

October 16/17, 2021

Providence, Plans and a Different Perspective

Daring to Be the Church Series

Acts 18:1-22

Pastor Josh Luse

Not too many years back, there was a children's story written. It was the same story, but it was told from two different perspectives. It was called *A Tale of Two Beasts*. And the story starts out with a young girl walking through the woods and she comes upon this little furry creature. It looks something like a squirrel, I'd say, in the pictures. And she hears what she thinks is this little animal, whining, crying out. So she takes this animal in; in compassion she wraps her scarf around the animal. She takes it back home; she cleans it up; she puts a leash on the animal and takes it on walks. She builds a cardboard box for it to live in, and she shows it to her other friends. But at some point, the animal bolts out the window. That's about the part of the story where the story changes. Part Two—and the perspective shifts now to the story from the perspective of the animal. And from the animal's perspective, he was sitting in the woods having a great time singing, when this large beast came and kidnapped him. She took her scarf and she tied him up with it and she took him home, and she stuffed him in a box. She would drag him around by a rope to bring him in front of other scary and terrifying beasts and parade him around, until he found his way to break and get out of there.

It reminds me that every story has perspectives that we can look at it from. And what I'm so excited about is our story today, in Acts, Chapter 18, actually allows us to see God's perspective, a bigger perspective than just that of Paul and what he could have described in seeing his circumstances from just his point of view. Now Paul is finishing up his second missionary journey and that'll come to a close at the end of this chapter. And he's been everywhere. He's gone to Derbe; he's been to Lystra; he's been Iconium; he's been to Thessalonica; he's been to Berea, and he's gone to Athens. He's gone to Omaha; he's been to Lincoln, right? It seems like he's gone all over the place. He didn't have enough time to get to those last two places, but if you would have given him time, he would have got there. But even though he didn't, his message still did.

If you've got a Bible, you can turn with me to Acts, Chapter 18. We'll begin there this morning.

Acts chapter 18, verse 1 says:

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked together, for they were tent-makers by trade. (*NASB, Acts 18:1-3)

Now Paul leaves Athens and goes to Corinth, two very different places. Athens was a smaller place, known for its intellectual debates. But he gets to Corinth, and this is a much bigger city. This is the third largest city in the Roman Empire, and this place is known for excitement. Vegas has nothing on Corinth, (What happens in Corinth, stays in Corinth!) Well, that doesn't actually ring true. What happens in Corinth gets spread all over the place. It's excitement; it's entertainment;

it's huge sporting events. This was the place to be, but it was filled with immorality. Behind the city rose a mountain that was 2000 feet high. And on the top summit of this mountain was a temple to Aphrodite, or Venus, the goddess of love. And in this temple, there were 1000 female slaves that would serve there by day, and then when night would come, they would descend down into the city and work as prostitutes in the street. This wasn't a huge place, but there was a quarter million people that are in this city. This place is a maximum spot for trade and travel and news to filter through because it's a small isthmus, a small area of land, and if you were traveling from the north to the south, or south to the north, you would have to go through Corinth, unless you want to go by sea. But on both sides, the east and the west, there were two large harbors. In fact, they had taken and built a log-rail system that would take boats from one side, three and a half miles, to the other side. So, it became a route that many would use as a shortcut or as safer travel than going around the whole end of the island.

This is the place where Paul comes into—an incredible opportunity for the gospel to spread, yet a very intimidating place to plant a church. And we know that Paul says he comes in weakness and in fear and trembling in First Corinthians chapter 2, verse 3, and we'll talk a little bit more about that. But Paul is coming in with apprehension into this place. And he's vulnerable, and we actually get to see a little piece of that. It reminds us that Paul is human. He's not the Savior; he's like you and me, a mere human being. He's vulnerable, and he's alone. Remember he left Timothy and Silas in Berea. So what does God do in this place? Well, it says he meets a couple, a man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Now it says that they had moved there because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

Now why does Luke start with this and share a little bit of this backdrop right from the beginning? I think it's there for two reasons. I think Luke is queuing up the story and building tension for something that's going to take place later in the story in this chapter. There's going to be an accusation leveled against Paul, and already he's saying, "Hey, Claudius." He's frustrated with the Jews and the issues that were happening in Rome, so, you know he said, "Just kick them all out of here." But I think Luke is also setting up a larger story. He's showing us that God is doing something even bigger within this. God, in His provision, is providing an opportunity. Aquila and Priscilla are pushed to Corinth; Paul plans to go to Corinth. But God's provision and providence bring them together. They just both, so happen, to move there at the same time. Interesting. They just, by chance, happen to both be believers when Paul is alone, and they just, so happen, to work in the same trade, and God continues to bring all of this together. Even though maybe it wasn't going according to Aquila and Priscilla's plans, God had a bigger plan.

It reminds me of this, that God's providence may call you into places that you never expected, so He can use you in ways you never thought possible...if you're willing to submit to His will. Did you catch that? Because that's key! As we look through this chapter, again: God's providence may call you into places that you never expected, so that He can use you in ways you never thought possible, if you are willing to submit to His will. And we see this couple continuing to submit to God's will, in beautiful and incredible ways with both of their lives. This couple, every time they're mentioned in Scripture, is always mentioned together. They are a picture of what God can do through a marriage on mission. This couple is amazing. Romans 16, verses 3 and 4, shows the impact that they've had on Paul's life. He says: "*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life; to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the*

churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.” This couple didn't just use their marriage; they used their work. They realize their work wasn't just an ability to make money. Their work was an opportunity for ministry, and they continue to use that work for a chance for ministry to go all around that area. Not only that, but they used their home. First Corinthians 16:19 says: *The churches of Asia send you greetings, Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church in their house. They send you a hearty greeting in the Lord.*

If you were to take a pie chart and graph it out for what sections of Priscilla and Aquila's lives were devoted to God, it would be the whole chart. It's the whole pie! It's the whole enchilada! (Kind of getting hungry right now, right?) It's everything! I wonder how much you and I devote our lives to God? Does He have it all, or does He have a sliver? This couple joins in mission with Paul in this new place of Corinth, and God is setting up the stage to do incredible things. So, what happens?

And Paul was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood is on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household; and many of the Corinthians, as they listened to Paul, were believing and being baptized. (Vs. 4-8)

So what does Paul do? He goes into his normal pattern. He goes into the synagogue to try and reach the Jews with a message of the gospel. Now there are several terms that leap off the page that continue to show us Paul's heart and his commitment to the mission. You notice he goes to them; he doesn't wait for them to come to him. Paul continues to travel all around this region, so that he can go to the people that need to hear this news. When he gets to Corinth, he doesn't just sit in Corinth and wait for them. He goes to the synagogue, to the places where they would be. I wonder, “Do you and I sit in our comfy places waiting for God to bring people across our path? Or do we have the same intentionality to go to the people that need the gospel?” When he goes there, he reasons with them. He listens, and he talks. He answers questions and skillfully navigates an opportunity to share the gospel. And he's consistent. Every Sabbath he is there. He tries to persuade them. He shares the Word. He's going to continue to follow it up with the thing that can actually, powerfully, impact their life—not his words, but God's words. And he testifies to them. This is actually a Greek word that means *to warn them*. It carries with it a seriousness.

I think as we look through this, it shows us that even though Paul does all this, Paul can't save these people. That's not Paul's job. That's only Jesus' job. Paul's job is to share the hope of the gospel and they reject that. At some point, no doubt, Paul gets frustrated. He realizes, “I have done what I can do, and I'm going to leave.” It says that he testifies to them, and then it says he does this interesting act. It says *he shakes out his garments, and says to them, “Your blood be on your own heads, I'm innocent.”* He does this dramatic act. Oftentimes Jews, who after they would leave a town or city, would shake the dust off of their garments. It was a picture as if to say, “You know what? I'm leaving everything here. I'm going on to the next place.” So Paul shakes out his garments; he says “I'm done; I'm going on.” But then he says something to these Jews that they

would have said, “Oh, wait, wait, I've heard this before. I know where this is at. This is from Ezekiel Chapter 3, and also Ezekiel Chapter 33, 1 through 9. And in this part of the Bible, the prophet is speaking of this watchman, whose job it was to sit up on the gates or the towers of the city. And their job was to be extremely intentional to look out beyond and find either danger that was approaching, or the enemy. And as soon as they did, they would sound the alarm; they would grab the trumpet so the city could be prepared, so the armies could rise up. They were the ones that would share the news first. Paul is saying, “Hey, I've done all I can do. I have shared the news; you're not responding. The blood is on your hands.” And he goes. What's kind of humorous to me is that in dramatic fashion, Paul says, “I'm done. I'm out of here.” And he leaves the synagogue. Where does he go? Next door! To the house right next door! It's almost like they would be walking out going, “Paul, we still see you; we know you're right there.” I could imagine somebody missing this whole event and they come back to the synagogue and they're saying, “Hey, where's Paul?” “Yeah, he's right next door.” And then they're saying, “Well, where's Crispus?” “He's next door with Paul too,” right? Paul doesn't say, “I'm stopping the mission. In fact, he's fueled by the mission! In other parts in Scripture, it tells us that Silas and Timothy, when they came, they brought with them news of how the churches around Macedonia were thriving, which no doubt would have energized Paul. And not only that, they gave out of their poverty to support him on mission. Now he has the opportunity to join into the work of sharing the gospel full time—something he's not been able to do before because he's working and sharing the gospel. Intentionally, because he doesn't want the people of Corinth to think that he's trying to teach them and then ask for their money. He doesn't want to put a burden on this young church. But now, because of God's providence, Paul is set up to continue to see the gospel expound on what happens. He goes, and there are Jews that continue to believe, and then it tells us that many Corinthians believed. They heard the gospel, and they were baptized, something that continues to happen even to this day. People hear the gospel. They believe, and they follow in obedience and baptism. We're a part of a movement that will not stop. But Paul, at this point, no doubt starts thinking a little bit. “I know how this journey ends. I've been in this place before; I know what unfolds in this thing. I remember back in Lystra, I shared news; good things are starting to happen.” The Jews started getting jealous. What did they do? They drug him outside the city, and they stoned him, leaving him for dead. Oh, but that's not the only story. I remember in Acts 16, in Philippi, he shared the news. Many are starting to believe God is doing incredible things, and then what happens? They beat him with rods and throw him in prison. In Thessalonica and in Berea he shares the news. God does incredible things and then he begins to face opposition. The enemy hates it when his slaves are freed. And no doubt within Paul, there's this fear that starts to grow up, of what's going to now happen in this place. Verse 9 shows us exactly that:

And the Lord said to Paul by a vision at night, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in the city who are my people.” And he stayed there for a year and six months, teaching God’s word among them. (Vs. 9-11)

God is a God that knows us intimately. He knows our limits, and he knows what we're walking through. And God meets Paul right in that place. God will do the same for you and me. We actually get an insight into what's happening in his life. It says, “Do not be afraid.” The Greek word that's used here has a present imperative. A better way of saying it would be, “Stop being afraid.” This is telling us that Paul is facing fear. He's fearful, but then God says, “Go on speaking; do not be

silenced.” This is also telling us that Paul is tempted at this point to stop sharing, to quiet down, to back off.

Much like you and me, our fear causes us to think, “I’m not going to take that move to obey what God is asking. I’m not going to share this message of hope; I’m not sure how they would respond.” So what do we do? We quiet down and we back off. Fear is actually a really powerful thing but it’s also something that shows us something really big within our hearts. Fear is a direct indication of my value system. What I fear most indicates what I value most. Paul is facing an opportunity to show what he values most. I love that somebody else said, “Courage is fear having said its prayers.” All of us will be fearful. But Jesus tells him not to be fearful. Why? He says, “Because I am with you.” He restates that same promise He gave as His commission, as He said, “Go and take this message out to every one of us,” and He said, “I will be with you to the end of the age.”

So Paul continues, ready to go. It says he stays in Corinth a year and six months. It’s the duration of his whole time there, and he’s teaching the Word of God among them. Now why would he do this? Verse 5, and now verse 11, show us the value of God’s Word. And we see all throughout Acts, that the church was powered by the Spirit of God and devoted to the Word of God. We talked about that all last week, and it’s important for me to know that every day I am being shaped, I am being formed by something. The question is not, “Will I be formed by something today?” We are all being formed by something every single day. The question is, “What is it that is forming my life today?” I think that is why Paul was so intentional about taking this young church that was stuck in the whirlwind of a crazy culture and helping them to start to form their lives around God’s Word. Just makes me wonder, “How much of our lives right now is being formed by God’s Word?” Maybe for some of us this week, we need to shut off some noise. We need to fast from some media. We need to turn that down in order to concentrate and be formed on God’s Word. I would say that before you leave today, ask God, “What would you have me do so that I can continue to be formed by the power of your Word in my life?” Jesus knew its power. He said in John 17:17: *Sanctify them in truth; your Word is truth.* Truth is true for all people, all places, all times. And the truth that we live our lives on, the truth that we bank our decision on, the truth that we are formed by, is the truth of God’s Word. So it goes on to verse 12, and it says:

But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews rose up together against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, “This man is inciting the people to worship God contrary to the law.” But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were *a matter of* some crime or vicious, unscrupulous act, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about teaching and persons and your own law, see to it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.” And he drove them away from the judgment seat. But they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and *began* beating him in front of the judgment seat. And *yet* Gallio was not concerned about any of these things. (Vs. 12-17)

Now, think of the tension that Paul is already dealing with. The Jews rise up, just like they always have been, frustrated with him. They take him before the proconsul of Gallio and now he thinks, “This is probably it.” Remember, what do we know about Gallio? He wasn’t there long; he was a powerful Roman ruler. So probably from 51 to 52 AD he’s there before he leaves because he gets sick. But we also know that he was connected to Nero through his brother. We also know that

Claudius, when speaking of him, calls him a friend, and proconsul. So right now, if I'm Paul, and I'm looking through the situation from my perspective, I'm thinking, "Things are not going to be good. Here it goes again." And the Jews think they have a brilliant plan. "We'll tell them that Paul is attacking laws." Now the word that's used here, as law, is a very general term in Greek. It could be used for Roman law, or it could be used for Jewish law. And so they set it up so they can try and weasel this case in front of Gallio, to tell him that Paul has been breaking the law, thinking maybe he'll bite—this would be Roman law. I mean, after all, Paul is continuing to talk about this other Jesus right, this Messiah, and Rome has this list of acceptable religions. Remember last week in chapter 17, they said, "What is this babbler saying? Seems like he's advocating a foreign God." So they're taking the same idea, and they're going to try and bring it before the court. But what happens? Paul is about to open his mouth; this also is fascinating to me. What did Jesus just tell Paul to do? He said, "Don't be silent; go on speaking." So Paul is ready to be obedient. Here's the moment; he gets ready to go, and before he can say a word, Gallio chimes in. "*If this were a wrongdoing, or vicious crimes, I would have reason to accept your complaint.*" This is a legal term, meaning to proceed with the case. But instead he says, "*Since it's a matter of questions about words and names, and your own law,*" he turns and uses that same general term of law, but now he throws it back on them—your Jewish law—he said, "*See to it yourself; I refuse to be the judge of these things.*" He turns it back on them, and he throws them out. "Don't use my courtroom to settle your theological debates." We see he has no compassion; they turn on the current synagogue leader since Crispus has believed and is now gone from there, so they turn on Sosthenes and they beat him in front of him. Now why? This could have been the Greeks that were riled up in this moment, and they turn in this anti-Semitic way and start to beat him. I don't think that's probably the case. Could have been that Sosthenes was a Christian sympathizer too. Luke doesn't tell us exactly. But you know what I think is happening here? I think they banked all of their plans on this plan working. This is a culture of honor and shame, and when it didn't work, they target this leader and they beat him. Now what happens, by Gallio throwing out this case, is he sets a precedent. He gives Paul an opportunity to continue to go freely and share the gospel for the next decade. And as he shares it, he does it under the authority of Roman covering. Just like in our day and age, as a case is decided, it sets a precedent for other cases to be judged up against. Now there is a precedent. If people bring Christians before them, they know what's going to happen. Paul could not have set up a more perfect scenario. But yet, in God's providence, He gives him the opportunity to continue to spread the gospel. Isn't this amazing! Verse 18:

After this, Paul stayed many days longer, and then he took leave of his brothers and set sail for Syria, with him (notice who is with him) Priscilla, and Aquila. At Cenchrea, he cut his hair for he was under a vow. And they came to Ephesus and they left them there. But he himself went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and he asked them to stay for a longer period, but he declined. But taking leave of them, he said, "I will return to you *if God wills,*" and he set sail from Ephesus. And when he landed in Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch. After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all disciples. (Vs. 18-23)

So after this, Paul continues to minister in Corinth, and then he goes to the harbor in Corinth, he does this vow. What's with this holy haircut? I think he gets a mullet maybe? No! Some scholars believe this is tied to a Nazarene vow. You can see a picture of this in Numbers chapter 6, verse

18. It would be where they would abstain from something with a vow for a period of time to show their devotion to God, to continue to focus intentionally on prayer with God. So maybe that's what's happening. This could have been this symbol of that. This haircut happened before, at the beginning of the vow or at the end. Some think it was a personal vow of thanksgiving for what God had just done. Looking at this from a bigger story, you could see how Paul would be so excited for this. So, they would cut their hair and then they would take it and offer it as a worship offering. When it says that Paul goes up, it most likely means he goes to Jerusalem. So he could very well have brought that offering at that time. And then he goes down, most likely back to his home base in Antioch. But who goes with them to Ephesus? The friends that God has orchestrated in this. The deepest friends you will find in life are those that pursue the mission of God wholeheartedly, together with you. They end up staying there four or five years in Ephesus and God uses them in mighty ways. I love this story because it shows us the bigness of what God is doing in things, and pictures ways that we don't always get to see.

Sometimes we end up in circumstances, in situations where we question God because we don't get to see the bigger picture. We just look through our perspective, in our lens...kind of like maybe those that witnessed what happened on February 15, 1947. There was a plane, a DC 4 that was headed to Quito, Ecuador, but it never would arrive there. On its journey, it continued to go closer and closer, and it hit El Tablazo, a 14,000-foot mountain right next to Bogota. And as it hit, the plane crumbled into a fiery metal mess, landed in a ravine below, killing everyone on board. One of the people that was on board that flight was Glen Chambers. It was his lifelong dream to go into ministry, so he had just signed up with the Voice of the Andes and he's on his way there. And as he's at the airport that morning, he wants to send a note to his mom, and so he grabs this piece of paper he finds in the airport, scribbles a quick note on it, and drops it in the mail. His mom would hear of that accident before she would receive this letter. As she receives this letter, she opens it up. On the back of the note was an advertisement. And there was one single word on that advertisement, and it was the word "Why?" And many of us could question, why do things happen like this? Why are we in the situation we're in? But for her, she was able to have a different perspective, a larger perspective. In reading his note and knowing that the God she serves is working a bigger story. I may not always be able to understand why things take place, but I can always trust and obey.

Henry Blackaby says it this way:

"When you face difficult or confusing circumstances, they can overwhelm you. And if you bury yourself in your circumstances, you will always have a distorted understanding of God. For instance, A whole lot of wrong conclusions can result if you try to look at God from the middle you might say, God doesn't love me, or God is not fair. But both of these statements are false. Have you ever been in the middle of a tragic or fearful situation where, in your prayers, you begin to accuse God of some things that you know are not true of a painful situation. What should you do instead? First, ask God to show you His perspective on what's happening. Look back at your situation from what you already know about God. And when you face troublesome times, the Holy Spirit will take the Word of God and help you understand the events from God's perspective. He

will reveal to you the truth of your circumstances. Then you can adjust your life and your thinking to what God is doing.”¹

Rather than letting my view of God be shaped by my circumstances, as a believer, with the help of stories like this from Acts chapter 18, I can let my circumstances be shaped from the view of my perspective of God.

Jesus, I thank You so much for stories like this that help us to see You are at work. We can trust You in the midst of hardships, knowing that Your will, will continue to unfold. It cannot be stopped. God, thank You that You are present with us even in difficult situations, that Your providential hand is guiding us and caring for us. God, thank You that all You ask of us is that we trust You, we follow and obey. God, help us to be a church that presses forward so that more and more people will come to know the Hope that You offer us through Your Son Jesus Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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¹ Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008, 2021).



FALL 2021 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

Acts: Daring To Be The Church // October 16/17, 2021

Providence, Plans and a Different Perspective // Acts 18:1-22

Introduction

Our passage this week opens with Paul heading out to Corinth on his own but it's not mere coincidence that he's soon joined by Aquila and Priscilla; God continues to spread the gospel among groups of believers. It's an encouraging reminder for us that the good hand of God is moving in our experiences too.

To get the most out of your group time, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What is a favorite Fall activity you like to enjoy with friends or family? Share what makes it so special (the food, the fun, the people).

2. Share something you've done recently to reach out with kindness to a neighbor, co-worker, or someone you've encountered in your daily life.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

 - 2) Invite someone to read the passage in the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What part of the church service this week met a need or spoke to your heart?
- 2) As we've been following Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey that began in Acts 15:36, we've seen him threatened, beaten, imprisoned, and rejected, but never discouraged. **How does reading in Acts 18:9-10 that Paul is fearful and withdrawn give insight into the reality of living a God-focused life in a sinful world?**

Have you experienced times of fear and discouragement while actively serving God and others? Share an example, if you are willing.

- 3) Read *1 Corinthians* 2:1-3 and notice how Paul describes this time in Corinth. Though Paul had arrived there alone, he is soon joined by Aquila and Priscilla, then Silas and Timothy. **How significant was it for Paul to have others support him at that time?**

Can you think of times when God has seemingly arranged for others to come alongside you when you were discouraged? What was that experience like for you?

Have you had opportunity to support others in similarly challenging times? What did you learn in both receiving and offering care in the company of other people?

- 4) In Acts 18:9-10, the Lord promised Paul that he would not be harmed which gave him courage to press on with the work in Corinth. **How does Paul's experience compare with how we receive a promise from God today?**

What are some promises that God has given you in challenging times? Share some practical ways you keep those promises in front of you.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

Prayer opens us up to the leading of the Holy Spirit which makes it an important part of the Christian life. We realize that everyone has their own comfort level with group prayer and we want this to be a time of safety and care. You may verbalize your prayer or pray silently to yourself, that way everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Some things to consider during prayer time:

- What did the message or group discussion cause you to notice about your relationship with Jesus?
- How can you express gratitude for what God's teaching you?
- What questions are stirring that only God can answer?
- Are there troubling things in your life that need to be confessed to God?
- Is there an unmet need that only God can fulfill?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Each week we're suggesting a couple of spiritual exercises. These are not required, but they may help us to actually live our faith and grow as followers of Jesus. Feel free to practice one or both of them. If a certain exercise is very helpful for you, maybe you can figure out a way to incorporate it into your daily life. **Next week in your Life Group, take a few moments to share how either of these exercises may have changed your outlook on your daily life.**

(Upward Look) Begin your day reading Psalm 27. Notice the characteristics of God; write them down, repeat them back to Him, or form them into a prayer of gratitude.

(Inward Look) At the close of your day, find a quiet place and set aside 10-15 minutes to reflect on the activities, attitudes and emotions that shaped your day. Notice times that felt distant from God. What was happening around or within you to create that distance? Confess anything that comes to mind.

Notice times that caused you to feel close to God or influenced by Him. Thank Him for His nearness.