



Theme: Power Made Perfect in Weakness – the Life of Paul

“Made for a Purpose”

Weekly Memory Verses:

⁴For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. – Ephesians 4:4

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 10 – Read **Acts 13:1-4, 8-15, 26-39**. Before leaving earth, Jesus laid out a vision of a global mission in Acts 1:7-8 as the church gathered. Antioch, in ancient Syria, was a large city, with a growing, important community of Christians. Jesus knew that Antioch couldn't be a stopping point, but instead it was a launching pad. The Holy Spirit moved that church to send Paul and Barnabas out into the wider world. They began in the area then known that we know today as Turkey, what was then called Galatia. Acts 13 reported Paul's message that many responded to by following Jesus, most for the first time.

 Paul told Jews and Gentiles that he preached new life and forgiveness in verse 39 when he said, “Everyone who believes in him is made right in God's sight—something the law of Moses could never do.” Some early Christians wanted to say besides having faith in Christ people still needed to keep Moses' Law. Have you ever heard, or thoughts, that salvation takes faith plus some action we must do to earn it? What made Paul's message especially vital as the faith spread outside the culture where it began?

 Paul knew Abraham's story, in which God said in Genesis 12:1, “Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you.” It didn't seem to bother him when the Holy Spirit told the Antioch church to appoint him and Barnabas “to the work I have called them to undertake” without filling in any details. How well are you able to trust and follow God's call even when God does not lay out all the details in advance for you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you called Paul and his friend Barnabas to launch out to brand new areas, places where there weren't any Christians at all. In whatever ways you call me to “new territory” in my life, help me to listen and respond. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 11 – Read **Galatians 2:19-3:7**. Paul's letter to the Galatians addressed the churches he planted on that first missionary tour in what is modern day Turkey with Barnabas. Some of the believers were frightened and confused by claims that Paul hadn't told them the whole truth, and that God did require them to follow certain rituals for salvation. Paul uses strong language in his letter. He writes that letting Pharisees who had become followers of Jesus require rituals like circumcision was "irrational." Faith in Jesus and trust in the Holy Spirit, not certain religious practices, had changed the Galatians' lives.



Paul wasn't talking about a technical detail. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, "It isn't a matter of a few twists and turns in the interpretation of the gospel, or... of the Jewish law. It isn't simply about one style of missionary policy as against another. It is a matter of who you are in the Messiah. It's as basic as that." Do you see yourself as a person who calls on Jesus only when you need to, or have you come to see your whole identity rooted "in Christ," in Jesus who died for you?



Until Paul told them about Jesus, most of the Galatian Christians were going about their day-to-day lives, not following scrupulous religious rituals. So, Paul asked in Galatians 3:2, "How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God's Message to you?" How would you answer his question? Are the good things you do an effort to impress God and earn salvation, or a response to God's grace and forgiveness changing your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep setting me free to live in the wonder of your self-giving love for me. Keep me growing in my ability to root my whole identity in being your loved, redeemed child. Amen.

Veteran's Day Prayer: Lord God, creator of humanity and author of peace, as we are ever mindful of the cost paid for the liberty we possess, we ask you to bless the members of our armed forces. Give them courage, hope and strength. May they ever experience your firm support, gentle love and compassionate healing. Be their power and protector, leading them from darkness to light. To you be all glory, honor and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday, November 12 – Read **Galatians 3:26-29 and 5:1-6**. The Jewish Christians who followed Paul to Galatia claimed the Genesis 17:10-14 required men to be circumcised to join God's family. No doubt some Galatians thought, "Why not hedge our bets? We'll trust in Jesus AND follow the rituals these other teachers tell us to carry out." But Paul was emphatic: there was no splitting the difference. "Faith working through love," not ritual purity, was what mattered. It was impossible to trust in both grace AND works for salvation.



Scholar William Barclay summed up Paul's words this way in his commentary on *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*: "To Paul all that mattered was faith which works through love. That is another way of saying that the essence of Christianity is not law but a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The Christian's

faith is founded not on a book but on a person; its dynamic is not obedience to any law but love to Jesus Christ." What attitudes, choices and actions help you build and maintain your love relationship with Jesus?



The kind of faith the "Judaizers" wanted had strong cultural and ethnic effects that divided people. Paul was born in that ethnic group and culture and said, "Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise." He rejected gender, economic or ethnic divisions. Do you ever struggle to accept believers in Jesus from a different ethnic or denominational background? Can we all find unity as "Abraham's descendants" in Christ?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that I get to belong to you, to be an heir according to your great promises. Thank you for the widely varied family of which that makes me a part. Amen.

Thursday, November 13 – Read **Acts 16:6–15**. After a major meeting that resolved that Gentile men did not need to be circumcised in Acts 15:4-21, Paul proposed another missionary trip. A disagreement kept Barnabas from going with him in Acts 15:36-40. In some way (Luke, the author of Acts, didn't say how), the Holy Spirit limited Paul's work in Asia Minor. In the port city of Troas, Paul had a vivid vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to come there and help them. Paul and his companions left promptly, for the first time taking the gospel into Europe.



Paul usually preached first in a synagogue. Philippi, though large, had no synagogue. So, Paul found a place of prayer by the river and spoke with the women who met there. Lydia, "a dealer in purple cloth," which was costly fabric in royal colors, was one of his first converts. Paul baptized her and her household, and she offered hospitality while they were in Philippi. How good are you at going to unknown territory (physical or mental) if that's what it takes to carry out God's mission?



There's a key detail in this reading. In verses 7-8, the writer spoke of Paul and his companions as "they." But verse 10 said, "WE prepared to leave for the province of Macedonia." With no great fanfare, Luke told his readers that he had joined Paul's group in Troas. "We" passages like this are found in Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, and 27:1-28:16. Luke was presumably present for these moments. Acts 1:1-2 tell us that Theophilus is the one whom this book is written to originally by Luke. How did the use of "we" highlight the trust Theophilus and we can have in the eyewitness quality of Acts? How did the writer's use of "we" only when it was accurate stress the writing's integrity?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you may not call me to sail to Macedonia. But nearly every day you let me meet someone like Lydia who doesn't know you. Keep me as ready to share you in new "territory" as Paul was. Amen.

Friday, November 14 – Read **Acts 17:15-31**. The apostle Paul traveled widely in Greece, starting Christian groups in major cities like Thessalonica and Corinth. At one key point, he ended up in Athens. In its day, Athens was what we might call a university town, with lots of novelty-loving philosophers. Commanded to speak to a council meeting on Mars Hill,

Paul declared his faith in a way that showed his learning to appeal to his audience. He left us a model for dealing respectfully and caringly with people of different faith traditions.



Some ideas about “evangelism” would say Paul, and Christians after him, should denounce the Athenians as pagan libertines and idolaters, going straight to hell. Paul’s sermon had a respectful, inclusive tone. In verse 28, he quoted Epimenides, a Cretan philosopher, and the Stoic poet Aratus. Did quoting pagan writers “sell out” his faith? How can learning about faiths and cultures other than your own allow you to create conversation rather than condemnation?



Luke wrote that the Athenians and their foreign guests, “used to spend their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the newest thing.” Paul’s message about Jesus, especially his resurrection, seemed very novel in Athens—they’d never heard anything like it. Could it be that in increasingly non-religious parts of our culture and world, the “novelty” of the good news might get more of a hearing from some people than its antiquity?

Prayer: *King Jesus, when Paul preached in Athens, he quoted Greek poets and Cretan philosophers. Help me know the culture around me well enough to use it to communicate, without losing my faith to that culture. Amen.*

Saturday, November 15 – Read **Acts 15:36-41, Galatians 2:1-3, Acts 16:1-5, 18:1-5 and 28:14-15**. We may picture the apostle Paul as a lone ranger figure. In the Bible passages we read today, we meet many people who worked closely with Paul. Letters to Timothy and Titus became part of the New Testament. Acts mentioned Silas with Paul multiple times. The end of Paul’s letters further showed his role as a leader of an ever-growing team of Christian leaders. His letter to the Romans closes with Paul sending greetings to 26 people he names and many others that are unnamed. Most of these people seem to be leaders of the church in Rome, many of whom are women, which was highly unusual. When Paul’s life ended around A.D. 64 or 65, the Christian movement to which he had devoted himself kept right on growing. The people he had shaped were a major part of his legacy.



Through the letters he wrote, Paul continues to shape lives today. Walter Wangerin, a Christian writer, captured that impact in his book *Paul: A Novel*: “Paul never ceased speaking,” Paul’s Voice falls upon us today: “Continue then, not only in my presence but so much more in my absence, to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” ... Timothy, do you hear him? Lydia, do you? Talking, talking, as from down the articulate wind: Rejoice in the Lord always. Listen, I’ll say it again: Rejoice! Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.” What parts of Paul’s writings have most shaped you, and those whose faith has meant the most to you?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you for Paul’s impact on so many lives, during and after his time on earth. Guide me, in whatever sphere you equip and call me to serve, to leave a positive mark on the lives I influence. Amen*