

Family Worship Guide – Week 9

READ

Read Acts 20:17-38

After having set sail for Jerusalem, Paul and his companions stop at the port city of Miletus. While in Miletus, Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus to come to him. What follows in verses 18 through 35 is Paul's final farewell speech to a group of men he dearly loved and had spent three years laboring with in ministry. This speech can be divided up into three parts: a review of Paul's past three-year ministry in Ephesus (20:18-21), a description of the present situation (20:22-27), and the future responsibilities of the Ephesian elders (20:28-35). Paul begins by stating that while he was in Ephesus he did not shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable. Instead, even in the midst of sinister plots from the Jews, he faithfully taught them both publicly and from house to house (20:18-21). The Ephesian elders knew that Paul had sacrificed much to faithfully proclaim God's Word to them.

As Paul transitions from his past ministry in Ephesus to his present ministry situation, he states that he is now compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. Although Paul does not know what will happen to him in Jerusalem, the Spirit has warned him that imprisonment and afflictions await him. The threat of prison and hardship would deter most people, but not Paul. He goes on to state that he does "not account (his) life of any value nor as precious," instead his one desire in this life is to "finish the course and the ministry that (he) received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (20:24). In doing so he will be innocent of every man's blood (20:26; cf. Ezekiel 33:1-6).

In verses 28-35 Paul turns to the future responsibilities of the elders in Ephesus. They were to be on the alert for false teachers. If the church was a "flock" and the leaders were like "shepherds," then Paul refers to the false teachers as "savage wolves." Paul warned that these false teachers would come in to the church, but some would also arise from among them. One of the reasons Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to be on the alert for such "savage wolves" is because Christ has purchased this precious "flock" by "His own blood." The account of Paul's visit with the Ephesian elders closes with the elders' deep love and affection for Paul (20:36-38).

Questions:

Paul faced many obstacles as he tried to advance the gospel. What obstacles or trials often hinder you from sharing your faith?

According to the passage, what motivated Paul to continue to share the gospel even in the midst of persecution and imprisonment?

In verse 24, Paul says that his upmost desire is "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." What is grace? How is the grace of God revealed in the gospel? In what way is this a motivator for evangelism?

Bottom Line: The great purpose of our lives is to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

PRAY

Pastor Eduardo Torres joined our staff in December of 2007 to assist our local Body in advancing the gospel among the Hispanic population of Birmingham. The primary focus of the ministry has been outreach to the Spanish speaking population of our city through weekly English as a Second Language classes, a weekly Sunday evening worship gathering, four weekly small groups across the city, and a variety of special outreach events such as carnivals, movie nights, marriage workshops, a Spanish version of Secret Church, neighborhood visitation, health clinics, etc. God has now opened the door for them to launch a Sunday morning worship gathering beginning April 3 at the corner of Highway 280 and Highway 41. We want to continue to pray for them as they seek to advance the gospel through this new venue.

SING

For this week's song, we chose 'By Faith', written by Keith & Kristyn Getty & Stuart Townend. As we read about the challenges that Paul and other believers faced in the book of Acts, we are reminded that they were able to advance the gospel in the midst of trials only because of the work of the Spirit in their lives. As we continue to do the work that Paul and others began, we must continually place our faith in Christ and not in ourselves. We want to "walk by faith and not by sight" as 2 Corinthians 5:7 says.

This song portrays several aspects of faith throughout Scripture: from the evidence that God is creator as we see in His creation, to the example of the patriarchs and heroes of the Bible, to the mission that we have as Christ's church, then to

the confidence that we have in the gospel. We desire as a church to display great faith in our Father and in His redemptive plan. Like Paul, we want our lives to be of no value compared to the importance of advancing the gospel.

MEMORIZE

Acts 20:24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

SUGGESTIONS

These suggestions were created by the age-group ministry leaders as a way to help parents better communicate the biblical truths discussed in the Family Worship Guide. These suggestions are intended to help parents facilitate God-centered discussions with their children. Parents should prayerfully use these suggestions, and any other means necessary, to help their children discover the truths of God's word and worship Him together.

Preschool

- Before you begin: gather one of your child's small, favorite objects that will fit in your hand (ex. a small toy or piece of candy) and your Bible.
- Read Acts 20:24 with your preschooler.
- Tell your preschooler that you have something very special clasped tightly in your hand. You want the child to guess which hand has the object. Say, "I want to pass it on to you." Then, let your child choose and let them keep the object.
- Remind your child that the most important and special thing we can ever pass on to someone else is the good news about Jesus. God wants us to share the good news with everyone!
- Conclude by re-reading this week's memory verse, Acts 20:24, with your preschooler. Let's pray and ask God to help us pass on the good news about Jesus!

Children

- Re-read Acts 20:24.
- Set out a king size version of your child's favorite candy bar in front of them. Tell your child that before you allow them to open the candy, you first need them to listen as you read something to them.
- Find the most boring reading material available in your home. Pulling the owners manual to an electronic device or searching something technical in Wikipedia are both great options. Read from the boring material for several minutes in a monotone voice. If your child becomes restless, gently remind them that they will only receive the candy bar if they listen to all of the reading material.
- After several minutes, thank your child for listening patiently and offer them the candy (or a portion of it).
- Ask: What was on your mind when I was reading that material?
- Explain: Just like you were focused on the candy during the past few minutes, Paul had one great consuming passion in his life. Paul said that even his very life was not counted as very valuable or precious to him when compared with how important and amazing this mission was. Paul was absolutely fixed on the goal of his life being used to advance the gospel of his Savior, Jesus Christ.
- Explain: Paul did not have this passion because he was such a great and special man. Remind your children that only a few years earlier Paul hated followers of Jesus and wanted to stop them at any cost. Paul wanted others to know that he lived the way he did because of God's great grace in his life (1 Cor. 15:10). Now there was no cost too high if it meant that other people might know of and trust in Jesus.
- Pray as a family that God would, by His grace, give you hearts that are consumed with a desire to see the gospel of Jesus Christ advanced on the earth.

Students

- As a family, re-read Acts 20:22-23.
- Ask your student to recall instances when he or she was involved in a group task (i.e. a school play, football game, choir competition, etc.). How was being involved in this task different from something you might have completed individually? Did your team have a unified purpose? If so, how? If not, why?
- Share with your family how Christ-followers have been given an overarching goal to spread the good news of the gospel. This is our goal both in good times and in difficult times.
- Explain how Paul knew he would experience persecution and hard times yet he saw the importance of the gospel being advanced. What things in your life are important enough to sacrifice for?
- Discuss the last gospel-centered conversation you had with someone. Conclude by reading Acts 20:24. Pray that the Lord would remind you of His presence even if the course and plan for you is difficult.

Prayer

Lives/Church

As you read through Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16-18), meditate on the conversions we see. How was Lydia converted? How was the Philippian jailer converted? Ask God to give you boldness this week to proclaim the gospel, and pray that His Spirit will open the hearts of those you share with to hear the gospel and respond favorably. Pray that God will make us a church that passionately proclaims His glory and His gospel daily!

Local

Focus: Brook Hills Hispanic Ministry

Local Church: McElwain Baptist Church: Mike Miller

Monday: Pray for the new Sunday morning worship gathering outreach to the Hispanic community in this area as it launches April 3 on Highway 41.

Tuesday: Pray for favor in the hearts of the Hispanic people of Birmingham to be receptive to the gospel and our outreach efforts toward them as many of them come from Catholic backgrounds and live in the shadows of our city.

Wednesday: Pray for additional bi-lingual leaders and musicians to join our Hispanic Ministry on Sunday mornings and to provide support as small group leaders.

Thursday: Pray for additional English speaking Brook Hills members to join our Hispanic Ministry to help with children and students on Sunday mornings and with English as a Second Language Sunday afternoon classes.

Friday: Pray that the Hispanic population coming to our ESL classes and other outreach initiatives would understand the gospel and respond in faith to Christ's provision for their sins.

Saturday: Pray for Pastor Torres and the other Hispanic Ministry leaders to be filled with God's wisdom as they seek to lead this ministry in advancing the gospel and equipping disciple-makers among the Hispanic community of Birmingham and beyond.

Scripture Memory

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24

By Faith

by Keith & Kristyn Getty and Stuart Townend

By faith we see the hand of God
In the light of creation's grand design
In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness
Who walk by faith and not by sight

By faith our fathers roamed the earth
With the power of His promise in their hearts
Of a holy city built by God's own hand
A place where peace and justice reign

We will stand as children of the promise
We will fix our eyes on Him our soul's reward
Till the race is finished and the work is done
We'll walk by faith and not by sight

By faith the prophets saw a day
When the longed-for Messiah would appear
With the power to break the chains of sin and death
And rise triumphant from the grave

By faith the church was called to go
In the power of the Spirit to the lost
To deliver captives and to preach good news
In every corner of the earth

By faith this mountain shall be moved
And the power of the gospel shall prevail
For we know in Christ all things are possible
For all who call upon His name

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Week 9

Global

Partner: This week we are praying for John and Amy Crawford, our Brook Hills church planting resident to the midwest region of the United States.

Short Term Teams: India

Monday: Pray for John and Amy as they continue to make preparations to plant their lives in the midwest.

Tuesday: Pray that God would give the Crawfords great wisdom and discernment as they seek God's guidance in regards to their church plant.

Wednesday: Pray for Spirit-empowered patience for the Crawfords as they have faced numerous obstacles and continue to wait on God's leading and timing.

Thursday: Pray that the Crawfords would have obedient hearts that are submissive to the Lord's leadership in their lives.

Friday: Pray that God would continue to sanctify the Crawfords and grow them to be more like Christ as they prepare to plant a new church.

Saturday: Pray that through the Crawfords ministry Christ will be made supreme and many disciple-makers would be raised up to reach the nations.

