



June 7 – Count the Cost

Weekly Reading – Acts 19-23

Main Point

Faithful disciples obey God with courage, even when obedience leads to hardship.

Key Verse: 2 Tim 4:17

Try to emphasize this verse throughout the lesson, building up to the Weekly Challenge to memorize the verse this week.

2 Tim 4:17 – But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Main Passage: Acts 21:10-15 & 2 Tim 4:17-18

Acts 21:10–15

[10] While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

[11] And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

[12] When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

[13] Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

[14] And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

[15] After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. (ESV)

2 Timothy 4:17–18

[17] But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

[18] The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

Background

Acts 21 takes place near the end of Paul's missionary journeys as he travels toward Jerusalem despite repeated warnings that suffering awaits him there. Along the way, believers—including the prophet Agabus—warn Paul that imprisonment and hardship are coming. Out of love and concern, many plead with Paul not to continue the journey. Yet Paul remains convinced that obedience to God is worth the cost, even if it leads to suffering or death.

2 Timothy was written years later near the end of Paul's life while he was imprisoned in Rome. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul reflects on God's faithfulness throughout his ministry and confidently looks forward to God's eternal kingdom. Together, these passages show that following Jesus faithfully often requires courage, perseverance, and surrender, but God strengthens His people as they obey Him.

Christ Connection

Paul's willingness to suffer for the sake of obedience points ultimately to Jesus, who willingly endured rejection, suffering, and death in order to accomplish the Father's will. Just as Christ set His face toward Jerusalem knowing the cross awaited Him, Paul continued forward despite the hardship ahead. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, believers are forgiven, strengthened, and given eternal hope, enabling them to follow God faithfully even when obedience is costly.

Life Group - The Flow

- 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building
- 10 minutes - Year of Prayer guided prayer time
- 5 minutes - Introduction (icebreaker, activity, or illustration)
- 35 minutes - Study and apply the Bible
- 5 minutes - Application exercise
- 5 minutes - Conclusion

Year of Prayer (10 min)

Always pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

Heavenly Father, how wonderful You are. Creation cries out in awe of Your power, the universe shines with your glory and greatness. Psalm 104 :1 says “Let all that I am praise the Lord. O Lord my God, how great you are! You are robed with honor and majesty.

Please share your words of adoration now. (pause)

Father, in the quiet of this moment, still our hearts before You. 2 Corinthians 11:21-30 reminds of the importance of confessing those times of subtle boasting of how much we do for You and for Your church. Help us to commit, at all times, to quietly helping another person through prayer, encouragement, or deed without self-recognition. Confess personal burdens that you haven’t committed to Him and which rob you of that “good cheer.” 2 Corinthians 5:4

Take a moment to silently confess any unconfessed sin, the Father, brings to your mind. (pause)

Father, give us hearts that are filled with thanksgiving for Your goodness in our lives. We thank You that our salvation does not depend on our wisdom but by His grace alone. Ephesians 2:8-9.

Please share any words of thanksgiving that you have at this time. (pause)

Father God, we ask You to guide our thoughts as we share our petitions and intercessions. Help us to commit ourselves to doing what the Lord requires of us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Micah 6:8.

Please share your petitions and intercessions at this time - have group members share Prayer Requests. (pause)

What a joy to come into your presence to pray with our brothers and sisters in Christ—to pray believing and in faith as You work in our midst. In the name of our Savior, we pray. Amen

Introduction (5 min)

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Before becoming one of the most influential missionaries in Christian history, **William Carey** was a poor English shoemaker with a growing burden to take the gospel to people who had never heard the name of Jesus. In the late 1700s, many Christians believed overseas missions were unnecessary, unrealistic, or far too dangerous.

At one ministers' meeting, when Carey passionately argued that Christians should actively take the gospel to the nations, an older pastor reportedly interrupted him and said:

"Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without consulting you or me."

Many people warned Carey that the mission field would be too difficult, too costly, and too dangerous. But Carey became convinced that obedience to God's calling was worth the sacrifice. He eventually traveled to India, where he endured sickness, hardship, financial struggles, and the death of family members while continuing to preach, translate Scripture, and train leaders.

Today, Carey is often called "The Father of Modern Missions."

His obedience helped inspire the modern missionary movement and influenced generations of Christians to carry the gospel around the world.

Like Paul in Acts 21, Carey understood that following God faithfully sometimes means moving forward even when hardship and opposition are guaranteed.

Ask:

- **Why do you think people sometimes confuse comfort and safety with God's will?**

Transition to Passage 1:

"In Acts 21, Paul faces pressure from people who genuinely loved him and wanted to protect him from suffering. But Paul believed obedience to God mattered more than avoiding hardship."

Study and Apply (35 min)

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says and how we can apply it in our lives this week.

Passage 1 – Acts 21:10-12

READ THE PASSAGE – Have a volunteer read Acts 21:10-12.

[10] While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

[11] And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

[12] When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Commentary

Leader Prep: Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

Acts 21:10

Agabus, a prophet previously mentioned in Acts, arrives and delivers a dramatic prophecy concerning Paul's future suffering. Old Testament prophets often used symbolic actions to communicate God's message clearly and powerfully. His arrival reminds believers that God is fully aware of what lies ahead for His people, even in seasons of hardship. This moment prepares both Paul and the surrounding believers for the difficult road ahead.

Acts 21:11

By binding his own hands and feet with Paul's belt, Agabus vividly illustrates the imprisonment Paul will face in Jerusalem. The prophecy does not condemn Paul for continuing the journey but serves as a warning about the suffering connected to his calling. Rather than discouraging obedience, the warning prepares Paul to endure hardship faithfully. The scene also highlights the costly nature of gospel ministry and discipleship.

Acts 21:12

The believers respond emotionally, pleading with Paul not to continue the journey. Their concern reflects genuine love and care for Paul. However, sincere concern can sometimes unintentionally pressure believers away from faithful obedience. Even spiritually mature Christians can struggle when obedience to God appears dangerous or painful.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** Why were Paul's friends so desperate for him not to go to Jerusalem?
2. **Discuss.** Do you think the believers' warnings and pleas were understandable? Why or why not?

3. **Discuss.** How can good intentions and genuine concern sometimes unintentionally discourage obedience to God?
4. **Deeper Dive.** What is the relationship between personal conviction and the counsel of other believers when trying to discern God's will?
5. ★ **Reflective** - write answers on an index card. When obedience to God becomes uncomfortable, what fears or concerns most strongly tempt you to pull back or avoid it?

Transition to Passage 2:

"Paul's friends loved him deeply and feared what suffering might do to him. But Paul viewed obedience to God as more important than comfort or safety. Now we'll see how Paul responded to their pleas and how God continued strengthening him through hardship."

Passage 2 - Acts 21:13-15 & 2 Tim 4:17-18

READ THE PASSAGE - Have volunteers read Acts 21:13-15 & 2 Tim 4:17-18

Acts 21:13-15

[13] Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

[14] And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

[15] After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. (ESV)

2 Timothy 4:17-18

[17] But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

[18] The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

Commentary

Leader Prep: Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, feel free to summarize key insights rather than reading it word-for-word.

Acts 21:13

Paul responds with deep emotion but unwavering conviction. He is not pursuing suffering recklessly but recognizes that obedience to Christ may require sacrifice. His willingness to suffer reflects the kind of surrender Jesus Himself demonstrated. Paul valued faithfulness to God more than personal comfort, safety, or even his own life.

Acts 21:14

When the believers realize Paul will not be persuaded, they ultimately submit to God's will. Their statement, "Let the will of the Lord be done," reflects trust in God's sovereignty even when the future feels painful or uncertain. Mature faith sometimes means surrendering outcomes we do not fully understand. This verse models humility and trust within Christian community.

Acts 21:15

Paul and his companions continue preparing for the journey to Jerusalem. Despite the warnings and emotional difficulty, Paul moves forward in obedience. Faithful discipleship often requires perseverance even when the path ahead is costly. Obedience to God is not dependent on comfort or certainty but on trust in His leadership.

2 Timothy 4:17

Near the end of his life, Paul testifies that the Lord stood by him and strengthened him during ministry and suffering. Though many people abandoned him, God remained faithful. Paul's endurance was sustained not by personal strength alone but by God's presence and power. Believers today can also trust that God strengthens His people in seasons of hardship and loneliness.

2 Timothy 4:18

Paul expresses confident hope that God will ultimately deliver him safely into His heavenly kingdom. This does not necessarily mean escape from earthly suffering or death, but assurance of eternal salvation and victory in Christ. Eternal perspective enabled Paul to remain faithful through hardship. His confidence rested not in circumstances changing, but in God's eternal promises.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** What stands out to you most about Paul's response to the believers in verse 13?
2. **Discuss.** How does Paul's example challenge the way we think about suffering, comfort, and obedience?

3. **Discuss.** How did God strengthen Paul throughout his ministry according to 2 Timothy 4:17–18?
 4. **Deeper Dive.** Why is eternal perspective essential for remaining faithful during hardship and uncertainty?
 5. ★ **Reflective** – write answers on an index card. Is there an area of your life where fear, comfort, or uncertainty is making obedience to God difficult? What step of faith may God be asking you to take?
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Teaching Toolbox Tip

Distinguish Between Warning and Prohibition

The believers correctly sensed that suffering awaited Paul, but that did not necessarily mean God wanted Paul to avoid Jerusalem. Sometimes God warns His people about hardship not to stop them from obeying, but to prepare them to endure faithfully.

Help your group see that difficulty is not always a sign that we are outside God's will. In Acts, suffering often accompanied faithful obedience.

Application Exercise (5–7 min)

Option 1: Reflective Prayer

Transition into Exercise: “Paul remained faithful because his confidence ultimately rested in God's strength and faithfulness, not in comfortable circumstances or guaranteed outcomes. Let's take a few moments to personally reflect on areas where obedience may feel difficult and ask God to strengthen our faith and courage.”

Time: 5–7 minutes

Supplies: Index card

Instructions

Invite members to quietly reread 2 Timothy 4:17–18

[17] But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

[18] The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

Encourage them to rewrite part of the passage as a personal prayer asking God for courage, faithfulness, and endurance in areas where obedience feels difficult or costly.

If appropriate, invite volunteers to share portions of their prayer.

Option 2: Encourage Forward, Not Backward

Transition into Exercise: “Paul’s friends genuinely loved him, but their fear of suffering tempted them to pull Paul away from what God was calling him to do. As believers, we also have opportunities to either strengthen one another toward faithful obedience or unintentionally discourage it. Let’s spend a few moments thinking about how we can become people who encourage others to follow God courageously.”

Time: 5-7 minutes

Supplies: None

Instructions

Divide into groups of 2–4.

Ask each group to discuss:

- a time when obedience to God felt uncomfortable, costly, or uncertain
- OR
- a situation where someone needed encouragement to follow God faithfully.

Then ask the groups to answer this together:

“What kinds of words or responses help strengthen someone’s faith and courage instead of pulling them away from obedience?”

After several minutes, invite groups to share:

- encouraging truths
- Scriptures
- phrases
- or practical support

that help believers continue following God faithfully during difficult seasons.

End with:

Invite each group member to identify one person they can intentionally encourage this week who may be facing a difficult season, hard decision, or step of obedience.

Transition into Conclusion:

“Following Jesus faithfully will not always lead us down the easiest or safest path, but God promises to strengthen and sustain His people as they trust Him. As we

close, let's remember that courageous obedience not only honors God, but can also encourage and influence the people around us to trust Him more deeply.”

Conclusion (5 min)

Leader Note: Copy and paste the Conclusion in your Life Group's group chat (e.g. text, GroupMe, email thread, etc.) and encourage them to keep these questions in mind and to memorize the Key Verse during the week.

Final Takeaway

After discussion concludes, read the takeaway statement:

Faithful obedience is not always easy or comfortable, but God strengthens believers who trust Him and follow Him courageously.

This Week's Challenge

Reflect:

This week, prayerfully consider whether fear, comfort, or uncertainty may be hindering your obedience to God in some area of life. Ask God to strengthen your faith and help you trust Him enough to follow wherever He leads.

- What step of obedience may God be calling you to take?
- What fears most compete with your trust in God?
- How can eternal perspective strengthen your faith this week?
- Who around you may need encouragement to remain faithful in hardship?

Memorize:

Review daily and/or memorize the **Key Verse** from this passage to remind yourself to run to God in hardship and be aware of possible witnessing opportunities in the midst of suffering.

2 Tim 4:17 - But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Prayer

Either pray something like the guide below, or invite someone in the group to close in prayer.

Father, thank You for the example of Paul and for the reminder that faithful obedience is worth the cost. Give us courage to trust You when following You feels difficult, uncomfortable, or uncertain. Strengthen us through Your presence, help us surrender our fears and comforts to You, and make us people who are willing to follow wherever You lead for the glory of Jesus. Amen.