

EARLY CHURCH AND YOU



KNOW THE BIBLE, FEAR THE LORD

2017 OCTOBER DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

(PUBLISHED BY CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHINESE CHURCH)

Introduction To Quiet Time/Personal Devotion

What Is Quiet Time/Personal Devotion: Quiet Time or Personal Devotion is more than just reading the Bible, it is a time of fellowship and dating with God. It is a time to get to know God and His will more as well as to enjoy His presence. Since personal devotion is a process of communication, it involves both “listening” (Reading His Word, Meditating, and Reflecting) and “talking” (Praying, Responding, and Devoting) to Him.

Time and Place: Choose a quiet place and a set time. If possible, morning is most ideal. If you must choose another time, choose a time when you can be most serene and alert. Also, make sure that you do your devotion before you spend time on the computer, TV, internet, or games so that your mind will not be filled with distractions that prevent you from meditating on God’s words.

Focus: Ask God to quiet your heart and to open your eyes so that you can understand God’s words. You can also praise God or sing a short hymn to Him.

Read & Reread: Read the Scripture carefully and meditate on what God is telling you. Usually, you may not be able to understand the meaning and essence of a passage when you first read it; only through repetition and meditation can one gain meaningful insights.

Using the Devotional Booklet: ①Please follow the steps in this booklet to first calm your heart with a short prayer and praise, then read and reread the given passage, and answer the questions accordingly. Then read the contributor’s insights and see how you could apply what you have learned in your life. Finally, end your Quiet Time with prayer and ask God to help you live out His words. ②Besides the reflection questions, notes, and applications, this booklet also asks the reader to fill in the date and time of each daily devotion so that the reader can evaluate his/her devotional life more precisely. ③The Scriptures quoted in this booklet are from NIV (1984). We would encourage you not to use the Bible Apps in your cell phone to read the Scriptures lest you will be distracted by the notifications or incoming calls. ④This Devotion booklet is contributed by various staff of the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church and is first written in either Chinese or English, and translated by other brothers and sisters. The contribution of the staff as well as of the translators is deeply appreciated. At times, some devotions are written in both languages by the contributor. ⑤Memory verses may be quoted for meditation and memorization depending on the context and as needed; thus, it may not be provided daily.

Be The Lord's Witnesses

Passage: Acts 1:1-15

October 1

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 1:1-15 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts were written by Luke the physician to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). In Acts the author specifically stated that he had written a former book (1:1), and the concluding section of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 24:36-53) is related to the beginning section of Acts (1:1-14). This shows that Acts is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke.

The word "Power" (δύναμιν) evolved into the English word "dynamite." "Power" and "miracles" (2:22) are the same word; this showed that the power the disciples received was not ordinary but it could change people's hearts.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 1:1-15 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. When the disciples saw the risen Lord on earth for the last time, what were they most concerned about?

2. Without hesitation Jesus gave the disciples a clear command. What was the command?

When the disciples saw the risen Lord on earth for the last time, they were most concerned about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. They had been waiting for a governmental, territorial and political kingdom. Therefore, they asked about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Even more so they hoped for this kingdom to come soon!

The question that the disciples asked showed two misconceptions. The first misconception was that they wished to establish a utopia through the kingdom of Israel; and the second misconception was that heavenly blessings would come at that time. The coming of the heavenly kingdom was the main theme from the teaching of Jesus. All the miracles and wonders that Jesus did were to testify that God's kingdom had already come. And yet the kingdom that Jesus talked about was not physical and political, but a life changing one. Whoever is willing to receive Jesus as Savior, and let God take control — God's will and His sovereignty will reign in his life. The risen Lord wanted the disciples to shift their attention from looking vertically for the restoration of the nation of Israel, to looking horizontally at lives that needed to be changed among the nations. Therefore, without hesitation He gave the disciples a clear command: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). This command can be summarized into four points:

1. At Pentecost all the Jews who came to Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit (2:1-13), then it came to the crowd in Samaria (8:5-17), afterwards it came to Cornelius who represented the Gentiles (10:44-47); finally it came to the 12 disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus (19:1-7). These four comings of the Holy Spirit testified what Jesus has promised!
2. The "power" that the disciples received was not just ordinary power, but it could change peoples' hearts. And the greater miracle is that peoples' lives are changed!
3. To become a witness means the emphasis is on using your life to witness God. The term "Martyrs" comes from the word "witness" (μάρτυρες). This means that the disciples would witness Jesus with their lives, even to the point of losing their lives. The disciples had to proclaim the good news of the heavenly kingdom verbally and through their lives.
4. The spreading of the gospel is progressive, from near to far, first from Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria, finally to all nations and the people at the ends of the earth. It surpasses regions,

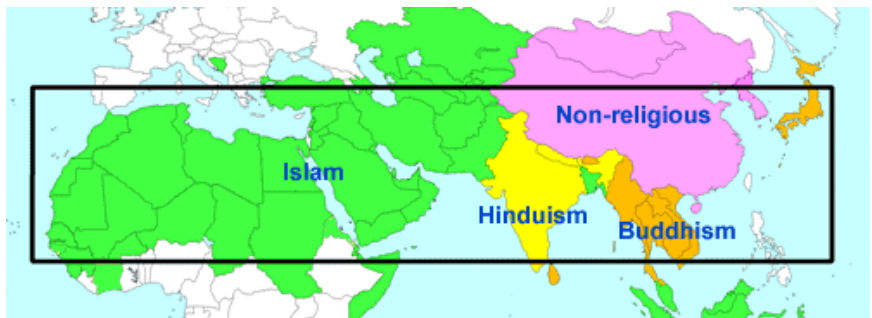
racess and cultures. It started from the same culture (Jews), progressed to similar culture (the Samaritans), and at last crossed culture to the Gentiles. Today there are approximately 10,000 people groups that live within the 10/40 window*, who are still waiting to hear the gospel. The Holy Spirit that came at Pentecost is still moving believers to spread the gospel to these people today. The task is tremendous and needs many workers. Who is willing to be sent?

APPLICATION: God's desire is to have all nations hear the gospel through those who follow Jesus. Whether the disciples were scattered willingly or by force, the gospel was spread. If you are willing to be a blessing to others, how would you share the gospel with your family, neighbors and co-workers? Please make a practical plan.

MEMORY VERSE: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

* The 10/40 Window is the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude. Two-thirds of the world's population live in the 10/40 Window. 87% are the poorest of the poor and 95% of the people are un-evangelized.



Who Will Take Part In The Ministry?

Passage: Acts 1:15-26

October 2

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 1:15-26 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "cast lots": the Israelites used this method to ask God to show them His will. For example: Joshua conquered and allotted land (Joshua 23:4), and the Israelites cast lot and found out that Jonathan tasted honey (1 Samue14:42), etc. Although the apostles cast lots, it was the Lord who decided; as it is written, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). Casting lots could be considered as a "temporary measure" before the coming of the Holy Spirit. However, there is no need for this practice after the coming of the Holy Spirit, for believers already have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and should follow His guidance (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18).

Peter asked all the apostles to choose another man to replace Judas, and they set some strict criteria. They proposed two men, Matthias and Justus. Both men had been followers of Jesus from the beginning, had seen all that the Lord had done, had heard all the teachings from the Lord, and could testify to the power of His resurrection. Justus did not refrain from serving even though he was not chosen. He became a faithful servant of the gospel among the believers. Matthias remained in Judea to witness for the Lord, and was stoned to death by the Jews. He died as a martyr for the Lord.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 1:15-26 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Why did the apostles not wait for the Holy Spirit to come before choosing a replacement? Why did they need to have 12 apostles?

2. What were the election processes and qualifications?

There was a connection between how the apostles chose Matthias to replace Judas with how Jesus chose the 12 disciples. (Luke 6:12-16) The number of disciples equals the 12 tribes of Israel and it represents God's people. The process of choosing Matthias included prayer, detailed consideration, discussions, and casting lots to arrive at a decision. First they listed the qualifications of the candidate: he must have been with the rest of the apostles starting from John's baptism to the time when they witnessed the resurrection of Jesus (vs.21-22). They followed these two objective qualifications, proposed two candidates whom everyone knew, entrusted them to the Lord through prayer, and finally cast lots for a decision.

APPLICATION: In order to be a first century apostle, one had to have seen the Lord, have worked along with Him, and have borne witness for Him. Although we have not seen the Lord with our physical eyes, we must have experienced Him. Please quiet down before the Lord, reflect on how you have experienced God in the past, and how you could walk and work with Him in the days to come.

MEMORY VERSE: "Then they prayed, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry...' Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles." Acts 1:24-26

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

The Early Church And You

Passage: Acts 2:14-47

October 3

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 2:14-47 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: As the crowd was amazed at how the Holy Spirit enabled disciples to speak in other languages, Peter proclaimed the gospel to them. The Book of Acts records five sermons on the gospel preached by Peter. The first four sermons were preached to the Jews, and the fifth to Cornelius.

There were at least two reasons why “all the believers were together and had everything in common” as recorded in Acts 2:44-45. Firstly, at that time there were many widows who needed help (6:1-7). Also Palestine was undergoing political upheavals and famines, which caused many believers to experience financial hardships; therefore, the church in Jerusalem had a great need to share their resources. Secondly, most of the believers in the church of Jerusalem were Jews, and they strongly identified themselves as the remnant of Israel. They believed that the kingdom of the Messiah would come soon; and in this kingdom everyone would obey God's commands, and no one would be poor. In order to fulfill God's commands, they provided for the needy and lived life as one in Christ.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 2:14-47 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What was the main point of Peter's sermon?

The believers in the early church often met to learn God's word (2:42), to continue to have fellowship together (2:46), to pray together (2:46), and to worship God at home and at the temple courts (2:46). The most noticeable characteristic of this lively spiritual fellowship was the sharing of everything among one another (2:44-45). The believers truly recognized that all that they owned were blessings from God, so they were ready to share with any brothers and sisters who were in need. Therefore, they enjoyed the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (2:47). Today when we gather at church, do we impact lives through prayer, worship, fellowship and sharing with one another? If we could live like the early church, more people would be moved to believe in God.

APPLICATION: The believers in the early church recognized all that they owned were blessings from God. Therefore, at any time they were ready to share with any brothers and sisters who were in need. How do you view the abilities, spiritual gifts, and material wealth that God has given you? How do you plan to offer your abilities, spiritual gifts and material wealth to God, so that you could be a blessing to others? Please list out your plan.

MEMORY VERSE: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:44-47

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Salvation Is The Power Of God

Passage: Acts 3:1-26

October 4

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 3:1-26 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: According to the decrees in the Old Testament, no man who had a defect or who was lame could come near the LORD (cf. Leviticus 21:16-23), nor could they enter the Holy Temple. We can imagine how difficult the life of a man crippled from birth was. He needed to rely on others, to be carried around, to depend on charity; and he lost all his dignity. Yet most tragic of all, he was kept outside of the Holy Temple so he was not able to worship God.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 3:1-26 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How did Peter and John heal the man crippled from birth? Where did the healing power come from?
2. What can we learn from the response of the lame man after he was healed?
3. After Peter and John healed the lame man in front of the Temple, Peter spontaneously preached. What message was he affirming in his preaching?

In the book of Acts, Luke described the lame man who sat begging at the temple gate called Beautiful. Though he was over forty, he was carried everyday to be laid at the passage way most travelled by people going to the Temple — the gate called Beautiful. The devout Jews would come to the gate three times a day to enter the Temple. Year after year, this man who was crippled at birth, depended on the charity of all the people entering the Temple. On this day, God's grace and mercy was upon him suddenly. Through Peter and John, God gave him more than he asked and imagined – not silver or gold, but the ability to walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The result was that he was completely healed. Unfortunately, nowadays, there are many who own much silver and gold, but have no trace of Jesus in their lives. After being healed, the man was ecstatic, he was walking, jumping and praising God. We can learn from the responses of others that he was a testimony of God's power by his acts and expressions. Who would not be amazed at a man crippled at birth, being able to walk and dance to praise God? In this miracle, it was not the power of Peter and John, nor the faith of the lame, but the wonderful name of the LORD that had immeasurable power to revive a man and made him a new creation. God used the healing of a man crippled at birth to be a testimony of the power of the gospel.

After healing the lame man, Peter took the opportunity to preach (Acts 3:12-26). He promptly revisited God's plan of sending Messiah for the Jewish audiences and reminded them the covenant between Abraham and God: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through your offspring". May we bless the unsaved through our faith and obedience.

APPLICATION: The lame man used his acts to testify to the power of God, walking, jumping and praising God. How would you testify your change so you can attract others to believe in Jesus? Set some workable plans to become a blessing to others.

MEMORY VERSE: "Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'" Acts 3:6

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Set Your Heart on Whom You Believe

Passage: Acts 4:1-32

October 5

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 4:1-32 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Salvation" (σωτηρία) comes from the two words "saved" and "healed."

"Lord" δεσπότης is a title that was less used by the authors in the New Testament. Many Chinese and English versions use the more correct term "Sovereign Lord." This word could also be translated as "autocratic", which means the master has absolute dominion over his slave.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 4:1-32 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Peter and John faced opposition as they proclaimed the gospel. On their release, they prayed with the believers. What did they pray about? What can you learn from the prayer?

2. Even though the disciples experienced much opposition as they proclaimed the gospel, they still set their heart in trusting God. What are some of the characteristics of the Lord in whom the disciples believed (4:10-12)?

Luke recorded a corporate prayer of the church. This could have been the longest prayer in the public. The event started when Peter and John were at the temple gate called Beautiful and healed a man crippled from birth (3:2; 4:22). The priests and elders warned and commanded them to speak no longer to anyone about the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples faced opposition as they proclaimed the gospel. As a result, they firmly declared that they could not help speaking about what they had seen and heard (4:19). When the believers heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God (4:24a). The format of the disciples' prayer is as follows: crying out to the Lord, quoting from the Old Testament, explaining, and asking. Peter and the disciples prayed for boldness and courage to speak God's word. They asked God to look upon them and care for them in their present difficult situation.

The disciples knew the one they believed in was the Lord who controlled all, died and resurrected. He took the initiative to enter into the disciples' lives, gave them courage and boldness to speak God's Word, to heal the sick and to perform miracles. John obeyed the Lord's command and proclaimed God's salvation in Jerusalem. Even when they were seized to stand in front of the Sanhedrin to defend the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter boldly proclaimed, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Today, if it were not because of God's salvation, those in our community and the unreached people in the world, would not have hope at present, in the future, or in eternity.

APPLICATION: As you witness for Jesus Christ and share the gospel with others, what hardships do you face? What are you most afraid of? Please make a list and give it to God. Ask God to give you the courage, boldness and wisdom to overcome the fear.

MEMORY VERSE: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
Acts 4:12

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

and became believers; however, some dared not join the apostles (vs. 13). Even worse was when the Sadducees in the Sanhedrin were filled with jealousy after they failed to persecute the apostles. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail (vs. 17-18). But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out (vs. 19), so that they could continue to tell the message of this new life in the temple courts.

Peter had a firsthand experience of the impact from the message of this new life. Even though he was being persecuted and threatened, he would not give up proclaiming Jesus. So, as the religious leaders threatened Peter, he replied with determination, “we must obey God rather than men!” (vs.29) Let us pray that God will enable us to have such determination, boldness to share the message of this new life, so that it may fill the whole world.

Again the apostles were persecuted by the Sanhedrin and they wanted to put the apostles to death (vs. 33). However, at that critical moment, God used an ally, who was a Pharisee named Gamaliel in the Sanhedrin, to save the apostles from danger and death at that time. After the apostles left the Sanhedrin, again with boldness they defied the strict orders from the religious courts. Whether they were in public or private, in the temple courts or at home, the apostles never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is Christ (vs. 42).

APPLICATION: It was through a Pharisee named Gamaliel who saved the apostles from danger. They experienced how God worked through people helping one another out of challenging situations. Recall a time when you were in an adverse situation, how did God protect you? Today if you were in a hardship or even a crisis for the sake of the gospel, how would you face it?

MEMORY VERSE: “Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’”
Acts 5:29

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Acts chapter 7 recorded the speech and argument delivered by Stephen in front of the Jews and the high priest who attacked, accused and opposed him. Stephen had a clear mind, passionate attitude and possessed sharp words that no one could top. In his speech, Stephen pointed out the rebellious and faithless nature of the Israelites who rejected and killed Christ despite of the experiences of Abraham, Joseph and Moses. He also relentlessly and directly pointed out the errors in the Jewish faith, which infuriated the people of the Sanhedrin who falsely accused him. The people in the Sanhedrin became as angry as a beast. They covered their ears, yelling at the top of their voices and rushed and dragged him out of the city. They all wanted to throw out the first stone to silence him; but Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Before he died, he witnessed to the crowd: "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God". Facing flying fists and stones raining upon him, Stephen prayed and moved us, he asked the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit. This martyr acknowledged Jesus being Lord till his death. Furthermore, he cared for the ones who intended to kill him and asked the Lord not to hold this sin against them (7:59, 60). He followed the prayer of Christ before His death, and he practiced the true love of Christ.

APPLICATION: They say, "How far will I go for something?" Likewise, you can ask, "How far will I go for the gospel I believe in?"

MEMORY VERSE: "That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."
2 Timothy 1:12

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Although our most familiar way of doing missions is with believers volunteering to be missionaries; historically, churches took a more passive role in missions. Quiet often, believers would come in contact with gentiles only when they were arrested or driven out. Acts 8 describes such a circumstance in which Christians began to spread the gospel under persecutions. Similarly, God is still calling His people to go into mission today; however, many Christians are concerned about living a comfortable life yet neglecting God's great commission. Often, God is like the mother eagle that stirs her nest, urging her children to fly and to bring forth their new life. Let us go after God's heart!

The apostles still remained in Jerusalem while the disciples were scattered. The reason was that in Jerusalem the apostles had a strong reputation and influence as they performed many miraculous signs and wonders. The religious leaders were fearful of the massive crowd so they dared not openly attack and persecute the apostles (5:26). Also, the apostles believed that the restoration of the kingdom of Israel was near, and that it would happen in Jerusalem; therefore, the apostles remained in Jerusalem while the disciples scattered throughout.

APPLICATION: The growth of the early church relied solely on the apostles and disciples proclaiming Jesus Christ by working and complementing one another, each one doing his work according to his gifts, and serving together with one heart in various posts. Similarly, what spiritual gifts can you use to work with brothers and sisters at church, so that you can fulfill God's great commission?

MEMORY VERSE: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." Ephesians 4:11-12

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Gospel Door Opened For The Gentiles

Passage: Acts 8:5-25

October 9

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 8:5-25 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 8:5-25 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Philip was tremendously effective while ministering in Samaria, he led many to Christ. Why do you think the converts did not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John arrived in their midst and placed their hands on them (8:15-17)?

2. Philip was the first to enter into Samaria and he was also the first who obeyed the Lord's command to bring the gospel from Jerusalem to Samaria. For the Jews who had a sense of superiority, it was not an easy command to follow. Yet, Philip obeyed the Holy Spirit who sent him and accomplished this great mission. Where is your Samaria? Contemplate on that and write down how you will bring the gospel there.

Stephen and Philip opened the gate for gentiles to receive the gospel. Stephen was martyred, the church was persecuted, the believers scattered and the gospel was spread. Philip was tremendously effective while spreading the gospel in Samaria, leading many to Christ. Philip preached effectively not only to the crowd but also to Simon who practiced sorcery. Philip cast out many evil spirits and healed many who were sick. He started the missionary work across race, geographical territories, and political groups.

The gospel reaching Samaria was a fulfillment of the promise Jesus mentioned before He ascended to heaven. Due to the long standing strife between the Samaritan clan and the Jewish people, God wanted to use the representatives from the Jerusalem church, namely Peter and John, to lay hands upon the Samaritans before the Holy Spirit would arrive. It was to make the apostles realize that the gospel indeed arrived at Samaria.

APPLICATION: Philip was a Jew, yet he shared the gospel with Samaritans who were despised by the Jews. That was a beautiful testimony that displayed the great love of Christ. Think about the different race and faith groups you encounter nowadays, how many of them have yet to hear the gospel and what might stop you from responding to their needs? How would you overcome these prejudices or obstacles?

MEMORY VERSE: “When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.”
Acts 8:6

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Philip did not return to Jerusalem with Peter and Paul. An angel of the Lord directed him to go south down to Gaza. On his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus (8:31-35). The eunuch believed and was baptized. Later it was through this eunuch that the gospel was spread to Africa. How wonderful! Philip not only spread the gospel to Samaria, but also to the land of the Gentiles. Today, there are many biblical literatures and evangelistic mass media targeting the unreached people, yet they have the same need as the Ethiopian eunuch. They need someone to be there to help them, to explain what they have read and heard. Ask God to send more workers to go among the unreached people, and to tell them about Jesus Christ.

Philip obeyed and the eunuch was blessed. In the past, Reverend Hudson Taylor followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit, committed to bring the Gospel beyond the bustling cities along the China coast into the backcountries. When Dr. Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, was a missionary in Guatemala, he followed God's instructions and accepted the challenge from the natives to translate the bible into their native language; thus the gospel reached the native groups. Many people would be blessed when we obey God and spread the gospel.

APPLICATION: Please quiet down and contemplate: The nonbelievers in your community, your closed relatives and friends, your co-workers, and all the unreached people in the world; which group is your immediate target to share the gospel with? Make a plan to share the gospel with them within the next few months. God wants to use you. He wants you to leave your comfort zone and be an obedient child of God.

MEMORY VERSE: "Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea."
Acts 8:40

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Saul's experience of returning to the Lord: He fell to the ground near Damascus and lost his eyesight for three days before he could see again. God even searched out and called for Saul Himself. God helped Saul through Ananias, and called Saul to preach the gospel to the gentiles. Ananias was not afraid of the difficult mission. After he received the clear explanation and instruction from God, he did not hesitate to take the risk of helping Saul to believe in Jesus. Thus, the gospel reached the gentiles through God's chosen instrument — Saul.

Ananias was a disciple who willingly obeyed God's commands. When the Lord called to him in a vision, his response was "Yes, Lord" (9:10b). After some clarification, "Ananias went" (9:17a). The short sentences reflect that Ananias was an obedient disciple of God.

APPLICATION: We may not share Saul's experience of dramatic repentance and his specific calling, but every Christian has a mission entrusted to him by God. Please list down what mission(s) God is waiting for you to accomplish faithfully.

MEMORY VERSE: "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.'" Acts 9:15

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Peter must have been astonished when he heard Cornelius's testimony of his vision, because before that, Peter had his own vision. He saw something like a large sheet containing all kinds of impure or unclean living things and a voice told him to get up, kill and eat. This vision was from God to Peter. God wanted Peter to understand that in His eyes, all are equal. This confirmed that the Gentile believers and the Jewish believers are perfectly equal. Peter was finally enlightened that God did not show favoritism. He then explained the words of Jesus Christ to the Roman officer and his friends and family. After Cornelius and his whole family believed, the house of Cornelius became the church of Caesarea and that was the first gentile church established by God outside of Israelites. Cornelius blazed the trail for Gentiles to believe in God.

Peter experienced the transformation away from ethnocentrism. He dared to break through the deep-rooted traditions of the Jews. He was willing to be close to the Gentiles and realized that the Gentiles could also be children of God. Through Peter, Cornelius and his family had a new understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They repented and accepted the gospel. Like Peter, we can also understand that God does not show favoritism, we can overcome our prejudice and let go of subjective self-obsession in order to respond to the vast needs of spreading gospel to the world.

APPLICATION: The experience of Cornelius shows us that no matter how good a person is, or how high his religious zeal can reach; those virtues are not the source of his salvation. People still need to hear the message and accept that Jesus is the salvation of the world. Try to recall and list out the similar or different experiences that you had when you were saved versus how Cornelius was saved. How did those experiences influence you?

MEMORY VERSE: “³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right’”

Acts 10:34, 35

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

After questioning Peter about why the Gentiles in Caesarea could accept Christ, the Jewish people in Jerusalem finally realized that the gospel was also for the Gentiles. How wonderful it is! But what seemed to be a simple truth, required Peter to explain in detail the three visions he received and how the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and his family, before the Jewish people would slowly come to realize that God had the same plan of salvation for everyone. That is the heart of God's love. Many today (including believers) are slow, dull or even blind in spiritual matters, we need more patience from God to share and to lead others to the truth.

APPLICATION: When you encounter someone who does not understand the gospel, how would you further share with him? Please write down some possible steps or ways. On the other hand, how would you treat your brothers and sisters who are slow in understanding God's words or His will?

MEMORY VERSE: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'" Acts 11:18

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Those disciples who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch and he brought a great number of people to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, brought him back to Antioch, and served in the church together. The disciples were called “Christians” first at Antioch. The name was given by the Gentiles to the believers because they often talked about Christ. When the gospel reached beyond the Jews and extended to the Gentiles, its effect was not just as a sect of Judaism. It had become a new and independent religion.

At first the Jews only shared the gospel to their “own people,” but later it also reached “the Gentiles” and told them. Similarly, the majority of the Chinese churches today still focus on spreading the gospel among the Chinese. Let us look forward to spreading the gospel beyond where the Chinese live, and go to the unreached people all over the world.

APPLICATION: The true meaning of a Christian indicates a disciple who is willing to follow Christ, to belong to Christ, to dedicate, to commit, and to serve in the work of spreading the gospel. Today you are also called a Christian. Please contemplate on the areas in your life that need renewal and change, so that you could become a true disciple who follows Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” 1 Peter 4:16

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Devote Yourselves To Prayer, God Will Make a Way

Passage: Acts 12:1-24

October 15

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 12:1-24 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTES: Chapters 1 to 11 in the Book of Acts record the persecutions suffered by the Jews at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders, and chapter 12 describes the first time the church faced conflict with the political power. This chapter records: the martyrdom of James executed by Herod, the imprisonment of Peter and his rescue by God, and the death of Herod, who was eaten by worms.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 12:1-24 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How did Peter escape from the prison?

2. What was Rhoda's response when she recognized Peter's voice at the outer entrance? Why did the others not believe what Rhoda said?

The Bible continuously reminds us that whenever things seem to get out of control, God will intervene if His children join together in prayer. Just like when Herod put Peter in prison with the intention of killing him after the Passover, the church gathered at the house of Mary to pray for Peter earnestly. That night, a servant girl name Rhoda (from the house of Mary, the mother of Mark) also joined the others to pray for Peter. As they were praying, an amazing thing happened—Rhoda heard knocking and went to answer the door, when she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that she ran back without opening it and told everyone the good news. At that moment, Rhoda’s exclaim interrupted their praying; but they did not believe her and even said she was out of her mind. Rhoda did not keep quiet even though those who prayed did not believe her; instead she kept insisting that it was Peter. Later, it proved that Rhoda’s firm belief was true. Whereas the people’s faith seemed lacking, Rhoda’s faith was praiseworthy; surely Peter must have commended her for it.

As believers we often encounter difficult circumstances and some even seem hopeless; yet never forget that God can deliver, He already provided a way out for us. What we need to do is to pray, and God will make a way in His time.

APPLICATION: When you encounter difficulties that may seem hopeless, how do you deal with them? What encouragement did you receive from Peter’s rescue?

MEMORY VERSE: “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Mark 11:24

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

The Mission Of The Church

Passage: Acts 13:1-15

October 16

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 13:1-15 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTES: "They" included all the members of the church "serving the Lord", which was translated to be "worshipping the Lord" (13:2a). To worship is to serve; when the people come to know God through worship, at the same time they also realize their own spiritual condition.

Luke introduced Paul as "Saul, who was also called Paul" (13:9). When the Jews were living under the Roman government, they were given both Jewish and Roman names at birth. Saul was a Jewish name, and Paul was the Roman name. Since Paul was also a Roman citizen, he used this name so that it would be easier for the Gentiles to know and accept him.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 13:1-15 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How did the church at Antioch become the first church to send off missionaries?

2. The Apostle Paul used to be against the Truth, but because of God's grace he became a believer of Christ. Furthermore, he proclaimed the message of Christ with earnestness. What was the mission that God gave him? What lessons can you learn from Paul's evangelism strategies?

The key figure in chapter 13 from the Book of Acts shifted from Peter who proclaimed the gospel to the Jews, to Saul who evangelized to the Gentiles; and from the church of Jerusalem, to the church in Antioch. In fact, the church of Jerusalem was not mentioned until the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15.

The leaders of the church at Antioch came from all over the world: Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement) was a Levite from Cyprus (4:36) who was a highly respected leader. Another leader was one from Africa who could have been Simon from Cyrene, the one who carried the cross for Jesus (Luke 23:26). The third leader was Lucius of Cyprene who was one of the founders of the early church (11:20). The fourth leader was Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. Lastly, Saul from Tarsus in Cilicia, became a great missionary and theologian. These five leaders reflected that the church at Antioch was a multiethnic and multicultural church.

The Book of Acts recorded the three mission trips that Paul took and his trial in Rome. During the first mission trip, the church at Antioch became the first church to send off two missionaries, Barnabas and Saul. In this trip they mainly worked in Western and Northern Palestine, visited Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and then returned to Antioch in Syria. For this trip Barnabas and Saul invited Mark as their helper (13:5); however, soon after they started the trip, Mark decided not to go on. It was possible that Mark was feeling homesick or worried about the hard work ahead;

another reason could be the changes in evangelism strategies and routes, which meant the shift from evangelizing the Jews to the Gentiles. Later in A.D.50-52, Mark took part in the second mission trip. At that time Paul had not yet been able to receive Mark back to the mission team, yet according to a letter Paul wrote later while being imprisoned, Mark was described as being helpful to him in his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11b). Later Mark evangelized in Egypt and founded a church at Alexandria.

When God calls believers to go into missions, He must first prepare them by having them serve in the church, because it is the place where God calls and trains His workers. When the believers in Antioch cared for the church and served the Lord, God was also preparing them and eventually sent them off afar to proclaim the Good News to those who had never heard it. Today, God is still working in a similar manner, calling the believers in the local churches to be trained to proclaim the Good News to the whole world.

APPLICATION: Which church ministry are you serving in currently? How does your serving equip you to evangelize effectively? If you have not participated in a ministry, which area would you like to serve in? Why?

MEMORY VERSE: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Paul understood that the Jews in Antioch were familiar with the history of Israel. So, he started his message using their background as a point of contact for sharing the gospel. Similarly, when we witness the gospel, we can also use personal testimonies or experiences of the audiences to be the point of contact or entry. For example, if we know someone is afraid of death, we can then use our own fear of death before our conversion to speak about the eternal life. For someone who lacks security, we can point out the fact that God will come to our aid and watch over us, He is our refuge in life. For someone who lives under pressure, we can share how we receive the peace from God when we are under pressure. For someone who feels a heavy sense of guilt, we can share our experience of how God forgives our sins. These are all conversational topics concerning the gospel and the points of contact when sharing the gospel. We can use them to inspire others' interest in the gospel. However, we eventually need to reach the core of the gospel and that would be who Jesus is and what He did. He died for the sins of the world, overcame death, and resurrected to give eternal life to those who trust in Him.

On the following Sabbath, almost the whole city (Jews and Gentiles) gathered to hear the word of the Lord. At that time, the Jews rejected Paul's testimony and talked abusively against what Paul was saying due to jealousy. Because they refused this mission, they refused not only Paul and the Gentiles, they refused God Himself. Therefore, Paul then turned to the Gentiles, for the Lord had commanded them to be a light for the Gentiles.

APPLICATION: In order to deliver the gospel, one has to read the Bible constantly, have a close relationship with God, understand and share God's words, and call all men to be saved. Write down how you plan to improve your relationship with God. Try to design a Bible reading plan that fits you and be a person who knows God's will and speaks the word of God.

MEMORY VERSE: "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Acts 13:47

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Remain True To The Faith

Passage: Acts 14:1-28

October 18

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 14:1-28 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Chapter 14 records the incidents that first happened in Iconium (14:1-7) and concluded in Derbe (14:21-28). In between the two incidents was a more detailed description of what the farmers did in Lystra (14:8-20). Both Peter and Paul were God's chosen apostles in the early church. Peter preached the good news mainly to the Jews, while Paul focused on the Gentiles. Evangelizing the Jews and Gentiles was a work of continuity and unity.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 14:1-28 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How was the lame man in Lystra healed? What can you learn from the lame man's faith?

2. Why did Paul and Barnabas forbid the farmers to worship them?

The event in Lystra began with the healing of the man who was lame at birth. Since Paul saw that there was an opportunity to preach the good news, he urged the people in Lystra to turn away from the idols to serve the living God (14:11-18). This lame man first

listened to Paul as he was preaching the good news about Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and power to fulfill all the needs. As a result he had faith. As you can see, faith comes from hearing God's Word. The lame man was first healed spiritually, then healed physically. It was his inner faith that changed his life. Faith is the foundation of all miracles, "Everything is possible for those who believe."

The healing of the lame man caused the Lystra farmers to begin worshipping Barnabas and Paul. They called Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes son of Zeus, because he was the chief speaker (14:12). Their superstition originated from the Greek and Roman belief in deities. They believed the gods would come down in human form to inspect everywhere. At first, Paul did not understand what was happening because they were speaking in the Lycaonian language; until the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates (14:13), then Paul suddenly realized their intention. So he told them to stop and then preached the gospel to them. From then on, persecutions from the Jews grew more intense, yet Paul did not pass up the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul, who used to persecute believers, was now an apostle being persecuted because of Christ Jesus and the gospel!

No matter what circumstances Paul and Barnabas were in, they remained true to the faith. They regarded knowing Jesus Christ as the most precious, and continued to preach the gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles.

APPLICATION: When you share the gospel to your family members or co-workers who do not know the Lord and they reject or criticize you, how do you respond? How would you explain the gospel?

MEMORY VERSE: "Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said." Acts 14:22

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

the meeting by reminding them how the words of the prophets affirmed God's desire to include the Gentiles in His plan of salvation. They considered circumcision as unnecessary. So they wrote a letter to the church at Antioch regarding their decision and sent it with Paul and Barnabas. This decision made at the council at Jerusalem played a very important role in the history of church development. It affirmed the equality between the Jews and the Gentiles; and that salvation is available regardless of race, which means everyone can receive salvation by believing in Jesus Christ. This decision not only affirmed the status of the Gentiles in God; it also allowed the Jews to rediscover their identity, which in turn led them to realign themselves with God. The gospel was for the Jews and the Gentiles.

Today as we share the gospel, we need to know how to discern the cultural differences between the biblical times and now. Therefore, we need to be careful as we keep the truth in God's Word, but also understand the cultural differences; so that we could live out the truth in the Bible but not miss the opportunity to share the gospel in spite of the cultural differences. In this way, we can witness for the Lord more effectively, lead people to Christ, bring glory to God and help to people.

APPLICATION: We need to be sensitive to the concerns that nonbelievers have, so that it will not prevent us from sharing the gospel to them. Do you have any cultural views or habits that need adjustment, in order to be more effective in sharing the gospel to the nonbelievers who are from different cultures?

MEMORY VERSE: "that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things."
Acts 15:17

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Ministry Team Work

Passage: Acts 15:30-41

October 20

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 15:30-41 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: “sharp disagreement” (παροξυσμός, 15:39a) — This word appears in the New Testament only twice. The first time it was used positively to express how we may spur one another on toward love (cf. Hebrews 10:24). The other time it was used negatively and has the connotation that “each have their own opinions and will not back down.”

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 15:30-41 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas would have a sharp disagreement over whether or not to let Mark join again?

2. It was not pleasant to have this disagreement, but in the end, what satisfactory outcome did you observe?

After the meeting in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas started their second mission trip. However, they had a sharp disagreement over whether or not to let Mark join again. Paul did not think it wise to take Mark because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work (15:38). On the contrary, Barnabas thought Mark deserved a second chance.

It was hard to decide which one is right in this matter. Some said that Barnabas only worked with people he was close to, and Mark was his cousin (cf. Colossians 4:10). Others thought Paul was unreasonable not to accept someone who deserted halfway. This disagreement indeed was not pleasant, but in the end, you can still see a satisfactory outcome. What was one mission team, now became two. Barnabas and Mark sailed for Cyprus, their hometown, to visit the churches on their first mission trip; whereas, Paul and Silas together formed a second mission team to evangelize the Gentiles. Both teams received blessings from the brothers in the church of Antioch. About ten years later, Paul mentioned about Mark being his fellow workers in the gospel and mission work and proved himself to be a comfort to Paul (cf. Colossians 4:10-11).

God will also call for teamwork for every ministry today. It is hard work to be a team member. Each would serve according to their own gift (Romans 12:6-8); but the role each plays in the ministry are equally valuable, whether being a spiritual leader or not. Many would quit in the middle, like Mark did. Perhaps they would rather live a comfortable life and do not wish to give up individual pleasure. If so, one would not grow spiritually, nor gain the blessings from God. But, in any way, do not give up on people like that. Perhaps, like Mark, they will change one day like Paul eventually said, “he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).

APPLICATION: A ministry team has leaders of different style and personalities. Some are like Barnabas who looked out for individual welfare first. Others are like Paul who put mission first and focused on the overall ministry. In a ministry team, what type of personality do you display? What attitude would you adopt to work with others?

MEMORY VERSE: ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”
Acts 15:39-40

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Be Faithful To The Lord's Will

Passage: Acts 16:1-15

October 21

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 16:1-15 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 16:1-15 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Paul recruited Timothy to join his team of missionaries. Since Timothy's father was a Greek, why did Timothy still need to be circumcised?

2. Why did God stop them from preaching in Asia and Bithynia?

Paul and Silas brought the letter from the council at Jerusalem and "went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (15:41). Before they fully began to expand their work, they recruited one more team member, Timothy, who was spoken well of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium (16:2). Paul led Timothy to Christ during his first trip. Timothy grew in the Lord, had a good reputation, and so replaced Mark John to become a co-laborer with Paul. Timothy was a child born of an inter-racial marriage between a Gentile and Jew. His mother Eunice was a Jewess (2 Tim. 1:5), and his father was a Greek. At the time when Paul recruited Timothy, he was not circumcised which indicated that his mother did not obey the Jewish law completely. In order for Timothy to better interact with the Jews, Paul requested that he be circumcised.

Since Paul, Silas, and Timothy were kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in Asia and Bithynia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision and got ready to leave for Macedonia. After arriving at Philippi, the leading city of that district of Macedonia, they led a woman named Lydia to Christ. God reveals to us what we should do at appointed times. Paul wanted to preach in Asia and Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit kept them from it; and as a result opened the door for the gospel to reach the Gentiles in Macedonia. Often when our plans fail, we will think of reasons for the failure such as blaming others and the situation; but we seldom think about the spiritual reasons. Perhaps the failure was God's way to stop it, and know that God has the best plan for us. We need to cultivate the sense of spiritual hearing so that we can carefully hear God's voice, and be led to understand His will. From the past experiences of missionaries, we can see that God often changes plans for His servants. William Carey, the father of Mission, planned to go to the South Pacific Islands, instead God led him to India. Adoniram Judson planned to go to India, yet God prompted him to go to Burma. Dr. A.B. Simpson, the founder of Alliance church, the evangelist Billy Graham, and Rick Warren from Saddleback Church, all wanted to evangelize in China, yet God guided them to remain in America, to evangelize the local people, to establish the local churches, and mobilize evangelism ministry.

APPLICATION: God's work is amazing and surpasses all that man can imagine. By obeying God, Paul and his team went to Macedonia, preached the Word faithfully, partnered with God in His work, led Lydia to Christ, and established the church at Philippi. Try to contemplate on this: in your surroundings, be aware of any opportunities that God leads you to evangelize. How would you respond to these opportunities?

MEMORY VERSE: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

John 16:13

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

them. The earthquake happened at the time when Paul and Silas were singing hymns; all the foundations of the prisons did not shatter, the walls did not collapse, but only the prison doors flew open and every prisoner's chains came loose. What was even more astonishing was that none of the prisoners escaped. Upon seeing what happened, the jailer felt helpless thinking that the prisoners must have escaped, since the prison doors were opened. The jailer knew very well that he could not explain to the magistrates the next morning, because the prison did not suffer any damages, yet the prisoners' chains came loose and the doors flew open. At which time he would have no excuse but be blamed for being either careless or accepting bribes. Therefore, he upheld the Roman tradition of honor by attempting to kill himself to avoid shame, believing that would be the best solution!

Yet, God's purpose was to save him and his household. When he found out that Paul, Silas, and the other prisoners did not take the opportunity to escape, he asked Paul what he could do to be saved. The reasons why he asked that question could be that he had heard Paul telling people the way to be saved (16:17) and he saw the amazing things that happened; however, he did not fully understand the way to be saved. Paul challenged the jailer directly by saying: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." (16:31) Paul did not mean that by believing Jesus, the whole household will automatically receive salvation; Paul challenged the jailer that if he believed in Jesus, then he would be saved. Similarly, his household could have a chance to hear the gospel, and so they would believe in Jesus and be saved.

APPLICATION: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." What can this promise remind you of?

MEMORY VERSE: They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Acts 16:31

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Receive The Message With Great Eagerness

Passage: Acts 17:1-13

October 23

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 17:1-13 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 17:1-13 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. When Paul mentioned the Scriptures, those Jews who did not believe started a riot in the city. Which part of the Scriptures caused those Jews to do so?

2. Which identity of Christ did the Bereans want to be assured of, as they examined the Scripture everyday?

While in Thessalonica, Paul led a large number of Greeks and prominent women to Christ. In the synagogue he explained the Scriptures, talked about the life of Jesus, and proved that Jesus of Nazarene is the Messiah whom the Scriptures prophesied. When those Jews who were not believers heard such talk, they formed a mob and started a riot to attack Paul and Silas. The two men left Thessalonica at night and travelled toward the west in the southwest direction. They arrived at Berea, a town along the way to Athens.

Berea was a small town along a small road. It had a Jewish synagogue and God-fearing Gentiles who were open to the gospel. They were a group of open-minded people who were willing to let go of their preconceived religious ideas. They examined the Scriptures everyday to see if what they heard was true (namely that Christ had to suffer, rise from the dead and He is the promised Messiah). Many of them gladly received the truth and God's word and were willing to accept that Jesus is Christ. Since the Bereans were open to the gospel, Paul grasped the opportunity to preach and explain God's Word to them. Mission scholars and the experts who did research on church growth had studied how people respond to the gospel, and they came up with the Receptive-Resistant Axis that shows responses such as being hostile, resistant, indifferent, and receptive to the gospel. It is a tool to help allocate resources, arrange for manpower, and focus on the people groups that are open to the gospel.

APPLICATION: Contemplate on this: When did you accept the Lord? In the process of knowing the Lord, how did you go from being resistant to receptive? Which stage of life do you think is more receptive to the faith: high school, college, adult or senior? Which age group do you think churches should allocate more resources and manpower to reach out to? Why?

MEMORY VERSE: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."
Acts 17:11

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

sneered at the mention about the resurrection of the dead, and others were uncertain. Paul reached out to the intellectuals in Athens by discussing philosophy, but only a few men followed him and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

From one man, God made every nation of men, divided the people into smaller groups, and encouraged man to seek the truth. He also provided ways to spread the news that Christ Jesus saves (17:26-27). In evangelism ministry, there is a time for reaping, and a time for loosening the soil or sowing the seeds; just like when Paul preached the gospel to the Athenians. Even though their responses were not very enthusiastic, it could be considered as loosening the soil, sowing the seeds and encouraging the Athenians to begin to seek the true God. On the other hand, when we help others to seek God, and discover spiritual values; our spiritual lives will grow as well. Paul said, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." (1 Cor. 3:7) Let us not be bothered by others' enthusiastic responses to the gospel or not, but pray unceasingly to God that He will work in people's hearts.

APPLICATION: When we share the gospel with nonbelievers, how do we help them seek God and discover spiritual values? Also, how does the process of sharing the gospel help you grow in your spiritual life? If you never had such an experience, pray to God that He will give you an opportunity to share the gospel with someone.

MEMORY VERSE: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

Acts 17:26-27

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

in Corinth reaped great harvest. Believers included the devout Titius Justus, Crispus, the synagogue ruler and his entire household. And many of the Corinthians who heard him, believed, and were baptized (18:8). The Corinthian church was established due to Paul's efforts to preach and exhort the Jews and the Greeks to believe in Jesus.

Paul's ministry was attacked everywhere by the Jewish people. But in Corinth, Paul not only received help from Aquila and his wife Priscilla, he also received help from Silas and Timothy who came from Macedonia. At the end of the second mission trip, Paul had a brief stay in Ephesus (18:18-21) and at that time, a young preacher, Apollos, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, eloquent and with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He was good at conveying information. However, Apollos knew only the baptism of John and had not heard of the promises that the Holy Spirit had already come. Therefore, he needed to learn the way of God more adequately from Priscilla and Aquila. And that changed his life, he then vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (18:28).

APPLICATION: Missionaries who are away from home would often have moments of being lonely and discouraged. More often than not, their only encouragement would come from the Lord Himself. For that reason, missionaries abroad are really happy to receive communications from people at home. Do you have in mind one or two missionaries you or your church support? Try to send a letter or email to them and that will bring much encouragement for them. Please do not forget them!

MEMORY VERSE: ⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." Acts 18:9-10

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Lord, Revive Me!

Passage: Acts 19:1-41

October 26

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 19:1-41 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 19:1-41 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. In Ephesus what happened to some disciples of John? Since they were called disciples, how could they have not heard about the Holy Spirit (19:2)?

2. What did Paul do in Ephesus that caused a riot?

Paul made a connection between the Holy Spirit and baptism; that when one believes in Jesus and is baptized, he must have received the Holy Spirit. John's disciples only understood that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance (19:3b), because they still remained in the Old Testament era up to the time of John the Baptist, and have not heard about Jesus. That is the reason why Paul explained to them that: "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (19:4). They accepted Paul's explanation and "were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (19:5b).

Ephesus was the city where Paul had stayed the longest. He lived there for 3 years (20:31) and regularly entered the Jewish synagogue to preach. Later, he was rejected by the Jews and so he left the

synagogue. Then he went to the lecture hall of Tyrannus to continue his evangelism ministry (19:9). He preached throughout Asia (19:10, 17, 20).

During that time the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, imitated Paul by invoking the name of Jesus to drive out evil spirits. It resulted in them being overpowered by the evil spirits and they ran away, embarrassed. When this became known to the people in Ephesus, many of them became believers and publicly burned the scrolls that they practiced sorcery with. The total value of the scrolls came to be fifty thousand drachmas.

Paul also performed extraordinary miracles in Ephesus (19:11b). When the handkerchiefs that Paul used to wipe his sweat and the aprons or belts that had touched him were taken to the sick, their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (19:12b). However, it was not because Paul possessed any special ability to perform these miracles, but rather God displayed His mighty power through Paul. God was at work through the miracles and Paul's proclaiming of God's Word. Therefore, Paul said: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (19:20). Paul's ministering in Ephesus reached the end and he decided to go to Rome (19:21). The riot in Ephesus began as Paul diligently preached the gospel day and night, led many people (who used to worship idols, but left darkness and entered into light) to now worship the true God. In Ephesus the craftsmen who made idols lost the opportunity to make money, so Demetrius aroused the crowd to accuse Paul. A very capable city clerk settled and quieted the roaring crowd; thus the whole situation came to an end peacefully (19:41).

APPLICATION: Paul stayed in Asia for two years and taught God's Word every day. Through God's word, the Holy Spirit cleansed the believers' lives, and so there was great revival. The changes in their lives were evident: their values were renewed, they no longer yearned for their former way of living, and were even able to live a life that could impact others. Contemplate on this: which areas in your life need to be cleansed and revived by God?

MEMORY VERSE: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."
Acts 19:20

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

hardships facing him (20:23b), therefore, he felt he was compelled by the Spirit (20:22b). He relied on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand God's will. He considered his life worth nothing to him, if only he might finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus had given him (20:24). Furthermore, Paul was a pastor who faithfully preached God's words. He did not hesitate to preach anything (20:20). He faithfully proclaimed the whole will of God to Jews and Gentiles alike, warning them clearly to leave sins behind and return to the true God (20:26). He did that regardless of whether his message was received gladly or not. Lastly, Paul led by example and was a model for the flock to follow. He said, "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak" (20:35a). Paul was an example "in everything", which included: his words, acts, services, inter-personal relationships and relationship with God, etc. Paul specifically mentioned about managing resources (20:33-34) because that had something to do with the purpose of this trip. On the way back from this mission trip, the emphasis was to collect offerings from churches in Greece and bring it back to Jerusalem. Paul was concerned that his efforts of raising money for Jerusalem church might be misunderstood. Therefore, he was extra prudent not to give any reason for attack.

In short, Paul's farewell words were good words from a kind pastor. He dedicated himself to serving God, faithfully delivered God's words, led by example and was a model for the flock. His life ministry became our model of serving God.

APPLICATION: Paul dedicated himself to serving God, led the flock by example, faithful to God's words and guidance. He became our example of how to serve God. What is your current focus and purpose when serving God? What lessons can you take from Paul's attitude in serving God?

MEMORY VERSE: "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Acts 20:24

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

to the Jews. Paul emphasized his sincerity towards the Jewish roots and belief and stated the only difference was his proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles (22:21). However, when he proclaimed that God sent him to the Gentiles, the crowd raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" (22:22b) Since the commander did not understand Aramaic nor the reason for Paul's appeal, when he saw that the crowd was in an uproar, he ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks to be flogged and questioned in order to avoid further trouble. Facing the centurion, Paul pointed out he was a Roman citizen. This time Paul's status as a Roman citizen saved his life. According to the Roman law, it was illegal to torture and flog a Roman citizen before a trial and the official could lose his position. After the commander ascertained Paul's Roman citizenship status, he became quite alarmed and so ordered Paul to be released (22:29-30). Recall the times when the Jews reacted in the same manner, as Jesus was confirming God's love for the Gentiles in the Nazarene synagogue. It is so easy for man to allow his pride and bias to blind him, that he cannot realize God's lenient grace and plan for salvation to save all.

APPLICATION: Paul said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1Cor 15:10a). Our birth, growing up experiences, education and training we received were all carefully planned by God. Try to be thankful for all these. How would you use all that God has planned for you to fulfill His mission?

MEMORY VERSE: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect." 1 Corinthians 15:10a

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Through the exchange between Festus, King Agrippa and Paul, we can see how Paul's role changed from being put on trial to taking the initiative to witness. Festus thought Paul's great learning drove him insane (26:24), but Paul replied boldly that all that happened was not done covertly (26:25-26). Paul challenged Agrippa directly by saying, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do" (26:27). King Agrippa asked Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (26:28)

Right away Paul grasped the opportunity to preach the gospel to King Agrippa and the crowd (26:29). It was a pity that these two well-known people, whom Paul met, rejected his message. Even though King Agrippa did not become a Christian, he could not deny all that Paul had said. His heart was touched and his soul was illuminated, yet he still hardened his heart and refused to accept Jesus as Savior. Countless people are just like King Agrippa; just when they are almost ready to accept Christ as Savior, they wait till they could find a more opportune time. At the conclusion of chapter 26, neither King Agrippa nor Festus could find anything that Paul did that would deserve death or imprisonment (26:32b).

APPLICATION: How many people around you are just like King Agrippa: when they are almost ready to accept the Lord, they hold back? Please list their names and pray for them, ask the Lord to grant you patience and opportunities and lead them to believe the Lord.

MEMORY VERSE: Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." Acts 26:29

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

The end of Acts did not account for the result of the appeal to the Caesar (Nero), nor did it mention in detail the relationship between Roman believers and Paul. The author instead focused on Paul's meeting with the Jewish leaders. Paul once again took the opportunity to preach to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah from God. Their responses were similar to the Jews who came before them, some were convinced, others would not believe (28:24b). The Jews stubbornly resisted Paul's message, making him more determined to turn to the Gentiles (28:28). Paul preached the kingdom of God boldly and without hindrance even in prison (28:31). Though Paul was under constant surveillance, God's words were not limited by surroundings, and no officials forbade him to speak. His hands were tied, but his lips were still able to preach Jesus Christ. Acts recorded that the spirit of the early church was "preach boldly and without hindrance." The gospel of heaven was preached through the faithful Apostles of Jesus Christ, and the gospel was not obstructed by persecution (2:5-8:4), nor by race differences (8:5-15:35), nor by geographical separation (15:36-21:8), nor by bondage (21:19-28:31). Although Paul's journey was completed, ours are just starting — that is how the gospel will be passed down from generation to generation.

APPLICATION: Paul exhorted Timothy by saying, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Tim. 4:2). This verse happens to be the best annotation for "preach boldly and without hindrance." If you wish to accept this challenge, for what will you ask God when you are among people who have not heard of the gospel? How would you handle the obstacles when preaching the gospel in Jesus' name?

MEMORY VERSE: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Timothy 4:2

PRAYER: Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

Monthly Reflection

Passage: Romans 12:1-2

August 31

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

QUIET DOWN: Use one to two minutes to quiet down yourself, try not to think about anything. If light music (without lyrics) helps, you could play some light music to help you focus.

PRAYER AND MEDITATION: Ask God to calm your heart, then read aloud Romans 12:1-2, slowly and repeatedly (you may repeat it three to five times or more, but avoid rushing through it). As you read, try to pay attention to specific words, moods or feelings, or any particular thoughts that speak to you between the lines. Use this Bible passage or your respective insight as a beginning prayer of today's reflection.

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy,
to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God –
this is your spiritual act of worship.*

*²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

*Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is –
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Romans 12:1-2

YOUR FEELINGS:

REFLECTION: Please meditate quietly and answer the following questions and prompts.

1. Please count and write down the various situations that you experienced God's grace in your life in the past month.

2. List down areas that you need to improve on.

3. Other reflections:

PRAYER: Ask the Lord to grant you strength to live out what you have learned today.

Overall Insights In October

Write down the overall spiritual insights that you have learned in your daily devotion this month:

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