

Family Activity: Sometimes people in churches hurt one another. It is important to ask forgiveness when we sin against someone. As a family, take a handful of coins in a container to a nearby fountain. Ask each person to take one or more coins. Explain that this is a time to tell God “I’m sorry” for any sins committed. Ask each person to individually pray (aloud or silently) “Lord, I am sorry I ...” and confess his or her sins to God. Then toss the coins into the water. Invite family members to dip their hands in the fountain for a quick washing. Finish by praying, “Thank you, God, for the gift of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Amen.” Make sure to also ask the ones who were hurt by your words or actions for forgiveness.



Olivet United Methodist Church

Weekly Devotional

The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul
Sunday August 6, 2017

Scripture: Acts 16: 6-10

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

Monday August 7, 2017

On the road again

Acts 15:36–16:5

Once the Jerusalem Council decided Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised, Paul was eager to travel and preach again. Barnabas was, too, and wanted to take John Mark (his cousin—cf. Colossians 4:10) with them. Paul disagreed strongly—John had deserted them on the first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:13). Instead of using up their energy fighting with one another, they multiplied their outreach. Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus; Paul took Silas to Derbe and Lystra, and there recruited Timothy, who became a trusted protégé.

- What a blow it would have been to the early church if Paul and Barnabas had stayed in Antioch feuding, trying to get church members on their side of the disagreement. What inner qualities did it take for them to “make lemonade out of a lemon,” turning their one evangelistic team into two? Paul later seems to have reconciled with John Mark (cf. 2 Timothy 4:11). What helps you leave past differences behind, and focus on building God’s kingdom even with those you may have disagreed with?
- Barnabas helped Paul (cf. Acts 9:26-28). Barnabas believed John Mark deserved a second chance. Paul took Silas, and then Timothy, under his wing to instruct and model for them. Who has inspired, encouraged and helped you? Do they know how much you appreciate that? Who can you encourage and help by sharing what you’ve learned?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I may not travel as many miles in my life as Paul did. But help me, as you did Paul, to make every day a journey deeper into your grace, an opportunity to spread your love to everyone I meet. Amen.*

Saturday August 12, 2017

“The greatest of these is love”

1 Corinthians 6:18-20, 12:31-13:13

Even though Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth, the Christians there had many struggles to grow beyond the self-serving, immoral culture that surrounded them. In a later letter to these Christians, Paul warned against the sexual immorality of their city. And, aware that they were dividing into factions striving for superiority, he penned his profound picture of what unselfish, enduring, God-sourced love looks like.

- Many first-world Christians, like many first-century Greeks, prefer a “head” oriented faith, which coolly analyzes religious ideas and avoids emotional expressions. Yet in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul called love “an even better way” [than relating solely through our strongest abilities]. Without love, he said, being able to “know all the mysteries and everything else” lacks eternal value. What makes God-given love “the greatest of these”—greater even than hope and faith? What does it mean for you to love God “with ALL your heart, with ALL your being, with ALL your strength, and with ALL your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27)?

Prayer: *King Jesus, I want to love as you love, but every day I fall short of that ideal. But every day your love surrounds me, and I trust it to help me keep growing toward the kind of love you call me to live. Amen.*

Friday August 11, 2017
An 18-month stay in Corinth
Acts 18:1-18

From Athens, Paul went on to Corinth (see map), a large seaport known for all the vices typical among idle sailors throughout history. Yet God told the apostle that he had “many people” there. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers, who became dear friends and co-workers (in Romans 16:3-4, Paul would write that they had “risked their own necks” for his life). He ended up staying in Corinth for 18 months.

- After Paul preached in Corinth for a while, some synagogue members (by now predictably) “opposed and slandered him.” He “left the synagogue,” but remarkably, “Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household came to believe in the Lord.” Jesus told Paul in a dream, “Don’t be afraid ... I’m with you.” How does it change your outlook in difficult, scary situations to have a sense that you’re not all alone, that Jesus is with you? Where do you need God’s comfort and courage right now?
- When Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, they were all far from home. He’d come from Athens, and faced hostility in Corinth. Priscilla and Aquila were recent exiles from Rome at Emperor Claudius’ orders. Most often God works through people. How did God use the close friendship that developed to strengthen all three people to serve Jesus more effectively?

Prayer: *Loving Lord, guide me as I keep building my ability to trust that you are always with me. And make me the kind of friend who can help and support someone else in serving you more faithfully. Amen.*

Tuesday August 8, 2017
Taking the gospel into Greece
Acts 16:6–15

In some way (Luke didn’t say how), the Holy Spirit seemed to put limits on Paul’s work in Asia Minor. Finally, in the port city of Troas, Paul had a vivid vision of a man from Macedonia (see map) asking him to come there and help them. So Paul and his companions left promptly for Macedonia, taking the gospel for the first time into a part of Europe.

- Paul usually began preaching in the synagogue—but Philippi, though sizeable, had no synagogue. So Paul found a place of prayer by the river, and spoke with the women who met there. Lydia, “a dealer in purple cloth” (i.e. high-end fabric in royal colors), was one of his first converts. Paul baptized her and her household, and she offered her hospitality while they were in Philippi. How good are you at moving into unknown territory (physical or mental) if that’s what it takes to carry out God’s mission for you?
- A fascinating detail occurred in this reading. In verses 7-8, the writer spoke of Paul and his companions as “they.” But after the dream, verse 10 said, “WE prepared to leave for the province of Macedonia.” With no elaborate fanfare, Luke told his readers that he joined Paul’s group in Troas. How did the use of “we” highlight the trust Theophilus (cf. Acts 1:1- 2) (and we) can have in the eyewitness quality of Acts? How did the writer’s refusal to use “we” except when it was accurate stress the writing’s integrity?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you may not call me to cross an ocean to Macedonia. But nearly every day you bring me into contact with someone like Lydia who doesn’t know you. Keep me as ready to share you in new “territory” as Paul was. Amen.*

Wednesday August 9, 2017
A jailer finds spiritual freedom

Acts 16:16–34

After Paul and Silas had been in Philippi for several days, they were put in prison (ironically, for setting an exploited woman free). Around midnight, in stocks in prison, they were praying and singing hymns. Luke reported that an earthquake shook the prison (again with no further explanation). Paul and Silas calmed their jailer's fears (if a Roman jailer let prisoners escape, he usually suffered the prisoners' penalty), and led him and his family to new life in Christ.

- Okay, let's think about this—"Around midnight, in stocks in prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns." To what extent can you deal with even a long line at the store or the MVA office by praying and singing hymns (inwardly if not outwardly)? In what ways does Paul and Silas' example provide a benchmark to help you assess how much room you have to keep growing toward spiritual maturity?
- After the earthquake, Paul's jailer prepared to kill himself rather than face the sentence of any prisoners he let escape. Scholar N. T. Wright said his question in verse 30 meant, "Will you please tell me how I can get out of this mess?" Paul and Silas' reply—"Believe in the Lord Jesus"—reached beyond his immediate concern, and spoke to the whole broken, lost mess we humans face. It's a basic question each of us has to answer: do you believe in (not just "about") Jesus?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, from Lydia, a wealthy merchant, to a desperate, nameless jailer, you were (and are) the final answer to the whole spectrum of human need. I trust you to be the ultimate answer to all of my needs, too. Amen.*

Thursday August 10, 2017
Paul's sermon in Athens

Acts 17:16–34

Paul and his team moved on to the cities of Thessalonica and Berea. There the pattern of early success, then jealousy triggering hostility, caused the team to split up for a time. Some believers escorted Paul to Athens, the Greek capital (see map). As he waited for Timothy and Silas to rejoin him, he preached to the novelty-loving Athenian philosophers. Even there, he won some converts.

- Some people would expect the apostle Paul (and all Christians after him) to denounce the Athenians as pagan libertines and idolaters, going straight to hell. Compare the respectful, inclusive tone of Paul's actual sermon with that stereotype. (In verse 28, he even quoted a Cretan philosopher named Epimenides and the Stoic poet Aratus.) What can you learn from Paul about how to share your convictions with others?
- Luke, maybe with a wry smile, wrote that the Athenians and their foreign guests "used to spend their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the newest thing." To them, Paul's message seemed very novel. Is it possible that, in an increasingly un-Christian world, the "novelty" of the good news might initially intrigue some people more than its antiquity?

Prayer: *King Jesus, when Paul preached in Athens, he was able to quote Greek poets and Cretan philosophers. Help me to know the culture around me well enough to use it to communicate, without selling out my faith to that culture. Amen.*