believers in Ephesus believed Paul would never see them again. Paul continued on the journey, staying with Philip (see Acts 8:26-40) and his prophetic daughters.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 21:10-14** from his or her Bible.

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

**ILLUSTRATE:** Consider bringing a belt and asking a volunteer to bind themselves like Agabus did or demonstrating it yourself. Ask, "Seeing this and hearing Agabus's words, what would you have been thinking if you were there?" (shock, horror, awkwardness; thinking this guy's crazy or wondering if his prophecy was true; feeling protective of Paul)

**HIGHLIGHT:** As a group, focus on the following idea from **verses 10-11** (DDG p. 58):

God's will through the Spirit's leading may lead us toward suffering, but we obey anyway.

- Agabus used Paul's belt (sometimes translated "girdle") to demonstrate what would happen to Paul. This technique of actively demonstrating a prophecy was done multiple times by the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah walked around with a yoke on his neck (Jer. 27:2-11) and bought a parcel of land on the promise that God would bring the Israelites back to Judah (32:6-25). He even bought some underwear, hid them in a rocky crevice in the Euphrates, and dug them up later (13:1-11). In all of Jeremiah's object lessons, he both spoke the truth and demonstrated it visually, just as Agabus did.

### AGABUS

Agabus was first mentioned predicting that a famine would spread through the Roman Empire. His prophecy, guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:28), spurred the disciples to send relief to believers in Judea by Barnabas and Paul. So Agabus was a familiar face and a reputable source. The name Agabus means "locust," which carries with it all kinds of prophetic imagery.

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Sometimes I am asked to speak to young people who are toying with the idea of being missionaries. They want to know how I discovered the will of God. The first thing was to settle once and for all the supremacy of Christ in my life. . . . I put myself utterly and forever at His disposal, which means turning over all the rights to myself, my body, my self-image, my notions of how I am to serve my Master."<sup>1</sup>

—Elisabeth Elliot  
(1926–2015)

**DISCUSS:** (DDG p. 58)

**Where do you turn in the Bible when you come face to face with bad news?** (to His attributes of being a good God in Psalms; to understanding God is omnipresent, everywhere all the time so I am not alone [Matt. 28:20]; to understanding that the Holy Spirit resides in me [Ezek. 36:27]; help learners turn to and recall God's blessings and presence in difficult situations in the Bible and in their own lives)

**EXPLAIN:** Guide learners to carefully consider **verses 12-14** and the collective "No!" that ran through the minds of Paul's friends. Then help them focus on Paul's response by using the following statement (DDG p. 58):

In all things, we follow God's will, trusting He is guiding us toward kingdom purposes and His glory.

- Let's not dismiss Paul's awareness of what the prophecy meant. He'd already recognized he was going to have trouble, but this was much more concrete. His friends acted just as we would probably act: they pleaded with him not to go. They loved him, and they knew his ministry was vital to the early church, particularly to the Gentiles. But Paul had already made up his mind: whether by life or by death, Christ would be honored through it (Phil. 1:20).
- Paul's words reflect the words of his Lord Jesus, who prayed, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), and "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (26:39).

**DISCUSS:** (DDG p. 59)

**How do we keep Paul's outlook on God's will, choosing to live obediently in the face of danger?** (Paul never forgot his testimony: who he was before Christ, how Christ called him, and his calling in the Lord; we too must consider the gospel in our own lives, both past and present; Paul clung to Scripture for hope, and he poured out his life for others and the gospel; as we follow these same steps, we'll find that obeying God's will becomes habit even when we are afraid)

**TRANSITION:** The Spirit had revealed to Paul that he would have trouble in Jerusalem. Agabus revealed that he would be bound. Like a movie, building to a big battle in the final scene, tension rises as we see what actually happened to Paul in Jerusalem.



# POINT 3

## FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT REQUIRES PROCLAIMING JESUS BOLDLY (ACTS 22:11-21).

**SUMMARIZE:** Paul arrived in Jerusalem and received a warm welcome from the believers there. But conflict remained: Paul was bringing salvation in Jesus to the Gentiles. Many Jewish Christians misunderstood his mission in Gentile areas, so Paul purified himself to show he still honored the law. Paul went into the temple and was spotted by Jews who were against his ministry. They stirred up a crowd, falsely accused him of bringing a Gentile into the temple, dragged him out of the temple, and were trying to kill him when the Romans intervened. Paul was given a chance to speak to the crowd, and he shared his testimony (Acts 21:15–22:10).

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 22:11-21** from his or her Bible.

**11** “And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. **12** And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, **13** came to me, and standing by me said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. **14** And he said, ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; **15** for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. **16** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’ **17** When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance **18** and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ **19** And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. **20** And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ **21** And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

**ENGAGE:** Help learners consider **verses 11-21** while inviting responses to the following statement (DDG p. 59):

Testimonies proclaiming Jesus are powerful and should be shared, even when they are not well received.

- Paul had spoken to the Roman guards in Greek (Acts 21:37), but he addressed the Jewish crowd in Aramaic (22:2). Paul received the opportunity to speak to the crowd that had just attempted to murder him because the Roman commander gave him the microphone, figuratively speaking. Most of us would have been thrilled to simply be not dead after what had just happened; Paul took advantage of the situation so that he could share his testimony.



### PAUL'S TESTIMONY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Scan this QR code for some reflections on the repetition of Paul's testimony in the book of Acts.

**ASK:** (DDG p. 59)

**How has God worked in your life where your testimony has shaped your current ministry opportunities?** (examples would include someone in a recovery ministry or grief ministry with a related testimony; someone who came to faith in youth ministry and now share their testimony as a volunteer in that ministry)

**DIG:** As a group, consider Paul's Jewish-friendly testimony in **verses 11-21**. Suggest your group look through the verses and point out Paul's Jewish references. ("Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews"; "the God of our fathers"; "praying in the temple"; how he imprisoned Christians)

**EXPLAIN:** Use **verses 11-21** to explain the following (DDG p. 59):

Though Paul was still a Jew through and through, still upholding the Law, he was now a Christian called to bring the gospel to all people, Jews and Gentiles.

- In Paul's "defense" (v. 1), he pointed to his Jewish influences: his upbringing, education, obedience to the law, testimony of high-ranking Jews, and confirmation from Ananias (see his Jewish credentials in v. 12). He tried to connect with his audience by showing that he too was a Jew, once hostile to Jesus. But because God called him, he now had to share with them the truth of forgiveness of sin through Jesus.
- But even being persecuted, Paul's heart was for his Jewish persecutors to know that he was once like them, but now was called by Jesus to tell others, including Gentiles, this message of hope.
- Paul surely knew that the idea of God sending someone to preach salvation to the Gentiles would inflame the crowd. But in looking through Scripture, we see even in the Old Testament many Gentiles who followed God faithfully: Melchizedek, Job, Caleb, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and more. God had promised Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

**DISCUSS:** (DDG p. 59)

**What part of your identity can seem to be prioritized above your identity as an ambassador of Jesus and why?** (mother, father, friend, doctor, plumber, breadwinner; sometimes these identities supersede our call to share the gospel to others because the latter is difficult or we're too busy or life's already hard enough; we find that instead of using these identities for God's glory to see people come to Christ, we ignore our call and see ourselves only with worldly eyes)

# MY RESPONSE

**SAY:** Paul's confidence in the midst of trying circumstances came from his faith that the God of his fathers was the God who had revealed His glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul believed that the faithfulness of God that was shown through the cross and resurrection of Jesus would sustain him through persecution and trial. Because Jesus endured opposition to bring about our salvation, we courageously testify to the gospel, even when the cost of telling the truth is high.

## HEAD:

Many believers face a difficulty and think, "Surely God wouldn't want me to go through this!" But that train of thought is not founded in Scripture. Jesus Himself was hated, scorned, lied about, falsely accused, ridiculed, and killed—and that was from His own people! Some of God's most glorious revelations come through persecution and suffering; His faithful ones do not shy from it.

**What should we do when we're tempted to avoid the hard situations we face?**

## HEART:

Paul walked into Jerusalem expecting a fight from the Jews. Because of his love for Christ and led by the Spirit, Paul still made the journey to Jerusalem. When we live out our love for God, we will walk into any situation with confidence.

**What group of people do you have a hard time extending grace and forgiveness to, and how can you confess that to God?**

## HANDS:

Paul had people all around him: traveling companions, fellow believers, and even a prophet. And yet many of them tried to talk him out of going to Jerusalem. As we clearly hear the voice of the Lord, we walk in obedience. They might think we're crazy, but our faith is in Him, first and foremost.

**How have you responded recently to the Spirit's guidance in growing God's kingdom?**

**PRAY:** Lord, we know Your Spirit is given to all who believe, and we have seen today that You guide us through that Spirit. May we yield to Him each and every day, trusting and obeying.

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Paul . . . shows us that we must have the courage to be vulnerable and speak personally about what the gospel means to us. Why? Because Christianity is an appeal to bring our whole life, mind and heart, to Christ. To leave out how we think, or how we feel, is to give an incomplete picture of how comprehensive Christian commitment is."<sup>2</sup>

—Timothy Keller  
(1950–2023)

## **POINT 1: FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT REQUIRES HOLDING AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE (ACTS 20:22-24).**

### **+ COMMENTARY**

“Paul saw his life toward himself as sacrifice. He only lived for one reason, and that’s to finish the work the Lord gave him to do, and that’s all. He says, ‘I want to finish my course and the ministry’ —and look at this— ‘that the Lord gave me. I received it of the Lord.’ Listen, if you really believe that God has given you the ministry, and that he’s in control of your life, you’re not going to worry about dying; you’re not going to worry about anything. You’re going to take it and spend it on him, because you know he’s in charge of it. . . . You should risk everything so that you fulfill your ministry, and then when you’re done, you can go and be with the Lord. That’s Paul’s passion. He says, ‘I’m not going to be worried about what they do to me. I’m just going to finish the job, and when I’m done I’ll go.’ Finish preaching. Oh, beloved, he saw his ministry in the right perspectives: service toward the Lord, teaching toward the church, evangelism toward the lost, sacrifice toward self.”<sup>3</sup>

### **+ ILLUSTRATION**

Illustrate with a “bigger and better” scavenger hunt. Hold up a pencil or a paper clip and ask, “Would anyone trade me something bigger or better than this?” Hopefully, someone will give you a quarter, a tissue, or something from a pocket, purse, or wallet. Take that item, hold it up, and ask again, “Would anyone trade me something bigger or better than this? (Normally done at a teen birthday party or in a youth group, students would trade with varying neighbors and come back at the end of an hour with whatever a stranger would trade, sometimes a broken kayak or microwave. But because this is an adult group and not a group of teens, you may get some funny looks. Persevere; it will be worth it.)

After a few trades, consider what might have happened if you’d attempted the illustration in your sanctuary or in a large crowd. Say, “You may have thought that my initial item wasn’t worth much, and maybe it really wasn’t, but we all saw the value when it was traded.” Explain that Paul declared that “I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself” (Acts 20:24). Challenge learners to consider how Paul’s statement about the value of his life was not actually a reflection of his ministry or even his diligence for Christ, but for his concern to preserve it when the threat of danger arose. Like your pencil or paper clip, Paul knew his life’s value came from being given away willingly, just as Jesus demonstrated.

# EXTRA

## POINT 2: FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT REQUIRES TRUSTING THE LORD'S WILL (ACTS 21:10-14).

### + COMMENTARY

“Paul did not deny the validity of the prophecy (v. 13) but declared that he was willing even to die. This Agabus had not foretold. The passage gives the distinct impression that not alone the delivery of a sum of money, nor the fulfillment of a personal desire to celebrate a Jewish festival at Jerusalem drove Paul on his course. It was nothing less than a principle which must be defended that led Paul to risk life itself in his attempt. Here is something closely akin to the determination of Jesus, some thirty years before, to go up to Jerusalem. . . . Paul’s sacrifice was just as real, even though he did not at that time lose his life. Paul literally gave up his life for the Gentile cause—for the principle involved in his empire-wide mission.”<sup>4</sup>

### + ILLUSTRATION

In 2011, Laura Story released a song called “Blessings” on her album of the same name. Make plans for your group to listen to the song. Before listening to the song, point out that the song was written about almost losing her husband to a brain tumor and reminds us that sometimes struggles are blessings in disguise.

After listening to the song, point out the similarity between the lyrics and Paul’s situation. He, chose to follow through on God’s plan for his life although it would lead to suffering and persecution. Yet his resolve led to the gospel being shared and people hearing his testimony about the truth of Jesus Christ.

Then turn the activity back to your group, asking, “Has there been a time in your life when you were certain of the Lord’s will for you and you were also certain that it was going to cause pain, hurt, and distress, not only for you but for your family?” Be prepared to share your own story first. This is a sensitive topic, and learners may not feel comfortable sharing. Say something along the lines of this: “Unfortunately, Paul isn’t the only one who would suffer as he followed God’s plan for his life. But we can learn from his example: he would not be persuaded to turn away from God’s path because there are greater blessings to be found, even in our earthly suffering.”

## POINT 3: FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT REQUIRES PROCLAIMING JESUS BOLDLY (ACTS 22:11-21).

### + COMMENTARY

“Now look at the mob. The word is admittedly not a very elegant one, but no other suits the occasion. Yet can we feel in our hearts anything of anger in the presence of that mob? Ought we not rather to feel the infinite sadness of the fact that any measure of conviction that came to that city had been weakened by the failure of the witness? That city had passed under the spell of the power of Christ on the day of Pentecost, even though they had rejected Him in the days of His flesh. . . . The arresting fact as we look at this crowd of Jews is that of their frenzy. It is an Oriental picture, perfectly natural; the tearing of garments, the flinging of dust into the air, as the result of the emotion that seized them. They were silent enough at first; they listened to all the earlier parts of that wonderful address characterized by so fine a courtesy and so definite a testimony. The occasion of the sudden outburst was one word—‘Gentiles.’ We cannot read that address of Paul, and believe that he had finished where he ended. It is most certain that he was going on, but he said ‘Gentiles,’ and in a moment the frenzy of the crowd was manifested. It was an expression of prejudice and of pride; prejudice which resulted from a false view of themselves in the economy of God. . . . They had taken a false view of themselves, and they would be true to that at all costs. . . . They believed that God had no care for those Gentile nations, except that of governing them and smashing them if they stood in the way of the Jew. That was their outlook, that was their mistake, that was their prejudice.”<sup>5</sup>

### + OPTIONAL DISCUSSION

The term “Gentiles” is sometimes translated “pagans,” “nations,” or “heathens.” They all mean the same thing: not Jews. Granted, God had chosen the descendants of Abraham to be His chosen nation, promising that He would bless those who blessed them and curse those who cursed them (Gen. 12:3). At Mount Sinai, He made a solemn covenant with the descendants of Abraham, now led by Moses. No other nation had this kind of relationship with God. And He instructed them to be very guarded in their interactions with other nations, noting their wretched lifestyle and abominable worship practices. Yet we also see in 1 Kings 8:41-43 that Solomon saw something different about the Gentiles: the door was never closed to any person from any place or people group who wished to serve the Lord.

Jesus most certainly revealed the acceptance of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. In Simeon’s prophecy about the infant Jesus, he said that He would be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32). Jesus began ministering to the Jews and called only Jews to be his group of twelve disciples, but with His final words to them, He instructed them to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Through the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Gentiles (see 10:45; 11:1). Though the Gentiles had, for many centuries, not known God, Jesus explained that the time had come to take the message of Yahweh and His Messiah to them.

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