



# Living Outside the Box

Experience God  
without Boundaries

**Join Us On the Journey**

Daily Devotional Readings from the Book of Acts

## ***Introduction***

### **And the Walls Come A Tumblin' Down**

It's easy to get out of a cardboard box. Just pop the lid and climb out. It's harder to see the invisible walls that hem us in every day. Assumptions, barriers, fears, conflict and rejection – we run into these so often we almost don't see them. Yet God never intended us to be boxed up. Nor does He want His people to stay shut up inside the box of a church building. Here are four tools to help you knock down the four walls of whatever box you find yourself in. *Living Outside the Box* could be the most powerful spiritual experience of your life if you take advantage of all four:

### **Love God Weekly in Worship**

The messages for the next 8 weeks will uncover the incredible story of the Church as it broke every barrier in the book of Acts.

<b>SundayVerses</b>	<b>Living Outside...</b>
Week 1 Acts 1:1-11	Assumptions
Week 2 Acts 2:1-47	Boundaries
Week 3 Acts 4:1-31	Fears
Week 4 Acts 4:32-5:16	Materialism
Week 5 Acts 6:1-7	Conflict
Week 6 Acts 8:26-40	Rejection
Week 7 Leave The Building	
Week 8 Acts 9:1-31	Yourself
Week 9 Acts 10:1-48	For Good

### **Grow in Grace Daily with Devotions**

This booklet contains 50 devotional messages. Read, pray and take an action step each day.

### **Share with others and Invite Friends and to Bless the Community**

**“The Church Has Left the Building”.** On that day, instead of “going to church” for a worship service, “Be the Church” and serve in the community. Sign up - either individually, as a family or with your Bible Study – for one of the many projects we've arranged. We encourage you to work your network of friends and invite them to worship, your Bible Study and to the mission project you choose the day we leave the building.

## Devotionals:

### Day 1, Acts 1:1-11

It was late June, 2008 and I was exiting a shop in downtown Ithaca when my phone rang. It was my friend Dan. I let it ring a second time, and a third. You see, I've learned to dread a phone call from Dan for two reasons: I know he is going to ask me to do something, and I also know that I won't be able to say no. I was, however, tempted to find out why he was calling, so I finally answered around ring five. "Rob, someone dropped out of the Bahamas trip. We've already got the ticket and everything else. Wanna come?" The nerve of that guy! He knew if he asked I couldn't say no.

Our relationship with God isn't on our terms. We don't get to choose when we are called to act for Him, both literally and metaphorically. As it says in verses seven and eight, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set.... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." We all spend so much time trying to make plans that I think we sometimes forget that God has the master calendar. He knows exactly when we are needed and what we will be called to do, neither of which can be found on our google calendars or iPhones. When the time comes to serve, God will give us a ring. All we need to do is answer.

*Prayer: Almighty God, I pray for the knowledge to recognize when You are calling me and the strength to step forward in Your name.*

**ACTION STEP:** Call a friend today and ask them to join you in reading this booklet.

### Day 2, Acts 1:12-26

My comfort zone: living in Yardley where I know my daily routine: hanging out with friends, having a hot shower, good food, and facebook. This summer I took a big step outside of my zone and went on the Bahamas mission trip, even letting my dad come. The trip was so much more than what I thought it would be, and I am grateful for this gift. In this passage, the disciples all met and prayed continually. In the Bahamas, we prayed *at least* seven times a day, which I never do at home, and we also chanted our trip verse, Phillipians 4:13. One evening, we held a sunset service on the beach, a perfect worship setting. We spread out over the beach, prayed, and wrote something in the sand that we needed His help to cope. As I wrote my burdens in the sand, I felt his presence spiritually rejuvenate me. I understood for the first time that God knew my heart, just as the disciples prayed in verse 24. Before this trip, my prayers were very selfish; now my prayers are focused on others as my prayer life grows. I know that I am growing through Christ who strengthens me!

*Hey God, thank you so much for knowing my heart. Please help me to live a life that shows that my heart beats for you. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Show a kindness or do a favor for someone you don't know today not because you are asked, but to share the love of Jesus

### **Day 3, Acts 2:1-13**

This summer I had the privilege to return to the Bahamas mission trip for my second time. The first day our group of 26 went straight to work cleaning up the backyard of Lunette and Forbes' home. We removed garbage, cleared rocks and gravel, and hacked down weeds in preparation to build two nurseries and gardens. Soon a crowd of children and adults gathered around us, wondering why we were there. I found myself gravitating towards the children, so I put down my shovel to go play. I felt guilty at first, but excited to meet new friends. The more I played with the children, the more I realized that seeing their faces light up with joy was the reason I came back for a second trip. It wasn't just about beautifying their home, but to fix up their lives. I actually didn't work on the site much again, but spent my days surrounded by children, laughing and playing. The most beautiful thing for me was that the children knew that someone loves and cares for them. I shed many tears as I struggled to say good-bye to all of my new found friends.

As I read my verses, I was surprised at the similarities between my experience in the Bahamas and these passages. In verse 4, the bible reads "All of them were filled by the Holy Spirit..." I now understand that each one of us was led by the Holy Spirit to go on this trip. Our *true reason* for this mission was to not just build gardens and repair homes, but to actually build lives and share the love of Jesus that was poured into us by the Holy Spirit.

*Dear God, please open my heart to letting your Holy Spirit live in me and move through me today to share your great love. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Sign up for a mission opportunity at church or in the community that is new to you.

### **Day 4, Acts 2:14-47**

For seven days we did everything together: rode the bus, ate, prayed, laughed, sweat, sang, worked, and slept all together. While I do these very same things with my family and friends back home, I think that something special happens when a group is united for Jesus and dedicates themselves to serving him for a week. This summer, I went on the Bahamas mission trip where we descended upon Grand Bahama Island to help rehabilitate homes and build gardens. As we worked, we also realized that we were building close relationships with the children and adults. We really did live in complete community that week, and our group just let go and soaked up God's presence. We worshipped together on the beach at sunset, praising God for the beauty and majesty of his creation. During our closing night, we shared what this week meant to each of us. We understood that we all need God along with the love and support of others. We reflected on our sins, and asked God for forgiveness. We shared communion together, and spent time in prayer reflecting on our awesome week and our awesome God. It was just like the early believers who dedicated themselves to Jesus and shared their entire lives together. The Holy Spirit was with the early believers and disciples. In the Bahamas, we saw God everywhere and in every one of us. The Holy Spirit was truly present, and worked through us for God's glory. Mission accomplished!

*Dear God, thank you so much gift of your Holy Spirit, and for the community of believers at Woodside. Please help us to seek you and feel your presence today. In your strong name we pray. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Write down the names of the people who are in your "community" (family members, friends, classmates, colleagues, etc.) and pray for each one of them today

## Day 5, Acts 3:1-26

*“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Walk.”*

**ACTS 3:6**

*Our mission trip to the Bahamas:*

The power we have is given by Christ Jesus. The power we had to go to the Bahamas and the strength we had to work in the Bahamas, was all Christ working through us, not us on our own. Although we traveled out of the country to work through Christ we are able to continue His work here as well. The power of Jesus Christ will guide us to carry out God’s healing and work in our daily lives.

*Dear God, please bless those whom you have given the strength to work for you.*

**ACTION STEP:** Give God the glory by telling someone that something you did was God’s work not yours.

## Day 6, Acts 4:1-22

*“But Peter and John replied: ‘For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard’.”  
(Courage in the face of adversity)*

**Acts 4:20**

For 9 days, I spoke to them in English and they understood...nothing. For 9 days, they spoke to me in Spanish and I understood, literally, nothing. Yet by the end of the trip we were an American-Dominican family and the tears and heartfelt good-byes expressed after our last worship service I will remember forever.

My 10 year old son lifted cinder block, dug footings and worked like a man in the pouring rain and blistering heat for a week, but at home I can’t get him to make his bed or place a dirty dish in the sink.

Strange things happened when I stepped out of my comfort zone for God and participated in my first mission trip. But they were satisfying, rewarding things. A language barrier, heat, torrential rain, intestinal distress, lack of sleep, blown tires, blisters, pains, and other were met collectively every day with “*GLORIA DIOS*” (Glory to God). For that is why we were in the DR, to accomplish the task at hand of constructing a church and bringing honor and glory to God in everything we did, no matter the obstacles. God was the great unifier, bringing people from vastly different backgrounds and life experiences together as the brothers and sisters in Christ that we are. And the result was amazing.

Stepping out for God on the DR trip was one of the best things I’ve ever experienced and made a great relationship with my son that much greater. Gloria Dios, indeed.

*Dear God, please continue to bless this congregation with the courage we need to step out in faith for you each and every day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Ask God to provide you the courage you need to take that step you’ve been thinking about.

## Day 7, Acts 4:23-37

*“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”*

**Acts 4:31**

Commanded by the reigning powers to stop teaching in the name of Jesus Christ, Peter and John sought God’s wisdom, power and strength. The result? The ultimate tool... the great gift of the Holy Spirit – God’s power within to energize, enable and levitate us up “out of the box” to make anything possible! Fear and lack of confidence undermine accomplishment and our ability to share the great news of Jesus Christ. Turn to the Lord in prayer! It works, I can attest to that... Post earthquake medical relief in Haiti? Medical clinics, home visits, foot washing for the Samaritan Feet Program in Haina? Taking the leap to pray out loud with my Dominican brothers and sisters despite the language barrier? How did I do it? The Holy Spirit took control through prayer! In God all things are possible. Time and again He carries me through challenges and raises me out of that confining box that threatens to hold me back.

*Dear Lord, please fill us with Your Holy Spirit and empower us to do all that You have called and equipped us to do. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Turn to the Lord in prayer today. Ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If you don’t feel the earth shake, experience the calming and enabling effect of the Holy Spirit.

## Day 8, Acts 5:1-16

*Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.”*

**Acts 5:3-4**

Ananias chose to withhold proceeds for himself, and Peter shows Ananias and the people that all we do even if not fully known to others is known to God. Ananias, in holding back, created a false perception that he gave generously as those in his community had for those in need, but was holding back, deceptive. He also demonstrated a lack of faith holding back in case he should need it rather than relying on God to provide.

I witnessed the Holy Spirit at work through a woman in San Migel. She lived in a “plywood” home with a rusted hole-filled corrugated metal roof. Sunlight peeked through and I’m sure rain during bad weather. Children peered through her door and giggled curiously as we chatted. The woman fed the children and expressed her sadness when she had no food for them. She spoke of God’s love and ability to provide, with a demonstration of faith, love and spiritual unity that I’ve never witnessed in my sheltered and privileged life. The enormity of faith and hope seen in the Dominicans showed me that I am not always honest with the depth of my faith.

*Lord, I ask that you will help me step out of my comfort zone in full faith that I will fully depend on you and through that faith share your love and hope and hope with others. Amen*

**ACTION STEP:** Take note of areas in your life where you might be hiding the truth.

## Day 9, Acts 5:17-42

*“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”*

### Acts 5: 41-42

This summer was my second mission trip to the Dominican Republic with Woodside, but my first with the opportunity to use my gift of healing as a physical therapist. At the end of every treatment, I said “Dios te bendiga” to each patient – “God bless you.” This was such a wonderful way to say good-bye and to sincerely wish that the person I had just treated would be healed.

Back in the States, I returned to my normal routine, which includes treating patients. But I didn’t end my sessions the same way. Why not? Why is it we can share our faith with strangers in a different country, but have so much trouble with friends and acquaintances back at home?

The apostles faced physical suffering and imprisonment, yet they obeyed God rather than men and “never stopped” sharing the good news of salvation through Christ. They weren’t worried what others thought about them or that people wouldn’t want to be their friends. God told them to spread the word and they did. They didn’t even have any special training. All they had was the joy that they were worthy to serve, the conviction that they must obey God, the knowledge that Jesus was Lord and Savior, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. What more could they need to change the world?

*Dear Lord, give me the courage to share the good news of salvation through faith in You with the people I am with every day. Please give me the sensitivity and the right words to reach them. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Who, today, could you share your faith with? Pray for the strength and courage to do so.

## Day 10, Acts 6:1-15

In my childhood and teenage years, I was fortunate to have many role models in our church. Many people who took on the task of taking care of the needs of others. Many who lived their lives dedicated to serving others. Many whose commitment to Christ equaled outreach to other members in need, communities in need, other countries in need. These people did not see the task of care giving as only the job of the leaders of the church, but the job of many in the church.

In the scripture passage for today, the daily care giving of the people was becoming more than the disciples could manage. The church was growing and more hands were needed to complete all of the ministries. The disciples chose and blessed seven men to assist them in their ministry. With these additional servants the word of God spread quickly.

In my life today, just like when I was growing up, I see many people in the church who are dedicated to serving Christ by serving others. I see many whether they are serving at the local soup kitchen or serving as missionaries across the borders, who serve tirelessly. Our lives, dedicated to Christ, should equal lives dedicated to service. This dedication to service helps spread God’s love.

*Dear God, Help us to not only see the opportunities to serve others and witness to them, but to act on the opportunities. Thank you for opening our eyes to Your will. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Do you view your life as an opportunity to serve Him through serving others? Ask God to direct you in where you should serve.

## Day 11, Acts 7:1-38

When I left home to become a missionary I thought of all the possible struggles I would face. Cultural differences, language barriers, incredibly sick people, and extreme poverty. The last thing I thought I would face would be people questioning my faithfulness and my actions. Maybe because this was the last thing I expected, I wasn't ready for it and it hit me much harder than anything else I witnessed. Just like Stephen, I too was accused of not being the Christian I claimed to be. It was so hurtful that I found my heart hardened by the gossip that was said. I wish I could say I was as eloquent as Stephen and that I used this time to preach more of the gospel to those Christians who were questioning my faith, but at the time I was so hurt I wasn't sure what to do. There also was a time when, just like Moses, my actions were questioned. It was difficult to realize that not all Christians will agree with my decision-making and may be confused and sometimes even angered by my judgment. We do not all have the answers or the truth, only God has these. It comforted me to read these Bible verses and find that I am not the only Christian who has been questioned and gossiped about. I find hope in the knowledge that God knows the truth and he knows my heart unlike no one else. Just as God did for Moses and Stephen he will use these hard situations for the glory of His kingdom and they will make us stronger as Christians.

*Abba Father, Daddy God. Even though our friends and family with fail and disappoint us, we thank you for the hope we find in the knowledge that you are the only perfect person in our lives and you will never fail us.*

**ACTION STEP:** The next time you feel betrayed or judged unfairly use it as an opportunity to pray for that person and draw upon Stephen's example to give you strength.

## Day 12, Acts 7:39-8 1a

*“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” Acts 7:51-52*

In biblical times farmers plowed their fields using oxen harnessed to a yoke. Sometimes an ox stiffened its neck, stubbornly refusing to accept the yoke. Thus originated the term stiff-necked. Old Testament writers repeatedly labeled the Israelites as such. From generation to generation God’s people refused to yield to the “yoke” of the Law and they remained unwilling to bend to His will.

So when Stephen called his accusers “stiff-necked” they knew exactly what he meant. And they were furious! “Who are **you** to accuse **us**? You’re the one on trial here! We trace our lineage back to Abraham. And you? You follow that blasphemer, Jesus!” But through eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, Stephen saw that the Sanhedrin’s veneer of holiness covered hearts hardened by pride, self-righteousness and arrogance.

And more than 2,000 years later little has changed. We define God in our own terms, obstinately unwilling to submit to Him. But we don’t use an ugly phrase like *stiff-necked*. No, we’ve traded the Sanhedrin’s harsh legalism for easy rationalizations—we’re independent, in control, self-sufficient, self-made—or just comfortable. When challenged by fellow believers, sermons and even scripture, we get our backs up. *Who are you to challenge me? To question how I spend my time or money? To expect me to go on a mission trip, attend a Bible study, tithe or pray out loud?*

*Holy Spirit open my eyes, give me a teachable heart and fill me with courage to follow You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** In what area of your life are you refusing to yield to the Lord? Where are you resisting the leading of the Holy Spirit?

## Day 13, Acts 8:1b-25

*“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”*

**Acts 8:4**

This passage tells us what Jesus’ followers did after they saw Stephen stoned. This chapter says “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”

So they “scattered”. I get that. But the next part? They “preached the word wherever they went?” REALLY? I think of myself as a woman of faith but would I have the courage to continue to preach the word after seeing a friend stoned to death and others imprisoned? I doubt it. I sometimes have trouble talking about my faith to friends and family!

These early Christians play a big role in my faith in Jesus. Thinking of them and the persecution they endured makes me realize two things. First, that these faithful followers believed so deeply that Jesus was the Son of God and their Savior that they were willing to give up their whole life to spread this Good News to all people. And second, that the Holy Spirit must have been alive in them, giving them more courage than was humanly possible.

These men and women were scattered like seeds, and because of their devotion and obedience these seeds continue to grow in us today.

*Dear Lord, please allow your Holy Spirit to live in me giving me the courage to continue to spread the Good News of your Son, Jesus to my friends and family.*

**ACTION STEP:** Step out of the box and share your faith journey with someone today.

## Day 14, Acts 8:26-40

*Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the Prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

### Acts 8:30-31

This passage centers on how God inspired Philip's actions, how he swoops in and saves the Ethiopian. We wish we identified more with Philip, but upon reading the passage we both more closely identified with the Ethiopian. He was faithful, but seeking help in understanding. Like him we feel the gravitational pull of God, but at times lack the tools to fully embrace Him. As a couple, our Christian faith was strong, but our tools to delve deeper into God's Word, and therefore interpret his plan for us, were weak. We read scripture, but without consistency or a sense of purpose and didn't use it as effectively as we could have to build the foundation of our faith stronger. It was probably for several reasons, but not least was, to quote the Ethiopian, "how can I unless someone explains it to me?" We lacked discussion, challenging point of views and consistency.

It was not until the Spirit moved us to individually join growth groups did we realize that there was something missing in our journey to understand scripture. By regularly attending, we have come to find out that there are others like us, searching to know God more fully, and committed to gaining a deeper understanding of the Word of God. God has blessed us with meeting wonderful people and strong Christians and it has been among the most important spiritual decisions we have ever made and much like the Ethiopian, reinvigorated us to follow God's direction.

*Lord, please help us understand your Word and like Philip, be open to opportunities, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to bring your word to others.*

**ACTION STEP:** Seek fellowship to better understand God's word. God loves a good crowd.

## Day 15, Acts 9:1-31

*"They sent him off to Tarsus."*

### Acts 9:30

Saul tells us he was confident, driven, in pursuit of an agenda. He was going to Damascus to stop the "way"-ward path of good Jews with legalistic, righteous force. He was a Pharisee, select among Jews, trained by the best educators and rabbis, advanced beyond leaders of his own age. He may have aspired to govern among the Sanhedrin. He was making a name for himself.

But Saul's journey to Damascus proved to be a detour off the fast track to Jerusalem. He spent three years in Arabia and Damascus; a study abroad for gentile evangelism. No longer the meteoric star destined for power and position; Saul embraced his gentile commission. From Caesarea **"they sent him off to Tarsus."** Tarsus, land of Saul's birth, meeting place of Hellenistic and Oriental culture, epicenter of philosophy and intellectual life, Tarsus. Saul was sent back to start. Only this time he ministered to everyone regardless of pedigree. Saul returned to relatives, communities and institutions previously outside his preconceived notions; outside his comfort zone. He served in the name of the Lord not making a name for himself but as a chosen instrument of the Lord.

Where are you being sent? Is it right back into your faith community to serve as a mentor to others? Is it right back into your neighborhood to witness to the healing love of Jesus? Is it right back into your family of origin to teach and heal? Is it right back into your industry, government, place of work or education?

*Pray for the lay leaders who teach and heal in Jesus' name. Ask the Lord, "Where are you sending me?"*

**ACTION STEP:** Embrace your gentile commission. The Lord may be sending you back to start and it may be closer to home than you thought.

### Day 16, Acts 9:32-43

*“Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed.”*

**Acts 9:40a**

*i. can. do. it. my-self.* The perennial cry of all two year olds. Unfortunately many of us never grow out of this stage. “I need your help” may be the most difficult sentence in the English language. I have constructed this box for myself many times, wrapped as securely as the most secret gift, containing the problems and insecurities that only I know about - a box that keeps me from stepping out with God.

Twice in these verses, Peter encounters problems that need his attention. He could try to fix them himself. (The old, impetuous Peter might have gone down that route first.) But instead he asks for help. Although we don't hear the actual request, Peter tells Aeneas that it is Jesus Christ who heals him. And, when he gets to Joppa and Tabitha, he sends everyone from the rooms and kneels to pray. I don't think that he asked God about the weather in heaven. Peter did not pretend that he could raise Tabitha himself; he knew that Jesus would have to do the heavy lifting.

*“and many people believed in the Lord”* **Acts 9:42b**

I have learned, as I've grown older, that it is okay to ask for help when I need it both from God through prayer and in English from my family and friends. It's a continuing process. When we insist on staying in the “I can do it myself” box, we miss the awesome power that can come when we step outside with Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, lead us to know that in our weakness we do need help. But in the asking and the answer, we will find strength in You.*

**ACTION STEP:** Who do you know that you trust as a friend who can help you step “out of the box”? Get in touch with them soon!

### Day 17, Acts 10:1-23a

*“Do not call anything unclean that God has made pure.”*

**Acts 10: 15**

Peter went up to his roof and closed his eyes, and God opened them with this vision.

For those of us who do not come from a Jewish heritage, this passage might be the second-most important story in the bible, behind only the resurrection of Jesus. In this story, the disciples come to realize that salvation through Christ is available to everybody everywhere, not only to the Jewish people.

And God has given to us part of the job of spreading his good news. That can be a frightening challenge, but remember that He will first do the hard part himself - in this passage God prepared Cornelius' heart to be ready to hear the news before he had him talk with Peter; and He is preparing the hearts of people in your life to hear the gospel from you. Maybe it is your neighbor to whom you bring the extra tomatoes from your garden, your brother who has grown steadily away from the church, or your coworker you've been working alongside for 15 years. Nobody is “out-of-bounds”- the Lord wants a relationship with each of his children.

*"[The Lord] is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* **2Peter 3:9**

*"Father, please open my eyes today and reveal the people in my life who You have prepared to hear the gospel. "*

**ACTION STEP:** Ask God show you the people in your life who He is preparing to hear about the love and grace of Jesus through you.

### **Day 18, Acts 10:23b-48**

*"...if we want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open."*

**Acts 10:35**

Hmm. Most of us agree we want God. But are we ready to do as He says? In this chapter of Acts, Cornelius, a Gentile, is told by God in a vision to send for Peter – a foreigner – a Jew. God gives no reason; Cornelius asks no questions – he just does it. And then waits. And when Peter comes, Cornelius invites him in and waits again, "ready to listen to whatever the Master put in your heart to tell us." Do we trust God enough to simply do what he asks and then wait for Him to reveal what it means?

We are a generation of questioners, of action – find out everything you can about a situation and forge ahead! Ever since I was a little girl I've been full of questions and NOT good about waiting. How hard it is for me to just listen to God without questioning and then wait – wait for God to reveal His plans, Himself. But the times I manage to do this; when I usually ignore my natural instincts to do things my way, to "make it happen." But the times I actually listen to that voice in my heart that says, "wait and listen for God's direction", those times are ALWAYS better.

*Father God, thank you for knowing what's best for us. Help us to learn to wait and listen for your Word.*

**ACTION STEP:** This week, try to quiet your heart so you can hear what your Father is saying. And then do it!

### **Day 19, Acts 11:1-18**

*"I was in the town of Joppa and was praying when I fell sound asleep and had a vision."* **Acts 11:5**

Peter experienced dreams. What about us? How do we hear from God? When God gives us the urge to follow, we cannot rest until we complete the task that has been assigned. When it's right, you will be stirred to do it. God spoke and challenged my growth group to have a women's conference. After praying, a unanimous "Yes" was reached. Shortly after the "What ifs" and uncertainty began to creep in.

We had no fellowship hall, kitchen, or keynote speaker! Interestingly every time we met in prayer, God assured us it was going to be ok. Who were we to doubt God's grace. The Holy Spirit was there to calm our fears. We stuck together, prayed for one another and became fearless! "No" was not in our vocabulary.

It would have been easy to table the Women's conference. Nobody would have blamed us. The problem was we had dedicated it to Him. An amazing thing happened. We thought we were gifting the women of our community but God was gifting us with something much better. He circumcised

our hearts. When a barrier came up, we got busy praying and then, “ouch” some pride was circumsised. Doors were shut and we had nowhere else to turn, “ouch” unbelief was pruned. When it got messy, “ouch” the band aid covering our worries was ripped off. We learned that there is strength in him. We grew as a team, as God’s girls, friends and Sisters in Christ. We experienced the beauty of listening to his outrageous request. He rewarded our faithfulness.

*Today I pray for my spirit to be stirred. Lead me God to the adventure you have planned for me. I pray for the wisdom to know when you are speaking to me. Help me to be fearless in your name. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Are you willing to be obedient, to have a life of changing moments? It’s not a burden to follow the Lord, it’s a true privilege.

### **Day 20, Acts 11:19-30**

<sup>2</sup>*News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.*  
<sup>23</sup>*When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.* <sup>24</sup>*He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. **Acts 11:22-24***

Several years ago I read the book, “A Grace Disguised,” by Gerald Sittser. The book had a great impact on my life. It was the true-life account of the author’s life. He suffered a great tragedy when the car he was driving was hit head-on by a drunk driver, killing his mother, his wife and one of his youngest daughters. The story is about the tragedy and loss, his faith, forgiveness. But the defining moment for any of us can be the loss, or can be about God’s great grace that can transform us in the midst of sorrow. I was privileged to meet and speak to the author a few years ago at a conference and we shared the wonderful ways that God’s grace flows to us.

Through times of suffering we can see that through God’s grace we can achieve greater depth, compassion, joy, and appreciation of simple blessings.

This story in Acts reminds us of the great persecution and suffering that was going on at the time. Yet Barnabas (the great encourager) arrived and *saw the evidence of the grace of God and he was glad.*

What a gift to live outside the box—to trust in God’s great grace. There is such depth in the faithfulness of God in our lives. If you are going through a difficult circumstance, a tough choice, a rough path in your life, try recalling God’s love, faithfulness and His great grace.

*Loving God: Thank you for the gift of your great grace. May we trust that your grace is sufficient for us. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Look for ways God blesses you by His grace.

### **Day 21, Acts 12:1-19a**

*“...but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening: he thought he was seeing a vision.”*  
**Acts 12:9**

“Pinch me! I must be dreaming.” We are not so different from Peter. When miraculous things happen, we doubt that they are real. When we finally accept the reality, we make ourselves crazy

trying to explain it rationally.

When my girls were young, we moved to a new house with our two cats. We also became part of a newly chartered church that met in a dance studio. One Sunday morning we were unable to find Rysa's cat, Ramoth. Rysa was upset when we left for church without finding her. She fervently prayed during the service for the return of her precious tabby. Day after day, week after week, we all prayed for Ramoth's return, but she had vanished.

After many weeks, we had given up hope and Rysa was heartbroken. Then the phone rang; it was the dance studio where we met for church. They had found a skinny, dirty, grey tabby. They had enticed her with milk and read her tag. We dashed to the car and sped to the studio, but she had escaped. We walked all around the area calling and calling for Ramoth. Finally she appeared – starving but alive.

Rysa had her miracle. Why did Ramoth appear where we met for church? There may be logical, worldly explanation. But for Rysa, it was God answering her prayers in a way that left no doubt that He was listening to her.

*Mighty God of Miracles, we confess that we try to explain your miracles rather than enjoy them. Help us to accept that you use all of your creation including other people to work your miracles. Open our hearts to your generous gifts and use us to deliver your miracles to others. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Next time something amazing happens to you or someone you know, don't try to explain it away. Accept it as a miraculous gift from God. Give Him the Glory!

## **Day 22, Acts 12:19b-25**

*On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*

*But the word of God continued to increase and spread."*

### **Acts 12:21-24**

If you asked me who my favorite musical artists were ten years ago I would have said Britney Spears and Destiny's Child. Today my taste in music sings a different tune with Nicole C. Mullen and Tenth Avenue North topping the charts.

Britney Spears might not make your Top 10 list, but often we allow musicians, athletes and movie stars to influence us. In Matthew 22:37, the first and greatest commandment for Christians is 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. Likewise, the 10 Commandments warn us against idolatry.

In today's passage, Paul talks about Herod's meeting with the people of Tyre and Sidon. Once Herod won their approval, they praised and idolized him as a god. Giving another the praise God deserves is turning away from Him who gave His life for you. What more must God do to prove how much He loves you and deserves your love in return?

While today I'm inspired by more Christ-like musicians, I still recognize the danger of praising a *person* for their gifts instead of glorifying *God* for the message in their music. We can even lose sight of His authority by relying too heavily on a fellow Christian for guidance. Give all your praise and honor to Him.

*Father, grant me the wisdom to see areas in my life where I'm not praising You with all my heart, soul and mind. I give you all my praise and return the love You showed me at the cross.*

**ACTION STEP:** What "idols" do you have in your life? Examine yourself thoughtfully knowing that all praise belongs to God, and God alone.

### **Day 23, Acts 13:1-12**

*"The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit..."*

**Acts 13:4**

I was comfortable being the "missionary wife". For the past six years I sent my husband off summer after summer to do God's work in the Bahamas. During this time, I (sometimes grudgingly) took care of the kids and the house in his absence. This, I viewed, was the extent of what God expected of my contribution to the mission field. Someone has to take care of things around here, right?

Then came Mission Sunday, 2009. I sat in the pew next to my daughter once again watching my husband and his Bahamas team talk about their trip, something I had done many times before. During this service there was a presentation from the Dominican Republic team, a slide show that included a picture of a Dominican child and a Woodside child smiling together for the camera. The Woodside child happened to be exactly the same age as my daughter and she exclaimed, indignantly I might add, "Mom, that isn't fair!! Why does he get to go and I can't?". "Well", I said, "you can go too. No one ever said you couldn't." That was the end of it. Megan and I became missionaries from that moment on. We were the first to sign up for the DR trip 2010.

This summer, standing in the sweltering sunlight and getting dirty (something I hate), it dawned on me that the Holy Spirit spoke through Megan that day. God was not calling me to sit on the sidelines of the mission field, but to be a player and experience it for myself.

*Heavenly Father, help me to open my mind and heart to where You are calling me.*

**ACTION STEP:** Open your ears and heart and listen for God's voice in the less obvious places.

### **Day 24, Acts 13:13-52**

*"We tell you the good news. What God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus."*

**Acts 13: 32-33**

I stood in a hole resembling a grave. The musty smell of damp earth with a hint of clay competed with the odor of my dripping sweat to offend my nose. The pica I raised over my head briefly eclipsed the Dominican sun before I brought it down with all of my strength against a rock mocking my efforts to move it. The rock rang like a bell. Vibrations shot up my arms into the back of my head and rattled my teeth. It brought to mind a line from a favorite musical, "Whether the pitcher hits the stone or the stone hits the pitcher, it is going to be bad for the pitcher."

Digging trenches for concrete footings is not my chosen line of work, nor something I particularly enjoy, but it is, in a very small way, an opportunity to sacrifice for others in return for others who sacrificed for me. American servicemen and women from our congregation serve in harm's way for me. Missionaries since Paul and Barnabas have risked their lives to spread God's word in my place.

And Jesus died on the cross for my sins.

Nothing I can do can compare with these sacrifices, but digging a trench so that a church may rise in a Dominican city and spread God's word is a way for me to remember my blessings and express my thanks.

*Lord, show me where I can serve you and give me the strength to respond.*

**ACTION STEP:** Express your thanks for others' sacrifice through action.

### **Day 25, Acts 14:1-28**

*“At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.”*

**Acts 14:1-2**

This is Paul and Barnabas first missionary trip to Iconium. They must have been very uplifted at the beginning when things were going so well. They had people that were converted and then in the next verse we see that things turned for the worse.

How many times in our life do we go all enthused with things going just as we would want and then God throws a kink in your plans. Mission trips can be like that at times; you are all set with your preconceived ideas of what it will be like and things can be overwhelming and so different from your normal everyday life. At this point we should take assurance in Paul whose faith remains strong even when he met tremendous adversity. God only gives us what we can handle.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for all the opportunities you've given us to know and love you. Help us to use our gifts to spread your word and truth throughout the world. We pray this all in the strong name of Jesus Christ.*

**ACTION STEP:** What are some ways that you have experienced conflict in the past when you have stepped out to do something for God?

### **Day 26, Acts 15:1-21**

*“...why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved...”*

**Acts 15:10-11**

“But we always do it that way.” Does that phrase spring from your lips whenever change is suggested? I cringe when someone says it during a meeting or discussion. Nothing kills an idea faster. I consider myself comfortable embracing change; in fact, I just changed from a PC to a Mac.

However...When I was a child, our Christmas tradition was fried mush (polenta if you're Italian) for breakfast. I LOVE it! My mother says she made it because it took too long to make on a normal day, so it had to be saved for holidays. For me, the crunchy slices smothered in maple syrup are nothing short of heaven. As a mom, I continued that tradition until, one Christmas, my daughters asked for a menu change. I was devastated! How could they reject MY tradition? It wasn't Christmas without my mush- or was it?

And that's the point, isn't it? Christmas isn't about traditions, it's about Jesus. And in this passage of Acts, both Peter and James reinforce the message that we are saved – not by our traditions, laws, rules, liturgies, songs, buildings, missions, or deeds – but by the Grace of Jesus.

*Father God, set us free to enjoy our traditions and give us the courage to change those that are burdens. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Prayerfully examine your traditions at home, work, and church. If they have become a yoke instead of a joy, follow the disciples lead – embrace change.

### **Day 27, Acts 15:22-41**

The *Inquirer*, the ABC nightly news, and even Good Morning America featured the news: Ann Rice, famed novelist best known for “Interview with a Vampire”, has quit Christianity! She writes on Facebook, “I remain committed to Christ as always, but not to being ‘Christian’.... It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group.”

How right Rice is! We Christians are often a rather motley group, prone to argument, known for legalism, and often lacking in grace. Acts 15 demonstrates that these challenges have plagued the church since the beginning. First, we see the Gentile Christians in Antioch burdened by teachers who demanded that they be circumcised. Then a short time later we see Paul and Barnabas at such odds with one another that they part company in anger. Christ’s followers are so painfully human! Yet, what Rice has forgotten is that while we may not be perfect, we are the people so loved by God that he sent his only Son.

Notice the rest of the story: God working in and through fallible followers to bring grace. To those burdened Christians in Antioch, a delegation is sent with a letter that heals the rift. God then uses the break between Paul and Barnabas to create two missionary journeys, doubling the communities reached with the gospel.

When God’s healing grace works in us, we become beacons of hope in a dark world. Forgiven- are we forgiving? Loved- are we loving? Welcomed by God’s grace- are our arms open wide in invitation to the world God so loves? Friends, let’s shine!

*Father, make us instruments of your peace!*

**ACTION STEP:** Look for the way God can use you to bring His grace, forgiveness and understanding to heal a hurt in your family, workplace, neighborhood or faith community.

### **Day 28, Acts 16:1-15**

*“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us”.*

**Acts 16: 9**

How many of us, while lying in bed, have had visions of things that we feel Jesus really wants us to

do; just like Paul? I know that after my nightly prayers, I can vividly hear this calling from Jesus. Also like Paul, it is not enough to listen; we must also take action! A recent vision that kept repeating in my mind was of the many who were suffering with Dementia or Alzheimer Disease. Did you know that after age 60 half of us will experience some form of Dementia. This is a scary statistic! Even more troubling is the fact that many who are afflicted are institutionalized and forgotten. This was very apparent while visiting Dad at Arden Courts in Yardley for three years.

Like Paul, the Holy Spirit laid these residents on my heart and our evening Growth Group decided to reach out to them during the holidays. For two Decembers we made up gift bags for each resident. We included several beauty products, necklaces for the ladies, and caps with their names engraved on them for the men. Each bag was decorated with a holiday card on the outside to make them look festive. The expressions of pure joy on each of the resident's faces exemplified how simple it is to share the Love of Jesus Christ to those less fortunate. These bags became cherished possessions and were carried around for days!

After Paul had received his vision, he prepared immediately to go to Macedonia to carry out God's work. Likewise, the nineteen of us worked together to bring God's Love to the forty-eight residents of Arden Courts,

*"Concluding that God had called us to minister to them." Acts 16: 10b*

*Heavenly Father, help us to reach out to all those in need, according to your will. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Contact an elderly person and offer support and love.

### **Day 29, Acts 16:16-40**

*"The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God-he and his whole family."*

**Acts 16:34**

When Paul and Silas were placed in prison, they continued their ministry by singing hymns and praying to God. A violent earthquake caused the prison doors to open and chains to be loosened, but none of the prisoners escaped. The jailer was so taken with the experience that he came to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Freedom Neighborhood One is a non-profit crime prevention organization located in Bristol Township. Just as Paul and Silas, when imprisoned, did not lose hope, the community center within often drug-plagued neighborhoods offers residents a safe haven and freedom from discouragement. The center provides them an opportunity for improvement in their quality of life.

Our Monday Evening Growth Group and members from other Growth Groups reached out at Christmas and presented gift bags for sixty children who attend the after-school programs. In addition to the school supplies, crafts and games, we also included a religious booklet. It was our hope to share the more important gift of the joy it brings in knowing our Lord and in reaching out to others. The computer systems that members of the congregation donated have also been received by the center and their wish is to have a computer lab set up for the children.

It was a wonderful experience to meet some of the people who interact with the residents. Their dedication was apparent. Hopefully the good news of Christ is spreading within the neighborhood and the future is a bit more promising because of Woodside's mission.

*Dear Lord, Please comfort the children who may feel lost and bring hope and joy to their lives. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Reach out to a child who needs help either in school or at home.

### **Day 30, Acts 17:1-15**

*“As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” Acts 17:10-11*

It's dark. Helped by friends, three men slip from Thessalonica. Guided by the Spirit, Paul and Silas travelled for months; they were beaten, imprisoned, chased from towns by “circumcision-heads” and, sadly, circumcised Timothy months ago to appease them. Tired, likely discouraged, they enter the next town and find ... Bereans keen to hear their message and eager to check it against God's Word!

It's dark. 5:30am on a Thursday in 2004. Sitting in the car, I wonder “Why did I agree to try this 6:00am Men's Group? Well, it's only an hour.” Turn the key. Drive. Park. Walk in, hesitate, and find ... six guys reading the Bible and asking questions like mine! When I can't find the passage, Jon helps. OK!

It's 9:40am on a Sunday in 2007. Sitting in the Woodside Library, I wonder “Why did I say ‘yes’ when asked to lead a group?” People enter. Introductions. Four new to Woodside. I start the DVD and find ... another group ready to explore. OK!

It's 8:30am on a Sunday in 2009. Praying on one of twelve chairs crammed into the Office, many books at my feet, I wonder “Why did I say ‘yes’ when someone in our group wanted to study Revelation? Glad Pastor Doug had time to chat!” People arrive. Catch up. Open with prayer, and I find ... we're in this together, though we clearly have different views. OK!

*Heavenly Father, thank you for making Woodside a place where your Word is read, taught, explored and applied. Holy Spirit, great Counselor, keep our minds open to hear your truth. Lord Jesus, keep our hearts burning with the flame of your love.*

**ACTION STEP:** Follow the Bereans' example! Agree as a group to read and discuss a recent sermon. Identify any points that raise questions for you, and any that speak deeply to you.

### **Day 31, Acts 17:16-34**

*“Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”*

**Acts 17:22-23**

When I read this passage, I think about how Paul used something very common to them, the altar “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” to introduce them to the living God. The way Paul approached the Athenians when they were asking questions about his message impressed me. He told them, he noticed that they were a religious people. After looking around the city and seeing all the idols, even one dedicated to an unknown god; he appealed to their seeking hearts with his remark. It made me think that there's something from his technique that we can learn in sharing the gospel with others. He made them feel they were almost there, because they were acknowledging there was a God unknown to them. When we want to present Jesus to someone; Try to find a common

ground. Perhaps the fact that they are caring; or that they are already demonstrating the traits that are godly; or if they feel that God is far away and does not care. Use something that's going on in their life that will help them to relate to God and his love of mankind, so much so, that he was willing to send Jesus so we could be reconciled to him and have eternal life.

*Dear Lord, help us to use Paul's example as we relate with others, that we may direct them to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you Lord. Amen*

**ACTION STEP:** Who can you introduce to the Living God? Think of what you can do to encourage someone in their walk with God.

### **Day 32, Acts 18:1-17**

*"Jesus told Paul: "Do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent"*

**Acts 18:9**

Paul spoke to the Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue about the Lord testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, but was met with disbelief and anger. Have you ever had this reaction from someone when you spoke of the saving grace of Jesus Christ? I have. When I first invite someone to accompany me to church, the reaction I often get is "I do not have to go a building to worship God." My reply is of course not (and what a revelation it is to know we are the Church!) However, I find that being among other worshipers is of great comfort and encouragement; a source of strength.

It is often hard to approach someone with the good news of Jesus Christ, but remember we are all called to be missionaries in His name. Try thinking about who you are introducing and what is at stake. Do not be discouraged if you are rebuked at first. Try different approaches, be understanding and empathetic to that particular individual's position, pray and ask the Lord for help. Remember He is always with us.

*Jesus give me strength in your love to reach out to someone today with the good news of your saving grace, in Your holy name I pray,*

**ACTION STEP:** Let the love of our Lord guide you and strengthen you as you encourage someone to join the Christian family. Step outside your comfort zone and share the grace of Christ.

### **Day 33, Acts 18:18-28**

*"Using the Scriptures, he explained to them, 'The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus.'"*

**Acts 18:28**

Paul taught a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla. They became followers of Jesus. They set up tent as both their home and their business, and everywhere they went, they shared the Word of God. Paul trusted them and left them in charge of Ephesus. When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos speak only of the baptism of repentance and not that of the forgiveness of sins, they didn't panic, they didn't look for Paul, and they didn't remain silent. They took Apollos aside, recognized the great gift of speech and intelligence Apollos possessed, and then the students became teachers. "When Priscilla and Aquila heard [Apollos], they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (v. 26). This past summer we had our second ministry camp. Twelve junior

high students came to church. We prayed, packed our lunches and drove to five different sites. This was the first year in which I asked the students not only to sweat for Jesus but (by talking) share the gospel. Students left their comfort zone and asked complete strangers if they could pray for them. Four students told homeless people why and how they became followers of Jesus. We read scripture, sang songs, and declared that “the Messiah you are looking for is Jesus” as we led the chapel service at the homeless shelter. All of us are students but sometimes we are asked to become teachers.

*Jesus, help me have the spirit of boldness, compassion and wisdom so that I can share the gospel with everyone you send me to. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** I will study the scriptures so that I can explain to others that Jesus is the Messiah.

### **Day 34, Acts 19:1-22**

Acts 19:1-22 tells us of a flurry of activity in Ephesus, as Paul baptizes and converts several souls, who have not previously known Jesus Christ. These truly converted Christians speak in tongues, prophesize, heal the sick, and perform miracles in the name of Christ. This passage also tells us of seven brothers, the Sons of Sceva, that don't know Christ, yet begin to try and cast out demons in his name anyway. They are challenged by an evil spirit, severely beaten, and are not victorious. They did not know Christ, did not have a personal relationship with him and had no business evoking his holy name. Satan, through that evil spirit, won this round over some unbelievers, who received a rather rude awakening. But Christ has won the ultimate victory, and through our faith in Him, we have been granted the ultimate gift of salvation. This is a gift that we need to share with others.

While in the Dominican Republic, I saw the tireless acts of true believers. I saw brothers and sisters of Woodside publicly proclaim their love of Christ. They described how Christ had changed their lives during testimonies delivered on a very hot evening, on a crowded city intersection in a foreign land, overflowing with strangers, who did not speak our language. These believers may not have been casting out demons, performing miracles, or speaking in tongues but they were publicly proclaiming their faith, which is what we are called to do. Following some great street corner preaching by the Dominican pastor, and our own Pastor Doug, one woman gave her life to Christ. Another victory!

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, through whom we have salvation. Give us the strength and ability to share the good news with others.*

**ACTION STEP:** Tell someone today about God's saving grace.

### **Day 35, Acts 19:23-41**

*“Paul....says that man-made gods are not gods at all.”*

**Acts 19: 26b**

In our hectic lives it is very easy to lose sight of what is important. Many of us have become totally involved in our jobs, our busy work schedules, our possessions and other “man-made idols.” We worship our possessions, our jobs and other man-made idols rather than our loving God and His Son Jesus.

In my travels to Haiti, I have witnessed a deep and abiding faith in the people of Haiti who have

accepted Jesus in their lives. I have been deeply inspired by the faith and love of Jesus that they demonstrate in every aspect of their lives. Individuals, who have lost loved ones, their limbs, their livelihood and their homes, and are now living in battered tents with meager possessions and little food, demonstrate a deeper faith and love of Jesus than I ever could have imagined! They have no possessions as we would know them. They have no “man-made idols.” And yet they have a deep love and faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Our man-made possessions and idols that we place on pedestals in our lives are not important. No, it is the love and the relationship that we have with Jesus and the work that we do through Him and in his Name.

*Lord, please help us place aside our man-made idols and strive to be witnesses, to testify to Your love, mercy, and your desire that we build in deep relationship with Your Son Jesus.*

**ACTION STEP:** Let the love of the Holy Spirit fill you today; and pray for the strength and wisdom to cast aside all that competes with His love

### **Day 36, Acts 20:1-12**

It seems pretty incredible that a man could actually fall asleep during a sermon while sitting in a windowsill, fall to his death, and then be resurrected to live by a hug. These verses remind me of just how awesome our God truly is, how powerful he is. Jesus performed many miracles that are well documented in the New Testament in order for us to understand that he was *of God*. In the Book of Acts, the disciples, who had been given the Holy Spirit, are now also performing miracles to convince the crowds that their words are true. These miracles are dramatic, and meant to once again convince people that God was ordaining their actions. One dramatic miracle is Saul's transformation. God blinded Saul on the road to Damascus, where Jesus then spoke to Saul asking him why he was persecuting his people. Saul, who became known as Paul, acknowledged Jesus, then was baptized and given the Holy Spirit along with his sight. Once a persecutor, Paul now is the very man preaching the word of God and here resurrects Eutychus from death back to life. Paul was an ordinary man who had extraordinary faith in Jesus, and his faith in turn yielded miraculous power through the Holy Spirit. I am an ordinary woman, but I believe in an extraordinary God. What can God accomplish through me if I am willing to give myself to him?

*Father God, thank you so much for accepting me just as I am. Please help me to be open to letting you work through me, so that others would see your love shine through me. In your strong and mighty name I pray. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** On a sheet of paper, list at least three people's lives you have seen changed by their belief in God.

### **Day 37, Acts 20:13-38**

It wasn't that long ago that I used to question the judgment, and even the sanity, of the missionaries that went to dangerous places and put themselves in harms way. When I heard stories of people being hurt and killed in such places, I felt conflicted. I had compassion for them, but also felt as if it was almost self-inflicted.

However I could understand why Paul made his travels. The church was in its early stages in his time and there were very few methods of getting news. So even though he was often mocked, beaten and imprisoned, Paul had to take these risks in order to fulfill his duty inspired by the Holy Spirit. A duty that eventually sent him to Jerusalem even though he believed that such a trip would

lead to his death.

The Holy Spirit is still asking us to spread this news. But why is this still necessary, 2000 years later? Because despite the informational overload in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are still plenty of people that do not know what Jesus sacrificed for us. Each of our own personal stories can be the most effective way that people get this message of our salvation. If there were just one person that you might touch, would you want that person to be deprived because you didn't share your story freely?

It has taken me a long time to learn to listen for what God is telling me to do and where to go. Maybe the Spirit will guide you to a soup kitchen or to a prison. It might send you on a mission trip abroad, or just to the local supermarket. Whatever you are hearing, you should take the time to listen. It might be daunting and a little scary, but the joy and rewards that follow are a blessing.

*Heavenly Father – Thank you for the love you have for me and for the person that introduced me to you. Please give me the strength and the courage so that I can go and share my story wherever you send me, to whomever is waiting. I want others to receive those same blessings that I have been given. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Still your mind and listen for God's prompting. When you hear, take action.

### **Day 38, Acts 21:1-26**

*Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."*

**Acts 21:13**

As I was planning my trip to the Haitian border in February, I eagerly told my friends and family about my mission. The response was far less enthusiastic. Reactions varied from, "You're going where?" to "It's not safe" to total silence. Even my mother begged me not to cross the border into Haiti.

As Paul prepared for his excursion to Jerusalem, many of his beloved friends and companions pleaded with him not to go. Even several prophets tried to dissuade Paul; these were people gifted with prophesy by the same Holy Spirit who had gifted Paul with wisdom and perseverance. Paul understood that his friends expressed deep concern for his safety out of love and respect. But Paul was resolute. He reminded them that he must heed his divine calling, despite the trials that lie ahead. His friends responded ultimately, "The Lord's will be done."

While in Haiti, we missionaries encountered physical and emotional trials, with some lasting well beyond the actual voyage. But these hardly compared to the pain experienced by the earthquake victims. Even so, it was these Haitians who validated my reason for going to Haiti: they graciously and warmly received my love and prayers. Together, we glorified God, transforming tents into temples of His Holy Spirit, who communicated hope and peace in a language understood by all.

*Holy Spirit, help us not to tempt or dissuade others away from Your will.*

**ACTION STEP:** Offer your prayers to a friend that is planning a mission trip or vacation. Pray that His will be done.

### **Day 39, Acts 21:27-36**

*"This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place."*

**Acts 21:28**

Do you sometimes lack the courage to pursue a goal or stand up for something that you feel is important because of the resistance you will encounter from peers, friends and family? Just think how Paul felt as he returned to Jerusalem knowing he was going to be confronted with great resistance. He was willing to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

*Dear Lord: We are all faced with challenges and resistance in our lives and I ask that you provide us with the courage and strength to face those challenges knowing that you are with us at all times.  
Amen*

**ACTION STEP:** Have courage to pursue whatever it is in your heart with conviction.

#### **Day 40, Acts 21:37-22:21**

*"...The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and see the Righteous One and hear words from His mouth. You will be His witness to all men..."*

**Acts 22:14-15**

Last year when I was facing major surgery and much uncertainty, I found out that there were a group of prisoners who were praying for a good outcome and recovery for me. When told this, I was truly humbled.

When I recovered I wanted to go and witness to these men that the power of prayer does work and I was grateful for theirs, just to thank them. In May I got my chance to do so and I can't express how blessed I felt for going to the prison to talk with them.

God wants us to have trust and be strong in Him so when we step out further from our comfort zone, He will bless us greatly. How can we go outside the box as Paul did? We can pray for a stranger and ask God to keep them strong and able to see His work in their lives. Pick someone you see every day or once a week, pray for them and after a month ask them how they are doing. Tell them you've been praying for them and that God loves them and is with them always. See how that has brightened their life and given them hope.

*Dear Lord, give us the strength and courage to help strangers with prayer and know that you will do the rest to bring them to your flock. Amen*

**ACTION STEP:** Find someone today to pray for; and remember that your prayers move God.

#### **Day 41, Acts 22:22-23:11**

*The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

**Acts 23:11**

How is God calling you to Live Outside the Box? Whatever that call sounds like, it is likely that you will need courage to follow through. I am not talking about courage that we can muster up on our own, because that would never be sufficient to do the Lord's work. It is difficult to fathom the kind of courage Paul displayed when he went on trial before the council. When I participated in Code Blue this past winter, I stepped way out of my comfort zone. I couldn't imagine before my first shift what to expect or how I thought I had the skills for this experience. Only God could have given me the

courage I needed to help a homeless man out of his wet coat and in to a dry one. This passage assures us that we can count on God's courage when we are willing to answer the call to be His witness. Maybe God is calling you to step outside your comfort zone by seeking help for an addiction, participating in a mission trip, joining a growth group, or inviting someone to worship with you so that they, too, can know the Good News. Just as Paul was given help, so will we be helped when we dare to go where God is leading. We can be sure that the Lord is standing near, ready to give us strength, a strength that allows us to speak boldly of and act boldly for Him.

*O Lord, give me the courage to be bold for You. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Reach out as a witness to someone today with an unexpected compliment. Be thankful for the courage you are given to do so.

#### **Day 42, 23:12-22**

*“But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.”*

**Acts 23:16**

When I was younger, I saw a plaque that read, “God couldn't be everywhere, that's why He created moms.” I always felt safe, loved and cared for by my mom and I try to do the same for my children now that I'm a mom. With age comes wisdom though and now I know that there are many people that God brings into our lives for his purposes. Family members, friends and sometimes strangers come in and out of our lives, doing God's work in protecting us, loving us and guiding us. To really open our eyes and see the impact people have had in our lives is to also see the possibilities of how we can make a difference in the lives of others.

One such person in Paul's life was his nephew. Imagine what would have happened if he had not heard of the plot to kill Paul or had not acted upon this knowledge by warning Paul of the plot. Certainly God was working through him as he ran to Paul to tell him the news.

*Heavenly Father, please use me to help someone today – to be your hands and feet in my family and community.*

**ACTION STEP:** Listen for the call of someone in need – it may be a whisper but God will lead you if your eyes are open and your heart is willing.

### Day 43, 23:23-25

Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen..."

**ACT 23: 23**

"I found that the accusation had to do with the questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death..."

**ACTS 23: 29**

Sound familiar? No real charge against Paul that would deserve death? Wait, didn't this happen to our Lord?

Why the large detachment of cavalry and foot soldiers? The threat against Paul's life was very serious; Paul's testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ had certainly enraged the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jewish leaders. We can assume that keeping Paul alive for a proper trial as a Roman citizen would be of the utmost importance; certainly a necessity of the commander who is in charge of keeping the peace. The size of the force commanded to guard this "dangerous" man, who was in a very dangerous position, speaks to the power of the gospel. After all, the beauty and mercy of salvation given to us sounds too good to be true.

As the Holy Spirit guides us to share the gospel to others, we must remember that our protection is so much greater than a detachment of hundreds of soldiers. He has redeemed us from this world; and we are free to walk with Him and enjoy His peace, no matter what injustice or accusation comes our way.

*Heavenly Father, by your great mercy you have made us your children. Protect us as we go forth sharing the power and great love of Your grace. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Pray for the Lord's protection and grace where you feel injustice in your life or another's. Trust in His redemption and love.

### Day 44, 24:1-27

In this section of Acts, we learn of Paul's presence before Felix, the current ruler of the land and chief decision maker for all accused. We see how Paul is persecuted and judged before Felix and how Felix is unwilling to set Paul free even though the charges are unwarranted and untrue. Felix wavers in this decision as time passes and he frequently calls Paul from prison to discuss Christ and his beliefs.

I believe this passage is for Felix and his indecision to accept Christ as his one true God. He procrastinates with Paul's guilt and in doing so tries to control the moment when **he** will choose to follow the Lord.

I reflect on this as I go through my life. How many times do I try to control the situation to my benefit and procrastinate over a decision only to delay the inevitable. Making business decisions is a great example; it is typically easier to not make the decision at all and wait for the outcome. I remember not calling a client when we were in the final hour of a business deal. My excuse was that I didn't want to bother them, but to my surprise, my competitor took the business. The client expressed that they felt my competitor "wanted it more".

Like a guiding hand, God will help you along the path, but choosing to do nothing and waiting for the hand to slap you on the behind will definitely leave a mark...

*Father, thank you for always being there for me in my life: to guide me, instruct me, and encourage me through the power of your Spirit. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** Pray about something that you are “leaving alone”. Ask the Lord to guide you to resolve the issue in his name.

### **Day 45, 25:1-12**

*“No one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!”*

**ACTS 25:11b**

As a new Christian, I not only believed that there was one way to the Father through the Son (Matthew 11:27), but that there was only one way to think and live as a believer and only one way to share the Gospel message.

In Acts 25:1-12, after two years in prison, Paul is once again brought to stand trial before the Roman governor and the Jews who have falsely accused him of a crime. Wanting to please the Jewish leaders, the governor asks Paul if he is willing to go back to Jerusalem to be tried. Paul knows that the Jews intend to kill him, so he declares, “No one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!” And to Caesar he goes.

God uses *who* we are in the circumstances we find ourselves. Paul, uniquely a Jew and a Roman citizen, can demand to be brought before Caesar’s court. He can confidently and boldly declare, “I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews, or against the temple or against Caesar.” Paul knows the law – of the Jews *and* the Romans.

Through the Holy Spirit, God can use each of us, with our unique background and experience (good and bad), to share his message of love and salvation. Don’t wait to be “better qualified.”

*Dear Lord, grant me the courage and confidence to do the work you have for me today.*

**ACTION STEP:** Read and study the Bible – “be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks...the reason for the hope that you have.” 1 Peter 3:15

### **Day 46, 25:13-27**

I have visited a Philadelphia County prison several times this summer. The visits have caused me to think about the men I have met there. Are they all guilty of their crimes? Are they all “bad” people? Were those that place them in prison just? These are all worthy questions. Regardless of how they arrived there, they are there. I can’t help but think of Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Many of these prisoners have to feel that same way. God cannot be in their lives in the midst of a maximum security prison. Yet, every time I have gone there I have seen these people are full of the spirit. They have the fire of Christ burning in them. I can’t blame them for lacking faith in God, except they don’t lack faith. In fact it is the opposite. Do they show their faith because faith is all they have? Or do they have a passionate faith because they don’t have 1000 things to distract them?

Greg Penza preached the story of Jonah at the prison a few weeks ago. Many of the prisoners were familiar with the story - if you turn your back on God and disobey him you'll find yourself in the eye of a storm. But Greg didn't preach that idea. Jonah was not just in a storm. He was in the darkest of places - the belly of a fish, tangled in weeds, in the bottom of the sea, in a storm. Where was God? Right there in that very dark place! God saved Jonah with a fish. He was finally getting Jonah's attention, strengthening his faith, and delivering him to safety.

*Lord God, give me the strength to turn to you in my times of darkness. Give me your wisdom and peace to lean on you as my rock of salvation.*

**ACTION STEP:** Invite God into the areas of your life which chain you from seeking His will for your life.

### **Day 47, 26:1-32**

*Then, Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."*

### **Acts 26:1**

The apostle Paul is in chains...and some seriously hot water. He's spent years traveling, preaching and "opening the eyes" of Jews and Gentiles alike to follow a new risen Messiah. And the Jewish leaders have had quite enough. Enough, they think, to nip this Christianity thing in the bud once and for all by putting Paul to death. So Paul is brought before King Herod Agrippa II, who has authority to do just that. The king makes a show of it, inviting local leaders and officials to witness the proceedings. After hearing numerous accusations Herod turns to Paul with the words above.

Now, Paul does something extraordinary.

He simply tells a story. *His* story. It is, near as I can figure, one of the world's first Christian testimonies. Then, Paul—still in shackles, mind you—looks Herod in the eye and takes it one step further. "I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am..." Wow – Paul goes for the double-dip. He delivers a first-century altar call, suggesting that his accusers *join* him (while in a simultaneous bit of Christian symbolism, invites a king to become a prisoner).

Amazingly, rather than ordering at least a good old-fashioned flogging for Paul's impudence, King Herod renders his decision, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

And, the defense rests...knowing that unflinching faith produces miraculous deliverance through Christ. Case closed.

*Lord Jesus Christ, help me share my story of faith, invite others to your Way and fully rely on you to take care of the rest.*

**ACTION STEP:** Get your story ready. You never know when—or under what circumstances—you'll be invited to "speak for yourself."

## Day 48, 27:1-26

*But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the Pilot and of the owner of the ship.”*

**Acts 27:11**

The ship, under sailing instructions from the centurion, ran into a storm and was wrecked. All aboard gave up hope of being saved. But Paul told them. *“So keep up your courage men, for I have faith in God”.*

**Acts 27:25**

How often in life do we ignore what God wants us to do? We think we know what is best, without God, and often follow the advice of other people. Later, when we run into the “storms of life”, we turn back to God for hope and courage to resolve the problem.

We as Christians like to stay in our comfort zone. But sometimes we need to take a risk for Jesus. Step out into the unknown or unfamiliar. A good way to start is to become more involved at Woodside. It could mean serving as an Elder, Deacon, Praise or Worship leader (reading, praying, singing, playing an instrument) Or teaching Sunday school, leading a growth group. Helping with Habitat, or going on a mission trip. These are all good ways to start.

But what does “Living outside the Box “ for Christ really mean ? That’s when it gets especially uncomfortable for me. Because I think it means to step out into the world of non-believers, and be willing to tell others about Jesus Christ; regardless of the consequences.

*“I love to tell the story ‘twill be my theme in glory To tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.”*

Oh God, give us the courage, like Paul, to not only “talk the talk” but also “walk the walk” for Jesus.  
Amen

**ACTION STEP:** Let’s resist that temptation to always be politically correct, when we have an opportunity to tell others about Jesus.

## Day 49, 27:27-44

*After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged.*

**Acts 27:35-36**

Wow, what a guy Paul was! He had persevered so much, arrests, multiple trials, a storm, and just when you’d think things couldn’t get worse....a shipwreck!

In the midst of the storm, Paul’s faith in God never waned and even with increasing obstacles, he even gave thanks. Then the unthinkable happened. In spite of his steadfast faith, the ship ran aground and began to break into pieces by the pounding surf.

However, an interesting turn of events occurred. Their wreck became their refuge. Today’s reading tells us that it was the planks, those broken pieces of the ship, which enabled many passengers on the ship to reach safety. God had promised Paul that he would come through the storm, and in spite of ever increasing difficulties and seemingly overwhelming odds, he continued to have faith in the Lord’s promise. Paul’s ship may have broken down but his faith never did.

When confronted with life’s challenges, do you follow Paul’s example of having unwavering trust in

the Lord's promises, or does your faith flow in and out like the tide? Have you ever been in a position where your actions of faith could either encourage or discourage others? It is often when the storm is the most severe and people around us see how we react that we can be the most influential.

*Heavenly Father, I pray that I can encourage others as I witness to them how you fulfill your promise to help us through the storms of life.*

**ACTION STEP:** Let others see how God can use what appears to be broken to fulfill his promises.

### **Day 50, 28:1-30**

*For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."*

#### **Acts 28:30-31**

Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Rome. In fact, it had been his plan several times, but each time his plan had changed (Romans 1:13). Ironically now, he comes to Rome not as a visitor, but as a prisoner. I'm sure this would not have been his plan A! Looking back over the events of Paul's life, it is clear that God's hand has been guiding Paul all along: his Roman citizenship which entitled him to appeal to Caesar instead of being released to the Jews, protection from the storm at sea and the viper in the fire, and house arrest in Rome which enabled him to preach "boldly and without hindrance". Paul could not see the path that lay ahead, he only knew that God had given him a desire and a commission to carry His name before the Gentiles and their Kings and he trusted God to work out the details

There have been many times in my life where I could not see "the plan". It is only in looking back that I can see how God was weaving everything together in His wisdom and love. We will not always see how God could possibly use our current circumstances for His glory and our good, but if the desires of our heart are from the Lord, and we put our trust in Him, He can use all circumstances to transform our lives and spread His kingdom. Can we trust Him with the details?

*Lord, help us to trust You with the details of our lives, knowing that You can and will use all things for good. Amen.*

**ACTION STEP:** "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding"  
Proverbs 3:5