

## Growing Mightily & Prevailing In 2018 Pleasant Plains 12-31-2017AM NICK ANGEL

- **\*READ Acts 19:11-20\*** Paul's time in Ephesus was certainly a very productive one. Prior to the verses that we just read, we find that during his time in this city the Apostle was busy introducing many to baptism in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. (**Acts 19:1-7**) We, also, find Paul spending three months in the synagogues reasoning with those present concerning the Kingdom of God. (**Acts 19:8**) Then we find Paul, over the next two years, spending his days in the school of Tyrannus reasoning with many there. His efforts were so prolific that Luke records that through what Paul did in these places that *"all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."* (**Acts 19:10**)
- If we then skipped ahead past our verses, we'll see that while there was great success in Ephesus concerning the Gospel...that didn't last the entire time he was there. In fact, Paul's time in Ephesus ended almost disastrously. He was making plans leave and go back towards Jerusalem, but his work in reasoning and persuading the multitudes to the Way of Christ had become known to many and that caused a great uproar from those who were followers of Artemis/Diana of Ephesus. Thankfully, Paul and the other disciples were able to avoid true disaster through a town clerk intervening for them. (**Acts 19:21-41**)
- Sandwiched in between these bookends of success and danger are a few other awesome stories that also have a little strange sprinkled into them. The first thing we see is the power of God being worked through Paul in some incredible ways. The miraculous power of God was even flowing through handkerchiefs and aprons that Paul had worn were healing folks. (**Acts 19:11,12**) But then we read of the crazy occurrence where men tried to use the name of Jesus and Paul to cast out an evil spirit, yet it didn't work and the possessed man beat these men up and took their clothes causing them to run from the house naked. (**Acts 19:13-16**) This happening became known to all around Ephesus and it caused many to come to Jesus so that His name was being magnified. Even those who had formerly practiced magic were willing to burn their books as a sign of the change in their lives. (**Acts 19:17-19**)
- With all of these things taking place, there is one verse that really sums it all up best and that verse is **v.20** where Luke says that *"the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."* Through everything that Paul and the rest of the disciples did, the word of the Lord, the Gospel, the Way, and the church grew and prevailed in a mighty way. In 2018, we want Paul's successes to be our successes. So for the next year, we as a church family, will be focusing much of what we will do on the idea of growing mightily and prevailing.
- Hopefully, you are in possession of one of our focus and plans books for 2018. Here in a few minutes we will hit some highlights from what is included in the booklet, but before we get to that, I want us to focus our minds on three attributes that were present in **Acts 19** that we will need to be in possession of if we want to grow mighty and prevail in 2018.

### **I. 3 Necessary Attributes To Grow & Prevail**

#### **A. Persistence**

1. Notice that those who had believed the Gospel and become obedient *"kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices."* (**Acts 19:18**) To these people, obedience to Jesus wasn't a one time event, but it was something that they continued to give great effort in. They weren't going to achieve that initial step of salvation and then going on living their lives as they did, but they were going to persist in their faith and discipleship.
2. This type of approach is one of the reasons the word of the Lord was able to grow mightily and prevail. They were able to have great success in their growth because they were consistently giving great effort to make sure that could take place. We know this was present in the life of Paul, but we also see it in these new disciples. If we are truly wanting to see the same type of success for ourselves then we must be sure that we, too, are persistent in our faith and efforts. We must be about the focus on our faith's day in and day out, day after day.

## B. Courage

1. Notice, again, that these new disciples were people who had come from pagan backgrounds. They were a people who had been practicing magicians. Yet, they were willing to literally throw it all away in order to follow Jesus. It would have been one thing for them to put everything away in private, but these disciples were courageous enough to do everything in the wide open in view of everyone. They were also so courageous in the respect that they were willing to burn books that help so much monetary value.
2. The courage of these disciples (and Paul when he sought to give a defense of his faith to the mob) can't be denied, and it was a huge reason why they were willing to give so much of themselves in order to be obedient and faithful. Likewise, if we want to really take big steps in growth then we must be willing to take on great courage. That might mean that we need to get out of our comfort zones. We might need to be willing to do new things. We might need to be willing to give effort to do what we currently do better. It might mean that we be willing to try old things in new ways. All of these things demand great courage from each of us, especially when it comes to taking that first step of self-evaluation. However, if we truly want to grow mightily and prevail in our faiths as these disciples did in **Acts 19**, then we need to build up to the same courage that they possessed.

## C. Knowledge

1. The persistence and courage of these people would never have been put on full display if it had not been for Paul and his efforts to instill within these people the knowledge of Jesus and His Way. Remember, Paul had spent many months reasoning and trying to persuade those who would listen to give their lives to Jesus. As he spent all those many days teaching and telling of Jesus, these people were having a fuller picture of the Messiah being painted right in front of them. As this picture became clearer, it became clear to them that He was worthy of their devotion and thus they were willing to be persistent and courageous in their faiths.
2. As we seek to grow as a church and as individuals in 2018, we must recognize that this growth will only come if we are willing to put in the effort to come to an even greater understanding of God and His will for us. It might be that we have not been persistent or courageous in our faiths up to this point in our lives. If that is where we are then it might be that we have not been willing to do these things because we are still not truly knowledgeable of our Lord. We might still not truly know who He is, what He has done, and what that means for us, but that can change this year.
3. This year, every person who makes up this church will be given every opportunity to grow in knowledge of God, His will for us, and many other aspects that are integral to our faiths. Those opportunities to grow which must be met with persistence, courage, and knowledge will focus in 2018 on three main areas of our faiths.

## II. 3 Areas Of Focus For 2018

### A. Knowing Jesus

1. There are many aspects of our faiths that demand that we grow in knowledge, but as we have seen in **Acts 19**, the first thing we must know and be convinced of is Jesus. We must recognize the utmost importance of knowing our Lord in a very intimate way. You would think that this would be quite difficult seeing as how He resides in heaven, but that is exactly why this book (the Bible) has been given to us! That is exactly why the Gospels were inspired by God to be written, so if we want to grow in knowledge of Jesus, then we must give ourselves over to reading and meditating upon the portions of this book that give us the greatest details concerning Him, His character, and His desires for us as His disciples.

2. We will seek to grow in our knowledge of Jesus by focusing our daily Bible readings upon the Gospels and the book of Acts. This week we will begin reading through John. After John's account we will read chronologically through the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke before finishing the year learning about the early growth of the church in Acts.
3. If ever there was a daily Bible reading schedule that should get folks excited, it has to be this one. I sorta can get why reading through Old Testament history or wisdom literature can take an extra bit of effort at times, but if we can't get excited to read, meditate, and think upon 2-4 chapters about Jesus in a week...well then we truly might need to do some really deep introspection within ourselves. We must all recognize the great potential for growth that can and will come to fruition if we can be persistent in our efforts to grow in knowledge of our Lord and His story. I have no doubts at all that anyone who is diligently committed to this year's daily Bible reading will have every opportunity to see growth within themselves by the year's end. Reading more about Jesus will only help us to grow in our knowledge of Him, but it will also help us in the area of discipleship.

## **B. Discipleship**

1. Discipleship is the natural outgrowth of giving such great efforts to know Jesus better. When we know Jesus, we will see how worthy He is, and it will help each of us to be more dedicated to growing in our faiths. To help each of us to grow in the many different areas in which we will act and serve as disciples, we have created these Christian Training Classes (CTCs) which will focus on different areas of service that disciples will find themselves involved in their lives.
2. We have had many people sign up for the many different CTCs that will be offered over the next few months, but we want to see even more people become involved. We especially want to see more of our young people sign up and participate in these classes geared towards specific areas where they either are currently serving or participating or where they hope to be able to serve and participate one day.
3. Our following of Jesus, which is discipleship, truly does affect every single aspect of our lives. It will influence who we are to our very core and character. It will influence how we think, what we say, and what we do. It will influence some of the greatest decisions in our lives. All of these areas of discipleship will be shaped one way or the other. It is our hope that this year's efforts towards growing in knowledge of Jesus and discipleship will be fruitful to its greatest potential. It is our hope that we, as individuals, will experience great growth within ourselves, but we also hope that the growth isn't limited to just ourselves, but that the growth extends to the growth of this church as a whole.

## **C. Evangelism**

1. A church that is dedicated to growth in knowledge of Jesus and discipleship will naturally see great strides made in the area of evangelism. While Jesus was on this earth, He spent so much of His time speak to the crowds and multitudes teaching them of the need for repentance and of the coming kingdom of God. As His apostles and disciples went about, after His departure, they continued to share this message of the need for repentance.
2. The fact is that disciples are supposed to make other disciples. It is the greatest pyramid scheme ever devised, yet we come offering something so much better than anything else anyone offers today. We come to others offering them forgiveness, salvation, and real purpose in this life. If we are growing in our knowledge of Jesus and dedication to Him, then it is going to be seen in our willingness to be courageous and share the Gospel with those who are around us.

3. Again this year, the Shepherds have created three service groups who will have many different responsibilities from month to month. Yes, in these groups we will have opportunities to serve one another when we have different needs, but it is our hope that we will all also take some time to sit down and consider different people we might know who are in need of the Gospel in their lives. I hope that each month the different groups will consider those who we can serve with the good news so that this church can not just grow as individuals who are becoming strong, but that the strength of this church will be seen in the work that is taking place in evangelizing the lost all around us. The fields are white and plentiful, and it is our hope that in 2018 we will grow and prevail in our efforts to share the Gospel with those who need it.

Before the lesson, Sammy led us in the song which will hopefully serve as a constant reminder to us throughout this year of what we are hoping to do throughout 2018. We are hoping to be about the business of growing to know more and be more about Jesus. Our shepherds and deacons have been busy at work putting together this great plan for this next year, and our hope and prayer is that each of us will take full advantage of these efforts so that we can all end 2018 knowing that we have grown from where we began the year. May God bless His church here at Pleasant Plains as we seek to grow mightily and prevail in 2018.

**\*PRAYER\*** *Our Father in heaven...we are so thankful that You have brought us through another year of service in Your kingdom. We pray that this past year has been beneficial in our efforts to seek and obtain Your wisdom, and we pray that it will strengthen us as we move forward seeking to grow mightily and prevail as a church. May Your richest blessings be with us and upon us in our endeavors. We pray that each individual member of this church will give every effort to grow, and we pray that you will especially strengthen our shepherds as they lead us in these efforts. May all of it be done to Your glory Father, and may we reap the great rewards of our efforts as we move forward. We love You Father, and we offer up these requests in the name of Your Son Jesus the Christ...amen.*