

FAITHFUL

with the Gospel

Integrated sermon, kids program,
personal reading and bible study series

27 July – 24 August 2014

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OVERVIEW

In Paul’s letter to the Philippian church he urges them (1:27) to “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”. His great desire (1:28) is that God’s people there may “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel”.

Paul’s words here to the Philippians are at the heart of this five week series. What greater way can we as a church seek to bring glory to God, than strive for these words of Paul to be true of us? This series aims to encourage us all to continue working towards this goal together.

Humanly speaking of course, such goals are unattainable. So please join me in praying that God will empower us here at Trinity Inner South, by His Spirit, to bring glory to Him in our lives and give us unity of spirit as we contend for the faith of the gospel.

Your brother in Christ,



Matt Lehmann

Senior Pastor



FAITHFUL WITH THE GOSPEL

This series aims to encourage us to be faithful to the gospel with our whole lives. There are three aspects to the series: the sermons, the bible studies and the daily reading plan.

SERMON SERIES

The sermon series picks up on the following aspects of faithfulness:

	TITLE	READING 1	READING 2
27 July	Faithful as a community	Eph. 4:1-16	Titus 2:1-10
3 Aug.	Faithful to the message	Acts 10:1- 23	Acts 10:24-48
10 Aug.	Faithful to the Spirit's leading	Acts 8:1-8	Acts 8:26-40
17 Aug.	Faithful in our conversations	1 Peter 3:13-16	Col. 4:2-6
24 Aug.	Faithful in our mindset	1 Cor 9:19-27	1 Cor 10:31-11:1

BIBLE STUDIES

The Bible studies are complementary to the sermons and don't pick up on the sermon text. As such they can be done the week prior or following the sermon.

	TOPIC	PASSAGE
Study 1	Faithful to the message	Acts 2:1-41
Study 2	Faithful with our opportunities	Acts 3:1-26
Study 3	Faithful amongst idolatry	Acts 17:10-34
Study 4	Faithful in adversity	Acts 25:23 - 26:1-32
Study 5	Faithful to the end	Acts 28:11-31

FAITHFUL WITH THE GOSPEL

BIBLE STUDY

Regular Bible study in small groups is a great way to grow as a Christian. If you are able to join one of our small groups and haven't done so yet, please consider it in the next few weeks. Many of our small groups meet weekly with some fortnightly, so perhaps on the other week do the study personally or with a partner or friend.

If you aren't able to make a group, perhaps find someone else who lives near you to go through the studies week each week. If you find it hard to get out, maybe find someone who you can chat through the studies with over the phone. I'm sure you are getting the picture that we think small group Bible study is important and a great blessing.

DAILY READING PLAN

Many of us know we'd benefit from reading the Bible more regularly but find it hard. I've included daily readings from Monday to Friday each week which will get you through all of the book of Acts by the end of the series. Why not commit to trying it for this series? And if you fall behind, don't give up, catch up!

IN OUR KIDS PROGRAMS

This will be a fully integrated series with the kids learning the same main points as the adults. There will be take home cards available from the leaders to help you keep the discussion going through the week.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Old Testament has many books that we would call historical narrative. Aside from the Gospels, which are not typical narrative, the book of Acts is the only book that fits this genre clearly. It is a great document to inform us of the spread of the gospel.

STRUCTURE AND CHRONOLOGY

The book of Acts is essentially Volume 2 that accompanies Luke's Gospel (Volume 1) neatly divided between Jesus' earthly ministry and his heavenly ministry via the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 reveals the structure that shapes the whole book: '... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'.

The narrative centres on Jerusalem and Judea in chapters 1-7; on Samaria in the transitional period in chapters 8-12; and then finally on the Gentile world, beginning in Asia and Europe, and ending up in Rome in chapters 13-28¹.

The chronology of the book of Acts is debated; however David Cook has come up with an excellent guide as follows:

¹ David Cook, *Teaching Acts: Unlocking the book of Acts for the Bible Teacher*, 16.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

TABLE:1 THE CHRONOLOGY OF ACTS ²

A.D	Events in Acts	Reference
c.33	Pentecost	2:1-11
33-34	Stephen's murder > dispersion Paul's conversion and commissioning Paul's period in Arabia	8:1 9:1-19 Gal. 1:17
35	Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem Antioch church established	9:26-28 11:19-21
43/44	James executed	12:1-2
46/47	Paul's second visit to Jerusalem	11:27-30
48	Paul's first missionary journey	Ch. 13-14
49	Council of Jerusalem	15:1-35
49-52	Second missionary journey (Paul in Corinth 50-52)	15:36- 18:22
52-57	Third missionary journey (Paul in Ephesus 52-55)	18:23- 20:38
57	Paul visits Jerusalem	Ch.21-23
57-59	Paul imprisoned in Caesarea	Ch.24-26
59-60	Paul's voyage to Rome	Ch.27-28
65	Death of Paul in Rome	

FOCUS OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

Much like Luke's Gospel, the focus is not primarily on the human characters involved. In Luke we'd love to find out more about how people's lives changed after meeting Jesus, but the focus is on Jesus himself. In the book of Acts we'd love to know more about the Cornelius, the Ethiopian treasurer and so on, but the narrative focuses relentlessly on the advance of the gospel.³

² David Cook, *Teaching Acts: Unlocking the book of Acts for the Bible Teacher*, 16.

³ David Cook, *Teaching Acts: Unlocking the book of Acts for the Bible Teacher*, 23.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

WHY FOCUS ON THE BOOK OF ACTS IN THIS SERIES?

The book of Acts focuses on the spread of the gospel, through God's people, empowered by the Spirit. As part of God's great plan of salvation we see it progress from Jew, to Samaritan and then to the Gentile world.

In the Roman Empire at the time these events happened, religious tolerance was imperative. It was a society rich in varied religious beliefs from Judaism to the Greek gods to the Epicurean life of pleasure and detachment. The Romans were tolerant of all religions as long as there was peace and one didn't affect the other. Such was the Roman commitment to unity that all citizens were required to sacrifice to the gods (including the Emperor).

For the first Christians, this stood at odds with the claims of their Lord Jesus that he alone offered salvation and there was only one true God. The way the apostles conveyed the gospel faithfully in this culture, which is not dissimilar to ours in many ways, is instructive for the church today.

In Acts we see how the ascended Jesus continues to empower his people by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the gospel faithfully in a world opposed to His message. As such, the book of Acts has been a great encouragement to many, and it should be to us too, as we seek to faithfully proclaim the gospel in our culture today.

PERSONAL READING – WEEK 1

Monday 28 July Acts 1

1. Read Luke 1:1-4.
Why did Luke write both the Gospel of Luke and Acts?
2. Read Luke 24:44-53
What links do you see between this passage and Acts 1:1-11?

Tuesday 29 July Acts 2

1. How would you explain to a friend the importance of Jesus being declared both Lord and Christ (verse 26)?
2. Why did the church enjoy favour with the people (verse 47)?

Wednesday 30 July Acts 3 & 4

1. What do we learn about hostility to God here (ch4: 3,17,18,21)?
2. Many get discouraged by the opposition of our society to the Gospel.
How should the apostles' example encourage us?

Thursday 31 July Acts 5

1. Who motivated Ananias here (verse 3) why is this typical of his work?
2. How could we use verses 33-39 in our evangelism today as evidence for Jesus being who he says he is?

Friday 1 August Acts 6

1. How do verses 2-4 help you think about how we should run church today and who we set aside for what ministries?
2. What was the outcome of this wise choice (verse 7)?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 1

PASSAGE: ACTS 2:1-41 FAITHFUL TO THE MESSAGE

1. To be a good messenger you need to know who to deliver the message to and deliver the message accurately, not leaving anything out. In what ways do we sometimes leave bits out of the gospel message?
2. Read Acts 2:1-21
3. We often are fascinated by Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, but this one (verses 17-21) from Joel 2:28-32 prophesies the outpouring of the Spirit. What do we gain by showing non-believers that Jesus' death on the cross and the outpouring of the Spirit are all part of God's predetermined plan?
4. This event at Pentecost ushers in a new era in God's unfolding plan (that we are still in today). What does verse 21 say is the great part of living in this time and how would you explain it to a friend?
5. Read Acts 2:22-23 and John 20:31
6. What was the purpose of Jesus' miracles?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 1

7. How, some 2000 years later, can we use Jesus' miracles to help people believe that he truly is the Son of God?

8. Read Acts 2:24-36
9. Many of your friends and colleagues may know you are a Christian. How many do you think would know that you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that you think he is alive today. What evidence would you give to support this?

10. How would you explain what it means for you personally that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (verse 36)?

11. Read Acts 2:37-41
12. Peter's message was not just for the crowd that day but for all generations. How would you explain the response needed to the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for us?

13. How then would you summarise the main parts of the gospel message as presented to us in Acts 2?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 1

14. Our audience is very different from Peter's audience, who were Jewish, familiar with the Old Testament and were hearing from eye witnesses to Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Our job in spreading the good news seems a little harder. What should comfort and reassure us as we seek to share the good news?

15. Read John 15:26-27 & 16:8-11

NOTE: Jesus is speaking to his disciples here and we haven't been with Jesus from the beginning' like them. Other than that, we know that the Spirit still bears witness as we bear witness (v.26). In 16:8-11 we see it is the Spirit's role to convict people of sin and the righteousness available from Jesus now that we can't see him or speak to eyewitnesses and of the coming judgement.

16. What comfort should we derive from the fact that God has poured out the Holy Spirit into us to enable us to be his messengers; and secondly the Holy Spirit also convicts people regarding sin and the righteousness available through Jesus?

PRAY: Praise God for giving us the Holy Spirit, ask that we would be sensitive to His leading in, and empowerment for, sharing the good news. Pray that we would be faithful messengers and know that it is God's part to convict people of sin and righteousness.

PERSONAL READING – WEEK 2

Monday 4 August

Acts 7

1. Can God’s messengers expect safety and protection?
2. Stephen’s vision of God would have been extremely comforting. What should we take from verses 55-56?

Tuesday 5 August

Acts 8

1. Do you think God still ensures “divine intersections” between unbelievers and Christians today?
2. What can we do to be prepared and faithful when such events occur?

Wednesday 6 August

Acts 9

1. What encouragement is this to the persecuted church?
2. Read ahead in Acts 22:1-22 and 26:12-29 to see how Paul uses his testimony to great effect. How can we use ours?

Thursday 7 August

Acts 10 & 11

1. What reputation did Cornelius have (10:1-2). Do you think we overlook the need to share the gospel with such people?
2. How is this a turning point in the book of Acts?

Friday 8 August

Acts 12

1. Why do you think Peter was miraculously rescued here but James was not?
2. How does verse 24 sum up Luke’s focus in the book of Acts?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 2

PASSAGE: ACTS 3:1-26 FAITHFUL WITH OUR OPPORTUNITIES

1. What everyday opportunities have you had in the past that turned out to be good times to share something about Jesus?

2. Read Acts 3:1-26
3. Have you come across any examples of healings or other miraculous events which gave opportunities to evangelise?

NOTE: There are two basic positions on whether or not such miracles still occur today to aid evangelism. At one extreme, some consider them vital and say that if they are missing we perhaps don't have enough faith. At the other extreme, some say definitely not they ceased after the time of the apostles. Like many things, I think the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. There was something special about the time of the apostles and miracles attested to both Jesus divinity and the apostle's message. As such, we should not be disappointed if we have never seen a miracle or healing. Yet from personal experience and the testimony of others, it does seem God still chooses to act in ways we would call miraculous. Of course these are great opportunities to use to proclaim the gospel. We should trust that the Holy Spirit knows best and will always work to further the gospel, so let God do his thing and we can simply focus on being faithful messengers trusting in the Spirit.

4. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
5. What comfort should we take from this today?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 2

6. Why do you think it's important to be aware of the Holy Spirit's work in evangelism? Discuss times where you've been aware of the Spirit's work in the lives of unbelievers preparing them to hear the good news of Jesus. How did you recognise it?

7. How do you think we can take the initiative in bringing about gospel conversations in everyday life?

8. When Peter did get the chance to speak, what did he focus on (i.e. how was he a faithful messenger)?

9. Like last week, we have to acknowledge that our audience is vastly different from the one Peter was speaking to. How could we explain these points to friends and colleagues?

10. Read Hebrews 4:12-13
11. How should we use God's word today in evangelism?

PRAY: For opportunities to share the gospel, the Spirit's guidance and the ability to faithfully take opportunities.

PERSONAL READING – WEEK 3

Monday 11 August Acts 13

1. How does ch.13 mark a turning point in God’s unfolding plan?
2. Opposition to the gospel is inevitable. What should the marks of a faithful messenger be? Which of them can you see in ch.13?

Tuesday 12 August Acts 14

1. How do we see Paul using great cross-cultural sensitivity in his short message in verses 14-18?
2. How do verses 8-23 show us how quickly people can be persuaded for good or evil? Was there lasting fruit in Lystra?

Wednesday 13 August Acts 15

1. In verses 1-5, what is the issue at stake? Why is it so important?
2. In what ways is the authentic gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, challenged today?

Thursday 14 August Acts 16

1. Given the debate in ch.15 does Paul’s decision to circumcise Timothy seem odd to you? Why might Paul have done this?
2. How is Paul’s bad reception used to produce a convert?

Friday 15 August Acts 17

1. How does Paul connect with his audience in verses 22-23?
2. Paul doesn’t give a standard “two ways to live” presentation of the gospel here. What are the key points he uses?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 3

PASSAGE: ACTS 17:16-34

FAITHFUL AMONGST IDOLATRY

1. Read Acts 17:16-21
2. As Paul walked around Athens, the people’s search “for the God’s” was plainly evident by their idols and statues. In what way do you think it is evident in our society that many still seek something more than the scientific explanation of life?
3. Paul was deeply grieved by what he saw as he explored Athens and saw the idolatry and how it influenced people to lead their lives. What aspects of our society’s “idolatry”⁴ grieve you? Do you think we grieve enough for our society’s sin?
4. What things are part of our lives that ‘numb’ our appropriate reaction to our society’s idolatry (e.g. t.v. shows that normalise sexual promiscuity⁵)?
5. What was Paul’s response to this idolatry?

⁴ To work out what we idolise, think what our society tells us bring fulfilment.

For example: number of sexual partners, possessions and so on you can make quite a long list!!

⁵ I’m not on a moral crusade here, but it is good to at least be aware, as an example, that some of our favourite shows can numb us to sin in this way.

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 3

6. We don't know all that Paul said to all of these people, but what does verse 18 say was the focus of his discussion?

7. How do you think we go at convincing people that what we have to say to them is "good news"? How might we do better at presenting it in this way?

8. Read Acts 22-34

9. We have moved in Acts from the gospel being presented to Jews, to it now being presented to Gentiles. How does the message change and how does Paul draw people in?

10. How can we draw people in with world events and illustrations from modern culture to help us share the gospel?

11. While the message changes slightly, what does Paul include in his gospel presentation? Do we need to share all the main points of the gospel in one encounter?

PRAY: For the Spirit's guidance in sharing an unchanging 'good news' message in an ever changing culture.

PERSONAL READING – WEEK 4

Monday 18 August Acts 18

1. What reassurance does God give Paul here in v. 9-10? What does this tell us about the sovereignty of God in salvation?
2. How should this encourage us as we face opposition?

Tuesday 19 August Acts 19

1. Ephesus became a key church in the province, yet less than 40 years later Revelation 2:4 is written about them. Read Rev 2:4 and think how we may be in danger of this, how we can avoid it and how we can remain faithful to the gospel.

Wednesday 20 August Acts 20

1. How does verse 24 summarise a faithful life?
2. What is one of the roles of being a faithful shepherd of God's people (verses 28-29)? How can we support them in this role?

Thursday 21 August Acts 21 & 22

1. Is Paul compromising himself here in verses 21-26? What principles may have guided him here?
2. How might you use your testimony like Paul does in chapter 22?

Friday 22 August Acts 23

1. How does verse 11 show God sovereignly guiding the proclamation of the gospel?
2. It was encouraging to Paul. How should it encourage us?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 4

PASSAGE: ACTS 25:23 – 26:32 FAITHFUL IN ADVERSITY

1. If you were buying a new car, how much weight would you put on the salesman's pitch, and how much on the testimony of someone who had owned the car for a few years?

NOTE: Personal testimony can be extremely powerful, with cars and in sharing the gospel. This passage records one of the greatest testimonies in the history of the church, which is given amidst great adversity.

2. Read Acts 25:23 – 26:32. It's long but great. To make more impact try reading it in parts (i.e. someone in the group is a narrator, someone Paul, someone Festus etc.)
3. In verse 8 what does Paul say is the reason he is on trial?
4. How would you describe your hope in Jesus? How could you use it to spark interest (or opposition like Paul) in the gospel?
5. In verse 9 Paul describes the dramatic change knowing Jesus has made to him. Not all of us have such dramatic testimonies, but how can we use the same approach?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 4

6. Scanning through Paul’s testimony here, what are some of the statements that would spark interest or offence (verse 8, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23 and maybe more)?

7. Derek Prime writes of this passage:

“Paul described his Christian experience as he obeyed the risen Lord. Giving an account of his obedience provided scope to preach the gospel to his hearers by telling them what he said to others! Besides outlining what had happened to him in the past, Paul testified to God’s continual help – ‘to this very day’. Testimony lacks freshness and spontaneity if it is not up-to-date. What I say about what the Lord Jesus has done for me in the past only rings true if it is plain that He is everything to me now”⁶

8. Discuss this quote. Do you think it is something you can include in your testimony? How would you describe it?

9. Read Mark 13:9-11, how should understanding the Spirit’s role encourage us as we testify?

10. Read Acts 26:28-29 and pray.

⁶ Derek Prime, *Active Evangelism: Putting the evangelism of Acts into practice*, 151.

PERSONAL READING – WEEK 5

Monday 25 August Acts 24

1. What does Paul see is the issue at hand (verse 21)?
2. How much do you think our testimony about Jesus relies on the resurrection? Does it feature when you share the gospel?

Tuesday 26 August Acts 25

1. Given Paul's threefold declaration of innocence and that no charges had been proved, why might he appeal to Caesar?
2. Read Romans 15:22-33. How does God answer this prayer?
3. How should we pray for our role in the spread of the gospel?

Wednesday 27 August Acts 26

1. How does Paul yet again use his testimony to great effect?
2. Read verses 28-29 again. How would you reply to someone who questioned your efforts to share the gospel with them?

Thursday 28 August Acts 27

1. How would you contrast Paul's and Jonah's faithfulness to God's word & their seeking to do the work ordained for them?
2. What promises has God made to us that sustain us in our trials?

Friday 29 August Acts 28

1. How has Paul been a faithful testifier to the gospel in Acts?
2. What encouragement can we take from this today?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:56-58 and pray for your faithfulness.

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 5

PASSAGE: ACTS 28:11-31 FAITHFUL TO THE END

1. At funerals people often speak from our family life, our work life and for Christians, our church life. What would you like said about how you lived out your faith in Jesus until the end?
2. Read Acts 28:11-31
3. How does this final account of Paul's ministry see him seizing opportunities for the gospel in unlikely circumstances?
4. In verse 17 we see Paul prioritising meeting Jewish leaders and sowing seeds in their minds about the gospel. Should we be strategic in seeking gospel opportunities with certain people?
5. For Paul at least, the strategy worked and even greater numbers came back to hear a full explanation of the gospel. What was the result of Paul's day-long efforts?
6. In our first study (question 12) we saw that part of proclaiming the gospel is calling people to a decision about Jesus.
Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-25. How should this encourage us?

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 5

7. Read Acts 28:30-31 again
8. How important would Paul's welcoming of those who wanted to hear about Jesus have been? How important is it for inquirers about Jesus to feel warmly welcomed in our homes or church? How might we seek to do it better?
9. Coming to the end of Acts, most of us would have found Paul's persistence under various trials exhausting and expected him to give up long ago. What do you think is the key to Paul's perseverance?

Alternatively, what truths has God revealed to us about the state of the world for those who don't know Jesus that should motivate us to persevere?

10. Derek Prime writes in concluding his excellent book on Acts⁷:

"I must admit, too, that it is possible to be discouraged from witnessing because of the lack of evangelistic enthusiasm on the part of other Christians. An evangelistic concern for other people's spiritual wellbeing is not all that common. But we may best help change the situation by the stimulus of example. We give a lead not by lecturing others, but by showing a concern for people, and sharing it naturally with fellow Christians. What steps can we take to overcome these fears?"

⁷ Derek Prime, *Active Evangelism: Putting the evangelism of Acts into practice*, 168.

BIBLE STUDY – WEEK 5

Here are five basic ones:

- Be yourself
- Commit each day to God
- Let things happen as God chooses, being prepared to ditch your prearranged programme for the day if need be.
- Do not feel that you have to explain every aspect of the gospel the first time you speak to someone.
- Live the Christian life! As you do so, more often than not the people for whom you pray will start to ask questions that will allow you to share the Lord Jesus with them.

11. One of God’s great gifts of encouragement is one another. How as a small group can you be a blessing to each other as you seek to share the good news of Jesus?

12. From this series how would you summarise God’s role in evangelism, and ours? How has this been an encouragement to you?

PRAY: Acknowledge that God doesn’t need us to accomplish anything in this world, including saving people. Pray, however, that we might be faithful with the gospel in all of our lives. Pray that God may bless and encourage us by bringing many people into his family through the faithful actions of our community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cook, David. *Teaching Acts: Unlocking the book of Acts for the Bible Teacher*. Edited by David Jackman and Robyn Sydserff. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publication Ltd. 2007.

Prime, Derek. *Active Evangelism: Putting the evangelism of Acts into practice*. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publication Ltd. 2003.

Other great books that I haven't quoted from but found extremely useful and would recommend as library additions are:

Dever, Mark E. *The gospel and personal evangelism*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007

Dickson, John. *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010

FEEDBACK

I'd really appreciate feedback on the series, how helpful you found it and any suggestions for improvement. If you are able please send any feedback via email to: matt.lehmann@trinityinnersouth.org.au

Feedback on each aspect of the series would be helpful:

SERMONS

1. Do you think they were faithful to God's word?
2. How engaging were they?
3. Did you feel they were applicable to your life?

BOOKLET

1. How helpful were the daily readings and questions?
2. Were the studies helpful?
3. Would you use them again if they were produced in future?

OVERALL

1. Did the series help you grow in your relationship with God?
2. Do you have a better understanding of how you personally and we as a community can be faithful with the gospel?

Any other comments you have would be welcome.

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