

P.S. 2020 Lessons We're Learning
"We're Learning – to Fall Upward"
September 13, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Acts:

Acts is a companion volume to the Gospel of Luke, continuing the story of Jesus' followers and tracking the church's growth after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Both books are written by the same author and addressed to Theophilus. The writer's name isn't given in either book, but early tradition names the author as Luke, doctor and companion of Paul. Whoever the actual author was, these works contain no specialized medical language or otherwise reflect a doctor's touch. They do reveal an educated writer of considerable literary skill and extensive knowledge of Jewish and Greco-Roman history, religion, and society.

Theophilus was likely a prominent Roman citizen who supported Luke's project. He may have funded Luke's research, writing, and publication. Luke dedicated his work to Theophilus but by no means writes only for him. The broad range of characters and places within the story of Acts suggests a wide audience and Greek-speaking Jews and God-worshipping Gentiles who want to know more about the Christian faith and community. Acts is a historical-theological narrative. It interprets the significance of God's work through Jesus Christ and his followers in the power of the Holy Spirit as they transition from a fledgling group of followers in Jerusalem to a global mission testifying "*about the good news of God's grace.*"

-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 215 (NT)

Reflect on this Scripture:

Acts 20:20-24 CEB

²⁰ You know I held back nothing that would be helpful so that I could proclaim to you and teach you both publicly and privately in your homes. ²¹ You know I have testified to both Jews and Greeks that they must change their hearts and lives as

they turn to God and have faith in our Lord Jesus. ²² Now, compelled by the Spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem. I don't know what will happen to me there. ²³ What I do know is that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city that prisons and troubles await me. ²⁴ But nothing, not even my life, is more important than my completing my mission. This is nothing other than the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify about the good news of God's grace.

Commentary

Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus brings to fitting conclusion his controversial mission to the city of Ephesus. Because it is his only speech addressed to believers, it carries paradigmatic value for the readers of Acts. We may insinuate what Paul says to the Ephesian elders into other stories in which Paul makes pastoral house calls to organize and encourage fledgling Christian congregations. His sermon topics concerning Christian leadership and character, in which he is exemplary, are particularly relevant themes of Paul's ongoing mentoring ministry. In this speech Paul emphasizes what he taught publicly and house to house: the importance of repentance and faith in Jesus and the centrality of God's grace. He also sternly warns the Ephesian leaders to be wary of potential false teachers, calling them to be faithful shepherds of the flock, following his own example of hard work and generosity. – adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol X, p 280

This week – We're Learning **to Fall Upward**. In his gripping speech recorded by Luke in Acts 20: 18-35, Paul acknowledges a looming journey to Jerusalem. Formerly, when he was at the pinnacle of his worldly success, Paul may have been welcomed by fellow Pharisees in a spirit of profound respect and open arms. However, since his Damascus Road experience, he has fallen from the good graces of the Jerusalem religious establishment into a persona non grata awaiting prison and public disgrace. This matters little to Paul since he has discovered a new life beyond career path and community respectability. He has experienced the risen Christ and the transforming power of his grace. Rather than protecting his image (the external 'container' or his life), Paul is now all about completing his mission and testifying about the good news of God's grace (the 'contents' of his life). In one sense, Paul had fallen. But from the perspective of Jesus, he had fallen upward.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

1. If we divide Paul's life into two seasons using the "fall upward" analogy, the first half was about advancement in external success (image - container). According to Acts 9:1-6, he experienced a Damascus road "fall" (literally). Can you relate? Have you experienced a fall that changed the direction of your life?
2. Richard Rohr writes that after a 'fall' or life disruption, some resort to doing repair work on their container (image) but others respond by moving to a new season (upward) of focus on the 'content' (mission) of their lives. Paul

clearly fell upward into a new season. How would you characterize your own journey? Is your tendency to do image repair work or do you seek an 'upward' path (or a little of both?). Explain.

3. How can your group help you discern this journey from 'fall' to 'upward'? Close by praying for each other.

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Acts 20:24
But nothing, not even my life, is more important than my completing my mission. This is nothing other than the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify about the good news of God's grace.
3. Consider the lessons that you are learning in this season, and prayerfully consider what God might be calling your 'second half' of life to look like.