

DISCUSS

A lot of us have expectations for how our lives will go, particularly when we are following Jesus. We think that if we are following God's plan, fulfilling his purpose for us, that life will be easy sailing. But in these last two chapters of Acts, when Paul was doing exactly what God called him to do, things continually went wrong. Read Acts 27:1–8, 21–26, and 28:1–3.

How would you describe Paul's road to Rome?

Paul wanted to go to Rome and Jesus had confirmed this goal in a dream (Acts 19:21; 23:11). By all accounts, Paul was going in the right direction, but his road was anything but easy. Slow travel, poor decision-making, and stormy seas turned his simple path into a winding, difficult journey. In the same way, following Jesus will not always be an easy road. At times, there will be roadblocks and hindrances to get where God wants us to go.

What challenges do you feel are keeping you from reaching your God-given potential?

Louie shared the story of his friends, Jay and Katherine Wolf, whose lives took a detour after Katherine suffered a stroke at a young age. But the Wolfs did not view the effects of the stroke on Katherine as a punishment or God failing them, rather they saw it as a God-given platform to fulfill his mission in their own lives. **In what ways could the detours in your own life be God's assignment to fulfill his mission through you?**

Louie said, "Your detour is for someone else's deliverance." The detours in our life can make us hyper-focused on ourselves and our own problems, but God might use your detour to bring more people to salvation.

What makes it hard to believe that your detour could help someone else believe in Jesus?

Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, but his detour took him to Malta. God detoured Paul so that people could be healed and know the name of Jesus. **What new opportunities has a detour in your life given you to serve others or introduce someone to Jesus?**

God may change your path without changing your final destination. It may be more difficult or entirely different than you imagined. **What could it look like to hold your expectations for your path loosely?**

Would you say that Paul's mission to Rome was a success or a failure? Why?

In what ways was Paul doing exactly what God called him to do in Rome?

When we look at Paul's life and ministry, we realize that God's mission will often bring us into difficult circumstances. Paul was rejected by his countrymen, run out of cities, imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, snake-bitten, and attacked by angry mobs. **In what ways does Paul's example change the way you see the hurdles to God's mission in your own life?**

House arrest may have stopped Paul's missionary travels, but it did not stop the spread of the gospel. In the video, Louie pointed out that Paul penned the books known as the Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—while he was in the Roman prison. God can work through any circumstance. **In what ways is God working through your current circumstances?**

What could it look like to trust God, even when you don't understand where he is leading you?

Acts ends with Paul in a prison cell. But the story of the church did not end shackled in Rome. The living story of Acts is now being written through us. **Who handed you the baton of faith? Who might you hand that baton off to or welcome into the work you are already doing?**

Note: To examine Paul's final thoughts on his life and ministry, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

We have reached the end of The Acts of the Apostles. Take a moment to think back over the last eight sessions and your own time reading the book of Acts.

What have you learned about the mission of God and your place in it?

In what ways has your perspective of your current circumstances changed while reading Acts?

As you leave this study, what specific acts of faithfulness will you practice to help build and establish God's church?

What if God had a different plan for your life? What would you think or feel if you never accomplished your goals?

Whether our goals are personally fulfilling or aimed at furthering the mission of God, we may not reach our goals in the ways we expect. Read Psalm 16:1–3, 9.

What could it look like for you to hand over your plans to the Lord?

How could you be open to God’s timing and direction as you seek to reach your goals?

2. Discovering Your Purpose

One of the most pressing questions in our lives is “What is my purpose?” We often find ourselves asking that question when we are at a crossroads or are dissatisfied with life. But trying to figure out our purpose is difficult because, in many ways, we are trying to understand the arc of our life’s story while we are still in the middle of it. But you don’t need to understand the full story before you know your next step.

What are you passionate about?

What unique gifts has God given you? Is there something that comes easy to you that is a struggle for other people?

What brings you joy or helps you recognize the beauty and brilliance of God in your own life?

In the video for this session, Louie reminded us that no one is inconsequential to God’s plan. You don’t have to be in ministry to minister to the world through your life. Review your answers to the questions above. **What is the intersection between your passion, your gifts, and your God-focused joy?**

It is shockingly easy to use our gifts in prideful ways, but God calls us to give our lives to others. Read Philippians 2:3–7. **In what ways could selfish ambition and vanity creep into your passion and gifts?**

What could it look like to use your gifts and passions to treat others as better than yourself?

In what ways could God work through your gifts and passions to further his mission?

It is helpful to think of your big dreams and goals, but instead of getting caught up in thinking about where you want to be in ten or fifteen years, think about your next step. **What can you do today or tomorrow to explore God's greater purpose for your life?**

3. Paul's Final Word

What is a successful life? That feels like an enormous question, especially in our culture, which is driven by the hope of personal success. No matter your stage of life or income level, every one of us has an image of what success looks like. **What do you think it takes to be successful? What would change in your life if you achieved your definition of success?**

Paul accomplished more in his life than most of us could dream to achieve. He was a leader of the church, gifted theologian, prolific evangelist, and he stood before kings and emperors. You couldn't count the lives he influenced across the dozens of cities he preached in. But in the end, none of his "success" mattered to him. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8. **What seem to have mattered most to Paul when he looked back on his life?**

Paul was faithful to God, and in the end that was all that mattered. In 2 Timothy 2:3-6, Paul illustrates his faithfulness to the dedication of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Take a moment to examine each analogy.

In what ways was Paul faithful in his fight (like a soldier)?

In what ways was Paul faithful his race (like an athlete)?

In what ways did Paul keep his faith (like a farmer)?

Like a soldier, Paul served and suffered. Like an athlete, he trained and competed obediently in God's mission. Like a farmer, he sowed seeds of the gospel and waited in faith for a spiritual harvest.

Success for Christians is not wrapped up in our income, our achievements, our influence, or our individuality. Success in God's economy is all about faithfulness to Jesus and his mission. **What would change in your life if you defined "success" as faithfulness?**

If success is gauged by our faithfulness, your worth is not defined by the changing standards of our culture.

You can be truly successful in any circumstance with any level of income or influence. You can be successful right now! **What would it look like for you to be faithful in your current circumstances, even if you aren't successful by our cultural standards?**

4. Acts 27–28 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's word.

This week, use this reading guide to examine the final chapters of Acts.

Day 1: Paul Sets Sail (Acts 27:1–38)

Day 2: Shipwrecks and Snake Bites (Acts 27:39–28:10)

Day 3: Paul Reaches Rome (Acts 28:11–16)

Day 4: Paul's Evangelism in Rome (28:17–28)

Day 5: Paul's Life in Rome (Acts 28:30–31)