

Teaching Tips

November 4
Bible Study Guide 10

Words You Should Know

A. Repent (Acts 26:20) *metanoeo* (Gk.)—To be sorry for sin and “turn to God.”

B. Shew Light (v. 23) *kataggello* (Gk.)—To make something clear to a wide audience or over a wide area.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Taking a Stand. It is difficult to stand by our convictions when other people think we are crazy. Confident that he spoke the truth, Paul did not back down from sharing the story of his faith in Christ.

A. Pray for your students and lesson clarity.

B. Read and study the complete lesson.

C. Research some political or civil rights figures that stood on truth and be prepared to share details about their lives.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Ask a student to open the class with a prayer, using the Keep in Mind verse.

B. Summarize the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections.

C. Have the class read the Keep in Mind verse and Lesson Aim in unison.

D. Share information about the political or civil rights figures you selected. Discuss.

E. Summarize the In Focus story. Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask several students to take turns reading the Focal Verses.

B. Use the At-A-Glance outline to explore the In Depth section.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Allow students to work in groups of two or three to answer the questions and discuss the points in the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning sections. Have them report back to the class when they finish.

B. Discuss the Lesson in Our Society section.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Do the Make It Happen section as a class.

B. Remind students to complete the Daily Bible Readings.

C. After receiving prayer requests, close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Paul before King Agrippa

Song: “Standing on the Promises of God”

Devotional Reading: Acts 23:1–11

Paul before King Agrippa

Bible Background • ACTS 25:23–26:32

Printed Text • ACTS 26:19–32 | Devotional Reading • ACTS 23:1–11

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** why Paul stood up for what he believed; **FEEL** confident in sharing our faith; and examine ways to **DEFEND** our faith, even in the face of rejection.

KEEP IN MIND

“But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus;
but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”
(Acts 26:25, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:
20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the
coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works
meet for repentance.

21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and
great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and
should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself;
much learning doth make thee mad.

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that
none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both
almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that
sat with them:

Focal Verses

31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

Lord. Paul freely and boldly admits preaching that Jesus had suffered; that Jesus had died and had been the first to rise from the dead, and that Jesus would one day proclaim light to the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul's assertion of Jesus' death, resurrection, and preaching to a world without particular respect to Jew or Gentile is why Jews had "tried to kill (him)" (v. 21, NLT).

At-A-Glance

1. Paul Declares His Apostleship (Acts 26:19–23)
2. Paul Declares the Truth (vv. 27–29)
3. Paul Declared Innocent (vv. 30–32)

2. Paul Declares the Truth (vv. 27–29)

This declaration proves to be too much to the governor, Festus, who shouts that Paul's Gospel will make people believe he is crazy. Modern-day Christians would do well to remember that when properly presented, some people will think the same thing of them. Paul taught the Corinthians, "the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (from 1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV). We must not allow such allegations to stop us from preaching to a dying world that there is a Savior in Jesus, the Christ. Our Gospel is characterized by truth and based on historical events: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Paul tells Festus that the things he has preached were based on truths and were probably known to King Agrippa. Paul now presses the challenge and asks King Agrippa whether he believes the prophets. In Acts 26:28 (NKJV), Agrippa's response is curious. He says in part, "You almost persuade me." One way to understand Agrippa's response is to mean that in a short time, Paul could persuade him to believe. We want to remember that there were obvious barriers to Agrippa's acceptance of the Gospel. One, seated next to him was his wife, who was also his sister. One of the hallmarks of Christianity is the willingness to turn away from sin and darkness in our lives. Here, Agrippa is openly living in an incestuous relationship. He may have been unwilling to give her up and other immoral areas in his life to embrace

In Depth

1. Paul Declares His Apostleship (Acts 26:19–23)

Paul begins by stating his credentials as a faithful Jew, who before his conversion had lived as a Pharisee. In spite of the fact that Agrippa was living in an incestuous relationship—he is married to his full sister, Queen Bernice—Paul is aware that King Agrippa is Jewish and is considered an expert on Jewish laws and customs. Paul makes it clear that he, like all Jews, is aware that the Jews were a "special" population, and he asserts that he is living in full expectation of God's promises to the Jewish people. Paul does not sugarcoat the truth. He tells the whole truth, including the fact that he had formerly hated and ardently persecuted Christians. Paul explains to King Agrippa that it is only after his conversion, when he begins to be a witness to the Gentiles for Christ, that he becomes a target of the Jewish authorities. The political charges against Paul were bogus. He had never offended the sanctity of the Temple. His charges stemmed solely from his attempts to preach the Gospel, based on the Word of the

Christianity. Another possibility is that King Agrippa feared that others, like Festus, would believe that he too was crazy if he embraced Christianity.

3. Paul Declared Innocent (vv. 30–32)

Paul has stated his case and now King Agrippa, his wife, and Festus go off to discuss what they have heard. It is obvious to all that Paul has done nothing wrong and is not guilty of any of the charges. As far as they are concerned, Paul is innocent. However, it appears that there is a legal problem with setting him free. Paul's initial appeal, as a Roman citizen, was to have his case heard by the "Roman" emperor. Agrippa's response seems to imply that once an appeal was made, it could not be retracted. Rather than read this as a mistake, Christians should recognize Paul's continued imprisonment as a fulfillment of the Lord's plan. Paul will get to witness to the emperor in the same way he had just witnessed to King Agrippa and the governor. He will also fulfill a long-standing desire of Paul's to visit the Christian community already present in Rome (Acts 19:21).

In Focus

Angie was an elementary school teacher at the local school. The parents of her students loved Angie, and her principal always complimented her on how well she controlled her classroom. Many of the teachers looked up to her and often asked her advice. Angie liked her coworkers but wasn't close to any of them. During lunch breaks, she often sat in the corner of the room rather than at the table with the other teachers. Angie, a Christian and a regular church attendee, was increasingly uncomfortable with the discussions that took place in the teachers' break room.

Off-color jokes were frequently told by some of her coworkers and lately, "the church" had been the favorite butt of the jokes. Christian beliefs

and practices resulted in side-splitting laughter. Angie felt that she should say something, but she was afraid that the people, who thought so highly of her, might become resentful. How would the people who thought she was an amazing teacher react after finding out she was one of the people they made jokes about?

Taking a stand for what you believe is never easy. Christians are not exempt. In today's lesson, we will see that God understands that His people are the objects of persecution and that He can fortify us to take a stand in Jesus' name.

The People, Places, and Times

King Agrippa II. He was the son of King Agrippa I, the ruler who was responsible for beheading the apostle James and who had Peter arrested. He was the grandson of the ruler who'd had John the Baptist beheaded. He was also the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who, in his attempt to kill the baby Jesus, had killed all the male Jewish children two and younger in Bethlehem.

Agrippa II's power was limited to authority over Jewish affairs, Scriptures, and conflicts. Rome appointed him as the curator of the Temple, meaning he had authority over the Temple treasury and to appoint high priests. Agrippa II did not have any children, and when he met the apostle Paul, he was living in an incestuous relationship with his younger sister Bernice. Agrippa's capitol was Caesarea Philippi, which he renamed Neronias in honor of Caesar Nero. Agrippa II called himself "Great King, pious Friend of Caesar and Friend of Rome." The last of the Herods, he died in A.D. 100 at age 73.

Background

When Jesus called Saul of Tarsus to be an apostle, he sent Ananias to Paul, to pray for him and to welcome him into the Christian family. The Lord prophesied, "[Saul] is a chosen vessel

unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (from Acts 9:15). Following his conversion from persecutor to Christian, the apostle Paul was a faithful and fervent disciple. He traveled broadly, spreading the Good News and winning souls to Christ. His zeal was not without trouble. Paul frequently found himself in personal danger. Opposition to Paul often came from the Jews, who believed he was a heretic. In Acts 24, an imprisoned Paul stands before the Jewish governor, Felix, facing false accusations that he incited Christians to riot against Jews, was the ringleader of a sect of zealots intent on overthrowing the Romans, and insulted the Temple, its priests and custodians. Although Paul successfully defended himself against these charges, the Jewish authorities pressured Felix to leave him in prison where he remained for two years.

Felix is succeeded by another governor, Porcius Festus. The Jewish authorities quickly met with Festus and urged him to transport Paul to Jerusalem. Unknown to the governor, they secretly planned to have Paul assassinated during the transport. This plan was thwarted, and under God’s direction, Paul wisely appeals to Festus to be tried in Rome as a Roman citizen. Festus had no choice, and Paul was brought to Rome to appear before Caesar, thus fulfilling the Scripture.

Search the Scriptures

1. What were Paul’s main three points of preaching (Acts 25:23)?
2. When Festus accuses Paul of being insane, what two qualities does Paul insist his testimony possesses (v. 25)?

Discuss the Meaning

Why is the resurrection of Christ from the dead so essential to the Gospel?

Lesson in Our Society

This lesson clarifies that God has a plan for each of us. In it we are able to see that God knows best and that He will protect us from all things. The only things that can happen to us are what God wills. When God asks us to take a stand, we must believe He has already prepared the way. The same God that rescued Paul from the Jewish authorities promises protection to us all.

Make It Happen

Have you been guilty of remaining quiet when you hear others say negative and insulting things about Christians? Pray and ask God to give you some “holy boldness” this week and provide opportunities for you to declare your Christianity, appropriately, articulately, and with love.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 26:19–32

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: 20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Agrippa II, “King Agrippa” here, and his sister Bernice came from Jerusalem to Caesarea to welcome Festus as the new Roman overseer of most of Palestine (Acts 25:13). Festus had little knowledge of Judaism, had been in Caesarea only a short time, and spent less than 10 days in Jerusalem. Agrippa oversaw Galilee west of the Sea of Galilee and a thin area south of it. This region was called Perea and was located east of the Jordan River. In addition, Rome had assigned supervision of the Temple to him. As the great-grandson of Herod the Great, he knew Jewish beliefs well and was interested in Jewish affairs.

For that reason, he asked Agrippa to hear the charges against Paul and Paul’s defense against them, even though Festus was his superior. Festus was at a loss about what charges against Paul to send for his appeal before Caesar (Acts 25:26a). Paul’s appearance before Festus and Agrippa was not a trial but an examination. He uses it as an opportunity to present the experience that convinced him that Jesus was the Lord’s fulfillment of Jewish hopes (Acts 26:1–18).

In verse 19, Paul’s “vision” (Gk. *optasia*, op-tas-EE-ah) was auditory rather than visual: “I heard a voice.” (Acts 22:7) A supernatural light blazed and blinded him (Acts 22:11, 13). Jesus’ voice was Paul’s “vision from heaven” as both the New Living Translation and the New International Version translate it.

Verse 20 describes Paul’s response to the Lord’s revelation through Christ. His actions outline how to share our faith. First, Paul goes to

those closest “in Damascus” and then to those who knew him best “in Jerusalem” (26:20, NLT). As he traveled, he shared with those with whom he had a common background along “the coasts of Judea” (v. 20, KJV). (Rather than “coasts,” Gk. *chora*, KHO-rah, another translation is “regions.”) “The God who was nothing” to Paul became “the God who was everything.”

Paul then gives one of the Bible’s most important definitions of true repentance and conversion. First, genuine repentance begins with remorse for our sin and turning away from it (Gk. *metanoeo*, me-ta-no-EH-o). Second, characteristic of heartfelt repentance is a “turn to God” (Gk. *epistrepho*, ep-ee-STREF-o) through faith in Christ. Third, the confirmation of honest repentance that gives one’s testimony credibility is “works meet for repentance.” This phrase becomes clarified when one understands that “meet” (Gk. *axios*, ax-EE-os) is an outdated word that means “worthy or deserving.” The best proof that true repentance has occurred is that our deeds match our words (Jas. 2:26).

21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

Note that Paul uses “causes”—a plural form. His arrests began when Jews from the province of Asia grabbed Paul in the Temple. Jews persecuted Paul and had him arrested repeatedly in that region (Acts 14:3–5, 19; 17:13; 20:3). The captain of Roman troops arrested Paul as a troublemaker amid claims that he defamed the Jewish people, Jewish teaching, and the Temple. They also accused him of defiling the Temple by bringing non-Jews into it (Acts 21:27).

22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: 23 That Christ should

suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

Paul begins his defense by acknowledging the Lord's help. That claim might seem ridiculous considering he had been in jail for two years and was about to be sent to Rome for trial (24:27; 25:26–27). But Paul felt that he'd experienced divine deliverance many times as he encountered hardship and persecution. Once he was beaten so severely that he was left for dead but survived (Acts 14:19). Repeated arrests followed, but with release each time, once with an apology (Acts 16:23–24, 35–39). A Roman captain stopped an attack on Paul, arrested him and transferred him to captivity in Caesarea. The arrest foiled a plot to seize and kill him (Acts 23:10–16). Paul saw the Lord's hand of help in all those events.

More evidence of His divine help was in Paul's skill in spreading Christ's message. He operated with the confident belief that the Lord supported his success in sharing his faith. When he says "obtained help" (Acts 26:22), Paul is clear that he is not working from his own power but under the leadership of the Lord. When we share our faith in Christ's message we can be assured of His reinforcement of our efforts. Paul was.

This passage tells of an opportunity for Paul to share the Lord's revelation in Christ to those at the pinnacle of influence in that part of the world. Their positions in Roman government made both Felix and Festus into channels for publicizing the Lord's ultimate will and purposes through Christ. Paul understood that. He refused to let this great opportunity slip away and waste it. That was because Christ had commissioned him to proclaim the Good News to all people (Acts 22:14–15).

"I continue unto this day," fails to encapsulate Paul's zeal for the task God had given him (26:22). "Continue" (Gk. *histemi*, HIS-tay-mee)

means to stand firm, but here the form of the word is intense, adding the idea of standing fixed, unwavering, and immovable from his convictions. Paul's example teaches that even when it might be human to lose hope, we can still be witnesses because we can count on the Lord's help.

Although the Asian Jews accused Paul of abandoning the Mosaic Law and the Jewish people (Acts 21:21, 27–28), Paul held to the orthodox expectation of the Messiah as prophesied by Moses and later prophets (Deuteronomy 18:15–18; Isaiah 53:4–9; Zechariah 12:10). As recorded in Acts 26:23, Jesus' coming to "shew light" (Gk. *kataggello*, ka-tang-GEL-lo) meant to make something clear to a wide audience or over a wide area. Paul did both of these things. To Paul, Christ's life, death, and resurrection were essential for making His love understandable to humanity.

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. 25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

These two verses show why Paul was such an effective witness to the Lord's revelation in Jesus Christ. Festus's outburst was not unusual. "A loud voice" means Festus bellowed at the ardor and certainty of Paul's faith (v. 24). Festus described Paul in the KJV as "beside thyself" (Gk. *mainomai*, MAH-ee-nom-ah-ee) or "crazy" in the NLT, and "out of your mind" in the NIV. Christian witnesses today shouldn't be surprised when they occasionally encounter charges of, "You're crazy," "That's ridiculous," or other similar responses to our attempts to share the Gospel. Paul's reaction wasn't to cower before rejection, resort to religious double-talk, or waver from what he had said. He followed Peter's counsel for sharing one's faith: "Always

be prepared to give an answer to everybody who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (from 1 Peter 3:15, NIV). Paul’s response in Acts 26:25 did not take an argumentative tone. Rather, his reply, “most noble Festus” showed respect for the governor’s agitation as well as the authority of his powerful position. Yet, it also showed Paul’s confident certainty in the trustworthy and reasonable nature of what he said. Likewise, Christians sharing their faith today should keep their confidence in the Lord’s truth without resorting to bitterness, argument, or anger.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Although Paul was replying to Festus’s loud reaction, he skillfully turns his reply to include Agrippa. He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great who attempted to kill Jesus at birth (Matthew 2:16), and the grandson of Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded (14:10). From childhood, Agrippa had been immersed in the events of Jesus’ life and his interaction with the Temple and its leaders. In addition, Agrippa had an ongoing interest in Jewish affairs and religion. Although he ruled over two small areas in Palestine, the Romans had appointed him as their overseer of the Temple. So Paul accurately depicted Agrippa’s knowledge of what he spoke.

His statement in Acts 26:26, “this thing was not done in a corner” was a widely known Greek saying. Also, Jesus had been crucified outside Jerusalem during Passover. Thousands of Jews from across the world were there. With this understatement, Paul emphasized Agrippa’s knowledge of what was widely known.

When asked whether he believed the prophets, Paul assumed Agrippa’s interest in spiritual realities. This was an effective approach to sharing his faith. Paul understood that then, as now, all people want to believe that their lives have purpose and meaning beyond their present circumstances. This should bolster Christians’ confidence as we share the Good News in Christ today.

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. 29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

Earlier, Festus deflected Paul’s witness by questioning Paul’s sanity. Here, Agrippa utilized another common ploy to sidetrack Paul’s witness for Christ. He accused Paul of trying to rush him into a decision without giving needed time to think or with too little information for making a good decision. In verse 28, “almost” (Gk. *oligos*, ol-EE-gos) means “a little” or “slightly.” Most modern translations, such as NLT, NIV, or NRSV, interpret Agrippa’s words as a question. He was asking Paul, “Do you think that in a short time, or with only a few words, you can convince me to become a Christian?”

Paul again gave us a good example of effectively sharing one’s faith. He responds by affirming his assurance that he saw his commitment to Christ as a good decision and as a sure path to purpose and meaning regardless of the uncertainties of his life.

30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they sat with them: 31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus,

This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

Here we see another means of avoiding the claims of Christ—departure. Agrippa, his sister, Festus, and the crowd of onlookers got up and left. Yet, all had heard a clear statement of faith in Christ and an appeal for commitment to Him.

In what most people would consider a bad situation, Paul found the opportunity to share the message of God's revelation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Within two years, Festus would be dead, but he'd heard the call to follow Jesus. The Roman captain commanded one-tenth of a Roman legion—600 men. Agrippa returned to rule over two provinces. Undoubtedly, the onlookers that day were also people of privilege, wealth, and above average influence. Paul had fulfilled his commitment and Christ's Will for his life (Acts 9:15; 23:11). Festus and Agrippa saw Paul's appeal to Caesar as a strategic mistake. But it was the Lord's way, through Paul, of spreading His message in Christ to the summit of Roman power.

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Say It Correctly

Agrippa. uh-GRIP-uh.
 Bernice. bur-NEES.
 Damascus. duh-MAS-kuhs.
 Festus. FES-tus.
 Jerusalem. jeh-ROO-suh-luhm.
 Judea. joo-DEE-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Appeasing Those Zealous for the Law
 (Acts 21:17–26)

TUESDAY

A Stirred-Up Mob
 (Acts 21:27–36)

WEDNESDAY

Taken into Custody
 (Acts 22:17–24)

THURSDAY

You Must Bear Witness in Rome
 (Acts 22:30–23:11)

FRIDAY

Paul's Background as a Pharisee
 (Acts 26:1–8)

SATURDAY

Paul's Encounter with Christ
 (Acts 26:9–18)

SUNDAY

Paul's Testimony before Roman
 Authorities
 (Acts 26:19–32)

Teaching Tips

November 13
Bible Study Guide 11

Words You Should Know

A. Delivered (Acts 27:1) *paradidomi* (Gk.)—
Handed a prisoner into someone's custody.

B. Health (v. 34) *soteria* (Gk.)—Denotes
salvation or deliverance.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Weathering the Storm. Paul's storm experience teaches that Christians can learn to respond calmly to crises, trusting God in every adverse situation.

A. Brainstorm catastrophic "storms" you have faced, and be prepared to share your responses to them.

B. Pray for students and lesson clarity.

C. Prepare a list of "storm resources"—your favorite songs and Scriptures that you use during tough times.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer.

B. Read the Aim for Change and the Keep in Mind verse in unison.

C. Discuss recent crises in the news.

D. Ask students to share their "storms" (crises) and related responses.

E. Summarize and discuss the In Focus story.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Invite students to read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times, Background, Search the Scriptures, the At-A-Glance outline, In Depth, and More Light on the Text to clarify the verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Have volunteers summarize the Lesson in Our Society and Make It Happen sections.

B. Discuss some tools that are available to help us weather storms. Share your list.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Invite students to share their favorite "storm resources."

B. Close in prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Paul Sails for Rome

Song: "The Storm Is Over Now"

Devotional Reading: Romans 1:13–17

Paul Sails for Rome

Bible Background • ACTS 27

Printed Text • ACTS 27:1-2, 33-44 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 1:13-17

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** how Paul's faith in God enabled him to remain calm in the midst of a storm; **APPRECIATE** how our relationship with God helps us cope in a crisis; and **WITNESS** to others about relying on God's strength when facing crises.

KEEP IN MIND

“And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship.
And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.”
(Acts 27:44, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

Focal Verses

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

At-A-Glance

1. Calm before the Storm (Acts 27:1-2)
2. Calm in the Storm vv. 33-38)
3. Shipwrecked, But Saved (vv. 39-44)

In Depth

1. Calm before the Storm (Acts 27:1-2)

On the surface, Paul's request for a trial before Caesar seemed easy to accomplish: Board a ship, travel to Rome, and speak with Caesar. But an unexpected hurricane-strength storm made the journey arduous and life-threatening. Before the storm hit, Paul—and everyone else on board—was seemingly unaware of its approach. The ship's crew comprised experienced seamen familiar with navigating seas in different weather conditions. Yet, their experience was no match for the storm.

Paul's experience with the possible cyclone or hurricane-force wind mirrors how Christians often unknowingly encounter storms. One day all may be well, and on the next a catastrophic storm rages. That storm could be a spouse's plea for a divorce, a life-threatening car accident, a medical diagnosis that seems impossible to beat, or an assault by a stranger that causes great physical or emotional harm. Whatever the case, like Paul, we are not aware of what is approaching, but God knows.

2. Calm in the Storm (vv. 33-38)

How did Paul remain calm? He relied on a previously developed, surefire method of weathering life's storms that he had learned which allowed him to be calm. We can use calm as an acronym advising us to: Call on God during crises, anticipate God stepping in to save us, listen to God's instruction, and make known God's promises.

Call on God during crises. Faith is an anchor, not a crutch. It tethers us to our Lord and Savior, who teaches us how to act calmly during storms. In faith, Paul called on God during the crisis, and God answered by sending a heavenly messenger. As the days lengthened, the storm became stronger while the passengers' hope of survival diminished. They needed God's help. Calling on God during a storm is paramount for the Christian who wants to weather that storm calmly.

Anticipate God stepping in to rescue us. Initially, Paul had sensed prophetically that there would be loss of life and loss of ship. Later, however, God in His mercy sent an angel to strengthen Paul and to deliver a divine message. Thus, despite the raging seas, Paul anticipated God's salvation. He expected to live, not die. Paul's trials had taught him to surrender his will, emotions, and plans to God. We must do the same in order to weather life's storms with calm as we anticipate God's salvation.

Listen to God's instruction. In Acts 27:24, Paul was instructed to "fear not" (KJV). It is the same instruction Abram, Israel, Joshua, and many others received in the past. It is the same instruction that God whispers to His children today. He intends for Christians to go through storms without fear. Prayer, Bible class, fellowship with other believers, and a determination to trust God are all necessary at such times to help defeat fear.

Make known God's promises. After Paul received instructions from the angel, he shared the vision and the inherent promise with the other passengers. He encouraged them, “[K]eep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me” (from v. 25, NIV). Sometimes in the storms of life we are involved not for our own good but for the good of others. Through us, others can see the mercy, grace, and love of God. That Paul and all others on board the ship could go more than two weeks without eating, for example, is a testament that God alone kept them alive. That they broke their self-imposed fast by eating bread is also miraculous as most people seek liquid to ease their bodies back into eating after a prolonged fast. Furthermore, that they could still be strong to maneuver the ship, that none died from disease or starvation prove that there was another “force” battling the external situations. Finally, although they may not have realized God's presence or protection, they were comforted by His promise as shared by Paul.

3. Shipwrecked, But Saved (vv. 39–44)

Panicking neither diminishes nor stops a storm. Rather, panic hinders our ability to hear from God and to share God's promises with others. When Christians respond by staying calm, their faith shines through storms. Our friends, family members, and coworkers observe the confidence we have in God and can gain strength from us as we cope calmly with crises. Thus, it's possible to turn storms into opportunities to share Christ and to bring others to salvation. We learn from Paul's experience that in many storms of life, we are unprepared to handle the storm without God's help. Our educational background, gifts, talents, finances, or other resources cannot provide the safe harbor we seek.

Satan is a thief that “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (from John 10:10, NIV). When storms arise, he uses them to fulfill that

purpose. But God is greater than our enemy. This is an important lesson to learn because when everything else fails, when all of our systems, vehicles, plotting, and schemes fail, we can be assured that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NIV). He never fails, and we can trust Him despite the thoughts that the enemy may place in our minds.

Finally, the crewmen's sneaky decision to cast out to sea with lifeboats—and later, their plot to kill the prisoners (Acts 27:30, 42)—shows how times of panic can lead us to behave irrationally. Ultimately, the ability to weather the storm was due in large part to Paul's calm response to it. He trusted in God's faithfulness. When we respond in a similar fashion, we, too, help others draw closer to God.

In Focus

Lamar and Joyce stood on their porch, eagerly awaiting the ambulance that would bring their son, Drew, home from the military rehabilitation center. He had been there four months as he recovered from an injury suffered during military maneuvers overseas. Once strong and athletic, Drew was now paralyzed from the waist down, but they were grateful their son was alive.

Initially, Lamar and Joyce resented the situation, but Drew's response to his disability had changed that. Over time, they came to appreciate how Drew's faith in Jesus Christ enabled him to respond to this life storm with cheerfulness instead of bitterness, and they were learning to do the same. Lately, they were attending church, hoping to experience some of the peace Drew had. The many friends, neighbors, and strangers who had donated time and resources to renovate the home in time for Drew's homecoming awed them. They knew adjusting to home life might be difficult for them, but they were ready to accept the challenge.

How we weather life's storms reflects whether we truly have confidence in God's faithfulness. Today's lesson shows how Paul's calm response to a storm helped bring others to safety.

The People, Places, and Times

Book of Acts. The second of two books written by Luke, Acts highlights "the acts of the apostles." It shares accounts of how the early church fulfilled its mission to "be witnesses [of Jesus Christ] . . . in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, KJV). As such, it offers a historical view of the growth of the church and the unity—or sometimes disunity—of its members. Furthermore, Luke shares the encouraging message that the Gospel is available to all people, regardless of race, class, or ethnicity.

Ships. In biblical times, ships were functional, not recreational, and used by merchants and traders in normal business dealings from spring through fall. Winter made sailing more hazardous. Soldiers, meanwhile, used ships to protect the seas from pirates and during war.

Background

Arrested after preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and requested a trial before Caesar. Within days of traveling there, the stormy weather made the trip dangerous. Paul warned Julius, the centurion guarding the prisoners, that, "I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also" (from Acts 27:10, NIV). Julius ignored the warning, and the ship continued until it encountered a hurricane-like storm.

When they had given up hope and feared dying, Paul first encouraged them by sharing a vision he had in which an angel told him that no one on board would die. However, Paul warned that despite the encouraging news, they would

be shipwrecked. Throughout the entire ordeal, Paul's confidence in God's faithfulness enabled him to act calmly. He believed the Word of the Lord, delivered by the angel, and trusted Him to fulfill His promise.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the centurion ignore Paul's advice in Lasea (Acts 27:8, 11–12)?
2. How did all of the passengers get to safety (v. 44)?

Discuss the Meaning

Paul's past experience with life's storms enabled him to calmly weather a natural storm. What have you learned in the past that enabled you to weather a recent storm? How did your positive response affect others?

Lesson in Our Society

Places such as Japan, Haiti, and some southern U.S. states have been hit hard recently by tumultuous weather conditions. When storms strike, how can Christians serve as beacons of calm and hope?

Make It Happen

Paul was able to provide an encouraging word to the others in the storm. Ask God to show you how to encourage others through e-mails, letters, or cards that provide hope and peace.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 27:1–2, 33–44

1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustas' band. 2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

Paul had waited two years under house arrest in Caesarea. Two Roman governors, Felix and Festus heard his defense against groundless charges of disturbing the peace and sedition against Rome. The first wanted a bribe, but Paul had used repeated appearances before Festus to fulfill his call by the Lord to proclaim the saving message of Christ (Acts 26:22a, 25; Romans 1:1, 14, 16). Finally, it was decided to transport Paul and some other prisoners to Rome under the supervision of a Roman officer. The officer was Julius, a member of an elite cadre of trusted, experienced soldiers.

Julius boarded his prisoners onto a ship from Adramyttium, a port city at the northeast corner of the Aegean Sea, which extends north off the Mediterranean Sea. His respect for Paul's faith may have begun gradually when he discovered the dedication to their shared faith. One of Paul's Christian converts, Aristarchus, boarded with Paul and either paid his own fare or he voluntarily boarded as Paul's slave. After

an easy 50-mile jaunt from Caesarea to Sidon, nothing went well for the rest of the voyage. After 400 miles of slow going, "because the winds were contrary," the ship docked at the coastal city of Myra (Acts 27:4, KJV).

There, Julius switched Paul and his other prisoners to another ship, a vessel full of grain that was supposedly going directly to Italy. While the first ship had been slow, everything on the second became worse. Because of turbulent weather, most shipping on the Mediterranean Ocean ceased by November, and it was already mid-October.

Ships in Paul's day would often have a single sail. This meant that a ship went in whatever direction the wind blew it. After Myra, the wind forced their ship 100 miles south past Crete, where the ship briefly put into another port. The ship's captain, its owner, and Julius debated over staying docked there through the winter.

Paul was an experienced traveler on the Mediterranean. Ernst Haenchen lists 11 voyages of Paul that are recorded in the New Testament (Haenchen, 702–703). Another commentator estimates that those trips totaled more than 3,500 miles. Paul knew the dangers of winter sailing and urged staying put. His opinion was ignored.

After that, for the next 14 days, a hurricane-force wind blasted them west about 700 miles. The word Luke used in Acts 27:14 for the storm is related to our present-day word "typhoon" (Gk. *tuphonikos*, too-fo-nee-KOS). That is where most of today's text begins.

27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

As daybreak approached, the storm's ferocity had not let up. Here, we see why Paul was such an effective witness for the Lord's revelation in Jesus Christ. The sailors had just tried to desert the ship and leave its passengers to fend for themselves. Nobody had eaten for 14 days. When we speak of fasting today, we mean going without food deliberately. Here "fasting" (Gk. *asitos*, AS-ee-tos), refers to a lack of appetite or available food. Perhaps the waves and rain had run down into the ship's hold and soaked into its stores, spoiling most of its food. Perhaps conditions were so tempestuous that cooking became impossible in its galley. Ancient writers hardly mention seasickness, but Luke may have viewed that as a given.

When things reached their worst, God's love for others was evident in Paul's concern for those on board. The selfless action of this small-framed, accused-heretic gave his witness with a trustworthy integrity on his way to trial before Caesar and possible execution. He "besought" (Gk. *parakaleo*, pa-ra-ka-LEH-o), or urged, his fellow passengers to eat because it is essential for their survival. Luke's word here described something Paul did repeatedly, not something he did once for show. In its noun form this was the same word John used in John 14:26 for the Holy Spirit, "the Comforter" (Gk. *parakletos*, pa-RA-kleh-tos).

This was not Paul's first effort at persuading the crew, the prisoners, and other passengers to eat. Nor was it his first assurance of their survival (Acts 27:21–26). He supports his first appeal to eat by relaying the appearance of an angel from God. This foreshadows Paul's appearance before Caesar and the survival of all on board but with the ship's eventual crash upon an island. Likely, only Paul's concern for the well-being of all the others on board saved him from being thrown overboard. The apostle began that first lecture about eating by saying, "I told you so" (27:21). Even a godly apostle is not above times of

exasperation and despair. Note Acts 27:20, KJV, where Luke admits, "all hope that we should be saved was then taken away."

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took some bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. 36 Then they were all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. 37 And they were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

For two weeks, other seafarers observed Paul confront their shared life-and-death struggle with the storm. The steadfast certainty of Paul's faith comforts them. While the storm rocked the ship, Paul takes bread and holds it while thanking God before eating it. His example renews the courage of his onlooking shipmates who follow his example by eating. The word "meat" (Gk. *trophe*, tro-FAY), here and in verses 33 and 34 can mean "animal flesh." However, it was the customary Greek word for nourishment in general.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

When everyone's hunger was satisfied, everyone thought more clearly, including the captain and the ship's owner. The time had come to focus on saving their lives more than on saving the ship and its cargo. As Ecclesiastes 9:4 (NASB) says in part, "A live dog is better than a dead lion." They lightened the ship to make it float higher in the water by throwing overboard the ship's cargo of wheat, which was doubtlessly intended for sale in Rome. By doing so, they lessen chances that the ship would run aground too far out for survivors to make it to shore. They accepted Paul's prophecy that God's will was for them all to survive the ship's destruction.

39 And when it was day they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. 41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

The first compass on a ship was not known outside of China until over a century later, and the sextant was not invented until the 1700s. Consequently, in Paul's day unless the sky was in view, sailors had no way to determine where they were or in what direction they were headed. When the ship came close enough to land to see the shore through the storm, no one recognized where they were. They did, however, see a depression in the coastline. Our KJV text for Acts 27:39 says they saw a "creek" (Gk. *kolpos*, KOL-pos), but most modern versions, such as NLT, NIV, and NRSV, say they saw a "bay." Therefore, they decided to try and run the ship aground on its shore.

To that end, the crew cut loose the four anchors they had dropped to drag the sea's bottom and slow the ship. They had feared running aground or crashing onto boulders in the storm's blinding squall so far out that survivors couldn't make it to shore (27:29). Besides releasing the anchors, they severed the top water paddles that served as the ship's primitive rudder. They then raised their one sail. Now, only God and the force of wind control the ship's movement.

Once again, events proved more difficult than they hoped. As the wind hurtles the ship toward shore, it passes over a spot where two channels, or "two seas," forced it into a sand

bank (v. 41). The front of the ship was wedged firmly in it, but its rear continued to be slapped violently by the fury of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them swim out, and escape. 43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purposes, and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land. 44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

As Paul had done, the soldiers helping Julius guard the prisoners foresee the coming destruction of the ship. The soldiers plan to kill them all, rather than risk that any might swim to shore and escape when the ship breaks up. The Roman penalty for allowing prisoners to escape was that their guards would receive whatever sentence the prisoners were due. It is probable that many of Paul's fellow prisoners were being sent to Rome for execution before bloodthirsty crowds in the Colosseum.

But Julius intervenes on Paul's behalf, and countermands the soldiers' plan. When KJV says in verse 43 that Julius is "willing" to save Paul, it sounds like a grudging decision to act by today's use of that word. Just the opposite is the case. The word "willing" (Gk. *boulomai*, BOO-lom-ah-ee) refers here to an action that Julius wanted and was determined to take. His desire to save Paul illustrates the respect he had for the apostle. Instead, he instructs that those who could swim to jump in immediately and swim to shore. He told those who could not swim to grab onto floating planks or other pieces of the ship and hold them while paddling to shore.

Thus, the reality of the angel's appearance to Paul and his prophecy that all 276 passengers would survive the ship's destruction were confirmed. Few Christians will ever share a

spiritual experience as extraordinary as Paul did. But the power of Paul's witness lay not in his private, supernatural experiences. Instead, other passengers, like the centurion, observed that Paul faced deadly peril and treated others kindly during the dangerous encounter. This observation gave witness to the credibility and authenticity of his faith. Likewise, Christians today can add power to their witness of trusting God by treating those who do not know Him with love, dignity, and kindness in every situation.

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Say It Correctly

Adramyttium. ad'ruh-MIT-ee-uhm.
 Augustus. aw-GUHS-tuhs.
 Aristarchus. air'is-TAHR-kuhs.
 Centurion. sen-TOOR-ee-uhn.
 Julius. JOOL-yuhs.
 Macedonian. mas-eh-DOH-nee-uhn.
 Thessalonica. thes-uh-LON-nay-kuh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Called to Be an Apostle
 (Romans 1:1-7)

TUESDAY

Encouraged by Each Other's Faith
 (Romans 1:8-12)

WEDNESDAY

Eager to Proclaim the Gospel
 (Romans 1:13-17)

THURSDAY

Paul's Journey to Rome Begins
 (Acts 27:3-12)

FRIDAY

A Fierce Storm Dashes Hope
 (Acts 27:13-20)

SATURDAY

Keep Up Your Courage
 (Acts 27:21-32)

SUNDAY

Brought Safely to Land
 (Acts 27:1-2, 33-44)

Teaching Tips

November 20
Bible Study Guide 12

Words You Should Know

A. Beast (Acts 28:4, 5) *therion* (Gk.)—A wild animal.

B. Flux (v. 8) *dusenteria* (Gk.)—A bowel sickness, such as dysentery.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Helping One Another. Paul's character, while shipwrecked, helped others recognize something extraordinary about him.

A. Pray for students and lesson clarity.

B. Read, study, and meditate on the entire lesson.

C. Bring to class recent bulletins or church announcements that highlight volunteer opportunities.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer.

B. Have volunteers read the Aim for Change and the Keep in Mind verse.

C. Invite students to briefly share how they are using their gifts to help others in the church or community.

D. Ask students to share times they have turned away from service projects because they were overwhelmed during crises.

E. Discuss the importance of helping others during difficult times.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Invite students to read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times, Background, Search the Scriptures, At-A-Glance outline, In Depth, and More Light on the Text sections to clarify the verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Have students silently read the Devotional Reading.

B. Discuss how it relates to today's lesson on helping one another and God's help during difficult situations.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Share the information on volunteer opportunities.

B. Discuss other service or ministry projects that students may know about.

C. Ask for prayer requests related to students' concerns about helping others or resuming ministry projects.

D. Close in prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Paul Ministers in Malta

Song: "May the Work I've
Done Speak for Me"

Devotional Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16

Paul Ministers in Malta

Bible Background • ACTS 28:1-10
Printed Text • ACTS 28:1-10 | Devotional Reading • EZEKIEL 34:11-16

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** how Paul helped people on the island of Malta; **APPRECIATE** the ways others minister to us; and **MINISTER** to those in need.

KEEP IN MIND

“And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.”
(Acts 28:8, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.
2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

At-A-Glance

1. Receiving Help from Strangers (Acts 28:1-2)
2. Divine Protection (vv. 3-6)
3. Ministering to Others (vv. 7-10)

In Depth

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 the Lord’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 the Lord 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 the 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.

In Focus

Brenda knew she was driving too fast for the poor road conditions, but she just wanted to get home after a long day. She hit a particularly rough patch and suddenly, Brenda's car spun out of control on the slick highway. She nearly missed careening into a ditch before her car skidded to a halt. Thankfully, she was not hurt, but the car would not start. She used her cell phone to call for help, but was still waiting. Then, 10 minutes later a dark car pulled up and a man jumped out, offering his help. She was afraid to talk with him until he showed her his badge: He was an undercover detective on his way home from work. Sighing with relief, Brenda allowed him to check out the car. Although he couldn't help, he stayed with her until her emergency roadside assistance service arrived.

We sometimes forgo help from others who do not look like us or because of the situation in which we find ourselves. Helping one another becomes easier as we realize God will often send unlikely strangers to help us in our times of need. Paul was such a helper to the sick islanders.

The People, Places, and Times

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).

Background

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.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the islanders believe Paul was a murderer (Acts 28:3–6)?
2. What critical help did Paul provide to Publius's father and others (vv. 8–9)?

Discuss the Meaning

News reports are filled with stories about the dangers of helping or receiving help from strangers. What strategies have you discovered to overcome fear of danger while helping others?

Lesson in Our Society

Distrust between races makes it hard for some people to receive help from people who aren't "their kind." How can God's love help believers break down barriers to communication and care for others?

Make It Happen

Paul did not allow his life storm to stop him from ministering to others. Is there an area of ministry or outreach that you have given up because of pressures from a difficult situation? If so, prayerfully ask God to help you resume using your gift to help others. Then, make an appointment with the appropriate ministry leaders to see what steps you must take to resume service.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 28:1-10

1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

Luke communicates his faith in God's care through his choice of two words in these verses. First, in verse 1 he adds an ending to a word that means we "were escaped" (Gk. *diasozo*, dee-as-ODZE-o), not "they" as in our KJV text. Secondly, Luke used a word here that meant to be rescued. That's why our text says, "we were escaped," instead of "we escaped." Luke clearly recognizes that the safe arrival on shore of every one of the ship's 276 passengers was solely the result of divine help. Although their ship became battered pieces on the shoreline's rocks, God confirmed Paul's prophecy from the angel's nighttime visit (Acts 27:23-24). It was not a fortunate accident by human effort but the manifestation of a promised deliverance by the God that Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus trusted with their lives.

Gradually, the survivors learned they were on the island Melita (Malta), in the Mediterranean Sea, south of Sicily and Italy. In straight-line measurements, they were 1,200 miles from Caesarea where they first boarded and still more than 400 miles from Rome. In the past two weeks, the storm winds had driven more than 500 miles from Fair Havens, where Paul had urged them to stay through winter (Acts 27:8-10, 21, NIV).

Our text describes the people of Malta as "barbarous." That doesn't mean they were savage barbarians. The word simply referred to people who didn't speak Greek. Luke marveled at the loving "kindness" (Gk. *philanthropia*, fil-an-thro-PEE-ah) shown repeatedly by the people of Malta. "No little kindness" means the care given went far beyond what was expected

(28:2). To appreciate this incident, it is crucial to remember what the conditions were.

Because of driving wind and rain, the ship crashed on the rocks. In the midst of that storm, in weather made colder by blowing torrents, the islanders came out to the shore and managed to build a fire. Likely, they built many to accommodate 276 people. Luke notes that the island people “received us, every one.”

3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper, and fastened on his hand. 4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

Paul was not a lazy person (Romans 12:11). Acts 28:3 says he “gathered a bundle of sticks” for the fire. One of those “sticks” could have been several inches thick, perhaps with loose bark that a little snake could slither under to hibernate during winter or maybe with a spot that had rotted away, leaving a hole where it curled up. That suggests that Paul wasn’t making a show of working. Rather, he was putting real effort into helping build up the fire. The surviving crew members, and other prisoners and passengers would have seen this. Paul was a man whose example garnered respect for what he said in witness to his faith.

As Paul dropped his armful of firewood into the fire pit, the heat wakened the snake, which crawled out and latched onto Paul’s hand. Although there are no poisonous snakes on present-day Malta, “viper” (Gk. *echidna*, EKH-id-nah), usually refers to a poisonous snake. The indigenous residents saw the snake hanging from Paul’s hand. They instantly jumped to the conclusion that he must undoubtedly be the worst kind of desperate criminal, such as a “murderer” (Gk. *phoneus*, fon-YOOCE).

The Maltese thought that justice demanded retribution for the presumed criminal’s evil deeds. Receiving a poisonous snakebite, after just surviving a shipwreck, implied that to them. KJV translated Luke’s word here as “vengeance” (Gk. *dike*, DEE-kay), but both NLT and NIV present the word to mean “justice.” However, NIV capitalizes “Justice,” as a reference to the Greek goddess of justice, whose name was Dike. This goddess was a companion of Zeus, the supreme Greek god. The people of Malta may have worshiped Greek gods and saw Paul’s snakebite as her act of punishment.

5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Undoubtedly Paul was wet and cold like all his shipmates. The description in verse 5 of his shaking the snake off his hand suggests determination rather than panic. “Shook off” (Gk. *apotinasso*, ap-ot-in-AS-o) is the same phrase Luke chose when quoting Jesus’ command to the apostles that they should shake the dust off their feet when leaving towns where their preaching of the Lord’s kingdom was rejected (Luke 9:5).

In Acts 28, each time Paul approached the fire with more wood, the Maltese citizens watched and expected him to swell up in reaction to the snake’s poison or suddenly fall dead. Neither happened. Paul plainly “suffered no ill effects,” as 28:5, NIV words it. In verse 6 (NIV), Paul’s observers “changed” (Gk. *metaballo*, met-ab-AL-o) their original opinion of him. Instead, they now wrongly surmised that Paul must be a god.

7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name

was Publius; who received us and lodged us three days courteously. 8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

Near the site where the ship wrecked and those on board swam or floated to shore was the estate of "Publius" (Gk. *poplios*, POP-lee-os), Malta's chief magistrate and leading citizen. The Greek term meant literally "the main one," or as we say today, "the top guy." Did the gracious and caring reception that the survivors encountered in their contact with the island's residents reflect the influence of the person at the top? Publius must have been of great wealth. In verse 7, Luke says he "received us and lodged us three days courteously." "Received" did not mean to impersonally accept people's presence but to actively extend hospitality in welcoming guests. The last word in verse 7, "courteously" (Gk. *philophronos*, fil-of-RON-oc), means "in a friendly manner." "Us" may mean a few people such as Paul, Luke, Aristarchus, and maybe the ship's captain, its owner, and Julius, the Roman official. Some commentators presume that all 276 stranded victims were housed. "Lodged" (Gk. *anadechomai*, an-ad-EKH-om-ah) in KJV is rendered "treated us kindly" in NLT and "entertained" in NASB. The word can be interpreted in all these ways.

Luke's point is that everyone on Malta treated the ship's survivors with exceptional care. An important lesson here for witnessing our faith is to remember, "all have sinned," (from Romans 3:23, KJV). However, people without Christ are not automatically bad people. That is why Paul admonishes in Colossians 4:6 (KJV): "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Peter gives similar emphasis in 1 Peter 3:15, NIV: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer

to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect," (see also 2 Timothy 2:24). Likewise, as we saw in the previous lesson, being unapologetic and confident in sharing our faith does not mean being impolite or disrespectful.

While enjoying Publius's generosity, Paul learned that his father lay confined to his bed by recurring bouts of fever and bloody diarrhea (Acts 28:8). Paul took the initiative to visit the man as he believed he should do to support the weak (1 Thessalonians 5:14). After entering the man's room, Paul approached his bed, and as Jesus often did, laid his hands on the man and prayed (see Mark 6.5; Luke 4:40; 13:13). In Acts 28:8, Luke says what Paul did: he "healed him" (Gk. *iaomai*, ee-AM-om-ah).

9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: 10 Who also honoured us with many honours: and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

Our text, verse 9, gives no indication that Publius sought or expected Paul's miraculous intervention. It's likely that he saw his father's condition was beyond hope of recovery. The average life expectancy then was well under 40. Over half of all babies died within the first year (Barclay, 188). When word got out that Publius' desperately ill father had been healed, sick people from across the island flooded to where Paul was "and were healed" (Gk. *therapeuo*, ther-a-PYOO-o).

The immediate response to the father's healing would not be a surprise (Ezekiel 34:13). What is remarkable is that, although our text uses the same English word "healed" for both the father and the islanders, Luke used *iaomai* in Acts 28:8 and *therapeuo* in verse 9. That doesn't mean that the father was healed and the islanders weren't. Both were cured. The

different words suggest a difference in how this happened. The father's healing described a miraculous, instant freedom from his ailments, whereas the basic meaning of the word for the others' healing is "to serve." When applied to sickness, it often referred to medical treatment.

Our text doesn't say the island's sick people came to Paul; it simply says they came. A number of commentators write that the second word for healing applied more accurately to Luke than to Paul. In Colossians 4:14(KJV), Luke is called "the beloved physician" and the NLT describes him as a "beloved doctor."

The different words may suggest two different forms of divine healing—through miraculous divine intervention when the condition is beyond human help and by Christian ministry. These sections of Acts 28 may describe Luke as the first Christian medical missionary. (Barclay, 189). He also notes that some medical problems are not cured either way. For example, Paul—God's instrument for healing Publius's father—suffered unrelieved torment from a "thorn in the flesh," (2 Corinthians 12:7–10; Galatians 4:13–14).

However, the Maltese people were cured. They saw loving care extended by people committed to a God who loved all people everywhere so much that He was willing to die for their sins.

Three months passed before another ship arrived to transport Paul and his other prisoners on to Rome (Acts 28:11). During those three months, in verse 10 Luke says the people showered "us," not simply Paul, "with many honours" (Gk. *timao*, tim-AH-o). This also supports the possibility that ministry by other Christians other than Paul is at work here. Although Luke's word could refer to things of material value or price, here, the word points to expression of affection, respect, and deep feeling. As Paul sailed away to trial in Rome, the islanders

showed their esteem by loading the ship with things needed to insure a pleasant journey.

Two major lessons stand out. One concerns our attitude toward those around us who may not share our knowledge or faith in God.. While all people are sinners, that doesn't mean they cannot do commendable deeds. The image of God that we possessed in ourselves at creation has been irreparably distorted by sin but not completely blotted out. Our marred instinct toward a God-like goodness waits to be restored by our decision to trust in God's power to repair our universal spiritual brokenness.

Another lesson is the importance for each Christian to consistently make God's love visible in order to give our verbal witness an attractive credibility. It is inconceivable that Paul, the great missionary-evangelist, would allow the opportunity with such a receptive audience to slip by him. In Acts 28, Luke illustrates how making God's love real through our actions can add convicting power to what we say about God's love through Christ.

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Say It Correctly

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

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Failure to Minister
(Ezekiel 34:1-6)

TUESDAY

God's Ministry to the Flock
(Ezekiel 34:11-16)

WEDNESDAY

God's Judgment of the Privileged
(Ezekiel 34:17-22)

THURSDAY

Extend Hospitality to Strangers
(Romans 12:9-13)

FRIDAY

Ready for Every Good Work
(2 Timothy 2:20-26)

SATURDAY

Do Good to All
(1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)

SUNDAY

Ministering to the Sick
(Acts 28:1-10)

Notes

Teaching Tips

November 27
Bible Study Guide 13

Words You Should Know

A. **Expounded** (Acts 28:23) *ektithemi* (Gk.)—Set forth (used in explaining the way of God).

B. **Persuading** (v. 23) *peitho* (Gk.)—Prevailing upon or winning over.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Spread the News. Even though there were many who refused to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul persevered in faith, preaching the Gospel and bringing salvation's message to those who would listen.

A. Pray for your class.

B. Read and study the entire lesson, underlining salient points.

C. Reflect on what "commitment" means and prepare to discuss it.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer.

B. Read the Aim for Change and Focal Verses. Explain why Paul thought his imprisonment was to serve the cause of Christ.

C. Review the Background and The People, Places, and Times sections and discuss Paul's life and commitment.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Read the At-A-Glance outline, and use the Search the Scriptures and Discuss the Meaning questions to expound on the Focal Verses.

B. Refer the students to the Words You Should Know section as the vocabulary words arise.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Ask a student to volunteer to read the In Focus story.

B. Discuss Ruth's difficulties and how they correlate with Paul's circumstances.

C. Highlight the Lesson in Our Society section.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Remind the students that we find strength by looking at Jesus as our example of how to keep our commitments: The Lord called and sustained Him through the pain and humiliation of the Cross.

B. Close with prayer.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Paul Evangelizes in Rome

Song: "Trust and Obey"

Devotional Reading:

Deuteronomy 4:32–40

Paul Evangelizes in Rome

Bible Background • ACTS 28:16-31

Printed Text • ACTS 28:23-31 | Devotional Reading • DEUTERONOMY 4:32-40

AIM FOR CHANGE

By the end of the lesson, we will: **SUMMARIZE** the points of Paul's Gospel message; **BE CONFIDENT** in our ability to use Scripture to bring others to knowledge of Christ; and **IDENTIFY** ways we can tell resistant listeners about Christ.

KEEP IN MIND

“Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”
(Acts 28:28, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

At-A-Glance

1. Paul Shares the Gospel with the Jews
(Acts 28:23–25a)
2. The Jews Turn Away (vv. 25b–27)
3. Paul Preaches to the Gentiles
(vv. 28–31)

In Depth

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.

In Focus

During the past year, Monique started recognizing that her grandma Jean was becoming more and more forgetful. Jean started to forget where she placed items in the house. She would start teaching and get so confused the students could not understand what she was saying. She would get in her car to run an errand, but not remember where she was going. She also frequently put food on the stove and forgot about it. The house almost caught fire numerous times.

At Monique's urging, Jean went to the doctor, who examined her and ran some tests. A few weeks later, the results of the tests came back. Jean was in the early stages of dementia. He told her the condition would progressively get worse over time. Jean felt devastated by the news. How long could she continue teaching? She had served as the church's Sunday School Superintendent for more than 25 years. She was a faithful and

committed worker. She wondered whether to stop now or wait until things got worse.

Sometimes challenging circumstances can make it difficult to carry out our commitments. At such times, we may need to persevere in faith in spite of the difficulties we experience. In today's lesson, Paul is imprisoned but keeps his commitment to share the Gospel, which leads to souls coming to Christ.

The People, Places, and Times

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.

Background

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). The Lord 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 the Lord 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.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Paul preach the Gospel to the Jews (Acts 28:23)?
2. What prophet foretold the Jews not listening to God's message (v. 25)?
3. How did Paul spend his time while in prison (vv. 30–31)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How was God's favor shown toward Paul in Rome?
2. How did Paul keep his commitment to God while imprisoned?
3. How was his faithfulness rewarded?

Lesson in Our Society

Commitment to ministry is sometimes hard. We have so many distractions and hindrances that can cause us to lapse in our responsibilities. Jesus also had a lot of adversity to deal with as He walked the Earth. However, He never allowed anything or anyone to stop Him from reaching the place He was destined to go, the Cross. If Jesus can remain faithful in spite of all He had to endure, surely we can, too. We must not allow family drama, workplace stress, or personal issues to hinder us from keeping our commitment to minister to others. The world may not understand how we can remain faithful, but we know the Lord can and will sustain us.

Make It Happen

This week, pray God will give you the strength to keep your commitments. Always remember, God is present and in control over your circumstances. Testify to others of the faithfulness of God and how He helped you keep your commitments.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 28:23-31

23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

Paul finally received his opportunity to declare the Good News in Rome. At a set time, a huge number of people gathered at Paul's house of confinement and listened as he "expounded and testified the kingdom of God" from morning until night. The word "expounded" in the Greek is *ektithemi* (ek-TITH-ay-mee), and means "to set forth" or "to declare." The word "testified" (Gk. *diamarturomai*, dee-am-ar-TOO-rom-ah-ee) means "witnessed, confirmed something by testimony." The Greek word for "kingdom" is *basileia* (bas-il-I-ah), which means "dominion" or "rule."

24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

Some of the people "believed" (Gk. *peitho*, PIE-tho), meaning "they were persuaded of something." In this instance, they believed in God's Word; however, others did not. The phrase "some believed not" in the Greek is *asumphonos* (as-OOM-fo-nos), and it means they spoke to one another in disagreement.

Jesus explained the importance and significance of receiving and then believing the Lord's Word in the parable of the sower. As Jesus told a crowd: "A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And others fell on good ground,

and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold” (from Luke 8:5–8). The apostle Paul sowed the seed, the Word of the Lord, amid his listeners. Some seeds did fall on good ground—“some believed” (Acts 28:24). However, some did not have confidence in the Word of the Lord. It fell on deaf ears and hardened hearts. These people chose not to yield to the Word of the Lord.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

Paul preached first to the Jewish people then to Gentiles. And almost without fail, he was persecuted by them in a variety of terrible ways. But Paul loved his people and always went to them first. This is a great example of God’s love for the Jews. A remnant would always believe, so Paul did not give up for all those years. Paul realized that in the Lord’s infinite wisdom, the rejection of Jesus by the majority of the Jewish religious leaders opened the door for the Gentiles to believe. So although this final word from Paul seems very harsh, we know it really isn’t.

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

When God first ordained Isaiah to go and preach to His people, this warning was given to him (Isaiah 6:9–10). Imagine how a young preacher would feel if the Lord spoke to them at the beginning of their ministry and told them no one would listen to their message. That is

just what happened to Isaiah, and some days he got pretty discouraged. Maybe you are in a difficult ministry and are finding very little response. Well, Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus all had this very same experience. This same Scripture was quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:39–40. Jesus had the same experience as Isaiah and Paul—all three of them had their message rejected by their own people.

28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

The Lord brought His great “salvation” (Gk. *soterion*, so-TAY-ree-on), which means “rescue, safety, deliverance,” first to His chosen people, the Jews. However, when many of them did not choose to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah, His salvation then went to the Gentiles. Paul said in the affirmative that the Gentiles “will hear it.” In other words, they will accept their salvation and be “grafted in” (Romans 11:17, KJV).

The apostle Paul explained the concept of the Gentiles being “grafted” into this great salvation with this metaphor: “But some of these branches from Abraham’s tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God’s special olive tree.” (Romans 11:17–20, NLT).

In the versed following the above passage from Romans, Paul explained to Gentile Christians that they should not feel superior to the Jews because some of the Jews were rejected. Their unbelief caused them to be rejected. He explained that Abraham’s faith was like the roots of a productive tree, and the Jewish people, are the natural branches of that tree. Because of their unbelief, some of the Jews have

been broken off from this fruitful tree. Gentile believers, whom he compared to branches from a wild olive tree, were “grafted in.” These Gentiles were added to the family of believers based on their faith in God, and therefore they could share in the faith community’s spiritual nourishment. Both the Jews and the Gentiles, then, are saved according to their faith and not because of their culture or heritage. The first step in salvation is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Thus, when Paul gave the Word to local Jewish leaders in Rome and some chose not to believe, they chose damnation. Those who believe become recipients of salvation—eternal life.

29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

After Paul spoke in Acts 28:28 of the salvation of the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered to be “dogs” or “heathens,” they “departed, and had great reasoning among themselves” (v. 29). In the Greek, the word “reasoning” (Gk. *suzetesis*, sood-ZAY-tay-sis), means “mutual questioning, discussion.” In essence, they left to ponder, consider, or think over among themselves the things that the apostle Paul had told them.

30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Paul preached the Good News of the Gospel in his own “hired house” (Gk. *misthoma*, MIS-tho-mah), which means “rented building,” under house arrest for two years. However, he did not spend these years in idleness. He kept on freely preaching the kingdom of God and teaching God’s Word with all “confidence” (Gk. *parrhesia*, par-rhay-SEE-ah), which means “freedom in speaking, outspoken, frankness, or bluntness.” He spoke with authority, under the power of the Holy Spirit, bluntly telling lost humanity what they must do to be saved from damnation.

Some biblical scholars tell us that after being released from house arrest in Rome, Paul set off on a fourth missionary journey. They support this assertion with the following facts: “(1) Luke, who was such a meticulous chronicler, did not give details of Paul’s trial before the Emperor Caesar; (2) the prosecutors had two years to bring Paul’s case to trial and time may have just expired; (3) Paul implied in his letter to the Philippians, which was written while he was in prison in Rome, that he would soon be released and would do further travels; (4) Paul gave further information on his intended travels—places that he had not mentioned during his first three missionary journeys; and (5) early Christian literature informs of other travels of Paul” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2211).

Paul was indeed committed to the cause of Christ, his Lord and Savior. He even used his imprisonment to bring glory to the Lord and to serve that cause. Because even his negative circumstances proved to be a positive witness of his faithfulness to Christ in the midst of struggles, his life was truly an example of successful Christian living.

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Say It Correctly

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

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Will They Listen to Me?
(Exodus 6:6-13)

TUESDAY

I Told You So!
(Deuteronomy 1:41-45)

WEDNESDAY

Charged to Teach
(Deuteronomy 4:5-14)

THURSDAY

The Voice of Discipline
(Deuteronomy 4:32-40)

FRIDAY

The Word Is Very Near
(Deuteronomy 30:6-14)

SATURDAY

We Would Like to Hear
(Acts 28:16-22)

SUNDAY

Teaching Boldly and without Hindrance
(Acts 28:23-31)

Notes
