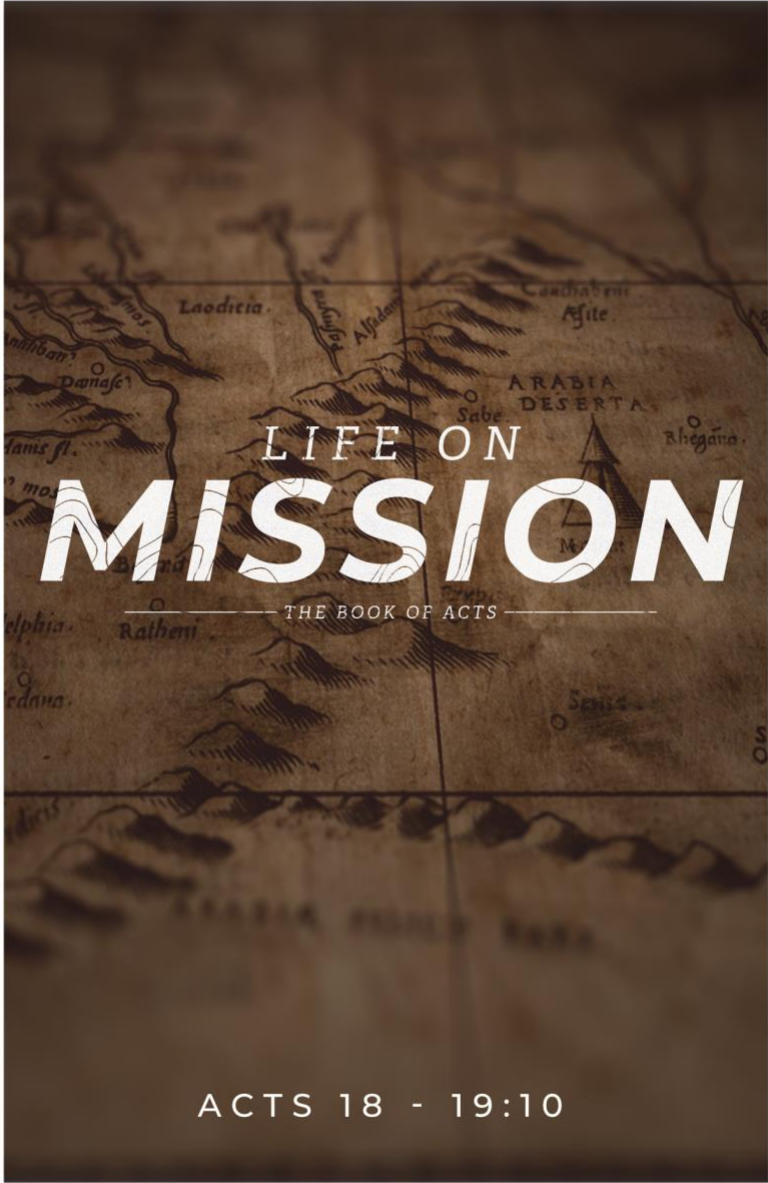




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 17 - 20



LIFE ON  
**MISSION**

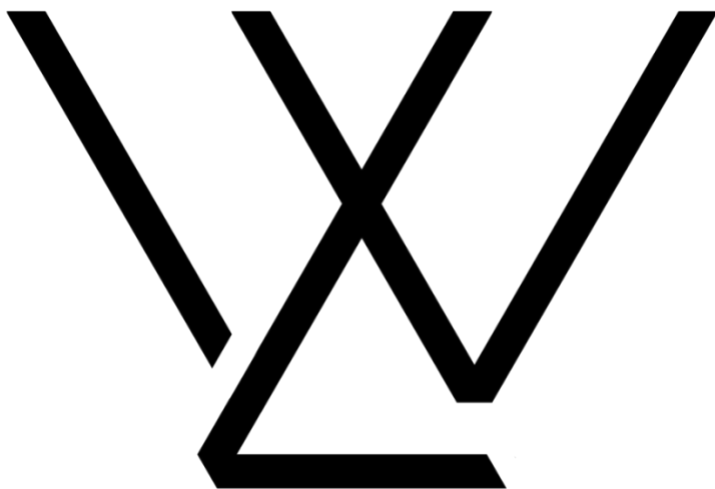
— THE BOOK OF ACTS —

ACTS 18 - 19:10









**Word to Life's** are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!



## — WEEK 17 —

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## — WEEK 18 —

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## Week 17: Acts 18:1-17

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ:** Acts 18:1-17

#### **EXPLORE:**

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 18:1-17 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** Acts 18:2 introduces us to Priscilla and Aquilla for the first time. Read through Acts 18:18, 18:25-27, and Romans 16:3 and write down what you notice.
  
- **Question:** Acts 18:6 says, *“And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*
  - Why do you think Paul responded that way?
  
  - Is that a good way for us to respond in our Christian witness today? Why or why not?
  
- **Activity:** Rewrite the word of the Lord given to Paul in Acts 18:9-10.



## **Week 17: Acts 18:1-17**

### **Day 2: Paul's Other Profession**

**READ: Acts 18:1-17 and I Corinthians 9:12-18**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The opening verses of Acts 18 introduce us to one of the most crucial, but often neglected aspects of Paul's personal life. Like his friends Aquilla and Priscilla, Paul was a tentmaker. His profession as a man of the trade firmly placed him within the working class. As we will study today, Paul's profession was profoundly significant in his Corinthian ministry.

Corinth was a city for public speakers. If there was ever a location in which an orator could make a living from fancy speech and charismatic presentation, it might as well have been in Corinth. According to the best historical records, preachers from different schools of philosophy would come to Corinth, depending on the listening crowds for financial support. This practice of gaining funding from gullible crowds was looked upon with general distrust by many in the ancient world.

When the early church fathers studied this text and others like it, they traditionally understood the tentmaking terminology as a general term for leather working. Regardless of the specifics, Paul embraced a working-class trade to support his ministry and to maintain its purity.<sup>1</sup> This professional decision connected him with the people who he desired to serve and it enabled him to have longevity in ministry.

Motivated by his desire to introduce people to the gospel, Paul chose to support himself rather than receive funding from the Corinthians. Later in his letters to the Corinthians, Paul detailed

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 20:34 for another reference to Paul's professional decision.

his decision and its motivation.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, Paul did not want there to be any sense of unwarranted distrust in the truthfulness of his claims about Christ.<sup>3</sup> As a result, he chose to support himself through the humble trade of tentmaking.

Although Paul certainly exemplified the benefits of being employed outside of the ministry, he did write on several occasions about the benefits that are experienced when a local church is able to support their pastors in the work of the ministry. Even when Paul discussed his own decision to forego funding from the church, he asserted that those who proclaim the gospel ought to earn their living by the gospel.<sup>4</sup> In summary, Paul's willingness to largely support his own ministry financially demonstrates the benefit in the exception rather than the general rule of ministerial pay.

**BIG IDEA: Paul's willingness to forgo financial support connected him to his people and protected his ministry.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What would be the advantages and the disadvantages of Paul's approach of largely self-supporting his own ministry?
  
- **Activity:** Read the qualifications for church leadership in I Timothy 3:1-7 and then read the expectations for churches toward their leaders in I Timothy 5:17-18. Write down what you notice between the two sections of biblical text.

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<sup>2</sup> See I Corinthians 4:12, 9:12-18 and II Corinthians 11:7 for reference.

<sup>3</sup> Later rabbinic writings that reflected on the times often required students of the law to adopt a trade to keep their mind from becoming idle and to keep their ministry from being tainted by greed.

<sup>4</sup> See I Corinthians 9:14 for reference.

## Week 17: Acts 18:1-17

### Day 3: A Timely Promise in a Difficult Place

**READ:** Acts 18:1-11

#### **EXPLORE:**

*And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."*

If, but for just one moment, I (Stephen) want you to imagine what it would have been like to be Paul and experience these words from the Lord in a vision. Corinth was the one of the largest, most cosmopolitan, and one of the newest developed cities in ancient Greece. It was the major center for commerce related to east and west trade and it had quite the reputation as an immoral city in the ancient world.<sup>5</sup> To live like a Corinthian was a euphemism for living immorally. Corinthian ministry would have been challenging to say the least. Despite this challenging context, Paul was experiencing ministerial success and, more particularly, a life-giving word from the Lord.

The vision in Acts 18:9-11 interrupts the opposition that Paul increasingly experienced with a word of protection, encouragement, and commissioning directly from the Lord. The promise of protection and the command to not fear would have been incredibly encouraging to Paul amid a complex situation in ministry and life. When Paul wrote later to the church in Corinth, he stated that he was afraid and had reservations when he first

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<sup>5</sup> Corinth was positioned with access to the Adriatic Sea and the Aegean Sea making it the premiere location for trade running east to west in the Greco-Roman world.

came to the city.<sup>6</sup> So, at just the right time, God provided a word of hope to His servant in need.

The commands to avoid fear and continue speaking come with the assurance of God's presence, His protection, and His plan for the people of Corinth. For Paul, the assurance of God which was made tangible in the nighttime vision was sufficient for him to plant roots and minister faithfully in Corinth for 18 months. Interestingly, this was the first city where Paul settled for an extensive time as a missionary. All of this hinged upon a timely word from the Lord and an assurance of his protection, presence, and plan.

These few verses in Acts 18 ought to be deeply challenging to us. I don't know about you, but when I read biblical texts like Paul's vision in Corinth, I am encouraged to think about all the ways in which the Lord is calling me to trust Him more in the difficulty of life and the complexity of Christian witness. Allow yourself to ask the question, "How would your life change if you lived out Acts 18:9-10?" May the word of the Lord take root in your soul and change your life for His glory!

**BIG IDEA: An assurance of God's presence, protection, and plan catalyzed Paul's ministry.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Spend time reading and re-reading Acts 18:9-10 and pray that the Lord would mold your heart to be faithful to His word.

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<sup>6</sup> See I Corinthians 2:3 for reference.

- **Activity:** In biblical scholarship, Acts 18:9-10 is referred to as a divine commissioning narrative. Examples of other divine commissioning narratives are included below. If time allows, read the following and write down what you notice.
  - Acts: Acts 5:17-21, 9:10-18, and 16:6-10.
  - Old Testament: Exodus 3:2-12, Joshua 1:1-9, Jeremiah 1:5-10, and Isaiah 41:10-14.





## Week 17: Acts 18:1-17

### Day 4: A Quick and Violent Escalation

**READ:** Acts 18:12-17 and I Corinthians 1:1-9

#### **EXPLORE:**

If you are familiar with the book of Acts and the ministry of Paul, the violent escalation at the end of Gallio's verdict should come as no surprise. Immediately following Gallio's refusal to judge what he deemed to be an internal, Jewish issue, the ruler of the synagogue named Sosthenes was beaten in front of the court. All this violence took place, and we are told that Gallio paid no attention to any of it.<sup>7</sup> The majority of this brief narrative is straightforward, but there are two primary questions worth asking concerning this scene.

#### Question 1: *Who exactly were the people that beat Sosthenes in front of the tribunal?*

The events are stunning. An accusation against Paul resulted in the beating of the ruler of the Synagogue. The central question that has puzzled scholars throughout history concerns who actively beat Sosthenes after the verdict. The culprits could have been the group of angry Jews who were exacting their pent-up aggression upon their leader because of his failure to secure the demise of Paul. Additionally, it is possible that even though Sosthenes was the ruler of the Synagogue, he had converted to Christianity and the Jews exacted vengeance upon him.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, it is possible that Sosthenes was beaten by anti-Semitic Greeks who had taken advantage of the fact that the Jewish leadership was out of favor with the government and Gallio in particular. It has been argued that a group of Greek men

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<sup>7</sup> See Acts 18:17 for reference.

<sup>8</sup> This viewpoint is plausible and often defended by those who propose the Sosthenes of Acts is the same as the one in I Corinthians.

beating Sosthenes makes the best sense of the fact that Gallio paid no attention to the events which were unfolding in front of the court. There was a strong anti-Semitic undercurrent in the ancient world, but the language is not clear enough in this passage to determine the culprits with certainty.

### Question 2: *Who exactly was Sosthenes in the Bible?*

The question of Sosthenes's identity is also a hotly debated topic. Although it cannot be proved with total certainty, Paul mentions a person named Sosthenes in I Corinthians 1:1 as a brother and coworker in the gospel. We cannot comprehensively prove that the Sosthenes of Acts is the same individual featured in the opening line of Paul's Corinthian epistle, but it is more likely than not. If indeed, he is the same man, we ought to marvel at the incredible turnaround that took place at some point in his life to become a brother and co-laborer in the gospel.

Although aspects of Acts 18 cannot be determined with holistic certainty, we can still marvel at the fact that what was intended to harm Paul in Corinth brought him no destruction and the church was established in a very difficult and even violent context!

**BIG IDEA: There is considerable disagreement about the scene with Gallio, but we should still marvel at the fact that the Corinthian Church grew amidst escalating violence and tension.**

### **APPLY:**

- **Question:** In your opinion, how drastically would the overall story of Acts 18:12-17 change depending upon who beat Sosthenes?
- **Question:** Today was an example of a scriptural passage in which there is considerable disagreement and some uncertainty. When you encounter biblical texts like this, what should you do to try and understand them well?

## **Week 17: Acts 18:1-17**

### **Day 5: A Needed Word of Encouragement**

**READ TOGETHER: Acts 18:9-11, John 16:33**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

It is nice to know that the Apostle Paul is a man just like us. Sometimes as we think about Paul or read his stories, he can seem more like a super-human than like a regular human. For example, after he is stoned in Lystra, he gets right back up and begins preaching in the city the next day! When he was imprisoned in Philippi after being beaten with rods, we find Paul and Silas singing hymns and praying to God. No doubt, Paul seemed to be a man of heroics, but he was also just a man in need of encouragement at times.

We see in our text that Paul is in Corinth and the Jews have opposed and reviled him once again. Even though the text doesn't explicitly say it, it does imply that the apostle Paul is downcast in spirit. Maybe he was afraid of being beaten once again. Maybe he was just tired of having God's message rejected once again by the Jews. Whatever it was exactly, our Lord knew that he needed a word of encouragement to carry on.

Jesus comes to Paul in a vision at night and tells him not to be afraid. Paul must have been discouraged from speaking, so the Lord tells him to keep on speaking and to not stay silent. The

Lord's reasoning for Paul not being afraid is because He is with him, and no one will attack him. Surely this was the exact sigh of relief that the apostle Paul needed. He doesn't have to worry or fear physical harm while in Corinth. In the end, Paul is only human. Being imprisoned, beaten, and opposed takes on toll on any man. Our Lord does not dismiss Paul's suffering but comes to comfort and strengthen him in it.

This needed word of encouragement empowers Paul, and he stays in Corinth for a year and a half, boldly proclaiming the word of God. As we have seen in Acts, this long of a stay for Paul was unusual. It is encouraging to know that one word from the Lord can produce more than a year of fruitful ministry.

Like the apostle Paul, we also need words of encouragement. The Lord may not visit us in a vision at night, but he does impress his Word on our hearts as we read it. He does send us fellow Christians to give us a fitting word in season. May we believe Jesus' words of encouragement today for many years of fruitful ministry ahead.

**BIG IDEA: All Christians need words of encouragement to continue in the walk of faith.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Have each family member/group member name a time that a word of encouragement has strengthened them.
- **Activity:** Go around in a circle and give each family member a word of encouragement from every member of the family.

## Week 18: Acts 18:18-23

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ: Acts 18:18-23**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 18:18-23 and complete the activities below.

- **Question:** After reading vv. 18-21, what do you notice about how Paul left different places?
  
- **Question:** Acts 18:19 mentions that Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. Do you think this would have been challenging for him to do? Why or why not?
  
- **Question:** After Paul had spent some time reasoning in the Synagogue, how did the people respond? Why do you think they responded or made requests in that way?
  
- **Question:** Why do you think that Paul responded to the Ephesians' request for him to stay by saying, *"I will return to you if God wills?"*
  
- **Question:** If someone asked you how you know what God's will is, what would you say?

## Week 18: Acts 18:18-23

### Day 2: Making a Godly Exit

**READ: Acts 18:18-23**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Gallio's decision to not charge Paul with any wrongdoing made it possible for him to stay in Corinth for a while without experiencing the most intense forms of opposition. Nonetheless, as this week's biblical text would make clear, Paul chose to depart from the brothers and set sail for Syria with some new traveling companions.

The Greek word inspired by the Holy Spirit through the writing of the author Luke was that Paul literally *took leave*<sup>9</sup> from the believers in Corinth. Interestingly, it is the same Greek verb used in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus chose to leave his disciples to pray on the mountainside.<sup>10</sup> We do not know why Paul chose to leave Corinth, but there is a great deal we can gain by noticing the finer details in his exits.

First, Paul did not leave in isolation, but alongside some new friends. In what must have been a sacrificial and committed act of loyalty, Priscilla and Aquilla both chose to leave Corinth to sail off into the distance quite literally. His exit did not burn bridges, it created new connections.

Second, upon his departure from Ephesus toward Caesarea and eventually Antioch, Paul communicated the centrality of God's will to his future hopes and plans. Acts 18:21 records Paul's departure from Ephesus, stating, "*But on taking leave of them he said, 'I will return to you if God wills,' and he set sail from*

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<sup>9</sup> The English is translated from the Greek word *apotassō* meaning to leave, depart, or forsake.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark 6:46 for reference.

*Ephesus.*” Paul’s words demonstrate his willingness to bridle his own desires to the overarching will of God. In this way, Paul models a right principle in life and a beneficial practice of exiting well.

A right reading of this text ought to challenge us as the readers today to consider not just the ways we serve and lead, but the ways we exit as well. Like Paul, do we minister, plan, and exit in accordance with the Lord’s will or our own? Like Paul, do we leave with the establishment of long-term relationships and new friends in ministry?

The truth is that we live in a culture that values starting new rather than finishing well. We exist in an environment that prizes the flashy more than the faithful. In the simple example of Scripture, we ought to be challenged not just to endure well, but to exit well also.

**BIG IDEA: As Christians, we ought to consider how to exit well and not just how to endure well.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What are some factors that make it difficult to exit somewhere well and in accordance with the Lord’s will?
  
- **Question:** How have you learned to know and embrace the Lord’s will as a way of life?

## **Week 18: Acts 18:18-23**

### **Day 3: Haircuts and Holiness**

**READ: Acts 18:18-23 and Numbers 6:1-21**

#### **EXPLORE:**

*“At Cenchreae [Paul] had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.”* – Acts 18:18b

It is not every day that you read about a haircut in the Bible. If the detail about Paul cutting his hair seems rather random, you are not alone. It seems odd to mention a vow-keeping haircut on the coast of Cenchreae in the middle of an incredibly pivotal missionary journey. As we will discover again today, no detail in the text is insignificant.

As Acts makes it clear, Paul had his hair cut in connection to a vow. This may seem odd to us, but this was deeply rooted in the Jewish concept of holiness and commitment. For example, some Jewish vows required the individual to leave their hair uncut until the conclusion of the vow. Most likely, Paul made a form of the Nazarite vow which is detailed in Numbers 6:1-21. Although we do not know why Paul made that vow, it could have been initiated because of the vision he experienced in Corinth.<sup>11</sup>

Generally, the individual who made this type of vow cut their hair at the conclusion. It would have been customary for an individual to make a sacrifice, cut their hair, and include them both in a burnt offering. Paul’s vow was undoubtedly a commitment made before God and others to live a pure, undefiled life. At this point, we ought to ask the question, “Why was it important for this detail to be included in the story?”

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<sup>11</sup> See Acts 18:9-10 for reference.



Perhaps, Acts highlights Paul's vow to highlight his loyalty as a practicing Jew even as he embraced Jesus as the promised Messiah. In a sense, we are reminded that Paul was a faithful Jew even as he embraced an ongoing ministry to Gentiles. Paul did not abandon his Jewishness to follow Jesus. Neither did he require Gentiles to become Jewish to follow Jesus.

In the small detail of Paul's haircut and vow, he demonstrates a commitment to his Jewish heritage that did not contradict his allegiance to Christ. This seemingly obscure act would have communicated powerfully in the ancient context.

**BIG IDEA: Paul's vow demonstrates that he did not have to abandon his Jewish heritage to faithfully follow Jesus as Messiah.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Read Numbers 6:1-21 and write down what themes you notice.
  
- **Question:** If indeed Paul's haircut is related to a previously made Nazarite vow as it is supposed, why do you think he chose to make one in Corinth?
  - How would the vow have benefited his ministry?
  
  - In your own words, why did Luke mention Paul's haircut?

## Week 18: Acts 18:18-23

### Day 4: The Will of God

READ: Acts 18:20-21

#### EXPLORE:

God has both a moral will and a sovereign plan. The biblical commandments, governing how we *should* act summarize God's moral will. The sovereign plan by which God orchestrates all events is much more mysterious. We go against God's moral will every time we sin, but we can never thwart his sovereign plan. In Acts 2:23, Peter tells his fellow Jews, "*This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*" In Gen. 50:20, Joseph tells his brothers who had sold him into slavery decades before, "*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive...*" These verses highlight grievous sins against God's moral will, which nevertheless unfolded according to his sovereign plan.

Joseph had to wait many years to see God's plan unfold for the saving of many lives. Until that point, it must have seemed senseless and random. Should we despair when clouds darken our lives, without any obvious silver lining? No, we need faith to trust that especially when we can't see it, God is *still* working all things together for the good of those who love Him.<sup>12</sup>

So, should we just do whatever we want, since it's all in God's plan? No! In Acts 2, Peter didn't tell his fellow Jews who had delivered Jesus up for crucifixion, "Just keep doing whatever you want." Rather, he said, "*Repent and be baptized.*"<sup>13</sup> In other words, be washed clean from your *rebellion against* God's moral

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<sup>12</sup> See Romans 8:28 for reference.

<sup>13</sup> See Acts 2:38 for reference.

will and receive a new life in which you learn *submission to God's moral will*.

Scripture reveals everything we need to know about God's moral will. Study the Bible, pray, and seek godly counsel to find out what pleases God. Let God's moral will guide your choices. However, many of the choices we face in life are morally neutral. In that case, do the ways in which you process decisions reflect your conviction regarding God's will for your life? Are you praying, trusting in God, seeking to please Him, reading the Bible, and receiving Godly counsel?

God will not tell you exactly what to do in every decision you make, but He will direct how you make decisions and how you respond to His leading. Pray, involve others, choose wisely, then don't allow yourself to be paralyzed by indecision. You will never foil God's sovereign plan. Make godly decisions and be reminded that the Lord is in control.

**BIG IDEA: In your decisions, seek to obey God's moral will, and have courage, knowing that no-one can thwart God's sovereign plan.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How do you make decisions? Do you pray and seek godly counsel?
- **Question:** Are you paralyzed by indecision and worried that you haven't discovered God's plan for your life? Does the knowledge that God has a sovereign plan, which no one can thwart, give you courage as you face difficult choices?

## **Week 18: Acts 18:18-23**

### **Day 5: Travel with Wisdom**

**READ TOGETHER: Acts 18:18-23, Proverbs 3:7**

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### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Missionary journeys are complex and require much planning and wisdom. The apostle Paul demonstrates this wisdom as he travels across the Roman Empire spreading the gospel. He has traveling companions that need to be placed in the right spots and he has traveling plans that need to be executed at the right time.

Our passage states that Paul leaves Silas and Timothy in Corinth but takes with him Priscilla and Aquila. Silas and Timothy need to stay in Corinth because the believers there are not quite mature enough to be left alone. As for Priscilla and Aquila joining him surely Paul does not want to travel alone, and they are also fellow tent makers which may be needed as he travels.

While in Ephesus Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila and he ministers in the synagogues there alone. Paul may have chosen to do this to protect Priscilla and Aquila. As we have seen throughout the book of Acts when Paul ministers in the synagogues he is often persecuted. The people of Ephesus ask Paul to stay with them longer, but Paul has to decline. Priscilla and Aquila will stay with them, but Paul must move on.

We see that Paul heads back to his sending church in Antioch. He stays there for a while most likely updating the church on all the ways that the Lord is using him and his traveling companions. Keep in mind he had been away from Antioch for around two years by this time. Paul then goes back through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia where he had planted churches and strengthens the disciples who are there.

As we see in our passage Paul must make quick decisions for himself, for his traveling companions, and for the churches that he is serving. Every step of the way he must seek God for wisdom. He is a man with responsibility, and he must act accordingly.

We may not be on a missionary journey like Paul, but we are all called to be on mission where our Lord has placed us. He has made us responsible for people and for ourselves. We need God's wisdom daily if we are going to steward our responsibilities well.

**BIG IDEA: Living well in this life requires wisdom from God.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** Paul was responsible for many things on his missionary journeys. What do you think was his heaviest responsibility and why?
  
- **Activity:** Read Proverbs 15 and have each family member choose their favorite one.



- **Question:** What do you notice about how Priscilla and Aquilla chose to instruct Apollos further?

- **Question:** What occurred in the life of Apollos after he was further instructed by Priscilla and Aquilla?

## **Week 19: Acts 18:24-28**

### **Day 2: Giftedness and Growth**

**READ: Acts 18:24-28**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The French philosopher, mathematician, and theologian Blaise Pascal, who was an avid defender of Christianity, once wrote about eloquence, “Eloquence is a painting of the thoughts.” He wrote about what Apollos exemplified in his teaching, namely, the power of eloquence in biblical communication.

According to Luke’s portrayal of Apollos, he was a native of Alexandria, well-instructed in the ways of Scripture, and most notably, an eloquent communicator. When we first encounter him in Acts 18 his true impact in the kingdom of God was only beginning, but he was already a gifted orator. One thing I (Stephen) really appreciate about Apollos is that even though he has developed the ability to effectively communicate, he has retained the humility to learn from Priscilla and Aquilla. Apollos was not arrogant in his eloquence, and he was not merely persuasive for persuasiveness’s sake. Because of his humble receptivity to new truth regarding baptism – and ultimately Christ – Apollos’s eloquence became a powerful tool in the arsenal of the early church.

Unfortunately, not all examples of eloquence in Scripture are equally as godly. Lofty speech was common in the ancient world and was often used to exalt the speaker rather than glorify God. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote about how he desired not to communicate with lofty words of eloquent wisdom, but with boldness and power.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, he communicated this truth in eloquent and well-worded argumentation. Paul’s issue

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<sup>14</sup> See I Corinthians 1:17 and 2:1-5 for references.



was not with eloquence, but with self-centered, lofty speech that glorified self instead of exalting Christ alone! Eloquence is not the issue; pride is.

When Apollos was educated by Priscilla and Aquilla he did not cease to be an eloquent speaker. Instead, he became more effective. He was eloquent without being arrogant because he did not view himself as too gifted to continue learning. Giftedness and humble receptivity to growth is a truly unique attribute which Apollos personified in the biblical text. Apollos did not have to lose his giftedness to be useful in ministry.

I wonder how often we refuse the opportunity to grow because we think too highly of our own gifting, and I wonder how often we fail to help other people grow because we do not lovingly correct and challenge them. I love the example we see here in Apollos and in the sweet example of those in his community who were willing to encourage and instruct him respectfully. His effectiveness was exponentially multiplied because his community came alongside him with intentional correction in the confines of loving relationship! Let us do likewise!

**BIG IDEA: Apollos represents a gifted person who is also humble enough to be willing to grow.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Eloquence sometimes gets a bad reputation in Christian circles. Do you think the criticism of eloquent speech is warranted? Why or why not?

## **Week 19: Acts 18:24-28**

### **Day 3: You Have Arrived... or Have You?**

**READ: Read Acts 18:24-28**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When our home flooded during Hurricane Harvey, my wife and three young boys went to live with my parents in Dallas while I stayed to rebuild. We didn't know it at the time, but it would be a month before I (Lucas) would have the opportunity to see them again. When I was, at last, able to travel to Dallas, the simple act of typing their address into my phone brought joy to my heart because I knew it would only be a matter of hours before we were reunited. I frequently glanced at the phone to see how much time was left in the trip. Every turn that Siri called out brought me one step closer to them. Finally, those wonderful words came: "You have arrived." Never had that phrase meant so much. Whether reuniting with a loved one, going on vacation, or simply making it home after a tough day, we have all experienced the joy of arriving at a much-anticipated destination.

In this week's passage, we meet a man named Apollos, of whom many would say, "He has arrived." Scripture tells us that he was bold, eloquent, competent in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in spirit<sup>15</sup>. Who wouldn't want these adjectives used in their biography? For all of Apollos' gifting, however, he lacked a full understanding of Christ.

Aquila and Priscilla met Apollos when he came to Ephesus. When these seasoned believers heard Apollos speak, they recognized his deficiency and "took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." In verse 26, we learn important lessons from both parties. When Aquila and Priscilla perceived his lack of

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<sup>15</sup> See Acts 18:24-25 for reference.

knowledge, they did not call him out publicly. They could have let jealousy motivate them to knock Apollos down a few pegs by showing that they had a greater understanding than he. Instead, in humility, they took him aside and shared the complete picture of Christ. Similarly, Apollos could have responded in pride and refused to listen to people who were presumably not as eloquent as he was. Instead, he was eager to learn more about the Savior he served.

How were these believers, each gifted in their own right, able to work together? How did their egos not get in the way? Humility was the key. In the GPS of their lives, knowledge for the sake of self-promotion was not the destination; serving and glorifying God was. Their desire to learn more about Christ was motivated by their desire to draw closer to Christ. As believers, we must understand that knowledge about Christ isn't the destination, serving and glorifying Him is.

One of the best qualities we can have as followers of Christ is to be teachable. I've heard it said by many, "If you're not teachable, you're not reachable." Not being teachable is a marker of spiritual immaturity. It is unfortunate that an unwillingness to be taught can be just as common in veteran Christians as in new believers, if not more so. The more we grow in Christ, the more teachable we should be.

One day, our joy will be complete when we believers arrive at our ultimate destination: eternity with Christ. Until then, we must remain open to learning more and more about the Savior who will welcome us home.

**BIG IDEA: Teachability is a marker of spiritual maturity.**

## **APPLY:**

- **Activity:** These events took place at the church in Ephesus. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to this same church regarding the idea of believers building one another up. Take some time to read and reflect on Ephesians 2:11-16 as it explains how God equips the church to this end.



## **Week 19: Acts 18:24-28**

### **Day 4: The Importance of Being Welcoming**

**READ: Read Acts 18:24-28**

#### **EXPLORE:**

First day of school. First day on the job. First date. While some love new experiences with new people, many find these events riddled with worry and concern: What will they think of me? How will they treat me? What if I'm not accepted?

In this week's passage, Apollos enters the picture of the first-century church. Although he was the new kid on the block among the believers in Ephesus, he was welcomed and became a source of encouragement to them.

At some point, Apollos desired to go to Achaia to minister to the believers there. Instead of just sending him on with handshakes and hugs, the church in Ephesus went out of their way to send a letter of recommendation that encouraged his acceptance among the believers he would encounter.

The longer we've been in a familiar setting, the easier it is to overlook the importance of being intentionally welcoming. The school or job that was new at one point becomes familiar and comfortable. We even begin to form cliques or build silos unintentionally. Before we know it, we become the ones who newcomers worry about, wondering whether we will accept them.

Apollos' ministry in Achaia proved to be remarkably effective, as he was welcomed by the believers there. He helped the church by refuting Jewish critics and showing how Scripture testifies that Jesus is the Messiah. How different the story might have been if the believers had not welcomed him!

We often sacrifice doing what is best for doing what is comfortable. The account of the people of Achaia welcoming Apollos highlights the importance of remaining open to new people and the effects that openness can bring. Comfort and familiarity should never be pursued at the expense of being intentionally welcoming.

**BIG IDEA: Does the way you extend welcome to others reflect the welcome that Christ has extended to you?**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Think of a time when you were the new person in a group. How did you feel? If someone made you feel especially welcome, take time to thank them. If no one made you feel welcome, let that motivate you to look for opportunities to welcome new people into the groups you are part of.
  
- **Activity:** Take some time to prayerfully consider ways that you can be more intentionally welcoming at church, school, work, or in your community.

## **Week 19: Acts 18:24-28**

### **Day 5: Intelligent and Teachable**

**READ TOGETHER: Acts 18:18-24, Philippians 2:1-11**

***Instructions:*** We believe that Biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life study has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, Day 5 of each week is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Apollos was a man of rare qualities. He was an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. He was intelligent yet humble. The Scriptures teach us that knowledge alone puffs up or makes us proud. As we grow in knowledge, then, it is imperative that we also grow in grace and humility. Apollos sets a great example for us to follow.

Luke tells us that Apollos came to Ephesus having already been instructed in the way of the Lord. I am curious why he traveled to Ephesus in the first place. Did he come on business, or did he come to share the word of God? We are not sure, but we can be certain that, ultimately, it was God who brought him.

While in Ephesus, Apollos spoke boldly in the synagogue. Apollos spoke true things of Jesus; however, his message was incomplete. He only knew Jesus' story up to the baptism of John. Apollos was most likely preaching a message of repentance, just as John the Baptist did. He now needed to add belief in Jesus' atoning death and resurrection to complete the message of salvation.



We remember that Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (Acts 18:19) and they were just the couple to give Apollos the further instruction he was missing. It is a beautiful testimony that Apollos received their instruction. Priscilla and Aquila were probably unable to speak as eloquently as Apollos, but that didn't stop Apollos from learning from them. Apollos' heart was in the right place, as he just wanted to be a faithful servant of the Lord. God would further use Apollos to encourage the believers in Corinth.

The word disciple means learner or student. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to be students of our faith, continually learning more *about* and more *of* our Savior. This learning, however, should not be done totally alone, but together with other believers as the Bereans did in Acts 17, and always under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. As we learn we must also grow in humility and grace. Being a disciple requires learning the Scriptures while also learning to live in the same humility Jesus had. As disciples of Christ, we are to be learning more about our faith and how to live it out every day until the day we die. As we do that, our realization that we will never be able, with our limited minds, to know all there is to know about our Lord and His ways should keep us humble!

**BIG IDEA: We need to be people who are intelligent while remaining teachable. Knowledgeable and still humble. Wise yet gentle-spirited.**

#### **APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** Why do you think it is so hard to grow in knowledge and humility at the same time?
- **Activity:** List three practical things we can do to grow in humility and in the knowledge of the Scriptures. (6 overall)

## Week 20: Acts 19:1-10

### Day 1: Exploring the Biblical Text

**READ:** Acts 19:1-10

#### **EXPLORE:**

Instructions: Spend time reading Acts 19:1-10 and complete the activities below.

- **Activity:** In biblical passages with dialogue, it can be helpful to outline the conversation in a line-by-line format. Spend time outlining vv. 2-4.
  
- **Question:** How is it possible that they can be called disciples in Ephesus if they were not baptized in Jesus's name and filled with the Holy Spirit?
  
- **Question and Activity:** How does a person know if they are filled with the Holy Spirit? Defend your answer with as much Scripture as you can.

- **Question:** The Holy Spirit is not always imparted in Scripture through the laying on of hands, but it is a crucial part of the story in Acts 19:6. Why do you think that process of laying on hands is important?
  
- **Question:** What do we learn from Paul's actions in each of the summarizing verses represented in Acts 18:8-10? How can we apply God's word in this same way?

## Week 20: Acts 19:1-10

**Day 2: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit, when you believed?”**

**READ: Acts 19:2, 6-7**

### **EXPLORE:**

There is often debate and confusion in the church today about what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is and how it is received. Some of the things that divide us can unite us if we can agree on the clear truths that are presented to us in the biblical text. Today, we want to understand this particular passage in its context and allow the plain thing to be the main thing.

As we have seen previously, there were disciples of John the Baptist, who still needed to hear about the fulfillment of John’s preaching, revealed fully at Pentecost in the giving of the Promise of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, John the Baptist had been beheaded about twenty-five years prior to Paul’s encounter with these Ephesian disciples. Just as Apollos had to learn more perfectly the way of God in Christ<sup>16</sup>, these disciples also needed to hear the rest of the story of Salvation.

Paul, in Romans 8:9, had certain criteria to test whether one was a true Christian or not. He wrote, *“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”* Paul asked the disciples, *“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”* The implication in Paul’s question is that true belief will lead to a reception of the Holy Spirit. Because of the disciples’ answers, it became clear that they did not understand the gospel.

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<sup>16</sup> See Acts 18:24-28 for reference.

These disciples of John, in this sense, were not fully disciples of Jesus. They had not experienced or been told of the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 and had certainly not heard the Spirit had been poured out in Jerusalem. They were believers in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, including John the Baptist's teachings, but they had never progressed into the fulfillment of those teachings.

Paul, discerning by the Holy Spirit that these were John's disciples needing the rest of the good news, explained the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, securing his Holy Spirit. Since they had only been baptized with John's baptism of repentance, they still needed to be born again. When these men accepted Christ as their awaited Savior, God gave them the Gift of His Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, the laying on of hands was a significant act in the early church, but we need to notice that there was no set methodical formula for receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Fundamentally, belief in Jesus secures the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the those who believe.

**BIG IDEA: Being a believer involves personally receiving the good news of Jesus's atonement and forgiveness of our sins, trusting in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit promised to all who believe.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** If someone were to ask you, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" How would you respond? Why do you answer this way?

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<sup>17</sup> See Ephesians 1:13-14 and Acts 1:8 for reference.

<sup>18</sup> See Acts 10:44-46 for reference and comparison.

## Week 20: Acts 19:1-10

### Day 3: Which baptism...What we teach really matters!

**READ:** Acts 19:1-6 and Luke 3:1-16

#### **EXPLORE:**

Paul's interaction with the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19:1-10 is among one of the odder passages in the unfolding story of the early church. After only a very brief line of questioning, it became clear that, unlike Apollos, who had been instructed in the way, this group of so-called disciples was unacquainted with the gospel and its effects. They had heard only of John's baptism, and they had not yet received the Holy Spirit which comes with genuine salvation.

Apparently, these disciples had not encountered the leadership and instruction of Priscilla and Aquilla who informed Apollos and, as a result, they were unaware of believer's baptism and the Holy Spirit. It ought to be obvious by now, but this missing understanding in the Ephesian disciples is a big deal to say the very least. To understand this more fully, it is necessary to take a closer look at what they believed.

When the group was asked by Paul about baptism, they mentioned only "John's baptism." John's baptism was designed as a form of ritual cleaning and purification in preparation for the Messiah's coming.<sup>19</sup> John the Baptist stated, "*I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*"<sup>20</sup> John's role as a forerunner to Christ was designed to point toward the coming Messiah. Paul encouraged these Ephesian followers of John's baptism to notice that the

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<sup>19</sup> See Luke 3:1-16 for reference.

<sup>20</sup> See Luke 3:16 for reference.

Messiah had come and a baptism in His name with a reception of the Holy Spirit was and is necessary.

Their ignorance to the Holy Spirit placed them outside the Christian fellowship. Their issue was that they had not yet recognized Jesus as the Messiah and the true fulfillment of what John the Baptist was preparing his followers for. Paul's argument was that a true follower of John would embrace a greater discipleship that claims allegiance to the one whom John obeyed. Jesus had come as Lord and Messiah and a new baptism was in order. This was not a baptism in honor of John, but in obedience to Jesus as Christ.

In one sense, it is shocking to read about this level of obliviousness in Scripture, but it is surpassingly incredible to read about the seeming quickness of the Ephesian disciples' conversion, baptism, and reception of the Holy Spirit. This is a profound reminder that what the church teaches or fails to teach really matters and it is a reminder of the prevailing grace of God despite the constant shortcomings of humanity.

**BIG IDEA: Right doctrine and teaching about baptism really matters.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** If you were Paul and you encountered the disciples in Ephesus who were baptized only into John's baptism, what thoughts and emotions would you experience and why?
  
- **Question:** What are some common misunderstandings about baptism that you have encountered in your life?

## Week 20: Acts 19:1-10

### Day 4: Looking for Windows of Opportunity

**READ:** Acts 19:1-10

#### **EXPLORE:**

When Paul withdrew from the synagogue in the face of hostility, he followed an evangelistic principle that Jesus taught His disciples. Read Jesus's instructions in Luke 10:6-10 given to his disciples before he sent them out to represent Him. They were told to look for and stay with "*a son of peace*" — one who welcomes them and their ministry. How were they to react to those who vehemently rejected them? Jesus said (paraphrasing), "Don't waste your time. Move on."

The principle is that we focus our evangelistic efforts where God is already at work. If our testimony is warmly received, we should linger there. If our message is rejected, we move along to fields that are already ripe. While we are harvesting the ripe field, we wait for God to prepare that hard soil. In time, we may loop back and give it another try.

We see this in Jesus's ministry to the Gadarenes. Read through Jesus's encounter with the demon possessed in Mark 5:1-20. Pay special attention to how the people responded to Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Did they willingly embrace Jesus? No! They wanted him to leave, so he left. But God did not leave them without a witness.<sup>22</sup> God continued to work, softening hearts and opening minds by the demoniac's testimony. When Jesus returned, He received a warm welcome.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See how they responded in verses 14-17.

<sup>22</sup> See v. 18-20 for reference

<sup>23</sup> See Mark 7:31-37 for reference.



People oscillate between gospel receptivity and resistance. One way to measure receptivity is whether they join us in spiritual conversations. When someone hangs up the “closed” sign over the door to their heart and mind, we ought to consider soberly and prayerfully whether we ought to move on. We stay in touch but spend our time with those who are ripe and ready.

Paul always looked for open doors. In Athens, he went to where people gathered to talk.<sup>24</sup> When he found a synagogue, he met with people who knew the Old Testament. When that door was closed, he sought spiritually minded people wherever he could find them.<sup>25</sup> Paul prayed for open doors and asked others to pray with him. *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word.”*<sup>26</sup>

If this gospel pioneer and bold witness for Jesus felt the need to pray and ask prayer for open doors, how much more should we pray the same?

**BIG IDEA: Christians ought to be looking for people with whom they can share the gospel.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Who within your circle of influence seems to be open to engaging with you in spiritual conversation? What can you do to make time in your schedule to spend more time with them?

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<sup>24</sup> See Acts 17 for reference.

<sup>25</sup> See Acts 16:13 for reference.

<sup>26</sup> See Colossians 4:2 for reference.

- **Question:** How should you change your relationship with those who continue to show the “not interested” signals?



## **Week 20: Acts 19:1-10**

### **Day 5: Godly Reasoning in Ephesus**

#### **READ TOGETHER: Acts 19:1-10**

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#### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

The apostle Paul travels back to Ephesus and encounters some situations that require godly reasoning. The Merriam-Webster definition of reasoning is the power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking, especially in orderly rational ways. The Christian life requires us to reason and to do so in a godly manner. Here in our passage, we see the apostle Paul operate with godly reasoning in two different situations.

The first situation Paul comes across in Ephesus is twelve men who are called disciples but who have not yet received the Holy Spirit. We see Paul using godly wisdom and reasoning by not assuming they had received the Holy Spirit and by asking good questions. These 12 men were like Apollos before he was further instructed by Priscilla and Aquila. They were followers of God but were only aware of God's revelation up to the baptism of John. They had been baptized into John's baptism of repentance, but they had not yet been baptized in Jesus' baptism. This means they lacked the Holy Spirit and so Paul baptized them again in Jesus' baptism and they received the Holy Spirit and proceeded to speak in tongues and prophecy.

The second situation where Paul uses godly reasoning is in the hall of Tyrannus. We are told that he reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus, and some manuscripts add that Paul did so from 11am to 4pm. The apostle Paul was operating like a visiting lecturer at a university. Whoever had questions or whoever wanted to learn more about the Christian faith from the surrounding regions could come and pay a visit. In fact, we are told that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks through this setup. Paul was the professor, and the people of Asia were his students.

God requires Christians to be thinkers and communicators of the faith. He wants us to utilize godly reasoning. The people of the world and Christians in the church have questions. May God use us as his instruments to instruct others in the Way.

**BIG IDEA: As Christians we need to be equipped to reason with godliness.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** What do you think Paul's classes were like in the Hall of Tyrannus? What do you think we can learn from this method of sharing the faith?
- **Activity:** Name some attributes that you believe are required to reason with godliness.







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