

Life Group Lesson

40 Days with the Holy Spirit • Week of July 17

Introduction

Obstacles are part of life. There is no place in Scripture we are promised a pain free life. In fact, Jesus said, “Here on earth you will have trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Yet, we can know peace in the middle of hardship; it is found in Christ, not in the things of this world. An obstacle in your path is not the enemy. The obstacle is actually an opportunity for God to grow you. Think about a big oak tree: it is the heat, cold, rain, wind, and even ground resistance that cause the roots to go deep and grow strong enough to sustain the trees height; insuring longevity and fruitfulness for many years. I once asked a man from Beirut about the ‘cedars of Lebanon’—his face brightened and with a beautiful accent said, “Oh yes, for every meter in height, there are five meters of deep roots beneath the ground. Ah, that is why the cedar is so strong and tall, so beautiful!”

Imagine the obstacles early believers faced when Rome began to persecute Christians. It is difficult to comprehend the courage they had – the resolve to proclaim allegiance to Christ alone – as they faced certain death. But they did. Surely the early church stayed the course by continuously relying upon the Holy Spirit. There is no way we can stand strong unless Christ stands with us. Too often today, we give up when the journey gets tough. Like the seeds that fell onto shallow soil with underlying rock; we sprout quickly, but since our soil is too shallow, we wilt under problems or challenges. Sometimes we are like the seed that fell among the thorns. We are excited about Christ for a moment, but then any fruit we could have born for the Kingdom is choked out by worries and the lure of wealth (see Mark 4:13-20).

Background

As the apostle Paul returned to Judea from his third missionary journey, the Holy Spirit had already told Paul that he would face jail and suffering. Still, Paul stayed the course and upon arriving in Jerusalem, he told James and other leaders of the church about the wonderful things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry. They rejoiced; but also told Paul that there were some skeptics spreading lies, accusing Paul of teaching Jews who live among Gentiles to ‘turn their backs on the Laws of Moses’ (Acts 21:20-22). The leaders encouraged Paul to go with four men they knew to the Temple, join them as they completed a purification ceremony, and pay for them to have their heads ritually shaved—

hopefully proving that Paul did, indeed, honor the law of Moses.

But toward the end of the seven days Paul is recognized and the men lying about Paul stir up a mob against him. He is being beaten when a Roman commander is informed and rescues Paul from the crowd, as well as hostile Jewish leaders and a plot for his life. Paul is taken under guard to Caesarea; and within about a week is tried under Roman law once the Jewish leaders arrive with their lawyer, Tertullus (see Acts 24). But after two years under house arrest in Caesarea (and a new governor) Paul finally appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Within days, Paul gets a chance to defend himself before King Agrippa and his sister Bernice who arrive to pay their respects to the new governor, Porcius Festus. The next day, as the king and Bernice arrive ‘in great pomp’ with other dignitaries, Paul is called into the auditorium to defend himself. As you can image, Paul uses this opportunity to share his faith in Christ. King Agrippa and the others listen to Paul intently, but the king finally interrupts Paul—

*“Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly? Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains.” ... And Agrippa said to Festus, “He could have been set free if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar.” When the time came, we set sail for Italy...
(Acts 26:28-29, 32; 27:1)*

Reading the Text

Read Acts 28:11-31

1. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you?
2. What are you going to do about it?
3. How can we help you?

In Closing

The largest obstacle you will ever overcome is ‘you’ – the hardest person to lead is you. Yet, with God’s help (the empowerment of the Holy Spirit) we can stay the course, no matter the challenges. The moment we fully surrender to God and decide to serve Christ faithfully, is often the very moment the heat is turned up. Paul writes believers in Ephesus: “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm” (Ephesians 6:12-13). Paul did not want his brothers and sisters in the faith to give up when they faced obstacles or persecution. He wanted believers to understand who (what) they were really fighting; and to know that the risen Christ they serve is stronger and mightier than the fiercest foe of darkness.

Hebrews 13:14 says: “For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.” Thus, keep this life in proper perspective. Paul was driven to share the truth about Christ wherever he went; he finally had a chance to preach Christ in Rome where he had desired to go (Acts 19:21) and where the Lord Jesus had said he would go (Acts 23:11). May we as believers in the Lord Jesus not buy into the false narrative that life, even ministry, is supposed to be up-and-to-the-right all the time. There are many times we will face pain, adversity and discomfort as Christ-followers. But if we stay the course, Jesus promises to be with us; He will never leave us or forsake us (Matthew 28:20). Let’s be careful about both inside and outside voices we listen to. Don’t waste time listening to anyone speaking outside the context of Scripture. Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Close in a Time of Prayer asking:

How can I pray for my fellow Life Group participants this week?

One Year Bible Readings

July 17: 1 Chronicles 24:1-26:11, Romans 4:1-12, Psalm 13:1-6, Proverbs 19:15-16
July 18: 1 Chronicles 26:12-27:34, Romans 4:13-5:5, Psalm 14:1-7, Proverbs 19:17
July 19: 1 Chronicles 28:1-29:30, Romans 5:6-21, Psalm 15:1-5, Proverbs 19:18-19
July 20: 2 Chronicles 1:1-3:17, Romans 6:1-23, Psalm 16:1-11, Proverbs 19:20-21
July 21: 2 Chronicles 4:1-6:11, Romans 7:1-13, Psalm 17:1-15, Proverbs 19:22-23
July 22: 2 Chronicles 6:12-8:10, Romans 7:14-8:8, Psalm 18:1-15, Proverbs 19:24-25
July 23: 2 Chronicles 8:11-10:19, Romans 8:9-25, Psalm 18:16-36, Proverbs 19:26

40 DAYS WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Text: Acts 28:11-31

Some formidable obstacles we must face:

1. _____ Obstacles
2. _____ Obstacles
3. _____ Obstacles

Plain Truth:

_____ and _____ boldly creates an
_____ movement.

So how did Paul love and speak boldly?

- a. _____ in Christ
- b. Be empowered by the _____ to love others first
- c. Be empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome obstacles by realizing that _____ brings potential and _____ brings _____ and grit!