

THE UNSTOPPABLE SPIRIT Part 5: The Mission Expands

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 5/ WEEK 14 THESSALONICA & BEREA

DAY 92 THESSALONICA: OPPOSITION

Scripture: Acts 17:5-9

Reflect: People were gravitating toward Paul's message about a risen Messiah, and for leaders used to holding the religious center of gravity, that was a threat. So they recruited "scoundrels," who loitered looking for trouble. Ancient marketplaces had men who could be paid to cheer, jeer, or throw a punch, like paid protesters today. Jewish leaders wanted chaos.

The mob went to Jason's house, and when they couldn't find Paul and Silas, they dragged Jason to the authorities. The charge they shouted is: "*These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.*" Man, I hope someone says that of me someday! A gospel that doesn't disturb probably isn't the gospel at all. Paul was teaching of Jesus as spiritual King. His opponents made that a political threat. Jews who despised Roman rule suddenly were Caesar's passionate defenders as they had a common enemy in Jesus.

City authorities made Jason post a security bond, a guarantee that Paul and Silas would leave and not return. Jason put his money and reputation on the line for missionaries he'd known only weeks. He opened his home. And his wallet. When the mob came, he absorbed the blow. Jason never preached a sermon or performed miracles. But he held the mission together by hospitality and personal cost. The church moves forward because of people like him: courageous ordinary believers pay the price.

The mob forced Paul out. The church in Thessalonica survived. Persecution scattered the missionaries but didn't stop the message.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Jason posted bail for missionaries he barely knew because he believed the message they carried was worth the exposure. Most of us won't face a mob. But every follower of Jesus eventually reaches a moment where faith costs something tangible: reputation, comfort, money, relational peace. Cheap faith agrees with Jesus in theory. Costly faith takes a hit, calls for sacrifice, sometimes writes the check. Where has your faith been easy, and where has it actually cost you something?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, as I look at Your sacrifice, I realize my faith should cost me something, too. Show me where you want me to pay the cost and help me be willing to do it... Amen.*

DAY 93 BEREA: NOBLE SEARCHERS

Scripture: Acts 17:10-15

Reflect: Berea was a small, quiet city called "off the beaten track." Paul went straight to the synagogue there. What he found was different. The Berean Jews, Luke writes, were "of more noble character" than those in Thessalonica. Two things earned the Bereans that label. First, they received the word with eagerness. Second, they examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were true. They went home and checked Paul's arguments against what God had already revealed. Eagerness and examination. Open hearts and clear heads. A good but rare combination. That's spiritual maturity, and it's a posture the modern church still needs.

The word Luke uses for "examined" is a legal one describing the investigation a judge conducts during a trial. They were digging, comparing Paul's claims about the Messiah against the prophets and the psalms and the law, doing the hard work of seeing whether the pieces fit. They did this daily.

The result? Many of them believed. When you study Scripture honestly and find the evidence holds, your faith grows stronger. The gospel invites you to think harder and follow the truth.

The good news traveled fast; so did the opposition. People from Thessalonica heard Paul was preaching in Berea and traveled to shut it down. The Berean believers escorted Paul all the way to the coast and eventually to Athens. Once again, ordinary believers did the unglamorous work of protection, logistics, and care. They held the church together. The mission always depends on people we barely remember.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: I love the example of the Bereans. They didn't just listen to a sermon and nod along. They went home and studied for themselves. This week, pick one passage from Sunday's sermon and spend ten minutes each day reading it in context, looking at the verses around it, and asking, "Is this what the text actually says?" Find a good commentary. But mainly just use your own curiosity and an open Bible. Be like the Bereans.

Pause to Pray: *Father, I want to really know what You're saying to me in Your word. Like the Bereans, help me take the time and care every day to dig more deeply and learn... Amen*

DAY 94 ATHENS: PROVOKED BY IDOLS

Scripture: Acts 17:16-21

Reflect: Athens was past its political peak but still the intellectual capital. It was a center for art, athletics, philosophy, and public debate and saturated with religion. Every gateway had its protecting god-of-choice.

Paul's spirit was "troubled" within him. The word describes a deep agitation. Every street, statue, altar. Each one provoked him. Paul looked at the beauty and saw people worshiping things that could never love them back. Idolatry grieves God because it promises meaning but delivers emptiness.

Paul went straight to conversation. He reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles on the Sabbath, and every other day he went to the marketplace, the Agora, the heart of Athenian civic life. Paul sat in the middle of it and talked to anyone, each encounter a divine appointment. Every day is a mission field if you have eyes to see.

Two schools of philosophy engaged him. The Epicureans taught happiness was the highest good. The Stoics believed in a rationality that ordered all things. Both systems were sophisticated and incomplete. Athens had a god for everything, and they still couldn't recognize the true God when His story showed up in the marketplace.

They brought Paul to the Areopagus on Mars Hill that held authority over religious, educational, and moral matters to examine him. They were professionally curious, always consuming the next thought, rarely changed. Intellectual hunger without spiritual commitment is just entertainment.

Paul stood on that hill, about to tell them of the God they'd been looking for.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Paul didn't just see Athens. He saw through it. Underneath the architecture and the philosophy and the marketplace buzz, he saw people building their lives around things that would never satisfy them. When you meet the God of the Bible, you don't just get inner strength. You get a whole new way of seeing everything. The question for today is simple: are your eyes tuned to what God sees, or have you gotten so comfortable that you don't even register all the idols around you anymore?

Pause to Pray: *Father, help me see with Your eyes. Help me see people as You see them, and, also, help me see the idols in my life and in the culture around me for what they are... Amen.*

DAY 95 MARS HILL SERMON: UNKNOWN GOD

Scripture: Acts 17:22-28

Reflect: Paul opens brilliantly, starting with what *this* audience knows. "I see that you are extremely religious in every respect." He sees these people have a deep instinct to worship. The instinct is right. The aim is off.

He names an altar inscribed "To an Unknown God." These altars were scattered around Athens, monuments to a haunting suspicion: what if there's a god we haven't met? Paul makes it a sermon. The God you're groping for already knows your name.

The Epicureans believed the gods existed but were completely indifferent to humanity. Paul says: this God made everything and sustains everything. The Stoics believed in an impersonal rational force running through all things. Paul says the Creator is personal, purposeful, and relational, orchestrating history so people would seek him and find him.

Paul says: "He is not far from each one of us." In a city with innumerable statues of fictional gods, Paul announces a God who is close. He finds fragments of truth embedded in their culture and uses them as bridges.

This is a masterclass in how to share the gospel with people who don't share your framework. He spoke their language, used their poets, met them on their own ground. The truth didn't change. The gospel translates into every culture because the God behind it made every culture.

Underneath is a pastoral heart. Paul is saying the God they've been looking for has been looking for them. Their altars are symptoms of hunger only one God can satisfy.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Paul quoted pagan poets to build a bridge to the gospel. He didn't retreat from culture. He engaged it and redirected it toward truth. This week, think of one song, show, book, or conversation that hints at a spiritual hunger, something that touches on meaning, identity, purpose, belonging, or hope. Then bring it up with someone. Use it as a starting point to share what you believe and why. Spiritual bridges are always built from common ground.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, You are an expert at building bridges with people. Please show me how I can build a bridge to someone who is far from You... Amen.*

DAY 96 MARS HILL SERMON: REPENT

Scripture: Acts 17:29-34

Reflect: Paul started wide, with creation, then moved closer as he built common ground. Now he narrows to the sharp point.

If God made us, we can't make him. Every idol in Athens was an attempt to shrink the infinite to the manageable. We still do this. We don't carve statues, but we reshape God into versions that suit us.

Then Paul pivots to something new: accountability. God commands all to repent. That word, 'commands,' lands hard. This isn't an option; he's delivering a command from the true God. God's patience is aimed at giving time to turn around, not permission to stay where we are.

God has set a day for judgment; the proof this judge has authority is the resurrection. God raised him from the dead. The resurrection was a line Athenians couldn't cross. The idea God would raise a dead body to life was offensive.

The audience split. Some mocked. Some deferred with polite procrastination. And some believed. Luke names two: Dionysius, a member of the council itself, and a woman, Damaris.

Paul preached faithfully amidst hostility. He adapted without compromising. And people believed. Faithfulness won't always produce a megachurch. Sometimes it produces a Dionysius and a Damaris and "others with them." And who knows what God did with those faithful souls.

The responses on Mars Hill are the same today. Mock it. Delay it. Believe it. The middle one might be the most dangerous, because it feels like wisdom. I'll consider Jesus someday. Often someday never comes.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Of those three responses, mocking, delay, believe, which one are you? Maybe most of us have moved past mocking, but delayed obedience is its own kind of refusal. Is there an area of your life where you've said "I'll get to that" to God? A conversation you know you need to have, a habit you know needs to change, a step of faith you keep pushing to next month? Procrastination dressed up as thoughtfulness is still disobedience. What's the one thing you've been delaying that God has already spoken clearly on? It might be time to take that step.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, in what area are you calling me to obedience? Help me see and hear that clearly and help me obey... Amen.*

DAY 97 CORINTH: TENTMAKING

Scripture: Acts 18:1-4

Reflect: Athens was academic; Corinth was a hub for trade--wealthy, diverse, and famously immoral. Paul arrived alone in weakness, fear, and trembling. In Athens he delivered a brilliant sermon and left with only a handful of converts. The gap between faithfulness and fruitfulness can feel like failure. Paul carried that into Corinth, but God met him there through two people and a shared trade.

Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish refugees expelled from Rome, lost their business, home, and community and landed in Corinth, setting up shop as tentmakers. Paul shared their trade and worked with them. A displaced couple and a discouraged apostle, stitching side by side. The Holy Spirit used this combo to rebuild momentum.

Aquila and Priscilla--always together, serving--hosting churches, training Apollos as a preacher, and risking their necks for Paul. God's providence often looks like a coincidence you only understand later. What felt like exile was God's positioning.

Rabbis were expected to learn a trade, so Paul made tents weekdays and reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath. He was consistent: engage the mind, open the Scriptures, build the case for Jesus as the Messiah, and let people respond.

Ordinary work done with kingdom intentionality is a platform for the gospel. You don't have to quit your job to serve God; you bring God to your job. The best missionaries in most churches aren't on staff. They're the ones in the workplace who've learned that every conversation is a potential gospel conversation if your eyes are open.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Aquila and Priscilla lost everything in Rome, and God used that loss to place them exactly where Paul needed them. Their displacement became their assignment. If you're in a season that feels like exile, a job change, a relocation, a loss that doesn't make sense yet, hold it loosely. God has a history of turning setbacks into setups. All the good stuff might be just on the other side of the disruption.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, help me recognize the specific ways You're orchestrating even the hard seasons in my life to bless others. Thank You for always having the best plan... Amen.*

DAY 98 CORINTH: VISION OF ASSURANCE

Scripture: Acts 18:5-11

Reflect: Silas and Timothy came bringing what Paul sorely needed: companionship and financial support. The churches in Philippi and Thessalonica sent money, which freed Paul to preach.

But opposition intensified. When Paul testified Jesus was the Messiah, the synagogue pushed back. They turned his message into mockery. Paul shook out his clothes and declared, "Your blood is on your own

heads. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Paul fulfilled his obligation to bring the gospel to the Jews first. Their rejection brought a redirection.

Paul set up in the home of Titius Justus, a God-fearing Gentile who shared a wall with the synagogue. Then, stunningly, Crispus, the synagogue leader, believed. Many other Corinthians also believed and were baptized. The harvest was finally coming.

Paul was afraid, but the Lord spoke: "Don't be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent. For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city." God met his fear with those three promises. Paul's job--keep speaking. Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's feeling fear and speaking anyway.

Paul stayed eighteen months teaching the word, building a church that would be one of the most significant in the New Testament. The Corinthian letters reveal a church of passion, division, confusion, and genuine faith. It wasn't a clean church. It was a real one. And it started with a frightened apostle who heard God say, "Keep speaking."

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: God told Paul to keep speaking when fear told him to go silent. Most of us face the same pressure in smaller doses: the conversation we avoid, the truth we soften, the conviction we swallow because people might push back. We might get cancelled. Today, identify one place where you've gone quiet and speak up. Send the text message. Have the conversation. Share what you believe. Courage isn't the absence of fear. It's feeling the fear and speaking up anyway.

Pause to Pray: *Father, where do you want me to take a stand and speak out for you? Give me the sensitivity to see where you are leading and the courage to speak truth... Amen.*

PART 5/ WEEK 15 CORINTH & EPHEBUS

DAY 99 GALLIO DISMISSES CHARGES

Scripture: Acts 18:12-17

Reflect: Sometimes God's protection doesn't come through your defense, he uses someone else. When Paul was accused of "persuading people to worship God in ways contrary to the law" in Corinth, God's sovereignty used Roman official Gallio, who couldn't care less about theology or the gospel, to safeguard the very mission that will outlast Rome itself.

Gallio made a ruling which echoed far beyond Corinth. Because Gallio's decision set legal precedent across the whole empire, the result was a decade of breathing room for Christians

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Gallio was no friend of the gospel. He was indifferent to it. And God used that indifference to protect the church. Maybe you have a difficult boss, a skeptical neighbor, a system that doesn't share your convictions, God doesn't need them to believe in order to use them. The hand of God moves through willing hearts and unwilling ones alike. Where are you waiting for everyone to get on board before you trust that God is at work? He just might be using the very person you'd least expect.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, what an incredible story! And a reminder that you are present and working even in unsuspecting people and places. Thank you for your good work. Open my eyes to see you moving... Amen.*

DAY 100 RETURN AND DEPARTURE AGAIN

Scripture: Acts 18:18-23

Reflect: Luke tells of Paul sailing to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila and did what he always did: he reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures. The response surprised him. They asked him to stay longer. Paul said no, yet he left Priscilla and Aquila to oversee everything. Here we see an example of Paul's leadership instinct. He planted trusted people and moved on.

Then, almost without taking a breath, Paul set out again. He walked the same overland route through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. This was the unglamorous, unrecorded, essential work of the church. Revisiting small congregations in remote towns. Teaching new believers how to hold on to their faith under pressure was the unglamorous, essential work of the church. Planting is only half the job. If nobody tends what's planted, the roots don't hold.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Paul walked 1,500 miles to check on churches he'd already planted. He didn't chase the next big thing. He went back to strengthen what God had already started. Faithfulness to what's behind you is just as spiritual as the pursuit of what's ahead. Who in your life needs you to circle back, not with a new project or idea, but just with your presence or encouragement; the kind of attention that says, "you still matter"? Why don't you reach out to them sometime soon.

Pause to Pray: *King Jesus, you are the one who calls us to be "fishers of men," a lifelong journey of relationship and discipleship. Thank you for this reminder to not become easily distracted when there is still work to be done. Today, I pray for _____... Give me the words and actions to encourage their faith. Amen.*

DAY 101 APPOLLOS TAUGHT BY AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

Scripture: Acts 18:24-28

Reflect: Apollos was an eloquent preacher and bold, yet he still had some stuff to learn. Zeal and incomplete knowledge can be a dangerous combination.

Two ordinary believers heard Apollos preach, they recognized the gap in his understanding, and they demonstrate a beautiful model of correction in the church: they took him aside privately, and explained the way of God to him more accurately.

The real test of Apollos's character showed up in what happened after the correction. He accepted the correction, because he cared more about the truth than about being right or defending his honor, and he became one of the most effective voices in the early church.

That's how the body of Christ works when it's healthy. Different gifts, different roles, one mission.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Apollos had the talent, the education, and the crowd's attention. He also had blind spots he couldn't see on his own. The reason Priscilla and Aquila could help him is because he let them. Today, what would it look like for you to open the door for someone to do that for you. Pick one person you trust, a spouse, a mentor, a close friend, and ask them a specific question: "Is there an area of my life or faith where you think I might have a blind spot?" Or another question I love, "what is it like being on the other side of me?" It takes some vulnerability to ask a question like that, but inviting honest feedback is one of the most helpful things a Christ-follower can do. Most people never hear the truth because they never make it safe to tell them.

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, I want my life, my character, and my actions to look more and more like you. May your Holy Spirit reveal my blind spots to me through your word or through another person. I, like Apollos, want to care more about the truth than my hurt pride when I am in error... Amen.*

DAY 102 DISCIPLES RECEIVE THE SPIRIT

Scripture: Acts 19:1-7

Reflect: Paul arrived in Ephesus and found about twelve men Luke calls "*disciples*," yet disciples of whom? Paul sensed this, and his first question cut straight to the heart of the matter: "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" Their answer was revealing: "*We haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.*"

The Spirit's arrival at Pentecost had changed everything, and these disciples had not yet received the Spirit. You can be sincere and still be standing outside looking in if you are not pointed forward to Jesus.

When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit is what moves you from preparation to participation, from knowing about the Messiah to actually knowing Him.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: These twelve men had built their faith on the best teaching available to them. It was true as far as it went. It just didn't go far enough. Many of us carry ideas about God that were shaped less by Scripture and more by experiences that forced us to form a distorted picture. The child who learned God was angry because their father was. The teenager who decided God was distant because a youth pastor disappeared. The new believer who was taught that if you have enough faith you'll avoid suffering. These aren't bad people with bad intentions. They're incomplete pictures mistaken for the whole portrait. What belief about God are you still carrying that was formed more by a broken experience or an incomplete teacher than by what God has actually revealed about Himself? Growth sometimes means unlearning the God you were handed so you can discover the God who's actually there.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus you are the Word, who was with God in the beginning, and you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Teach me your truth and may my life point others to you... Amen*

DAY 103 THREE MONTHS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Scripture: Acts 19:8-12

Reflect: Then some, of those Paul spoke to in the synagogue, became "*hardened.*" When someone begins distorting the mission of Jesus to poison others against it, continuing to engage in that space does more harm than good. Paul knew when to stay and when to leave.

Strategically, he withdrew with the disciples from there and relocated into a borrowed lecture hall, teaching in the afternoon daily after working a full morning at his job, resulting in "*all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.*" Paul trained people and they went out. The gospel was spreading through multiplication not addition. God was performing "*extraordinary miracles*" through Paul's hands. The power was God's, channeled through Paul.

Paul combined daily routine and the steady discipline of teaching. Miracles confirmed the message. But the miracles alone didn't build the church, teaching did. The spectacular and the ordinary worked together, and neither one was dispensable. Consistency is the fertile soil for the miraculous.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Paul taught in a borrowed lecture hall during the heat of the day after working a full morning making tents. The gospel spread across an entire province because one man was willing to do the unglamorous daily work of showing up and teaching. The most significant spiritual impact in your life probably won't come from a single dramatic moment. It will come from the things you do every day that nobody applauds. The parent who opens a Bible with their kids at breakfast before the chaos of the school run. The small group leader who prepares faithfully every week even when only four people show up. The coworker who prays for the person in the next cubicle by name, month after month, without seeing any change. That's the Tyrannus principle. Show up. Be consistent. Trust God with the results.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, you know me by name, you provide for my every need, and you are teaching me to follow you using the skills and financials for which I have labored each day. Because of this, I can make myself available to serve others... Thank you, Jesus. Amen.*

DAY 104 THE SEVEN SONS OF SCEVA

Scripture: Acts 19:13-20

Reflect: Proximity to the power of Jesus is not the same as possessing it. Knowing the right words is not the same as knowing the Person.

In Ephesus, the Sons of Sceva were pairing magical acts with Jesus' teaching, this equated to empty words with no authority. The event Luke tells us about stripped away the illusion, you can't split your allegiance between two spiritual authorities, magic and Jesus, and expect either one to hold. This set in motion the literal burning of magical practice type scrolls throughout the region, which came at a costly price. Yet the act represented repentance and total allegiance to Jesus.

The gospel won in Ephesus the same way it wins everywhere: through the authentic power of Jesus working through people who actually know Him.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: The Ephesian believers burned their scrolls, the spiritual safety nets they'd been keeping alongside their faith. Most of us don't have spell books. But we have our own versions of hedged bets, the habits, relationships, or backup plans we hold onto because we're not quite ready to trust God with everything. Today, name one thing you've been holding in reserve, one area where

you've kept a foot in both worlds. Then take one concrete step to let it go. Surrender that looks expensive in the moment always looks like freedom on the other side.

Pause to Pray: *Abba Father, Jesus Son of God, Holy Spirit the Helper, please forgive me when I split my allegiance between You and the things of this world. There is no power or authority except Yours, and a singular allegiance to You brings freedom. I surrender ____ to you. Amen.*

DAY 105 PAUL'S PLANS

Scripture: Acts 19:21-22

Reflect: Paul's "resolved in the Spirit," is the pivot point that will drive the rest of the book of Acts.

The phrase "in the Spirit" wraps that "resolved" human decision in divine direction. It looks like a faithful person making wise decisions with the Spirit shaping their desires from the inside out. When you are seeking God, He doesn't often override your decision-making, but He does shape it, sometimes in a completely different way than expected. In this case, Paul arrived at the forecasted location, Rome, yet as a Roman prisoner. God's "yes" to your calling doesn't always come wrapped in the packaging you expected.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Paul made plans. Detailed, strategic, Spirit-informed plans. And almost none of them unfolded the way he expected. He got to Rome, but in chains. He got to Jerusalem, but was arrested. The destinations were right. The paths to get there were God's to decide. Is there a plan in your life right now that you've been gripping so tightly that you've confused the destination with the path? What would it feel like to hold the "where" with open hands and let God choose the "how"?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I know my goal in life is to have an unwavering faith in you, to give glory to God, and to share your love with others. You desire to steer my daily steps to achieve this, yet I still stubbornly choose to go my own ways. I ask for your forgiveness. I surrender my strong will to your path. Amen.*

PART 5/ WEEK 16 RIOT IN EPHESUS

DAY 106 DEMETRIUS STIRS UP TROUBLE

Scripture: Acts 19:23-27

Reflect: Demetrius wasn't opposing Paul because of religious disagreements; Paul was bad for business.

There's a principle embedded in this scene that the early church understood and we sometimes miss. The gospel is a threat to the systems that keep people trapped. The freeing message of the gospel is still bad for business industries built on monetizing sinful practices.

There's no stronger proof of gospel power than when its enemies start complaining about how effective the gospel is. The opposition becomes the endorsement.

This resulted in people, who met Jesus, walking away from things that were binding them. The earliest Christians didn't win the culture war by attacking culture. They won by introducing people to a better King. When Jesus shows up, idols start to lose their grip.

The question today is whether we're allowing the gospel to go deep enough into our lives that it starts to truly disrupt and unseat our idols.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Demetrius dressed up his financial insecurity in religious language. We often do the same thing. Where in your life have you recently called something a matter of conviction that was really just a matter of comfort? What's the Artemis temple you've been protecting, the thing the gospel keeps bumping up against that you've been too invested in to let go? Will you let the Spirit sit with that question today. Give Him space to speak to you.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, the One by which I have been saved, thank you for this reminder from scripture that God alone is to be worshipped, not gold, family, fame, or worthless objects. I confess I have given _____ to much hold over my heart and mind today, I turn from this, and I pray for the opportunity to share this victory with someone today. Amen.*

DAY 107 CONFUSION IN THE THEATER

Scripture: Acts 19:28-34

Reflect: The guild meeting becomes a pagan mob stampeding into a stadium.

Paul was advised to not enter the theater where a meeting was taking place. Sometimes the Spirit speaks through bold actions. Sometimes the Spirit speaks through the people who love you enough to block you from taking a stupid and unnecessary risk. Both are voices worth listening for. The mature believer can tell them apart.

It's a hard thing to accept when you feel called to engage. But waiting is sometimes the most obedient thing you can do. The gospel doesn't always need to be defended. Sometimes it just needs to wait out the noise.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Courage isn't always walking into the theater. Sometimes it's listening to the friends who tell you not to. Paul had enough boldness for ten men, and he still needed his disciples and his political official friends to override him. It's a good reminder that while we need more courage and boldness, we need equal measures of discernment to know what to speak up and when to shut up. Today, remember: the Spirit often speaks through the people standing between you and a fight you're itching to pick. Before you walk into your next confrontation, ask who the Spirit has put in your life to pull you back, and whether you're honoring their voice or overriding it.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I thank you for _____, whom you have already appointed, to provide godly advice in the matter weighing on my heart today. I will act in obedience. Amen.*

DAY 108 THE TOWN CLERK RESTORES ORDER

Scripture: Acts 19:35-41

Reflect: A Roman administrator ends a riot in Ephesus, he wasn't a believer, an apostle, nor particularly interested in Paul or his message. He was worried about his career. God used him anyway.

The early Christians lived faithfully, preached Jesus, and trusted God to handle the rest. And when the opposition reached a boiling point, God answered through the least likely advocate in the city. Your circumstances don't always need a miracle. Sometimes they just need the right person at the right meeting saying the right thing. God has more of those people in play than you realize.

God's mission moves forward even when His people can't see how. The enemy's loudest days are often his last stand before a sound defeat.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Think of a situation in your life right now that feels loud and out of control. A conflict at work, a hard conversation with family, a decision you can't seem to land. Before you try to fix it, pray for the unlikely person, ask God to send the unexpected messenger, maybe a door that opens from the outside. Then do one ordinary thing today to stay faithful while you wait. Answer the email with grace. Make the phone call you've been avoiding. Show up for dinner. You don't have to resolve the riot. You just have to keep living faithfully until God sends the voice that calms the situation.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, you are Perfect Peace! Teach me to live faithfully, share your story often to bring clarity out of chaos, and trust God to handle the rest. I am praying for your intervention with ____ and the courage for me to be at peace with your timing and the outcome. Amen.*

DAY 109 THROUGH MACEDONIA AND GREECE

Scripture: Acts 20:1-6

Reflect: Paul learns about a plot to kill him, so he shortened his intended itinerary at Ephesus. He sent for his disciples, encouraged them one last time, and said goodbye. Walking away must have felt like leaving a family. Leadership in the Kingdom always eventually looks like letting go.

Then Luke picks up the pace. Paul goes through Macedonia, exhorts the churches "at length," and arrives in Greece, where he stays three months. It's interesting to note, the same Paul who felt a divine "must" pulling him toward Jerusalem was also willing to take the long way around to get there. Obedience and prudence are not opposites. Boldness does not mean you to walk into every ambush you hear about. Sometimes the most faithful thing you can do is change the plan and live to fulfill the calling another day. There is such a savviness to Paul's movements.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Paul's life was full of goodbyes. Leaving Ephesus. Leaving Macedonia. Leaving people he loved. He was able to do it because he wasn't clinging to any place as his permanent home. Where in your life right now are you holding on to a season God may be asking you to release? A role. A friendship that's changing. A city. A chapter. What would it look like to let go the way Paul did, with encouragement on your lips, an embrace, and feet willing to walk into whatever's next? Sit with that question today.

Pause to Pray: *Just as you, Lord Jesus, poured out your love for me on the cross, I do not want to overlook opportunities to express my love to others. I am guilty of rushing through moments where authentic expressions of love and gratitude was the better choice. Lord help me to slow down and recognize these. Amen.*

DAY 110 EUTYCHUS FALLS

Scripture: Acts 20:7-12

Reflect: While Paul was speaking, young, fatigued Eutychus fell to his death. Paul came down the stairs, wrapped him in his arms like a father holding a son. *"Don't be alarmed,"* Paul said. *"His life is in him."* And then continued talking until dawn.

Don't miss the last verse. *"They ... were greatly comforted."* Luke ends the story not with the miracle but with the comfort. The word he uses for *"comforted"* is related to one of Paul's favorite terms for the Holy Spirit. The Comforter. The One who comes alongside. And the Spirit provided it, through a boy restored to his parents.

The miracle in this story isn't only the resurrection. It's the way the early church kept going. They worshiped through the night, and walked out into the sunrise carrying a brand new comfort.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Think of someone in your life who might relate to Eutychus. Exhausted. Hanging on by a thread. Showing up to church or life out of habit more than passion. Maybe that person is you. Today, do one concrete thing to go embrace them. Send the text. Make the call. Invite them to coffee. Sit next to them on Sunday. Don't preach at them. Come alongside them, the way Paul came down the stairs and wrapped his arms around a boy who had fallen. Grace doesn't shame people who are exhausted. It restores them.

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, I praise you for being at work in 2026 in mighty ways, both the favorable and seemingly unfavorable. I thank you for The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who comes along beside me on the hard days. I am trusting you to work in all things for my good and your glory. Amen.*

DAY 111 SAILING TO MILENTUS

Scripture: Acts 20:13-16

Reflect: Just as Paul walked on part of his journey, some of the most important work you'll do might happen in the quiet stretches between all the so-called important work.

Next Paul takes a coastal and moves the gospel forward on the ordinary port schedule of human commerce. God's mission tends to travel the same ordinary roads we all travel on. The difference is, followers of Jesus are carrying something not everyone else possesses. The hope of the gospel.

An important detail: Paul decided to sail past Ephesus. That might not sound like much until you remember what Ephesus meant to Paul. And he certainly would have been tempted to stay. He knew the temptation, so he forced himself to sail past. Paul knew the Spirit was pulling him toward Jerusalem, and he was hurrying to arrive by Pentecost.

There's a kind of maturity in Paul's choices, taking time to slow down and working in the ordinary.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: What's your Ephesus? What is that place, or relationship, or pattern, or pull that seems good on its face but would stall the calling God has for you if you gave in to it. Today, don't just resolve to resist it. Build a plan around it. Take the long walk. Change the route. Make the decision in advance so you don't have to make it in the moment. Discipline isn't white-knuckle willpower. Sometimes it's the foresight to sail past the harbor before the temptation has a chance to dock.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, you already know ____ is pulling me in an unhealthy direction. With boldness in your strength not mine guide me around this so that I can live a clean life and keep the hope of the gospel in the forefront of my mind while daily interacting with people. Amen.*

DAY 112 PAUL'S FAREWELL: HIS MINISTRY

Scripture: Acts 20:17-21

Reflect: The transparency of Paul's integrity is demonstrated when he turns to the people who watched him live for three years and say, *"You saw it all. You know the full truth about me."*

Has your life been one thing in public and something else entirely in private. Real credibility is built by sameness over time. It's the slow accumulation of ordinary days where what people see matches what God sees.

The world's definition of successful leadership looks nothing like Paul, but Paul's looks just like Jesus.

To everyone, he said: the whole key to all of it is Jesus, turn from whatever's holding you. Trust the One who can actually save you. That's still the whole story.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: I want to come back to this idea that the people closest to you know the truth about your character. Your spouse, your kids, your coworkers, the friend who texts you all the time. They've watched you. And what they've seen is either consistent with what you say you believe, or it isn't. Today, take an honest inventory. Ask yourself: if I turned to the people who've been around me the longest and said, *"You know how I've lived among you,"* would that be a comfort or a confession? Then take one small step toward being a person of integrity. Integrating who you are in public with who you are in private.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, you are my confidant. I want to be broken by the grace of you Jesus and change the way I have been living in the area of _____. Sharing the real me with another person is not easy, help me identify an accountability partner and become a person of integrity. Amen.*

PART 5/ WEEK 17 PAUL'S FAREWELL

Day 113: PAUL'S FAREWELL: HIS FUTURE

Scripture: Acts 20:22-27

Reflect: There's a kind of courage that only makes sense when you've already settled the question of what your life is for. Paul says he's going to Jerusalem "compelled by the Spirit." He also knows the Spirit has been warning him, in city after city, that suffering is coming soon. The Spirit is sending him, and the Spirit is also telling him it's going to be painful. Paul goes anyway.

Most of us want the Spirit's leading to come with some guarantees. We want to know we'll like what's at the other end. Paul models something harder. The same God who calls us sometimes calls us into places we wouldn't choose. Obedience means walking into those places anyway.

Paul says, "I am innocent of the blood of all of you, because I did not avoid declaring to you the whole plan of God." Paul is telling the Ephesians: If anyone stumbles into eternity unprepared, it won't be because I softened the message to keep the peace.

This is what obedience looks like at the far end of a life well spent. Paul is willing to walk into chains because the One who called him is worth it. He values finishing over surviving. He can stand before people he loves and say, with a clean conscience, I told you the truth while I still had breath to tell it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Paul's clean conscience came from a long obedience he built one conversation at a time. None of us land at the end of our lives with the courage to say "I held nothing back" unless we've been practicing that courage in ordinary rooms, on ordinary days, with ordinary people. There's a phrase that has become popular that just says 'clarity is kindness.' The kindest thing you can do for someone is to be clear with them even if it's painful. Sit with this question today: Is there someone in your life who needs to hear something true from you, but you've been avoiding the conversation because it feels risky? A friend drifting from the faith. An adult child you've stopped pressing on spiritual things. A coworker who's asked honest questions and gotten safe answers. Ask the Holy Spirit to name that person, then ask yourself what you'd say to them if you knew you wouldn't see them again. You don't have to deliver the conversation today. But don't set the question down. A clear conscience at the end of a life gets built on small acts of courage in the middle.

Pause to Pray: *Father, I want to be able to say that I held nothing back. Help me to become a person who is bold and has clarity of words so that others might hear of the hope of Jesus through me. Amen*

Day 114: PAUL'S FAREWELL: GUARD THE FLOCK

Scripture: Acts 20:28-31

Reflect: Yesterday Paul told the Ephesian elders he was heading to Jerusalem knowing chains were waiting for him, and that he could stand before them with a clean conscience because he had held nothing back. Now he turns the mirror forward.

Paul chooses his words carefully. "Be on guard." And notice where the guarding starts. Not with the flock. With yourselves. The first threat to a leader is almost never the wolf at the gate. It's the drift inside his own soul.

Then he widens the lens. Guard the flock. But look at how he describes the flock. This is "the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood."

Then Paul gets specific about what the elders are up against. "Savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."

Most of us listening aren't elders. But the principle applies to every believer who loves anyone else. Guard yourself first. And then look around at the people God has put in your care. Love them enough to say something when something needs to be said.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Paul's first instruction wasn't about the wolves outside. It was about the condition of the soul of the leader. Before you can protect anyone else, you have to pay attention to what's happening in your own heart. Take a few minutes today and write down the three biggest influences on your thinking right now, whatever they are: a podcast, a person, a news source, a streaming show, a social media feed. Then ask one question of each: is this pulling me closer to Jesus or negatively rewiring how I see Him? Be honest. If something on the list is pulling you off course, decide today what to do about it. The first thing a person is responsible for is what's going on inside their own soul.

Pause to Pray: *Dear Jesus, please open my eyes to any influences in my life that are having a negative impact on the way I view you. Amen*

Day 115: PAUL'S FAREWELL: EMOTIONAL GOODBYE

Scripture: Acts 20:32-38

Reflect: For a few days now we've been sitting on the beach at Miletus with Paul and the Ephesian elders. Now he reaches the end of his speech. An emotional conclusion for a ministry team who deeply loved each other. Paul's final act as their pastor is to let them go. That's how he ends it. "I commit you to God and to the word of his grace."

Every pastor, every parent, every mentor has to do this sooner or later. The hardest thing about loving people is that you can't stay with them forever. Then the day comes when you have to open your hands and trust that God will carry them places you never could.

Then he shifts. He wants these men to remember something about how he lived. He didn't covet anyone's stuff. He worked with his own hands. He supported himself and the people around him.

Paul is telling these future leaders: watch for the love of money. He seals the warning with a saying of Jesus that isn't recorded in any of the Gospels. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." A life that pours out is richer than a life that scoops up.

And then comes the moment that should get us every time. Paul kneels. These tough, seasoned elders fall on his neck and weep. They kiss him. They can't stop.

Real love hurts when it leaves. The goodbyes that you feel deep in your heart are proof you actually loved somebody. May we all love deeply enough that some of our goodbyes really cost something.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: The final gift Paul gave the Ephesian elders wasn't one more sermon. It was his example of open hands. Hands that didn't grasp for silver, didn't reach for gold, didn't take advantage of the people he served. A leader's hands reveal what a leader loves, and Paul's hands loved the flock more than anything the flock could give him. Carry that image with you today. When you close your hands around something, ask what you're really holding onto. Your position. Your reputation. Your comfort.

Your resentment. An open hand blesses. A closed hand grabs. The people God has placed in your life can always tell the difference.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, help me to understand what I am truly holding on to. Show me what I need to let go of and what I need to hold more tightly. Amen*

Day 116: Journey to Tyre

Scripture: Acts 21:1-6

Reflect: Luke opens this section by capturing the emotion of the moment, "We tore ourselves away." The parting at Miletus wasn't a handshake and a wave. These men loved each other.

Paul is a missionary on a tight schedule trying to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. Yet he stops in Tyre for seven full days while the ship unloads cargo. And what does he do with those seven days? He goes looking for Christians.

And those disciples knew something was wrong. The Spirit was telling the disciples what was going to happen in Jerusalem. They heard the Spirit say, "chains and suffering," and their love for Paul filled in the rest. "So don't go." The revelation was accurate. Their application wasn't.

Paul listens to them, honors them, loves them, and still gets on the ship.

Luke writes that the whole church walked Paul to the boat. And when they got there, they knelt on the sand and prayed together. Whenever the gospel's messengers part ways, they hit their knees and cover the goodbye in prayer.

This is what the church is supposed to feel like. Strangers who become family at the speed of the Spirit.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: These believers refused to let Paul board that ship without praying over him first. That kind of sending off is such a cool model for Christian friendships. These days, sometimes friends will say I'll be praying for you. We text "praying right now!" But how often do we stop, put our knees on the ground, and actually talk to God about that person we love. Here's the challenge: Pick one person in your life today who is walking into something hard, whether it's a medical test, a job change, a difficult conversation, a trip, a new season of life, and send them off the way Tyre sent Paul off. Call them. Knock on their door. Pull them aside. Ask if you can pray with them out loud, right now, before they walk into whatever's next. Want to really make an impact? Get on your knees together. The prayer doesn't have to be long. Just make it real.

Pause to Pray: *Father, please show me who needs prayer today. Amen*

Day 117: WARNINGS IN CAESAREA

Scripture: Acts 21:7-14

Reflect: The crew stops at Caesarea, and Luke includes a significant detail. Paul stays at the house of Philip the evangelist. The last time we saw Philip, he was running from Saul's persecution. Now twenty

years have passed. And the man eating dinner at his table is the same man who used to drag Christians out of their homes and throw them in prison. Paul once hunted believers like Philip. Now Paul sleeps in Philip's guest room. Only the gospel could write a scene like that.

Then Agabus shows up. He's a proven prophet. He's the kind of guy who speaks, and people listen. He says, "This is what the Holy Spirit says. The man who owns this belt is going to be tied up like this and handed over to the Gentiles."

He doesn't say "don't go." He says only, "this is what will happen." The prophecy was a warning, not a prohibition. But the people watching couldn't handle the difference. Everyone who loved Paul pled with him to turn back.

But Paul says, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." He has already worked this through in his soul.

And then one of the most difficult prayers of the Christian life. "The Lord's will be done." The Caesarean believers couldn't talk Paul out of it. So, they did the only thing faithful people can do when obedience looks costly. They said the prayer Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and let their friend walk toward his own cross.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Paul's friends loved him but still gave the wrong advice. It happens more than we'd like to admit. People who care about us can misread the Spirit's warnings as the Spirit's prohibitions and beg us out of the very obedience God is calling us into. Love is a gift, but love is not always the same as discernment. Sometimes it's the difference between what's easy and what's best. Scripture, the Spirit, and the settled conviction of your own soul have to do the driving. Today, sit with a decision you're wrestling through. Notice whose voice is loudest in your head. Consider if what's pulling you off course is someone's fear disguised as their care. Choose what's best over what's easiest, and keep walking toward what the Lord has asked you to do,

Pause to Pray: *Spirit of Christ, I need discernment. Help to know what is best, and give me boldness to fulfill your will, even if it's not the easiest. Amen*

Day 118: ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

Scripture: Acts 21:15-19

Reflect: The sixty-five miles between Caesarea and Jerusalem was too far to cover in a single day. So, Luke tells us they stopped at the home of a man named Mnason, "an early disciple" from Cyprus.

Whatever his story, he was there near the beginning, and he was still there. So, when the traveling apostle needed a place to sleep, Mnason's house was ready. Some of the most important people in the kingdom of God are the ones who just stay faithful for decades and keep their eyes open for chances at Christian hospitality.

Then Luke writes, "When we reached Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters welcomed us warmly." Remember that twenty-five years earlier, Paul had left Jerusalem as a newly converted man that nobody trusted.

This is what the fruit of time and faithfulness looks like. The man who once hunted the church is now the church's best-known missionary. The gospel has the power to redeem that which looked like it was permanently broken.

The next day Paul goes to meet James and all the elders. Luke says Paul "reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." He lists God's wins. The conversions. The churches. The Gentile believers now worshipping Jesus. The Jerusalem elders would have been leaning forward. Every story was evidence that Jesus really was building His church to the ends of the earth.

When believers from different corners of the world sit down together and tell each other what God has been doing, the room fills with the presence of the Spirit. Gospel storytelling is how the church stays connected. Your life, lived faithfully in your small corner, is part of a story God is weaving with millions of other faithful lives around the world. When you tell that story honestly, you encourage everyone who hears it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Paul walked into James' house and he led with what God had done. Too often we think of our lives with ourselves as the main character. The language of "God did this" has gone missing from most of our everyday conversations. Before the day ends, what if you took ten minutes to name, specifically, three things God has been doing in your life over the last couple of weeks. Not what you did. Not what happened to you. What God did. Trace his fingerprints. A prayer answered. A door opened. A relationship healed. A sin loosening its grip. Then find someone today and tell them one of those God stories. The kingdom grows in the ordinary moments when God's people notice God's work out loud.

Pause to Pray: *God, I thank you and I praise you for... Please show me a person who needs to hear about what you have done. Amen*

Day 119: THE PURIFICATION PLAN

Scripture: Acts 21:20-26

Reflect: Jerusalem had tens of thousands of Jewish believers, and all of them were "zealous for the law." These are Jews who follow Jesus and still keep Moses. Their faith in the Messiah didn't erase their cultural and religious identity.

Rumors were swirling that painted Paul as a man who tells Jewish believers to abandon Moses altogether. That was never Paul's teaching. Paul had fought hard against forcing Gentiles to become Jewish. But he never told Jews to stop being Jewish.

James and the elders propose a plan. There are four men in the church who have taken a Nazirite vow. The elders ask Paul to do two things: pay for the men's sacrifices and undergo a brief purification ritual himself. If Paul shows up in the temple courts sponsoring a Nazirite vow, the rumor about him falls apart.

Paul never confused the essentials of the gospel with the cultural expressions around it. Salvation is by grace through faith. The secondary stuff is negotiable for the sake of the mission. So Paul takes the men and goes to the temple.

Most of us struggle with the opposite problem Paul had. We confuse our preferences with the gospel. We treat our cultural expression of Christian faith as the only legitimate one. We make people adapt to us before they can be welcomed in. James and Paul model something different. Hold the gospel with a closed fist. Hold secondary issues with an open hand.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Paul was willing to lay down his preferences to protect his witness. A lot of modern Christians choose to protect their preferences and call it their witness. Pick one preference in your life today that's been getting in the way of your relationships or your impacting your church life, and lay it down for thirty days. A worship style you complain about. A political opinion you keep trying to work into conversations. A way of doing church or parenting or hospitality you've treated as the only right way. Don't compromise any of the essential stuff. Just loosen your grip on something that was never essential in the first place. You may find that what felt like spiritual conviction was just personal comfort in the end.

Pause to Pray: *Father, help me to know what preferences I should let go of for the sake of removing barriers that keep people from Jesus. Amen*

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