

THE UNSTOPPABLE SPIRIT Part 4: The Gospel Breaks Barriers

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 4/ WEEK 10 FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY BEGINS

DAY 64 SET APART FOR MISSION

Scripture: Acts 13:1-3

Reflect: Today, the story of Acts takes a dramatic turn. For twelve chapters, the gospel has been spreading reactively, pushed outward by persecution and circumstance. Now, for the first time, the church is about to send missionaries on purpose.

Take a look at this leadership team. Luke lists five names, and if you slow down long enough to notice who they are, you'll realize this is one of the most remarkable collections of people in the entire New Testament. Do you see what's happening in this room? A Cypriot Jewish landowner, an African, a North African, a man from Herod's palace, and a reformed religious terrorist. Five men from completely different backgrounds, ethnicities, social classes, and life stories. And they're worshiping together. Leading together. Listening for the voice of the Spirit together. This is the church at Antioch. This is what the gospel produces when it's truly at work.

This is a hinge point in the book of Acts, some have even called it one of the "hinges of history." For twelve chapters, the gospel has spread from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria. Now it's heading to the uttermost parts of the earth. The third phase of Jesus' commission in Acts 1:8 is beginning. And it starts the same way everything in Acts starts. With ordinary people listening to the Spirit and saying yes.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: The Antioch church sent away their two most gifted leaders because the Spirit asked them to. What would you have the hardest time releasing if God asked for it? Maybe money or comfort are the obvious answers. But think deeper beyond that. What's the thing you'd resist giving up for the sake of His mission?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I want to say "I surrender all" but I'm tempted to hold this thing back... Spirit, release my grip and help me go all in for the mission of God... Amen.*

DAY 65 CYPRUS: ELYMAS THE SORCERER

Scripture: Acts 13:4-12

Reflect: The church at Antioch laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, prayed over them, and let them go. They didn't have a lot of details. Just the Spirit's call and the church's obedience. So where did they go first? Cyprus. Barnabas's homeland. A wealthy island in the eastern Mediterranean known for its copper mines and its worship of a Syrian goddess of love. John Mark came along to assist. And from their very

first stop, they did what they'd keep doing for the rest of the journey: they walked into the synagogue and started preaching.

Eventually they reach Paphos, the seat of Roman provincial government, and they get a surprise. They encounter two men who couldn't be more different.

Elymas, the man who made his living claiming to see hidden spiritual realities, is struck blind. His physical darkness now matches his spiritual condition. And you can't miss the echo of Paul's own story. Paul himself was struck blind on the Damascus road. He too groped in darkness until someone led him by the hand. But for Paul, the blindness led to sight, to conversion, to a whole new life. Luke leaves the door open for Elymas. The blindness is "for a time." It's discipline, not destruction. A chance to repent.

The proconsul sees all of this and believes. Luke says he was "amazed at the teaching of the Lord." Not amazed at the miracle. Amazed at the teaching. The power confirmed the message, but it was the message itself that captivated him. This is the first recorded conversion of a purely Gentile government official through Paul's ministry. The gospel is crossing yet another barrier.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Takeaway: The gospel always has opponents, and they're not always the people you'd expect. Elymas was religious. He was Jewish. He had spiritual credentials. But he used his position to keep people from the truth. Opposition to God's work doesn't always come roaring. Sometimes it comes much more subtly.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, thank you for the faithful ministry of ordinary men and women... may we not be discouraged by opponents, but strengthened and emboldened by your Spirit... Amen.*

DAY 66 ARRIVAL IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH

Scripture: Acts 13:13-16

Reflect: Cyprus was just the first stop. The team sailed north to the coast of Asia Minor, and what waited for them there would test their early resolve. At this point, Paul becomes the clear leader of the team from this point forward, and Luke signals the shift with this simple change in how he describes the group.

Then John Mark left.

Whatever drove Mark's decision to abandon the journey, it's a reminder that mission teams are made up of real people with real limits, and not everyone finishes what they start.

Paul and the remaining team climbed through the mountains and arrived at Pisidian Antioch, a Roman colony and military outpost in the southern region of Galatia. This Antioch was a strategic Gentile city with a significant Jewish population.

On the Sabbath, they walked into the synagogue. This became Paul's consistent pattern throughout his missionary career. He basically employed a simple two-fold strategy: go to the largest city in the region

and start there. And in each city, he went first to the synagogue. The reason was both theological and practical. As Paul would later write in Romans 1:16, the gospel was "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The synagogues also had God-fearers, Gentiles who were drawn to the God of Israel but hadn't fully converted to Judaism. They already had a theological framework for the idea of God. These became a natural bridge for the gospel to cross into the wider Gentile community. And practically, larger population centers had influence that could eventually spread the gospel into surrounding regions.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Paul walked into an unfamiliar city and used the opportunity he was given. He didn't wait for perfect conditions. Today, I challenge you to look for one open door in your normal routine, a conversation, a meeting, a moment with a neighbor, and offer something genuine. Share an encouragement. Ask a real question. Say something you've been holding back. Use the opportunity right in front of you.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, give me courage! Spirit, fill my heart with compassion and my mouth with words of life... Amen.*

DAY 67 PAUL'S SERMON: ISRAEL'S HISTORY

Scripture: Acts 13:17-25

Reflect: This is the first recorded sermon Paul ever preached on a missionary journey. Luke is showing us Paul's method, giving us a template for how Paul approached a Jewish audience with the gospel message. He doesn't lead with Jesus. He starts with the story his listeners already know and love. He begins at the very beginning, with the patriarchs, with Egypt, with the wilderness, and he walks them through Israel's history with one unmistakable emphasis: God is the subject of every verb.

This isn't history the way we usually read it, centered on great men and their achievements. This is history with God at the center. Paul is making a theological point through a historical survey. Israel's story has never been about Israel. It's been about God's relentless faithfulness to a people who kept wandering away from him.

And the moment Paul reaches David, he makes a leap that would have sent a ripple through the room. "From this man's descendants, as he promised, God brought the Savior, Jesus, to Israel." Up through verse 22, every head was nodding. Then Paul skipped the rest of Israel's history and jumped from David directly to Jesus, claiming him as the fulfillment of everything God had been doing since Abraham.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Paul told the story of God's faithfulness across centuries to make one point: it was all heading somewhere. Your story is heading somewhere too. The scattered pieces of your life, the waiting seasons, the wilderness stretches, they aren't random. They're building toward something that God is authoring. And it's something that only God can see from above.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I trust that you know my whole story. Spirit, help me reflect with gratitude and look forward with wisdom... Amen.*

DAY 68 PAUL'S SERMON: JESUS' RESURRECTION

Scripture: Acts 13:26-37

Reflect: Paul turns to Scripture and stacks three Old Testament texts: Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10. His logic is tight. God promised David an eternal throne. That promise requires an heir who conquers death. David himself died, was buried, and decayed. Everyone can walk to his tomb. So, when Psalm 16 promises that God's "Holy One" would not see decay, it couldn't have been about David. It had to be about someone else.

This last quotation is where Paul lands his argument, and it's the same text Peter used at Pentecost. Who was David writing about? Paul's logic is tight: David served God's purpose in his own generation and then fell asleep. That's a beautiful phrase, by the way. David served God's purpose in his generation. There's a whole sermon in that single verse. But the point Paul is driving at is this: David's body returned to dust. But Jesus, the one God raised up did not.

You see, the resurrection isn't a feel-good epilogue to some story who's ending is already written. The resurrection of Jesus is the load-bearing wall of the entire gospel. Without it, God's covenant with David is broken. Without it, the prophets were wrong. But if God really raised Jesus, then every promise God ever made is trustworthy. Every single one.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Paul said David "served God's purpose in his own generation" and then fell asleep. That's a one-sentence obituary worth spending some time with. If someone wrote that sentence about your life right now, would it be accurate? What would need to change for it to be true?

Pause to Pray: *What purpose am I serving right now? Spirit, take my heart and set it on fire for Christ and His mission... Amen.*

DAY 69 PAUL'S SERMON: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Scripture: Acts 13:38-43

Reflect: Paul has been building his case piece by piece. He walked the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch through Israel's history, showing God as the actor in every scene. He traced the line from David to Jesus. He presented the resurrection, backed by eyewitnesses and anchored in Old Testament prophecy. The room has been leaning in. Now Paul arrives at the point of the whole sermon: what does this risen Jesus mean for the people sitting in front of him?

This is the first time in Acts that the word "justified" appears in Paul's preaching, and it's the word that would later become the backbone of his letters to the Romans and Galatians. Paul frames his standard

gospel proclamation with the note of justification. This is distinctly Pauline theology making its first recorded appearance.

And the claim is staggering. The law of Moses, the thing these people had built their entire spiritual lives around, could never make them right with God. It could diagnose the disease. It could expose sin, convict the conscience, show you how far short you fell. John Phillips put it perfectly: "The law could corner him, convict him, condemn him, but it could never cancel his sin." But through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified. Declared righteous. Set free.

God is doing something unbelievable again, this time through the resurrection of Jesus. And the danger is the same. You can hear all the evidence, nod along in agreement, appreciate the argument, but still walk away unchanged because you refuse to believe what God is actually doing.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Challenge: Paul said the law could diagnose the problem but never solve it. Most of us carry around at least one thing we keep trying to fix through willpower, discipline, or self-punishment. Here's my challenge today: name it. Write it on a card or in a note on your phone. Then underneath it write: "Justified through Him from everything." Carry it with you today as a reminder that the thing you can't fix has already been covered. You can walk through today, just as if I'd never sinned. Justified.

Pause to Pray: *Praise you, Jesus! This thing I could never fix on my own has been covered by your sacrifice. I am justified- it is 'just as if I'd never sinned'! Amen.*

DAY 70 REJECTED AND JOYFUL

Scripture: Acts 13:44-52

Reflect: A whole week has passed. It's the following Sabbath. And the synagogue is standing room only. Almost the whole city showed up. And the Jewish leaders couldn't stand it.

"It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first." This was Romans 1:16 in action, *"to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* Paul and Barnabas had honored that order.

Then Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6: *"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth."* This was one of the Servant Songs, originally addressed to Israel as God's servant. Old Simeon had quoted this same passage when he held the infant Jesus in the temple. Now Paul applies it to the mission he and Barnabas are carrying out. The Gentile mission isn't Plan B. It was always the plan. Israel was chosen to be a light to the nations, and now that light was going where it was always meant to go, all the nations will be blessed, the ends of the earth.

The Gentiles' response was immediate and beautiful: they rejoiced and honored the word of the Lord. While the Jewish leaders rejected, the Gentiles rejoiced. And the word of the Lord spread through the whole region. This little church plant, launched over the course of two weekends, lasted for hundreds of years. And it's because new believers were already carrying the gospel outward.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: The Jewish leaders rejected the gospel and the Gentiles rejoiced over it. They heard the same message. Sat in the same room. But had completely different responses. The difference wasn't the quality of the evidence. It was the posture of the heart. Joy doesn't come to the people with the best situations. It comes to the people willing to receive what God has for them.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, the circumstances I face aren't ideal, but I know that your Spirit is with me and You have something here for me to see, learn, experience. Help me receive and walk with joy today... Amen.*

PART 4/ WEEK 11 MINISTRY IN LYCONIUM & LYSTRA

DAY 71 ICONIUM: A DIVIDED CITY

Scripture: Acts 14:1-7

Reflect: Paul and Barnabas walked into Iconium. The synagogue was their natural starting place. Luke says they "spoke in such a way" that a great number believed. And right alongside the fruit came friction. The unbelieving Jews began stirring up Gentiles against them.

"SO they stayed." In most stories, opposition triggers retreat. Here, opposition triggered resolve.

Boldness in the face of pushback is evidence of God's power.

The gospel divides before it unites. The message of grace draws some in and pushes others away, often in the same room. If your faith never creates tension with the people around you, it might be worth asking whether you're living it out enough to notice.

When the plot to stone them surfaced, Paul and Barnabas fled. They'd been brave, but they weren't reckless. Courage and wisdom can share the same road. They moved on to Lystra and Derbe, "where they continued preaching the gospel." Persecution relocated the mission; it didn't end it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Is there an area of your life right now where you're pulling back because of pushback? A relationship, a conviction, a calling that's met with resistance? Paul and Barnabas saw opposition as a reason to stay longer. What would it look like for you to lean in instead of stepping back? Ask God to show you the difference between wise retreat and fearful avoidance.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Grant me the courage to stay engaged in... Amen.*

DAY 72 LYSTRA: HEALING AND WORSHIP

Scripture: Acts 14:8-13

Reflect: Lystra had no synagogue, so Paul went to the marketplace and started preaching. A man lame since birth was in the crowd. Paul called out, "Stand upright on your feet!" The man jumped up and started walking.

And then the story takes a strange turn. The crowd erupts in a dialect Paul and Barnabas didn't understand, calling them gods. They saw the power and jumped to the wrong conclusion. We do this too. We see God move and credit luck, talent, or coincidence. Or we find a hero and put them on a pedestal instead of giving God the praise.

By the time Paul and Barnabas realized what was happening, a worship ceremony was being organized in their honor. The miracle meant to point to the living God was about to become an act of idolatry. The human heart is wired for worship - it will find something to bow to. The question is never *whether* we'll worship. It's whether we'll worship the right God.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Sometime today, when someone compliments your work, your parenting, your character, or something you've accomplished, practice redirecting the credit. Say it simply and sincerely: "I'm so grateful for your compliment, that's because of God's grace in my life." It doesn't need to be awkward or preachy. One sentence. See what it feels like to turn the glory to God in real time.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, You are the source of everything good. Help me to bring glory to you in... Amen.*

DAY 73 PAUL AND BARNABAS REFUSE WORSHIP

Scripture: Acts 14:14-18

Reflect: The crowd was convinced they were hosting gods in human form. The moment Paul and Barnabas grasped what was happening, they tore their clothes and sprinted into the crowd screaming. Paul addressed the pagan audience with no background in Scripture. He started with what they could see and touch: creation. In a culture filled with dead idols made of stone and metal, Paul drew a stark contrast. Your gods are carved. The real God carves worlds.

Then he appealed to their daily experience. Rain. Harvests. Food. Joy. These weren't random gifts from Zeus. They were evidence of a living Creator who had been providing for them their whole lives.

The patience of God is staggering. He sustains people who ignore him, feeds people who worship statues, and leaves clues about himself in every sunrise and harvest until someone tells them the rest of the story.

That's what Paul and Barnabas were doing. The rain and the seasons had been whispering. Now the gospel was speaking plainly.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Rain, food, seasons, joy. God has been leaving evidence of himself in your everyday life since before you knew his name. Every ordinary blessing is a witness. Pay attention today. The Creator isn't hiding. He's providing, and provision is one of the love languages he shares with you and me.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for revealing yourself through the blessing of...Amen.*

DAY 74 STONED AND LEFT FOR DEAD

Scripture: Acts 14:19-20

Reflect: Angry people tracked Paul down. They turned a crowd that had been ready to worship the missionaries into a mob ready to kill them. The man who once watched a believer die of stoning was

crumpled on the ground. They dragged his body outside the city and left him. What happened next was extraordinary.

New believers watched their teacher get battered and dragged out of their city. And they went to him. They showed up when it cost something.

And then Paul got up. He walked back into the city, and the next morning left for Derbe. You can't account for that kind of endurance apart from the Spirit.

Suffering didn't end Paul's mission. That's what following Jesus looks like sometimes. You get knocked down, the Spirit picks you back up, and you walk on to the next opportunity to serve Jesus.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Where have you been beaten down lately? Maybe not with literal rocks, but with criticism, failure, rejection, or exhaustion that left you wondering whether you could keep going. Paul got up. The disciples gathered around him. Both details are really good to consider. Sometimes you need the resilience to stand, and sometimes you need the community that stands with you while you can't. Which do you need more right now: the courage to get back up, or the humility to invite some people to gather around you?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for helping me endure...Please grant me courage to... Amen.*

DAY 75 STRENGTHENING DISCIPLES

Scripture: Acts 14:21-23

Reflect: They turned around and went back. The Jews who had opposed them were still in those cities. The danger had only grown since they left. What are they thinking?

They went back because new believers can't survive on a conversion experience alone. The first pass through these cities was evangelism. This second was spiritual strengthening. Both were essential.

Strengthening. ...to make firm, to establish, to shore up the foundation. These were brand new Christians. Paul and Barnabas came alongside them, taught them and answered their questions.

Then came the warning. "It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

This is honest discipleship. Following Jesus would cost them something, but the cost was worth it. He didn't want them to be surprised by suffering. Surprises demoralize. Warnings prepare.

Hardships are real. The kingdom is more real. And the God who raised Jesus from the dead can carry you through both.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Think of one person in your life who is newer in their faith or going through a hard season. Send them a text today. Tell them you see their faith. Remind them the road is worth it. You don't need a sermon. You need a sentence. Strengthening someone's soul sometimes starts with ten words on a screen.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for allowing me to be a part of's faith journey. Grant me wisdom and sensitivity to encourage him/her today. Amen.*

DAY 76 RETURN TO ANTIOCH

Scripture: Acts 14:24-28

Reflect: The journey covered roughly 1,400 miles over the course of one to two years. They left as two men sent by a local church. They came back with a story that would reshape the Christian movement. They told the story of what God had done through them. Paul and Barnabas kept everything in proper perspective, viewing themselves as instruments through whom God accomplished his purposes. All the glory went to Him. This perspective is essential for any servant of the Lord.

Then comes the headline of the whole journey: "He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." This sentence reimagines the trajectory of everything that follows. God swings open doors that no human can shut and shuts doors no human can open. And this door, faith for the Gentiles, would turn the Jewish Christian church upside down and lead directly to the Jerusalem Council in the next chapter.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Paul and Barnabas reported what God had done with them. The word "with" is a great posture. They told the story as collaborators giving credit to the One who opened every door. When you tell the story of your life, your work, your growth, pay attention to your posture. God is always "with" you in the story. Make sure he stays central in the telling.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for always being with me. Help me to maintain perspective in.... Amen.*

DAY 77 THE CONTROVERSY BEGINS

Scripture: Acts 15:1-5

Reflect: Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch when men arrived from Judea with a message: "Unless these people are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, they cannot be saved." Their teaching was clear: faith in Jesus is a good start, but it's incomplete. Paul and Barnabas fought back. The sufficiency of Christ's work was the whole thing.

The Antioch church appointed Paul, Barnabas, and others to travel to Jerusalem and bring the question before the apostles and elders. When they arrived, believers from the party of the Pharisees, devout men who had come to faith in Christ and still carried their Pharisaic convictions, insisted circumcision and law-keeping were necessary for salvation.

The people adding to the gospel were sincere believers. They thought they were protecting the church. Yet once you try to add a single requirement to grace, it becomes something other than grace.

The church is about to wrestle this out. Is the gospel enough, or does it need our help?

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: We all carry an invisible list of extras we attach to the gospel. Cultural preferences, political convictions, lifestyle expectations, theological traditions we've elevated to the level of salvation itself. What's on your list? What requirement have you been placing on other believers that Jesus never required? Ask the Spirit to show you where you've been adding to grace.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I am so grateful for the complete sufficiency of the gospel. Help me to release...and extend your grace... Amen.*

PART 4/ WEEK 12 THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

DAY 78 PETER'S TESTIMONY

Scripture: Acts 15:6-11

Reflect: The apostles and elders gathered, and there was "much debate." Then Peter stood up. The Jerusalem church had already accepted that "God has given the Gentiles repentance that leads to life." This question was already answered. Why are you reopening it now?

God himself "bore witness" to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit "just as he did to us." It was the same gift, with the same visible signs.

Why "test God" by putting a yoke on Gentile believers that the Jewish people themselves had never been able to carry? The law had been the weight Israel had borne since Sinai, and they buckled under it at almost every turn. Why load that burden onto people God had already accepted without it?

Then Peter provides a thesis for our entire Christian faith: "We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way they are." Grace came first. Law-keeping never saved anyone.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Peter's closing line rearranges the whole equation. He didn't say Gentiles are saved like Jews. He said Jews are saved like Gentiles, by grace alone. Every human being who has ever been rescued by God was rescued the same way: through the unearned, undeserved kindness of Jesus. You can't improve on grace. You can only receive it.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for the gift of your grace. Help me to give the same to... Amen.*

DAY 79 BARNABAS AND PAUL REPORT

Scripture: Acts 15:12

Reflect: Theology alone doesn't always move people. Sometimes you need a story. So, Barnabas and Paul stood up and told theirs.

The combination of Peter's speech and the missionaries' report created a one-two punch that the legalists couldn't survive. Peter gave them the theology. Barnabas and Paul gave them the evidence. The truth of the gospel needs both clear teaching and real-life examples.

Luke wanted us to see the moment when the stories of ordinary missionaries, told in plain language, about what God had done, changed the trajectory of an entire movement.

Your story carries more weight than you think. God doesn't just work through eloquent preachers and trained theologians. He works through people who are willing to stand up and say, "Let me tell you what I saw God do."

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Reflection: When was the last time you told someone what God has done in your life? Not a polished testimony for a stage, but a simple, honest account of how God showed up? Barnabas and Paul didn't give a sermon. They told their story. And a room full of people who had been arguing fell silent and listened. Who in your life needs to hear your story this week, and what's keeping you from telling it?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for showing up for me in... Please grant me opportunity and courage to share my story with... Amen.*

DAY 80 JAMES'S JUDGMENT

Scripture: Acts 15:13-21

Reflect: James opens by affirming Peter's testimony, then he argues from Scripture. James's point is pastoral and practical: if God's own prophets anticipated a day when Gentiles would belong to him without first becoming Jews, then the church has no business adding requirements God. He delivers his verdict: we shouldn't heap unnecessary burdens on people who are coming to faith.

But James is also a realist. Jewish and Gentile believers had to live, eat, and worship together. So James proposes practical guidelines. These were concessions for fellowship, not conditions for salvation.

Freedom in Christ doesn't mean freedom to disregard the people sitting next to you.

The Council's decision protected the gospel from legalism on one side and carelessness on the other. It said: you are fully saved by grace, and you are fully responsible to love your neighbor. Both truths must shape how we live together.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Challenge: Think about one area of your life where you have freedom in Christ but someone close to you has a different conviction. Maybe it's a lifestyle choice, a worship preference, or a cultural practice. This week, ask yourself what it would look like to limit your freedom in that one area out of love for that person. Freedom that costs you nothing isn't really serving anyone. Real love makes room at the table for people who see things differently.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, help me to lay down my freedom in... so I can love others more...Amen.*

DAY 81 THE LETTER WRITTEN

Scripture: Acts 15:22-29

Reflect: The council didn't just draft a document and mail it. They selected respected leaders in the Jerusalem church to travel with Paul and Barnabas and deliver the decision in person. Together they represented both sides of the community that had just come through a crisis. The medium was part of the message. Sensitive communication deserves a human presence. An email or a memo can inform, but a person in the room can reassure.

The early church believed the Spirit had been an active participant in their deliberations. Through that messy, human process, the Spirit was guiding them toward unity. Consensus born from honest conflict, submitted to the Spirit, is one of the most powerful things a church can experience.

We tend to fight over secondary issues with the same intensity we bring to primary ones. The Jerusalem Council modeled a better way: hold the essentials tightly, hold the preferences loosely, and hold each other with loving unity.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Takeaway: The Jerusalem church put faces with their letter because they knew that sensitive decisions need a human touch. In an age of texts, emails, and comment sections, the most important conversations still deserve a real presence. The next conversation you're tempted to have through a screen, especially if it involves conflict, correction, or care, go in person. Show up. Presence communicates what words alone can't.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Thank you for being with me in... help me to be truly present with...Amen.*

DAY 82 THE LETTER RECEIVED WITH JOY

Scripture: Acts 15:30-35

Reflect: The Antioch church had endured "serious argument and debate." They'd sent advocates to Jerusalem and then waited, wondering whether the movement would survive its first real theological crisis. The tension must have been suffocating.

Now the delegation arrives. The letter is read aloud and they rejoiced. The Antioch believers could finally exhale. Grace won.

Then Judas and Silas stayed. They "encouraged and strengthened the brothers and sisters with a long message." Encouragement in the biblical sense is coming alongside someone who's been shaken and helping them find their footing again. That's what Judas and Silas did.

God doesn't just lead his people through hard seasons. He makes sure someone shows up on the other side to help them process what happened. Crisis without care creates trauma. Crisis followed by encouragement creates resilience.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Reflection: Think about a time when someone showed up for you after a difficult season. Just to be present, to encourage, to help you find your footing. I'm sure you appreciated it so much. It feels almost like an angelic visit when that happens. So I ask, who in your life right now might be on the other side of something hard and could use that same kind of presence? What would it look like to be the voice of encouragement for them this week? A paraclete, one who comes along side another.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Teach me how to encourage and comfort as I have been encouraged...Amen.*

DAY 83 PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE

Scripture: Acts 15:36-41

Reflect: "Let's go back and check on the churches we planted." This was a reasonable and uncontroversial idea, until Barnabas suggested they bring John Mark. John Mark had been with them at the start of the first journey but had walked away when the mission got hard. And Paul hadn't forgotten. Paul knew difficulties were coming: He needed people he could count on. Barnabas saw a young believer who'd stumbled but deserved another chance. Both had a point. And neither would budge. So they separated.

Years later, Paul wrote to Timothy, "Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in my ministry." That sentence represents redemption. The man Paul once refused to take on a trip became someone Paul

specifically requested in his darkest hour. Paul's willingness to change his mind about a person reveals a maturity that only comes with time and humility.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Challenge: Is there someone in your life you've written off because of a past failure? Someone who let you down and you closed the door on? This week, ask God whether it's time to reopen that door. You don't have to pretend the failure didn't happen. But Barnabas saw something in Mark that Paul couldn't see yet. Ask the Spirit to show you whether there's a "Mark" in your life who needs a second chance and maybe reveal a blind spot you didn't see before.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, Help me see....as you see him/her. Grant me wisdom in that relationship. Amen.*

DAY 84 TIMOTHY JOINS THE TEAM

Scripture: Acts 16:1-5

Reflect: Timothy's mother was a Jewish believer, His father Greek. Although considered Jewish, Timothy had never been circumcised. He lived in the overlap between cultures. Believers in both Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him.

Paul looked at this young man and saw someone worth investing in. Then Paul did something that looks contradictory. He circumcised Timothy. Why?

The answer is the difference between principle and strategy. The Jerusalem Council had settled the principle: circumcision is not required for salvation. Timothy's circumcision strategically removed a barrier to ministry. If Paul brought an uncircumcised man of Jewish descent into the synagogues, it would have created a scandal that had nothing to do with the gospel. Paul held the gospel with an iron grip and everything else with an open hand.

The controversy that threatened to tear the movement apart actually clarified and energized it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Takeaway: Let's talk about Timothy. He grew up between two worlds, Jewish and Greek, fully at home in neither. And God used that exact tension to make him the perfect bridge for Paul's mission. The parts of your story that feel like liabilities, the in-between places, the mixed backgrounds, the experiences that don't fit neatly into a category, those are often the very edges of your journey God wants to use. Your complexity is an asset, not an obstacle.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I give you every complexity of my story. Please use...for your good and your glory. Amen.*

PART 4/ WEEK 13 SECOND JOURNEY- MACEDONIA

DAY 85 THE MACEDONIAN CALL

Scripture: Acts 16:6-10

Reflect: Paul had a plan, probably to go south toward Ephesus, but the Holy Spirit said no. Paul adjusted and turned north toward Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus said no again.

Two closed doors in rapid succession. Luke doesn't tell us how the Spirit communicated this, but Paul was sensitive enough to recognize the Spirit's voice and obedient to change course when he heard it. Most of us want God to open doors. Paul's story reminds us that closed doors are guidance too. Sometimes obedience feels less like a confident march and more like a confused shuffle.

At Troas, God broke the silence. During the night, Paul saw a vision: a man from Macedonia, pleading, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" Macedonia was across the Aegean Sea. It was Europe. This was uncharted territory for the gospel. This was a critical moment. If Paul had turned back east, Christianity might have remained primarily an Asian religion. Instead, God was sending the gospel west into Greece, eventually toward Rome, and eventually the gospel would reach you and me. One vision in a coastal town, and the trajectory of God's kingdom bent. God's timing is always larger than the moment you're standing in.

Discerning God's will often works this way. You rarely get a single neon sign; instead, you often get a series of redirections, growing conviction, a community that confirms what you're sensing. Eventually, through this active Spirit, the pieces click.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Are there any doors that have closed in your life recently? The job that didn't come through. The relationship that ended. The opportunity that fell apart. You've probably spent energy grieving those closings or questioning whether you missed something. But what if the closed doors are the guidance? What if God has been steering you by the things He's prevented as much as by the things He's provided? Sit with this question today: What is the one open road in front of me that I've been too distracted by closed doors to notice? God's no is often protecting a bigger yes.

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, make me sensitive to the open road in front of me and help me see that bigger yes and walk into that leading... Amen*

DAY 88 LYDIA BELIEVES

Scripture: Acts 16:11-15

Reflect: From Neapolis, they walked into Philippi. Luke calls Philippi a colony because he wants you to know the gospel is about to walk into the heart of Roman power and identity.

Paul's normal strategy was to head straight for the synagogue. In Philippi, there wasn't one. Instead, they went outside the city gate to the river, where they expected to find a place of prayer. What they found was a group of women. No men. The Macedonian man from the vision turned out to be a gathering of women by a river. God has a sense of humor!

Among those women was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. Lydia was far from home, running a business in a foreign city and a "worshiper of God," the same term used for Cornelius. She was a Gentile drawn to the God of Israel and spiritually hungry. She'd come a long way toward God but hadn't heard about Jesus.

The God who closed doors in Asia, who sent a vision to Troas, who put wind in the sails across the Aegean, now opened one woman's heart. God is always working ahead of his people. Every closed door behind Paul was leading to this open heart.

Lydia and her household were baptized, and she insisted the missionaries stay in her home. Her new heart became an open living room. Lydia's conversion moved outward into hospitality, willing to risk reputation for the sake of the gospel. When the Spirit opens a heart, a whole life opens.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Lydia's first instinct after meeting Jesus was to open her home. Hospitality is one of the most overlooked spiritual practices in the modern church, and one of the most powerful. This week, invite someone into your space. It doesn't need to be fancy. A meal, a cup of coffee, an evening on the porch. The point is presence, not presentation. Pick one person who might be lonely, new to your community, or far from God, and make room for them at your table. An open heart always leads to an open door.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, as I open my heart to You, help me open my home and my life to someone who needs to know Your love... Amen*

DAY 87 THE SLAVE GIRL DELIVERED

Scripture: Acts 16:16-21

Reflect: They kept returning to that place of prayer. One day, a slave girl intercepted them. She had a "spirit of prediction," which in Greek is literally "a spirit of Python." This girl was a walking fortune-telling business, and her owners were profiting handsomely. She was enslaved to her masters, to the demonic spirit, and to a system that saw her as a revenue stream rather than a human.

She followed Paul's team, shouting, "These men are the slaves of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." In pagan religion, "Most High God" could easily be a reference to Zeus. "The way of salvation" was language other mystery religions used. The devil has always been happy to say accurate things if they serve his purpose. This was a distraction.

Paul tolerated it, but, finally, he had enough and spoke directly to the spirit and it came out immediately. The authority was devastating, and the source was the name of Jesus. The Spirit who had been on the loose since Pentecost liberated a girl from years of spiritual captivity. Freedom rides in the wake of the gospel.

Her owners calculated their loss. The moment the gospel threatens the wallet, resistance gets fierce and personal. So they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the authorities. They wrapped their greed in patriotism. The gospel threatens systems that profit from enslaving. Wherever people are exploited, Jesus says they can be free. That kind of gospel makes enemies.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

The slave girl's owners couldn't see past her usefulness. She was profitable, so they kept her enslaved. When she was set free, they didn't see a miracle. They saw a financial loss. We do the same thing when we reduce people to what they produce for us, when we value someone for their output, their role, their usefulness to our agenda. Every person you encounter today carries the image of God. They are not a means to your ends. See people the way Jesus does: worth liberating, not leveraging.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, help me see the people I meet with your eyes. Help me value them as Your image bearers and love them apart from what they can do for me... Amen*

DAY 88 BEATEN AND IMPRISONED

Scripture: Acts 16:22-28

Reflect: They ordered Paul and Silas stripped and beaten with rods, a brutal Roman punishment. Beating a Roman citizen without a trial was illegal, but Paul and Silas never got the chance to speak. After the flogging, they were thrown into prison. The jailer put them in the inner prison and locked their feet in stocks designed to maximize pain. These two men were bleeding, confined in darkness, their legs immobilized in a position making sleep nearly impossible.

At midnight, their singing carried through prison walls. Two men who had every reason to cry out in anger or despair filled a Roman dungeon with worship. Faith tested and refined can erupt in the strangest moments. Paul and Silas drew from a joy that went deeper than their circumstances.

The prisoners listened. People in bondage were exposed to freedom. You never know who's listening when you worship through your pain. Then God showed up. A violent earthquake shook the prison. Every door flew open. Every chain broke. The Spirit was at work again, and this time he blew the building wide open.

The gospel doesn't just set you free; it can position you in sacrificial places for the sake of another's soul. This is how God operates. He doesn't prevent suffering; He redeems it. The unstoppable Spirit isn't stopped by prisons or politics or pain. He works through all of it, and often the people who suffer most are the most convincing witnesses that God is real.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Paul and Silas chose worship when everything in their bodies was screaming for relief. They didn't wait until the circumstances improved to praise God. They praised God in the middle of the worst night of their lives. Where are you waiting for your situation to change before you engage with God? What if worship isn't the reward for getting through the hard season, but the thing that sustains you in it? Ask yourself honestly: have I been withholding praise because I'm waiting for God to fix something first?

Pause to Pray: *Father, I'm trusting You with the hard places in my life. Help me praise You loud and strong even when I can't see Your answers yet... Amen.*

DAY 89 THE JAILER BELIEVES

Scripture: Acts 16:29-34

Reflect: The jailer called for lights. The first thing he did was rush to Paul and Silas and fall at their feet, trembling. This was a hardened Roman soldier, but something broke him. Every instinct said this was more than a natural disaster. These men carried an authority that outranked his Roman superiors.

His question was raw and urgent: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They served a God with real power that shook the jailer's world enough to make him ask the most important question. How can I be saved?

Paul answered: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Believe. Not just mental assent, this carries the weight of 'trust'.

Bleeding and exhausted, Paul and Silas gathered the jailer's household and shared the gospel. The mission doesn't wait for comfortable conditions.

Now, the jailer washed their wounds. Repentance changes how you treat people. Then the jailer and his entire household were baptized. Immediately. When you encounter God, urgency makes sense. The gospel works fast when the heart is ready.

This passage reveals God's range as the changer of hearts. God meets people where they are. There is no one-size-fits-all conversion story.

And see the new Philippian church: a businesswoman, a freed slave girl, and a Roman jailer with his family. Rich and poor. Free and formerly bound. Roman and foreign. We see the beginning of a pattern that would continue through history; the gospel builds the most diverse and unlikely communities!

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

The jailer's first act after believing was to wash the wounds he had caused. Conversion changed how he treated the people right in front of him. Is there someone you've been harsh with, dismissive toward, or careless about? Today, take one concrete step to repair that. Send a text. Make a phone call. Offer a specific apology. You don't need to over-explain. Just clean the wound you left. Repentance that doesn't reach the people around you hasn't finished its work yet.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, if I have wounded someone, help me own that hurt and show me specifically what you want me to do to help repair that wound and help me do it... Amen.*

DAY 90 RELEASED WITH HONOR

Scripture: Acts 16:35-40

Reflect: Morning came, and the magistrates sent a message: "Release those men." Luke doesn't explain why. They assumed Paul and Silas would leave, but Paul refused. The magistrates broke fundamental Roman law.

The magistrates were rash and now faced the consequences. Why did Paul play this card only now? If Paul had pulled rank earlier, there would have been no prison, no midnight worship, no earthquake, no jailer falling to his knees. The jailer's family might never have heard the gospel. Paul understood sometimes the path through suffering leads to someone else's salvation.

But now, Paul thought of the church he was leaving. He demanded the magistrates come and escort them out, clearing the record to the whole city: these men are innocent, their message is legitimate, and anyone following them is under protection of Roman law.

The magistrates came and apologized to Paul and Silas, begging them to leave. Before leaving, they went to Lydia's house where Luke says Paul and Silas "encouraged" believers there. Two men with fresh wounds walked out of a prison, proof that suffering for the gospel doesn't have the final word. Then they departed.

Luke likely stayed, shepherding this small, diverse church that was growing on solid ground. Paul later wrote to the Philippian church with more affection than to any other. The gospel arrived in Europe through all kinds of closed doors. On the outside it appeared none of it went according to plan. But, in fact, all of it went according to God's.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Paul used his legal rights to protect people who couldn't protect themselves. He could have used his Roman citizenship to avoid suffering himself. Instead, he saved it to shield a vulnerable church. At some

level, leadership always becomes a stewardship question. Every advantage you carry, whether it's education, connections, financial margin, social capital, or institutional trust, is an opportunity to cover someone who doesn't have what you have. The measure of your influence isn't what it gets you. It's who you share it with.

Pause to Pray: *Father, help me see who needs my influence right now and show me how I can use what You've given me to bless someone else... Amen.*

DAY 91 THESSALONICA: SOME BELIEVE

Scripture: Acts 17:1-4

Reflect: Paul's strategy was consistent: go to major cities where the Scriptures were already read. A synagogue meant people already believed in the God of Israel and accepted the authority of the Old Testament. He could build from that.

Thessalonica was the capital of the province, a commercial port with a large Jewish population. Paul chose it as a strategic center for the gospel. Paul thought in terms of influence and planted churches in cities that could send the message rippling outward.

Luke uses four words to describe what Paul did over three Sabbaths: He reasoned, explained, proved, and proclaimed. He reasoned with them from Scripture, engaging their minds in dialogue. He explained, opening a text and unfolding its meaning layer by layer. He proved, literally "setting alongside," placing Old Testament prophecies next to the facts of Jesus' life and letting the audience see the correspondence. And he proclaimed: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah."

Results in Thessalonica were mixed. Some Jews were persuaded, but most converts came from the God-fearing Greeks, Gentiles who attended the synagogue, worshiping Israel's God, but had never fully converted to Judaism.

First and Second Thessalonians show a community already wrestling with deep theology. Paul planted fast, but he planted deep. The gospel invites us to think harder and follow the evidence. Paul's method was persuasion rooted in Scripture, not manipulation rooted in pressure. And the Spirit worked in both the reasoning and the responding. Changing hearts is his job not ours.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Paul built his case for Jesus using Scripture his audience already respected. He met people on their own ground and reasoned from there. This week, identify one person in your life who is spiritually curious and ask them a genuine question about what they believe. Listen well. Then share one thing about Jesus that connects to what they already value. Evangelism doesn't require a script. It requires paying attention to where someone already is and building a bridge from there.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, who do You want me to connect with to talk about what they think of You? Lead me to that person and prepare me to listen... Amen.*

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