

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

HOW ONE MAN CHANGED THE WORLD

Lesson 14

villagebible.church/unstoppable

DEVOTIONAL

If you know Christ as Savior and Lord, you desire to have God use you to make a difference for Him in the world. Last week I reread part of the story of Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to China, and I thought, “The huge country of China is different today, 100 years later, because of Hudson Taylor’s vision and commitment to take the gospel to that land.”

Then the convicting question hit me, “Will Flagstaff be any different because I have lived and labored for Christ here?” To be honest, I’m not sure that I have a satisfying answer to that question yet! But my heartfelt prayer is that God would so use me that this part of the world would be changed for His glory because I lived here.

The apostle Paul changed the world as few other men have ever done. He lived in a day before jet airplanes or cars and paved highways. He had to go everywhere by foot, on donkeys, or by sailing vessel, none of which were very speedy. He did not have a telephone to call and talk with the leaders of churches that he had founded around the Roman Empire. He couldn’t even call someone across town. If he wanted to see the person, he had to walk across town and hope to find him at home. He didn’t have computers, email, copy machines, or other modern tools that make communication easier. He spent many years of his ministry in prison, unable to move about freely. He contended with fierce opposition both from outside and inside the church. And yet, after 25–30 years of ministry, he left a lasting impact on the world, not only in his time, but also for all times.

How did he do it? Much of it must be explained as God’s sovereign working through this man. As Paul taught, God has allotted to each of us various gifts and measures of faith (Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12). Thus, even if we’re all faithful to the Lord, we will experience differing results in our ministries. It would be wrong to condemn ourselves because we don’t see the same results that Paul or Hudson Taylor saw. But we can learn from the apostle the biblical principles that governed his ministry and seek to apply them to our own lives, whatever gifts and calling God may have given us.

I am convinced that at the heart of Paul’s strategy was his unswerving commitment to establish and strengthen local churches.

Paul changed the world through his commitment to establish and strengthen local churches.¹

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-50-how-one-man-changed-world-acts-201-16>

OPEN IT

1. Who is someone outside of your immediate family that has been influential in your life? What have you learned from them and how has it helped?

READ IT

Acts 20:1-16

Use this map² as a guide as you follow in Paul's footsteps:



EXPLORE IT

2. What did Paul do before he left for Macedonia?

²Map by Understand Christianity which also includes an interactive map and can be found @ <https://www.understandchristianity.com/timelines/pauls-third-missionary-journey/>

3. **Why did Paul not sail to Syria?**

4. **What did the disciples do on the first day of the week?**

5. **What event happened as Paul was preaching in Troas?**

6. **Where was Paul in a hurry to get to at the end of our passage?**

APPLY IT

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Our text for this study reads like some of the obscure passages that we frequented in Exodus and in Leviticus. “Details, details” might be an apt summary. It reads like a travelogue of the missionary Paul. These verses mention lots of places, modes of transport, individuals (at least eight), activities, etc. And while the details may be of some geographic interest, nevertheless the matters, except for vv. 7–12, appear pretty mundane—somewhat blasé. Yes, these are mundane matters, but I trust that we will see that the mundane matters.

In fact, I would argue that it is in the mundane that our character is really revealed, rather than in the exceptional matters of life. For instance, a careful examination of this text reveals many aspects of Paul’s person—manifestations of his character in the midst of the mundane. We see, for example, that Paul was concerned for others and burdened for them. He was busy, focused, devoted and tireless. He was passionately single-minded. He was a leader, decisive, fearless, courageous and indomitable. He was a mentor, a disciple and an encourager. And there is no doubt much more we can learn about Paul from this text. We are told that the devil is in the details. I would suggest that God is in the details. God orchestrates the mundane and uses it to fulfil His purposes and to accomplish our ministry. This is certainly the case here.

7. **What can we learn about Paul’s life and ministry from Luke’s description in the first 6 verses of the chapter?**

8. **Luke records what seems to be an average day account of Paul and his travels. Share with your group what your average day looks like from morning till evening.**

Paul shares with the Corinthians how he was feeling as he left Ephesus after the riot in Acts 19.

1 Corinthians 15:30–32

*And why should I live a life of such hourly danger? I assure you, by the certainty of Jesus Christ that we possess, that I face death every day of my life! And if, to use the popular expression, I have “fought with wild beasts” here in Ephesus, what is the good of an ordeal like that if there is no life after this one?*³

2 Corinthians 1:8–11

*We should like you, our brothers, to know something of what we went through in Asia. At that time we were completely overwhelmed, the burden was more than we could bear, in fact we told ourselves that this was the end. Yet we believe now that we had this experience of coming to the end of our tether that we might learn to trust, not in ourselves, but in God who can raise the dead. It was God who preserved us from imminent death, and it is he who still preserves us. Further, we trust him to keep us safe in the future, and here you can join in and help by praying for us, so that the good that is done to us in answer to many prayers will mean eventually that many will thank God for our preservation.*⁴

9. Luke tells us that though Paul was distressed and burdened, he remained engaged in Christian ministry as well as fellowship with others as he traveled from city to city. Why is it important to remain engaged with others when the world seems to be against you? Why do so many people have the tendency to withdraw during those times?

10. Twice we see that Paul was encouraging others as he visited with them. Who has been an encouragement to you in the recent past? What did they do or say that was such an encouragement?

He encouraged them (Acts 20:2). “Encouragement” in Greek is persuasion, cheer, and comfort. Paul lifted their spirits in the face of the persecutions and pressures and gave them solid reasons to keep on believing.⁵

11. How are you returning the favor of encouragement to those around you? Why is it important to be encouraging even when our circumstances are less than ideal, as was the case for Paul?

³ *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B Phillips copyright © 1960, 1972 J. B. Phillips. Administered by The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England. Used by Permission.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 4377–4379). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

THERE IS NO “I” IN TEAM

The early church practiced the principle of spiritual teamwork that Jesus had taught his disciples. Paul never traveled alone. At least eight men made the trip to Jerusalem with him:

- **Sopater**—Alias: Sosipater. Home church: Berea. Paul’s relative (see Romans 16:21).
- **Aristarchus**—Home church: Thessalonica. Paul’s coworker (see Acts 19:29). Was with him in prison and on the voyage to Rome (see Acts 27:2).
- **Secundus**—Home: Thessalonica.
- **Gaius**—Home church: Derbe. Probably became a Christian when Barnabas and Paul first visited there (see Acts 14:20–21).
- **Timothy**—Home church: Lystra (see Acts 16:1). Paul’s spiritual “son” (see 1 Timothy 1:2). Permanent member of Paul’s team.
- **Tychicus**—Home: Asia province. Carried messages from Paul to the churches (see Ephesians 6:21–22; Colossians 4:7–8).
- **Trophimus**—Home: Asia. Focus of controversy in Jerusalem that led to Paul’s arrest (see Acts 21:29).
- **Luke**—His presence is revealed by references to “us” and “we” (Acts 20:5–6).⁶

12. Paul was regularly surrounded by a community of people and often lamented when he was alone. Why is it so important for even the most gifted of Christians to be involved in Christian community?

One of Paul’s recurring themes is the unity of the body of Christ, made up of members with diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:13–22; 4:1–16; Colossians 3:11). As you know, Jesus prayed that His followers, including those who would believe through the witness of the apostles, would be one, “so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20–21). It is essential that we affirm our fellow believers in Christ, whether they belong to our denomination or not. If they truly know Christ as Savior and Lord, we are one, and we must demonstrate our unity by our love. We sin if we wrongly divide from fellow Christians over minor doctrinal issues or personal preferences.⁷

13. How does our working side by side with other Christians help people believe in Jesus? What types of problems can develop because of our diversity or differences?

How can we alleviate these problems before they cause division?

⁶ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 4401–4406). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-50-how-one-man-changed-world-acts-201-16>

CH**CH: What Missing? UR

Importantly, these believers made the effort to honour the Lord's Day even though it was not culturally accepted or even appropriate. Remember, Sunday was a regular working day in these early days of the new covenant. Saturday was still the accepted Sabbath, but even though these disciples had worked all day, they still chose to gather after work for Lord's Day worship.⁸

14. Years ago, Sundays were viewed as off limits and left for worship and other church activities. What things that are vying for people's time today can impact corporate worship and other church activities? Are there any positive or negative outcomes to this societal trend?

Luke's record of this visit gives a rare glimpse of a regular early church meeting. It looks more like a family gathering than a formal "worship service." That's as it should be. After all, Jesus promised His followers more than to be part of an audience. He said they'd have a family—brothers and sisters, parents and children (see Mark 10:29–30). In the face of life's pressures, only a family can meet the Christian's need for support.

- They met on Sunday. This is the first New Testament reference to the first day as the regular meeting time for Christians.
- They ate together. Early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) as part of a potluck meal (love feast).
- They met at night. This was probably to accommodate slaves who could only come when the day's work was done.
- They met three floors up (Acts 20:9). Early church meetings were held in the homes of members. Wealthy homes often had a third-story loft. Many people also lived in three-story concrete tenements in which poorer families occupied the third floor.
- The length of the meeting was not regulated by the clock (Acts 20:7, 11). More important issues were in focus.⁹

15. It is common today for churches to say that they are following the early church model when it comes to being a church in the 21st century. After seeing how Luke describes the church life in Acts (see also Acts 2:42–48; 4:32–37), how does your church square up with Luke's description of Sundays in Acts?

⁸ Sermon by Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/the-mundane-matters/>

⁹ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 4435–4447). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

MOM, “IS HE ALMOST DONE???”

Young Eutychus may have put in a hard day’s work before coming to the meeting. The place was lit with smoky oil lamps (Acts 20:8). The atmosphere was stuffy. Sometime after midnight, Eutychus fell asleep and fell out the window! He landed on the stone pavement three stories down! Dr. Luke may be the one who pronounced him dead.¹⁰

16. While we shouldn’t be too hard on this young kid, this experience gives us some food for thought. How often do you find yourself fighting to stay engaged or even awake during Sunday services? What, if anything, might this say about the service, and what might this sleepiness say about you?

17. What things can we do so that we are alert and ready to fully participate in corporate worship?

18. In order to alleviate modern-day Eutychus syndrome, churches have employed all manner of whizbang to keep people entertained. Is there value in such an approach, or should it be avoided at all costs? Explain your answer.

19. The scene that night must have been hard to forget. Boy falls three stories and dies during a church service and then is raised from death to life. Not a good Sunday to miss!!! What is the craziest event that has happened during a church service, and when have you seen God do something miraculous during a time of corporate worship?

¹⁰ Ibid.

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups