Acts **Jeff Reichanadter**

Week 15—Use Your Gifts to Serve: Acts 16,18,21 October 29 & November 1, 2026

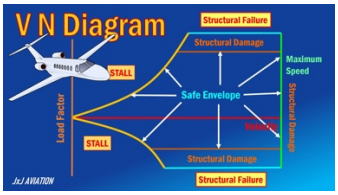
> *Lydia opens her home, creating space for the church to grow. Aquila and Priscilla open their home to Apollos and use their gifts of hospitality and teaching to instruct him in the way of the Lord. Agabus offers a prophetic word of clarity and discernment to Paul. Normal people, living in the power of the Spirit, build others up.*

When a child in our family turns thirteen, we walk them through a one-year rite of passage that initiates them into what it means to become a man of God or a woman of God. Part of this milestone includes inviting several people into their lives as mentors. We ask each mentor to highlight a virtue that they are passionate about and use a metaphor to teach the virtue. My son Chapman is thirteen and he is currently walking through this journey. A couple weeks ago, my friend Scott took Chapman flying.



Scott taught Chapman about how flight works and used it as a way to think about our identity, what are we made for. Airplanes can drive around on the runway, they can sit around in the garage, and people can tinker with the engines, but airplanes are made with a purpose. They are created to fly! We spent time in the classroom and then Chapman got to handle the controls as we flew around the city. [View the online service to see a video of the flight.]

When we returned to the airport we went back into the conference room and Scott introduced us to something called the "flight envelope."



A flight envelope is the range of conditions in which an airplane is designed to fly safely—how fast or slow it can go, how high it can fly, and how much stress it can handle. Every airplane is designed to operate within a certain envelope. If the airplane flies

- **Too slow,** the wings can stall because they aren't producing enough lift.
- **Too fast,** airflow and forces can damage the airplane or make it difficult to control.
- **Too high,** thin air limits engine performance and the wings' ability to generate lift.

- **With too much force,** a sharp turn or abrupt maneuver can exceed the airplane's structural limits.

Every airplane is created with a purpose in mind. A crop duster is designed to fly low over a field, carrying and spreading what the crops need. An F-15 is designed to fly at extraordinary speeds and perform the maneuvers required of a fighter jet.

You may have seen the opening scene of *Top Gun: Maverick*. Maverick is flying an experimental aircraft. He reaches Mach 10, but then he keeps pushing. As he goes beyond what the plane can handle, it breaks apart.



The expression "pushing the envelope" comes from testing aircraft near—or beyond—those established limits.

Many of us feel that kind of pressure—to keep pushing, to carry more, or to serve in the same way someone else does. Others of us feel as if we are puttering around on the runway or stored in the hangar, when we know God designed us for a meaningful purpose, so we feel stuck or useless. God has created each of us with gifts, a particular story, and a crucial contribution to make. The invitation is to discover how God has uniquely wired you and then lean into that. "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others" (1 Peter 4:10).

Today we are in the book of Acts again and we are going to discover that *God uses the simple gifts of ordinary people to advance the extraordinary work of the Gospel.*

First, let's meet Lydia.

> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. **The Lord opened her heart** to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, **she invited us to her home.** "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, **"come and stay at my house."** And she persuaded us. (Acts 16:13-15, emphasis added)

1. **Open your Heart. Open your Home. Open a door for the Gospel.**

Notice that something was already at work in Lydia. She already had means. In the ancient world, being a dealer of purple meant that you were working with very expensive materials. She already had a home. Her heart seemed to be hungry for the message, as she was gathering with other women in a place of prayer. And then she believed and was baptized, along with her entire household. f

The Lord opened her heart and then she opened her home to Paul and Luke. This is the design: when God leads us to salvation, he also calls us to use what we have to serve the church and advance the Kingdom!

From the very beginning, hospitality has been essential to the heart of God. He created a garden that would be home for humanity. When sin separated God and man, God clothed them. When a flood came, God showed Noah how to build a boat. When Israel fed from Egypt, God provided them with shelter.

In the Old Testament:

- In Exodus, God provided manna in the wilderness for his people, and he provided shelter for Israel in a hot, dry land.
- Israel's identity is connected to being a stranger in a strange land, though God is still their caretaker. God gave clear guidelines as to how they should care for the foreigner, since they too were foreigners.
- An amazing story in 2 Kings 6 tells that the enemies of Israel were struck with blindness and their entire army ended up trapped inside the walls of Israel. The king asked Elisha if they should kill the soldiers and Elisha said, "No, feed them and send them away." So, "He prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away … and Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory" (2 Kings 6:23).

In the New Testament:

- Jesus is portrayed as a gracious host welcoming children, prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners, and the poor, giving a radical welcome to all the wrong people.
- Jesus called the apostles to depend on and provide hospitality (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-11).
- In Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 14:12-14, Jesus calls us to show hospitality to the hungry, the sick, the prisoner, the stranger, and the poor.
- Hospitality is a huge theme in the book of Acts. It was foundational to the church that "they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46).

Everywhere hospitality shows up we see this picture of the Lord adding to their number those who were being saved!

Another illustration of this is Priscilla and Aquila.

> After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. (Acts 18:1-3)

The passage goes on to say that while Paul was with them he would go into the synagogue and try to persuade the Jews and the Greeks (Acts 18:4).

> Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. (Acts 18:7-8)

So we continue to see the good news about Jesus spread—all made possible in part because Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to Paul. Acts 18:11 tells us that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half!

Then they all move to Ephesus where Priscilla and Aquilla open their home to another man, Apollos.

> When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 18:26-28)

We see this theme again: they open their homes, they also open the Scriptures and open their mouths to train Apollos; he grows as a result of their hospitality and Bible training then he advances the gospel and the Church grows.

Hospitality is just one way that we use what we have to bless others. Sometimes we think that hospitality is only for those with a large home or for those who know how to throw a party. But hospitality is a way of being in the world. It is living in such a way that we openly welcome others into our world.

And it's not offering welcome only to our friends or family. It's opening our home to strangers.

The Greek word *xenos* means "stranger," but also "guest" and "host." From xenos comes the New Testament word for hospitality: "philoxenia" means a love of the guest/stranger. The word "hospitality" is an extension of the word "hospital." When we open our homes and our hearts to

others, we are offering spaces not only for welcome, but for nurturing, healing hurts, and repairing of wrongs.

Jesus said to his friends, "I am going now to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you also may be." Every time we open our homes to others, we are welcoming others into a glimpse of heaven where we will make our homes in God. Hebrews 13:22 says, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have welcomed angels without knowing it." Peter tells us to "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9).

1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 contain job descriptions for elders and leaders in the church which include hospitality. I always knew that if I drank too much wine or cheated on my wife it could disqualify me for my calling, but it turns out that if I am not inviting people into my home, I am not living into my call as a Christian.

One author stated that

> Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren't afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share…A community which refuses welcome—whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors—is dying spiritually.

When you walk into the east entrance of our church, you'll see a huge banner that says, "Welcome Home." My experience at The Creek has been that those are not simply words on a banner, "welcome" is a way of being here. We have recently opened up a Thursday night gathering because our elders are committed to making room for everyone. Clare Rice has spearheaded a ministry called "Supper Clubs" where guests at The Creek are invited into the homes of some of our leaders to share a meal and meaningful conversation. A friend shared with me the other day that they had so much fun at one of these supper clubs that the guests said, "Let's do this again! Next time we're hosting!" Some people in our life recently hosted a meal and their faces beamed as they shared about the experience. One of our friends said, "I was tempted to skip it and go to another pumpkin patch because it was such a beautiful October night. But instead we went to supper club and we were overjoyed!"

In her cookbook, *"Hungry for Home: A Year Together at Hillside Farm,"* Ruth McKeaney writes, "Our heart has always been to have an open home…No matter how big or how small, no matter how little or much you have to share, an open home blesses not only those you welcome inside but your family as well." This echoes the words of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Someone I know recently served in Creed Kids for the first time. She arrived early, set up balloons, and had a blast! She said, "This must be where I am supposed to serve because I'm so excited about it!"

Frederick Buechner said, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” What is your deep gladness? Where does this come into contact with the great hunger of the world?

You might remember the words of missionary Eric Liddell, whose story was told in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. Eric was training to run in the Olympics. He said, “God made me for a purpose: for China. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

I told you about my friend Scott, the pilot that taught Chapman how to fly. He has such a huge heart to advance the gospel. I can almost hear him saying, “God made me for a purpose, to share the Gospel. But he also made me to fly. And when I fly I feel his pleasure.”

I loved how his passion to serve and his passion for flying overlapped when we were together a few weeks ago. There he was, right in the heart of the envelope, doing what God made Him for, and he was soaring indeed.

As we flew around the city, eventually came down to the southside and flew over The Creek.



As we flew over the building, Scott tipped the wings and I found myself up in the heavens, looking down on our church property.



I thought, “This must be what God sees when he looks at our church.” But God whispered, “No, Jeff, I don’t see the outside. I see the inside. I see John on his tractor, farming the field, using his gifts and love for farming so we can use the money from these crops to send kids to Bible college. I see the person working with our food co-op. I see the man serving in our special needs ministry. I see the person behind the camera. The woman changing diapers. And I see the big sign when you walk in that says, ‘Welcome Home.’”

Friends, your life is a gift. When you live out your calling, you are welcoming people into theirs! When you live into your gifting, you call forth others into the gifts God has for them. “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:9-10).

Serving begins with noticing a person, making room for their story, and offering what you have.

Communion

Every time we receive communion, we are recipients of Jesus living into His calling. He knew that “the Son of Man came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

When we come to this meal, we are welcomed by Christ himself. He says, “Come to me, eat and drink.” In fact, some traditions call the bread the host, which comes from a Latin word meaning “sacrificial offering.” But the word “host” also points us to the reality that Christ is our host. He welcomes us as he offers what he has—body broken, blood shed, forgiveness offered. Now let us receive what Christ freely gives.

> The bread, Christ’s body, which is for you.
> The cup, Christ’s blood, spilled out for you.

One way of opening our hearts toward one another and speaking words that uplift is a practice used in churches all around the globe called “passing the peace.” The action is simple, but profound. It is a word of blessing that simply welcomes others by saying, “The peace of Christ be with you.” And the response is, “And also with you.” Or simply repeat, “The peace of Christ be with you.” Now that we have been welcomed to the table by Christ to receive his peace, let’s pass the peace to one another. Take a moment and great each other with a word of peace!