Sunday, November 8, 2026 - Small Group Questions with Leader Notes
No Longer Living for Ourselves

Acts 21:3–14, 17–23

This Sunday we continued a sermon series entitled *"Empowered to Bear Witness to Jesus' Kingdom."* This series focuses on how the risen and ascended Jesus empowers his disciples for mission through the gift of the outpoured Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. Observe. Read Acts 21:3–14. As Paul travels toward Jerusalem, he's met with several different people and responses to his journey. What do you notice about the way Luke describes these encounters? What do people say and do, and how does Paul respond?

Pay particular attention to the warnings Paul receives, the response of his companions, and Paul's determination to continue.

Leader Notes:

An interpretive question is how we understand the warnings from the Holy Spirit. Is the Spirit telling him what to do (go or not go)? Or is the Spirit showing him what awaits him?

There is room for discussion here. The important thing to notice is that Paul understands his journey as a calling from which he cannot turn aside, even when others are, out of love for him, concerned for his safety. It also seems to be the case that God is leaving the final decision to Paul.

Avoid resolving the tension too quickly. Luke wants us to feel the emotional weight of Paul's journey.

2. Paul conviction. Look again at verses 10-14.

Agabus gives Paul a prophetic warning about what awaits him in Jerusalem. Those travelling with Paul plead with him not to go, but Paul remains resolved.

What do you think motivates Paul's determination? What does his response in verse 13 reveal about how he understands his own life and his calling?

Leader Notes:

Paul's conviction is rooted in his allegiance to Jesus and the calling he has received.

Paul does not speak as though his life is ultimately his own possession to protect at all costs. His life belongs to Jesus, and he is willing to entrust his future to him.

This is an important distinction: Christian discipleship is not about seeking suffering or treating our lives as unimportant. Rather, it is about discovering that our lives find their true purpose when they are given over to Jesus.

You might invite the group to consider the difference between being willing to suffer for something we believe in and being compelled by love for someone to whom we belong.

3. The nature of Christian discipleship. Read Acts 21:13

Consider Paul's words alongside Jesus' teaching in John 12:24-26. What connections do you see between Paul's attitude toward his own life and Jesus' invitation to follow him?

What might it mean for someone to no longer live for themselves? How is this different from simply being a good or selfless person?

Leader Notes:

An important distinction here is that Christianity is not simply an invitation to become more generous, sacrificial, or morally impressive. The gospel announces that Jesus has given himself for us. We don't earn God's love through self-sacrifice. Rather, having received God's grace, we are freed to give ourselves away. This may lead to a discussion on the nature of grace:

- Grace is given, not earned.
- Yet Grace makes a claim on our lives.
- The grace of Jesus transforms our values and what we are willing to give ourselves to.

4. The nature of the church. Read Acts 21:17–23.

When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, he meets with James and the elders and gives an account of what God has been doing among the Gentiles through his ministry. Notice how the leaders respond in verses 19–20.

What does this encounter reveal about the relationship between Paul, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, and the Gentile believers? What tensions or challenges do you notice?

Leader notes:

It’s worth noticing that Paul doesn't simply arrive in Jerusalem as an individual missionary reporting his personal accomplishments. He is participating in the life of a much larger church.

God has brought together people from very different backgrounds, histories, and religious experiences into one new community in Jesus. This is an important theme throughout Acts. The church is not simply a collection of individuals who happen to share similar spiritual beliefs and interests. It is a new humanity being created through the reconciling work of Jesus.

The unity of the church is not a side issue, it’s a central aspect of the witness the church offers to the world.

5. Giving ourselves away for one another. Look at Acts 21 20–23.

Paul is confronted with a concern about how his ministry is being understood by Jewish believers. The elders propose a course of action that will help address these concerns.

How does this situation challenge our understanding of Christian freedom and our responsibility toward other believers?

What might it look like to willingly lay aside our own preferences, rights, or freedoms for the sake of the unity and well-being of the church?

Leader notes:

This passage shows Paul's approach to Christian freedom. Paul understands that Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to belong to God's people. At the same time, he is willing to accommodate Jewish sensitivities when doing so does not compromise the gospel.

This connects with Paul's teaching elsewhere:

- 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. Paul makes himself a servant to all for the sake of the gospel.
- Romans 14:13–19. believers should avoid putting stumbling blocks in one another's way and pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding.
- Philippians 2:3–5. Christians are called to look not only to their own interests but also to the interests of others, following the example of Jesus.

Note that Christian unity does not require uniformity (everyone thinking and being the exact same) or that we should accommodate every demand. The deeper principle is that our freedom is not for our own benefit. Love directs how we exercise it.

6. Looking back over the passage, what do we learn about the way following Jesus transforms both our individual lives and our life together as the church?

Where might Jesus be inviting you to move beyond living primarily for yourself and toward giving yourself away for the good of others?

Leader Notes:

The question of Christian maturity is not simply whether we are growing in our knowledge, becoming more spiritually disciplined, or becoming more involved in church activities. It is whether we are increasingly being conformed to the image of Jesus, who gave himself for us.

We might invite participants to consider:

- Where am I still primarily organizing my life around my own comfort, security, or preferences?

- Where might God be inviting me to give myself more fully to Jesus and to the people he has placed around me?

Close in prayer