

NOIUTLOVER



Acts 1

Have you ever felt bummed out because something didn't end as well as you expected? And then, instead of pressing on to make things better, you held a pity party for yourself? This could have been how the disciples felt as the book of Acts begins – but praise the Lord it wasn't. Jesus' disciples were left waiting for the promised Holy Spirit whom Jesus had spoken about after seeing his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. Instead of doubting and being anxious, the disciples were entirely confident in their mission to 'win the world for Jesus' and "they were in this for good, completely together in prayer..."

With the promise of the Holy Spirit the disciples were assured to be reminded of all that Jesus said, to be lead into all truth, and to hear through Him what the Father was saying. Their faith was great in that they believed what Jesus told them and they lived that faith out. This core group of followers had taken a hard blow. One of their own had outright betrayed Jesus for a small fortune in coins that lead to Jesus' crucifixion. Ultimately, Judas committed suicide upon realizing the extent of what he had done.

Nowadays we would likely send in a group of grief counselors to help such a group deal with the loss, betrayal and shock appropriately. Instead, Peter stood and spoke the plain truth of the situation. Peter didn't dwell on the tragedy, analyze why Judas did what he did, or urge the group to take some time off to deal with their grief. Peter initiated the next course of action, that is, the next step necessary in fulfilling their mission and mandate; he got the ball rolling in filling the hole that was left in Judas' absence. Simply put, they needed to find someone to take his position. Peter understood that, although Judas was a traitor, he had previously worked in an assigned place of ministry and they could not be entirely effective without replacing him.

When we look at the way in which Judas was replaced we may be somewhat perplexed. The disciples narrowed the choice down to two people and then drew straws to determine who would fill the position of ministry. If we knew that our church leaders today were making decisions by drawing straws we would likely question their logic and maybe even doubt their sanity! The practice of 'casting lots' was a long standing method of hearing from the Lord and a place in which chance was not in control. The disciples prayed in faith for God to "show (us) which of these two you have chosen." Their faith in God's methods was revolutionary because they trusted His hand in something that, when logic is applied, seems ridiculous.

What can we learn from this revolutionary group of disciples who began the early church? I would suggest two points.

Firstly, we must continually look forward and avoid dwelling on the past. It's great and healthy to be inspired by successes and victories of the past but dwelling on the set-backs, disappointments and failures we've seen really drags us down. Paul (a true revolutionary) wrote in Philippians 3 that although he wasn't perfect he was "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead" (v. 13) and goes on further to say that "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things." (v.15) It is God's desire that we press on in the difficult situations. We need to have His perspective on what is happening in the Kingdom and see what we must do in order to bring His work to completion.

Secondly, we need a revolutionary faith to believe that God will guide and direct as He sees fit. The responsibility is on us to learn to hear Him and his directives clearly. Peter and the other disciples believed with great faith that God's hand was truly in the 'casting of lots.' This method was their way of submitting the decision at hand to the ascended Lord. We, too, can experience God's plans in fullness when we submit all things to Him, having extraordinary faith to believe that He wants to speak to us in our

MMCCXX

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The idea is for you to go where there needs to be an expression of Jesus. Take some friends. A couple of you get part-time jobs. You all pour 60+ hours/week into the Salvation War. How? Make friends. Start cells. That's it. It is bi-vocational (you get a job to pay for your living). It is cell-based (the whole expression of the Body is in cells).

The End?

revoDevos are crafted by students and staff of The War College, The Salvation Army (info@thewarcollege.com).

REVOLUTION

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decision-making. James 1:5 reminds us: "if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

Q: Is there anything in your past that is holding you back from living out God's calling for you in fullness? Pray Psalm 139:23-24 and see what the Lord reveals to you. Be prepared to listen and submit to what He reveals.

Do you have faith enough to believe that God will speak to you when you ask him for guidance in making decisions? Pray for wisdom and believe what He reveals to you – it will revolutionize your life.

The War College

For more revolutionary aids, check out armybarmy.com (including the blog, eStore, demo of the week, etc.) and thewarcollege.com.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

The War College is an incarnational training school in Canada's poorest postal code aimed at training this generation's warriors to win the world for Jesus. Oozing Primitive Salvationism (which is chari-flavoured, mission-focused heroism) this project attracted scores of applicants from several countries. Most of you couldn't hack it. But maybe you're the exception. If so, you can apply at [thewarcollege.com](mailto:info@thewarcollege.com) (info@thewarcollege.com).

Acts 2

The key verse of Acts 2 is verse 1, ". . . they were all with one accord in one place . . ." The people of the first church were different. They each had different gifts, they looked different, some even spoke different languages, but they were all gathered together and held the same focus. They were all meditating on and serving God. They weren't worried what others were doing or thinking of them. They weren't thinking primarily of their families, or what was for dinner or even what to wear the next day – imagine that! They each had their minds and hearts set on God in worship. And look what happened! They were all baptized with the Holy Spirit so that God would be glorified for all to see.

Unity isn't about uniformity - everybody coming together and being the same. Unity is about a bunch of different people coming together and being able to work together for one purpose. God made each one of us differently. He has chosen each one of us for a specific purpose. In the body of Christ all parts are needed to accomplish the job successfully.

Verses 42-47 state that the people of the church were always together. This is what the revolutionary church should look like. The church body should be our main focus – it should be our lives! God created us for community and in that we should be together always fellowshiping, edifying each other and, especially, working together for the salvation of others. God will bless us, even in our vast differences. Think of how much you are already blessed with the time you spend with the church body. Wouldn't there be even more blessings and more miracles the more time you spend together and learn how to work together for His glory and honor?

Q: How much time do you spend with those in your church family? Are you getting to know everybody in your church or do you stick to the same group of people every Sunday? What are you doing to edify the church body in which you are partners with?

As Christians we should be celebrating our differences and working hard together to save others!

Sounds Of The Revolution



SOUNDS OF THE REVOLUTION: Worship with the west coast retro-prophets, led by Joshua Ivany, Danielle Strickland, and Mark Hood. Buy this stuff at armybarny.com.

REVOLUTION

Acts 3

I live in the downtown Eastside of Vancouver, the poorest postal code in North America. In my neighbourhood I have learned not to carry change. Nearly every block I walk I am asked for change. I've recently thought up a smart reply: "Do you just want me for my money?" Panhandling, in my neighbourhood, is laced with objectification. Not only are those who might have change looked at as coin dispensers, but solicitors are objectified as coin slots. For those caught in the game, money is quickly exchanged so that nobody has to be bothered. This, of course, can involve charity; but what sort of charity are we talking about? It might look like a nice gesture to hand out a quarter to one of my neighbours but I have learned that this change is, in the majority of cases, spent on a toke of dope.

Today I read Acts 3 and went for a run. I ran into a couple of people who asked me for change. It's funny because I wear spandex - obviously without pockets. Another thing I usually do when people ask me for change is ask, "What for?" Today Ricardo wouldn't say and the other man just continued on in the pursuit. I invited them both over for dinner, hoping to meet their need rather than feed into the 'money will solve my problems' game that goes on around here. That is what Peter and John do in this passage of Acts (and then some!). Rather than satisfy a beggar with the most obvious need, they looked deeper - they saw the man and his deepest need. Peter didn't have change, although I don't think he was wearing spandex. He didn't invite the beggar for supper either. He saw a greater need. And Peter knew that God's power was enough to meet that need and make the beggar whole. There is a saying that goes, "The good is the enemy of the best." Blessedly, Peter and John knew better than to give a good hand shake, say, "God bless you" or find some way to get the guy change or a bite to eat.

Keith Green has a song about this, "Asleep in the Light:"

'cause he brings people to you door
And you turn them away
As you smile and say
God bless you, be at peace
And all heaven just weeps
'cause Jesus came to you door
You've left him out on the streets
Open up open up
And give yourself away
You see the need, you hear the cries
So how can you delay

Giving the best means I have to get out of my comfort zone. Sometimes this means I'll have to do some extra work. I might have to strike up a conversation with someone who just wants something from me. It might start with taking a walk where I might encounter someone who begs for change. But, given the opportunity and the faith to put a situation in God's hands, I might see something revolutionary. Somebody's life could be revolutionized because I look beyond immediate need and see a void where God can heal, provide or save.

The best is accompanied by great faith. It takes faith to know God can give more than we can. Faith desires greater things; greater things for your life, your school, your family. This is where revolutions begins - waiting on God and having faith for the best.

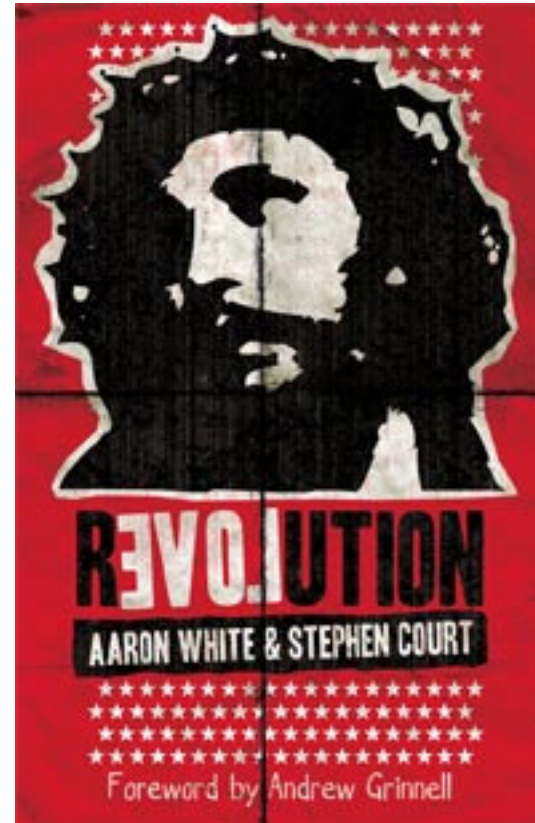
Q: Where can you position yourself to have an opportunity to see the best for others?

What keeps you from going out of your comfort zone? What keeps you from applying God's power to situations in faith?

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REVOLUTIONARY RESOURCES

revoDevos are part of the Revolutionary Package that includes:



REVOLUTION by Aaron White and Stephen Court- challenging you to join the revolution to win the world for Jesus. Buy at armybarmy.com.

Acts 4

We live in a time of tolerance where we are pressured to keep our opinions, beliefs, and convictions quiet if they are likely to offend others. But when have you ever heard of revolutionary occurrences in a place of silence and muted proclamations? No where! The truth is, things happen when passionate and Spirit filled people go against the grain and do and say what they know is right.

Peter and John were arrested for healing in Jesus' name and letting Jesus speak truth through them. You must remember that they were in Jerusalem and the very people who put Jesus on the cross were just a "stone's throw" away. I'm pretty sure that being arrested or persecuted were the last things on their mind and maybe they were thinking more along the lines of being put on the cross themselves. They saw first hand Jesus conquering death (Hallelujah!) but, still, think of what might've crossed their minds: "If I start talking about Jesus out loud and in public, I'm probably going to be put on a cross!" The opposite was true! They didn't shrink back from even the possibility of death. They followed their convictions, no matter what the cost. We, too, know about Jesus and if we *don't* start talking about truth, eternal life, and his omnipotent power we *will* die, and live in self destruction – for eternity.

Verse 8 says Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and he let it all out and with boldness. He didn't plan it all out and worry about saying the right thing in a smart or catchy way, nor did he worry about how offended anyone would be. The jury that these men stood before couldn't speak against the Holy Spirit! The same goes for us. We don't need to defend ourselves because God is our defender. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and let Him speak through you and for you.

Finally, Peter and John told all their buddies about the victory and they all praised the Lord for it. I suggest if we want to stay on God's good side and want him to use us in powerful ways we should give a good amount of time praising Him for the victories in our life. We also need to trust in the Lord to provide the victory – in his way and timing. Pray for eyes to see and ears to hear what the Spirit is saying so that you can experience and comprehend the Lord's sovereignty in all situations.

Q: Do you follow your convictions or try to sweep them aside? Have you ever asked God to fill you with the Holy Spirit? Trust Him today to bless and honor you when you step out in faith for him.

Acts 28

"I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could tell you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel-- the Messiah-- has already come.' They replied, 'We have heard nothing against you. We have had no letters from Judea or reports from anyone who has arrived here. But we want to hear what you believe, for the only thing we know about these Christians is that they are denounced everywhere.' " (v.20-22)

This year in the War College, I am blessed to have a course called "Extreme Evangelism." In this course, we are taught how to evangelize and that love is our greatest weapon because it never fails. We are also taught what evangelism inevitably leads to, that is, persecution, suffering, and martyrdom. Many people consider this teaching to be very extreme. Most "normal" Christians would say that being tortured for Christ's sake is only something which is set apart for "extreme Christians." Perhaps this teaching is not extreme but, rather, normal. Perhaps this suffering should not surprise us as Christians, and that those who claim to love Christ but sit in their pews and never get persecuted for what they believe are actually the abnormal ones.

Two definitions of the word "extreme" suggest "Most remote in any direction; outermost or farthest" and "Extending far beyond the norm." So, in order to understand the meaning of extreme, we need to discern what the norm is. The apostles, whose lives and ministries are recorded in Acts, were some of the very first Christians. The book of Acts is a history of the grass roots of Christianity. Here, we can learn the basics and the standard.

This was the early church's experience - people being healed, the dead being raised, people having demons kicked out of them, persecution, martyrdom, and people getting saved every day. This is generally not my experience, and likely not yours. To me, it all sounds very extreme.

In the verses that I highlighted Paul meets some guys who have heard of Christians. Their reputations were extreme and they were denounced everywhere and were bound in chains because of their beliefs. I am suggesting that this is normal. Being tied up in chains for Christianity is normal. Being persecuted and kicked out of a town for your faith in Jesus is normal. Hundreds of people getting saved every day is normal. The dead being raised is normal.

All that we see as normal may be far, far away from normality. All that we see as extreme may be more normal than anything that we know or imagine. We need a revolutionary shift in our way of thinking.

Q: What is your experience? What do you consider to be normal? What do you consider to be extreme? What is something that goes back to "normal" Christianity that you find very different from your own experience?

REVOLUTION

Acts 5

We could really revolutionize the church if we all brought forth our full offering to the Lord and uncovered the hidden darkness within us. You likely haven't heard of anyone or experienced for yourself being struck dead for withholding things from God – or even outright lying against him. That is not to say that there are no repercussions to this kind of behavior, however. God is just and can not act in opposition to his nature. There are always consequences when we aren't co-operating with God.

Chapter five in Acts starts with the fateful story of Ananias and Sapphira. This greedy couple had a chance to bring their full offering to the Lord, yet lied to Him instead - as if He wouldn't know that they were lying. God struck Ananias dead for lying to the Holy Spirit. Sapphira, his wife, was asked to come in afterwards and lied in the same way. She was struck dead too. Imagine how God could have used them if they had given themselves and their full offering to the Lord. When their secret darkness came to light it was exposed for what it was and God had to deal with it justly.

We can learn from people like Ananias and Sapphira. We can learn from similar situations that we see in our community today. Perhaps you know someone who has suffered greatly as a consequence of personal sin. Or maybe you know someone who has caused great pain in the lives of family members because of the darkness and secrecy in their own life. It is our opportunity to learn from these stories so that we can be aware and on guard against the schemes of the enemy who wants to steal from, kill and destroy us and the wonder-working power of God in us. Verse 11 in this chapter says that "This incident struck terror into the whole Church, and into the hearts of all who heard of it." We too should have a reverent fear for Lord and his power. His power is revolutionary and turns things upside down.

The apostles continued on after this incident by spreading the Word of the Lord, healing people and casting out demons. The Pharisees didn't like this at all. The apostles represented Jesus. Jesus was that dude that they killed but somehow seemed to come back to life. The Pharisees had the apostles thrown into jail.

After God rescued the apostles from jail the Pharisees wanted to kill them. A Pharisee of knowledge and power, Theudas, stood up and declared: "Do not kill them - if they are not from God they will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God." These words were divinely spoken and saved the apostles lives.

Instead of killing the apostles, the Pharisees beat them severely and warned them NEVER to preach the Good News of Christ again. Do you think that stopped the apostles? Not at all! They left praising the Lord for being flogged. They left and went straight to the markets screaming: "JESUS IS THE MESSIAH!" These apostles were different than Ananias and Sapphira because they brought themselves fully to God, even amidst persecution. Their actions weren't selfish or aimed at self-glorification and the results of their obedience were life, not death. Glory was given to God instead of the enemy.

Q: Are you holding back from bringing something to the Lord?

Is there secret, hidden darkness in your life that needs to be exposed by the light?

Have you ever been in a situation where someone's words were revolutionary?

Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? Have you made yourself open to this possibility?

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Acts 27

If you're like me, the word 'hero' conjures up a mental picture for you of someone who is strong and courageous, intelligent and persuasive and who beats the odds. The truth is, heroes often come from the most unlikely circumstances. Think of Jesus, savior of the world. He came from the most weak and humble of beginnings yet conquered sin and hell and did so through a life of servant hood. Think of your favorite superhero. He/she likely came from humble beginnings too or appears with the natural eye to be feeble and unlikely to accomplish much.

In this chapter of Acts we see some of the heroic nature in Paul. Paul was a man who had been entirely humbled by the Lord. His conversion was a dramatic one that caused him to change the entire course of his life. All that he knew and pursued was wrong and he died to himself in order to live a servant life for Christ. He endured suffering and imprisonment at the hands of his enemies for the sake of the gospel. That doesn't sound much like a typical hero to me.

Paul's encounter with Jesus was revolutionary. From that time on, no matter the circumstance, God's power was displayed and used for Christ's glory. This truth is evident as we read about his experience on a boat during a disastrous storm, in the middle of nowhere. He was a prisoner and had no rights; the authorities cared far more about themselves than him, a filthy, no-good lawbreaker. Waves and winds were strong and hope was small. Paul knew lives may be lost. He warned the ship's crew of the impending disaster – shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries and loss of life – but they cared little about what he said.

In this situation I would feel panicked and angry that no one listened to me. Paul encountered an angel who assured him that they would be safe and eventually arrive at their destination. In typical Paul fashion, he took the risk to speak up again to the ship's crew and assured them that they would survive. He gained their confidence and was then able to give them further instruction on how to survive the storm (v. 31-38). His help and wisdom also gained him favor as the commander of the ship spared him from death by the soldiers.

Paul didn't panic; he knew God had everything in his hands and nothing Paul could do could save them. God was faithful and spared their lives and only the ship was destroyed. Would you, a prisoner, be so sure of God's faithfulness and tell your captors that God would save you? Or would you do all you could in your own strength to escape or to save just yourself? The only reason that Paul was a hero is because he allowed Jesus to revolutionize his life. Paul held fast to the promises of God and pressed in to them even when times were tough. Paul gained safety and protection and favor with man because of his faithfulness to the Lord. The hero in Paul was Jesus. This means, for us, being a hero is inevitable... we just need to live as servants who aim to please our master.

Q: Have you been in a situation where you tried to do everything yourself?
When faced with trials, do you rely on God or on your own strength?
How does Jesus want you to be a hero?

Acts 6

With church growth come growing pains. You're probably too young to remember the TV show "Growing Pains." It was one of those family sitcoms that involved some conflict with the kids, and Dad (a clinical psychologist) would step in and solve the problem. It was all a part of the children's way of growing up and learning fairness and consequences for their actions. As we see in this chapter of Acts, the early church was going through similar growing pains. This time the dispute was based on some racial tension. Such a situation could have led to a church split, fragmenting not only people and their relationships but the message of Christ into sects and races.

In its infancy, the church would have suffered if this situation was permitted to grow into a larger problem. The apostles, fortunately, did not turn a blind eye to the problem nor did they decide to come down with the gauntlet of authority. They had their priorities straight as expressed when they said: "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to serve food." They were also aware that mercy ministries such as giving out food to widows were necessary acts of faith. So, the program of feeding the needy wasn't scrapped. Here's what the apostles did: they picked seven men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to manage this ministry. Strange qualifications for being given the job of administering food, you think? Not really. This kind of task isn't a light responsibility and later in the chapter we see that Stephen's wisdom gets him in some serious trouble.

Handing out food is more than a handshake and a smile; it is a ministry, as are all mercy ministries like shelters, thrift stores, vouchers, drop-ins, job hunting clubs and ESL classes. However, we often think that any old sap can or will do the job of handing out food. Those who are interacting on the front lines of a ministry must be Spirit-filled so that we are actually ministering in Jesus' name. Now I'm not saying that baby Christians cannot be brought along with someone who is discipling them in a ministry but I am saying that it's a dangerous thing to give someone responsibility over tasks if they are not full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom.

While Jesus was on earth, he was a revolutionary. He turned things upside down and inside out. We might expect that he would have done so through his great powers and wisdom, however, the most revolutionary things he did came out of his servant attitude. Jesus ministered in power as he humbled himself to the position of a servant. He went as far as to suffer on the cross for our sake. Perhaps we can learn a few lessons from him. Striving for the prominent or cool positions in the church may get us a great line on our resume, but won't necessarily get us a right standing in the Kingdom of God.

Q: Search your heart today. Is there any offensive way in you, even in your ministry?
Have you been 'working' or 'serving' for the wrong reasons?
Ask the Lord to revolutionize your will and heart so that you can minister in power as Stephen and Jesus did – as humble servants.

Acts 26

Paul asks us, "Why does it seem so incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?" Good question. Unfortunately, it's true for the majority of believers today. We are often caught remarking either mentally or aloud as Festus did, "Too much study has made you crazy!" (v.24) But things SHOULD be on the flip side. As Paul asserted, so should we: "I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. I am speaking the sober truth." (v.25) "No problem-I'm bold enough" you say? I believe it. Amen.

BUT...First we need to sort out our identity crisis. Are we truly firm believers with Paul, or are we on the fringes of legalistic religion with Festus and Agrippa? Too often, we've allowed Satan to feed us thoughts and we receive them without even thinking. Too much of this has led us to a place where we are shocked when God raises someone from the dead or answers our prayers in abundance. Now, I don't mean to say that God is not incredible. He most certainly is. Yahweh is MOST HIGH (Ps. 7:17) and there is no one like Him (Ex. 8:10). Indeed, our awe and wonder should provoke us to praise, but not to be surprised.

Scripture tells us that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). The question is, then, why don't we ask? Back to this brainwashing idea - it's exactly what has happened to us. Too much study without the practical. Satan takes the truths we're taught in Bible Study, at camp, in church...and twists them around until all we're left with is confusion and complacency. Friends, this should not be. It should NOT be surprising to any of us that God can raise someone from the dead. It's in His character! Check out Ezekiel 37 where it tells of how he raised a whole army! Just because it doesn't happen frequently doesn't mean God can't do it. Usually, we don't ask and that's because we're not expecting, watching, or waiting for the Lord. How do we fix this? We need Jesus. We need God to reveal more of Him to us so we can know Him and expect Him to show up. Let's face it, if Jesus isn't with us, what's the point?

Get to know the Lord. Ask Him to tell you about Himself and show you some of His characteristics. If I go to the store and buy chocolate milk, my roommate is not surprised because she knows I love it. Someone who doesn't know me might be surprised. Let's partner with God to minimize the shock factor and heighten the expectancy. As He reveals Himself, praise Him for His awesomeness!

"Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favour from the LORD." (Proverbs 8:33-35) Expect the Lord to show up in your life. Train your heart and mind to ask Him as often as you can remember, "Show me your glory." Expect that He's with you always and live like you believe it.

Q: Do you have faith to believe in the miraculous? Do you truly know the character of God? Study him!
You won't be surprised, then, when he does the incredible and shows his revolutionary power.

Today we see things that we don't like about the church. We see hypocrisy, dead religion, a lack of love, apathy about things God really cares about, and the list goes on. What do we do about these things? Some people keep quiet, some people speak privately about them and some people speak publicly about them. While Jesus was on the earth he said that the way to know if we love God is to watch for obedience to his commands. We are to speak when God wants us to speak and we are to speak what God wants us to speak. Are we always obedient to when and what the Lord is prompting us to say?

Stephen, in Acts, was a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit and he had a holy discontent for the way things were. Stephen spent his time administering the food distribution in the church, doing signs and wonders, and speaking with those in the synagogues. He spoke of things that the people didn't like or agree with. Stephen continued on despite opposition because he knew he was speaking God's words. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit; the words that came out of his mouth were from God. We, too, need the Holy Spirit's help and counsel in order to speak in a revolutionary way.

Stephen also knew what he was talking about; he knew history. He was informed. He knew that the times he lived in were a direct fulfillment of prophecy. Are we the same? Do we make educated statements or are we sometimes clumsy with what we say? Words have power. We need to make sure we only speak words that are from God. And when you do speak words from the Lord, don't be surprised if you get opposition.

In this chapter Stephen primarily was pointing out the sins and blindness of those in opposition to his message with the backing of God's word. They had rejected Christ and his message. They had their Messiah killed! Stephen reminded them of what the prophets said so long ago and how their own actions fulfilled these prophecies. They were infuriated by what he said and couldn't believe he had the guts to say it! God speaks to people's hearts to convict them, and people don't like to be made aware of their sin. Sometimes he chooses to use other people to reveal sin and to bring conviction to our hearts. Our reaction to what we hear is what will be revolutionary or not. We have a choice to let conviction revolutionize our life or cause us to go deeper into disobedience and hard-heartedness.

When you speak on behalf of the Lord you will get persecuted for speaking truth – whether it is for the purpose of bringing conviction or not. Make sure it is God's words you are getting persecuted for; that it's God's voice you are following. Test it with the scriptures. Would you really gain anything if you were persecuted for the words of your own mouth and not the words of the Living God?

Q: If God were to speak a revolutionary message to you for the church, are you prepared to give it? Do you guard the words that come out of your mouth? Do you test them with the scriptures? Do you rely on God's understanding instead of your own? How about personally? Do you receive what God says to you through others or do you reject words that convict and make you feel uncomfortable?

The religious leaders hated Paul. They made up stuff about him and planned to ambush and kill him. It wasn't him that they hated exactly, it was his message and that he was so darn successful at preaching it! Little did they know that the 'damage' was already done. Paul, more than any other person, was responsible for the spread of Christianity.

I would not like to be in Paul's shoes. He was locked up by the cops, stuck in prison for two years and still hadn't had any real charges brought against him! That stinks. I don't know about you but I think I would be wearing a decent frown. In chapter 25 of Acts we find Paul still in limbo, seeming to go nowhere because of the situation caused by the authorities. And why? Simply because they weren't sure what to do with him as we read Festus's remarks (recorded in verse 27): "For it doesn't seem reasonable to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!" Festus has no idea what charges to press and so Paul continues to sit in prison day after day.

Praise the Lord because Paul had a really good outlook on life - after Jesus revolutionized him, that is. But I still think he likely struggled some days to trust in the 'big picture' plan that Jesus had for him. Sitting in a prison cell, day after day, not knowing what tomorrow would bring and also feeling like so much time was being wasted could have really got to him! Not enough to immobilize or deter him! He was still fighting and writing and praying and reaching others just like always. He didn't lose heart and he didn't give up. His passion and zeal weren't dampened in the least.

Sometimes we do have a perspective of life that is tinged with negativity. We may not find ourselves in a prison cell for two years but nevertheless are dissatisfied with life for several reasons. We might feel like the place we find ourselves at the moment is not where we should be. We might feel like we're imprisoned by the impositions of others on us. We might feel like the future is friendlier and more fulfilling than today. We might feel like the grass is greener on the other side.

No matter what the case, we can learn from and follow Paul's example and live life day by day. When we have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Lord is doing *today*, in our present circumstance, revolution enters the picture. There is so much potential to miss out on what God is doing and teaching when our focus is on tomorrow. God does reveal future plans to us in his time but that should not be all we strive after. Keeping in step with the Holy Spirit each day is when God's power will be seen and be made evident to others. Not only will our attitudes and outlook on life be revolutionized but so will the perspective of others when they see our example.

Q: Is there something about 'today' that makes you dissatisfied with your life? Ask Jesus to reveal how today fits into the big picture and let his revelation revolutionize your attitude!

Acts 8

At times I've fallen into the trap of assuming that certain people don't want to hear truth/the good news. And because of that failure of mine, perhaps someone has missed out on a life changing event. Sometimes we make judgments about people based on how they dress, where they're from, or their reputation. It's an easy trap to fall into. You might assume that the girl who sits next to you in class who dresses 'Goth' wants nothing to do with what you have to share. Or, that your Muslim neighbour wouldn't want to listen to God's truth about Jesus. How about the marijuana smoking 'hippie' who talks about peace and harmony? Does he have the whole truth in his life? We never know who is ready to hear truth in fullness (the gospel) unless we ask and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us as Philip did.

Truth is revolutionary. As humans we have an innate desire to search for, know and experience truth. Sometimes we're fooled into believing that we have truth yet we still have a sense of being incomplete. In this chapter of Acts we read about three people from very different circumstances, yet each of them desired truth. First, we read about Philip who was preaching in Samaria. Next we're introduced to Simon who lived in Samaria and was a successful and famous sorcerer. Finally, we read of the Ethiopian man who was returning home after making a trip to Jerusalem. In all three cases, truth revolutionized their lives.

We know from the scriptures that Philip was a man of faith. He was a disciple of Jesus and became an apostle, sent out to spread the news of Christ to the ends of the earth. Philip experienced a life change through his relationship with Christ and allowed God to work through him as a revolutionary. Philip believed so strongly in the truth he knew that even amidst persecution (v.1-3) he continued to preach the Good News of Jesus. He went to Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. Many believed the truth and there was much joy there because of the signs and wonders that happened. Simon recognized that the power of God seen through Philip was stronger than the magic he performed. He, too, believed the gospel, was baptized and followed Philip and the truth he spoke. He even went as far as to offer money in order to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. I guess he still had some more to learn about truth; God's power can not be bought or achieved.

Finally, Philip was directed by an angel of the Lord to travel south. On a road he was led by the Holy Spirit to walk alongside the chariot of an Ethiopian man whom he overheard reading the scriptures. This man was actually reading God's word but didn't understand what he was reading. He was definitely searching for truth but didn't have the eyes to see or hear what God was saying to him through it. Praise the Lord for Philip and his ability to hear the Lord; the Ethiopian man was led into truth that revolutionized his life! The Ethiopian believed and was saved. Hallelujah.

God wants to use us in the same way that he used Philip. In Galatians 5:25 Paul reminds us that if we walk with the Spirit, we must also keep in step with the Spirit. I'm suggesting that is what Philip did. He was in tune with what the Holy Spirit was doing and waited for his guidance. The fruit of his conversations and preaching is a testament to the power that was working within him. Philip wasn't an out of the ordinary kind of guy. He was simply chosen and called by Jesus to be his disciple. We, too, are chosen. Jesus desires to use us as agents of truth and fullness.

Q: Have you ever experienced a 'divine encounter'? That is, a time when God connected you with someone who needed to hear truth? Pray for more divine encounters today and ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you and guide you as they occur. Can you identify with lost and searching people such as Simon? Pray that the Lord would give you a passion for souls and a love for the lost and let him take over as you spread the truth of the good news!

Acts 24

We've all been in trouble at some point or another. Usually we're in trouble because we really have done something wrong. It's not very often that we find ourselves in trouble for doing good. In school the class troublemaker is widely known for disobeying the teacher, bothering and interfering with classmates and breaking well known school rules. It turns out, too, that the troublemaker is the person who gets blamed whenever trouble arises, even when they weren't involved! Causing trouble doesn't start a revolution (when the outcome is negative) but being a troublemaker for the Lord is indeed infectious and revolutionary!

Paul was a troublemaker. At least that's what Tertullus the lawyer claimed in verse 5. The officials hated him and the Jews had it in for him. He got under their skin. They said he was a ringleader and a crowd stirrer - sounds like a pretty awesome guy to me. I want to be a troublemaker who stirs people to action for the Lord! Paul admitted to his accusers his belief of the scriptures and prophets and his hope that God would raise "both the righteous and the ungodly." Paul believed that his actions in this life had an impact on the life to come and so he "always (tried) to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else" (v.16). Paul had a clear conscience about what he did because he knew the kind of 'trouble' he stirred wherever he went was Godly and Spirit-led.

When Paul made his defense he didn't sound like a rioter and he didn't sound like the kind of guy who would be hated all over the world. Why was Paul's life so offensive? Because he did everything in the name of Jesus, that's why. He believed in radical Christianity, Christianity 24-7, everywhere and in every way. His message was love and he lived that message until it hurt. Paul stirred up trouble by preaching truth, teaching people to love God and man, worshipping wholeheartedly, hoping in God and giving to the poor! He had good news and he was going to share it no matter who it offended. His convictions were strong and he didn't back down.

We must take one more lesson from Paul before we go out being troublemakers for the Lord. We must have our defenses in order. Paul was ready to face his accusers with the truth; no lies and no excuses. He told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth – and we know he did because his whole life was a testament to it. Paul always stood up for truth and good and got in trouble because of it.

Today there is great potential for getting in trouble for doing good and staying on the side of truth. Being a voice and standing up for the rights of the poor, the aborted, the hungry, the abused and the prostituted can very well get us into trouble in society today. This is the kind of trouble we need to see more of. We need more trouble that aims to revolutionize situations and lives for the better.

Jesus tells us to put him first and spread the gospel. Let's do it! There are more ways than one to spread the gospel. Spread the gospel of love, peace, justice, mercy, hope, and righteousness. And the next time you get in trouble, make sure it's for a good cause.

Q: Recipe for becoming a revolutionary troublemaker:: love like crazy, live, give, preach, teach, worship, believe, be bold, be good, have faith and walk the talk. Live like Jesus, for Jesus. You can do it! How can radical love make you a troublemaker today?

REVOLUTION

Acts 9

WHAT IS REVOLUTION?

My dictionary tells me that *revolution* means "an assertedly momentous change in any situation." In this Jesus revolution we want to see a momentous change in the world around us - people living their lives in fullness for Jesus! But the change we want to see in our world first has to happen within ourselves. We can't preach an empty gospel; that is, one that hasn't first changed us.

Saul/Paul was bad news for the 'followers of the way' (early Christians). He was there when the first Christian, Stephen, was killed for his faith in Jesus. He had risen to become one of the most senior and ruthless persecutors of Christians that there was. You can see in verse 1 that he was 'breathing out murderous threats' against them and trying to lock them up or kill them (verse 2).

Then Saul of Tarsus encountered Jesus Christ. Revolution. There was an 'assertedly momentous change' in his life. In less than a week Saul went from zealously persecuting Jesus to zealously preaching in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. Now THAT is revolution! Come on! His life was turned upside down; his mission and purpose for living had completely reversed!

You know what? Jesus wants us to *really* encounter Him so that He can do this revolution in us. He wants us to experience Him in such a way so that we turn 180 degrees from our sin. He wants us to literally 'go and sin no more.' You may not be the worst of all sinners but there are likely places in you that need to be revolutionized. And think of the hardest, meanest, darkest person you know. God wants to do the same work in him/her as he did in Saul! That is good news if I've ever heard any.

We know what happened to Saul after he allowed God to do this work in him? He lead a hard life, facing persecution, death threats, any amount of hardship, imprisonment and, eventually, execution. But he ended up writing most of the New Testament (a source of deep encouragement and truth for us even today) and brought the Truth of Jesus Christ to the furthest reaches of the known world! This guy experienced personal revolution and then took that Jesus revolution to the world!

The key to revolutionary change lies in verse 17 - *he sent me that you may...be filled with the Holy Spirit.* When we allow Holy Spirit to fill us entirely, He changes us. He revolutionizes us!

The song *Send the Fire* by William Booth talks of this experience and describes what happens when God sends the Fire of His Holy Spirit to fill us:

*To burn up every trace of sin,
To bring the light and glory in,
The revolution now begin,
Send the fire!*

Q: Ask Holy Spirit to fill you. Ask Him to remove any part of you that remains without the light of Christ. Ask Him to make a revolution happen in you; for Him to make you holy. Receive it by faith, and then walk it out in your life, in your world and in your relationships with people.

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Acts 23

Paul got arrested, beaten, and even had an attempt on his life. He had to face his accusers and give reason for his words and actions. In this chapter of Acts, Paul's words incited argument between the Sadducees and Pharisees and prompted the Jews to plan an ambush that would take his life. Through it all, the Lord stood near Paul and reminded him to "Take courage." God knew that Paul's troubles would not end there. He told Paul to take courage because his mission wasn't over. God's next mission field for Paul was Rome. Within this story we find Paul slyly escaping an argument and sending his accusers into one. We may find ourselves easily thrust into arguments and fights, but this is not the way of a true revolutionary. Sometimes, we're not sure how arguments begin. Take this story, for example.

A boy once asked, "Dad, how do wars begin?"

"Well, take the First World War," said his father. "That got started when Germany invaded Belgium."

Immediately his wife interrupted him: "Tell the boy the truth. It began because somebody was murdered." The husband drew himself up with an air of superiority and snapped back, "Are you answering the question, or am I." Turning her back upon him in a huff, the wife walked out of the room and slammed the door as hard as she could.

When the dishes stopped rattling in the cupboard, an uneasy silence followed, broken at length by the son when he said, "Daddy, you don't have to tell me any more; I know now."¹

The mother and father in this story ended up turning against each other when the conversation started by a simple question from their son. They lost sight of what the issue really was. In a sense, they got confused.

The Lord has a track record of sending the enemy into confusion and thwarting his plans. The story in 2 Chronicles 20:20-23 illustrates this principle well. King Jehoshaphat led his army into battle with praise and worship of the Lord at the forefront. As they began to honour God in this way, their enemies were confused and began to fight one another! God's people were spared.

Jesus – the greatest example of a revolutionary - never got caught up with people such as the Pharisees and their trap arguments. He was slow to speak and quick to listen to the Holy Spirit who always gave the right response. After talking with Jesus, sometimes his adversaries went away confused and up in arms with each other. God thwarts the plans of the wicked and accomplishes much through the obedience of the righteous.

God provided for and protected Paul. In order to elude the planned ambush God used Paul's nephew (who heard of the plan) to provide a commander of the Roman army to escort him safely there. God may not use the most obvious methods, but He always looks out for us and always puts us where we need to be. God thwarted the enemy in this circumstance so that his will could be furthered through Paul's mission to Rome and the Lord trusted Paul with this work and mission because of his proven faithfulness and obedience.

Q: Do you get caught up in worthless arguments? What can you do to ensure you're only involved in discussions that edify others, bring glory to God and extend the work of his kingdom?

Has God entrusted you with a specific mission? If not, how can you prove your faithfulness and obedience to him today so that he can trust you with a larger task?

¹Green, M. P. (1989). *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching : Over 1500 sermon illustrations arranged by topic and indexed exhaustively* (Revised edition of: The expositor's illustration file.). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Acts 10

The world we live in today is filled with an abundance of ethnic groups and religions, often living in close quarters. Peoples from all over the world can be found in almost every major city. In fact, I'm willing to bet that every day you interact with at least two or three people from a different ethnic background or faith. It's pretty normal behavior when we connect most closely and feel most comfortable around those who are most similar to us. Sometimes we get into a habit, however, of only seeking out relationships with people of our own culture or heritage... or social class or background. Sometimes we fear what is different because it takes more effort to cultivate connections with people who are unlike us.

In Bible times we see an enormous amount of segregation between cultures and ethnic groups. Peter was a Jew and for most of his life didn't associate with Gentiles. So in this chapter of Acts we see that it took Peter a while to realize through his encounter with Cornelius that the Lord actually wanted him to go and meet with a Gentile in his own home. Remember, this was strictly forbidden in Jewish law because Gentiles and their households were unclean!

Peter took a risk and went. When he prayed over Cornelius and his household, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The lives of Cornelius and his family members were revolutionized. Cornelius likely had a significant amount of influence over those in his work, too, as he was the Captain of his regiment. Peter's risk very likely impacted those working under Cornelius too as they would see the power of the gospel and the change the Holy Spirit did in his life. Peter could have started a Jesus revolution in the Italian regiment because he followed the Lord's leading.

Peter and the brethren were amazed at what had happened, and realized that God does not restrict salvation to just one people group. Salvation is for the 'whosoever.' Sometimes our thinking is stuck in a rut. We stay inside the box and question God, as Peter did, when he instructs us to do something out of the ordinary and possibly against what we've always believed.

We must examine our thoughts and actions moment by moment through God's filter. The truth of the gospel is not just for those who we expect will be open to receive it. The truth of the gospel is not just for those who fit into a profile that we have conjured up in our mind. There are people you walk by and maybe even talk to every day who have not yet received salvation. They may even have a different faith. Would you consider telling them about the joy that Jesus Christ brings?

It is God's desire that all would be saved. Let's do our best to fulfill our Lord's desire. Let's cast off spiritual prejudices, proclaiming truth in the name of Jesus by our words, and the way we live, so that the Gentile nations and people of different faiths come to know the one true God and experience him in Jesus.

Q: Do you have any spiritual prejudices? Would you even consider having a meal in the home of a Muslim, or a Buddhist, or a Jehovah's Witness?

Do you know how to witness to people of other faiths? Consider learning about them so that you have a deeper understanding of them and their faith.

Acts 22

You know what's revolutionary? A word of testimony. Paul stood up in front of a mob of people (who, by the way, wanted to stone him) and was completely honest about his life. He shared his past – how he was a devout Jew who studied and practiced the law with zeal. He confessed that he persecuted Christians (enthusiastically), even some to the point of death. Even more than that, he testified about the revolution that Jesus brought to his life. He told the crowd that the Lord himself revealed his will to him and sent him on a mission to preach to not only the Gentiles, but to the entire world. Paul's words and actions were so disturbing to those in Jerusalem that an actual riot had erupted. Paul knew and understood why the Jewish people were so enraged by what he said and did; he used to be one of them! He requested to speak to the crowd and said in verse 1: "listen to me as I offer my defense." Usually a statement of defense is given by a defendant to protect him against a plaintiff's action. Paul would have known very well that the extent of what he was going to testify to would likely give the crowd even more reason to hate him. His testimony would not result in protection and resolution of the mob.

In Revelation 12:11 we read: "They (brothers and sisters in Christ) overcame him (the enemy) by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." We often know and believe that Jesus' blood can overcome anything, but do we remember that second part? The word of our testimony is also powerful and effective in overcoming the enemy. Paul, indeed, lived this out as he fully trusted in the blood of Jesus to work in power in his life. He also didn't cling to his life so much to shut up when a mob was about to kill him for what he said. He believed that what he experienced and lived must be shared and spread to anyone who would listen. He seized this opportunity to do just that.

Who has the opportunity to stand up in front of a mob every day? Not many people in the western world. We do have opportunities in our everyday lives to let the power of Jesus' blood and the word of our testimony to revolutionize the lives of those around us. When we're in our classrooms, at work, playing soccer, out shopping, going to the movies or walking through our neighbourhood we can speak up and tell people what Jesus has been doing in our lives. We won't always get a warm reception from our listeners. We may even be ridiculed. Sometimes we'll discover that a timely testimony will be just what our friend or neighbour needed to hear; it could revolutionize their moment, day, or life! But, will we do it? Will we give up our self-images and reputations to spread the word of God? It's a challenge, no doubt, but it's what we're called to do. We're called to do something radical, against what the world says to do. Jesus tells us to put him first and spread the gospel. Let's do it. Act as the fist of God and give the enemy a good jab with the word of your testimony today! The blood of the Lamb can do the rest of the work.

Q: How can you allow the blood of the Lamb to overcome the enemy in your life? Ask the Lord what you can overcome today with his help. Have you ever felt like your testimony has little power? Ask the Lord to show you what you can share with others that will impact them for him.

REVOLUTION

Acts 11

Have you ever been put in charge of a "situation?" That is, something that has started up and needs someone with some degree of authority to deal with it? If you have, did you look at the task at hand and feel full of joy? If you didn't, think about what you can learn from the revolutionary leadership of Barnabas - the "Son of Encouragement."

Now the believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) couldn't be quiet about the good news of Jesus Christ. They couldn't help but preach the word of God wherever they went. They went about telling their fellow Jews about the fulfillment of the Messianic promise. There were some revolutionaries amongst the group that went to Antioch. They believed the truth that the good news of Jesus was for everyone, not just the Jews (v21-22). A large number of Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord because of their revolutionary work.

What was the result of these revolutionaries and the way they followed unpopular beliefs? The church that started at Antioch was a mixed church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles. No longer were Christ's followers thought of as just a sect of Jews; they were emerging as something quite different and they started to be called something other than Jewish (v26). When the church at Jerusalem heard of this they were quick to send a leader out to see just what was going on. Change was happening and they were unsure it was a good thing.

When Barnabas, a Levite (4:36), arrived on the scene at Antioch, he was quick to see the work of the Spirit and began to encourage those around him to stay close to the Lord (v23). Barnabas was on the cutting edge of ministry. No other church that had formed was so distinctive from Judaism. Thousands of years of tradition and customs were being challenged. What did Barnabas do when confronted with this situation? Try to enforce that people must conform in order to control the situation? No! He looked to see what God was doing, and partnered with God in that work.

Sometimes we're faced with people whose attitude is that of those at the church in Jerusalem. When new and different things are happening they question, maybe criticize and hamper what is happening. Sometimes they are working against the Lord by trying to dampen the work of revolution. We need to have the same attitude of Barnabas. Instead of being discouraged and allowing our efforts to be diminished, we need to press on and follow God and his lead and encouragement.

Q: What new things do you see God doing in your area? How do you see His Spirit at work? How can you partner with God to see Him glorified and His kingdom come? Do you generally embrace change or try to diminish it?

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Acts 21

Fortune tellers are intriguing, at least at first glance. If Tarot cards really can predict your future, wouldn't you want to know what they had in store for you? A desire to know the future has always gripped our human minds. Generally, we are intrigued by the unknown and unseen mysteries of this world. Although interesting and widely used, we must be aware of the enemy's schemes in these activities! The enemy likes to imitate all that is good and tries to pass it off as harmless and beneficial. A word about the future is not in itself evil; it is the source that we should be aware of.

In scripture we see the words 'prophet' and 'prophecy' frequently. So what exactly is a prophetic word? To prophesy is to foretell future events pertaining especially to the kingdom of God or to utter forth, declare, a thing which can only be known by divine revelation (source: Strong's concordance). In this chapter of Acts we see how God gave a prophetic word to several people about Paul's future if he traveled to Jerusalem. Paul was first warned by some disciples through a word from the Holy Spirit that he should not continue on to Jerusalem. Next a man named Agabus who was gifted in prophecy told Paul that he would be bound and turned over to the authorities if he went to Jerusalem.

Paul continued on to Jerusalem. Does this mean he didn't believe the words given to him by the Lord? Was he in the practice of scoffing at or ignoring prophecy? Paul believed full well that he was in danger. He believed the word from the Lord. What he did scoff at was the believers' weeping and begging for him to stay. Paul himself said that he was prepared to be "jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." (v.13) This word of knowledge from the Lord did not deter him from going forth in what he believed was his mission.

Knowing the future can be scary, especially if it holds knowledge of inevitable pain, struggle or something that is a real fear for you. Knowing the future can be really exciting, especially when it holds the knowledge of future victory, growth, and blessing. Either way, prophecy has the potential to usher in revolution! We read earlier that revolution means "an assertedly momentous change in any situation." Receiving a word from the Lord through prophecy presents us with choice. We can choose to believe it in faith or we can choose to scoff at it and brush it aside. It is the choice we make that will determine whether we further the Jesus revolution in our life or in the Kingdom through our response to prophecy. Paul continued on in a revolutionary way by going where God wanted him despite the truth of danger and possibly death.

I pray that you will partner with the Kingdom and heed the word of the Lord from prophecy. In their new song "I Will Follow Your Voice" the band "Downhere" sings of the commitment to following the Lord and his voice: "I won't take advice from cynics; I won't listen to the word of fools. Sure, everyone has their own take on what I should do, but... I will follow your voice, I will trust your choice, I will not fear. I will follow your voice, not my will but yours be done here..." So be it in our lives, Lord!

Q: Have you dabbled in ungodly forms of future-telling? Ask God to purify you and break any strongholds these activities may have planted in your life. Do you believe that people today are gifted with the ability to prophesy? Why/why not? Ask the Lord for a word of knowledge and believe in faith that he will give you one, either directly or through another believer.

Acts 12

Have you ever prayed for something, not really expecting God to answer, and were greatly surprised to see him act in response to your pleas? Have you ever prayed for something despite your thought that it wasn't really possible? Prayer is a powerful thing. In God's word it says that the prayers of righteous people are powerful and effective. The prayers of the saints are like sweet smelling incense to the Lord and he loves to respond to them in his grace, mercy and justice. In Acts we see the power of prayer so much that it did something revolutionary.

Chapter 12 of Acts shows Peter in quite the situation. He was placed in prison and about to be put on public trial because he preached about Jesus. The King-- King Herod Agrippa-- hated what was going on in the church. He had the apostle James killed with a sword, and Peter arrested and under the guard of sixteen soldiers. It seems ridiculous to have one man (one non-violent Christian man, that is) being guarded by so many. What exactly was King Herod so afraid of? Perhaps he had good reason to fear - Peter's God had power far beyond any number of guards. Herod likely didn't know the number of people Peter had praying for him but he did know that this stirring revolution was bad news for him and his authority over the people.

While Peter was in jail, an angel of the Lord stood before him, made the chains slip off his wrists, as easily as butter, and walked out with him past the guards. The entire time, Peter thought that he was just having a vision and that in reality he was still sitting in the prison cell. But, it was really true - the Lord sent His angel and saved Peter from trial and more persecution. This was truly a miracle. Why did this happen to him? As it says in Acts "So Peter was kept in prison; but long and fervent prayer was offered to God by the Church on his behalf." (v.5) The Lord sent an angel in response to the Church's earnest prayers on Peter's behalf.

I'm sure that many of the believers did not expect their prayers to be answered in such an extreme way, but God is that kind of God. When His people passionately cry out to Him without ceasing because one of their brothers is in trouble, he hears and he does not turn a deaf ear. Angels are sent into action when the Lord's people pray.

Q: Who do you know that needs the forces of heaven to help them?

Do you really want the Lord to step in? Do you want it enough to earnestly pray for them?

Write down some people who need you to pray for them. Take some time right now (or you may forget), and pray passionately for them. Keep praying. Persist. Be earnest. Then sit back and watch the Lord fight for you. He is faithful.

Acts 20

There's a saying that goes "One man's junk is another man's treasure." Have you ever wondered how something could be amazingly interesting to one person while completely dull and boring to another? Two people could be watching the same movie, or visiting the same tourist attraction and one is having the time of their life while the other is bored to tears. What if the thing that you were most passionate about; the thing that consumed your attention and devotion, was something much more important? Like your faith? In this chapter we see how Eutychus missed the boat. He didn't catch on to what was happening - the excitement of it all.

At the beginning of this chapter we get a glimpse into a healthy fellowship of believers. There appears to be lots of encouragement, sound teaching, fellowship and breaking of bread together; altogether an organic group. Unfortunately for Eutychus, (who already seems to be headed down the road of misfortune with a name like that) things weren't looking up for him.

Sometimes we catch a glimpse of what the Holy Spirit is doing and it gets us motivated to move into action all the plans that he has for us. Others, however, just aren't catching on. Maybe that person is a close friend. Maybe that person is you. The bad news is that for the middle-weight, lukewarm, nowhere man, the destination is death. Who wants to die when they can have life, and life to the fullest; life given by the Being that created it in the first place? Some of us need a wake up call so we don't fall asleep at the wheel. We're going to not only miss out on all that life has for us, but we can potentially kill anything worth living for.

Eutychus fell to his death (and usually when you're dead - you're dead) but thankfully there was hope given in a hopeless situation. He was raised from the dead. Think about that for a minute. This wasn't some sci-fi movie, this actually happened. The dude was dead and then was raised to life. How did the people react? What did the 'church do in response?' (v. 11&12)

Sometimes the word of God is hard to swallow. Paul had to go through some rough times, but he admits "My life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned to me by the Lord Jesus ..." In Ephesians 4:1 Paul wrote "Therefore I ... beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God." What is your calling? Where is Jesus asking you to be faithful? To walk out life among the dead? Paul pleads with them in v. 28-31 as I plead with you, to be on guard, watch out for your family in Christ, be a leader, and step up to the plate. Know the truth in and out and get ready to fight! Knowing the truth is the key to being free.

Let us be LIGHT and let us be LIFE. Let us walk in a manner that's worthy of the calling God has given us. It is preached a lot that we need to be light in dark places. We need to be LIFE in DEAD places. Let us be generous in giving life and remember 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (v.35).

Q: How would you respond? How do you respond when people who were walking in death (backsliding, struggling with issues, being fickle hearted, allowing lies to eat them on the inside) are brought back to life? Take a moment to process that and make it real for you. What does that look like? What kind of change ensues?

REVOLUTION

Acts 13

Prayer and fasting aren't exactly the most popular practices or disciplines in the church today. In fact, few of us have been taught the life-changing, revolutionizing benefits of fasting even if we grew up in the church. The early Christians believed in the importance of fasting. This belief is demonstrated in this chapter where they were fasting and praying to receive direction from God (v.3-4).

It's a good thing that the elders of the church at Antioch were fasting, praying, and waiting on the Lord. And it was even better that they were obedient to his directions. As a result of their discipline and obedience, Paul and Barnabas were dedicated for special service to Jesus and sent out by the Holy Spirit to preach the Good News. This was a very important occasion in our church history! Paul became a revolutionary member of the early church. He wrote much of the New Testament and was in the habit of seeking God in fasting and prayer as well. His Spirit led life brought revolution wherever he went.

In verse 15 we see how the Lord caused people to seek after him and this was displayed through their hunger to hear from Paul and Barnabas. It says in the chapter "those in charge of the service (at the synagogue) sent them this message: "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for us, come and give it!" Paul and Barnabas were welcomed and sought out because of their transforming message. They were a source of encouragement for the believers and also received encouragement from the believers.

Because the Holy Spirit was in charge of their journey large crowds were drawn to hear Paul and Barnabas preach. They offered the message of salvation to the Gentiles, as noted in v.44. The message that Jesus died for the Gentiles as well as the Jews was a very new and challenging concept. The God of Israel also having a plan for the Gentiles was a revelation that made some Jews very angry and jealous. The Jewish leaders in the crowd were angered and incited a mob against Paul and Barnabas to run them out of town. Praise the Lord that the message was preached despite its unpopularity! Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and continued to preach the Good News no matter the circumstances.

Q: What areas do you need to improve on in speaking the Gospel? Try seeking the Lord about this, and remember what our brother in Christ, Paul, writes through God's Holy Spirit in Philippians 4, v.13: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

Are you as bold as they were, to speak the message of Jesus despite what kind of persecution you might face? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

Has the Lord revealed anything to you lately that you have not followed through with? Don't worry - He's rich in love and patience. He also likes his children to be obedient. To help us with this, one thing to remember is what Jesus says: we actually love Him by obeying Him (John 14: 23 & 15:10) and we can ask Him for His help to do this, too.

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When was the last time you prayed while fasting, and waited on the Lord? You never know what he might reveal to you. God's revelation to the elders at Antioch led to His will being done and His kingdom advancing. That's good news!

Acts 19

The atmosphere is electric. The crowd is hyped. The rivalry is fierce. It's Hockey Season! I'm an Englishman so Hockey is foreign to me, yet even as a first-time fan, within minutes of the face-off I'm cheering like the best of them for the home team. Passion is quite contagious; whether it's a sporting event or maybe a music concert. Either way, we often give our allegiance quite readily, especially in a pressured environment such as a crowd where momentum continues to build.

In Ephesus, we read the same about a crowd in the city's local meeting place (v.29). Hoards of people were lured into a situation; shouting aloud the name of a false god called Artemis... for two hours! This situation reflects part of our nature. As humans, we were born longing to belong - to feel a part of something greater than ourselves - to fight for something. Ultimately though, we were born to worship.

Matt Redman expresses this heart's desire, based on Song of Songs 3:1-4 when he writes: "In my soul there's a cry today: Be the King of this heart. I've stood in the desert and thirsted for you, I've run through the city, now I won't let go. I'm throwing myself on your mercy, O God." Deep within us we have a hunger and desire to be in relationship with something greater than ourselves. We have a hole inside us that only the one true God can fill.

Whom and what do we choose to worship? While statues like Artemis seem a bit far off, our generation has made its own false gods, and there are lots! Money, self-image, power, material possessions, music, sex, drugs, and alcohol are a few. We live in a culture of cool; the latest trends and fashions distract us from the one true God we were made to worship - Jesus. We're left feeling empty and confused when we chase after false gods. In Ephesus we read that "Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there" (v.32). The people were caught up in the wave of what was happening around them and lost sight of who they were and what they were doing.

It's so easy for us all to be caught up in the world's trappings. Our enemy seeks to trap us in things that waste our time, steal our allegiance and leave us feeling empty - leading us to chase after more and more that does not satisfy. We really lose our identity and who we are in Christ when we conform to the patterns of the world. We must become aware of the enemy's schemes and not be naive to the way the world is actually against us.

Our world is full of false gods like Artemis. Paul, however, knew his identity in Christ and didn't waste time chasing after worthless things. If we are to avoid the mistakes that the Ephesians made, we too need to know our identity.

Q: Where is your identity found? Ask God to reveal areas in your life where false gods may be lurking and ask Jesus to take them away. Seek to become a worshipper who is solely devoted to the one true God.

Acts 14

There's no doubt about it. True revolutionaries live extraordinary lives. Put yourself in the shoes of Paul and Barnabas:

You walk into a new city. You scope it out, check out the people. There's a chance people will accept you. There's also a really good chance they'll try to kill you. It seems everywhere you go, people want you dead. This might be the last place you tell anyone about Jesus. But something inside you can't stop. Jesus is just too good to keep to yourself - you need to tell the world. So if it gets you killed, that's okay.

Welcome to the life of Paul and Barnabas. These men constantly had a question all revolutionaries have to come to terms with: "Who's on my side, and who isn't?"

Unfortunately for these two, those who weren't on their side usually wanted them dead. In Iconium they preached with God's power so that many people believed in Christ. God even backed up their message by giving them the power to do miracles! A lot of people were buying into what Paul and Barnabas were doing. On the other hand, there were a lot of people who tried to kill them. Paul and Barnabas barely escaped with their lives.

Paul and Barnabas faced a completely different problem in the next town. When God gave Paul the power to heal, the people began to worship him and Barnabas as gods! This time, God's messengers had a lot of people on their side, but for completely the wrong reasons. They were all about the flashy stuff, but they didn't accept Jesus. In the end, they all turned on Paul and Barnabas, and Paul almost died by a stoning.

Being a revolutionary isn't easy. It nearly got Paul killed a lot of times, but because of his revolutionary commitment to Jesus, a lot of people heard the gospel. He changed the course of history. Jesus wants to use you just like He used Paul and Barnabas. You can be a revolutionary too. Are you willing to put yourself on the line to tell others about Jesus?

Q: Who will be on your side when you tell others about Jesus? Why do you want to be a revolutionary? Are you in it because it sounds fun/because you think you should/because someone else told you to, or are you in it all the way for Jesus?

REVOLUTION

Acts 18

Paul was called by God to many different positions in the church. In the beginning of chapter 18 of Acts, Paul had just moved to Corinth and started living and working with a tent-maker named Aquila. Paul was using his time with Aquila wisely by discipling him and his wife, Pricilla. While Paul was working as a tent-maker during the week, he also ministered on the Sabbath to the Jews and Greeks. After a while, the Jews opposed Paul and became violent towards him, so he decided to focus his ministry on the Gentiles. Paul stayed in Corinth one and a half years teaching the Gentiles full-time about Jesus.

Paul moved to Ephesus, and Pricilla and Aquila moved with him. Paul left them in the town to do the work of God without him. While Paul was in Ephesus he preached to the Jews in the synagogue. The people of Ephesus asked Paul to stay longer but he had the call of God on his heart. From there, Paul journeyed around to different churches, strengthening them in their faith and ministries.

Paul ministered in different ways to different people. Just because he worked an average job didn't mean his life was compartmentalized. He preached and ministered wherever he found himself – including on the weekends! He also didn't limit himself to the weekends either, but went into full-time ministry soon afterwards. He preached to the Jews and then he preached to the Gentiles. Paul always found the time and the people. No matter what the circumstance, Paul always did God's work.

When we compartmentalize our lives there is the danger that God won't be included in some of the compartments. The revolutionary way of living is a holistic approach – allowing God to invade and infuse all relationships, positions, and circumstances with his purposes. God didn't intend that we would cut our life into time blocks or segments that are available only to specific plans... that are often our own. Paul was a revolutionary because God was the center and purpose behind all of his activities and we would do well to take his lead.

The lyrics of "Jesus, Be the Centre" make a good prayer to God that could help begin to align your heart with his:

Jesus, be the centre.
Be my source, be my light, Jesus.
Jesus, be the centre.
Be my hope, be my song, Jesus.
Be the fire in my heart.
Be the wind in these sails.
Be the reason that I live, Jesus, Jesus.

If Jesus were to become all these things to you, you would be a revolutionary. Your life would be like a continuum of work and worship and honour and glory for him.

Q: Are you waiting until you finish school to 'do God's work?' Are you waiting for a paid position to come along?

Are you doing the work that God has presently called you to? Are you using the excuse of a 'full time job' or 'full time student' to not minister full time where you already are?

Is your life quite compartmentalized and God is left out of some of the compartments? Ask the Lord to reveal to you how you can break down those barriers so that you can live life more fully.

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Acts 15

Rules. Made to be broken? Well, not exactly. But there's good news. In Old Testament times, people were bound to rules. Christianity was defined by it because there was no other way. The consequences for breaking or bending the customs were extremely harsh. A fate of being stoned to death easily awaited anyone who was unwilling to follow the directions of the rulers in governmental authority or the temple priests.

Thankfully, we've been redeemed! "He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds!" (1 Peter 2:24) This is the new covenant: the gift of life! The trouble with the rules is that they're impossible to keep by our feeble human selves. Therefore, sin is inevitable. But Jesus not only took our sins, He caused the curtain to be torn that hung between us and God. This means that we have direct access to God and He has also called us His children so we have the rights of sons and daughters. With God's power in us, nothing is impossible.

But still, questions remain. What's the point of the law if we're completely covered and spoken for because of the blood of Jesus? And if laws can't help us earn forgiveness or salvation, why do we as a church harbor so much bitterness toward our brothers and sisters that is often rooted in legalism? First, let's remember that we must not judge others, especially in the area of salvation. God alone knows someone's heart. Peter said this: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, 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, just as they are." (v.8-11)

God set forth the law for our benefit but we're given a choice to follow them or not; a personal choice, that is. Following the law is one of the many ways we display our love for God and our devotion to Him. However, they don't give us salvation or help us earn forgiveness. New life comes to us through Christ when we confess our sins and forsake them, that is, accepting His forgiveness and provision. FULLNESS of life comes when we embrace His commands and choose to intentionally love Him. When we don't live life under this truth, we quickly set up our own rules and processes for being a part of the church. Yes, we need covenant, but we must not make new rules. Here is the difference: rules are given by the King alone and must be followed. Covenant is a privilege and a calling. It can be entered into by anyone but enforced by God alone. Either way we look at it, we have no right to judge.

Q: How do we make these principles evident in our living?

Live love: 1 Corinthians 13. Read it and do it. Don't hold grudges. Be truthful, not condescending. Choose covenant: make a covenant with God-one that challenges you. This will help you fix your eyes on Jesus when you realize it's hard to keep. It will also help keep your eyes off others. Be graceful: Try a day in your new covenant. At the end of the day, go to Jesus and ask Him to show you where you need His grace. Be humbled and receive it. Then, freely give as you receive.

Acts 17

Sometimes people try to connect or make friends with you by attempting to relate to you in a funny way. I've experienced situations in which a teacher or youth group leader's attempt to identify with a group of teens was quite ridiculous. Instead of making a connection and therefore a positive influence, their strange behavior or inappropriate words did the opposite – drove their 'audience' away from them or caused them to be laughed at and mocked.

Paul and his friends were traveling from city to city, telling people the truth about who Jesus was. They arrived at Thessalonica and Paul argued from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. Now some Jews were persuaded, but not all. The rest, angry at losing men and women to his crazy new cult, organized a mob to find Paul and drag him before the authorities. Paul and his friends escaped in the nick of time and traveled to Berea over night. I'll bet that Paul encountered clashes in culture and group dynamics wherever he went but he pressed on in the knowledge that the gospel is universal and is for all.

Paul arrived at Berea and went straight into the synagogue to preach again. Paul was going strong, that is until the mob from Thessalonica caught up with him. He made a run for it again, waiting at Athens while his friends caught up. Now Athens was a marketplace of religion, filled with idols, foreign beliefs and different types of philosophies. In a single day you could be faced with beliefs and ideas to many extremes and be encouraged to pick and choose what suited you. Sound familiar?

This spiritual mess before him stirred Paul's spirit and he started again, teaching and preaching about Jesus. Now some philosophers approached him and asked about this new, fad belief - Jesus Christ. Paul pointed at the inscription on one of their idols: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' This unknown god, said Paul, was the real, eternal God who wasn't made with human hands. He taught them about God using their own beliefs, their own philosophies and he quoted their own poets. Like an art, Paul was able to connect with the philosophers on their own level. He connected with them by relating his message to their own passion and lives.

With converts in Thessalonica and Berea, you would say that Paul's evangelical efforts were certainly successful, particularly at provoking religious fanatics and violent flash-mobs. The church today has also tried to tell the world about Jesus, but the response is quite often similar to the mob in Thessalonica. In part, this is because we sometimes go unprepared in that we don't know who we're ministering to or how we can relate to our hearers. We often offend others unnecessarily because we haven't done our homework by studying and asking the Lord how best to reach specific groups of people or even specific individuals. We can learn a good lesson from Paul. He was a wise man by telling people he encountered during his travels about the love of God in ways they understood and related to.

Q: Do you have a friend who doesn't know God? What do they think or believe about life and spirituality? How could you explain Jesus in a way they would understand? How can you show them that Christ has relevance in their life?

REVOLUTION

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Acts 16

A lot of time and energy is wasted in the church today. I'm not talking about long-winded prayers or people leaving the lights on in the church building. I'm talking about how we plunge into new ministry and endeavors that sound exciting and full of potential without consulting God first. Funny isn't it? We want him to be in all and through all but we go ahead and do stuff that wasn't his idea in the first place. We're not going to start any revolutions doing things that God hasn't initiated or desired. That's a surety.

In this chapter of Acts we see that Paul and his crew continually checked with the Lord about his plans for their mission. In verses 6-10 we read how the Holy Spirit told them where to minister and what places they should avoid. Of course he would have good reason for these decisions; likely reasons that would keep them from wasting their time and energy. Paul's ministry was revolutionary because he saw where God was working (or wanted to work) and joined him there.

Another lesson from this chapter of Acts is that revolution is contagious. Once it has started in one person, you can't stop it from spreading to others. Paul and his buddies were traveling around from town to town and when in Philippi God used Paul to revolutionize Lydia's life. Because of one woman's new faith her entire household was baptized and this opened the door for a major revolution in Philippi.

One final lesson from this chapter is that God can use the most futile looking situations and turn them into revolutionary situations! Paul and Silas were severely beaten and then thrown into jail in Philippi for "teaching the people to do things that (were) against Roman customs." (v.21) They saw this situation as another chance to evangelize and praise God. Everyone was listening to Paul and Silas while they sang praises and prayed while they were imprisoned. The foundations of the jail shook and all their chains were broken.

The inner freedom that Paul and Silas experienced came from worshipping God in a dreadful circumstance. This freedom revolutionized the situation as their literal chains fell off, they shared the gospel with their jailer, and his entire family got saved.

Q: What are some other ways we can start revolutions? Preaching, singing etc...

When we praise, a revolution begins in us and we can't help but impact those who hear us. Are our praises shaking foundations? Are they starting revolutions?