

November 1

Peter

Acts 2:1-12

The Holy Spirit comes down

The disciples, now called apostles, were gathered together in a house on the day of Pentecost (a Jewish feast to celebrate the beginning of the harvest season).

Suddenly, the rushing noise of a strong wind filled the house, and what seemed like tongues of fire came to rest on each of them. All those in the house were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.

Many godly Jews had come from far-off countries to gather for the celebrations in Jerusalem. When they heard the strange sound of wind above the house, they came running to see what was happening. They were even more amazed when they heard the apostles speaking in their languages.

"How do these men know our language?" they exclaimed, "They are all from Galilee!" But others mocked them saying that they were probably drunk.

Did the Holy Spirit fill people in Old Testament times?

In Old Testament times, there were a number of people who had a special blessing of God's Spirit on them for a time, to do a special task. For example, the Spirit of the Lord came on Samson and gave him power to tackle and kill a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:6). Others were given the Spirit to lead God's people, for example, when David was anointed as king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13).

When Jesus went back to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit on all who followed Him (John 16:7). The Holy Spirit now lives in *every* believer! When someone becomes a follower of Jesus by believing in Him, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside that person from that moment on! (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Verse for today

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Acts 2:17

November 2

Peter

Acts 2:14, 37-47

The Church is born

A large crowd gathered around the house where the Holy Spirit had come down in an amazing way and filled the apostles with power.

Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly started preaching to the crowd, telling them what the prophet Joel said: "God will pour out His Spirit on everyone."

When the people heard Peter's words, they felt guilty about their sin and asked, "What should we do?"

Peter replied, "Turn away from sin and be baptized in the name of Jesus. Then God will forgive you and fill you with the Holy Spirit."

Many believed and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the Church that day. They started to meet in groups; they shared whatever they owned, and they worshiped in the Temple area every day.

How and when did the Church begin?

While the disciples were gathered in a room, not knowing what would happen next, it was as though the Lord was busy forming the Church; preparing it to be born.

On the day the Holy Spirit came down, the disciples burst into the streets with the message of Jesus. Immediately, the Church started to grow as thousands came to know Jesus. Suddenly, the newborn Church became active, grew, and had a purpose.

- They met for worship, prayer, and breaking of bread (communion).
- They eagerly listened to the apostles' teaching.
- They shared what they owned and gave money to the poor.
- They used their spiritual gifts, and miracles happened.
- As they preached the Word of God, many turned from their sin and were saved.
- Those who were saved joined the group of believers, and the living Church grew.

Verse for today

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Matthew 16:18

November 3

Peter

Acts 3:1-10

A new day for a beggar

One afternoon, Peter and John were on their way to a prayer meeting when they saw a crippled man sitting at the Temple gate. When the man saw Peter and John, he asked them for money.

Peter stopped and said to the beggar, "Look at us." The man looked up expecting some money.

Instead, Peter said to him, "We do not have silver or gold, but what we do have we will give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk!"

Taking him by the hand, Peter helped him up, and immediately, the man's feet and ankles became strong. Then he went into the temple area with them, walking and jumping, and praising God.

When the people saw the man walking and realized that he was the cripple who sat at the gate every day, they were utterly amazed.

Has everyone got the gift of healing?

God has chosen certain people to have the gift of healing. The Holy Spirit gives them power to heal the sick and the disabled in miraculous ways. Do you wish you could help sick people? Maybe your mom has been sick and you felt helpless as you stood next to her bed. God has not given everyone the gift (ability) to heal someone, but that doesn't mean we can't pray for the sick. God will always hear, and He answers a prayer of faith! (James 5:15-16).

Paul tells us that there is something more important than having the gift of healing—and that is, having love. You could help a sick person feel better just by showing that you care! Why not pick some flowers, write a cheerful note, draw a funny picture, or do odd jobs for someone who is sick.

Verse for today

Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:30-31. Also read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

November 4

Peter

Acts 3:11-16

God is glorified

The cripple who had been healed was holding on to Peter and John with joy. People rushed from all sides of the Temple porch to see the beggar who had been healed.

When Peter saw the people, he said to them, "Men of Israel, why are you so surprised? Why are you staring at us as if we made this man walk by our own power? It is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who has glorified His servant Jesus. You handed Him over to be killed, but God raised Him from the dead. The man you see here was made strong by faith in the name of Jesus. It is in the name of Jesus that this man was healed."

How can I glorify God?

When we think of God, we think of Him as being awesome and majestic—and He is! One would think that the only way to glorify such a great God is by doing something impressive. Yet, if that were true, those who are not very talented and don't have much to give wouldn't be able to glorify Him. But God notices the small things we do for Him. It is often the things that no one else notices that please God most. Do you remember the woman who gave her last few coins? (Mark 12:41-43).

If ever there was a person who had absolutely nothing to give, it was John the Baptist. Yet, he glorified Jesus by saying: "He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

Whenever you are obedient and allow God to use you, you magnify Him—you make Him greater in the eyes of others. Peter says that we should live such good lives that even unbelievers will see our good deeds and glorify God (1 Peter 2:12). Every time we glorify the Lord by our actions, our words and our songs, we let God and others know that He is truly the Greatest!

Verse for today

I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.

Psalm 86:12

November 5

Peter

Acts 4:1-6, 13-22

Peter and John are threatened

While Peter and John spoke to the crowd that had gathered around them, some Temple officials came to arrest them and put them in jail. Meanwhile, many of those who had heard Peter's message put their trust in Jesus, and the number of believers grew to about five thousand.

The next day, leaders and teachers of the Law gathered in Jerusalem and had Peter and John brought to them. The council of leaders asked Peter and John many questions. "With what kind of power or in whose name did you heal this cripple?" they wanted to know.

Then Peter told them about Jesus whom they had rejected and crucified. The leaders were surprised by the boldness of Peter and John, and were amazed when they found out that they were just ordinary men with little education.

How did Peter, the fisherman, suddenly know so much?

Would you feel nervous if you had to stand in front of everyone at school and speak to them?

Peter wasn't used to speaking to large crowds. In the past, Jesus had done all the teaching and preaching. But now, Jesus wasn't there anymore. In a way, Peter was on his own, yet in another way, Jesus was right there with him. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit to teach them what to say (John 16:12-14).

Three years earlier, Peter had been an ordinary fisherman. Only weeks before, he had denied Jesus. But now, the Holy Spirit was guiding Peter's thoughts as he spoke—and people were absolutely amazed!

You can also speak out for Jesus like Peter did. By reading the Bible and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts, you will know the right thing to say when you tell others about Jesus.

Verse for today

The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. Luke 12:12

November 6

Peter

Acts 4:23-31

The believers' prayer

When the priests and elders realized that they couldn't really punish Peter and John for healing a lame man, they warned them never to speak about Jesus again.

But Peter answered, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

After being warned again, Peter and John were released and returned to the group of believers. When the believers heard about the chief priests' threats, they joined together to pray to God.

"Creator of heaven, earth and sea," they said. "Hear the threats that have been made against us. Let us speak Your message with boldness! Reach down and heal people, we ask, and may there be many wonders and miracles. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Why do we say "in Jesus' name" when we pray?

When we pray in Jesus' name, we pray to God the Father with the support and blessing of His Son. So when we use Jesus' name to end a prayer, we must be sure that Jesus agrees with what we have prayed. We should, therefore, pray with a pure heart that listens to God's Spirit. "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18).

When a king instructs a servant to take charge of something, the servant acts with the king's power and authority. Although he is only a servant, his words are a direct instruction from the king and must be obeyed.

The name of Jesus is the most powerful name in the universe: it is greater than every other name (Philippians 2:9). By praying in the name of Jesus, we—His servants—pray with the power and authority of the King of kings.

Verse for today

... I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive... John 16:23-24

November 7

Peter

Acts 4:32-37

The believers are one

All those who had put their faith in Jesus were united—they believed one message and had one purpose. They shared everything because they realized that what they owned had been given to them by God.

The apostles' message spread all over as they taught the truths they had learned from Jesus and preached about His death and rising again.

Because the believers cared for one another, no one in their group had any needs. Some believers even sold their houses and land, giving the money to the apostles so they could help the needy.

Why is unity in the Church so important?

The believers were one in heart and mind (v32): they had the same faith in their hearts, and the same belief in their minds.

When Jesus was with His disciples, He prayed to the Father for them, saying; "I will no longer remain in the world, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave me, so that they may be one as We are one" (John 17:11).

Jesus prayed that His followers would be one, and God answered that prayer by sending the Holy Spirit to unite all believers. The Holy Spirit brings us together and makes us one in Jesus.

It is only when we are one through our love for Jesus and for each other that we can:

- Help each other grow in our faith (1 Corinthians 14:26)
- Worship and glorify God with one heart (Romans 15:5-6)
- Pray with power (Matthew 18:19)
- Give an offering that is pleasing to God (Matthew 5:23-24)
- Witness for Jesus with the right attitude (Philippians 1:15)
- Do good deeds in a meaningful way (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Verse for today

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:3

November 8

Peter

Acts 5:1-4

The lie

Some new believers were so keen to help the poor that they decided to sell their houses and land and give the money to help the needy.

Ananias and his wife Sapphira also sold some property, but decided to keep some of the money for themselves. Ananias went to the apostles and put the money at their feet.

Then Peter said to him, "Ananias, why have you let Satan take control of you? You have lied to the Holy Spirit by keeping some of the money. Before you sold the property it belonged to you, and even after you sold it, the money was yours. You have not lied to men—you have lied to God."

Is it wrong to pretend?

Do you sometimes play a game where you have to pretend something? God doesn't mind when children (or adults) use their imaginations to pretend things in a fun way. However, it is wrong when you allow people to believe a lie—when you mislead them by keeping quiet or by hiding something from them.

Ananias went to put the money at the apostles' feet—as others had done—pretending that it was all the money he got from selling his land. He could have kept all the money for himself, or put some of it in the offering. But instead, he brought the money to the apostles as if he were giving everything, and by doing this, he acted out a lie.

Giving to God is an act of worship. God is holy, and He wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth (see John 4:24). Ananias dared to lie to the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. The Lord wants us to be honest in *everything* we do; especially in the way we worship Him.

Verse for today

No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence. Psalm 101:7

November 9

Peter

Acts 5:17-20, 33-42

The unstoppable Church

The apostles met in the Temple area and did many miracles. As more and more people became believers, the high priest and others became very jealous. They arrested the apostles and put them in jail.

But during the night, an angel of the Lord came and opened the jail door. He led the apostles out and told them to go and preach the message of a new life in Christ.

When the chief priests heard that Peter and the apostles were preaching in the Temple area, they arrested them again and wanted to kill them. But Gamaliel, one of the religious teachers said, "Don't take action against these men. Remember the two leaders, Theudas and Judas, who had crowds of people following them? Both these men were killed and the crowds that followed them scattered. If what these 'Jesus-followers' believe is not from God, they will scatter too; however, if it is from God, not even you will be able to stop them!"

Can people stop the Church of Jesus from growing?

Gamaliel used examples of two groups whose members had scattered when their leaders were killed. Jesus had also been killed, but He rose again! And His small group of followers was growing by the day.

Since then, the enemies of Jesus (and even some religious people) have tried to stop the Good News from spreading. They have tried to stop people believing in Jesus by killing them and burning their Bibles. Yet, the Church just keeps growing as more and more people get to know Jesus.

Isn't it exciting to be part of this Church that has spread all over the world? It just keeps growing, and it will never end!

Verse for today

*Jesus said, "...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."
Matthew 16:18*

November 10

Peter

Acts 6:1-7

Staying focused

The believers were kind to the poor and needy. Every day they handed out food to widows who didn't have enough to live on. Everything was going well until some widows complained that they were not getting food like the others were. So the apostles got together to see how they could sort out this problem.

"It wouldn't be right for us to get involved in checking that each widow gets her fair share," they said. "If we did that, we wouldn't have time to preach. We should rather choose seven wise men that are filled with the Holy Spirit and give them the task of handing out food. Then the rest of us can get on with praying and with preaching the Word of God."

Everyone was happy with the idea. So they chose seven men and prayed for them as they started their work among the poor.

What is the most important job of the Church?

It would be silly if a team of hockey players got so involved with choosing team colors, displaying trophies, and raising funds, that they didn't have time to practice or play a match.

In the same way, there are many activities happening in the Church. Most of these are good, and—like the feeding program—are blessed by God. However, the apostles realized that they shouldn't get so caught up in running these programs that they wouldn't have time to do what they were supposed to.

The last thing that Jesus said to them was; "Go all over the world and make disciples; teaching them all that I have told you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Telling others about Jesus is still the most important task of the Church, yet each of us can reach someone in a special way when we do the task that God has called us to do!

Verse for today

"...You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

November 11

Peter

Acts 10:9-20

"Surely not, Lord!"

One day, while the midday meal was being prepared in the home where Peter was staying, he went upstairs onto the flat roof of the house to pray. While he was praying, he had a vision—a picture-message from God.

A large sheet came down from the sky. On the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles and birds, which Jews are not allowed to eat. Then he heard a voice say, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat!"

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything unclean like this."

The voice spoke to him again: "Do not call anything unclean that God has made clean." This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering what this vision could mean, some men arrived at the house. They had been sent by Cornelius, a Roman army officer. Immediately, the Spirit said to Peter, "Go with these men, for I have sent them."

Can our religious beliefs keep us from pleasing God?

God wanted Peter to go speak to Cornelius (who wasn't Jewish like Peter was). But Peter had allowed his Jewish belief to shape his thinking and block his understanding of God's plan.

Religious traditions aren't wrong if they remind us of a truth or help us understand a Bible truth better. However, we should be careful of ideas and traditions that keep us from pleasing God.

If you are unsure whether a certain belief is from the Bible or whether it is simply a tradition, ask someone to show you places in the Bible where you can find out more about the topic. Then pray that God will help you understand what you have read.

Remember, always make sure that what you believe agrees with the Bible.

Verse for today

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.
Colossians 2:8*

November 12

Peter

Acts 10:23-35

No favorites in the Church!

The day before Peter's vision, Cornelius, a Roman official, had also seen a vision. In his vision an angel appeared to him and told him to send men to find Peter.

When the men arrived in Joppa, they found Peter and told him that Cornelius wanted to see him. So the next day, Peter and the men left for Caesarea. When they arrived, they found Cornelius and his family and friends waiting patiently.

Then Peter spoke to those who had gathered, saying, "Our Jewish custom does not allow us to enter the house of a Gentile (a person who isn't a Jew). But through a vision, God showed me that He accepts all those who do what is right, no matter what race they belong to."

Does God have favorites?

The Good News of Jesus is for everyone—every person from every race, every class, every belief, and every culture. Yes, God loves every person on this earth (John 3:16). But just because He loves so many millions of people, don't think that God doesn't notice you in the crowd. God loves *you* personally!

Because God made you special, He knows you and loves you in a special way, and He has a special purpose for your life. God loves you with a love that is just for you—as though you were the only person in the universe. Yet God loves every other person that way too, and because He has no favorites, it means that you will never be less important than someone else! God's love is so great that He can love all His children as though each of them was His favorite child.

God also wants us to accept people, and to be kind to all—no matter where they come from, what they look like, or what they believe.

Verse for today

*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.
James 2:1*

November 13

Peter

Acts 10:44-48, 12:1-10

Powerful prayers

While Peter was speaking to those who had gathered in the home of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit came on them. Everyone believed the Word of God and was baptized.

However, as the message of Jesus spread, King Herod started arresting the believers in order to keep the Jews happy. He had Peter arrested and put him in prison with sixteen soldiers to guard him. Meanwhile the other believers gathered to pray for Peter's safety.

During the night, while Peter was sleeping between two guards, suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared next to him. The angel shook Peter and woke him up. "Hurry! Put on your shoes and coat and follow me!" the angel said.

So Peter followed the angel out of the prison cell, past the guards, and up to the huge iron gate leading to the city. Then the iron gate opened by itself. Peter thought he was seeing a vision, but after they had walked down the road the angel disappeared, and Peter knew he was free.

Why is it so important to pray with others?

When the believers got together to pray, God did a mighty miracle. Did everyone expect a miracle? (see Acts 12:12-15). Sometimes, when we pray on our own, our faith seems small. Yet, if God can use faith the size of a little seed, imagine what He can do when a whole lot of believers get together to pray.

We are the body of Christ. He wants us to be joined together in all we do—in worship, in serving Him and in prayer. And so, when we pray in a group, Jesus is right there with us, listening to every word that is prayed (see Matthew 18:20).

When we pray in a group, the Holy Spirit helps us to pray for the same thing in different ways. And by praying together we also encourage each other to have more faith!

Verse for today

(Jesus said,) "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." Matthew 18:19

November 14

Philip

Acts 8:26-35

"Go to the desert!"

One day, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

So Philip went there and saw someone riding along in a chariot (a horse-drawn cart). It was the treasurer of Ethiopia! He had gone to worship in Jerusalem and was on his way home. The Spirit told Philip to go up to the chariot and stay close to it. As he did, he heard the man reading aloud from the book of Isaiah.

"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I understand when there is no one to explain it?" the Ethiopian answered. Then he stopped the chariot and invited Philip to come and sit with him on the chariot.

The Ethiopian had been reading the passage in Isaiah: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before the shearers, so He opened not His mouth."

And so, Philip used that passage to tell him the good news that Jesus, the Lamb of God, died to take away our sin.

How can I reach my friends for Jesus?

Philip had gone to preach in Samaria, where many were turning to God. Even though Philip was being used there in a wonderful way, the Spirit told him to leave the area and go to the desert. This shows how important it is to God to reach the heart of a single person who is ready to receive Him. Here are just some ways God can use you to reach someone:

- Let your life be an example of what it is like to follow Jesus.
- Tell others how Jesus can be their friend too.
- Use the Bible: Philip used Isaiah 53 (v7). You could use verses like these: Sin - Romans 3:23; God's love - John 3:16; Believing in Jesus Romans 10:9; Forgiveness - 1 John 1:9.
- Invite your friend to your church or fellowship group.
- Pray that the Spirit will work in the hearts of your friends.

Verse for today

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

November 15

Philip

Acts 8:36-40

This is the best news!

As Philip and the Ethiopian traveled along the desert road in a chariot, Philip explained the whole message of Jesus to him, starting with God's promise to send us a Savior. Then Philip told him that God had fulfilled this promise by sending Jesus to die in our place. He also told him how Jesus had risen again and commanded His followers to make disciples and baptize them.

As they traveled, they came to a place where there was water. The Ethiopian said to Philip, "Here is water! What is keeping me from being baptized right here?"

The Ethiopian official ordered the chariot to stop. Then he and Philip went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away, and the Ethiopian went on his way with great joy.

Why do people get baptized?

The Ethiopian wanted to be baptized because he believed in Jesus. Philip had told him the Good News of Jesus; about becoming a disciple, being baptized and about learning all that Jesus commanded (see Matthew 28:19-20).

- Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. It shows that the person's life of sin has died (and been buried) and a new life has risen with Jesus. "...Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).
- Baptism is a command. Jesus instructed His disciples to make new disciples (followers of Jesus) and to baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Verse for today

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Galatians 3:26-27

November 16

Barnabas

Acts 4:36, 11:19-24

Son of Encouragement

Barnabas, one of the Levites who served in the Temple, had become a believer. He was from Cyprus, a large island in the Mediterranean Sea. His real name was Joseph, but the disciples named him Barnabas, which means Son of Encouragement.

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem hated the believers and started persecuting them more and more. The believers fled to distant cities, spreading the Good News of Jesus wherever they went. Many who heard their message believed and were saved.

When news of what was happening reached the Church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to encourage the believers in city of Antioch. Barnabas was overjoyed to see the wonderful things God was doing in Antioch and encouraged the believers to stay faithful to the Lord.

How important is the gift of encouragement?

If there's one thing everyone needs, it is encouragement. Life is tough! We all get discouraged and need someone to help us see past the difficult situation we are in; someone who gives us hope, and helps us think positive, helpful thoughts.

Many of the new believers had to change their way of life because they were used to serving heathen gods. Some were rejected by their families and friends, and some lost their jobs. The believers, who were insulted and mistreated, needed someone like Barnabas to renew their hope and courage.

The Spirit has given us different gifts: some prophesy, some enjoy serving, some are able to teach and some have been given the gift of encouragement (see Romans 12:6-8). If you are a positive person who loves to cheer up those who are downhearted, and be a friend to those who feel rejected, you are an encourager like Barnabas!

Verse for today

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
1 Thessalonians 5:11*

November 17

Stephen

Acts 7:54-60, 11:25-26

Christians in Antioch

Stephen, a faithful believer, was one of the men chosen to help give out food to poor widows in Jerusalem. In the same city there were jealous leaders who hated those who followed the Way of Jesus, but Stephen boldly told them about Jesus.

That made the leaders so mad that they dragged him out of the city and killed him.

When the other believers saw what the leaders had done to Stephen, they fled for their lives. Many went to live in far-off places like the city of Antioch where Barnabas was encouraging the Church and teaching them the truths of the Gospel.

It was in Antioch that believers were first called Christians.

How do I become a Christian?

If your parents were born in China and speak Chinese, you could think of yourself as being Chinese. If you were born in Spain, you would be Spanish. If you are born in a Christian country and your parents go to Church, would that make you a Christian?

The believers in Antioch were not born in a Christian country; they were not born in to a Christian family, yet they were Christians. The people in Antioch called them Christians because they believed in Christ and followed in His Way.

You become a Christian when you believe in Jesus—when you tell Him you are sorry for your sins and ask Him to forgive you. Jesus then makes your heart new and sends the Holy Spirit to live in you and help you do what is right. This is God's firm promise; that you are, and will be, His child forever (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Verse for today

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Romans 10:10

November 18

Paul (Saul)

Acts 9:1-9

A voice from heaven

As more and more people heard the message of Jesus and believed, Saul (who hated Christians) asked the high priest for letters to make it easier for him to arrest the Christians in Damascus.

While Saul was on his way to Damascus, a bright light flashed from the sky. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul. Why are you persecuting Me?"

"Who are You, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the voice replied. "Go to the city where you will be shown what to do."

Saul got up from the ground, but he couldn't see a thing. He was completely blind. So the men who were with Saul took him by the hand and led him to the city of Damascus where he spent three days without food and water.

Why do some people hate Christians?

Do you think it would matter to a stranger living in another town that you read your Bible and believe in Jesus?

Why did Saul spend so much time and energy hurting Christians who were just minding their own business? In fact, they were helping poor people, healing the sick, and spreading the Good News of God's love.

These Christians were taking the Light of Jesus into the dark (sinful) parts of the world. Saul's problem was that their message of Light was also showing up the sin and wrong motives in his heart. Jesus said, "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" John 3:20. We should not be surprised when the Light of Jesus, which shines in our lives, shows up the sin in the hearts of unbelievers and makes them feel guilty and angry.

Verse for today

Jesus said, "No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also..." John 15:20

November 19

Paul (Saul)

Acts 9:10-19

Saul—a changed man

Ananias, a believer in Damascus, had a vision in which the Lord said; "Ananias! Get ready and go to the house of Judas in Straight Street and ask for Saul. In a vision, he has seen you placing your hands on him to heal him of his blindness."

Ananias answered, "Lord, many people have told me about this man and about the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. He is coming to Damascus to arrest all those who worship You."

The Lord said to Ananias, "Go, because I have chosen him to serve Me."

So Ananias went to the house where Saul was staying and said to him, "The Lord sent me to you so that you will see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Ananias placed his hands on Saul, and at once he was able to see again. Then Saul got up and was baptized.

How can you tell if someone is a Christian?

Ananias was afraid of Saul—but God had changed Saul's heart. The Bible gives us number of ways that show when someone is a child of God.

Someone who is born again:

- believes that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world (1 John 4:15, 5:1)
- obeys the commandments of God (1 John 2:3)
- follows the example of Jesus (1 John 2:5)
- does not deliberately keep on sinning (1 John 3:9, 5:18-19)
- shows love in practical ways and with a pure motive (1 John 3:18-19, 1 John 3:14, 1 John 4:16)
- has the Spirit of God living in him (1 John 3:24, 4:13)

Verse for today

Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Matthew 7:17, 20

November 20

Paul

Acts 13:1-3, 14:21-28

Paul's first missionary trip

One day, while the believers in Antioch were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set aside Barnabas and Saul for a special job I have for them."

So the believers placed their hands on them and prayed for them. Then Barnabas and Saul (who became known as Paul) went on their way and took John Mark as their helper. The Holy Spirit guided them as they went from place to place. Paul, and his faithful companion Barnabas, preached the message of Jesus, and many were saved.

On their way back, they visited the new believers and encouraged them to stay true to Jesus. They also chose leaders in the new churches and prayed for them.

What is discipleship?

A seed that has not been planted is dead. But when it is buried in the ground and watered, suddenly, there is life! A person who doesn't know Jesus is like a dead seed. But, when he allows Jesus to bury his old life of sin (Romans 6:4) and receives the life-giving water of the Holy Spirit (John 4:13), a new life appears—completely different from before.

Once a seed has sprung to life, it needs to be watered. In the same way, new believers need to be discipled. They need special care until their faith has taken root. As Paul preached the Word, many were born to a new life in Jesus. But, Paul didn't just leave them to struggle on their own. On his way back, he visited the believers to encourage them and strengthen their faith.

- *Evangelism* is telling people the good news of the Gospel (Mark 16:15).
- *Discipleship* is teaching and caring for new believers (Matthew 28:19-20).

Do you have friends whose faith is not that strong yet? Pray for them, visit them, or phone them. Encourage them for Jesus.

Verse for today

The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded...
1 Corinthians 3:8

November 21

Paul

Acts 13:13, 15:36-41

A disagreement

Some time after Paul's first missionary trip, he said to Barnabas, "Let's go back to the towns where we preached, and find out how the new believers are getting along."

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, as they had done on their first missionary trip. But Paul felt it wouldn't be right to take him because he had left them to go back home during their first mission trip.

Paul and Barnabas had a big disagreement about this, so each went their own way. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas to go with him and headed for Syria.

Should Christians always agree about everything?

Can you believe it? Paul and Barnabas arguing? Paul and Barnabas were best friends who were passionate about serving God. Yet, it was probably their enthusiasm that made them feel so strongly. The problem was that on their first missionary trip John Mark had decided that this was not for him (see Acts 13:13).

Paul didn't want a half-hearted quitter tagging along. His goal was to serve the Lord! Paul wanted a helper who was dedicated to the Lord; not someone who would get him sidetracked.

Barnabas, on the other hand, always looked for the best in others. He was the one who helped Paul get started, and had also seen the potential in John Mark. Now John Mark was willing to try again, and Barnabas was willing to give him another chance.

God uses our different gifts and personalities to serve Him in different ways. Paul's firm strength kept him focused, while Barnabas' friendship brought out the best in others. It is not always wrong to disagree with someone, as long as we do what God wants and keep our relationships friendly.

Verse for today

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus...
Colossians 3:17*

November 22

Paul

Acts 16:6-15

Paul's second missionary trip

Paul and Silas set out on the second missionary trip to visit the churches that had started up.

But as they traveled through the province of Asia, the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching there. At one stage they tried to go into the area called Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus stopped them again. So they carried on traveling across the province of Mysia, to the coastal city of Troas.

During the night, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia begging him to come and help them. After Paul had seen the vision, he got ready at once to leave for Macedonia and boarded a ship going to Philippi.

Should I wait for God to guide me before I do good?

Is it okay to tell others about Jesus and do good at any time, or should I wait for Him to tell me what to do?

God has made us in His image and given us the ability to reason—to think things through. The Holy Spirit will use the feeling that inspires us together with what we have learned and believe. The more we are willing to be used, the more opportunities God will make for us to serve Him.

As with Paul, God will sometimes speak to us by putting His thoughts in our minds. We have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). When we are in tune with His Spirit and follow Bible principles, most of what we do should be exactly what God wants.

A ship that isn't moving cannot be steered. Paul didn't sit around waiting for God to point him in the right direction. It was as Paul went out to preach that the Spirit showed him where to go.

It is better to go out and do things that please God than do nothing while you wait for God to give you 'special instructions'.

Verse for today

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10

November 23

Paul

Acts 16:16-28

Paul and Silas in prison

When Paul and Silas were in Philippi, they set a slave girl free from an evil spirit that lived in her. The girl's owners were furious because she had made money for them by telling people what would happen in the future. So they dragged Paul and Silas to the marketplace and had them stripped and beaten. Then they took Paul and Silas and threw them in jail. The jailer—who would be sentenced to death if they escaped—locked them in the inner dungeon and put their feet in wooden clamps.

At about midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises, there was a great earthquake! The prison doors swung open and the prisoners' chains fell off. The jailer—who had been sleeping—was so afraid that he was about to kill himself with his sword. But Paul yelled, "Don't do it! We are all here."

Will praising God change my difficult situation?

From what happened to Paul and Silas, it seems that when we praise God in trying circumstances, He sets us free from our troublesome situation.

Paul and Silas probably had no idea that their praise songs were like a key to their prison cell. The fact that they didn't try to escape shows that they were quite happy to stay in the cell—if that's where God wanted them to be. Their praise songs were bringing glory to God; blessing the other prisoners and helping them to feel the peace and joy of the Lord.

Praising the Lord in faith may well bring a change to your situation because He is such an awesome and powerful God. But even if you are not set free from your troubles straight away, singing praise songs to God will set your *heart* free.

Verse for today

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation... Philippians 4:12b

November 24

Paul

Acts 17:16-18, 22-30

Paul in Athens

When the earthquake struck the prison where Paul and Silas were being held, the terrified jailer asked them what he should do to be saved.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, and your family too," they said. Then Paul and Silas told them about Jesus, and they all believed.

Paul and Silas were released from prison and left Philippi. They traveled to Thessalonica, and on to Berea, preaching in the synagogues. Some listened to them eagerly, while others were jealous and caused so much trouble for them that the believers feared for Paul's life and sent him to Athens. While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, he told the people of Athens about the only true God. Some, who liked discussing new ideas, invited Paul to tell them more.

"I see that you people are very religious," Paul said. "As I walked through your city, I saw the places where you worship and found an altar with the words, 'To an Unknown God' written on it. Well, I know this God: He is the One who made the world and everything in it."

Do all religions worship the same God?

You might have heard someone say, "It doesn't really matter what you believe because all religions worship the same God."

Well, that's what the people in Athens thought. In fact, they weren't quite sure who God is, so they made idols and altars for many different gods. And, just in case they missed one, they even had an altar dedicated to an 'Unknown God'. This gave Paul a chance to tell them about the God they didn't know. "Your imaginary gods are dead," he told them. "There is only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth. And there is one way to be saved—through His Son, Jesus Christ."

Verse for today

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5

November 25

Paul

Acts 18:1-4, 9-17

Paul in Corinth

After preaching in Athens, Paul went to the city of Corinth. There he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, who also made tents for a living like Paul did.

One night, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. "Do not be afraid," He said. "Keep on speaking about Me, for I am with you. No one will attack you or harm you in any way." So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching people the Word of God.

When Gallio became the new governor, a group of Jews arrested Paul and took him to Gallio to be judged. They accused Paul of getting people to worship God in a way that was against their law. But Gallio became impatient with the Jews and said, "This man has not committed a crime. Sort out your own religious problems!"

And with that, Paul was set free. God had kept His promise!

How do I know which promises in the Bible are for me?

The Bible is filled with the promises of God: some were made to the Israelites of the Old Testament, some are for born-again believers and some promises are for everyone.

There are also personal promises, like the promise God made to Paul, to keep him from being harmed. And as we know, God did keep Paul safe while he was in Corinth. Does this mean that the promise God made to Paul has no meaning or value to us?

God's written Word is also His living Word. He uses the Bible to speak to us personally, even though our situation may be quite different from the one in the Bible. That is the way God guides us—and that is what makes the Bibles so useful and exciting. When you ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word, the Holy Spirit makes a verse or passage come 'alive' with meaning—as if it was put there just for you.

Verse for today

For the word of God is living and active. Hebrews 4:12a

November 26

Paul

Acts 21:27-36, 25:9-12

Paul is arrested

From Corinth, Paul sailed across the sea, visiting some of the churches he had started. His long journey ended at the seaside city of Caesarea from where he traveled on land back to Jerusalem.

As usual, Paul went to the Temple, and it wasn't long before some of the Jews from the province of Asia noticed Paul and dragged him out of the Temple. They even tried to kill him, but the Roman soldiers stopped the riot and took Paul to the fort.

About forty Jews met secretly and planned to kill Paul, so the commander of the Roman soldiers sent Paul, guarded by a troop of soldiers, to Felix the governor in Caesarea. There, Paul was put in prison until Felix died two years later and Festus became the new commander. Festus wanted to send Paul back to Jerusalem to be tried by the Jews, but Paul, being a Roman citizen, asked to be tried by the Emperor of Rome instead.

How can I be sure of my faith when others say I am wrong?

How could Paul have been so sure of what he believed when people kept telling him that he was wrong?

Jesus was so real to Paul that it didn't matter to him what others believed. When you are around others who don't believe in Jesus and you wonder if their ideas could be true, remember these few points:

- Talking to Jesus is as real as talking to one of your "unseen" friends on the phone. Ask the Holy Spirit to let you feel the closeness of Jesus.
- Read the Bible, which is the Book of Truth (John 17:17). The more we read the Bible, the stronger our faith becomes.
- Spend time with other Christians. By being around those who love the Lord you will realize that there are many others who believe what you believe.

Verse for today

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

November 27

Paul

Acts 27:1, 7-15, 21-26

A storm at sea

Paul was handed over to an officer and put on a ship sailing to Rome where he was to be tried (judged) by the Emperor.

A strong wind was blowing out at sea, which made sailing slow and rough. Eventually they got to a harbor called Fair Havens where they stayed for some time. The captain and crew didn't want to spend winter at that harbor and were ready to sail out a few days later. But Paul warned them, saying, "Men, it will be dangerous for us to keep sailing. We must stay here!"

But when the wind died down, the captain decided to set sail and head out to sea. However, once they were out at sea, the strong wind started to blow again, so the sailors had to throw cargo overboard to keep the ship from sinking. They lowered the sail and let the wind and waves drive the ship along for two whole weeks.

Will the Holy Spirit warn me of danger?

Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit (not by the wind). He had learned to pray about things and be sensitive to what the Lord was saying to him. He didn't need a weather forecast to know that the ship wouldn't be safe if they left the harbor.

Some people rely on the advice of experts; others look for signs to guide them. Then there are those who simply react to circumstances. In this case, the captain of the ship was the expert—he knew the sea. The signs were good—the wind had died down. The circumstances weren't great—no one wanted to spend winter in that dump of a harbor.

It isn't wrong to ask others for their opinion in order to help you make a sensible decision. But remember, the Holy Spirit also guides you as you read the Bible.

When you need to make an important decision, the Holy Spirit may warn you by giving you an uneasy feeling, or He may give you peace to know that you are doing the right thing.

Verse for today

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. Proverbs 12:15

November 28

Paul

Acts 27:39-28:6

The shipwreck

One night, an angel of the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Don't be afraid, Paul! You will appear before the Emperor of Rome. And because of God's goodness to you, He will also spare the lives of those with you."

The next day, Paul spoke to the men on the ship. "You should have listened to me and stayed in the harbor," he said. "But take heart, although the ship and everything on it will sink, not one of you will drown."

Everyone felt better and had something to eat; then they threw the rest of the food into the sea to lighten the ship.

When daylight came, they saw an island in the distance so they hoisted the sail and headed for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbank and started to break up. Everyone jumped overboard into the rough sea. Some swam ashore while others clung to pieces of wood, until finally, everyone reached the shore, cold and exhausted.

Is it wrong to feel like giving up?

Do you think Paul ever felt like giving up? Do you think it is wrong to feel discouraged? This wasn't the first shipwreck Paul had survived. It didn't seem fair that Paul, who served God with such eagerness, should face so much hardship. Paul actually gives us a list of some of those hardships (see 2 Corinthians 11:24-27).

Feelings are real. We wouldn't be human if we didn't get discouraged. At one point, even the prophet Elijah wanted to give up (1 Kings 19:4). What is important, however, is that we don't allow the feeling of discouragement to control our actions, because then we would probably quit.

Paul realized that, having a goal—and being determined to reach that goal—made the decision to keep going much easier (see Philippians 3:14).

Verse for today

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9

November 29

Paul

Acts 28:11-16, 30-31

Paul, in Rome at last

The people living on the island of Malta—where Paul had been shipwrecked—were kind and helpful. They made a fire on the beach where the survivors could warm themselves, and they also gave them food. After three months, those who had been shipwrecked boarded a ship heading for Rome.

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was allowed to live in a house with a soldier guarding him. Paul lived in the house for two years and welcomed all those who came to see him. Although he was not allowed to leave the house, he was able to preach about the kingdom of God and teach those who came to hear more about Jesus.

Did God really want Paul to spend so many years in prison?

Although the house where Paul lived for two years was guarded day and night, it was a lot better than the other prisons he had been in. Paul had spent many years in prison, not because he had done something wrong, but because he told others about Jesus.

You might think that Paul could have reached many more people if he didn't have to 'waste' those years sitting in jail. But Paul saw it differently, and this is what he said: "Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (Philippians 1:14). Now it was no longer just Paul preaching. Because of his courage and faith, many others started speaking out for Jesus.

And while Paul was in prison, he wasn't just sitting there doing nothing. Because he couldn't get around to visit the churches, he wrote letters to them and to his friends. These letters have become part of the Bible; and now, everyone can read the words of Paul and be blessed by the deeper truths of our faith.

Verse for today

(Paul said), "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains." Colossians 4:3

November 30

Paul

Romans 5:12-15,20, 6:1-4

Paul's letter to the Romans

While Paul was in Corinth, he wrote a letter to the people in Rome. Paul was longing to go to Rome but hadn't been able to get there, so he wrote a letter to the Romans telling them of God's plan to save them from sin.

Paul wrote: Sin came into the world because of Adam's disobedience. Because of one man, Adam, sin and death spread all over the world; but through another man, Jesus, there is forgiveness for everyone.

The Lord gave us laws to help us realize that we can never be perfect, and so, we must turn to Him for forgiveness and help. The more sin there is, the more we realize just how willing God is to accept us. Does that mean we should keep on sinning so that God will keep on showing His kindness? Of course not! How can we keep on sinning if our old sin-nature has died? With our new life in Jesus, God has given us power over sin—the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Is a person who keeps the Ten Commandments sinless?

Have you ever tried to pick yourself up by your shoelaces? Everyone knows that that would be silly because the unseen force of gravity is pulling you down.

Just as our bodies are affected by the law of gravity, our spirits are affected by the law of sin. From the day we are born both these forces pull us down—that is why we fall, and that is why we sin (Romans 7:23). Adam's sin nature has been passed on to every person, even to those who lived before the Commandments were given, like Cain and Abel (Romans 5:13).

God gave us rules to show us that, on our own, we can never be good enough to meet His standard of holiness. Trying to be sinless by keeping every Commandment is like trying to float up into the sky by going on a diet. There is only one way to be sinless, and that is by allowing Jesus to fill us with His goodness (Romans 8:1).

Verse for today

"There is no one righteous, not even one ..." Romans 3:10