

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

November 2, 2025

If you are new to Bethel Life Center or new to the Bible, we are going through the book of Acts. The book of Acts is the 5th book of the New Testament, and it tells us how the life of Christ is being lived out in the life of Jesus followers. We are in Acts 17.

You will be different in the next 5 years because of the books you read and the people you align with. The most important book you will read or listen to as an audio is God's word.

This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book.

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great **eagerness** and **examined** the Scriptures **every day** to see if what Paul said was true. ¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. (Acts 17-NIV)

Everyone is religious – even those who pretend not to be. Again, everyone is religious. All people worship something. Some people worship a pot-bellied statue of an Eastern philosopher. Some worship a sports figure, a river, a mountain, science, success, pleasure, or even the person in the mirror.

People will sacrifice for that which they worship. They ascribe worth and value to that which is worshipped. People expect their god to give them meaning, pleasure, protection and even immortality.

Acts 17 describes the apostle Paul's continual trek to Rome. We are introduced today to the Macedonian cities of Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. Acts 17 is a 30,000-foot fly over. Each stop is an artist's sketch of three different responses to Paul's preaching of the word of God.

Dr Luke records in Paul's second missionary journey how God's Word was received in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Look at your notes and you can see the responses:

Thessalonica-Resisting the Word of God

Berea-Receiving the Word of God

Athens-Ridiculing the Word of God.

In one chapter Paul will go from Phillippi to Thessalonica about 100 miles. Paul will walk it in 3 days. A distance of a little further than Wichita to Emporia.

Then Paul sneaks his team out of town one night to begin a 45-mile walk to Berea. The distance from Wichita to Hutchinson. This route has left a well-known Roman road and the boys heading to Berea will travel along a more primitive route.

Then Luke tells us Paul left Berea under the threat of another riot and will travel by ship to Athens. A distance of about 300 miles. As Paul enters Athens, he can see on the horizon, rising above the activity of the city-one of the 7 wonders of the world-the Acropolis of Athens.

This is Athens' highest point, and its most famous building is still standing today-Parthenon.

So, Paul has traveled in our text the distance from Wichita to Waco, Texas, about 450 miles. It is about 450 miles from Wichita to St Louis. Ok, I think you get my point.

Acts 17, is quite a trek. 3 churches were planted. Paul's team breaks apart by God's design, and each team member of Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy works to disciple new believers in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

Paul's second missionary journey lasts from 49-52 BC, he travels throughout Macedonia (modern Greece), planting churches, experiencing the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Paul leaves a wake of disciples that would cause the gospel to go one day around the world.

⁶ So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. (1 Thess 1:6-NIV)

Paul's mission is to tell God's people, the Messiah has come, his name is Jesus. Jesus is our long awaited and predicted Messiah.

Jesus died 16 years ago on a Roman cross in Jerusalem and was resurrected after 3 days. He appeared to the apostles; on one occasion he appeared to over 500 Christ followers and finally to me.

Paul says, "I am standing here today in Thessalonica, Berea and Athens, because I have been assigned to tell you sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Jesus is our Savior and sin bearer."

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, "It was necessary that we first preach the word of God to you Jews.

But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we will offer it to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For the Lord gave us this command when he said,

'I have made you a light to the Gentiles,
to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.'^[a]"

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were very glad and thanked the Lord for his message; and all who were chosen for eternal life became believers. (Acts 13-NIV)

Paul sermons were simple-Jesus will forgive your sins and give you eternal life. That's what we are looking for-life after death and forgiveness of sins. Have you made that decision? Don't wait another minute.

Throw out the old, law and circumcision and in with the new life of grace and faith.

Paul's method was simple, trek throughout Macedonia and go to church with the Jews first. Why? Because many Jews will welcome Paul's new teaching and receive Jesus Christ and start a life with the Savior. Paul's first stop will be the capital of Macedonia.

Thessalonica – Resisting the Word of God (Acts 17:1-9)

² As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. ⁴ Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women. (Acts 17-NIV)

Thessalonica was about 100 miles from Philippi and was the capital of Macedonia. If the message of Jesus atoning death and resurrection could take hold there, it would spread to outlying communities and local churches would then sprout up throughout Macedonia. And sprout up they did.

If you turn to the book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul sends his church family a letter and congratulates them on the spread of the gospel to neighboring regions.

⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (1 Thess 1-NIV)

Tragically some will reject this message and the announcement of Jesus life and ministry. Jews will once again be hostile to this news. And this happens in Thessalonica, some rough necks are hired to run Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke out of town.

⁴⁻⁵ Some of them were won over and joined ranks with Paul and Silas, among them a great many God-fearing Greeks and a considerable number of women from the aristocracy.

But the hard-line Jews became furious over the conversions. Mad with jealousy, they rounded up a bunch of brawlers off the streets and soon had an ugly mob terrorizing the city as they hunted down Paul and Silas. (Acts 17-MSG)

Traveling all night, Paul and his team arrive in Berea to a much better welcome. After a while you would think Paul would be a little gun shy, going to church with the Jews. But in Berea Paul finds a warm welcome and sincere followers who were thrilled, ecstatic that Paul announces **the Messiah has arrived**. Then Jesus left again. But he has given us the Holy Spirit to carry on his work.

Paul was so overjoyed with how the Bereans received Christ and the message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life; Paul calls the Bereans a people of noble character.

Berea – Receiving The Word of God (Acts 17:10-15)

¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17-NIV)

All of us should imitate the Bereans by faithfully studying God's word daily. Memorizing it. Researching it. Reflecting on it. Even testing it. Let me offer some core beliefs about studying God's word. If this comes off as one of my rants, so be it!

You apply God's Word to conform you into the image of Jesus.

The purpose of God's word is to make you like Jesus. Romans 8:28 tells us, God predestined you to be **conformed** into the image of Jesus Christ. You are either in the word and the word is making you like Jesus Christ, or you are in the world, and the world is squeezing you into its mold.

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12-NIV)

God's word keeps you from the attraction of the world, by offering you the application of the word. Every time you study God's word, your mind is being renewed.

Keep in mind to know God's word, and not do it, is to know nothing at all.

So much of the chaos and carnality in the world, is because people are not living their lives according to God's word. How else do you explain how a whole segment of society can justify the kinds of violence going on, as if it is their right to act that way.

When God's word is removed from the town square, from public education, and even now from hospitals and hotels what you have is a society filled with rebellion against God and his word.

God hates violence and the shedding of blood. When you take God and his word out of the equation, it is the only explanation that makes sense. Jesus said to his disciples, "why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and you do not do the things that I tell you. (Luke 6:46)

Either stop calling me Lord or start doing what I tell you.

To know and not to do, is to know nothing at all.

Jesus said to those at the end of age, who said, Lord, have we not done many wonderful things in your name, Jesus never denied this truth, but adds...**depart from me. I never knew you.** (Matt 7:22-23)

Jesus Christ knew everything that was going on in their lives. Jesus encounters these religious juggernauts, they had all the data, they had mastered the Old Testament scriptures.

But they were never mastered by them.

Did they know where the Messiah was to be born, they were experts. Bethlehem of Judea, but when the time came and some Magi strolled into town asking around for the king, did they go next door and check it out? No, they were too busy making everyone else a slave to their religious practice that was empty of obedience.

Their knowledge created no responsibility on their part, this is why Jesus often said, "Have you not read?" They were the most read part of society. And the least changed.

James 4:17, If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

How does that grab you? Not just poor judgement, they totally missed the mark. Completely shot over the target.

You apply God's Word to every (other) area of your life.

Come to a Bible passage that is dealing with honesty. What do you do? You think of all the areas in which you are honest. Honest in the marriage-absolutely. Honest with their children-for sure. You want to know the truth, come to me.

Honest with his workers, yes, they call him honest Abe. But, dishonest with his boss. He never thinks of that area. That is sort of out of bounds. What happens if he thinks about the workplace?

This person **rationalizes** their position to himself. And it remains the same.

You apply God's Word by listening to the Holy Spirit. (or rationalize)

Every one of us has an early warning system.

The moment that truth and application get close to the point of need, all the bells start to go off. This person is confronted with dishonesty, but he can't get away from it. **Finally, he says, ok I am dishonest with my work.** What does he do? **He rationalizes that position.** Look you don't understand, my competitors are all non-Christians, how can you expect me to be honest with a group of dishonest people? And he feels comfortable with it.

Example, a man tries to impress you in front of his kids, that he stole \$500 from government. He says it to you, in front of his kids. But he justifies by saying, "the government has ripped him off, by squandering \$10,000 of dollars in taxes, government regulations, etc."

He notices, you are not that impressed, and he adds, but I gave it to missions. That is classic illustration of rationalization. He always has a justification, he describes how bad the government is in managing their financial affairs, cost over-runs to the total of millions and he says, "what is \$500?"

When government wastes money like that, how can you expect me to be honest? **That is a finely woven rationalization stronghold.** A system.

The older you get, the more experienced you become at rationalization. You become a master. You can almost see it coming down the road. You can smell it twenty miles away.

Why I don't have to forgive that person? Why I don't have to give God my tithe. And all the signals come in loud and clear, whenever you are confronted by anything that tends to be convicting you have got 16 reasons why God's truth would not work for their situation.

You apply God's Word for more than an emotional experience.

People have an emotional experience, for which they substitute for a volitional decision. You are emotionally moved by God's word, but you make no change. You are even brought to tears now and then. The word of God really digs up some dirt. You are wrecked. Then the service ends, and you go and chat with the pastor, and describe how moved you were. You announce how right-on the presentation was. You were even moved to tears. As you make the motion of wiping your face.

Pastor that was a wonderful sermon. Tears are rolling down. You really got to me today, Pastor. Thanks, a lot. And what do they do, they go home, and the Chiefs play the Bills.

On the outside they have all the makings of a big transformation, giving, attendance, serving, sharing faith and they go home and do nothing with the study of God's word.

These are the most dangerous people in your church. They study. They learn. They are moved emotionally. And they do nothing about change. This is the hardest person to reach. Why? Because they have been moved. Convicted by the truth. Even shed some tears. But they have not been changed by God's word.

Ok, back to Acts 17. Once again, the devil hits the fan, and many unbelieving Jews arrive in Berea and stir up a riot. How did these men hear that Paul and Silas were reaching more people for Christ? A growing witness of Bereans who not only studied God's word, but they also proclaimed God's word it got back to Thessalonica.

Never forget Satan also has his missionaries. The believers in Berea outsmarted the enemy and took Paul to the Aegean Sea and put him on a ship 300 miles bound for Athens. Once again, Paul left a fruitful field, but while Paul was sailing away the Holy Spirit and new converts went to work building another church. **Paul is two for two.**

Leaving land and sailing away from Thessalonica and Berea two churches are left in good hands. Timothy goes to Thessalonica and Silas and Luke stay in Berea.

Paul arrives in Athens Greece around 17-18 years after the time of Christ death. Athens was famous for culture and education. Like our world today, cultural paganism dominated the landscape. Cultural paganism enjoyed art, theatre and was completely absent and destitute of a moral compass. World class architecture dotted the landscape. The most famous being the temple of Parthenon.

Dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena, the Parthenon sits high atop a compound of temples known as the Acropolis of Athens. It was the largest and most lavish temple the Greek world had ever seen.

1000's of years later in universities around the world people are still reading the likes of Aristotle and Plato. Their thinking belief systems still hold captive modern man. Greek religion was a world of gods and goddesses whose ambitions acted more like humans than gods. There were an unlimited number of deities to choose from. Some would say there were more gods than men in Greece.

One day Paul is wrecked by a city given wholly to idolatry. Let's read some of the text.

¹⁶The longer Paul waited in Athens for Silas and Timothy, the angrier he got—all those idols! The city was a junkyard of idols.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ He discussed it with the Jews and other like-minded people at their meeting place. And every day he went out on the streets and talked with anyone who happened along.

He got to know some of the Epicurean and Stoic intellectuals pretty well through these conversations. Some of them dismissed him with sarcasm: “What a moron!” But others, listening to him go on about Jesus and the resurrection, were intrigued: “That’s a new slant on the gods. Tell us more.” (Acts 17-MSG)

Greece draws tourists by the millions today to ancient sculptures, theater, art, and architecture, but in Paul’s day it was all connected to Athenian religion. Paul knew that idolatry was demonic at the core.

Athens-Ridiculing the Word of God (Acts 17:10-15)

Welcome to Athens where God’s word was ridiculed as we saw in Acts 17. Then Paul will tell the most religious people of the day who worshipped 1000’s of gods in Athens, the God you seek in not far from you.

²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Acts 17-NIV)

Since God is not far from the Athenians, how do they have an encounter with him if they are so engrossed in pleasure and pain. The Epicurean said, “Enjoy life,” and the Stoics said, “Endure life!”

Paul gives us clinic a tutorial about how to introduce Jesus Christ to ancient Greek paganism and modern-day Kansas paganism. Let me suggest a couple of Pauline strategies. They come in the form of 4 questions.

Questions 1: Are you willing to go to where lost people live? (Acts 17:17)

Question 2: Will you tell others Jesus Christ wants a personal relationship with them? (Acts 17:22-23)

Questions 3: Do you know how to unmask the unknown god, making Jesus Christ known? (Acts 17:24-29)

Question 4: Do you live in an awareness that time is short? (Acts 17:30-31)

In the final verses 32-34, they tell us that results may vary, that is a marketplace slogan. Do your best and leave the rest. Leave the rest to God. There are 3 responses when Paul tells them about the Lord.

Some mocked. (vs 32)

Some want to know more. (vs 32)

Some joined Paul and believed. (vs 33-34)

There were 3 responses, and this is the way it will be. When you share about Jesus, give your testimony.

(1) Some will mock you. Persecution comes with our faith. (2) Others will be investigators and seekers, who want more study, research, and time. Some are curious. I am not sure I believe yet, I want to know more. (3) And the last group are those who will believe. They say YES!

How can I start a relationship with Jesus? Paul faced these groups and so do we. All we need to do is our part.

Our part is: we are either planting the seed or watering the seed. That someone else planted. It is God who gives the increase. God who saves the soul.

Sometimes people will say to me, "Pastor Ken, you saved me." I understand what you mean, but Jesus saved you, not me. I have never saved anyone.

God does the saving, I do the planting, watering and maybe harvesting. But not saving. Let me close with this prayer:

Father,

Give me eyes to see the lost. Give me a passion to love the lost. Give me a heart that breaks for the lost. Give me a will to win the lost. Give me a mouth to tell the lost about Jesus!

In Jesus Name, Amen.