



3 Rules to Follow When Dating Gets Serious



By Allen Reynolds

Dating is one of the most widely thought and talked about topics among young adults. But unfortunately, it is one of the least talked about subjects in churches. The lack of conversation can stem from social stigma (church leaders don't want to talk about it), demographics (people in congregations are not dating for one reason or another), and even theology (the

Bible doesn't explicitly talk about dating the way we do today). These conversations are more relevant than ever as millennials and Gen Z are waiting longer to have committed relationships and more intentionally approaching marriage if they plan to get married at all. Here are three rules to follow as a believer when dating gets serious.

1 Do they have their own relationship with Jesus?

This is probably the most important question for believers trying to find a potential mate. There are people who are not followers of Jesus who have wonderful relationships and marriages. However, people who are following Jesus have an established set of values, vision for healthy life, and hopefully a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that are key in allowing relationships to thrive. If a person isn't seeking Christ for themselves and is in a relationship with someone who is a believer, it is a set up for challenges down the road. Your spouse cannot be dependent on you, their friends, family, church, location, or anything else to maintain their connection with God. If they do, when people falter and places change their faith will be challenged. When changes and challenges arise, how can you two get back on the same page? How will you discern what

is next? How can you show love in the process? It is more likely that the challenges just become an ongoing battle of your desires vs. theirs that leaves both of you wounded.

2 Do you have a friendship?

Friendships are an expression of mutual respect and godly care between two people. If there is not a mutual respect, a view of one another as equals, or a history of godly care that isn't dependent on your romance it is a setup for struggle in your relationship. A lack of mutual respect is a breeding ground for dysfunction in your relationship. When people are healthy friends they expect mutuality and they have intimacy in shared knowledge and care for one another. When a friend makes a mistake most of the time they can forgive, move past it and keep

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being friends because there is a belief that they care. Yet in romantic relationships, this often gets missed and it becomes a game of “*prove you love me*” with fear, lack of mutuality, and limited resilience.

3 Do you have a shared vision of family?

When couples attend premarital counseling this is one of the biggest issues that they work through. Some couples unfortunately have not talked about or really come to agreement on a shared vision of family until they are getting married. It can lead to pain and heartache if one spouse wants multiple children and the other doesn't want children at all. Should both people work? Is career advancement or family stability more important? What do we do when an elderly parent or loved one needs help or becomes ill?

What does it mean to be a family? These are all questions that our own families shape in us - we need to have respect and mutual vision as we both become part of each other's family and take the steps to build a new one.

Early on in a dating relationship it's great to simply have fun and learn compatibility. But when things get serious and head toward marriage we have to ask different questions. These questions and others helped me distinguish the fun dating relationships I had from the serious relationship that is now my happy marriage. These are just a few important rules to follow and questions to ask. But if we are willing to answer the hard questions we can build a better foundation to turn our temporary romances into lasting loving relationships.

Lesson 12





Where We're Going

We will understand why the people of Malta reacted to Paul as they did, learn that others are watching them, and be encouraged to demonstrate our faith by ministering to those in need.



Get Them Going

Have your class close their eyes. Tell them to imagine being in a boat, out at sea during a terrible storm. The storm is so bad that there is no visible sunlight for two weeks. The boat violently slams into huge rocks as it tries to get close to nearby land. The ship is crushed. Those who are able to swim begin to swim to shore. Those who can't swim float on broken wreckage pieces. Once they make it to shore, they endure frigid cold and heavy rains. Finally, they are able to gather some sticks to place on a fire that had just been built, when suddenly a venomous snake is driven out by the heat and bites them on the hand. Ask the class how they would feel at that particular moment. Ask if they would be ready to minister to and help others.



Stop, Drop, and Pray

So many memories came flooding back as I read the writing prompt for my college essay. The prompt asked me to write, in 500 words or less, about the most frightening time of my life. It actually wasn't that long ago. It was when an earthquake rocked my school and town. I remember it like it was yesterday. It had been on a Wednesday and it must have been close to 11:15 a.m. because I had just arrived at my 4th period English class. At first, I didn't know what was going on. I thought one of my friends had grabbed the back of my chair and was jerking me backwards. I turned to tell him to stop fooling around in class before we got in trouble. To my surprise, when I turned around, I saw that not just my chair was moving, but the whole room was swaying. Books began to fall from the shelves and many of my classmates screamed. I was paralyzed with fear. I didn't scream. I didn't cry. I just froze. It was surreal.

I remember so vividly how calmly Mr. Weingarten reacted. He stood and motioned with his hands for everyone to quiet down. "Listen to me," he said sternly. We all stared at him as he continued. "Everyone away from the bookshelves and the windows. We will all be fine. I want you to quickly and quietly follow the fire escape route down the stairs and outside."

We all did exactly what he said and we were fine. It turned out to be what the news called tremors, but it felt like more than that to me. About a week later, I asked Mr. Weingarten how he was able to stay so cool, calm, and collected. He said, "When I realized what was happening, I prayed. I asked God to remove fear and give me wisdom on what to do and how to handle the situation so that all my students would be safe, and that's what He did. Just remember, in life, situations will arise that will be scary, but always stop and pray, and God will guide you through."



Real Talk

1. Name at least three ways in which our reactions to difficulties in our lives have the potential to bring glory to God.
2. In what ways does prayer give us peace and wisdom in times of difficulty?
3. Why do you think we so readily blame the hardships that people suffer on them, as if they must have done something wrong? Read Psalm 34:19 and John 16:33 and explain why, according to Scripture, this is erroneous thinking.



The Big Picture

In Acts 27, a massive storm arose and the ship carrying Paul and quite a few others was destroyed. By the grace of God, no lives were lost. In today's passage, we find Paul, the other passengers, and the shipwrecked crew on the island of Malta. The natives were very kind to them and God gave Paul an opportunity to minister and bring healing to those on the island.



Make It Stick

“As it happened, Publius’s father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him.” (Acts 28:8, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

Acts 28:1 Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta.

2 The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us.

3 As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand.

4 The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, “A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live.”

5 But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed.

6 The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn’t harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.

7 Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and treated us kindly for three days.

8 As it happened, Publius’s father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him.

9 Then all the other sick people on the island came and were healed.

10 As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people supplied us with everything we would need for the trip.



The Players

Barbarous people. The people of Malta were not barbarians as they are defined today. Rather, in biblical times, Greeks used the term for anyone who didn’t speak Greek and was seen as an uncultured individual.

Malta. Also called Melita, it was an island located near both Sicily (60 miles away) and Syracuse (90 miles) and was in a strategic location for trade. It is clear that the island had an established government system and that its chief, Publius, was wealthy. He was able to lodge the 276 ship passengers at his estate (Acts 28:7).



Backstage

After surviving a brutal northeast storm, Paul and the other passengers either swam to the island of Malta or floated there on boards or pieces of the destroyed ship (Acts 27:44). The inhabitants warmly welcomed the strangers out of the rain and cold. Rather than resting with the others, Paul gathered firewood. As he did, a snake rose from the fire and bit him. When the islanders witnessed the biting, they believed it was divine payback for some perceived crime and waited for Paul to die. Paul, however, simply shook the snake off. The fact that he was not harmed changed the islanders’ opinion: They now thought he was a god.



Combing Through

1. Receiving Help from Strangers (Acts 28:1–2)

While it is true that it is “more blessed to give than to receive” (from Acts 20:35, KJV), it is equally true that believers must learn to receive help during difficult situations. Family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors are among those who assist in time of need. And as Paul discovered on the island of Malta, strangers also may provide timely assistance.

Paul and the other passengers found this to be true as they landed on Malta, wet from the sea during winter. They had no clothing to change into, no firewood or matches by which to warm themselves, and no food to eat. The islanders, quickly assessing the situation, came to their aid. They built a fire, offering exactly what the stranded strangers needed most. They later provided lodging and months later gave the ship’s passengers needed resources to continue to Rome.

During stormy seasons of life, we learn there is no such thing as a “small blessing.” Anything and everything that helps make a difficult situation easier to bear is big to the recipient. The residents of Malta built a fire. The ship’s passengers were wise enough not to devalue the islanders’ help or to reject it because of the givers’ nationality. God recruits believers and nonbelievers to help Christians in distress. Learning to receive help from nonbelievers is especially difficult for some Christians.

It is not always how much we give or even what we give but that we are willing to be used by God to aid someone in distress. Our availability goes a long way in showing recipients God’s providence and care. Using the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus taught that a neighbor is anyone in need of help, and the “good” neighbor is the person who provides help in the time of trouble. The parable teaches that we should be grateful givers and receivers. As others rush to assist you, joyfully receive their gifts of time, talent, or treasure. If you struggle with asking or receiving help from others, ask God to make you a gracious recipient.

2. Divine Protection (vv. 3–6)

Soon after surviving the tumultuous storm at sea, Paul found himself shipwrecked on an island. Rather than sit back and allow the islanders to serve him, Paul also got involved in collecting firewood for the needed fire. As he began serving others, a viper came out of the fire and bit him. The islanders took this as a sign that Paul was a murderer who was about to reap a requisite punishment. What was Paul’s response? He shook off the snake and continued his activities without any ill effects. That one action, more than any words, served to remove any doubt from the islanders’ minds that Paul was a criminal.

The fact that he was able to shake off the snake is reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching after His resurrection. Jesus appeared to the 11 original disciples and gave them what is commonly called the “Great Commission.” During His discourse, He discussed the signs that would follow believers. Among these, He said, “[T]hey will pick up snakes with their hands; and ... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (from Mark 16:18, NIV). Paul exhibited

both of these miraculous signs while on Malta. He did not do so to benefit himself but to help others. The people recognized something different about Paul because of these signs, which was evidence of his faith in Christ.

3. Ministering to Others (vv. 7–10)

Paul was able to minister to others in spite of finding himself in a trying predicament. Rather than fall prey to depression and selfishness because of his circumstances, Paul continued to use his gifts

and talents in executing the ministry God had given him, with signs following. When it became known that the chief's father was sick, Paul did what he knew to do. He laid hands on the man and healed him. That ability to rise above the circumstances and continue to flow in God's anointing was critical to the islanders' perception that there was something extraordinary about Paul. His example teaches that we, too, can rise above our situations to help others in need. Further, it proves that in spite of any difficulties we encounter, God's gifts and callings can still work through us if we allow them to.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have participants read Acts 28:1–10, BACKGROUND, and IN DEPTH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Have participants answer the following questions:

1. Why do you suppose the people of Malta reacted to Paul the way they did?
2. Think of a challenging situation in your life when you had an opportunity to put your faith into action. Do you believe that the way you handled that situation allowed others to see Christ in you? Explain your answer.
3. If, from a distance, someone watched everything you did, and overheard every conversation you had over the past month, what might they say about your character? Would they believe you are truly a Christian?



Next Steps

1. Reflect on who is watching you or following you who may not know you well. What image are you sharing with them? Does it reflect your relationship with Christ?

2. Think about how you can be intentional about letting your public life reflect your faith. Try one way to do that in the coming week.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Have students discuss a time when they saw or heard someone handle a difficult situation in an extraordinary manner. Ask them what it was about that person's reaction to the situation that was so extraordinary. If this event was something that was captured on the news or on YouTube, create a link on your social media that will enable others to see this godly reaction. Give the link a title, perhaps something like, "Living to Give God Glory!"

B. Personal Application

Paul writes in Philippians 4:9 (NLT), "Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you." Write this Scripture on a 3"x5" card and carry it with you everywhere for a period of time you choose. Read it and ask God to enable you to live in such a way that if, like Paul, people put into practice everything they heard from you and saw you doing, the peace of God would be with them.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

B. Prayer

Lord God, help my life reflect Jesus Christ and bring Him glory, especially in challenging times.

In Jesus name,
Amen



Say Word?

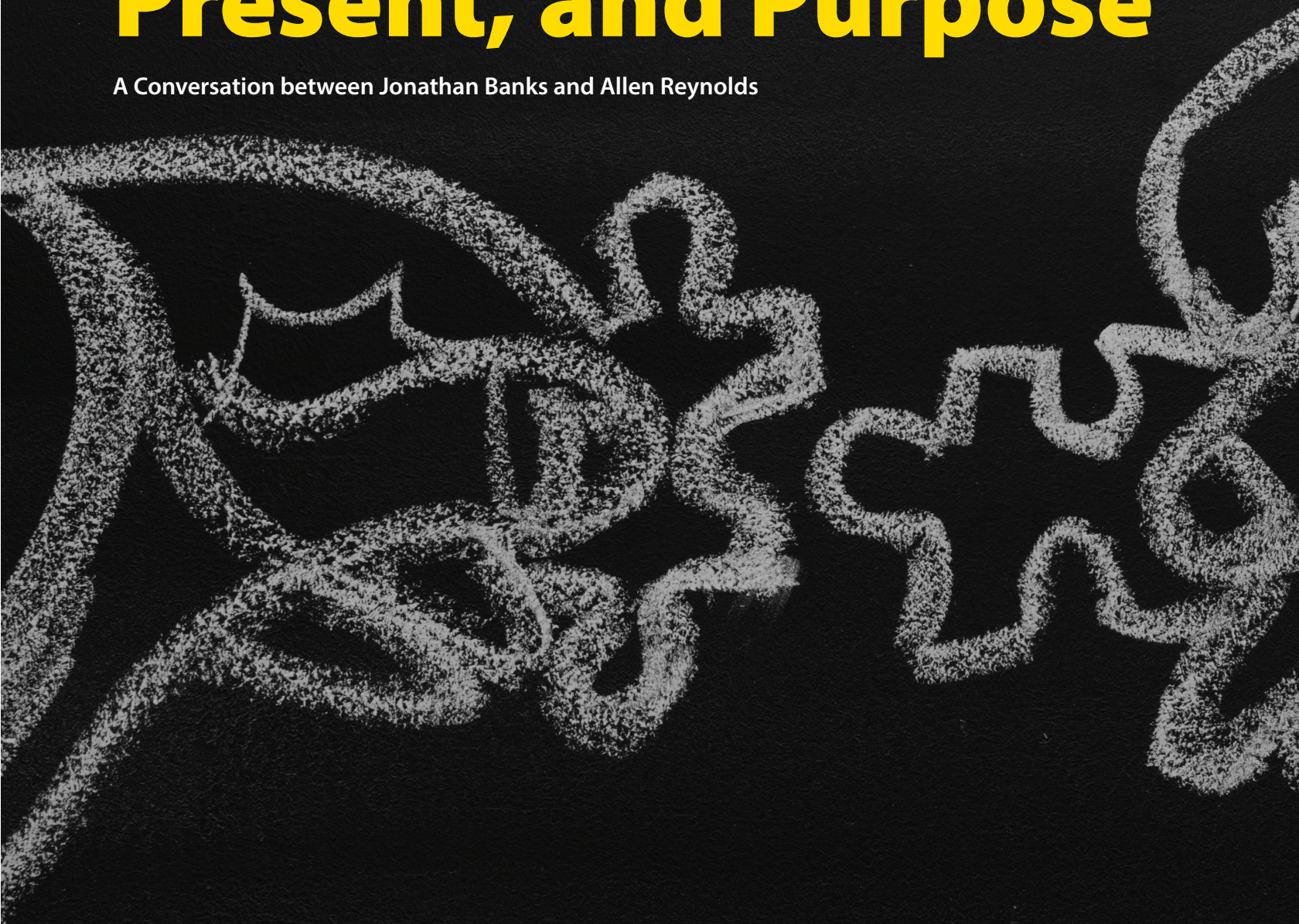
Melita. muh-LEE-tuh.
Publius. POOB-lee-uhs.

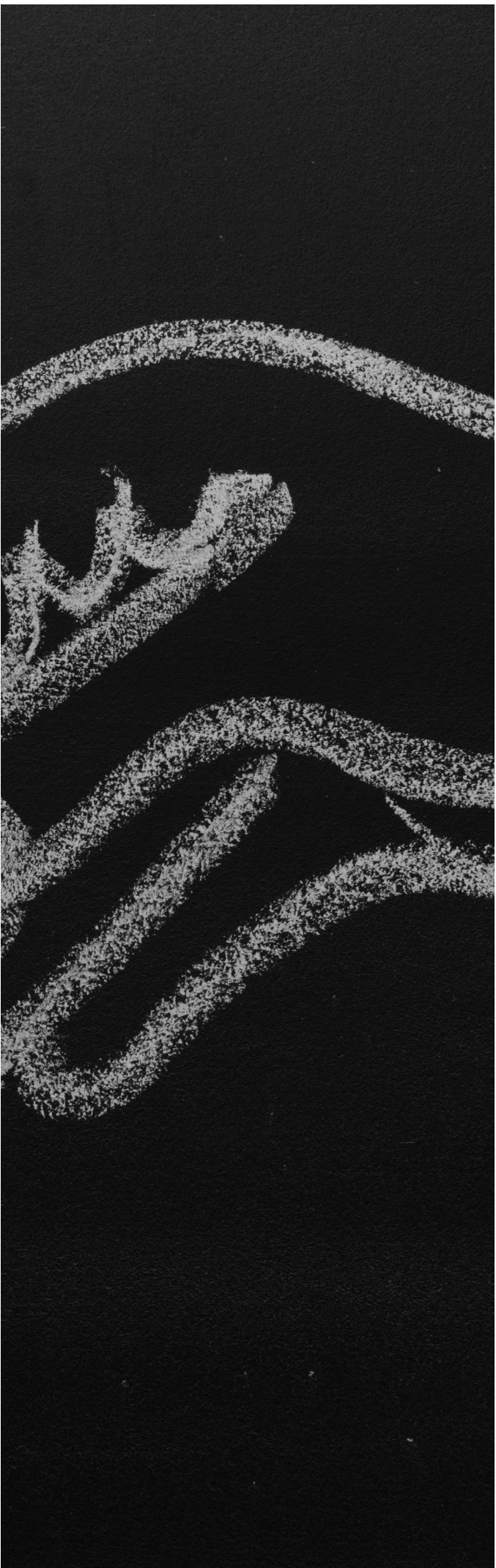
SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.—Mother Teresa

Bridging the Gap **Between Past,** **Present, and Purpose**

A Conversation between Jonathan Banks and Allen Reynolds





Allen

One of the questions that comes up all the time for our UrbanFaith audience, how is it that I find my purpose? How is it I find my giftings? How do I find that place where God may be calling me? Can you talk a little bit to folks trying to figure that out?

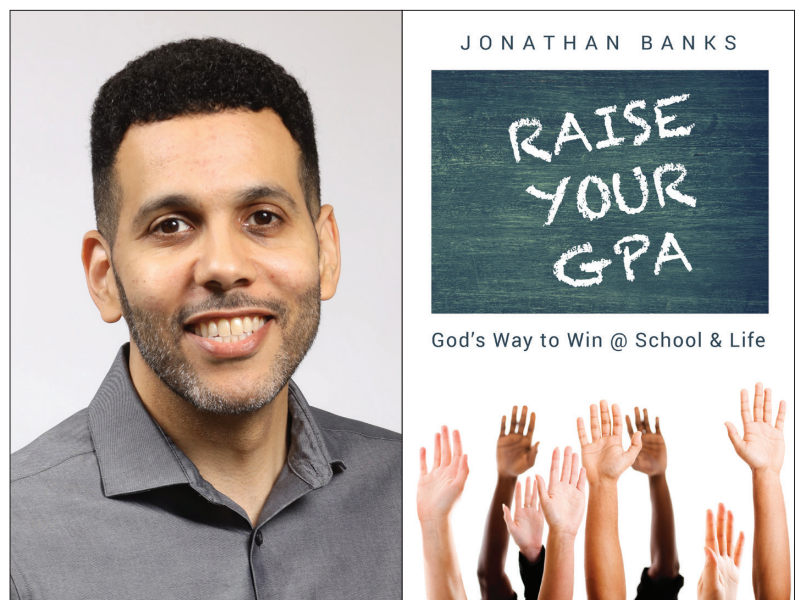
Jonathan

My family and I have seen the merry go round in the circus behind purpose, preaching, and life. I know this sounds a little cliché, but this is experience talking. Your purpose will find you. The Bible says the steps of a good person are ordered and it also says in Proverbs 3, that if you acknowledge the Lord in all your ways, he'll direct your path. It doesn't say that if you perfectly pray, that if you hear from heaven, go on a 90 day fast [he will direct you]. It says you have to acknowledge him. By putting God first, seeking his face, trying to honor him with what he has put inside of your heart, and looking for ways to maximize those opportunities. God will help your purpose find you.

I started out in engineering school, ended up going to business school. Now I serve in ministry full time, empowering young people, coaching youth leaders, serving pastors, connecting with community leaders. Your purpose will find you the same way that God pre-ordained us, loved us before the foundation of the world, knew us before He formed us in our mother's womb. He has a purpose that is greater than our life. And here's the way I like to explain it to young people, that you are not big enough to mess up God's plan for your life. It doesn't matter if you are middle aged, young adults, tween, teen wherever God has you right now. You're not big enough to mess up His plan. Acknowledge Him.

That doesn't mean that you should not be intellectually curious, doesn't mean that you shouldn't be spiritually curious. You have to do a spiritual inventory, and a natural inventory. What has God blessed me with? Ask prayerfully, do I believe I can apply this for His glory, and our good? And then of course, the Bible says in the multitude of counselors, there is safety, you got to find people that are smarter than you in certain areas more experienced than you in certain areas, especially when it comes to our young people.

If you go back 90 years, and you know, back then a lot of women were running small businesses, men, oftentimes were doing labor. And if your



father was a plumber, you didn't go on a 40-day consecration and ask God, what should I do with my life, if you were a young man, your father was a plumber, you knew you were going to be a plumber. You don't have to pray and ask God, but yet your life still made an impact in your community. Nowadays, things are very different. Our whole apprenticeship model has turned into much more of a collegiate model, where now we pay people to educate and to open up doors of opportunity and resources in different fields of work. You can now pay someone to train you to be a tradesman, a plumber, a carpenter, you can pay someone to train you in the field of science or nursing or healthcare. And who you pay is typically a college or a university, where they prepare you with a skill set to grow into that field. That is a very different dynamic. Back in the day, there was mentorship, there was apprenticeship where you were able to learn your orientation as a young person. You were able to see that field, and you [would] begin to think in that field and you would innovate in that field. Nowadays, you are forced to play catch up all the time. And oftentimes, we're waiting until we're 18, 20, 22, to discover new areas of growth in our lives. There's nothing wrong with that. It's okay to be 21, 25, 27 and not know exactly what God has for you to do. But we cannot wait in preparing our people, beginning to orient them in terms of math, science, English, communication. We've got to make sure that we're firm on the competencies in those core subjects, because then God can open up every door as we grow and discover new ways of serving him, serving our community, opening up businesses. God will do amazing things when we're prepared.

Allen

How can [we] create space or find ways to allow God to lead [our] lives? Can you just give us a couple of nuggets?

Jonathan

I think oftentimes, we make godly living, only attainable by superheroes, pastors, and grandparents. That is not the case. If God has a favorite group of humans, it's young people. Show me that anywhere else in the Bible where God says it would be better that you tie a big rock around your neck and be thrown to the river than to mess with any young person. His favorite people are young people. And demystifying walking with God is essential. Understanding that God never said, love me with your best. He never said love Me with your perfection. God said love Me with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength, which means your victories and your tragedies, God wants your blessings. And he also wants your mess ups. He wants all of you and he just wants you to give him your attention, your affection, your time to really trust Him and to seek Him. That is like the biggest thing. God said, if you seek me, you'll find me that is one of the promises that is so underrated.

Allen

What is the last piece of advice you want to share with our audience? I'll say first with students and then with teachers or caregivers or parents.

Jonathan


For every student..., when I was in high school, people would ask me, What I wanted to be when I grew up? And I would tell them a biomedical engineer, their eyes got so big, and they would begin to just dump praises on me and tell me how great I was and how smart I was. That felt good. But that was not God's plan. That was something I read in a brochure. For every young person hear me, the brochure will be glossy, shiny, and it will be that shiny object that once you come up with an answer, you almost feel locked in like you can't change. I want to encourage you, before you decide on a career trajectory, on a college major, or on a trade school focus make sure that you shadow. Know what that means follow along and go on the



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“Be who God called you to be, but you’ve got to investigate more of what God’s gifts inside of you are. Don’t just give the pat answer, discover more about different careers, and then be prepared for God to shift you as new careers open up.”

job with at least two different people in that field, so that you can see not just the commercial and the brochure and the website that’s designed to get your money to go into that program, but that you actually see the work that’s being done. And if it resonates with you, fantastic. If it doesn’t, you got to get out and shadow more individuals. Shadow someone in the sciences, shadow someone in healthcare, shadow someone that’s working as a professional counselor, lawyer, coach. Shadow someone who is working in the sports arena, oftentimes, you know, we are limited to what we’ve seen. Sports, food, and clothing labels, there is more to life than that. And in fact, when you dominate the industry in the area that God has for you to grow in, you’ll have as many clothing labels, as much food and as much music and entertainment than you can handle. Be who God called you to be, but you’ve got to investigate more of what God’s gifts inside of you are. Don’t just give the pat answer, discover more about different careers, and then be prepared for God to shift you as new careers open up. When I was coming up in high school, I couldn’t be an app developer or a software developer. There was no such thing as the Internet back then. So as new things emerge, new technologies open up, there will be new opportunities for you. Be prepared. You can’t forfeit science. You can’t forfeit math. You have to dominate in communications, you have to be competent, young people. That’s why you want to do well in school, school is not just a place to meet your friends to hang out. Thank God for that.

And for every caregiver out there, if I have one nugget, oh, goodness, there, there are a lot. But I would really say believe in the young people that you’re mentoring, tutoring, teaching, and loving on. Believe in them, do less for them, do more with them. We think that they’re always dependent on us. Oftentimes, they’re smarter than us. They’re better prepared than us. They are certainly more malleable than us. They can change, they can grow, they can adapt. So we’ve got to prepare them for an unlimited future, which means we’ve got to employ them in leadership. Now, shame on us when we put the program together, and then expect them to be encouraged and excited about it. Now, if they’re not at the table, when it starts, why should we expect them to be invested in it, help them develop their leadership potential now, help them develop those entrepreneurial skills. The Bible even talks about now. Now faith is a substance and we [have] to activate their faith. Now make sure they’re praying, now make sure they’re fasting now. Help them come alongside you now. And don’t make them do it like you do it. Let them do it like they want to do it. Make sure if you can’t back it up biblically, don’t make them have to do it. Because then that breeds hypocrisy that breeds religiosity. And nothing turns young people off more to God and religiosity and hypocrisy. Make that relationship authentic. Help them fall in love with real Jesus. And then there will be no limits. The sky is not the limit, certainly not our limited mentality, and capacity is not the limit. There are no limits in God. That’s why the Bible says all things are possible to them who believe, and that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength, not just the things that we can think of. They can do all things, even things we have not dreamed of yet. That’s why eye has not seen ear has not heard. But God will reveal it to us when we raise our GPAs or God Point Averages.

Lesson 13





Where We're Going

We will have a deeper understanding of the definition and scope of evangelism; be enlightened as to the importance of knowing and making Scripture the foundation of our efforts to share our faith; and be encouraged to explore our own gifts, as well as expand our comfort zone so they can alleviate hindrances and find a comfortable way to talk to others about Jesus.



Get Them Going

Excite your students by initiating discussion about political correctness and how it might interfere with one's ability to publicly witness to others. Emphasize examples where public prayer and imposing one's belief upon another is prohibited. Ask if anyone feels if there are instances where people have gone too far with any of these issues. Encourage participants to be specific and to elaborate.



Company Policy

Kim worked for Simon and Young, a collections agency. She jokingly called it Sodom and Gomorrah. She felt it was a dreadful place because all she ever seemed to hear were her coworkers bragging about their scandalous rendezvous or gossiping behind each other's backs. To keep herself from being drawn in, Kim made sure she kept her usual conversation to "hello" and "goodbye." She busied herself with work throughout the day, and used her lunch break for Bible study and prayer. She felt as though she had a good handle on the job until her pastor preached a new series of sermons at church.

"If you're only at your job to get a paycheck, you're missing your calling," the pastor emphasized during Sunday's service. "If you think you're the one who got you the job, you're wrong. God strategically placed you in that particular place with those particular folks for a particular reason ... and it has nothing to do with your paycheck."

That sermon made Kim want to understand her God-given purpose at S&Y. She prayed for God to show her why He put her there. From then on, she saw everything in a new light. Kim found herself in conversations with coworkers; one woman wanted to lose weight and Kim offered to walk with her during their lunch break. The woman gladly agreed to Kim's one condition, which was to discuss the Scripture-of-the-day during their stroll, and to pray together before and after it. Three weeks later, one of Kim's coworkers stopped by her desk. "Hey Kim, will you pray for me and my mom?" Kim asked the woman to repeat the question, especially since this was the employee who instigated many of the problems among coworkers. "I know it's unexpected, but I just got a call that my mother has been in a terrible car accident."

Kim remembered her own prayer to God and immediately ushered the woman to the nearest restroom. When Kim ended the prayer, she felt bold enough to ask the woman if she had any type of personal relationship with Christ. Then Kim shared the Gospel, as well as her own testimony.



Real Talk

1. How was Kim's perspective changed on the people at her company? What impact did it have on what she did at work?
2. Paul was used by God to spread the Gospel in Rome, even though he was on house arrest and confined to his quarters for two years. In what ways can you be a better witness for Christ right where God has placed you?



The Big Picture

Today's passage finds Paul, still a prisoner, arriving in Rome after being extradited from Caesarea by King Agrippa. There, Paul met with vast numbers of local Jewish leaders. With the use of Scriptures, Paul proclaimed the Kingdom of God in an attempt to convince them about the truth of Jesus Christ.



Make It Stick

“So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it.” (Acts 28:28, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

Acts 28:23 So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul’s lodging. He explained and testified about the Kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Scriptures. Using the law of Moses and the books of the prophets, he spoke to them from morning until evening.

24 Some were persuaded by the things he said, but others did not believe.

25 And after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: “The Holy Spirit was right when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,

26 ‘Go and say to this people: When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.

27 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’

28 So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it.”

30 For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him,

31 boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.



The Players

Rome. Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. Its population exceeded one million people. The city was wealthy, literate, and artistic. The Romans worshiped many pagan gods and even some of the emperors.

Jews who had come to believe apparently started the Roman church during Pentecost (Acts 2:41–47). They spread the Gospel on their return to Rome and the church grew. While in Corinth, Paul wrote a letter to the Romans to encourage the believers. After taking money to Jerusalem for the poor Christians there, he desired to visit the Roman believers on his way to Spain (Romans 15:23–28), but his visit did not happen as he had planned. Years later, Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner.



Backstage

Finally, after a 2,000-mile journey that started in Caesarea, Paul arrived in Rome. He was permitted to live in his own quarters under house arrest or with a light chain. This fairly good treatment resulted from a favorable report from a Roman official, Porcius Festus, and the goodwill of the centurion (Acts 24:23). This proves God can grant us favor even with our enemies.

Paul called together Rome’s Jewish leaders. The Jews were back; the decree of Claudius expelling them from the city had expired (18:2). Paul addressed the leaders as “my brothers” to acknowledge the common Jewish blood he shared with them (from 28:17, NIV). Paul wanted the leaders to feel connected to him. In doing so, they may have enough compassion toward him to try to understand the ordeal that created his unjust imprisonment. He explained to them that he was bound because of the hope of Israel, which is the Messiah. He grabbed their attention because they wanted to know more about Jesus. There was a great dispute about Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah. They agreed to listen to Paul’s presentation of the Gospel.

The Jewish leaders’ agreement to hear the Gospel was in fulfillment of Paul’s calling to share the Good News with the world, starting in Jerusalem (9:13, 28). God planned that through the seed of Abraham, He would send the Messiah into the world. Now that the Messiah had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ, the entire world needed to know about Him. That is why Paul traveled on missionary journeys during his lifetime. He wanted everyone to have the opportunity to receive Jesus Christ. In spite of the way he arrived in Rome, Paul knew God had a purpose for his imprisonment. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, KJV). Therefore, what was intended for evil, God worked it into good in Paul’s life and ministry.



Combing Through

1. Paul Shares the Gospel with the Jews (Acts 28:23–25a)

On the agreed-upon day, the Jewish leaders came back to the place where Paul resided with an even larger group than expected. Paul testified and taught them about the kingdom of God all day into the evening. He tried to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament (Acts 28:23). Romans, written some years earlier, reveals Paul’s ongoing dialogue with the Jews in Rome.

Some of the Jews were persuaded while others were not. Everyone has to make a choice to either accept or reject the Gospel. The most important fact is that we share the Gospel with people no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves. God was faithful in preserving Paul’s life so he could share the Gospel in Rome. He was imprisoned but did not complain. He used the opportunity to keep his commitment to spreading the Word.

2. The Jews Turn Away (vv. 25b–27)

Verses 26 and 27 are quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10. They are also quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13:14, 15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:40. We can picture in these verses people covering their eyes and ears so they can’t perceive or hear because they are so adamantly against the message and will do what they think will stop the message from getting through. It was predicted that the majority of the Jews would not accept their Messiah, but they are also responsible because they are refusing to look and listen. But don’t forget the significant number of Jews who believe, including Paul and the apostles.

3. Paul Preaches to the Gentiles (vv. 28–31)

Because the Jews rejected the message of salvation, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles. He knew the Gentiles would listen, so he spent two years teaching, preaching, counseling, and receiving visitors (Luke, Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, and Mark) while confined. During his imprisonment, Paul wrote many of his epistles:

Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Paul did not let his imprisonment hinder him from proclaiming the Gospel. He did not worry about the outcome of his upcoming trial. Instead, he committed his life into the hands of God. For Paul, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (from Philippians 1:21). His faithfulness was rewarded through souls coming to Christ.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Acts 28:23–31, BACKGROUND, and IN DEPTH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Have students answer the following:

1. In today’s passage, many came to hear Paul’s message about Christ. Some believed but some did not. How do you think Paul felt when the message he shared was rejected?
2. What will you do when people refuse to listen when you are sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ?
3. What was the final thing Paul said to the group of Jewish leaders before they left? What was the significance of his final words?
4. Paul was used by God to spread the Gospel in Rome, even though he was on house arrest and confined to his quarters for two years. In what ways can you be a better witness for Christ right where God has placed you?



Next Steps

1. Reflect on the word evangelism. What negative or positive feelings do you have about that word?
2. Take time to define what it means for you to share your faith. What ways are you able to share your faith? Would you be comfortable sharing about your relationship with Jesus with someone else?



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Create a one pager or infographic along with matching posters specifically designed for believers. Share them with other Christian churches and organizations. On the tract’s cover, use a creative way to ask the recipient if they make it a regular practice to seize every opportunity to win souls for Christ. Point out that if their answer is “no,” they are not in the minority. Provide supporting Scriptures to educate them on what God requires about sharing our faith from all believers (II Timothy 4:3–5). Emphasize the importance of knowing that some people will not be saved no matter what you do to present the Gospel,

but more importantly, some will never know anything about God if we don’t tell them (Romans 10:14–15).

B. Personal Application

Challenge yourself to bring someone who doesn’t attend church to a service and Sunday School with you next week. Today, make a specific strategy on how to accomplish this goal. Compile a list of the people you plan to ask. Rehearse your planned invitation. To give your offer a personal touch, try to cater specific things for specific individuals. And then, go for it!



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Present the DAILY BIBLE READINGS listed in the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE.

B. Prayer

Holy Spirit, lead me as I share my faith with others. Help me to be sensitive and discerning as well as wise. Help me to show you and not be caught up in myself.

In Jesus Name,
Amen




Say Word?

Esaias. eh-sah-EE-as.
Expounded. ik-SPOUND-ed.

SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

Spend more time in study and prayer. That’s the secret of successful evangelism.—Billy Graham

Parting Shot



Faith is how we know God is working in our lives now and will continue to be with us in the future. But faith is not the same thing as belief. Faith is not a matter of simply believing in the way many of us think of it today, but rather trusting God. This trust is not based on wishful thinking or basic logic. It is the basis of our relationship with God based on the work He has done in our lives and the lives of those who have gone before us through Jesus Christ. Our faith is called to be active and responsive to the gift of God's grace. We cannot simply say we have faith; we must live it out daily. We live faithfully, consistently seeking God because He has showed His love and power in our lives.

The Lord has given us revelation of what it means to live out our faith through the lives of disciples from the early church until today. In Hebrews we learned what faith is, how it perseveres, and how it is truly motivated. In the beginning of Acts we witnessed how various people respond in faith to the Good News of Jesus Christ. And as we closed Acts with Paul's missionary journeys, we discover how faith enables us to endure the trials and difficulties of life. We are part of a legacy of faith in God. The testimonies of believers who have gone before us help to inspire and encourage us as we continue in our own faith journeys. As followers of Jesus it is not easy to hold onto our faith in a world that often rejects Jesus. But we are able to see the blessing and hope of our faith as we study the scriptures and share together with one another as the Church.

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