**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

**Acts 21:1-26**

**\* Read Acts 21:1-26. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will unpack Paul’s resolve to know and follow Jesus, even in the midst of opposition, hardship, and trials. He will challenge us to spend our lives for the sake of Christ.

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 21:1-26?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*Leaving Miletus, Paul continues his journey to Jerusalem, spending time with brothers and sisters in Christ along the way at the various stops. In Tyre, Paul was encouraged not to go to Jerusalem, yet the disciples at Tyre prayed with him as he departed for Jerusalem (verses 3-6). In Caesarea, Paul was yet again encouraged not to go to Jerusalem, yet Paul affirms his resolve “even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Thus, the disciples gathered with him said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.” (verses 7-14) In Jerusalem, Paul stayed in the house of Mnason, reported to the Jerusalem elders all that God had done among the Gentiles, and affirmed his unity with the Jewish believers by paying for the expenses of four men participating in a Nazirite vow (verses 15-26). In this passage, we see the friendship/fellowship that the gospel creates among believers and we see the costs that Paul is willing to accept to know and follow Jesus.*

*As your read this passage, think over these questions: How do we reconcile Acts 19:21-22; 20:22-23; 21:4, 10-14 (in other words, is Paul disobedient to the Spirit by going to Jerusalem)? How do we explain Acts 21:17-26 in way that affirms it is a gospel unity issue rather than a gospel definition issue (in other words, Jerusalem elders are not asking Paul to change his understanding of gospel)?*



*Note: This map of the third missionary journey comes from the ESV Study Bible.*

**2. What is going on in Acts 21:1-6?**

*Leaving Miletus and the Ephesian elders, Paul continued his journey to Jerusalem. After passing through Cos, Rhodes, and Patara, Paul and his companions arrived in Tyre. While in Tyre, they spend a week with the disciples of Tyre. Through the Spirit, the disciples at Tyre urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but Paul pressed on the Jerusalem anyway. Before he left, the Christian families at Tyre gathered with Paul on the beach to kneel in prayer with/for him and to say farewell to him. Once again (like in Acts 20:36-38), we see a heart-wrenching goodbye, yet at the same time we are reminded of the love Christians had for one another and of the priority of prayer for one another.*

*Note that the journey from Miletus to Cos to Rhodes to Patara are short trips on a coastal vessel that sails along the coast for a day or two at a time. The journey from Patara to Tyre is a long trip (about 400 miles) on a seagoing vessel that sails on the open sea for a period of 5 or 6 days.*

*As you think about this passage, ponder the following questions: How is love demonstrated/cultivated in your community group? How often have you prayed with/for one another? Like Paul and his companions, do we actively seek out disciples so that we can pursue knowing and following Jesus together (see verse 4)? Husband/Father, how do you involve your family in and lead your family in knowing and following Jesus (see verse 5)?*

*About verse 4, Darrell Bock writes, “As the parallel warning in Caesarea shows in 21:11–15, the Spirit seems to have revealed what Paul would face, and the warning comes out of the resultant worry about Paul’s well-being, what Le Cornu and Shulam call ‘an inference’ from the message. He is ready to risk his life for the gospel, however, and is determined to move ahead (19:21; 20:21–22; for the result, see 21:33, 28:17).”*

*John Polhill writes, “The seeming conflict in the Spirit’s directions is even more pronounced here with the note that the Tyrians under the influence of the Spirit urged Paul not to go. Obviously, the Spirit would not be giving Paul two contradictory messages at the same time. The most likely solution is to see Paul’s resolution to go to Jerusalem as the primary emphasis. Paul was absolutely convinced that God was leading him to the city. On the other hand, the warnings along the way prepared Paul for the imprisonment and hardship that did indeed befall him there, fortified him for the experience, and convinced him that God was in it all. This was not at all difficult for Paul to accept. Paul certainly never sought out difficulty. He had no martyr complex. On the other hand, he accepted suffering as a part of his witness and often alluded to this in his letters (see Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-29; 12:9-10; Colossians 1:24-25). The words of the Tyrians are best understood as part of Paul’s preparation for the difficult events in Jerusalem. The Spirit’s role is best seen as informing them of those coming hardships for the apostle. Their very natural reaction was to urge him not to go. Their failure to deter him only heightens the emphasis on Paul’s firm conviction that God was leading him to Jerusalem and had a purpose for him there.”*

*John Polhill writes, “They (disciples at Tyre) were also aware that prayer was the disciple’s best fortification in a time of suffering and trial.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “We can’t ultimately create Christian fellowship; God establishes it. It’s our job then to cultivate it, to work on it, to maintain it.” Merida highlights four ways that friendship is expressed: practicing hospitality, showing affection, praying together, and discussing important decisions. What can you do today to be a good friend to another believer?*

**3. What is going on in Acts 21:7-16?**

*In this passage, Paul’s journey to Jerusalem continues along three stops in Ptolemais, Caesarea, and Jerusalem. At Ptolemais, Paul stayed with and encouraged/greeted the brothers for one day. At Caesarea, Paul stayed with Philip the Evangelist for many days. Luke notes that Philip has four unmarried daughters who prophesied, yet in this passage, he shares the prophecy of Agabus. Agabus acted out the prophecy that Paul’s hands and feet would be bound if he continued on to Jerusalem and that Paul would be handed over to the Gentiles if he continued on to Jerusalem. In light of this prophecy, the believers in Caesarea urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, yet Paul was resolved in going to Jerusalem, even if that meant dying for the name of the Lord Jesus. Seeing Paul’s resolve, the disciples entrusted Paul to the Lord, saying, “Let the will of the Lord be done.” After this, Paul and his companions, along with some brothers from Caesarea, journeyed to Jerusalem where they stayed in the house of Mnason of Cyprus who was an early believer.*

*Note that Luke’s mention of Philp’s four daughters who prophesied is a subtle reminder that the new covenant has dawned. Paul was headed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pentecost, yet while in Philp’s home he witnessed that Pentecost had come, as the Spirit had fallen on Philip’s four daughters who prophesied (see Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-18).*

*For Philp the Evangelist, see Acts 6:1-7; 8:1-40. For Agabus, see Acts 11:27-30. For Old Testament prophets acting out their prophecies, see 1 Kings 11:29-31; Isaiah 8:1-4; 20:1-6; Jeremiah 13:1-11; 19:1-13; 27:1-22; Hosea 1:2.*

*As you read this passage, think about these questions: What is it that binds Paul with these believers in various cities? Why does Luke mention that Philip has four unmarried daughters who prophesied? How does Paul cultivate this resolve to know and follow the Lord, even if it leads to death? In our own lives, how ought the following statement be applied: “Let the will of the Lord be done”?*

*Darrell Bock writes, “Stott argues a distinction between a prediction and a prohibition in the various messages referring to utterances through the Spirit in this chapter. Agabus has predicted what will take place, and the believers urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He is not, however, prohibited from doing so….There is no indication in Luke’s narrative that Paul is disobedient here, as the Spirit has told Paul what he will be facing (Acts 20:22–23).”*

*John Polhill writes, “This was not so much a warning on Agabus’s part as a prediction. Unlike Christians of Tyre, he did not urge Paul not to go. Rather, he told him what was in store for him. This was all the more certain when one considers the nature of such prophetic acts in the Old Testament. The act itself set into motion the event it foretold. It established the reality of the event, the certainty that it would occur. Agabus’s act prepared Paul for the events to come and assured him of God’s presence in those events.”*

*John Stott writes, “What fortified Paul in his journey was the Christian fellowship which he and his travel companions experienced in every port. In Tyre they found disciples and stayed with them seven days (see Acts 21:4). In Ptolemais they greeted their sisters and brother and stayed with them one day (see Acts 21:7). In Caesarea they were accommodated in the home of Philip the evangelist and stayed with him ‘a number of days’ (see Acts 21:8, 10). The disciples from Caesarea then personally escorted Paul and his party to Jerusalem, where they were to stay with the early Cypriot convert Mnason (see Acts 21:15-16), and on arrival in Jerusalem the sisters and brothers ‘received [them] warmly’ (see Acts 21:17). It would be an exaggeration to call this Paul’s ‘triumphal entry’ into Jerusalem. But at least his warm reception strengthened him to bear the crowd’s shouts a few days later ‘Away with him!’ (see Acts 21:36).”*

*Darrell Bock writes, “What is so instructive about the scene is that once it becomes clear that Paul is being driven by the Spirit to face what is ahead, the believers who love him and God’s will embrace the path and support him. As this scene and the next with James show, good arguments can often be assembled for a variety of options in life’s direction, but sometimes flexibility in seeing what God desires allows for support and unity to form a bond of cohesion that makes the spiritual community stronger. In one case, it is believers who are asked to be flexible. In another, it is Paul who shows cultural sensitivity. In both cases, it is a willingness to minister in an engaging manner and tone with some sensitivity to others that makes a healthy change of mind possible….If all believers possess God’s Spirit, we must be willing to learn from each other and hear each other.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “Luke, however, believed Paul was right in going to Jerusalem, as indicated by the references to the Spirit in Acts 19:21 and 20:22. The Spirit led Paul to make the decision to go to Jerusalem, and he also provided the compulsion to go. Further, Luke clearly sees Paul as following in his Lord’s footsteps.”*

**4. What is going on in Acts 21:17-26?**

*After receiving a warm welcome, Paul and his companions met with the Jerusalem elders where Paul recounted story by story how God worked among the Gentiles, leading the Jerusalem elders to glorify God. After this time of report, the Jerusalem elders set before Paul a situation that encouraged Paul to demonstrate his unity with Jewish Christians. The situation is that many had heard (wrongly) that Paul taught the Jews who lived among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, abandoning the practice of circumcision and rejecting the practice of the customs/festivals. Thus, in order to demonstrate unity with Jewish Christians, the Jerusalem elders asked Paul to pay for the expenses of four men who were completing a Nazirite vow as a sign that Paul observes/keeps the law. Paul accepts their request to demonstrate unity with Jewish Christians in this way.*

*For background passages, see Acts 15; Romans 14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (more generally, 1 Corinthians 8-10). For Nazirite vow, see Numbers 6:1-21. For Paul’s observance of Jewish law, see Acts 16:3; 18:18; 1 Corinthians 7:18-19. For growth of Jerusalem church, see Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31.*

*As you read this passage, think through these questions: How do we explain that the issue in this passage is gospel unity, not gospel definition (because it sounds in some ways that the Jews are adding to salvation through this strict adherence to the law)? In our own lives, what are situations where we might give up our Christian liberty for the sake of maintaining Christian unity?*

*ESV Study Bible: “Those under a Nazirite vow would abstain from wine, strong drink, grape juice, grapes, or raisins; would avoid any contact that would defile them (such as contact with a dead body); and would not cut their hair (*[*Numbers 6:1–21*](https://www.esv.org/Numbers%2B6%3A1-21/)*). When the time of the vow was over (often 30 days), they would cut their hair and present an offering in the temple. If Paul went with them and personally paid for the cost of their offering, it would show that he did not object to Jewish converts following OT customs voluntarily, so long as those same customs were not required of Gentile believers.”*

*Darrell Bock writes, “In sum, what we see here is Paul being asked to act with cultural sensitivity to the Jewish context he now finds himself in, without compromising the gospel. He is quite willing to do so for the sake of the unity it may create.”*

*John Polhill writes, “Paul thus underwent ritual purification (see Numbers 19:12) to qualify for participation in the completion ceremony of the four Nazirites which took place within the sacred precincts of the temple. This would be a thorough demonstration of his full loyalty to the Torah, not only in his bearing the heavy expenses of the vow (see Numbers 6:14-15) but also in his undergoing the necessary purification himself.”*

*Darrell Bock writes, “Another point Fernando correctly makes is that sometimes what may not be necessary for us personally may be what is required for the sake of the community or in order to help maintain unity….Only discernment, engagement, and prayer, however, can determine when the hard path is to be taken and when an easier escape should be sought.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “James’s concern wasn’t about salvation—he and Paul agreed that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works of the law (see Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 6:15). He wasn’t concerned about what Paul was teaching the Gentiles either—the Jerusalem Council had agreed on what should be communicated to them (see Acts 21:25; 15:20, 29). James’s concern didn’t involve Paul’s view of the moral law. Both James and Paul agreed that regenerate people should pursue holiness by walking in God’s ways. The concern, rather, had to do with Jewish cultural practices. Should Jewish Christians cease from following certain cultural traditions? Word had spread that Paul was teaching them to avoid customary activities. But this was untrue. He never demanded that the Jews abandon circumcision. In fact, his hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost revealed that he still valued Israel’s calendar.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “This passage reveals the heart of this great missionary. Paul’s passionate about God’s glory, the unity of the church, and the evangelization of all people. He’s literally willing to do anything for the sake of the gospel—as long as he doesn’t compromise it. Paul offers a powerful picture of Christian liberty in this passage, showing us spiritual maturity. Paul wouldn’t use his liberty to show everybody all he could do because of the freedom he enjoyed in Christ. Instead, he became a ‘slave to everyone’ (1 Corinthians 9:19) like Jesus, who humbled himself, looking on the interests of others in selfless, redeeming love (see Philippians 2:3-11).”*

*Tony Merida writes, “Never compromise the gospel and never participate in sin when you are attempting to reach people, but don’t convey the impression that everyone must first be like you before they can take your invitation to accept Christ seriously.”*

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. In this travel journey of Paul, we are reminded of how the gospel creates community so that men and women from all walks of life come together as one in Christ. As you reflect on this idea of the gospel creating community, how have you seen that to be true in your personal life, in your community group, and in the church family? How can we maintain/cultivate the unity that God creates through the gospel?

2. On the theme of community, how has God used gospel community to encourage you, challenge you, and more? Share a personal story of how God used the church family to minister to you and to encourage you to persevere in knowing and following Jesus.

3. In the book of Acts, Paul is always surrounded by community or pursuing community with brothers and sisters in Christ. In your own life, how have you seen the need for gospel friendships? Do you have any gospel friendships? As a community group, how can we pursue gospel community/friendships? Why is cultivating gospel friendships good for our own personal journey with Christ and for the church family as a whole? Think through how the four commitments of community groups (growth, relationship, love, mission) flourish out of gospel friendship.

4. One of the challenges in the Christian life can be discerning God’s will (see Acts 19:21-22; 20:22-23; 21:4, 10-14). How can we discern God’s will in our life when faced with different choices and options? What role does Scripture, prayer, the body of Christ, etc. play in helping us discern God’s will in certain situations? How might the statement in verse 14 be appropriate to say/pray/rest in at times?

5. In your community group, do you see relationships being cultivated along the lines of similar interests (for example, love of sports, shopping, or some other hobby) or flowing out of gospel foundation (for example, common bond in Christ, discussion of God’s Word, serving together in mission, etc.)? Put another way, how much of our discussion in our relationships with church friends center on the Word, prayer, reaching the lost, discipling one another, etc.? For Paul, we get the picture of men and women coming together to hear the Word, pray for one another, bear one another’s burdens, and more. Not that this has to be the central theme in every conversation we have with someone, but is this even a theme/note in our conversations with one another at all? You may have a much better way of asking and illustrating this question than me, and if you do, please let me know. Also, please let me know if this question is unclear and I’ll try to help clarify it.

6. In verse 13, we see Paul’s resolve to know and follow Jesus, even if that means death for the name of Jesus. What is it that enables Paul to make this bold claim? In our own lives, how do we cultivate this kind of resolve in our own lives? Also, what does knowing and following Jesus with this resolve lead us to give up? As you think about these questions, think through what we are to do personally (role of your own personal journey in knowing and following Jesu) and corporately (role of community group in helping)

7. One of Paul’s practices in his ministry is giving reports of how God worked to save the lost, to sanctify the saints, to strengthen the disciples, to plant churches (see verses 17-20a). In your life this week, how have you seen God at work? Take time to share stories of how God challenged you through His Word, answered a prayer, sanctified you through a circumstance/trial of life, used the body of Christ to encourage you or to help you put off sin and put on Christ, and more.

8. In Acts 21:20b-26, Luke records the story in which Paul affirms his unity with Jewish believers. In our own lives and in the life of the church, how do we discern between gospel convictions (non-negotiables) and preferences? How do we determine when it is useful and wise (though not necessary for salvation) to do things for the sake of unity in the body of Christ? What might examples be in our own setting?

9. As you look at this passage, how does it call us to obedience and an others-focused mentality? Remember, Pastor Aaron is challenging us to be about obedience and others in 2018.

10. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. David Jones):

 A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

 B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

 C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

 D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

 E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

 F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

11. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

 A. Understanding the Bible

 1. What do we learn about God?

 a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

 b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

 c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

 2. What do we learn about people?

 a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

 b. Look for the fallen condition.

 c. Look for how God’s people should live.

 3. What do we learn about relating to God?

 a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

 b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

 c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

 4. What do we learn about relating to others?

 a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

 b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

 c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

 B. Applying the Bible

 1. What does God want me to think/understand?

 2. What does God want me to believe?

 3. What does God want me to desire?

 4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

Resolve to know and follow Jesus, even if it leads to your death in the name of the Lord Jesus. As you make this resolution, pour your life out in pursuing friendship and discipleship with other believers.

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—Ephesians 5; Proverbs 12

2. Tuesday—Ephesians 6; Proverbs 13

3. Wednesday—Philippians 1; Proverbs 14

4. Thursday—Philippians 2; Proverbs 15

5. Friday—Philippians 3; Proverbs 16

6. Saturday—Philippians 4; Proverbs 17

7. Sunday—Colossians 1; Proverbs 18

* **Unhindered Series**

1. April 22nd—Acts 21:27-22:29

2. April 29th—Acts 22:30-23:35

3. May 6th—Acts 24:1-27

4. May 13th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 25:1-12

5. May 20th—Acts 25:13-26:32

6. May 27th (Memorial Day Weekend)—Acts 27:1-44

7. June 3rd—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)