

Scriptural Roots of Advancing the Gospel into the Nations

Introduction

We each are part of a fascinating story that has roots. You play a key role in the story of your family and your family history has roots. You also play a vital role in the story of The Navigators discipleship movement that started years ago and spread to many nations. Together we are part of a bigger story of the Gospel of Jesus and His kingdom spreading into those nations. The roots of that bigger story are found in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit leads each generation to return to its roots to gain insight into their role.

What is the Spirit teaching us today? That is the question that God used to give us our Calling, Values, and Vision, and that is still the question before us today.

The Spirit speaks to us primarily through the Scriptures. *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope* (Romans 15:4). We come to the Scriptures because we believe that in the God-breathed record, the wisdom of God, the heartbeat of God, and the purposes of God are being revealed in ways that instruct and inspire faith for every generation of Jesus' followers.

We know that the events that the Scriptures record happened in contexts very different from our own. So we come asking the Holy Spirit to teach us what we need for our time and our place. We come conscious of our fallibility and wanting and needing one another's insights as well as our own.

For those of us with leadership influence, it is especially important that we keep wrestling together with the implications of the Calling, Values, and Vision that God has given us as Navigators, in the light of the Scriptures, asking the Spirit to guide us.

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Your Assignment

Between now and the International Forum in Malaysia in September, we ask that you spend from 3-5 hours on each of the five studies, and come prepared to share what you learn with others at the Forum. Over the next three months before the Forum, that would take about one day a month, or a morning or evening each week. So, you could weave your study into your daily or weekly routines, your team Bibles, or even a team retreat.

The studies are deliberately written in a form that is not overly directed. They invite you to reflect broadly on the inspired record of the birth of the Gospel movement and to make observations that can guide us as we work together to live out our Calling as Navigators.

Let's be praying earnestly, as we study and reflect, that the Spirit will indeed speak to us through the Scriptures and guide us as Jesus promised.

Study 1: Jesus' Ministry in the Gospels

Read and reflect deeply on one of the Gospels, beginning with Mark 1:14-6:12 and John 13-17.

As the Father sent me, so I send you. We believe that Jesus is the author of our Calling, so it is important that we look into the Gospels to see how He lived out what He has called us to.

1. What different approaches and types of ministry did Jesus use and why?

2. What different types of people did Jesus engage with in His ministry?

3. What do we learn about how He envisioned the advance of the Gospel—

a. From His example?

b. From His teaching, including the parables?

c. From His prayer?

Study 2: Launching Movements of the Gospel

Study Acts 1-12.

The first twelve chapters of Acts describe the pioneering efforts of the first disciples, initially in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7) and then after Stephen's death, into Judea and Samaria and the first Gentile contexts (Acts 8-12).

The Jerusalem Ministry of the Apostles: Acts 1-7

The early chapters of Acts describe the growth of the Gospel among early responders in Jerusalem (clearly prepared soil, but with significant official opposition).

1. What did the recipients of the ministry in Acts 1-12 understand the Gospel to be? How did the Gospel bear fruit among them, what did that fruit look like?
2. What approaches to ministry do you observe in this context?
3. What do you note about prayer among those who were launching this movement?
4. What do you observe about their relationships with one another? What do you observe about embryonic expressions of *ekklesia*¹?
5. What was the generational impact and why?
6. Which of these seem most instructive for Navigators and in what contexts?

¹ *Ekklesia* is the Greek word that is translated "church" in English translations of the Bible. Today the word "church" carries many connotations that go beyond what the Scriptures specifically say. Many of those extra-biblical connotations are good, but some are not helpful in contexts where the Gospel is just now arriving.

The Scattering from Jerusalem and the Beginnings of the Church in Antioch: Acts 8-12

As the believers were scattered from Jerusalem, the Gospel began to spread more widely.

7. What approaches to ministry carried the Gospel into its next phase among the Gentiles?

8. What do you observe about the how the fruit of their ministry flowed into their context and the nations around them? What efforts were made by leaders to stay connected and to sustain generational growth?

9. Reflect on how the Gospel took root in Antioch and the significance of this for the unfolding story of the Gospel's advance (Acts 11:19-30 and Acts 13:1-3).

10. What do you observe about the role of the Holy Spirit in these first 12 chapters of Acts?

11. What are important lessons for us as we seek to implement our Calling to advance the Gospel into the nations through spiritual generations of labourers? What other questions and observations should we consider?

12. What is one insight that you sense God may be leading you to retain and apply in your ministry?

Study 3: Paul's Pioneering Ministry

Study Acts 13-18 and 1 Thessalonians.

The first two of Paul's missionary journeys are the clearest examples in Scripture of pioneering missionary efforts.

1. What approaches did Paul use in planting the Gospel in new contexts?
2. What social, political, cultural, religious, or other realities in the contexts influenced him?
3. What do you observe about the distinct ways that Paul adapted in communicating the Gospel in these two contexts: Acts 13:16-43 and Acts 17:18-34?
4. How did opposition and persecution affect and shape the movement and the faith of the new disciples?
5. As you read through Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, what desired outcomes of his ministry do you sense were most important to him?

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6. What evidence of a strategy do you notice guiding Paul’s efforts? What would you identify as elements of his strategy?
7. What steps did he take to ensure the generational continuance of the ministries he planted?
8. How should our study of “Paul’s missionary journeys” influence our pioneering efforts?
9. Other questions or observations we should consider?
10. What is one insight that you sense God may be leading you to retain and apply in your ministry?

Study 4: The Planting and Growth of the Gospel in Ephesus

Study Acts 19-20; Ephesians; 1 Timothy; 1, 2 and 3 John; and Revelation 2-3.

The longest look we have in the Scriptures at the Gospel being planted and growing in one context is Ephesus and outwards from Ephesus into the Roman province of Asia. (The events of Acts 19 were taking place in AD 53, and Revelation 2-3 was probably written about AD 90.)

1. How was the Gospel planted in Ephesus?
2. How did it spread and grow in Ephesus and into the surrounding province?
3. What did Paul accomplish during his two years in Ephesus? What did he leave behind? What was unfinished when he left?
4. What was the generational impact and why?
5. How did Paul and his team demonstrate commitment to coming alongside the missional community that Paul left behind in Ephesus?

Study 5: Paul's Vision for the Fruit of his Ministry

Study Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

Paul's letters give us much to consider as we wrestle with the ongoing generational fruitfulness of those we disciple.

1. What do you notice in these letters regarding Paul's vision for the fruit of his ministry?
2. How did Paul expect this to be worked out, and what did he see as critical to it happening?
3. What provision did Paul and his fellow workers make to come alongside, support, and encourage the outworking of this vision?
4. What do you notice regarding the relationships between local leaders and mobile leaders such as Timothy and Titus?

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5. We will be gathering in Malaysia as the International Leadership Community of The Navigators. 1 Corinthians 16, Romans 16, Colossians 4, and 2 Timothy 4 are four chapters in which Paul gave us a personal look at his international leadership community. He mentioned by name many of those with whom and to whom he ministered. As you read these passages, what stands out to you about their relationships and the different contributions?

6. What are some lessons for us as Navigators?

7. As you look back over these five studies, what are some of your insights about the roles of pioneering, local laboring, local leading, and coming alongside? How could you see those insights applied in your context?

8. As you think about the Navigator work around the world today, what do you believe we need to emphasize from these studies as an International Leadership Community?

9. What insights from these five studies do you sense God may be leading you to retain and apply in your ministry?
 - a. Changes of understanding?

 - b. Changes of attitude or motivation?

 - c. Changes of behavior or practice?