

The Odyssey of St. Paul

The study that you hold in your hands is the result of a life-changing encounter with the apostle Paul. It was inspired by Dr. Paul Maier. Let me tell you how it began. As the teacher of a large adult Sunday school class, finding material that is both relevant and thought provoking is always a challenge. As providence would have it, while sorting through some teaching material, my husband literally tripped over this series that had been tucked away in our church storage area. The minute I slipped the video into the VCR and “The Odyssey of St. Paul” began; I knew he had stumbled across something very special. (Don’t you love it when that happens)! And so began an amazing journey for my class and me.

You may be familiar with the apostle Paul. It’s likely that you remember him as a rebel on the road to Damascus who got knocked off his horse by a blinding light. (Am I the only one who thought he fell off a horse? News flash. There was no horse.) Or perhaps you remember him with his jail mate Silas who together watched wide-eyed as God opened prison doors in response to their praise. Or, maybe you remember him as a reluctant sailor who, against all odds, led 275 nauseous fellow travelers on a salty swim to safety. What ever your recollections of him, you are about to embark on a journey that will provoke you to take a deeper look at this unlikely evangelist. In fact, I think this study has the potential to change your life.

“Now, how is that possible?” you ask. Well, because that is precisely what happened to me. I graduated from a great Bible school (with honors, I might add). I was confident that I had a good understanding of who Paul was and of the mark that he had left on our world. I was wrong. Pathetically wrong. With every video I watched, my discomfort level grew. I felt compelled to ask myself some hard questions. Why couldn’t I name all the books that the apostle Paul had written? Why was it that I didn’t even recognize half the names of the cities Paul had visited? And most distressing, where did I ever come up with the notion that Priscilla and Aquila were two spinster sisters?

Is it possible that I had slept through all those mandatory classes? Did I take a really long bathroom break? Whatever the disconnect all those years ago, it was not until I began to watch his life unfold before me that the full scope of who he was and what he accomplished became clear. This is the man who brought the gospel to the Gentiles. That’s good news because that means me, and you. He kicked open doors that had previously been closed to us. He suffered great persecution so that we could claim this gospel as our own. He penned at least 13 books of the New Testament. Most of the Scriptures that I had committed to memory over the years flowed from the stylus of this prolific writer. For the first time in my life his legacy mattered to me. His passionate determination to “complete his course” has inspired and challenged me.

And so, it is my prayer that as you watch this series and dig through your Bibles together, the apostle Paul: the man, his mission, and his message will provoke you to live the same, “in your face”, “kicking it” kind of life that he did.

So, pack a nap sack, grab your sandals, and lets get started.

Young Saul

Have you ever discovered that to really understand who a person is, and what makes them tick, you often need to take a look at where they came from? This has never been truer than with the apostle Paul.

Listen carefully as Dr. Maier details those early years, and watch with amazement as God takes a little Jewish boy by the hand (or perhaps more accurately, by the scruff of the neck) and together they begin the journey of a lifetime.

List three facts from the video that are new to you. What do you find to be remarkable about them?

Piece together (on a white board or flip chart) the early years of Saul, using the information that you've just learned.

These Scriptures will refresh what you've heard.

Acts 7:58-8:3

Acts 22:3-5

1 Timothy 1:15

Philippians 3:4-6

O.K. so we have determined that this was not a young man that you would want your daughter bringing home but, don't be too quick to judge him because although deceived he believed he was valiantly defending the truth. You may want to pause for a moment and consider our world today. Daily the newspapers are full of stories of young men and women sacrificing themselves on the bloody altar of deadly deception. They are convinced to their very core that the battle they fight is just. The apostle Paul would understand the fuel behind such a zealous pursuit.

We find this radical crusader on his way to the city of Damascus, intent on wiping out the divisive cult that was gripping his part of the world. Tucked safely in his pocket were official papers that gave him sweeping authority over their futures. Picture him on the road, about noon, the mid eastern sun beating relentlessly down upon him. We pick up the story in Acts 9:3, ***“As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”***

“Who are you sir? Saul asked.” The voice replied, “I am Jesus the one you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you are to do.”

He stumbled to his feet and was led by the hand of one of his bewildered companions into Damascus. There the blind avenger spent three life changing days and nights without food or water.

Can you even begin to imagine what those days were like for Saul? They involved the complete dismantling of everything he knew and believed since he was a small child. If this Jesus was indeed the Messiah, (and it appeared that he certainly was), his entire belief system was crashing

down around him. Though blind, he for the first time was beginning to see. It's no wonder he didn't feel like eating.

Verses 10-19 of chapter 9 give us a look into the life of a precious believer named Ananias. It's hard not to feel sorry for him. He was scared half to death and with just cause. Still, he obeyed the voice of God. This is a good lesson for all of us. Even if you're afraid, obey. Especially, when you're afraid, obey! His decision to do that changed his world. Your decision to do that may well change yours.

You know what grips me? Turn to Acts 9:17, "***So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, 'Brother Saul the Lord Jesus who appeared to you...'***" No need to read further. The first words spoken to the raving zealot by a follower of the Way, were "Brother Saul." He called him "Brother." I love that!

These early years of Saul are pivotal to the man he would become. Every time I hear the story I shake my head in wonder as I see God sovereignly weaving into the life of Saul, those things that He would later redeem and use for His glory.

Table Talk

In your groups discuss what you think those things may be. Let me give you a few clues.


- 1) How many languages did he speak? So what?
- 2) He was a Roman citizen. Big deal? Yes or No?
- 3) He learned a trade. So, the guy could sew. What difference would that make?
- 4) He was far more zealous than others his age. OK, he was the teacher's pet. Who cares?
- 5) He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Relevant? Why?

If you are meeting Saul for the very first time, these observations may not mean much, but if you've been around awhile and have read the end of the story, the truth is becoming increasingly clear. Paul's life is a study in God using everything we have and are, and then rewriting the story of our lives for His purposes. Be assured of this: God never wastes anything. Nothing. Not your parentage or your nationality. Not your upbringing or your education. Not your skills or your personality. Not your pain, nor your tears. And remarkably, not even your mistakes. He can and will buy back every day of your life. In fact, He already has. Take a few moments and reflect on how this has been true in your life and share it with the group.

I wondered as I studied Paul, is it only in retrospect that we understand this profound truth of redemption? Did Paul ever recognize it himself? Galatians 1:15 give us a clue about that. Imagine him moved with emotion, choking back the tears as he pens, "***For it pleased God in his kindness to choose me and call me even before I was born***" Oh, he knew all right. He knew.

Want to dig a little deeper?

Read Acts 8:1-8 Tuck this piece of information away for now. We'll come back to Philip later in this study and you won't believe how God brings these two, Philip and Paul, nose to nose again.

 Think this lesson was good, hang on, “Straight Street” leads us straight to the desert.

The New Saul

The new Saul. The new and improved Saul. He hit the ground as one man, and got up a completely different one. How cool is that. But,..... be aware that there's nothing like a life-altering conversion to bring the skeptics out in full force.

Listen, and then list as Dr Maier details some of the theories that have been used, over the years, to invalidate this dramatic encounter.

- 1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____
- 4)_____

We find this new Saul now full of both food and the Holy Ghost. Acts 9:20 tells us what happened next: ***“and immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues saying, “he is indeed the Son of God”*** Can you imagine the looks on the faces of the Pharisees when Saul took the microphone during “testimony time”? Despite his zeal, God knew that Saul needed a little one-on-one time, so his new address for the next three years was a one-room sandstone somewhere in the middle of the Arabian Desert. Now I will admit it nearly kills me to have virtually no idea what happened to Saul during this “desert shift.” Nonetheless, I think it’s a valuable exercise to stop and consider what this season of his life *might* have been like.

Table Talk

- 1) What do you think Saul would have been feeling during this time? Emotionally? Physically? Spiritually?
- 2) Write down three lessons or truths God might have been teaching him.
- 3) If you had to guess, (and you do) which was the most challenging one for him to learn?
- 4) Has God ever marched you into the desert for a training period?
- 5) Share the most important truth you learned while there.

After God’s private tutoring lessons were completed, (at least for now) Saul headed back to Damascus. His preaching had become even more powerful. (That often happens after a visit to the desert) It was just too much for the Jewish leaders. The little man with the big mouth would have to be silenced. The Christians though, caught wind of the plot; stuffed him in a fish basket; and lowered him through the city wall in the middle of the night. In short order he had gone from being an illustrious, well-respected scholar, to a smelly midnight fugitive. I’m guessing he had never been happier.

We find him trudging towards Jerusalem. Now, I’m not sure if he was expecting a welcome Sabbath brunch to be awaiting him, but Scripture tells us that the believers there were afraid of him. In their eyes apparently, who he had been still over-shadowed who he now was. I wonder how he felt about their reaction to him. Frustrated? Disappointed? You may have some idea of how Saul felt. Perhaps you have walked away from a past you’d like to forget. Perhaps your reputation has suffered. Perhaps the road back seemed longer and lonelier than you had imagined. Be encouraged with this, an old life filled with poor choices, in time, will always be eclipsed by a new life filled with good choices. Always.

Well, hang on to your yarmulke because God was about to change Saul's life forever. Enter Barnabas. While others were recoiling in fear, Barnabas stepped forward in friendship. He took Saul by the hand and introduced him to the two most influential players in Christendom: Peter and James. Galatians 1:18 tells us that he was with them for 15 days.

There are so many places in Scripture that I would love to slip into. This is one of them. Can you imagine these three great men meeting for the first time? One, the half-brother of Jesus. One, a burly fisherman. One, a converted Pharisee. Don't rush over this. Stop for a moment and think back over their lives and the stories they each would have to tell. I'm guessing what followed would have been a memorable fortnight of confession, laughter and tears.

But before Saul could even unpack his suitcase, another death threat was exposed and he was spirited out of the city and sent by sail to Tarsus. I'm not sure we understand what this would have been like for Saul. He was walking back into the city of his boyhood. He had left it years earlier armed with a determined plan to eradicate a dangerous cult that had arisen. He was the pride of his parents. The envy of his contemporaries. He returned a failure (at least in their eyes). Not only had he neglected to wipe out the cult, but incredibly, he had joined it. There's every reason to believe that he was now rejected by those who once loved him, despised by those who once revered him.

Several years passed. Saul was now an independent missionary. He was probably based in Tarsus and traveled from there into the regions of Cilicia and northern Syria. These would not have been easy years for him. II Corinthians 11:23-29 gives us a glimpse at some of the things he suffered during this time. I'm guessing that it would have been a lonely time for Saul as well. In my mind's eye, I envision him one night wearily making his way back to Tarsus after another evangelistic endeavor. He is alone and tired. In the distance he sees someone approaching. It doesn't take long for him to recognize his big strapping friend of long ago. The son of encouragement was on his way. A smile spread across Saul's very ordinary face. Barnabas grabs him and excitedly tells him what was happening in Antioch. Saul packs his bag and they were off. For the next year we see these two friends, these two brothers in arms, working side by side, in the cosmopolitan city of Antioch. Friends in ministry. There's nothing quite like them. O.K. pass the tissues, this kind of stuff always makes me weepy.

Want to dig a little deeper?

Read II Corinthians 12 1-10

Paul's thorn in the flesh has been debated for centuries. We won't know for sure what it was until we ask Paul ourselves. But from the video, list the theories Dr Maier suggested or others you've heard over the years. Whatever conclusion you come to, it might be a good idea to memorize verse 9 as a reminder that sometimes in *our* journey God says, "*My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.*"



Enough already, blow your nose, and pull yourself together cause you're about to embark

on a mission trip you'll never forget.

The Voyage to Rome

When I get to heaven I'm going to ask to see the video of the apostle Paul on his way to Rome. I suppose he always thought he'd have to pay his own way, arrange his own transportation, chart his own course, and pack his own lunch. Clearly God had other plans. I can see this fearless missionary standing on the wooden deck of that great ship, beard wet with sea water, eyes full of emotion, with a big grin on his face as he embarks on an all expenses paid voyage of a lifetime.

Don't forget to trace this final trip on your map. As you're listening to the video determine how many days our sailors were lost at sea and what they did on each of those days to try and save the ship.

Table Talk

After the video read Acts 27:21-26

I love verse 21, "***Men you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Fair Havens. You would have avoided all this injury and loss***" Am I alone here or does this sound like somebody's mother? Actually it sounds like *my* mother. Come to think of it, it sounds like me! Many commentators feel that Paul was not trying to chide the sailors but encourage them. Really? What's your take on that?

Turn to Acts 28:15. It reads, "***the believers in Rome had heard we were coming and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage***" This verse, to me, seems to have been an after thought for Luke. The preceding verse says, "***And so we came to Rome***" In verse 15 he's actually going backwards to add information for us. It's as if Luke said to himself, "Oh I forgot to tell them about the believers that came to meet us on the way, I need to include that." I'm so glad he did.

Let me tell you why this verse is special to me. It's tangible evidence that all through his life God provided Paul with what he needed the most. It's unlikely that the apostle knew any of the believers that he met that day, yet inspired by a sacrificial love, they walked 43 miles to greet him. Paul's reaction is noteworthy. He bows his head, thanks God and takes courage.

It would be easy to presume that by this stage of his life, this godly man should have been able to go it alone. I mean really, he had raised the dead; rebuked the devil; survived an earthquake; commandeered a sinking ship; shaken off a poisonous viper; and led a whole island to faith. Yet, despite all the great exploits, God knew the man. He knew what the man needed. And what he needed was friends.

Perhaps you never considered the astounding group of men and women that God brought into Paul's life to support and encourage him. In your group make a list of them. Then pick three of those friends and come up with a question you would like to ask them about Paul.

Why don't you take a minute and share about one special friend that you know God has brought into your life?

Acts 28:16 says this, ***“When we arrived in Rome Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging though he was guarded by a soldier”*** Scholars believe that this elite company of guards would have worked on a rotating schedule. Every 12 hours one would leave and another would come to ensure that the diminutive apostle stayed put. The picture it paints for us is comical. Consider this for a moment. What do we know about Paul? He was in your face. He was passionate. And he told his story to anyone who would listen. Paul couldn’t have planned this any better himself. He didn’t have to look for an audience. They came to him and then they chained themselves to his leg. Cracks me up!

You may wonder if this method of evangelism was effective. Turn to Philippians 1:12,13, ***“and I want you to know dear friends that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including all the soldiers in the palace guard knows that I am in chains because of Christ”***

As one by one those guards came to faith and the gospel began to sweep through the imperial household, I can see Paul falling to his knees and with tears running down his worn face thanking God for those chains.

It’s during this same two-year time span, while under house arrest that Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. You may have heard them referred to as the Prison Epistles and now you know why.

Luke ends his book with these two verses, ***“for the next two years Paul lived in his own rented house. He welcomed all who visited him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God with all boldness and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him”***

Seems to end rather abruptly doesn’t it? It’s like reading a book that has completely captured your heart and then realizing that someone ripped out the last chapter. I always wondered why Luke didn’t write a sequel to the book of Acts. The truth is he did what God asked him to do. He chronicled the history of the early church and traced the spread of the gospel in the then known world. He completed the task he was chosen to do. You can’t ask for more than that can you?

Dr Maier indicates that there is some debate about what happened during the last years of Paul’s life. What, from the video, do we know for sure?

It’s hard to imagine the emotion as the small band of believers walked with their cherished friend to the place of execution. It was there without fear or regret that Paul laid his neck on the chopping block. He had finished his course. He had kept the faith. To those passing by he was just another outlaw paying for his crime. They could not know that nineteen centuries later millions would continue to be inspired and challenged by his story, by his sacrifice and by his Savior.

Want to dig a little deeper?

The apostle Paul was almost sixty years old. We find him in a smelly, dark dungeon. He is cold and he is lonely. It’s in this setting that he writes his last letter, II Timothy, to his beloved son in the faith. As you turn there to read this precious book, picture the apostle bent over and scarred, straining against the darkness, as he reaches for a piece of parchment for the last time.

The First Mission Journey

Barnabas and Saul (he was still Saul) were about to embark on the very first overseas missionary trip in history. Pretty exciting stuff. But don't miss what preceded this historic event. Turn to Acts 13 and read verses 1-3. Three things stand out. The believers were worshipping. The believers were fasting. The believers were praying. And in *that* atmosphere the Holy Spirit spoke to them. Any questions?

As the video plays track the journey with a colored marker on the map provided. Listen for the answer to these questions.

- 1) Who was Elymas and why was Saul annoyed with him? Dr. Maier suggests two possibilities.
- 2) Acts 13:9 becomes an important verse in this lesson. Why?
- 3) Perga was a beautiful city. What things archaeologically lead us to that conclusion?
- 4) Paul's first recorded sermon was preached in what city?
- 5) Paul and Barnabas got into a little trouble at Lystra, (O.K. more than a little) and Paul ended up with quite a headache. What was that all about?
- 6) On this mission journey Paul established a pattern of ministry that he would follow throughout his life. Write it down.
- 7) Derbe would have been a welcome relief for Paul and Barnabas. Why?
- 8) What one thing do both Lystra and Derbe have in common?

Table Talk

Acts 13:13b simply states, "*there John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem*" What reasons does Dr. Maier suggest may have caused him to leave? Can you think of any others?

Have you ever been tempted to judge a person based on one incident? It's easy to do, isn't it? I'm determined not to leave this lesson thinking poorly of John Mark. Together read these Scriptures

and smile as you hear, “the rest of the story.”

Colossians 4:10

2 Timothy 4:11

Philemon 1:23,24

1 Peter 5:13

What life lessons can be learned from John Mark? I’m guessing a smart group like you can come up with at least four.

Turn to Acts 14:21-28. Read this slowly together. It tells us that Paul and Barnabas returned again to the churches that had been established. They encouraged them and prayed for them. They appointed elders to give leadership. **“Finally**, verse 26 says, **“they returned by ship to Antioch of Syria”** Know this, after Paul and Barnabas preached the Good News in Derbe they could have taken a quick trip through the mountains and been stretched out of the shores of the Mediterranean Sea sipping camel juice before they knew it. They decided though to go back and revisit those new believers. It took them three times as long but it was a selfless decision that undoubtedly determined the success of the churches in the region of Galatia.

Want to dig a little deeper?

We know that Saul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He knew that too. Why then do you think he continued to first go to the synagogue when he entered a new city?



O.K., start saving your pennies cause we’re all headed to Lystra to excavate the ruins. That’s the good news. The bad news is there’s a big fight brewing in the next lesson and we are going to walk right into the middle of it.

Quarrels and the Second Mission Journey

This lesson gives us a front row seat as we witness the struggles and challenges faced by the apostles and the first century church. If you are looking for a sugary exposé you will be disappointed. If you are looking for flawless leaders or perfect parishioners you will be disheartened. This is rather, a bracingly honest look into a momentous time in history when the foundations for the early church were being laid.

Don't forget to trace the route of the second mission trip on your maps.

As you watch the video pick out three things in each category that make you say,

- A) I never knew that.
- B) I'd forgotten that.
- C) That's unbelievable.

There is simply no way to over-estimate the importance of the Council of Jerusalem. It was there that a group of leaders made a decision that forever would determine the course of Christianity. The council was convened to address a concern raised by a group of narrow-minded legalists called the Judaizers. They insisted that, no one could be saved unless they kept the Jewish custom of circumcision. Paul and Barnabas forcefully contended against them. If the council agreed with this requirement, every thing Paul had preached would be in vain. After much debate and endless wrangling (sounds like a modern day church business meeting) Peter rose to his feet and asked those assembled, ***“Why are you now questioning God’s way by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear?”*** Good question. James assumed the chair, and a critical decision was made. **“Circumcision is not necessary to ensure salvation.”** This good news was carried by four very happy men, Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas (don't forget this name) to the church in Antioch. But don't take my word for it, read it yourself, Acts 15:23-31.

Table Talk

I am disturbed by the question that Peter (has this guy come a long way or what?) pointedly asked those at the first Apostolic council. Stop for a moment and think. Why were the Jews so determined to deny others access into the faith? And perhaps, it's just as important for us to ask: is it possible that we too, nineteen centuries later, still make it hard for others to find faith in Christ? Do we burden people with a yoke that they were never meant to carry? And if we do,

why? Discuss this in your group. Perhaps you have experienced this dilemma first-hand. If so, you may want to share how it has impacted your Christian walk.

Let me leave you with some observations:

- 1) We often burden others the way we were burdened.
- 2) It's not just those outside faith we burden but other believers as well.
- 3) Our spouses and children may well labor under the weight of unnecessary yokes.
- 4) Instinctively most of us know whether we are grace-driven or law-driven. If you are law-driven (as I many times find myself) you have to be very aware of your inclination to burden others with yokes that are simply of your own making.

If this has been a moment of revelation, it's an opportune time to stop and ask God what He may now require of you.

You would think that the Judaizers would be gracious in their defeat. No chance of that. Paul knew it was essential to return to those young Galatian churches and deliver the decision of the Jerusalem council to them. Their faith in Christ was indeed enough. Paul and Barnabas were about to embark on their second missionary journey. But, it was not quite that simple. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along with them. Turn to Acts 15:36-41 to hear Paul's response and find out what happened next. Do you think that Paul's decision was harsh or do you think it was justified?

Listen to the words Paul later penned in Ephesians 4:2, "***Be humble and gentle, be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.***" When I read these words from an older, wiser Paul I wonder if perhaps he was thinking back to an inexperienced youth named John Mark. What do you think?

Well, two mission trips were now underway. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. Paul took Silas (told you not to forget his name) and eventually arrived in Lystra. It was here that a young disciple named Timothy joined the group. He would become a very important addition in the months and years that lay ahead.

It was at Troas that they were directed by the Holy Spirit to sail to Macedonia. This group of four, now including the beloved physician Luke sailed across the Aegean and finally arrived at the city of Philippi.

Want to dig a little deeper?

Turn to Galatians and read chapter 2:1-5. Scripture tells us that Titus, one of Paul's traveling companions, was not circumcised. Now read, Acts 16:1-5. Here we find that Paul arranged to have Timothy, another companion, circumcised even after the Jerusalem council said it wasn't necessary. Sound's confusing, what's going on?



Ever wonder what it would be like to experience an earthquake? Grab your hard hat and take cover, because in the next lesson you're about to find out.

The Second Mission Journey and Greece

Paul's second missionary journey was well underway. Acts 15:36 – 18:22 chronicles the journey for us. Be forewarned this is not a trip that you will find advertised in a glossy travel brochure. Over this three-year period we'll see the gritty apostle Paul stripped, beaten, imprisoned, maligned, and indicted. It would be enough to make most of us give up. Or at least clam up. But not Paul.

As the video plays, pick two of these three cities and note four things that stand out about them.

A) Athens

B) Corinth

C) Thessalonica

Table Talk

In your groups read Acts 16:16-25. Consider the reality of the scene being played out before you. Verses 22-25 are a graphic depiction of what happened to Paul and Silas. The Bible says they were:

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 4) |
| 2) | 5) |
| 3) | 6) |

I suppose as a child I was protected from the horror of this drama but in rereading the story it is impossible not to be confronted with the enormity of what these men suffered. It was brutal and it was bloody. You can pretty this up if you want to but if you do, you will miss the power of the truth that's found here. Listen to verse 25, read it aloud, ***“around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening”***

Let me show you three things that are easily missed with a cursory glance.

- 1) The time. It was around midnight. The middle of the night. Have you ever noticed that pain or fear or confusion always seems worse at night? In the dark.
- 2) They were praying and they were singing. It's one thing to pray its another thing entirely to sing.
- 3) Others were listening. Others are always listening.

The stunned prisoners were a captive audience to a sacrifice of praise. That alone would have been strange enough. They had no way of knowing that momentarily they were about to become key players in a shake up of momentous proportions. Verse 26 says, ***“Suddenly, there was a great earthquake and the prison was shaken to its foundation. All the doors flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off”*** Read it again. ***“the chains of every prisoner fell off.”***

How is that possible? Let me suggest that in circumstances when praise is the last thing that comes naturally to you and you praise anyway, that choice will not only free you but has the

potential to free those around you as well. The challenge for most of us though is not in believing that truth, but in behaving it. What do I mean? The fact is: **I can agree with that truth, affirm that truth; and even teach that truth but until I appropriate that truth it's just information.** I have to begin **to behave that truth in the dark of my night.** When *I'm* in pain. When *I'm* suffering. Is anybody hearing me? What a lesson Paul and Silas taught us here!

Have you ever seen a sacrifice of praise lived out before you? I have and I will never forget the portrait that it painted for me. A life lived to a melody of praise. When you see it you'll know, because it will quite simply take your breath away.

I can't end this lesson without drawing your attention to the great city of Athens and what happened there. Read Acts 17:15-18:2. What kind of picture do you see emerging of Paul and this time in his ministry? How might he have been feeling? Write those observations down.

What do we know for sure? He was alone. He was anxiously awaiting the arrival of Silas and Timothy. He was deeply troubled by all the idols. He went to the public square day after day to convince them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. They mocked him. They laughed at him. A few believed. He left Athens and went to Corinth. It's hard to tell on your maps but Corinth would have been a fifty-mile walk. That's a long walk any time. That's an especially long walk when you're alone and discouraged.

Now let's read between the lines, for just a moment. It's likely that Paul thought that he had failed in Athens. "***A few believed***" the Bible says. Just a few. From his vantage point Athens appeared to be a miserable attempt at mission work. Try to imagine the weight of that realization for Paul. The image of him walking alone to Corinth saddens me. If only he had known that one day the sermon he preached on Mars Hill would be inscribed in bronze and remain there as a memorial for all antiquity to witness. If only he had known that millions would one day walk a street named in his honor. If only he had known that hundreds of Christian churches would be planted in the city that had so disappointed him. If only he had known. He knows now.

Is there some thing to be learned here for us? There certainly is for me. This lesson shouts: "Keep working; keep planting; don't give up. Eternity alone will reveal the results of your labor." Makes me want to keep on going! How about you?

Want to dig a little deeper?
Check out Priscilla and Aquilla (not two spinster sisters)
Acts 18:1-3 Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and 2 Timothy 4:19
How many would have liked these two for friends? My hand is up.



Have you ever fallen asleep in church? In the next lesson, the apostle Paul may have some advice for you on where you should (or shouldn't) sit.

The Third Mission Journey

You would think that after the last trip Paul might want to take a break. Strangely enough trouble only seemed to solidify his call, his drive, his determination. A couple of months was all he needed to catch his breath and be back on the road again.

Don't forget to trace the trip on the map. Write down seven things from the video that make you say, "Now that's interesting!"

Apollos is an intriguing character whose story is tucked between Paul's second and third mission journeys. The Biblical Academy would have had every reason to nominate him for an Oscar in the category of "outstanding supporting actor" but he was one of those personalities that often was lost in the bigger story. Not this time, let's take a closer look.

Table Talk

Read Acts 18:24-28

- 1) List eight facts about Apollos.
- 2) How did Aquila and Priscilla approach Apollos after hearing him preach? Why is that significant? Is there a lesson tucked away in here for us as well?
- 3) How did Apollos respond?

I can't help but wonder why Apollos hadn't heard of Christ? Where had he been? In a cave? In the desert? I'm anxious to know how he reacted when he finally heard that the Messiah he had been waiting for had already come. I'm speculating this passionate young guy jumped to his feet, pumped his fist in the air and yelled, "Yes, that rocks" (O.K. maybe not).

Verse 19:1 tells us that Apollos went to Corinth (which was the capital of Achaia) Can you think of another evangelist had who recently spent time in Corinth? I'll give you a hint. He was short, bald and thorn ridden. Yup, Apollos went into the very city that Paul had just left. And guess what he took with him? A watering can. That's right. Paul planted, Apollos watered. Talk about a dream team! Is this the last we hear of Apollos? No. Corinth was only the beginning of his impassioned mission endeavor. Many believe it was this extraordinarily gifted man who wrote the book of Hebrews.

You know, one day I want to meet Apollos. Actually one day, I want to be *like* Apollos. Have you ever known anyone like him? How did that person inspire or challenge you?

I find this tiny verse in Acts 20:13 fascinating. "***Paul went by land to Assos***" I want to know why

he walked. Let me suggest a possibility.

Read the six verses that immediately precede this one.

A dead child comes back to life in the arms of Paul. Have you ever found that when God does something “over the top” whether through you or around you, sometimes you just want to be alone to process it all ? Just a thought.

Remember the “dig a little deeper” from lesson one; turn there for a moment to refresh your memory. We’re going to camp here for a while, so sit yourself down, kick off your sandals, and turn to Acts 21:8 and listen as Luke writes, *“then we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.”* Now I would love to spend a day or so talking about the four prophetic daughters, but time and space do not permit me. Rather, I’m choosing to focus on their father, Philip. This is not the apostle Philip but as the verse indicates, one of the leaders in the early church. Acts 8:26-40 tells us some of his story. Why don’t you turn there and read it. Reread verse 40. *“He preached the Good News there and in every city along the way until he came to Caesarea.”* I was intrigued with Philip and decided to see what else I could find. I could hardly believe what I discovered! Read Acts 8:1-8

Let me frame this for you. There was a young murderous Jew named Saul who was determined to completely wipe out a heretical sect of Christians that was springing up. His bloody tirade forced a young man named Philip to flee for his life from the city of Jerusalem. Philip, armed only with the power of the Holy Ghost began to take the countryside by storm. The Bible says he was mighty in both word and deed. Eventually he ended up in Caesarea. Fast-forward twenty years. Paul's ship sailed into the port of Caesarea where he and his companions were in need of lodging. In God's divine scheme of things, they found themselves knocking on the door of a man named Philip. I would love to freeze-frame these next few moments. I wonder if Philip had any idea who would be standing on the other side of that door? Did he have the faintest clue who would be sleeping in his guest room that night? Did he know the one sitting next to him at breakfast would be the infamous Saul? We just don't know. But what we do know is this. The young Philip who two decades earlier had been forced from his home, at the hands of Saul, now in love and fellowship opened his home to the very same. Can you believe that! (I wonder if one of those prophetic daughters knew this would happen?) I wish I could have been there. I would have given Luke the night off and written the account myself. God in His beautifully redemptive plan causes these two great men to come full circle. How awesome is that!

Want to dig a little deeper?

Dr. Maier mentioned a woman named Phoebe that Paul met on this trip. Though Acts doesn't mention her, you can read about her in Romans 16:1-2. Paul has often been unfairly criticized as dismissing women. That's simply not true. This scripture will give you some understanding of the high regard in which Paul and the early church held women. It is believed that Phoebe may have been the person that carried the irreplaceable letter of Romans from Corinth to the city of Rome.



Ever been unjustly accused, you're not alone. In the next lesson, Paul knows exactly how you felt!

The Third Mission Journey

You would think that after the last trip Paul might want to take a break. Strangely enough trouble only seemed to solidify his call, his drive, his determination. A couple of months was all he needed to catch his breath and be back on the road again.

Don't forget to trace the trip on the map. Write down seven things from the video that make you say, "Now that's interesting!"

Apollos is an intriguing character whose story is tucked between Paul's second and third mission journeys. The Biblical Academy would have had every reason to nominate him for an Oscar in the category of "outstanding supporting actor" but he was one of those personalities that often was lost in the bigger story. Not this time, let's take a closer look.

Table Talk

Read Acts 18:24-28

- 4) List eight facts about Apollos.
- 5) How did Aquila and Priscilla approach Apollos after hearing him preach? Why is that significant? Is there a lesson tucked away in here for us as well?
- 6) How did Apollos respond?

I can't help but wonder why Apollos hadn't heard of Christ? Where had he been? In a cave? In the desert? I'm anxious to know how he reacted when he finally heard that the Messiah he had been waiting for had already come. I'm speculating this passionate young guy jumped to his feet, pumped his fist in the air and yelled, "Yes, that rocks" (O.K. maybe not).

Verse 19:1 tells us that Apollos went to Corinth (which was the capital of Achaia) Can you think of another evangelist had who recently spent time in Corinth? I'll give you a hint. He was short, bald and thorn ridden. Yup, Apollos went into the very city that Paul had just left. And guess what he took with him? A watering can. That's right. Paul planted, Apollos watered. Talk about a dream team! Is this the last we hear of Apollos? No. Corinth was only the beginning of his impassioned mission endeavor. Many believe it was this extraordinarily gifted man who wrote the book of Hebrews.

You know, one day I want to meet Apollos. Actually one day, I want to be *like* Apollos. Have you ever known anyone like him? How did that person inspire or challenge you?

I find this tiny verse in Acts 20:13 fascinating. ***“Paul went by land to Assos”*** I want to know why he walked. Let me suggest a possibility.

Read the six verses that immediately precede this one.

A dead child comes back to life in the arms of Paul. Have you ever found that when God does something “over the top” whether through you or around you, sometimes you just want to be alone to process it all? Just a thought.

Remember the “dig a little deeper” from lesson one; turn there for a moment to refresh your memory. We’re going to camp here for a while, so sit yourself down, kick off your sandals, and turn to Acts 21:8 and listen as Luke writes, ***“then we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.”*** Now I would love to spend a day or so talking about the four prophetic daughters, but time and space do not permit me. Rather, I’m choosing to focus on their father, Philip. This is not the apostle Philip but as the verse indicates, one of the leaders in the early church. Acts 8:26-40 tells us some of his story. Why don’t you turn there and read it. Reread verse 40. ***“He preached the Good News there and in every city along the way until he came to Caesarea.”*** I was intrigued with Philip and decided to see what else I could find. I could hardly believe what I discovered! Read Acts 8:1-8

Let me frame this for you. There was a young murderous Jew named Saul who was determined to completely wipe out a heretical sect of Christians that was springing up. His bloody tirade forced a young man named Philip to flee for his life from the city of Jerusalem. Philip, armed only with the power of the Holy Ghost began to take the countryside by storm. The Bible says he was mighty in both word and deed. Eventually he ended up in Caesarea. Fast-forward twenty years. Paul's ship sailed into the port of Caesarea where he and his companions were in need of lodging. In God's divine scheme of things, they found themselves knocking on the door of a man named Philip. I would love to freeze-frame these next few moments. I wonder if Philip had any idea who would be standing on the other side of that door? Did he have the faintest clue who would be sleeping in his guest room that night? Did he know the one sitting next to him at breakfast would be the infamous Saul? We just don't know. But what we do know is this. The young Philip who two decades earlier had been forced from his home, at the hands of Saul, now in love and fellowship opened his home to the very same. Can you believe that! (I wonder if one of those prophetic daughters knew this would happen?) I wish I could have been there. I would have given Luke the night off and written the account myself. God in His beautifully redemptive plan causes these two great men to come full circle. How awesome is that!

Want to dig a little deeper?

Dr. Maier mentioned a woman named Phoebe that Paul met on this trip. Though Acts doesn't mention her, you can read about her in Romans 16:1-2. Paul has often been unfairly criticized as dismissing women. That's simply not true. This scripture will give you some understanding of the high regard in which Paul and the early church held women. It is believed that Phoebe may have been the person that carried the letter of Romans from Corinth to the city of Rome. Can you imagine being the one chosen to assure the safe delivery of such a precious document? I'm infamous for putting things down and forgetting where I left them. It's entirely possible; I could have lost the book of Romans. "Now where did I put that scroll?" If you're over forty you know exactly what I'm talking about.



Ever been unjustly accused, you're not alone. In the next lesson, Paul knows exactly how you felt!

Arrest and Imprisonment

Picture it. The prophets are prophesying. The women are weeping. The believers are begging. "Don't go, Paul don't go." But it's no use, this courageous apostle has set his face towards Jerusalem and there's no stopping him.

As the video plays write down eight things that you are hearing for the very first time. (I'm betting "Tertullus" will be on your list) When the video is completed compare your list with the others in your group.

In your group, read Acts 21:17-27.

This is a really interesting portion of Scripture. It details that upon entering the city of Jerusalem, Paul is greeted warmly by the Jewish believers and is invited to give his mission report. His slides are sensational and it's obvious to everyone that God is really using Paul on the mission field. Verse 20 though says this, "**after hearing this, they praised God. But then they said...**" But then they said. You're doing a great job Paul *but....* Poor Paul. He simply couldn't win. It didn't matter what he did or what he said somebody ended up being miffed. The local believers formed a committee and devised a plan to help out our perplexed apostle. Read about it in verses 23 and 24.

Now, I must be honest, if I had been Paul I don't think I would have been open to a group decision on what they thought I needed to do to solve *their* problem. Paul was completely innocent of the charges against him. That's why his response to them is astonishing. The Bible simply says, "**he agreed to their plan.**" What? You mean he didn't yell or stamp his feet or throw his motzah ball. No. He merely agreed to their plan.

His decision, I guess shouldn't really surprise us in light of what he wrote in I Corinthians 9:19-23. It might be a good idea to turn there and read it together.

He had determined to be all things to all people in order to win some. When he was with the Gentiles, he became like them, without breaking the law, so that he could have access to their hearts. And if the Jews were offended by something they thought he had done he would have shaved his head to make it right.

Let me tell you a little story. A few years ago we went on a missions trip to the Ukraine. The culture was different. The food was different. The churches were different. The women in their services wore headscarves, and we were expected to do the same. This was not good news for me. I'm not a pretty sight in a headscarf. As a matter of fact, no matter how many ways they tried to tie that scarf on my head, I always ended up looking like a cleaning lady. But I wore that scarf and I put a big smile on my face because if I hadn't, I would have lost the right to speak into the lives of those beautiful Ukrainian women. Did I think a headscarf was necessary? No. But, if I had chosen to go without one, my message would have been completely invalidated because I would have offended them. I quickly learned that if it was important to them it needed to become important to me. Apparently Paul never made it to the Ukraine but it was obvious that he knew and understood this principle.

Table Talk

- 1) Discuss the issue of "becoming all things to all men" in your groups.
- 2) Can we run into danger here? How?
- 3) Has God ever required you to live out this truth?
- 4) Are there similarities between this discussion and the "stumbling block" issue that Paul writes about in I Corinthians 10:23-33. Is this concept still applicable today? If it is give some examples of how it might play out in our day-to-day lives?

The very next scene (Acts 21:27-40) finds Paul in the middle of a savage mob. Read it for yourself. He had been dragged from the temple amid accusations that he had taken a Gentile inside. The entire city of Jerusalem was in a furor. If it hadn't been for the intervention of the commander of the Roman regiment Paul would have been murdered in the street. As they carried him up the stairs to the fortress to interrogate him he asked permission to address the crowd. Envision the scene. The battered apostle gripped the stairs as he motioned to the people. A deep silence descended upon them. He had a perfect opportunity to defend himself. A rare chance to rail against the injustice he has suffered. He chooses to do neither. Rather he elected to tell his story. Read it for yourself in Chapter 22:1-23.

I am convinced that most of us fail to appreciate the power of our stories. People can refute facts and disagree with theology. But your story is **your story**. It's hard to debate the evidence of a changed life.

Why don't you take a few moments and tell your story to your group. (You may need to tell the "Readers Digest" version.)

I must point out that when Paul was being spirited away to Caesarea, please note that he was riding a horse. I knew there was a horse in this story somewhere. (This will mean nothing to you if you haven't been with us from the very beginning.)

As we end this lesson turn to Acts 26:30-33 and read these few verses. We see Bernice, King Agrippa and Festus (who later starred in Gunsmoke..sorry I just couldn't resist) as they left the great auditorium. They were shaking their heads at the lunacy of Paul's request, for they all agreed that if he hadn't appealed to Caesar he could have been released. Little did they know that the apostle had long ago packed his suitcase in preparation for a trip to Rome.

Want to dig a little deeper?

The Nazarite vow that the four Jews had taken has a very intriguing history. You can read more about it in Numbers 6:1-21.



If you are even the least bit queasy you may want to get some Gravol for the next lesson. And a raincoat. And a life preserver.