

The Unstoppable Church
Building the Church
Acts 20:1-16
Pastor Bryan Clark

Last weekend there were several hundred people that responded to an invitation to deal with stuff in your life that God doesn't want there, and it was very encouraging. Our staff put together a brochure that may be of some help to you. I don't know what your issue is or what you're dealing with, but we have lots of different opportunities to serve you. So you may want to read through this. If there is some way that we could help you work through whatever it is, we'd be more than happy to do that.

There may be a couple of you that are wondering this morning why I stand before you in jeans. I'll tell you in a minute. First, I need to read you a story.

Maybe you heard about the guy who fell in love with an opera singer. He hardly knew her, since his only view of the singer was through binoculars—from the third balcony. But he was convinced that he could live “happily ever after” married to a voice like that. He scarcely noticed she was considerably older than he. Nor did he care that she walked with a limp. Her mezzo-soprano voice would take them through whatever might come. After a whirlwind romance and a hurry-up ceremony, they were off for their honeymoon together. She began to prepare for their first night together. As he watched, his chin dropped to his chest. She plucked out her glass eye and plopped it into a container on the nightstand. She pulled off her wig, ripped off her false eyelashes, yanked out her dentures, unstrapped her artificial leg, and smiled at him as she slipped off her glasses that hid her hearing aid. Stunned and horrified he gasped, “For goodness sake, woman, sing, sing, SING!”

-- from *Strike the Original Match* by Charles R. Swindoll, (Multnomah, 1980), pp. 55-56.

Well, sometimes reality is a bit that way, isn't it? The fact of the matter is, on Sunday we put on our Sunday clothes and we put on our Sunday faces, and we come to church. But when church is over, we go back home and we take off our Sunday face and our Sunday clothes, and we're back to who we are.

The reality is, who we are at home *is* who we are. I know that we say we're coming to church (and I use that language myself). But we don't come to church; we are the church. Most of our Christian life is not lived out in this building. It's lived out in blue jeans. This really isn't ultimately where we live out our Christian faith. It's lived out in blue jeans and the everyday stuff of life.

A couple of years ago Patti and I were in a fast-food restaurant here in town, and I had been out in the shop all morning—I was pretty grimy. This would kind of look dressed-up compared to that. I could tell there was a lady to my right that was kind of checking me out. (You know, you can just kind of feel that.) She kept looking at me, and I was just ignoring her. Finally I heard this voice say, “Pastor Clark?” She was stunned! I had climbed off my cloud and put on blue jeans.

But the reality is, this is me. If you ask my kids, this is me. This is everyday, ordinary, unimpressive me. But the overwhelming majority of my Christian life isn't lived out in this auditorium; it's lived out in blue jeans. Frankly, my friends and neighbors don't care how I dress

up on Sunday; they want to know how I live out in blue jeans on Monday—because that’s the only world they understand, the only world they really know.

That’s what we want to talk about this morning. There’s a tendency in the book of Acts to think that every day was a day of the miraculous—every day was spectacular; every day God was rockin’ the place. And we look at our own Christian lives, and we say, “Boy, that isn’t what my life looks like.”

Well, if you have a Bible this morning, turn with me to Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 19 was one of those spectacular chapters. The power of God was evident. He was rockin’ the place. He was turning Ephesus upside-down, and it ends up in a riotous mob. The city clerk finally gets them quieted down and sent home, and we pick up the story in chapter 20, verse 1.

After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece. And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. (Acts 20:1-6, *NASB)

Now we come out of chapter 19 where there’s some wild stuff going on. God’s power is so supercharged the people get articles of Paul’s clothing and demons are cast out and diseases are cured. You have the demons jumping on these false prophets and they rip their clothes off and they run naked through the streets. There’s a mob and it’s wild, and we’re on the edge of our pew.

Then in chapter 20 it’s pretty exciting—Paul goes from here to here, and here to there, and there to here, and then here to there. It’s pretty exciting, isn’t it? And if that doesn’t have you on the edge of your pew, in the next paragraph somebody actually falls asleep in church. Can you imagine such a thing?

As a reader, we really ask the question, “Why are you telling me this?” Now admit it, if you are reading this paragraph in quiet time, what do you do with it? Do you come away supercharged that this is really dynamic stuff? You probably skip it and say, “I don’t get that.” You just move on.

So why *are* we told these things? Well, just to put a little bit of a geography to it, we’re going to shoot a map up on the screen and I’m going to track this so you understand a little bit more of what’s happening here. The red line indicates Paul’s third missionary journey, which is what he’s on right now. It started here in Antioch, moves up through Derbe and Lystra, ends up here in Ephesus (which is where the story is taking place in chapter 19), moves up through Asia, ends up in Macedonia in Philippi.

Most people think he probably stayed in Philippi at least a year, maybe two years, and then worked his way down to Greece or Achaia. He probably was in Corinth for that time, was there about three months. While he was in Corinth he wrote the book of Romans. What he said he wanted to do was

go out on the Mediterranean Sea and make his way all the way back to Syria (meaning back to Antioch) and work his way all the way down to Jerusalem in time for the feast.

But there was a plot to kill him. So instead of sailing back, he goes back up through Macedonia, works his way back to Troas. And that's where we pick up the story at the end of this paragraph. The reality is, that was the life of Paul.

It's easy to start thinking every day was a day of the spectacular; every day the place was rockin'; every day was something supercharged. But the reality is, that isn't true. Those moments were few and far between, even in the book of Acts. As a matter of fact, from cover to cover in the Bible they were few and far between.

There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of days where we know nothing about what happened—where Paul went from here to there, spent time there. He spent a year to two years in Philippi; we know nothing about that time. He spent three months at Corinth; we don't know anything about that time. But it's just the routine, the ordinary, the mundane, the reality of traveling from here to here, here to here, here to here. That's what the text is about.

In verse 1 he says he brought the disciples together after the mob went away, and he exhorted them. It's a Greek word that means he "called them alongside." We would say he encouraged them. He was building up the Church.

It's the same thing in verse 2. He left and went to Macedonia, went to Philippi. Then he ends up in Corinth in verse 3 and he's exhorting them. The word is used three times; he's encouraging them.

We're reminded that Paul wasn't just about making converts. That has never been the mission of the Church. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples." There's something very different between converts and disciples.

You'd think with all of the world that didn't know Jesus, that Paul wouldn't have gone back to the same cities on this journey; he would have gone to new places. But he didn't. He went to places where he had already planted and established churches. He encouraged them and he called them together and he built into them and he equipped them and he poured himself into them in order to build the Church—because that's the mission.

It's very important to understand not only was that important because he deeply cared about these people and wanted to shepherd them (and we'll see more of that at the end of chapter 20 in a couple of weeks), but it's also because that's the most strategic way to reach the world. You don't reach the world by just making mass converts. You reach the world by planting churches that are strong and healthy and reproducing.

There's a dramatic difference between addition (which is converts) and multiplication (which is discipleship). Just think of it this way: What if we as a church were to try to reach a thousand converts a year. Now that would be a significant number of people—a thousand converts a year. So at the end of five years, we'd have 5000 converts. At the end of ten years, we'd have 10,000 converts, and so forth. It'd take us 250 years to reach the city of Lincoln. And what we'd have is 250,000 converts.

But what if we took a different strategy? A thousand people a year seems like a bit of a challenge. We've never had that in our history. But what if there was a different strategy? What if the strategy

was simply that you would prayerfully consider that God would give you one person over the course of a year—one person that you would introduce to Jesus and bring in to be discipled. Just one person. Over the course of that year, we would go from 3000 to 6000. Then we'd go from 6000 to 12,000.

It would take us eight years to reach the city. Instead of 250 years, it would take us eight years. It would take us approximately 32 years to reach the world. That's staggering, isn't it?—because it's not addition, it's multiplication—one person at a time brought in and discipled. And then that person reaches somebody else and you reach somebody else. The power of that is staggering.

Well, that's exactly what Paul understood, and that's why he was building churches. That's why he was going back and visiting churches he had established—to build them up, to strengthen them in order that they might together reach the world.

You remember when Paul was in Corinth, things got pretty ugly and they wanted to take Paul out. They met before Gallio, and Gallio said, "You know, the guy hasn't done anything wrong. Leave him alone." And that ruling actually paved the way for Paul in a number of cities.

But apparently when Paul was in Corinth, he heard word that if he got on that ship, they had a plot. The plot was probably: *When we get far enough out into the sea and far enough away from Gallio, we're going to pitch this guy overboard.* So he decided not to go on the ship, and go work his way back up through Macedonia and work his way back.

We're told some of the details of that. We're told that as the churches establish themselves, leaders emerge. Then they gather together for kind of like a conference. And I'm imagining Paul reenergized their vision and the mission and aligned them and taught them and just encouraged them—because the reality is, the everyday life as a follower of Jesus is hard.

We put on our Sunday best and we come together. Our faith makes sense here—because we're with likeminded people and there's a sense of alignment. It makes sense, and this is our value system, and this is what we're doing.

But we leave here and we go out there, and it doesn't make a lot of sense. It doesn't make sense to the people that we work with, to the people we go to school with, to the people that live next door. And so we come back to get aligned and get re-visioned and get trained and equipped. That's what we do here. That's exactly what Paul is about.

Even in verse 6 he tells us that in sailing from Philippi to Troas, it took him five days. You think, *What difference does that make?* Well, in chapter 16 it only took him two days. There's just a subtle reminder that even that was about the weather and the conditions and what took him two days now took him five days. That's the stuff of life.

That was Paul's life. In between these mountaintop experiences was just the ordinary everyday struggles of life. It was faith lived out in blue jeans, because that's the reality of it. The mountaintops are few and far between. It's helpful to understand that.

I think the next paragraph is just a window into one night that probably causes us to rethink our imagery of what it was like when Paul was with them. It says:

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread.... (vs. 7a)

I want to take just a little bit of a rabbit trail. This is the first time in the book of Acts that we've been told that the church met on the first day of the week, which would be Sunday. That's a significant thing. It's a question I get asked all the time. "Why do we meet on Sunday? And what about the Sabbath? And are we supposed to still keep the Sabbath, and what does that mean and what does that look like?" There's a lot of confusion on that.

We know from other New Testament books, as well as the book of Acts, that the New Testament Church started meeting on Sundays. It was the first day of the week. It was the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

But we go back to the Old Testament. We talk a lot about the Ten Commandments and we want them hanging in all these buildings. But one of those Ten Commandments is, "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." We have to ask the question: If we're so committed to the Ten Commandments, what does that commandment mean? We do the other nine and ignore that one for the most part.

Well, what *does* that mean? Are we still under the Old Testament Covenant of the Sabbath? Well, it's very important to understand what the meaning of the Sabbath was. The Sabbath was basically a picture that God had promised that someday He would do the work; He would provide salvation. And they would simply enter in to the finished work of God, and they would rest there.

So every Sabbath day was in essence a reminder of that. They would cease their working and they would rest as their way of saying, "We believe someday God is going to provide salvation and we will rest in it. He will do the work, not us."

So in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, the writer of Hebrews tells us that when Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled the promise or the foreshadowing of the Sabbath day—so that when we trust Jesus as Savior, we enter into His finished work. We rest in what He has done. And that is our Sabbath. So the question is raised in Hebrews 3: *Is there a Sabbath day?* And the answer is yes. *What day is it?* Today. *Oh, you mean Sunday?* No, I mean today. Ask me on Monday. I'll say, "Today." Ask me on Wednesday. I'll say, "Today."

Every day, I live in the Sabbath rest of what Jesus has done for me. So it's not that we ignore that commandment; it's that we live in the fulfillment of that promise. I celebrate the Sabbath by faith every moment of every day of my life if I've trusted Jesus as Savior. I obey that commandment more today than anyone ever did in the Old Covenant, because I rest in the finished work of Jesus. Every day is my Sabbath rest.

That's why in Colossians chapter 2 Paul said, "Be very careful of people who try to put upon you Sabbath-keeping or the feasts or the festivals," because they were just shadows of the substance to come. And now that the substance has come and those shadows have been fulfilled, we don't still live in the shadows. We live in the substance.

Now there's nothing wrong with people that want to keep a Sabbath day or people that want to celebrate those feasts if that's meaningful to them. As long as they don't project that on other people because then it becomes a form of legalism.

There is wisdom in a rhythm of life that has one day of rest in seven—time spent thinking about God and setting aside from our work. But it's not the Sabbath of the Old Covenant. It really doesn't hardly resemble that at all. It's realizing that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Jesus, and I live every day in that rest.

You remember in Acts chapter 15 the Jerusalem Council met, and there was discussion about whether or not a Gentile would have to become Jewish in order to become a believer. The issue was circumcision; and the decision was no, that's not necessary. But at the end, the Council said, "But there are a couple of areas that are pretty sensitive to our Jewish brothers and sisters. Be aware of these so we don't offend them unnecessarily." But what's interesting is, the Sabbath wasn't listed. It's as if it had become a non-issue by then.

Even in Romans 15, when Paul is writing to a Jewish audience, he says, "By the way, the Sabbath thing is just an issue of conscience. Just be aware of where your brother is on the issue."

So there's no question that the Bible teaches that we live in the fulfillment of the Sabbath because of our salvation, but not a one-day-a-week Sabbath as the Old Covenant understood it.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him." When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left. They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted. (vv. 7-12)

Now, again, we ask the text: "Why are you telling us this?" He was a year or two in Philippi. We know nothing. Three months in Corinth. We know nothing. And all of a sudden he's going to tell us a story about a teenager who fell asleep in church, like that's the big news. Well, what's the point? Well, the point is obvious. You fall asleep in church...and you die! I mean, come on, I don't write it. I just preach it. I mean, you could fall asleep and hit your head on a pew. In a couple of months we'll be in the new building. You could fall asleep and fall out of the balcony. It's a timely message.

Well, of course, that's *not* the point. They're eating together. They're having probably Communion and a meal together and Paul is talking to them. And because he is going to leave in the morning, they're wanting everything they can gain from Paul. So they're pulling an all-nighter and Paul is preaching on and on and on and on, as preachers tend to do.

Luke dearly loves the apostle Paul. As a matter of fact, one interesting thing about this text is Luke is back on the team again, or with the team maybe is a better way to say it. You remember back in chapter 16 he was using the pronoun "we" because he was traveling with Paul. Then he seems to disappear. He probably stayed at Philippi, and he hasn't been there, but now he's back on the team. They probably left him back in Philippi, and now he's back to "we."

He is saying, "We were there and he was in that upper room." And poor Luke is trying to say, "You know, it wasn't Paul's fault. I mean, the room was stuffy. They had these torches and the

flames were flickering and it was late.” And here, poor Eutychus is trying to stay awake. The verb tenses used would indicate that he was trying to stay awake but just keep nodding and drifting. We’ve all been there. It’s a horrible feeling and you just can’t pull out of it.

That’s what’s happening— this poor young man (the Greek work used would put him between 7 and 14 years of age)—probably sitting in a window to somehow try to stay awake. But finally he just couldn’t take it, and out he goes! And Luke, the medical doctor, says he was dead. Paul goes down and works a miracle. It’s the last of eight miracles of someone being raised from the dead in the Bible.

But what’s interesting is how this one is recorded. Paul goes down; he lays on him; he’s back to life; he goes back to the upper room; he has a snack. They all have a snack and they go on with the service. It’s recorded in such a way to say: *You know, this is just the reality of it—that in the midst of the ordinary, in the midst of the routine, in the midst of the mundane, once in a while God shows up and reminds us: This is still about something supernatural---because that’s how the Christian faith is lived out.*

Now wouldn’t you be honest and say if you had in your mind a picture of what it was like when Paul came to town and when he was preaching at the church there, it probably wasn’t like this? It probably was a pretty dynamic experience where you’re imagining, you know, flames of fire and smoke and the place is rockin’ and articles of clothing that are casting out demons and healing diseases. The place is rockin’ and everybody’s on the edge of their pew, and it was a happening place.

What Luke reminds us is, no, this was just the ordinary, everyday stuff of building the Church. It was long and they were weary and they were tired. And sometimes the message got a little bit long and got a little bit boring, and this is just the reality of it.

But in the midst of the ordinary, God gives them a glimpse that this is also supernatural. This is also God-empowered. This is also about something bigger than ourselves, and there’s a picture of that in bringing life back out of death. But then they just go back, have a little snack, and go on with the service. And at the end of the day they were encouraged because the boy is alive, and they’ve been renewed in their understanding of truth and the vision of what God has called them to.

That’s just the reality of our Christian faith. Every day isn’t a mountaintop experience. Every day the place isn’t rockin’. Every weekend the sermon may not be all that good. It’s just the reality that we live our lives day to day in our blue jeans and ordinary, everyday, mundane, routine circumstances of life. That’s just as true of the first-century believers as it is of us today.

Verse 13:

But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. [It’s pretty dynamic here. They had taken a ship and Paul is walking. That’s just the details. It’s everyday stuff.] And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. (vv. 13-16)

Isn't it interesting, you have two paragraphs with just the details? He went here, then he went here, then he went here, then he went there. And then you get this one snapshot into one night in one place. It's pretty ordinary other than this glimpse of the supernatural.

It's a reminder that Paul spent a lot of time traveling from here to there, spent a lot of sleepless nights pouring himself into the believers. These people would go out and have to live out their Christian faith in the everyday stuff of life. Every day wasn't supercharged handkerchiefs. Every day wasn't demons being cast out. Every day wasn't a day of the supernatural and spectacular. As a matter of fact, those mountaintop experiences were few and far between.

We sometimes forget that, don't we? We read the book of Acts and it seems like every day was a day when the place was rockin'. And we wonder, *What's wrong with us?* We look at our everyday lives and we say, "You know, it doesn't look like that. You know, I wasn't exactly rockin' the joint this past week. I had to take care of stuff at home and with my spouse and with my kids and homework at school and the everyday stuff of my job."

There are the ups and downs, and it seems kind of routine oftentimes. It's normal, and it's average. There wasn't anything very spectacular this week. But that's the reality of it. That's what it means to live out Jesus in blue jeans.

Most of you know about five years ago I got the nutty idea I wanted to train a horse. I have been at it ever since and try to keep you entertained with stories along the way. I wonder sometimes when I say that—if you take a horse from being completely unbroken to a trail ride—I mean, what's your vision in your head when you hear "breaking a horse?"

If you don't know much about horses and you watch TV, you probably think that's kind of this rough, tough, jump on the horse, hang on until the thing gives up, and it's kind of a burly cowboy, tough guy kind of a thing.

But it's not like that at all. As a matter of fact, if you know horses, you know it's not like that at all. It's very different from that. It doesn't look like a rodeo at all. It wouldn't entertain you at all. It's routine, monotonous. It involves a lot of persistence and a lot of patience as you do the same thing over and over and over and over again.

As a matter of fact, I have a couple of horse-training videos that the girls don't appreciate. You know, I can clear out a room in 30 seconds. But when they're in a mocking mood (which seems to be most of the time; they get that mocking gene from their father, by the way), they sound something like this when they're imitating the horse-training video. The horse goes around the round pen for ten minutes and the trainer is talking about nothing really. And then finally he says, "Now watch. Watch. Oh, the ear turned." And then you go another ten minutes and, "Oh, look there, the tail swished."

Then the culminating moment, after 30 minutes in the round pen, is, "Look, look, he licked his lips!" and that's the celebrating moment. And by that time the girls are in a coma. But that's the reality. Any of you who have trained horses, you know that's the reality of it. It's really not all that exciting. If you were to come out and watch, you wouldn't really see a whole lot—just a horse doing one thing over and over and over again.

Well, that's the reality of our Christian faith. If you're under the illusion that it should be dynamic and spectacular and miracle-filled every single day, you'll probably be looking in the mirror and you'll wonder, *What's wrong with me?*

But it was not even like that in the book of Acts. Those moments were few and far between. The reality is the Church was built with the everyday stuff of life. Oh, there are days when you're feeling it and your Christian life is clicking and you feel like God is right at your shoulder. And man, it is happening! There are other days when it feels like God is a million miles away. You're bored with your faith, and you wonder what's wrong.

We as consumers tend to be looking for one experience after another. We live in a consumer culture, and that affects our thinking and we find ourselves looking for the next experience. I've got to find the next book and the next formula, the next experience that's going to wire me up again.

God doesn't need consumers. What God wants is disciples, recognizing that most of our Christian faith is going to be lived out through the ordinary stuff in blue jeans. There will be those mountaintop experiences. And they're pretty special. They're a chance for God to give us a glimpse of His power and remind us, *Hey, this may feel ordinary; this may seem like just another day. But every day is an opportunity for God to step in and do the spectacular, do the unexpected, the unimaginable.* He reminds us, *Hey, this is about something more than just us. This is supernatural. This is about something that will last forever. This is about our mission to change the world.*

Now and then God gives us those glimpses and we're reminded that this is about something very special. It's about something supernatural. But not most days. Most days seem kind of ordinary, kind of routine as we live out our Christian faith in front of our friends, our schoolmates, our work associates and our neighbors—everyday, routine stuff in blue jeans. But that is the world they understand. That's the world they know. That's the language they hear.

God doesn't need consumers looking for the next great experience. What He needs are disciples that will persevere, that will be faithful. There will be days when you'll be feeling it and it seems like it's all coming together. But there are going to be days when it seems dry and dusty and God seems a million miles away. On those days God needs people that will persevere, people that will remain faithful, people that will hang in there. And God will give you a glimpse of His supernatural power and remind you, *This is about something special.*

God wants us to understand that our lives as Christians are not ultimately lived out here in this building with our church clothes on and our church faces on. It's just not. We come here to get trained. We come here to get equipped. We come here to get built up. We come here to get convicted. We come to get aligned. We come here to worship—but even understanding worship isn't ultimately what we do for an hour a week; it's how we live 24/7. And if you aren't living it 24/7, no matter how loudly you sing, God doesn't see it as worship.

What we do together is just the culmination of how we lived in blue jeans all week long. That's our calling. That's who God has called us to be—that we might build the Church, that we might reach the world.

Our Father, we're thankful that You are such a faithful God. You reveal Your presence in the most ordinary experiences of life. Lord, we read through the book of Acts and sometimes it seems like there was something spectacular going on every single day. We look at our own lives and wonder why it isn't that way. We can get discouraged and frustrated, find ourselves chasing the next big experience to try to put a little energy into our Christian faith. But Lord, even in the book of Acts it wasn't that way. A lot of days were routine days of traveling and meeting and building up the Church.

Lord, help us to understand ultimately our Christian faith isn't lived out in this building. It's lived out in blue jeans and the everyday stuff of life. Lord, might we be faithful—faithful on those days when we're feeling it, and it feels like You're standing at our side and it's all making sense; and faithful on those days when it just seems like You're a million miles away, and it all feels kind of dry and boring. Lord, especially in those moments we need to persevere. We need to remain faithful. Lord, from time to time You give us a glimpse of Your supernatural power and remind us this is about something special. Lord, find us faithful on the mountaintop, in the valley, but mostly in the everyday stuff of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Study Questions
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Opening Discussion

1. What are the current struggles and challenges you are facing?

What is most likely to cause you discouragement these days? Why?

2. When we gather to worship we remind ourselves of what God wants us to be and do. Many are energized and convicted by His truth and desire to live accordingly. Yet, the realities of Monday morning invade our lives with hundreds of demands and challenges that tend to knock us off the mountain top and back into “real life.” Do you ever struggle with this tension?

Do you ever struggle with what you think the Christian life should look like and what it actually looks like in your daily life? Why is this?

Bible Study

1. Read Acts 20:1-6. The term “exhorted” in verses 1 and 2 means “to encourage” or literally to “call along side of.” What is the difference between just seeking more converts to Christianity versus building the Church?

Which approach will reach more people in the long run? Why?

2. Sometimes it appears that Paul’s life was eventful day after day as the cities were turned upside down for Jesus. Yet, there are hundreds of days of Paul’s ministry unaccounted for in Acts. For example, he likely stayed in Macedonia (Philippi) for 1-2 years, then to Greece (Corinth) for 3 months. We know nothing of what happened at those places during those days. What do we learn from this?

Should we expect that every day with Jesus is an Acts 19:11, 12 experience?

3. The churches listed in Acts 20:4-6 remind us that the local churches are part of a greater Church with one God and one mission. After Paul moved on from each place the believers were left to organize themselves and continue with the everyday stuff of being the Church and accomplishing the mission in the circumstances of everyday life.

Read Acts 20:7-12. Why do you suppose Luke chose to record this event?

4. Read Acts 20:13-16. Why does Luke list again the ordinary details of Paul's travels?

Even in the book of Acts, was every day an Acts 19:11, 12 experience?

Why is this important to understand, and how does this encourage us in our Christian walk? (Notice a word meaning "encourage" is used in Acts 20:1, 2, and 12)?

5. What happens when Christians are always looking for the next big experience or spectacular event to energize their faith?

Ultimately, is the Christian life lived out on the mountain top, at the foot of the mountain, or sometimes even in the valley?

6. What should be our expectation when gathering for worship each week?

Are we there for an "experience" that will reenergize us for a few hours or to be refocused, taught and equipped to live for Jesus in the everyday stuff come Monday morning?

Application

1. In what way does God's truth help you navigate through the struggles and challenges you discussed in Opening Discussion question 1?

2. What does the faithful Christian look like day in and day out?

Is the Christian life defined more by faithfulness or the sensational on a daily basis?

Why is this important to understand?

3. How do we balance the everyday reality of living out our Christian faith in the everyday circumstances of life without losing sight that today God may interrupt the ordinary with a dramatic display of His life changing power?