

Trusting through Trials

We're walking through the book of Acts. This is really the Acts of the Holy Spirit as God's Spirit is moving and working. Back then, He's moving and working in our lives and through the church today. So we're looking at Acts chapter 21 Verse one through 16 today. If you have a Bible, you can grab that, grab something to write with unless you're driving and then I wouldn't suggest it. But as we begin, we're talking about trusting through trials.

And I'm reminded this story of something that happened in the jungles of Vietnam back during the Vietnam War. There was a story about a young girl who had developed a serious blood disease. So much so that she probably wouldn't live much longer unless she got a blood transfusion. But the only person who had a good match for her blood was her younger brother who's about six years old. So they asked the little boy, would you be willing to give some of your blood to save your sister? And he said, well, I'll have to think about it. He went for a walk and he came back with tears in his eyes and he said, yes, I will give my blood. And the doctor came and, and he put the needle in the little boy's arm and the blood began to flow. And the little boy just had his eyes transfixed on his sister, thinking, watching her. And as the blood was flowing, he looked at the doctor and he asked the question, when do I die? See, he thought that by giving his blood, he was giving his life. And that is a sacrifice that is true loving sacrifice for someone else and that's the way God has called us to live as his followers to be willing to lay down our lives as Jesus set that example for us he wants us to go and do the same and it may not

literally be dying physically dying but it is sacrificing many of the things that we hold on to that we're going to need to let go of in order to allow others to live, to know the good news of Jesus.

And so we're looking at how Paul does that as we get into Acts 21, starting in verse one, what's happening is Paul is going on this trip to Jerusalem in spite of the warnings that he's getting from wise counsel from other churches, from his friends along the way. He gets counsel from Christians in Tyre and Caesarea, but he's not swayed. He's determined to go all the way to Jerusalem. No matter what ways they try to warn him, Paul trusts that God is in control and that he's going to do what he is convinced that God is leading him to do.

Ultimately Paul makes it to Jerusalem where he is warmly welcomed by the local church there and this passage really shows Paul's commitment to following after God's call listening to wise counsel taking that information in and trusting in God's plan even when you're not certain 100 % even when you're facing sure opposition in your life. And that's what the big idea that we want to receive from what we're talking about today is that you should trust God even though you're facing trials, even though it's certain that you're going to face trials in your life. And of the ways we're going to apply this to our life, the first one, as we look at Acts 21 starting in verse one, we want to follow God's call. Follow God's call for your life.

Let's read verses one through three that says,

After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre where our ship was to unload its cargo.

So this is really exciting because you see all of these different important historic cities that Paul is traveling to. And you know, in that sense, the Christian life is such an adventure. I was thinking about how in my own life, because I said yes to God, he has led me to some great places around the world, not only around America, but in places south of America, like Brazil and Bolivia and Guatemala and many different places in Mexico that I've gotten to experience because I simply said that yes to God wherever you lead me I will go and it really is a great adventure.

So look at Kos. Here was a place that was a commercial and trading island on this major shipping route. It was famous as a medical center with a major medical school and the temple of Asclepius, the Greek god, little "g", god of medicine. It was the place where Hippocrates, the Greek physician, was born and Apellus, the Greek painter. So that's Kos or Kous.

There was also the place, the island of roses that was called Rhodes. And it was at the entrance to the Aegean Sea, which made it an important shipping center. This city was also known for its university that specialized in speech and rhetoric and debate.

Also, there was Patara that was located at the mouth of the Xanthus River that made it an important commercial city for all the towns and the bordering towns around the river. and it was on a major shipping route to the Mediterranean Sea, which made it a very wealthy, important city. And Paul traveled there from Patara by ship directly across the Mediterranean to Tyre of Phoenicia. It was around 400 miles away.

He went through Cyprus which we've talked about before.

He went to Tyre, which was one of the most famous seaports of the ancient world. Tyre was a free city and Paul spent a week there with the church in Tyre. And in verse four, it goes on in Acts 21 and says, *we sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the spirit, they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. When it was time to leave, we left. It's we because this is written, remember, by Luke, who was with Paul. We left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship and they returned home.*

So as we walk through these 16 verses today, there are four major tensions that we're gonna see. That tension and pull between two forces in your life. And this is so true when you step into leadership, into ministry, you're gonna find that there is tension that's always at work, these pulling forces on you, and you gotta embrace that tension and manage the tension, it's not gonna go away. And the first tension that we see is

The pull of a Spirit-filled church versus this sense of God's call that Paul was struggling with.

He hears the word from this Spirit-filled church, well-intentioned, well-meaning. And he also knows of his own internal sense of God's call for his life. Anytime a spirit-filled church has something to say, we had better listen. The church's warning put pressure on Paul to not go. We see that they urge Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. What do we know about this church? Well, it was a small church, but it was a Spirit-filled church and we know it was small because Paul and his traveling buddies They had to look for it and it took a while before they found the believers This church was in tune with the Holy Spirit. So they were able to immediately Warn Paul about the trials that he was going to face and they were right about that that he was gonna face trials the Spirit empowered the church to see what was gonna happen to Paul.

Just like that church was a spirit-filled church, every church should be filled with the Spirit that speaks to us, directs us, and empowers us by the power of the Spirit to help people, to speak into people's lives, to help them as they face their troubles, temptations, and trials in life.

And so the church at Tyre, they gave this warning to Paul as a prohibition, don't go. But Paul received it as information, as the spirit was preparing him for what he would inevitably face when he got to Jerusalem. And there was this tension that he was facing between listening to their advice, and of course he listened, but following their advice versus following the call that he felt from God.

and the church felt strongly that they knew what God was telling them, but Paul felt strongly about his own convictions. And so Paul had to do what he believed was God's will and God's purpose, God's direction for his life.

You know, it's easy for us when somebody gives us a warning to stay back and listen to other people's advice and to stay safe and comfortable instead of following God's more dangerous call for our lives. In my situation, when I was looking at leaving from the church I was pastoring in Luling to move over to Hays County to Kyle and Buda to start a brand new church, I had many friends, family, pastors, well-meaning Christians who warned me. They said, don't do it. It's going to fail. It's not going to work. There's no way that this is gonna happen and you're gonna be sorry if you try to start a church. And I just was certain of God's call and I took what they were saying as not don't do it, but as this is gonna be difficult. This is gonna be harder than you know. And I also at the same time had others who were assessing me, who were speaking into my life, and who were affirming God's call. It's not that they were saying that I was being told, don't do it. It was that the people who I wanted to affirm this decision, many of them said, ah, I don't know that that's gonna work, putting doubt into my mind. But others were saying, yes, this is a call from God, you should do it. And I had to balance all that, I had to weigh it, and ultimately,

I had to seek God's purpose and His plan for my life and make that difficult decision. And I'm glad I did because God has used it, God is blessed, and so many lives have been changed. This

church entire just couldn't wrap their minds around how Paul getting arrested could be a good thing. They couldn't imagine how having Paul's voice silenced and have his ministry shut down could be

the best thing for the kingdom of God. But God knew what was to take place and as all of Paul's arrests and all that he was going through was happening, it put Paul in places of influence, being able to speak to the highest leaders in the land, the highest courts in the land, and God was gonna use it to spread the kingdom of God through all of the Roman Empire. We also see about this church,

entire that it was made up of close families. You can see how the families, it says all of them along with their wives and children went with Paul to the ship and the whole church was part of saying goodbye to Paul. That must have encouraged him. He needed that encouragement and that's an example to us today of how church should be. It's not, church should be for the whole family and the whole family is involved. Parents and children together, involved, and serving, and leading, and ministering, and reaching out, and worshiping, and growing through the church. That's the picture of what the church should be like. We also see that the church was full of bold believers who were willing to speak up about their faith and live their faith out in the open, out in public.

When they got to the docks there, they prayed and they knelt down in front of all the, you can imagine all of the dock workers that were there, maybe other families were there saying goodbye

to their loved ones, and they see these Christians over there kneeling down and praying to God. And so they were willing, they didn't want to hide their faith, they were willing to live out their faith publicly. When we are following after Jesus, it means that when God says,

go this direction, we go even if there is risk involved, even if ultimately it may lead to imprisonment, it may lead ultimately even to death. You know, the world is a better place because Michelangelo didn't say, I don't do ceilings. And if we're gonna be faithful to the ministry that God calls us to, we need to understand.

that we need to understand the key attitudes of some of the people that we see in scripture see the world is a better place because Moses didn't say I don't do pharaohs the world's a better place because Noah didn't say i don't do boats and animals the world's a better place because Rahab have didn't say I don't do spies the world's a better place because David didn't say I don't do giants the world is a better place because mary didn't say I don't do stables. I don't do virgin births. The world is a better place because Paul didn't say, I don't do letters. The world's a better place because Mary Magdalene didn't say, I don't do feet. The world's a better place because Jesus didn't say, I don't do crosses. And the world will be a better place if you and I don't say, I don't do.

There was a man who, there was a man who visited a church that was known for its energetic worship services. And as the guy took a seat on the front row, the pastor went over to the keyboard and

he began to play and he began to say, yes Lord, yes Lord. And then a woman in the church started singing out, yes Lord, and then more and more people started singing out in a huge chorus, yes Lord, yes Lord. And then more and more people started saying, yes, Lord, yes, Lord, yes, Lord. And finally the congregation became more silent and the pastor said, God, you've heard our answer. Now tell us what to do. And that needs to be our attitude that we say first, yes to God, and then allow him to tell us where it is, where to go, what we're to do.

The second thing that we see here in this passage, is that we need to be seeking wise counsel. Seeking wise counsel, starting in verse seven. It says, we continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemus, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. There's this tension here that we see of remembering all of the believers and all of their needs versus, here's where the spirit is telling me to go.

And I see this in our own ministries and our own busyness, even at the church. Maybe you're volunteering at the church and you have a role, you have a job to do, you're supposed to go serve with kids or serve in the parking lot or in the cafe or wherever. And so you're trying to get to that ministry spot. You're trying to get into your usher position or whatever it is. And in the process, you walk past people who are in need, who need connection. And they need you to share your heart or listen to them. And so we gotta remember, this is what we say, is walk slowly through the halls. Even though you've got this important job to do, yes, you wanna do that, but you also remember that the people are what we're

here for. And so what Paul did as he had that opportunity, he had one day in Ptolemies. And...

He had just enough time to connect with the believers there for that one day. He couldn't share everything he wanted to, but you better believe he shared what was most important. And he was always thinking about how to help people grow and be established in the good news of Jesus. He was all about reaching people and grounding them and founding them in the gospel. And so Paul was so captured and captivated with his call to go where the spirit led him that he continued on and he was not dissuaded from preaching and reaching his own people in Jerusalem where he was trying to End up he was trying to go to Jerusalem. So in verse 8 it says leaving the next day We reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist one of the seven

He had, check this out, four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Four single girls who were prophesying from God. Philip was one who was chosen to be one of the first deacons and he was on fire for God. He became an evangelist who reached Samaria with the gospel 20 years earlier. Now he had a family, these four single daughters who had

this gift of prophecy from the Holy Spirit. And it's interesting to know, and we need to notice how faithful Philip was in helping his family know the Lord and develop and use their God -given gifts. And all of his children were serving the Lord. They were women who were being used by God, who have gone out and

You know, today what we see is people are looking for their purpose out somewhere in the corporate world when really the way we find our ultimate purpose is by getting involved in ministry and what God has called us to do. You find such fulfillment in that using the gifts that God has given you. These women, they were single women and they were being used.

by God. And so often we put all these stipulations, all these requirements on what it takes to be used by God. Oh, I need to be married, then God can use me. It's not only okay to be single, but if you have not found that person that God has called you to marry, then you're in the right position if you're single for this moment. Don't wait, don't put serving God on hold. Don't wait for marriage if you can begin to serve God right now. And we need to be about encouraging more people to use their gifts as God has gifted them with gifts. And we see here that families can all serve together as a powerful team. And I wanna encourage you, pass ministry onto your children. Do ministry as you're serving others. Do it together as a family. But we see,

this tension also here of what Paul was expecting certain persecution and yet he had this unwavering commitment to do what God was calling him to do even though it meant yes there's going to be persecution that takes place. So we see here what's about to happen with this prophet named Agabus in verse 10 it says after we had been there a number of days a prophet named

Agabus came down from Judea coming over to us. He took Paul's belt tied his own hands and feet with it and said the Holy Spirit says in this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the

owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles when we heard this we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. So this was Luke who was writing this and the other people there.

They all said, don't do this Paul, don't go because you're going to get arrested and you're going to face persecution. And I'm sure Agabus' prediction really hit home with Paul because he was the prophet that God had used in Acts 11, 27 through 28 to predict the famine in Jerusalem. And by putting Paul's belt around his own hands and his feet, Agabus was using a symbol.

the same way the Old Testament prophets used pictures and object lessons to drive home a point. But Paul interpreted this as a warning of preparation, not as a warning of prohibition. Paul was like, okay, I'm bracing myself, I'm preparing myself for what I know is going to come. And it raises the question here, was Paul doing the right thing by going to Jerusalem? He sensed this deep conviction to go and you've got to respect his conviction. But you know he was a he was not a sinless infallible person only Jesus was perfect and so you know whether he made the right call or not he was being led and sensing this leading from God. The church attire said through the spirit that he shouldn't go. Agabus

took his belt and warned him and said, you're going to be bound up. Luke and the other disciples were warning him. But you know, after this, when he made it there to Jerusalem, his influence was limited to national leaders and to people who actually made their way to Paul. He would become a prisoner literally for Christ for the rest of his life, as far as we can tell from Acts. But Paul,

probably felt that he would never make it back to Jerusalem if he didn't go right then. He loved his people so dearly. They were his people. And he would have given his own soul, his own life for their salvation. So he was driven to go to them and to witness to them one more time. And maybe that drive became such a compulsion. You know, it just was overwhelming. And God worked through this in his life.

to further the gospel in incredible ways, in incredible ways. And so he had this pressure on him not to go. And this is something where you kind of have to read all of this and decide and say, is this the right thing or not? But I personally believe certainly Paul was being led by the spirit to go. This was part of God's will and part of God's plan. He would not be dissuaded from going to Jerusalem. He wouldn't be stopped from doing what he was sure God wanted him to do. And so sometimes in our life, even our own friends don't understand God's will for our lives. But when God's will is clear to us, we need to move forward despite their well-meaning good intentions to stop us and to do what we believe God has called us to do. Now that raises the question of how do we really know God's will. Well certainly you look into God's Word to know God's will. It's so important that we are grounded in the Word of God which is why it's so good that you're listening right now and you're learning the Word of God because we need to know God's Word. God speaks to us through His Word. He also speaks to us through His people. Okay, He speaks and

We can get good, godly counsel and good, godly advice. He speaks to us through his Spirit's work in our life, in our heart, and the way that still small voice is leading us. He leads us through our experiences, through open doors and closed doors in our life. But always it comes back to the Word of God. God will never tell you to do something that contradicts or goes against what he has already revealed to be true in the Bible. So we have to come back.

the Bible time after time to say here is what God is calling me to do. The third thing we see here is trusting God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty refers to His absolute and unrivaled rule over all His creation and their circumstances in life. So let's look at verse 13. Then Paul answered, Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. When He would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, The Lord's will be done.

After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Manasen, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. Here we see what I think is the final tension here, and that is the pull of being with those we love versus the willingness to give your life for Jesus if you have to. Not that you're trying to be persecuted or imprisoned or even die but you're willing to do whatever is necessary and Agabus' prophecy had shaken those people who were around Paul and they were begging him not to go so you can imagine how Paul's heart was broken he didn't want to let them down and he didn't want to leave them and he didn't want to dismiss what they were

saying but he said you're breaking my heart but he had to go and do what God was calling him to do. He was convinced God called him to go to Jerusalem. And you know, that is what we need to be convinced of as well. Not to go to Jerusalem, but whatever it is that God is calling us to do. He said in Acts 21:13, I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And so we need to be willing to say,

You know, I'm gonna do the right thing, I'm gonna follow God's call, I'm gonna stand up for Jesus, even if it means that I'm gonna be bound, that I'm gonna be imprisoned, or that I will die. I'm willing to do whatever is necessary to fully surrender my life to the Lord. But then they gave in, and they said, the Lord's will be done. And that's how we should respond to people in our lives who are convinced of God's will in their life.

If they are convinced this is what God wants them to do and you think, ah, this doesn't sound good, you can say, well, I'm putting you in God's hands. God is gonna take care of you as long as you're following him. I'm trusting you into the hands of our good God, even if it means that you go into a hard place. Some other disciples from Caesarea joined the ministry team there and they went part of the way with Paul.

And this is a picture of care and concern and love. One of them was Manason. All we know about this person named Manason was that he's one of the earliest disciples who walked faithfully with Jesus for many years. And he had the gift of hospitality. He opened his home and welcomed people into his home. And that is a gift. If you have that gift, I want to encourage you to use it, to

open your home to others, that your home could be a place, it could be a lighthouse, a place that shines and shares the love of Jesus. And as you trust God's will for your life, remember, it's not your plan, it's not someone else's plan, it's God's plan. We get into trouble when we begin to say, God, I'm not trusting your plan for my life. I think I'm gonna do what I want with my own life and we make up our own plan.

And the challenge is, God doesn't show us every part of the plan, every step to take along the way. We're kind of on a need to know basis. Because if we knew all the ups and the downs and the twists and the turns that would happen along the way, then we wouldn't understand it anyway. If God had showed me all that we would have gone through since the time we started the Connection Church back in 2004, and he showed me all of that and all the difficulties and struggles and hurts, up and betrayals that we had that we've gone through upfront, I might have said, that's too much. I can't do that. But looking back, I see that we have been led by the hand of God every step of the way. But many times it's very clear from God's word what he wants us to do. And we, yet we, we need to do it. We need to do it. If you want to know, God's way and God's will, then look in God's word. He's revealed his will in so many areas. Do those things, do the things that are clear. Do the things that you know that you're certain about. We need to take him at his word and do it his way. And when you don't know all the steps you're supposed to take, then just take the next step. Be obedient in what God has called you to do today. Keep moving forward in the light of the steps that he gives you.

But so many times we want to know, God I want to know what you want me to do in 20 years, in 30 years. But it doesn't work that way. God shows us His will one step at a time, one day at a time. That way we're depending on Him each day, daily. To follow Him, to know Him daily, to depend on Him and trust Him daily. He shows you in His Word what He wants you to do each and every day, starting today. So...

Just do that. What is the next step that God is calling you to take? Because what we're learning today is that we need to follow God's call. We need to seek wise counsel. We need to trust God's sovereign plan that he's in control. And we need to apply this to our life today. I hope that you will do that, especially if you're going through difficult circumstances. Know that God is with you and he is calling you forward to follow after him and he's gonna be with you every step of the way.