

The Good News of Jesus is not that your life will be free from struggles and trails. Quite the contrary, Paul was a prisoner in chains when he boldly proclaimed the Kingdom of God.

The Good News is that:

- Jesus is Lord,
- He is the Resurrection,
- He is the Way the Truth and the Life

To the world this is counter cultural and an offense.

In your own words, how do you explain what makes the Good News worth suffering for?

WRAP-UP

The book of Acts has given us an overview of the birth of the church. We observed how the circumstances of its beginning turned into difficulties as they spread from Jerusalem, to Judea to Samaria and the ends of the earth. But even in the face of persecution and many trials, the family of God supported one another, encouraging each other to love and good works. And Paul was our example to suffer willingly for the Gospels sake, relentlessly preaching the Good News of Jesus; His life, death and resurrection.

Memory Verse

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.
-Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- Be on the lookout this week for ways you can share the Good News of Jesus.

“From Easy to Difficult”

Book of Acts – Week #17

INTRODUCTION

As the book of Acts closes, we find a very different picture compared to its beginning. In Acts 2 we saw the young church after Pentecost gathering to learn, to fellowship, to share meals and to pray. There were signs and wonders being performed and the community of believers shared all they had. In verse 47 we are told they were enjoying the goodwill of all the people. In circumstances like these, starting the church was relatively easy, but by the end of this book life for the church has changed. They were persecuted, martyred and Paul was imprisoned in Rome. What started out easy had become quite difficult. But the Kingdom of God would not be stopped, and in this study, we find how believers respond when things go from easy to difficult.

Key Passage

ACTS 24 - 29

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Who are we when things are difficult?

Acts 28:11-16 NLT - 11 It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island--an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead. 12 Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. 13 From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. 14 There we found some believers, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. 15 The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God. 16 When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

Paul had a long, miserable journey to Rome. When he arrived, he was greeted warmly, welcomed and encouraged by the believers there. The family of God showed up when Paul needed them.

Can you think of a time when the family of God showed up for you? What kind of support did you receive- prayer? encouragement? something practical? Have you had an opportunity to be there for someone you know needed support in a hard time? If so, how was your support received?

Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT - 24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

In the days of Covid19 this verse takes on new significance. Tension and division have arisen all around us. It is easy to allow cultural hostility to slip into the church where it can disrupt Christ's unity. But we are called to motivate others to love and good works. Currently not everyone is able to gather together physically, yet many have more needs than ever before.

Who do you know who needs encouragement, either due to isolation, or the emotional physical and economic stress of the pandemic? Now plan a way to be there for that person as a means of support and encouragement, either individually or as a group.

2. We Willingly Suffer for the sake of Jesus and His Kingdom

1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT - 6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

Throughout scripture we are told to expect hardship and suffering. It isn't a popular message, but it is true. Peter tells us that the hardships we face will refine our faith as gold is refined. The refining process required heat applied to gold to melt it and force impurities to the surface where they could be removed. And then more heat is applied until no impurities remained.

Think about a time when you faced the kind of heat that refined your faith. What were the circumstances and what would you say was removed during that process?

In the book of Acts, the church was refined through difficult circumstances, even today we continue to face difficult circumstances. By definition, refinement means removal. Just as pruning removes branches that are not fruitful, the church is likely to emerge post-Covid minus a few branches.

How do you feel about change in the church? Are you looking for the new direction God may be taking his church, or is it more important to return to what was familiar in the past? What new opportunities or improvements, do you see for the church in 2021?

3. We Relentlessly Live out and Preach the Good News of Jesus

When life becomes difficult, we are faced with hard choices. Our natural tendency is self-preservation. We may want to run and hide, or we might become defensive and angry. And frustration can make us just want to give up. But Paul was not deterred from preaching the Good News while he faced adversity.

Acts 28:20, 30-31 NLT - 20 I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could explain to you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel--the Messiah--has already come." ... 30 For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, 31 boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.