

THE UNSTOPPABLE SPIRIT Part 2: The Church is Born

Note: This plan follows the content of Pastor Derek's podcast, "Acts Daily Devotional." You can also find this plan on YouVersion. Find more information at www.whoisgrace.com/acts

PART 2/ WEEK 3 POWER & OPPOSITION

DAY 15 HEALING AT THE GATE

Scripture: Acts 3:1-10

Reflect: Peter and John are on their way to pray at the temple. Pentecost was weeks behind them. Everything had changed, and yet here they are, two fishermen walking the same familiar path to the same familiar gate.

The man waiting there was lame from birth. For forty years he had been carried there daily. Everyone who frequented the temple knew his face. He was as much a fixture of that entrance as the gate itself.

Most people navigating a busy entrance look anywhere but at the person asking for help. Peter looked straight at him and asked for the man's attention in return. Dignity came before the miracle. Presence came before the power.

Then Peter says, "I don't have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you." What he had was living faith in a risen Savior, and with it, access to the authority of the one who had defeated death.

Peter reaches down, takes the man's right hand, and lifts. The healing happens in that moment. His feet and ankles became strong, then the man stood, then walked, then the detail that makes the whole scene come alive, he was "walking, leaping, and praising God." All three at once. Forty years of sitting, and this is what freedom looks like.

The miracle was real, but the setting was entirely unremarkable until the moment it wasn't. You should remember that as you move through your own ordinary week. You don't manufacture divine appointments. You just show up, stay present, and keep your hands open.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE: Today, practice the discipline of the full stop. At some point in your day, you will encounter someone who is easy to walk past. Someone asking for help you weren't planning to give. Stop. Make eye contact. You may not have what they're asking for. But take a moment to consider what you do have. Your time. A word. A prayer offered right there on the spot. A genuine moment of being seen can be its own kind of miracle. "I don't have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you."

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, help me to see those who are asking for help. Please show me what I have to give even if it's not what they are asking for. Amen*

DAY 16 PETER EXPLAINS THE HEALING

Scripture: Acts 3:11-16

Reflect: The healed man won't let go of Peter and John. He's clinging to them, and a crowd is forming fast. Now Peter has an audience he didn't ask for.

Peter's first move is to deflect the attention. "Why are you staring at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness?" Peter is saying: this wasn't our prayer life. It certainly wasn't our spiritual résumé. We didn't earn this.

When God does something through you, the pull to absorb the credit is very real. Peter had every opportunity to let the crowd's awe settle on him and John, and he shut it down immediately.

Not one to pass up an opportunity to preach the gospel, Peter uses this miracle to point everyone to the Messiah. He exalts Jesus in several ways but as a lead up he sharply indicts the unbelieving crowd. He walks them straight into what they did. You handed him over. You denied the Holy and Righteous One. You killed the source of life. It reads confrontational, but Peter isn't trying to shame them. He's trying to wake them up. He names the sin clearly so he can offer the remedy clearly.

And then the turn: "whom God raised from the dead." Every accusation lands harder because of that phrase sitting right behind it. You killed him. God raised him. Your verdict wasn't final. You see, the resurrection doesn't just prove Jesus is alive. It proves the crowd was wrong about who he was.

Then Peter explains the healing plainly. "By faith in his name, his name has made this man strong." The man standing in front of them, walking on legs that had never worked, was the evidence. Peter just wanted them to understand who did it.

One name. One source. Peter doesn't soften it or wrap it in qualifications. He says it and moves on, trusting the crowd to reckon with it. You don't argue people into Jesus. You put Jesus in front of them and let him make his own case.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S TAKEAWAY: You're not the light, you're the mirror. Let your life point past you to Jesus. When someone compliments you for something God did through you, practice the redirect. Don't deflect with false humility ("Oh, it was nothing"), but don't own what isn't yours either. Try something like: "I'm grateful God let me be part of that." Get comfortable pointing people past yourself to Jesus.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, if there is any good happening through me, you are the one doing it. Help me to have the right words to give you the credit, so that the people around me might see you.*

DAY 17 PETER'S SECOND SERMON

Scripture: Acts 3:17-26

Reflect: Peter just finished telling the crowd that they killed Jesus. He didn't soften it at all. "You killed the source of life." But Peter shifts his tone. Having named their sin clearly, he doesn't leave them there.

Peter says, "I know you acted in ignorance, just as your leaders did." He's not excusing what they did. Ignorance doesn't erase guilt. But it does open a door. So he builds the bridge. Peter named the sin, but then immediately makes room for the sinner.

Then he makes the offer: "Repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out." God doesn't just minimize your record or file it away somewhere so he can come back to it later. He wipes the surface clean. Repentance doesn't just clear your conscience. It erases the record.

And then Peter describes what follows repentance: "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." What an amazing phrase. It paints a picture of relief after exhaustion. Carrying guilt is tiring in a way that's hard to explain until you've set it down. There's a beautiful rest on the other side of repentance.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE: Think of something you've confessed to God but never fully let go of. Now picture Peter's words: your sins can be "wiped out." Write down one sin you've been carrying that God has already forgiven. Then cross it out. Tear up the paper. Whatever physical act helps you remember it's wiped out. The act won't add to what God has already done, but sometimes our hands need to let go to remind our hearts it's already gone.

Pause to Pray: *Father, I confess that I ... Please forgive me. Help me to trust that you have kept your promise to wipe my record clean. Amen*

DAY 18 FIRST OPPOSITION

Scripture: Acts 4:1-4

Reflect: The last couple of days we've been reading Peter's sermon. Now, it's hitting its stride. He has offered them the blessing of forgiveness and new life. But just as he's wrapping up his sermon the doors swing open and the religious authorities walk in. The sermon is over. The real test of opposition is just beginning.

Peter and John get hauled off to custody. And Luke drops a line right in the middle of the arrest account, sandwiched between the seizure of the men and their overnight detention. Luke says: "*many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of men came to about five thousand.*"

Think about that timing. The preachers are being led away in custody and the harvest is still coming in! You can lock up the messengers. You cannot lock up the message. The authorities thought they were shutting something down. They were actually just clearing the stage for the next act.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S REFLECTION: Think about an area of your life where following Jesus has created friction, with a coworker, a family member, in a conversation you've been avoiding. Have you been reading that friction as a sign you're doing something wrong, or is it possible it's a sign you're doing something right? Reflect on this today: Proximity to Jesus is better preparation than any apologetics you could rehearse. Stay close enough to him that when a moment demands something from you, there's actually something there to give.

Pause to Pray: *My Jesus, help me learn to be close to You so that I can have Your words in the right moments and be bold, even if there is opposition.*

DAY 19 PETER BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Scripture: Acts 4:5-12

Reflect: Yesterday Peter and John were arrested. This morning they're brought before the Sanhedrin, the same council that had condemned Jesus weeks earlier. The question gets asked, "By what power or in what name have you done this?" And Peter opens his mouth.

Peter goes straight at them. "*By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead.*" The healed man is right there as proof. That man walking around in front of the Sanhedrin was Exhibit A.

Peter closes with the line that has rattled around in history ever since: "*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.*" The claim may sound exclusive. But what Peter was actually saying is that the door is open to everyone through one person, Jesus. The exclusivity isn't about who's kept out. It's about who made the way for all.

Peter says all of this to the men who had killed Jesus. Which means the offer is on the table even for them. That's the gospel. It goes to exactly the people you'd least expect it to reach.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S TAKEAWAY: Let's think about boldness. The next time you're in a conversation where someone challenges your faith or questions your commitment, remember Peter. You don't have to be combative, but you don't have to be vague either. Consider this takeaway: Boldness isn't about intensity; it's about clarity. Peter didn't yell or posture. He simply told the truth about Jesus, clearly and directly, trusting the Spirit to back him up.

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, help me to have the boldness to simply tell the truth about Jesus. Help me to trust that you will confirm your truth in the hearts of people, in your time. Amen*

DAY 20 BOLD WITNESSES RELEASED

Scripture: Acts 4:13-22

Reflect: The Sanhedrin has a problem on its hands. They have to figure out what to do with these two fishermen and the man who's been healed. They are baffled by Peter and John. Luke notes they were "*uneducated and untrained.*" This phrase points to the fact that they were without formal rabbinical schooling. In that world, you didn't get to speak publicly about Scripture without the right credentials.

Then Luke gives us the line that anchors the whole scene, maybe his whole book: "*They (the council) recognized that the men had been with Jesus.*" The Sanhedrin couldn't explain the boldness any other way. Time with Jesus changes what comes out of you when the pressure is on.

The healed man standing right beside them doesn't help the council's case. They can't dispute the miracle. Everyone in Jerusalem knows it happened. So they pull out the only move they have left: intimidation. "Stop speaking in this name."

Peter and John's response is devastating in the best possible way. "*Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide.*" They're just naming the moment. There is a conflict of authority, and they've already decided who wins that conflict. Then they add the line that reveals their whole motivation and heart: "*We are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.*"

The council threatens them again and lets them go, stopped not by conscience but by crowd control. The people are giving glory to God and public opinion is not on the Sanhedrin's side. The messengers walk free, the healed man keeps walking, and the gospel keeps spreading.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE: When Jesus is the only one you're performing for, you finally get to live free, steady, courageous, and honest. Here's the challenge: Write down one place where you're holding back your faith because someone's reaction matters too much. Then sit with Peter's question: "*Is it right in God's sight for me to listen to them rather than God?*" You don't have to say everything all the time, but let faithfulness nudge you to speak when it counts.

Pause to Pray: *Father, your voice is the only one I want to listen to and obey. Help me not to hold back because I fear the reactions of others. Amen*

DAY 21 THE CHURCH PRAYS FOR BOLDNESS

Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

Reflect: Yesterday, Peter and John were released. The council threatened them, warned them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore, and then let them go. Peter and John go straight back to the church and report the threats. And the church's response? They pray together. And their prayer is a model worth imitating.

They start with God's sovereignty: "*Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.*" When you're facing opposition, the most stabilizing thing you can do is remember who actually holds authority over all of it..

They pray, "*In this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus.*" Then they frame it in God's purposes, "*to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place.*" The worst thing that ever happened, the execution of the innocent Son of God, happened inside the will of a sovereign God.

Because of what they know about God's sovereignty, they can ask for something that would otherwise seem foolish. They pray for boldness to keep going directly into the threats. They prayed, "*Grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness.*"

Then God answers in a way that removes any ambiguity about whether he heard. The place shakes. God is saying: I'm here and I heard you. Then they are all filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter and John's courage inspired the church to pray for courage, and God flooded them with it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S REFLECTION: The church's instinct when facing pressure was to pray, and specifically to pray by rehearsing what they knew to be true about God before they made any requests. Today, before you bring a single request to God, spend a few minutes just describing him back to him. His sovereignty, his faithfulness, his track record. Anchoring prayer in the character of God doesn't change what you're asking for. It changes who you believe you're asking.

Pause to pray: *Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. You are sovereign. I trust you. Amen*

PART 2/ WEEK 4 UNITY & TESTING

DAY 22 ALL THINGS IN COMMON

Scripture: Acts 4:32-37

Reflect: The church prayed for boldness. And God answered. The Spirit fell, and the believers spoke the word of God with fresh courage. Now Luke pulls back the camera to show us what that kind of Spirit-filled courage does to a community.

One heart. One mind. Nobody hoarding, nobody in need. Luke ties the radical generosity directly to the resurrection testimony: "*With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them.*" When you genuinely believe Jesus conquered death, it rewires your relationship to everything else. Your house. Your savings. Your carefully laid back-up plans. If Jesus beat death, none of your stuff is as ultimate as you thought it was. It becomes something different. Tools, not treasures. Resources for the mission, not trophies to your personal security.

Then Luke introduces us to a specific man as an example of this spirit. Barnabas sells a field and brings the money to the apostles. This was a tangible asset, something he could have held onto as a safety net. And he let it go because people in his church community needed it more than he needed the security it represented. Generosity at this level is a theological decision. It says: I believe God is more reliable than my backup plan.

The unstoppable Spirit doesn't just make people bold in the streets. He makes them generous in their homes.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Ask God honestly today: Is there something I'm clinging to that you're inviting me to share? Maybe it's money, maybe it's time, maybe it's a skill or a resource you've been keeping all to yourself. Is there a need you're aware of that you could meet? Not out of obligation, but out of the overflow of knowing Jesus is alive and His mission is unstoppable.

Pause to Pray: *Father, I believe you are more reliable than any backup plan I could have. Help to view what you have given me as tools for the mission. Teach me to live generously. Amen*

DAY 23 ANANIAS FALLS

Scripture: Acts 5:1-6

Reflect: This is one of the most jarring passages in all of Acts. A man sells property, gives some of the money to the church, and drops dead when confronted about it. If you read that and feel uncomfortable, that's good. It means you're paying attention.

We need to see clearly what the actual sin was. Ananias wasn't required to sell the property. And once he sold it, he wasn't required to give any of it. "*Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal?*" The money was his to keep. Keeping part of it was not the problem.

The problem was the lie. Ananias wanted people to believe he had given everything, the way Barnabas had. He wanted the reputation of total surrender without the actual cost of it. He wanted to look like a man fully devoted to God and the mission while secretly hedging his bets behind the scenes. And he coordinated this deception with his wife.

Peter calls it exactly what it is: Satan filling his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. Lying to the Holy Spirit was a direct act of spiritual deception against the presence of God himself dwelling in his people.

This was an exceptional judgment for an exceptional moment. God doesn't strike down every believer who struggles with honesty. But the severity of the response here tells us something about how seriously God takes the authenticity of his church. A community built on performance is fragile. A community built on honesty before God is unstoppable.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: The story of Ananias isn't meant to terrify us. It's meant to invite us into authenticity. God would rather have your honesty than your polished image. Today, what would it look like for you to practice being real with God? It could start by confessing to him where you've been pretending. Ask Him to search your heart and show you any area where you're more concerned with how things look than how things actually are. Your prayer life. Your generosity. Your marriage. Your faith. Then tell God the truth about it, out loud, in prayer. That's where authentic discipleship begins.

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, search your heart and show me any area where I'm more concerned with how things look than how things actually are. Amen*

DAY 24 SAPPHIRA FALLS

Scripture: Acts 5:7-11

Reflect: Yesterday we read the terrifying story of Ananias who walked into the early church gathering, laid his offering at the apostles' feet, and dropped dead when Peter exposed his lie. He and his wife had sold a piece of land, secretly kept some of the proceeds, and presented the rest as if they'd given everything. Without knowing what went down, his wife Sapphira comes looking for him.

Peter asks her a single, direct question: "Did you sell the land for this price?" She looked Peter in the eye and said yes. What is most striking in this story is how much Sapphira's fate was sealed by a prior agreement. She and Ananias had made a private decision to deceive the community together. The lie didn't start at the door. It started in the quiet of their home, in a conversation between two people who decided that appearances were worth protecting more than integrity.

Some readers find this passage troubling. Does God still act this way? Is this what we should expect when we're less than fully truthful about our spiritual lives? Remember, the church was weeks old. The Spirit had just been poured out. The integrity of the entire movement was being established in real time, and God was making clear from the very beginning that his church would be built on authenticity, not performance.

God sees through the version of ourselves we curate for others. That's the most clarifying truth in this passage. And once you really believe it, the energy spent on managing appearances starts to feel like exactly the kind of weight you were never meant to carry.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's Takeaway; Here's a sobering meditation for today: Sapphira had a chance to tell the truth. Peter asked her a direct question, and she could have confessed. But she chose the lie instead. How many times do we get chances like that? Moments where we could come clean, admit the truth, drop the pretense, but we double down instead? Today, ask God to show you if there's an area where you're being given a chance to be honest and you're choosing to maintain the facade instead. Maybe it's at work, where you're taking credit for something you didn't fully do. Maybe it's in your spiritual life, where you're letting people think you're closer to God than you actually are. God is giving you a chance to come clean. Take it. The freedom of honesty is so much better than the burden of pretending.

Pause to Pray: *Father, please show me any areas where keeping appearances has been more important to me than authenticity. Amen*

DAY 25 SIGNS AND WONDERS INCREASE

Scripture: Acts 5:12-16

Reflect: Ananias and Sapphira had both been given the opportunity to tell the truth but they both chose to lie and they both died. Great fear swept through the entire community. That's where we left off — a church shaken, sobered, and more aware than ever that the Spirit of God was genuinely present among them.

There's a theological pattern in Luke's writing: inner purification produces external power. We just watched God guard the integrity of his church with fierce seriousness. Now, on the other side of that, the Spirit moves with remarkable force. Signs and wonders are multiplying. People are streaming in from towns surrounding Jerusalem. The sick are being healed. Those tormented by unclean spirits are set free.

We should ask what this means for us. The Spirit who filled that first community is the same Spirit who lives in believers today. The mission hasn't changed. The power source hasn't changed. What sometimes changes is our expectation. We can settle into a version of faith that's tidy and manageable and largely

predictable, where we've stopped anticipating that God might actually show up and do something we can't explain.

The early church lived with a wide-open posture toward what God might do. They prayed, they gathered, they bore witness, and they watched. People carried their loved ones into the streets on cots because they fully expected God to meet them there through His church. Oh that the world would look at today's church with a similar expectation.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's Reflection: Do you believe God still works in power today? Or have you settled into a comfortable, powerless Christianity where you go to church, sing some songs, listen to a sermon, and go home unchanged? The early church expected God to show up. They believed He would heal. They trusted Him to move in ways that defied natural explanation. Today, ask God to increase your expectation of His power. Maybe there's someone you know who's sick, and you've been reluctant to pray for healing because you're not sure if it will work. Pray anyway. Maybe there's a situation in your life that feels impossible, and you've stopped asking God to intervene. Ask anyway. Don't let cynicism or past disappointment rob you of faith. The same Spirit who filled the early church lives in you. Expect Him to move.

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, help me to see where I have stopped anticipating that you might show up. Help me to live with more expectation that you will do great things. Amen*

DAY 26 ARRESTED AND FREED BY AN ANGEL

Scripture: Acts 5:17-26

Reflect Jealousy. The Sadducees were watching their influence drain away. The apostles were doing miracles. The crowds were following them. Thousands had come to faith. The Sadducee were being upstaged by a band of Galilean fishermen. The arrest was an act of institutional self-preservation dressed up as religious authority. They couldn't debate the apostles. They couldn't deny the miracles. So they put them in jail.

What happened next is the kind of story that would have circulated through Jerusalem for years. During the night, an angel opened the jail doors and brought the apostles out. Everything looked secure from the outside. The cells were just empty.

Listen carefully to the angel's instruction to the apostles: "Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life." The word "life" here was one of the earliest names the church used for the gospel.

So they did.

There's a pattern running through Acts that this passage captures. Every time human authority tries to contain the gospel, the effort reveals its own limits. The Spirit-driven mission cannot be locked down by human structures, no matter how formidable they appear. Modern church, we must keep this in mind.

The apostles walked out of a locked jail and went straight back to preaching. They didn't need the door to open before they decided to obey. They were already committed. The open door was God confirming what they were already prepared to do.

Obedience first. Confirmation follows.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's Challenge: The apostles didn't wait for favorable circumstances before committing to the mission. They were already all in, which is why a locked jail cell was an obstacle for their captors but not for God. Think of one area of obedience you've been delaying because the circumstances don't feel right yet — the timing isn't perfect, the door isn't clearly open, the risk feels too high. Take one concrete step in that direction today. Write it down. Tell someone. Do the first small thing. Trust that the God who opens locked doors is more than capable of handling what comes next.

Pause to Pray: *Father, help to obey your commands even when it seems like the opposition is too great. Amen*

DAY 27 WE MUST OBEY GOD

Scripture: Acts 5:27-32

Reflect: The disciples are standing before the council again, and the high priest wants answers.

He says what's really bothering him: "You are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." He's not primarily worried about theology. He's worried about reputation. The apostles keep telling Jerusalem that its religious leaders crucified an innocent man, and people keep believing them.

Peter's reply is seven words that have echoed through church history: "We must obey God rather than people." It was a statement of moral necessity. When what God requires and what human authority demands come into direct conflict, the choice isn't really a choice. We must obey God.

The apostles knew what they'd seen. They knew what they'd been told to do. And no amount of institutional pressure was going to change either of those things. When your confidence rests on what you've actually witnessed, you can stand in front of the most powerful room in the city and speak with steady calm.

That kind of courage doesn't come from personality. It comes from proximity. The men who stood there had been with Jesus. It showed.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's Reflection: Have you ever faced a moment where obeying God meant disobeying people? Maybe your boss asked you to do something unethical. Maybe your friends wanted you to join in something you knew was wrong. Maybe your family pressured you to compromise your convictions. These moments are tests. And Peter gives us the answer: "We must obey God rather than people." His boldness in that room didn't start when he opened his mouth before the council. It started in all the smaller, quieter moments of choosing God's voice over every other competing voice. Ask yourself the question today: whose voice am I actually obeying right now? Let the answer inform your next step.

Pause to Pray: *Father, please show me if there is any voice that I am obeying instead of yours. Help me to have the boldness to obey you no matter what. Amen*

DAY 28 GAMALIEL'S WISDOM

Scripture: Acts 5:33-42

Reflect: Gamaliel was one of the most distinguished rabbis of his generation. When he stood up in that room, people listened.

His argument went like this: history is full of movements that looked dangerous for a moment and then evaporated the instant their leader died. If this Jesus movement is the same kind of thing, you don't need to do anything. It will collapse on its own. But if it's from God, you can't stop it. And you don't want to be on the wrong side of that fight.

The council took his advice, with one compromise. They couldn't release the apostles without some show of authority, so they had them flogged. This was thirty-nine lashes, and it was designed to be brutal enough to permanently discourage public preaching.

The apostles walked out rejoicing. They considered it an honor to have suffered publicly for the name of Jesus, to have shared something of what he endured.

And then they went back to work. Every day, they kept teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah. The flogging didn't produce a quieter, more cautious version of the apostles. It produced more of the same.

The unstoppable Spirit produces unstoppable people. They're unstoppable not because they're extraordinary, but because they're surrendered.

What might a step of Ordinary Obedience look like today?

Today's Takeaway: Gamaliel asked the Sanhedrin a question they weren't prepared for: he basically asked, what if you're wrong about Jesus? It's still the most important question a skeptic can sit with. If

Jesus is just another failed movement, you lose nothing by investigating him seriously. But if he's who he claimed to be, the cost of being wrong is catastrophic for the unbeliever. Gamaliel's logic cuts both ways. The apostles walked out of that room bleeding and rejoicing because they had already answered the question for themselves. Jesus was worth it. The evidence had convinced them. The Spirit had confirmed it. If you're skeptical about Jesus, don't dismiss the question. Sit with it. What if your conclusions about him are wrong?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, if there is any skepticism in me, please show me. Help me to know the pure truth of who you are. Help me to be so confident in that truth that I might proclaim it no matter what. Amen*

PART 2/ WEEK 5 SERVING & SUFFERING

DAY 29 SEVEN SERVANTS CHOSEN

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

Reflect: The church was exploding with growth, but cracks were starting to show. Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily food distribution, and a complaint rose that threatened to divide the movement from within. The apostles faced a critical choice: abandon their calling to fix the problem themselves, or empower others to step up. They chose wisely. Seven Spirit-filled servants were selected, all with Greek names, uniquely positioned to serve the overlooked community. The result? The word of God spread even faster, disciples multiplied, and even priests started coming to faith. When everyone plays their part, the mission accelerates.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S TAKEAWAY: The early church grew because everyone played their part. The apostles focused on prayer and preaching. The seven focused on caring for widows. Nobody tried to do everything, and nobody dismissed any role as unimportant. Let me ask you, where are you serving right now? If you're not plugged in anywhere in your church, this passage is your invitation. The church needs people who are full of the Spirit and wisdom to show up and serve in a whole variety of roles, whether that's teaching kids, welcoming guests, setting up chairs, or caring for people in need. Don't wait for a glamorous assignment. Just look around and ask, "What's being overlooked that I could help with?" And if you're a pastor or church leader who is doing everything yourself, take a cue from the apostles. What do you need to release so you can focus on what only you can do? Empowering others isn't abandoning responsibility; it's multiplying it.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, give me ears to hear when Your Spirit arrests my heart to intervene on another's behalf or step forward to serve... I don't want to miss an opportunity to serve You Jesus and to help someone You love... Amen*

DAY 30 STEPHEN ACCUSED

Scripture: Acts 6:8-15

Reflect: Stephen was chosen to serve tables. He also ended up debating scholars in the synagogue and getting dragged before the Sanhedrin. Full of grace and power, he performed signs and wonders that drew opposition from the Synagogue of the Freedmen. When they couldn't win the argument, they changed the rules. False witnesses were bribed to accuse him of blasphemy against Moses, God, and the temple. The charges echoed the ones leveled at Jesus. Public opinion began to shift. And in the middle of the chaos, everyone in the courtroom looked at Stephen and saw something they couldn't explain: his face glowed like an angel. Faithfulness attracts opposition, and peace under pressure tells a story words can't.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S REFLECTION: Stephen's face told a story his words hadn't even gotten to yet. Calm in an environment built for intimidation. Peaceful in front of people paid to destroy him. Before he ever opened his mouth to defend himself, the Spirit had already spoken through him. Sit with this question today: When pressure comes, what does your face say? What do your reactions, your tone, the way you carry yourself, tell people about what you actually believe? We talk a lot about our faith. The Spirit is interested in forming the kind of person whose presence communicates it.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I know You have established the path of my day, help my heart to remember this as the day's details unfold, hold me fast to You, Lord, and give me a peace which allows those around me to see it is You in whom I trust. Amen*

DAY 31 STEPHEN'S DEFENSE: ABRAHAM

Scripture: Acts 7:1-8

Reflect: The high priest asked Stephen one question: 'Are these things true?' Most would have defended themselves or apologized. Stephen told a story. He started with Abraham, the father everyone in that room revered. And the first detail he highlighted was devastating: God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, pagan territory, nowhere near Jerusalem or the promised land. Before the temple existed, before sacred geography mattered, God was already moving. Abraham spent his entire life as a wanderer in the land he'd been promised, never owning a foot of ground, holding only to God's word. Stephen's point cut deep: God has never been confined to a location. Faith follows Him wherever He goes.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE: Abraham's obedience came before clarity. He left before he knew where he was going. He trusted before he had a reason to. Most of us are waiting for more information before we take the next step. More confirmation, more certainty, more of a guarantee that it'll work out. But the pattern Stephen is drawing here suggests something different: God tends to reveal the next thing after we move on the last thing. What's one step of obedience you've been sitting on, waiting until you feel

more sure? Write it down. Then do it today. You don't need the full picture to take the next step. You just need to trust the One who has it.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, thank You for Your promise of enduring love, as it gives me the courage to take this... next step today. Your Word Lord is a lamp to my feet and a light to guide my feet when I step forward. Amen*

DAY 32 STEPHEN'S DEFENSE: JOSEPH

Scripture: Acts 7:9-16

Reflect: Stephen's history lesson moved to Joseph, and the parallels became impossible to ignore. The patriarchs, jealous of their brother, sold him into slavery. They thought they were getting rid of him. God was positioning him to save them. 'God was with him.' Four words that reframe everything. The pit didn't end Joseph's story. Neither did the prison. God gave him favor before Pharaoh and elevated him to power in Egypt. When famine struck, the brothers who betrayed him had nowhere else to turn. On the second visit, Joseph revealed himself. Stephen was building an argument: Israel's deliverers always come in two movements. First rejected, then revealed. Joseph. Moses. And now, Jesus.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S TAKEAWAY: Joseph couldn't have narrated his own story as it was happening. From the pit it looked like betrayal. From the prison it looked like forgotten. From the palace it looked like redemption. But it was always all three, moving in one direction. Carry this with you today: the part of your story that feels most like the pit may be the part God is using most. You don't have to understand it to trust the One who's writing it. Is there a situation in your life right now that feels like betrayal, or rejection, or something that's gone terribly wrong? Maybe someone else's jealousy has turned against you. Take heart from Joseph's story. God was with him in the pit, in the prison, and on the throne. God is with you too. What others meant for evil, He can use for good. Trust the process, even when it doesn't make sense.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, when I am rejected, You welcome me. When I suffer, You comfort me. When my plan of an easy life/day fails, You are there to pick me up. When I cannot see the path ahead, I trust You already have it planned for me. Thank You. Amen*

DAY 33 STEPHEN'S DEFENSE: MOSES PART 1

Scripture: Acts 7:17-29

Reflect: Moses was born under a death sentence, raised in Pharaoh's palace, educated in all the wisdom of Egypt. At forty, he saw an Israelite being beaten and intervened, killing the Egyptian. He assumed his people would recognize that God was giving them deliverance through him. They didn't. The next day, he tried to make peace between two fighting Israelites, and one turned on him: 'Who appointed you a ruler and a judge over us?' Moses fled to Midian and spent the next forty years as a shepherd, wondering if he'd completely misread his calling. He hadn't. God was still writing the story. Rejection by people is never the final word when God is the one who sent you.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today? (include Derek's content)

TODAY'S REFLECTION: Think about a time you stepped out in faith, sure God was in it, and the people you expected to understand completely missed it. Maybe they pushed back. Maybe they questioned your motives or your authority. Maybe you've been quietly second-guessing yourself ever since. Moses spent forty years in Midian between his first attempt and his burning bush moment. He didn't waste those years. He was being formed. Where are you right now in that gap between stepping out and being recognized? What would it look like to stop reading the silence as a verdict and start reading it as preparation?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I seek You during this time of waiting to know Your wisdom, gathering strength to be prepared by You, and being comforted by You in the meantime. Amen*

DAY 34 STEPHEN'S DEFENSE: THE MOSES PART 2

Scripture: Acts 7:30-43

Reflect: After forty years in the wilderness, God appeared to Moses at a burning bush on Mount Sinai. Not in Jerusalem. Not at a temple. At a random thorn bush in the desert, and God declared the ground holy. The man Israel rejected became their deliverer, performing wonders at the Red Sea, receiving living oracles on the mountain. And still, the people pushed Moses aside. While he was on Sinai receiving God's word, they built a golden calf and celebrated what their own hands had made. Stephen quoted Amos: God gave them over. When people persistently reject what God offers, eventually He lets them have what they've chosen. Another deliverer now stood before the Sanhedrin. Would they repeat the pattern?

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S MEDITATION: Moses encountered God in the wilderness because he "approached to look more closely" at something unusual. Today, will you practice noticing? Is there a prompting you have talked yourself out of. A moment that you have let pass. What would it look like to start treating those moments as invitations instead of interruptions? God still speaks. The question is whether we're paying attention. Take five minutes of silence today and simply ask: "Lord, what are you doing around me that I've been too busy to notice?"

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank You for the details of life You help me see. Now, I am choosing to listen Lord..... And then I will act in Your strength. Amen*

DAY 35 STEPHEN'S DEFENSE: THE TEMPLE

Scripture: Acts 7:44-45

Reflect: Stephen addressed the charge that hurt most: that he'd spoken against the temple. He honored its history, tracing the tabernacle from Moses through Solomon. Then he quoted Isaiah, letting God speak: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?' Stephen called the temple what it was: made with hands. The phrase Jews used for pagan idols. When a

symbol of God's presence gets treated as the source of God's presence, something has gone wrong. The temple was always meant to point somewhere, never to be the destination. God met Abraham before there was a promised land. God was with Joseph before there was a tabernacle. The story was always bigger than the setting.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

TODAY'S CHALLENGE: Here's an honest question: Have you put God in a box? Maybe it's a location, "I only really connect with God at church." Maybe it's a routine, "God only speaks to me during my quiet time." Maybe it's a mindset, "God couldn't work through that person, that situation, or that mess." Today, consciously invite God into one space you normally consider "secular," your commute, your lunch break, a work meeting, a difficult relationship. Ask Him to show up somewhere you haven't expected Him. Then watch for what He does.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I am so thankful You know me better than I know myself, You see my actions yet know the intent of my heart in every action or word I speak. Align my view of You with who You are and help me to clearly see where You are working, so that I may be open to wherever You show up today. Amen*

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