

WHAT IS CENTRAL? "MISSION IS CENTRAL" ACTS 28:17-31

The "gift of life" is an expression commonly associated with stem cell and organ donation. Gift of Life is also the name of a national, public, not-for-profit registry facilitating transplants for patients in the United States and abroad (www.giftoflife.org), with the goal of curing blood cancer through marrow and stem cell donation. Its website highlights stories about donors and their recipients like this one: "Christopher Salz, a resident of Neustadt, Germany, was surprised during his wedding reception when his groomsmen stopped the party to start up a projector. They played a video for him, a greeting from Adam Tornheim—the American man who had saved his life through a stem cell transplant five years earlier. Although Christopher and Adam had never met, he and his bride Maike watched with their hearts full of emotion—their wedding would never have been possible if not for this stranger. Then, as the video ended, Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the U.S.A.' began to play—and from a side room in walked Adam himself. As Christopher wiped away tears of astonishment and emotion the two men embraced, and then Adam received a warm hug from Maike as the wedding guests cheered."

Recipients aren't the only ones blessed by donation; donors are blessed, too. Many consider giving the "gift of life" the most meaningful thing they have ever done. For example, when it comes to organ donation, if a kidney donor is incompatible with the intended recipient, a paired kidney exchange or "kidney swap"

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— Diane Severance and Dan Graves

can be arranged. In that case, the donor exchanges kidneys with another donor/recipient pair, making two transplants possible. Sometimes this is done repeatedly within a group of people creating kidney donor chains that can include as many as thirty recipients. One donor-member of such a chain testified that her donation, which saved the lives of thirty people, made her entire life worth living.

If giving the gift of *physical* life through stem cell or organ donation can make life worth living, how much more so can giving the gift of *eternal* life through sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ!

This Week's Core Competency

Giving Away My Faith – I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

You have probably never heard of Edward Kimball, but if you are a Christian, you have no doubt heard of Dwight L. Moody, a shoe salesman before becoming a Christian, who was used by God to lead thousands of people to Christ. The story of Moody's conversion is told by Diane Severance and Dan Graves:

"Dwight came to Boston as a teenager from Northfield, Massachusetts, and he felt all alone in the big city. The boy was desperate for work. An uncle took him on as a shoe salesman—on condition that he be obedient and that he attend Mt. Vernon Congregational Church. The young man had been raised in a Unitarian church which denied the full divinity of Christ and did not emphasize human need for salvation from sins. Now Dwight heard about those things. But he decided that he wanted to enjoy the pleasures of the world and wait to get saved until just before he died.

"However, the kindness of his Sunday School teacher, Edward Kimball, turned young Moody into

cont. pg. 2

his life-long friend, and encouraged him to persist in his church attendance and regular Bible reading. Though Moody did try to read the Bible, he couldn't understand it. Kimball later said he had never seen anyone whose mind was as spiritually dark as Dwight's.

"That changed on this day, April 21, 1855. Kimball came to the shoe store to ask Dwight to commit his life to Christ. Dwight listened closely and became a Christian that day. Immediately he began sharing his faith with others, including his own family. They wanted nothing to do with his faith. 'I will always be a Unitarian,' his mother said. (However, she converted shortly before her death.)

"And at first Dwight Moody wasn't allowed to become a church member. Asked what Christ had done for him, the nervous boy replied that he wasn't aware of anything particular. Leaders felt that was an unacceptable answer.

"When Moody later moved to Chicago, he wandered the streets to find young boys to bring to his Sunday School class. He had a passion for saving souls and determined never to let a day pass without telling someone the gospel of Jesus Christ. Often he irritated strangers on the street by asking them if they were Christians-but his pointed questioning stirred the consciences of many. God used the converted shoe salesman to become the leading evangelist of his day.

"Estimates vary, but Dwight Moody is thought to have led as many as a million people to confess faith in Christ. Among his many achievements on either side of the Atlantic was the founding of Moody Bible Institute" (www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/dwight-l-moody-was-converted-11630499.html).

When Edward Kimball, a simple Sunday School teacher, shared the gospel with D. L. Moody, a teenager with a "spiritually dark mind," little did he know that his faithfulness would not only lead to the teen's salvation, but also to the salvation of a myriad of others.

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Acts 28:17-31

17 Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. 18 They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. 19 The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. 20 For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

21 They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. 22 But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

23 They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from

the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. 24 Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. 25 They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

26 "Go to this people and say,

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

27 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.'

28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" [29] 30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ-with all boldness and without hindrance!

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Bracket "three days later" in v. 17.
- * Circle "local Jewish leaders" in v. 17.
- * Bracket "arrested in Jerusalem" v. 17.
- * Circle "hope of Israel" in v. 20.
- * Circle "sect" in v. 22.
- * Underline "the kingdom of God" in v. 23.
- * Double underline "from the Law of Moses" and "from the Prophets" in v. 23.
- * In the margin next to v. 26 write: "Isa 6:9, 10."
- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 28.

day **2** EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Explain the *temporal* reference, "three days later," in verse 17.
2. Describe the circumstances surrounding Paul's arrest. (See Ac 21:17-22:1 and 22:22-29.)
3. According to Paul, the Romans wanted to release him, but the Jews objected (v. 18). Explain. (See 25:1-12.)
4. Paul says, "It is because of the *hope of Israel* (cf., 26:22-23) that I am bound with this chain" (v. 20). How so?
5. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 22.
6. According to hearsay among the Jews, "people everywhere are talking against this *sect*." Explain what they mean by "sect." (See 24:5.)
7. *Summarize* the content of Paul's daylong witness to the Jews the second time he met with them.
8. Does verse 28 suggest to you that God has abandoned his people Israel for the Gentiles? Explain. (See Ro 11:1-32.)
9. **Discussion:** Talk about what verses 30-31 indicate about Paul's commitment to mission.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Paul arrived in Rome after a long list of harrowing experiences. He was assaulted by the Jews and arrested by the Romans in Jerusalem (Ac 21:17-22:29), and appeared before the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin (22:30-22) before being transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea. There he was interrogated by two Roman governors—first, Felix (24:1-27) and then two years later, Festus (25:1-22)—and one Roman king, Herod Agrippa II, (25:23-26:32). And although no fault was found in him, and the Roman authorities wanted to release him, he was handed over to a centurion named Julius, and the two sailed for Rome, since he had appealed his case to Caesar (25:11-12). On the journey, Paul survived a shipwreck, a snakebite, and being a castaway on Malta for three months. The rest of the trip from Malta to Rome was a piece of cake! Three days after arriving in the city, he called together the local Jewish leaders to explain his circumstances, defend his innocence, and persuade them about Jesus. A normal person would have taken time to recuperate before reengaging in ministry, but Paul was no normal person. When it came to the mission, Paul was like a beagle with a bone.

On Acts 28:17-31, one commentator writes: "The account of Paul's witness in Rome centers primarily on his testimony to the Jews of the city. This comes as something of a surprise because the narrative up to this point has prepared us for Paul's witness before Caesar. Nothing, however, is said of his trial before the emperor. Instead, the focus is on Paul's encounter with the Jewish community in Rome. A familiar pattern reappears, where Paul was first heard favorably by them, then was resisted, and finally turned to the Gentiles—a pattern that recapitulates Paul's experience with the Jews of Pisidian Antioch (13:42-48), of Corinth (18:5-7), and of Ephesus (19:8-10). It is not by accident that Luke ended his book on this note. The Jewish rejection of the gospel and the acceptance of the Gentiles has been a major theme throughout Acts. Indeed, the book opens with the question of Israel's place in God's kingdom (1:6). It closes on the same note" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 538).

Verses 17-22 contain Paul's summary of events intended to explain his circumstances and defend his innocence. The details of what led to his earlier incarceration and recent arrival in Rome are contained in chapters 21-28. In verse 17, Paul begins by claiming his innocence. "My brothers, although I

have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans." Then he goes on to assert that a thorough examination before Jewish and Roman authorities confirmed his innocence, ultimately leading to a "not guilty" verdict—on the part of the Romans at least. In fact, they wanted to release him, but because the Jews objected, Festus, the governor, wanting to do the Jews a favor, asked Paul if he was willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. But Paul knew better. Rather than run the risk of being ambushed on the way, Paul appealed to Caesar, which led to him being sent to Rome. In a nutshell, he argued it wasn't because of wrongdoing but because of the hope of Israel that he found himself bound with a chain (v. 20) before them. He was in custody because he preached the message of the law and of the prophets concerning the kingdom of God, "that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles" (26:23).

All of what Paul said came as news to the Jews. They had heard nothing from Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, neither had any of their number returned from Jerusalem with anything bad to say about Paul. Quite the opposite, they wanted to hear Paul's views because "people everywhere" were disparaging the "Nazarene sect" (24:5). All in all, Paul's first meeting with the Jews ended well, which naturally led to arranging a second meeting.

Paul's second meeting with the Jews, focused on persuading them to believe in Jesus, didn't end so well (vv. 23-28). Fueled by their curiosity, an even larger number of leaders came to the meeting conducted where Paul was being held under house arrest. For an entire day, he tried to persuade them that "the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles" (26:23) and that Jesus was the Messiah. Perhaps he used words similar to those of Peter, who declared in his sermon on the day of Pentecost that Jesus was raised to life and exalted to the right hand of God (2:32-33), so "Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (2:36). Paul likely clarified that as Lord and Messiah, Jesus now rules over the present manifestation of the kingdom of God and will rule over Israel and the nations in a future "millennial" manifestation of that kingdom. The response of the Jews was mixed—"some

were convinced but others would not believe" (v. 24). As they began to leave, Paul quoted the words of Isaiah as a warning to them. One commentator writes: "Paul cites the passage to warn the audience that the nation of Israel is falling into the national pattern of not believing and of reflecting hardheartedness. Paul is like Isaiah, and the present Jewish community is like the ancient nation . . . It is a prophetic warning (cf. Tannehill 1985; Moessner 1988; Moessner 1989) that to refuse to hear the word is to risk reaching a point where it will never be heard (Marshall 1980: 425)" (Darrell L. Bock,

Acts, BECNT, 755). In the face of Israel's rejection, Paul declared, "God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen" (v. 28).

Luke concludes the book of Acts by describing Paul's continuing ministry in Rome. Even though the apostle was under house arrest, "He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! Paul's unwavering, tireless commitment to mission regardless of the circumstances is an example to all who believe.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Paul's unwavering commitment to the mission of sharing the gospel—never mind the circumstances—is one that every believer in Christ should follow.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

List two things you would not expect to hear from Paul, for example, "Now's not the time to share the gospel" or "I would share the gospel but I'm afraid of what people will think of me."

List two things you have said to yourself that prevented you from sharing the gospel.

Suggest ways to address those things that prevent you from Giving Away Your Faith.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 17 **three days later** I.e., after arriving in Rome. After a harrowing six-month journey from Jerusalem (August A.D. 59 to February A.D. 60) to Rome (Ac 27-28), which included shipwreck (27:27-44) and wintering for three months on Malta (28:1-11), Paul wastes no time initiating a ministry to the Jewish community in the city.

v. 17 **local Jewish leaders** "There was a strong Jewish community in Rome, stretching back at least to the triumph of Pompey in 62 BC . . . Putting together the various allusions to Jewish presence in Rome, the best estimate of its size in the middle of the first century is about 40,000-50,000, most of them slaves and freedmen. The Jewish population was concentrated mainly in Trastevere (across the Tiber). We know of some ten to thirteen synagogues, all of which may have been in existence at this time. However, we hear nothing of a Jewish council in Rome; so the 'first men of the Jews' ["local Jewish leaders," NIV] would presumably be leading members of several at least of the synagogues. Nevertheless, we can assume a network of communication between the synagogue communities, so that those who responded to Paul's invitation can be regarded as representative of the Jews in Rome" (James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 351).

v. 17 **arrested in Jerusalem** See Ac 21:27-36 for the account of Paul's arrest; 22:30-23:11 for his appearance before the Sanhedrin; 24:1-27 for his trial before Felix; 25:1-12 for his trial before Festus; 25:23-26:32 for his trial before Agrippa.

v. 20 **hope of Israel** Cf., "And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestor that I am on trial today" (26:6), including "God's kingdom, the Messiah and the resurrection (see v. 8)" (NIV Study Bible, note on Ac 26:6). "The hope of Israel was more than a resurrection; it meant fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel (cf. 26:6-7). Paul firmly believed Jesus is the Messiah of Israel who will return someday and establish Himself as the King of Israel and Lord of the nations (cf. 1:6)" (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 430).

v. 22 **sect** Cf., 24:5. Nearly thirty years after Pentecost, "in Jewish eyes at least, the new movement centering on the name of the Nazarene (see on 4.10) was simply another sect, like the 'sects' of the Sadducees or the Pharisees (cf. 5.17; 15.5; 26.5). Which is also to say that at this beginning stage we are not yet talking of a new religion, far less a religion sprung full grown into existence at the first Christian Easter or Pentecost. We are talking rather of a movement within the first-century Judaism of the land of Israel, a messianic movement (Jews who were followers of the way of Jesus of Nazareth), indeed, from Christian perspective at least, a renewal movement, whose potential for renewal within the religion of Israel has never been fully realized" (Dunn, 2).

v. 23 **kingdom of God** "The term 'kingdom of God' probably means the same thing here as it usually does in Acts, namely: Messiah's rule, both now and in the messianic age to come (cf. 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:31)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Acts," 2019 ed., 489, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf).

v. 23 **Law of Moses, the Prophets** Cf., Lk 24:27, 44. The Old Testament is divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Here "from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" amounts to "from the Old Testament scriptures."

vv. 26-27 **quotation** Cf., Isa 6:9, 10. "Paul's parting word was a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10, in which God told the prophet that his Jewish hearers 'would not believe' God's message through him (cf. Matt. 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40-41). Paul saw that this word to Isaiah was as applicable in his own day as it had been in Isaiah's. He also regarded it as inspired by 'the Holy Spirit'" (Constable, 489).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Monday my teenage son asked if we could host Fellowship of Christian Athletes at our home because the coaches were unavailable and they had to cancel the meeting on campus. After a small panic attack, my husband and I said of course they could meet at our home. At 6:30 p.m. sharp a swarm of kids converged with snacks, pizza, and random musical instruments to hang out. After lots of laughs and games, with absolutely no prompting, my son started playing Elevation Worship's Do It Again on the piano and the sweetest worship began. What comes to mind when you hear the words "mission field?" When I think of the mission field, I think of some faraway place with dirt roads and no running water. This FCA meeting reminded me that my greatest mission field is my home. It feels sometimes like parenting is a loop of "Brush your teeth," "Pick up your dirty dishes," "Bring me the 72 dirty cups from your room!" I get caught in the task of parenting, the day-to-day grind, and forget the discipleship. This random group of kids reminded me what it's all about: hospitality, love, joy, and pure worship of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. This week, I want to change my words to be a steady drip of discipleship: "God is faithful," "Jesus is enough," "He moves mountains and He'll do it again." Parents, I'm praying for you as you disciple your young children in your mission field!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read: Ac 28:17-31

1. From verse 23, what was Paul telling the people?
2. How did the people react?
3. What did Paul boldly preach about?

What Do You Think

Why do you think some people rejected what Paul told them?

What R U Going To Do

Be bold this week! Ask a friend if they have heard about Paul and tell them his story about how Jesus saved him (Acts 9). Use the salvation bracelet you made in small group this week to share the gospel with a friend.

Core Comp

Giving Away My Faith - I tell others about Jesus to help with God's work.

Memory Verse

Matthew 22:37-39 – "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed Scrolls _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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