



Theme: Power Made Perfect in Weakness – the Life of Paul **“Life and Death”**

Weekly Memory Verses:

10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. – 2 Corinthians 4:10

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 24 – Read **Acts 19:1-41, 20:13-17, and 21:11-13**. The apostle's third missionary trip involved a long stay in Ephesus. Ephesus was an extravagant city that made most cities in the world look small and insignificant. No city in what we know as modern day Turkey was more famous or more populous. The followers of Jesus in Ephesus had burned expensive sorcery scrolls and bought many small silver idols. He won so many people to Christ that Demetrius, a silversmith, led devotees of the pagan goddess Artemis in a riot. In Greece, we read that Paul collected an offering for Christians in Jerusalem and then said a warm farewell to the Ephesus church elders in Acts 20:18-38.

🔥 To human eyes, Jesus often seemed to ignore economic “common sense” when he spoke in places like Matthew 6:25-34 and Luke 19:1-10. Those sorcery texts were **valuable** because scrolls were hand-copied rarities. Demetrius hinted at this when he spoke of the silversmiths’ “easy living” in verse 25 and the honor of “the great goddess Artemis” in verse 27. As you read this story, was Artemis’s honor more important or his own pocketbook? Has following God faithfully ever cost you economically? If so, was it worth it?

🔥 People who change the world don’t quit. As he went to Jerusalem, Paul asked the Ephesian church elders to meet him in a nearby port city. It was an emotional farewell. Paul said, “I’m going to Jerusalem. I don’t know what will happen to me there. What I do know is that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city that prisons and troubles await me” in Acts 20:22-23. Where is God calling you to exercise perseverance and hope in the face of difficulty right now?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for standing by Paul, whose life and writings guide and inspire me. Give me something of his courage and faith, as I do whatever you set before me. Amen.

Tuesday, November 25 – Read **Philippians 1:12-18 and 3:10-14**. Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary on Philippians, “Others were moved by what Paul calls *eritheia*... which originally simply meant working for pay. But the man who works solely for pay... is out solely to benefit himself.... there were those who preached all the harder now that Paul was in prison, for his imprisonment seemed to present them with a heaven-sent opportunity to advance their own influence and prestige and lessen his.”

 Paul said in the text for today that some people preaching Christ had “jealous and competitive motives.” Surely, he’d object to that, urge the church to condemn them? Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Paul for Everyone*, “Paul’s reaction is to celebrate. That’s fine by me, he says. As long as people are going around saying that Jesus is the world’s true Lord, I shall be happy.” Paul was far less worried about his own prestige than about God’s mission in the world. How close are you to his attitude? How can you grow toward that?

 Scholar William Barclay in his commentary said Paul’s word for reaching out in Philippians 3:13 “is used of a racer going hard for the tape. It describes him with eyes for nothing but the goal. It describes the man who is going flat out for the finish.” How can you live your life in such a way that you are going flat out for the goal of living the life God calls you to? What choices can you make in the weeks and months ahead that will empower you to run God’s race with eyes for nothing but the prize?

Prayer: Lord of my life, let me hear and respond to your calling voice above all others. Give me the courage and the hunger to pursue your high calling wherever it leads me. Amen.

Wednesday, November 26 – Read **Acts 21:27-33, 22:21-29, 23:11-21, and 25:4-12**.

Some of Paul’s Asian enemies saw him in the Jerusalem Temple. Guessing wrongly that he’d led a Gentile into the “Jews only” area, they urged the crowd to kill him. Only prompt Roman action saved Paul from violent death. But Acts 23:11 says, “The Lord stood near Paul.” God said, “**Be encouraged!** Just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so too you must testify in Rome.” Paul was clear that one day he would go to Rome. Now, thanks to these accusations, he would not only go to Rome, but it was an all-expenses paid trip!

 Paul’s enemies made exaggerated claims in Acts 21:28. Paul valued his Hebrew heritage. He did **not** teach “against” the Hebrew people, their law or the Temple. When have you seen others exaggerate the position of people they disagree with, creating a “straw man” to discredit? Are you able to differ with someone without overstating or even lying about what that person believes?

 Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Acts for Everyone: Part 2*, Acts 23:16 tells us, “Paul’s sister had a son who heard about the ambush. This is something

we didn't know and would love to know more about. Did Paul have lots of family in Jerusalem? ...Were they...supporters of what he was doing or embarrassed by the attention he was drawing to the family? We know none of this." We know God used Paul's alert nephew to save Paul from a deadly trap. When have you seen God work through surprising people?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I'm not sure I could carry out the hugely challenging mission you gave Paul. But I do ask that you'll guide me and strengthen me to do the tasks you set before me each day. Amen.*

Prayer for Thanksgiving from Psalm 100 (The Message)

¹⁻² *On your feet now—applaud God!*

*Bring a gift of laughter,
sing yourselves into his presence.*

³ *Know this: God is God, and God, God.*

*He made us; we didn't make him.
We're his people, his well-tended sheep.*

⁴ *Enter with the password: "Thank you!"*

*Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.*

⁵ *For God is sheer beauty,*

*all-generous in love,
loyal always and ever.*

Thursday, November 27 – Read **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**. We often think gratitude is purely a feeling, a reaction to something outside of us. That makes "give thanks in every situation" puzzling—some situations do not trigger positive feelings. But psychology researcher Robert Emmons wrote, "It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful...being grateful is a choice, a prevailing attitude that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives."



A recurring theme in gratitude research is that choosing to be a grateful person does not mean you become blind to the bad things in life, or the sad or angry feelings you may have about them. It does mean, however, that we also choose not to let the bad things blind us to the things for which we are grateful. What way(s) have you found to remember the things for which you are grateful when your life takes a difficult turn?



Scholar William Barclay wrote, "There is always something for which to give thanks; even on the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun, the shadows will fall behind us but if we turn our backs on the sun, all the shadows will be in front." As this series focuses on gratitude's benefits, are you finding yourself more inclined to resist changing the direction your life faces, or to seek to increasingly "face the sun"?

Prayer: *O God, you are like the sun, always shining your love and mercy into my life, whatever may happen in my family, my workplace or my health. On this day of Thanksgiving, help me learn how to keep my focus on you every day. Amen.*

Friday, November 28 – Read **Acts 26:6-8 and 19-23, 28:16 and 30-31**. The ending of Acts may seem puzzling. Luke, who wrote Acts, almost certainly wrote the book after Rome had executed Paul. But Paul's death wasn't the point. His message was meant to be the focus. The book of Acts ends positively. We see the expansion of the Good News emphasized earlier in the book and it continues even to the heart of the Roman world. In this way, the book of Acts points to how the Good News will continue, "to the ends of the earth" as we read in Acts 1:8.

 In Acts 26:8, Paul posed a question to King Agrippa and Roman governor Festus that is still fundamental for Christian witness: "Why is it inconceivable to you that God raises the dead?" Some doubters might say, "I've never seen it happen." True—but we believe all kinds of things about our world and universe that we've never personally observed. Can you trust as strongly in Jesus' resurrection as Paul did? How can you, with care and love, pose the question he posed?

 Scholar N. T. Wright said in *Acts for Everyone: Part 2*: "The real hero of the whole book is, of course, the Jesus who was enthroned as the world's Lord at the beginning, and is now proclaimed, at the end, 'openly and unhindered', that is, with all 'boldness' ... and with nobody stopping him." Paul was in Rome, under the nose of the emperor who claimed the title "Lord." Even there, Paul said that title belonged only to Jesus. Can you boldly share that Jesus is "Lord"?

Prayer: *True Lord Jesus, you called Paul to carry your message to "the ends of the earth." Thank you that his message has reached me, over 2000 years later, in a place Paul couldn't even imagine. You were Lord in Rome; you are Lord in my life and my world. Amen.*

Saturday, November 29 – Read **2 Timothy 4:5-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58**. In 2 Timothy, the apostle Paul knew his earthly life would soon end. The Roman emperor hoped killing him might stop others from becoming Christians; Paul was confident it wouldn't. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in *Paul for Everyone*, "The picture we get... is of a man facing serious trouble and likely death.... He lives in the present world, Caesar's world, as already a cheerful citizen of the world to come, Jesus' world." Paul asked Christians in Corinth, who'd grown up in a skeptical Greek society, "How can some of you say, 'There's no resurrection of the dead'?" (1 Corinthians 15:12). He quoted Hosea 13:14, where the prophet used an ancient form called a "taunt song" to ask, "Where is your sting, Death?"

 Hebrews 2:15 says that by dying and rising again, Jesus "set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death." That was clearly true for Paul. Has Jesus' presence in your life set you free from the fear of death? In what ways is it liberating to surmount that fear? You may feel that you have only a relatively short time left to serve God in this life, or you may be looking forward to many decades of faithful service. Is your life's direction such that you are

confident that, whenever it ends, you can say, as Paul did in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, “I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. At last, the champion’s wreath that is awarded for righteousness is waiting for me”? If not, what “mid-course corrections” do you want to make so that Paul’s words can also be your personal testimony?

Prayer: *O Jesus, you walked into the darkest, deepest place we face—into death itself—and then emerged, alive and victorious. Keep me on course to end this earthly life in faith and triumph, as Paul did. Amen*