



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 Philanthropy, Hospitality, and Friendship
(*The Book of Acts*, pp. 65-72)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 The Ever-Expanding Gospel
(*The Book of Acts*, pp. 78-81)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Philanthropy, Hospitality, and Friendship

The story of Paul's sea-voyage to Rome – with a violent storm, shipwreck, and adventures on Malta – provides not only a glimpse of Paul as one who was open to fresh encounters with all peoples but also, surprisingly, a lasting impression of Gentiles as receptive, friendly, and hospitable.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Acts 27:1-28:10

Reflection

"The subject matter of the book of Acts is the living God as revealed," Joshua Jipp observes. So, as it is giving us "a historical explanation for the expansion of the Church and its transformation into a multiethnic institution," Acts is also making claims on us "about who the living God is, how God is known, and the kinds of people the Church of the living God ought to be."

What, then, should we take from the lengthy story of Paul's voyage to Rome? What does it reveal about God and our discipleship? To answer these questions, Jipp focuses on Paul's dealings with several figures who are not in the Christian movement. Ancient writers often used sea-adventures and encounters with exotic people to delineate a hero's character and destiny. That is what Luke is doing in this story of Paul's return (after a six-chapter absence) to a Gentile setting: "Three distinct interactions between Paul and Gentile characters provide a window into the lasting impression of Paul that Luke wishes to leave his readers."

- ▶ *Julius, the Roman Centurion*, might have been stereotyped by readers as "violent, brutish, or greedy," Jipp notes, but Luke portrays him in a "glowingly positive" way. Julius displays philanthropy by allowing Paul to gather with friends (Acts 27:3), and later saves Paul's life (27:43). "Philanthropy – often translated as kindness, love for humanity, or generosity – was considered to be one of the premier Hellenistic virtues and was often associated with the making and maintenance of friendships through acts of mercy, kindness, hospitality, and clemency." We do not know this centurion's motivation, but his acts of mercy toward the vulnerable are startling.
- ▶ *Paul's shipmates* are saved on three occasions by the apostle's prophecies, exhortations, and encouragement. First, Paul prophecies about the danger of continuing the sea journey (27:9-11), which is realized when a typhoon almost sinks the ship (27:18-20). Then, when everyone onboard has lost hope, Paul encourages them with the angel's message that they will make it safely to Rome (27:20-26). He also advises the centurion to keep the fearful sailors on the ship (27:30-32). Jipp explains, "On six occasions Luke uses forms of 'to save' in order to refer to the salvation or safety of the shipmates and Paul (27:20, 31, 34, 43, 44; 28:1), and given that one of Luke's primary themes is God's salvation for all people, it may be that Luke intends the reader to view God's rescue of the crew through Paul as a metaphor for the salvation of the Gentiles." Finally, Paul



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hosts a salvific meal for everyone onboard (27:33-38), which echoes Jesus' meals with all people in the Gospel of Luke (e.g., Luke 9:11-17; 22:14-23; 24:28-35).

- ▶ *The Maltese islanders* offer remarkable hospitality to Paul. These "natives" (or, barbarians) might have threatened the shipwrecked strangers, but instead they show "unusual kindness" (or, philanthropy) by building a fire to keep the prisoners warm (28:2). Their leader, Publius, shows more hospitality after Paul survives the viper's attack. Paul reciprocates by healing Publius's father and others who are sick. The Maltese cement their relationship with Paul by giving the provisions for the rest of his voyage.

Jipp concludes, "Luke leaves his readers with a portrait of Paul as entering into host and guest relationships with outsiders as a means of extending God's salvation to all people. Luke seems, in fact, to make a point of invoking cultural stereotypes (of Roman centurions, prisoners, and barbarians) only to overturn them—namely, to show that these are the people to whom God's salvation has and will extend and that they are not only worthy of receiving but are supremely capable of practicing and initiating friendship, hospitality, and philanthropy."

Study Questions

1. Identify the examples of philanthropy, hospitality, and friendship in the story of Paul's sea-voyage to Rome. How are these three virtues connected to one another in the story?
2. How does Luke surprise readers with the character traits of the Gentiles in the story? Why would he do this?
3. What admirable traits does Paul exhibit in this story? How is the apostle most like God in Christ?
4. How does your congregation give and receive philanthropy, hospitality, and friendship with people who do not belong to the Christian movement? What insights about these virtues can you glean from this story?
5. "Acts re-calls us to a radically selfless gospel whose mission is to reach the ends of the earth at any and all personal cost," Chad Hartsock writes. "It reminds us that the 'ends of the earth' can be in a land far away, or among the socially marginalized neighbors who live in our shadows every moment." Discuss his observation in light of this story.

Departing Hymn: "Day by Day, and with Each Passing Moment" (v. 1a, 3b)

Day by day and with each passing moment,
strength we find to meet our trials here;
trusting in our Father's wise bestowment,
we've no cause for worry or for fear.

Help us, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
e're to take, as from a father's hand,
one by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
till we reach the promised land.

Caroline V. Sandell-Berg (1865); translated by A. L. Skoog, alt.
Tune: BLOTT EN DAG

Philanthropy, Hospitality, and Friendship

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how both giving and receiving philanthropy, hospitality, and friendship are woven through the story of Paul's sea-voyage to Rome.
2. To consider how Paul is presented in this story as a model for our discipleship.
3. To discuss how your congregation gives and receives philanthropy, hospitality, and friendship with people who do not belong to the Christian movement.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *The Book of Acts (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Day by Day, and with Each Passing Moment" locate the familiar tune BLOTT EN DAG in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with an Observation

Edgar J. Goodspeed (1871-1962), the renowned scholar at the University of Chicago who was noted for his collection of Greek manuscripts and translation of the New Testament, was fascinated by the unusual nature of the Acts of the Apostles. He wrote, "Where, within eighty pages, will be found such a varied series of exciting events—trials, persecutions, escapes, martyrdoms, voyages, shipwrecks, rescues—set in that amazing panorama of the ancient world—Jerusalem, Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, Rome? And with such scenery and settings—temples, courts, prisons, deserts, ships, barracks, theaters? Has any opera such variety? A bewildering range of scenes and actions (and of speeches) passes before the eye of the historian. And in all of them he sees the providential hand that has made and guided this great movement for the salvation of mankind." (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1937], 188-189, online at www.earlychristianwritings.com/goodspeed/).

In this study, Joshua Jipp explores one of the most exciting events in Acts—the great storm and shipwreck and improbable rescue on the exotic island of Malta that the Apostle Paul undergoes on his sea-voyage to Rome. What role does this lengthy adventure play in Luke's narrative of the early Church? How does it present Paul as a model for our discipleship?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide your hearing of the strange tale of Paul's shipwreck and rescue.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 27:1-28:10 from a modern translation, or a team of three members to read the passage in this way: Acts 27:1-13, 27:14-44, and 28:1-10.

Reflection

In this study, like the previous one, “Warning to the Wise: Learning from Eutychus’s Mistake,” members will need to appreciate Luke’s literary artistry not just to catch the detailed nuances of Luke’s story, but even to understand what the story is about and why it is included in the book of Acts. Joshua Jipp shows how the sea-voyage story highlights Gentile characters who give to and receive from Paul acts of philanthropy, hospitality, and friendship. Encourage members to explore the role these virtues should play in their discipleship, both within the congregation and as they interact with people who do not belong to the Christian movement.

Study Questions

1. Form three small groups to study these distinct interactions in the story – Paul with Julius, with the shipmates, and with the Maltese. In each case, which party initiates the relationship, how does the other party respond, and how would you characterize their actions – as an act of philanthropy, hospitality, and/or friendship?
Briefly clarify the three overlapping virtues. Joshua Jipp writes, “*Philanthropy* – often translated as kindness, love for humanity, or generosity – was considered to be one of the premier Hellenistic virtues and was often associated with the making and maintenance of friendships through acts of mercy, kindness, hospitality, and clemency.” The term is explicitly used in Acts 27:3 to describe Julius’s action, but members may find the philanthropic attitude in other characters as well. *Hospitality* involves making a stranger welcome, and serving as host in the distribution of resources to meet the other’s needs. *Friendship* is a more ongoing relationship of reciprocal caring, but we often speak of people being “friendly” when they act in ways to initiate such a relationship.
2. The *soldiers* in the story might be stereotyped as brave and faithful citizens, but more likely they were seen by readers “as violent, brutish, and willing to use force to keep the prisoners in order” (cf. Acts 27:43; Luke 23:11). The *ship’s crew* would be strangers to the prisoners as well, and seen as unlikely to take their advice (Acts 27:10-11) or care for them (27:29-30); furthermore, the *prisoners* on this voyage were strangers to one another as well (27:1). Luke twice describes the *Maltese islanders* as “barbarians” (28:2, 4), which heightens the expectation that they will be *inhospitable* to the shipwrecked strangers. Jipp writes, “Luke seems, in fact, to make a point of invoking cultural stereotypes (of Roman centurions, prisoners, and barbarians) only to overturn them – namely, to show that these are the people to whom God’s salvation has and will extend and that they are not only worthy of receiving but are supremely capable of practicing and initiating friendship, hospitality, and philanthropy.”
3. Paul is “open to fresh encounters with all peoples,” both accepting and offering hospitality. He is generous to strangers, sharing “the gifts of God – table-fellowship, the salvation/safety of the shipmates, and healing,” Jipp notes. “When Paul initiates a meal with his shipmates and takes the lead as host (27:33-38),...[he] clearly mimics Jesus’ sharing of meals with all people in the Gospel of Luke.”
4. Invite members to give examples of *giving to* and *receiving from* others (especially those who do not belong to the Christian movement) philanthropy, hospitality, and friendship, either in their personal lives, or in concert with other members of the congregation. Consider how members can encourage and support one another in activities that display these virtues.
Jipp comments on the motive and manner of Paul’s generosity: “the gifts of God – table-fellowship, the salvation/safety of the shipmates, and healing – are not hoarded or held back as the exclusive property of Paul but are shared liberally and freely with those not belonging to Paul’s own kinship network. They are, furthermore, shared without requiring or asking for a response.” He continues, “Congregations who would continue to embody the same message and values should reflect upon where and how their gifts and resources may be put to use in service of the larger world.”
5. Chad Hartsock describes “the ever expanding gospel” in Acts as moving out geographically from Jerusalem and across cultural barriers to Gentiles. In this story, Luke emphasizes that Paul interacted in love with people – e.g., the Roman centurion, the rough seafarers, and the “barbarian” Maltese people – who might be stereotyped as bad or dangerous by readers. By analogy, the gospel today should be shared with all people. Sometimes, this means sharing it with people who live close by, but are stereotyped and socially marginalized from the Church due to their ethnicity, economic status, or behaviors

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.