



Osborne Baptist Church

PURSUING GOD IN ISOLATION • SESSION SIX: ISOLATED FROM THE CHURCH •
ACTS 28:28-31 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

Despite being restricted under house arrest, Paul still made the most of every opportunity he had to share the gospel.

INTRODUCTION

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

In what circumstances is it easy for you to share God's love with others? In what circumstances is it difficult?

How is your desire to share your faith with others impacted in times when you feel isolated?

Paul could have easily let his circumstances override his proclamation of the gospel. Instead of throwing in the towel after being arrested and put under house arrest, he continued to proclaim God's love to all who would listen to him. We should do the same.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Since Paul was not considered a dangerous criminal, he enjoyed limited freedom in Rome while waiting for his case to come up. During this time, Paul was unable to be together with the church freely as He had in the past. However, house arrest did permit him to have visitors. When Paul could not be with the gathered church or go to lost people, he arranged for lost people to come to him.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 28:28.

Paul was imprisoned for his beliefs, yet he used his circumstances to share the gospel with others. How might your current circumstances prove to be a way for you to share the gospel with others? How can you use your circumstances to point others to Jesus?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. What are some ways Paul had suffered up to this point in Acts 28?

How might Paul have been tempted to turn inward at this point in His life, rather than focusing on sharing the gospel with others? How do you typically respond to hardship?

Paul made it clear to his invited guests that salvation was found in Jesus the Messiah. He used the Jews' Scriptures to present his evidence. Yet many of the Jewish leaders would not believe Paul's words and accept the gospel. Nonetheless, Paul remained bold in his witness for Jesus. He let his Jewish audience know that although they rejected Jesus, God had a plan to take the gospel to the Gentiles. It was His plan for Paul all along (see Acts 9:15). It is still His plan for the world today—that the gospel message be boldly proclaimed to people of every tribe and tongue.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 8:30-31.

Paul had limitations placed on him (house arrest/limited mobility). What limitations are part of your life right now? How might those limitations be used to advance the gospel?

Paul knew that now was the time for him to step up and find new ways to preach the gospel. If he couldn't share Jesus in the public square, he'd do it in the privacy of a rented home. Paul was flexible in his mission work—if he couldn't move about, he'd simply invite people to come to him. Paul realized his mission to the Gentiles, having heard God's voice on the Damascus Road. His appointment as "the preacher to the Gentiles" emboldened him to share the gospel up to the very end of his life.

Within a few short years, scholars believe Paul's life ended at the hands of Emperor Nero during a time of intense persecution. How might the words of Acts 8:31 have served as a fitting epitaph on Paul's grave?

What do you need to build into your life right now so that your faith in Christ will be what people remember about you at the time of your death?

Respond to the following idea: what is most true about you comes out in times of great hardship (such as isolation).

The Book of Acts ends in an unusual way. Paul proclaimed the gospel without hindrance. Literally, the final Greek word is an adverb: “unhinderedly.” Not only had the gospel reached Rome, but more importantly it overcame all barriers and was proclaimed freely. Despite Paul’s restrictions under house arrest and physical separation from the body of believers, he made the most of every opportunity to share the gospel with others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do the same.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When was a time (or a present time) when you felt restricted or isolated from the body of the church for reasons outside of your control? How might people see Christ through your experience?

What are some ways you might seek to strengthen the bonds of your relationships in the church, even during times of physical separation?

What are some ways you might share the gospel with others, even in times of restriction or isolation?

PRAYER

Praise the One who made the gospel possible—thank Jesus for salvation. Ask the Lord to help you be content in all circumstances, and invite the Holy Spirit to embolden you to proclaim His name in any place, at any time. Pray that your circumstances, no matter how challenging, would be used for the glory of God and the spreading of the gospel.

COMMENTARY

| ACTS 28:28-31

The ship on which Paul was traveling as a prisoner wrecked on the island of Malta, which is south of Sicily. Paul immediately impressed the island’s inhabitants when God delivered him unharmed from a viper’s bite. Paul carried out a ministry of healing among the islanders. In turn, they honored him in many ways (Acts 28:1-10).

After the winter had passed and the seas were again safe for travel, Paul’s party secured passage to Italy on another Alexandrian ship that had wintered on Malta. They sailed from Malta to Syracuse, the capital of Sicily, and from there to Puteoli, the main Italian port for the large

grain ships. From Puteoli Paul's party proceeded on foot the 130 miles to Rome. South of the city he was met by two separate groups of Roman Christians who had come out to greet him. Once in the city, Paul was allowed to live in an apartment rented at his own expense. He remained under military guard (vv. 11-16).

Paul probably was unchained in his rented quarters. Still, he was under guard and does not seem to have been able to leave the house. Paul therefore summoned the Jewish leaders in Rome to him. His usual pattern of witness in a new city was to begin with his own people, the Jews. Since he could not visit the synagogues of the city, he invited the members of the synagogues to himself. Paul explained to them his circumstances.

In this first meeting with the Roman Jews, Paul presents us with two lessons about witnessing. First, he was an example of adaptation in witness. He had his regular pattern of witnessing in a community: where a synagogue was present, he always began there. Confined to his quarters, he quickly adjusted to the changed circumstances; he had the Jews come to him. Second, Paul presented an example of consistent witness in all circumstances. In facing a trial where his very life were at stake, Paul was foremost a witness to Christ.

The Jewish leaders were a receptive audience. They told Paul that they had heard rumors about the Christians and wanted to know more. Perhaps some of them already had debated with Roman Christians, but they wanted to hear Paul's views.

On a prearranged date, a much larger group of Jews appeared at Paul's house to hear him present the gospel. He preached all day about the kingdom of God, which is God's sovereign rule in the hearts of individuals. He showed how God's rule came to us supremely through Jesus Christ. They were Jewish and would be familiar with the Scriptures. Paul sought to convince them through all the Scripture, both the Law and the Prophets, that Christ is the long-awaited Messiah. The Jewish response to Paul's testimony was mixed. Some believed, but others rejected the gospel.

When many of the Roman Jews failed to accept Paul's witness, Paul responded in a familiar manner: he turned to the Gentiles. Paul was not giving up on his fellow Jews. The question was not one of excluding Jews but rather of including Gentiles.

For two years Paul awaited his trial before Caesar and spent his time witnessing to all who came to see him. This had been the story of Paul's entire ministry. Paul witnessed from his rented quarters both boldly and without hindrance. Throughout Acts, bold witness involves the power of the Holy Spirit. The story of Acts is largely about how the gospel came to be preached without hindrance. Gradually, the barriers were removed that separated people from Christ and from one

another in Christ. No one gave himself more selflessly to removing those barriers than Paul. Paul would live to make his defense before Caesar. God also had preserved the lives of all on board, just as He had said He would.