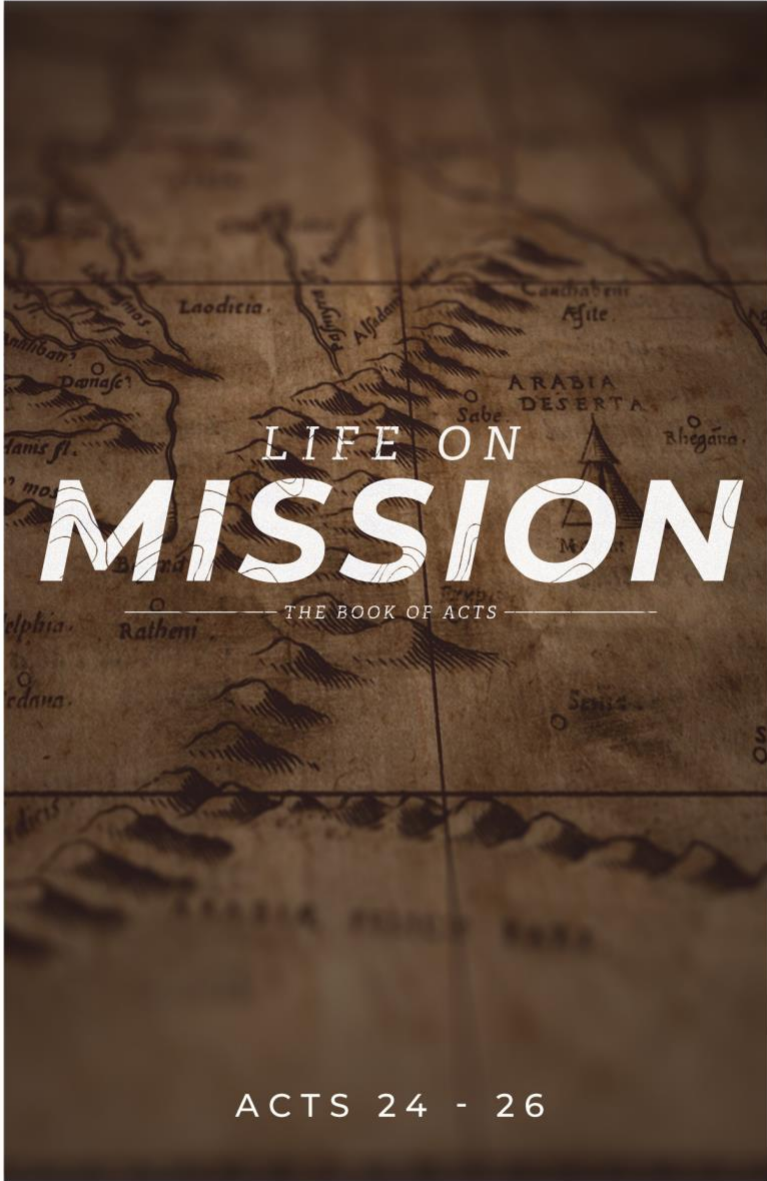
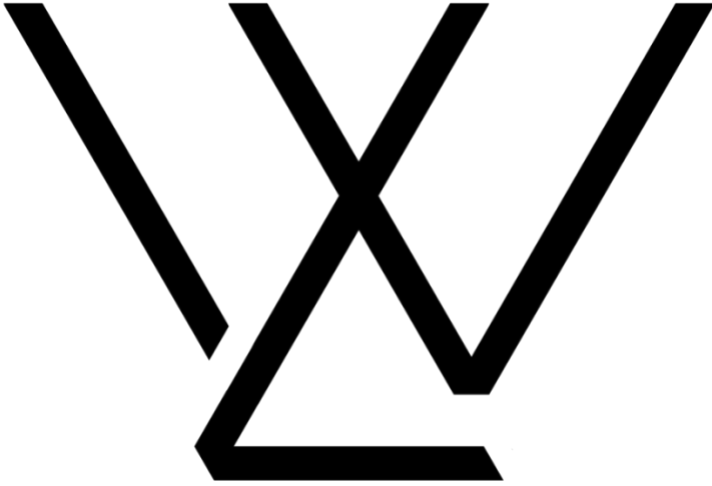




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 6 - 10





Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

Contributors

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Week 6: Acts 24:1-27

Day 2: “Have Confidence—Share your Testimony”

READ: Acts 24:1-27

EXPLORE:

Paul was on mission to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to explain that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, whom the Jews had been expecting for so long. According to the Scriptures, Jesus died on the cross, not only for the sins of the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. When Paul preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, this stirred up great wrath from the Jews and especially the Sadducees, for they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The High Priest Ananias was a Sadducee and was so filled with venom against Paul that he was willing to hastily travel from Jerusalem to the seat of the Roman governor Felix at Caesarea by the Sea.

After the plot to kill Paul was revealed, Paul ended up being escorted to Caesarea to be brought before the governor, Felix, with a letter from Claudius Lysias. Upon reading the letter, Felix said to Paul, *“I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.”* However, as we probe into Acts 24 today, we find our Apostle Paul being presented to Felix just five days later on the pretense to not detain the governor any longer. The charges against Paul by Ananias and some elders were presented by a Roman official named Tertullus. Beginning with flattering words concerning Felix’s reforms and supposed peaceful way of ruling, Tertullus began the accusations against Paul without any witnesses present. Despite all this flattery, Felix was no friend of the Jews who hated him. He was known more for taking bribes than for helping the Jews. More than likely, after Paul revealed he had arrived in Jerusalem wishing to bring alms to his nation and to present offerings, Felix hoped that money would be given him by Paul.

During this hearing, without witnesses, Paul was falsely accused of being a plague, stirring up riots among the Jews, being a ringleader of a sect called the Nazarenes and even trying to profane the temple before he was seized. According to Paul in our earlier studies, he was actually persecuted for living his life before God, in all good conscience. In his own defense before Felix, Paul said these charges were totally invalid. The one thing Paul did admit to was being a follower of The Way, which the Jews claimed to be a sect, and of worshipping the God of their fathers, believing everything written in the Law and the Prophets. It was Paul's defense that it was with respect to the resurrection of the dead that he was on trial before Felix that day.

Because Felix had reckoned that he had a very accurate knowledge of the Christian beliefs concerning salvation, called "The Way," it was his intent to keep Paul in prison with privileges and decide his case later. People who belonged to The Way were considered true followers of Christ and kept to the true course of action, in relation to God.¹

Keeping Paul in custody in Caesarea allowed time for the Gentile, Felix, to often summon Paul so he and his Jewish wife could hear him speak about faith. Felix's wife, Drusilla, was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I and the sister of Agrippa II (who will appear in the next chapter). During these many conversations, three subjects were presented to them by Paul: righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. More than likely, Paul teaching about these specific things caused Felix to fear condemnation. Drusilla's marriage to Felix was considered a scandal because it caused her divorce from her first husband. Despite the uncomfortable conversations regarding the coming judgment for sin, Felix continued to send for Paul often in the hopes of Paul giving him money.

¹ This is the sixth reference to "The Way" recorded in Acts.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. Desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. The actions of Paul's good conscience in preaching this Gospel resulted in his arrest and trumped-up charges of deserving death. Just as Jesus had predicted in Luke 21:12, Paul indeed had hands laid on him, faced persecution, and was being delivered over to kings and governors "for Christ's name's sake". As Jesus said, this led to an opportunity for Paul's testimony. In this section of Acts, Paul is brought not only before the governor Felix, but also his successor Festus and later before King Agrippa. As it so happened, the Lord stood by Paul at this time and said, *"Take courage, for as you have testified as to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."*

BIG IDEA: Follow Christ wholeheartedly and share your story, even when it could eventually lead to persecution.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Do you understand the Gospel message about "The Way", as Paul preached it? If not, spend time going over the sermons in Acts concerning salvation.
- **Activity:** Write out your own salvation story, beginning with how you were lost without Christ and how you were found by Him. Your personal testimony is powerful. Be prepared to confidently share it.

Week 6: Acts 24:1-27

Day 3: One Unified Story

READ: Acts 24:1-21

EXPLORE:

Author and theologian Scott McKnight once wrote, “One reason why so many Christians today don’t know the Old Testament is because their ‘gospel’ doesn’t even need it!”²

We are all too often guilty of that very wrongdoing. We disconnect the work of God revealed in the whole of Scripture, which results in the detachment of Jesus from the story of Israel. This is a crucial error that, thankfully, Paul did not make when he stood before Greek and Jewish authorities.

He said, *“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”*³

In a few short words, Paul powerfully communicated the glorious consistency in the God who is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. By referencing to the God of our fathers, the Law, and the Prophets, Paul was explaining that Christian faith is both the fulfillment of and coherent with the Old Testament. His *“confession”* in Acts 24:14 would have been breathtaking to the surrounding audience. After denying several false accusations made against him, Paul affirmed that he belonged to the Way, which was called a sect.⁴

The original Greek wording in Acts 24:14 is structured as an emphatic statement, indicating that Paul remained totally loyal to the God who is

² The King Jesus Gospel by Scott McKnight for reference.

³ See Acts 24:14-15 for reference.

⁴ See Acts 24:10-13 for reference.

revealed in the Old Testament. Reminiscent of his speech in the Areopagus in Athens⁵, the apostle Paul wanted to be very clear that he was not presenting a new God in his preaching of Christian resurrection. He was proclaiming the triune God revealed throughout the biblical text.

We ought to learn from Paul's example that is visible in this chapter. If you pay close attention to the wording of Acts 24:14-16, you will notice that Paul was asserting that the proper mode of worshipping the God of both the Law and the Prophets was to be done according to *The Way*. The gospel of Jesus ought to lead us to a place where we consistently marvel at the same God who has been revealed in the whole of Scripture. In our lives and with our words, may we intimately know and powerfully proclaim the God who is revealed in the entire biblical text.

BIG IDEA: The gospel ought to lead us to a place where we consistently marvel at the same God who has been revealed in the whole of Scripture.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Why do you think we are often guilty of disconnecting the work of Christ in the New Testament from the Old Testament story?

- **Activity:** The story of Scripture has often been broken into four sections: (1) Creation (2) Fall (3) Redemption and (4) Restoration. It is important that we know these summarizing segments and that we can articulate them. Practice summarizing these scenes in your own words.

⁵ See Acts 17:23-31 for reference.

Week 6: Acts 24:1-27

Day 4: Terrified not Transformed

READ: Acts 24:22-27

EXPLORE:

The ending section of our passage this week provides us with a fascinating moment between Paul, Felix, and his wife Drusilla. It may not be possible for us to unpack all the interesting details from this text in this weekend's sermon, so we are going to address some important details in today's study.⁶

There is no doubt that Paul gave an incredibly powerful defense that would easily lead us to believe the response of Felix might just be favorable. This, however, did not turn out to be the case. Felix knew Paul's message and he knew it well.⁷ He listened closely and was, at times, seemingly challenged by the statements of Paul.⁸ According to the text, Paul chose to discuss righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment with Felix and Drusilla. There is nothing coincidental about these three points of emphasis.

Righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come are all common themes in the Pauline writings, but they would have been especially convicting for the powerful couple. Felix, which is Latin for "happy" is quite ironic. According to the ancient Jewish historian named Josephus, the marriage between Felix and Drusilla was hardly filled with joy. As we can see in Acts 24, their lives and leadership were filled with corruption.

To a couple that was known for lacking relational discipline, Paul spoke on self-control. To a man who consistently sought to extort the imprisoned, Paul spoke on righteousness.⁹ To a man that was willing to wrongly imprison a man to do the "unjust" a favor, Paul reasoned on

⁶ I (Stephen) hope that you will have a chance to read and reread the biblical text after today's Word to Life.

⁷ See Acts 24:22 for reference.

⁸ See Acts 24:25 for reference.

⁹ See Acts 24:26 for reference.

the coming judgment of God. Paul reasoned concerning the very things that had ensnared their hearts and lives.

With this context in view, it makes sense that Felix was “*alarmed*.”¹⁰ Paul had identified brokenness in Felix’s life, and he was left trembling. It is incredibly important to notice that even though Felix was terrified by Paul’s words, he was not transformed by them. There is a huge difference between the two! In the same way that many who encountered Christ were superficially amazed and simultaneously unchanged, Felix was terrified by the truth, but remained untransformed. Paul had pinpointed areas of idolatry and sin and his response was not repentance, but refusal. In view of God’s Word and His conviction in our lives, may we not merely be challenged, but be changed for His glory.

BIG IDEA: Felix was terrified, but not transformed. In contrast, when we are convicted of sin and idolatry, we ought to be both challenged and changed for God’s glory.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Paul pinpointed three areas of compromise in the life of Felix and Drusilla (righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment). If three areas of sinful compromise were identified in your life, what would they be?

- **Activity:** Pray on the things you have listed above, coming to the Lord in a spirit of repentance and receive His forgiveness and transformative love toward you. Invite a friend or mentor to hold you accountable and to encourage you

¹⁰ See Acts 24:25 for reference.

Week 6: Acts 24:1-27

Day 5: A Political Pawn

READ TOGETHER: Genesis 50:20, Exodus 23:1, 1 Peter 3:16

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Politics these days are quite divisive. Some say it is worse than it has ever been. In some ways I (Sabino) am sure that is true, but our country has also seen a Civil War. Politics, power grabs, and pride have been a part of human history from the beginning. Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, we have had to learn how to live with corruption.

The apostle Paul is caught up in a political game and must deal with much corruption. His accusers are repeating the same old lies when Paul was first arrested in Jerusalem. They label him a plague and falsely claim that he stirs up riots and even tried to profane the temple. Paul preached a message of reconciliation between God and humanity. How does this message stir up riots? No, it was not Paul's message that stirred up riots, but the sinful hearts of men who oppose the gospel message.

Paul is allowed to give his own defense against his accusers. He says that he worships the God of our fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and believes everything laid down by the Law and the Prophets. Paul's point is that Christianity is not opposed to the Jewish faith, but that it is the fulfillment of it. Paul also states that he came to Jerusalem to bring alms and present offerings. He seeks to do good to the nation. His final point is that he is on trial in respect to the resurrection of the dead. In other words, Paul says he is only on trial because he preaches the resurrection of the dead, which all Jews should believe.

This is where Paul turns into a political pawn. Felix, the governor, seems to like Paul. He summoned him often to speak with him about faith and life. However, Felix was hoping to be bribed by Paul. He wanted Paul to give him money and then he would let him go free. After two years, Felix's term was coming to an end. He knew Paul was innocent but decided to leave him in prison to do the Jews a favor. Paul was used as a political pawn by Felix, but God was using this situation to get Paul an audience with Caesar.

BIG IDEA: Paul is caught up in political corruption, but God still has His hand on him.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** What do we learn from Paul in how to deal with false accusations?
- **Activity:** Make a list of other faithful servants who were caught up in political corruption and discuss how God sustained them.

- **Question:** What do you think it would have been like to be Paul in his experience before the tribunal while being surrounded by accusatory Jewish leaders?

- **Question:** Read and remind yourself of Acts 1:8. After doing so, reread Acts 25:12 and notice how significant this move is in the development of Paul's ministry to the early church.

Week 7: Acts 25:1-12

Day 2: Continuing Toward Rome...

READ: Acts 25:1-12

EXPLORE:

Soon after he became the new procurator, Festus went to Jerusalem. This leadership move makes sense because Jerusalem was the religious and cultural center of the people who would now be under Festus's jurisdiction and control. It did not take long before the Jewish leaders asked to have Paul moved from Caesarea to Jerusalem. In a scene that is reminiscent of the more than forty zealous Jews who vowed to not eat or drink until they had killed Paul, the Jews in Jerusalem did not have pure motives for moving Paul.¹¹ They wanted to murder the apostle on his way from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

After Paul's brief defense before Felix, recorded in Acts 24:7, we are reintroduced to one of the most crucial themes in the book of Acts...the expansion of the gospel message to Caesar in Rome. As a brief reminder, two previous examples we encountered earlier in our study of Acts are provided below.

- **Acts 19:21** *Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."*
- **Acts 23:11** *The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."*

Because of Paul's innocence and his appeal to Caesar, the apostle officially became Rome's "problem." Interestingly and rather unsurprisingly, Acts is one of the primary ancient sources used by historians to understand how an individual might have been able to

¹¹ See Acts 23:12-13 for reference.

make an appeal before Caesar. We should not underestimate the significance of this move that takes place in Acts 25.

We need to remember that a story that began with 120 believers in Acts 1 is now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, making its way before the leader of the Roman Empire. The gospel was advancing incredibly. Adversity could not stop it and hostility could not silence it. The gospel was headed to Rome.

When life presents us with opportunities to doubt God's provision or His plan, we would do well to remember the promise of the Lord in the life of the early church to advance the gospel to Rome. When we grow weary or settle into complacency, may the same God who worked His will in and through His enemies spark your heart once again to live life on mission. Just as the gospel was advancing toward Rome, the Kingdom of heaven continues to break through here and now!

BIG IDEA: God will continue to accomplish the ultimate expansion of His gospel and we have a crucial role to play in His purposes.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does the promise of the gospel's expansion to Rome encourage you in your faith and witness today?

Week 7: Acts 25:1-12

Day 3: The Sin of Partiality

READ: Proverbs 28:21, James 2:1-13

EXPLORE:

Partiality is dangerous and yet often unacknowledged. Broadly, partiality occurs when someone who is giving judgment delivers an inappropriately biased or preferential ruling which is not based on truth or justice, but on favoritism toward one or more persons against another.

In Felix¹² and in Festus, we can see that they dealt with Paul not based on truth and justice, but in favoritism. Paul remained in prison because Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor. In much the same way, it was Festus's desire to do the Jews a favor that led to him asking if Paul wanted to make the dangerous journey to be tried in Jerusalem. To be clear, not every favor is a sign of favoritism or partiality. When we consider the leadership and corruption displayed by both Felix and Festus, however, it is clear that they dealt in partiality.

When we look at passages like this, we should resist the urge to write off favoritism as some ancient problem that we don't deal with today. Even though favoritism is deadly to our souls and to our witness in this world, it is often allowed to run rampant in our hearts and lives. For those who have come to understand the saving grace of Christ which transforms enemies of God into His children by His Spirit, there shouldn't be a hint of partiality. As followers of a God of justice and of grace, we ought to deal in truth and integrity rather than prejudice and preferential treatment.

The book of James records, *"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."*¹³ Ultimately, if God is the Lord of glory and we are not, then His supremacy and holiness

¹² See Acts 24:24-27 for reference to our study last week.

¹³ See James 2:1-13 for reference and full context.

have done away with our feeble excuses for favoritism and discriminatory behavior. Allow me to highlight three specific ways in which partiality is damaging.

First, partiality is idolatrous in that it idolizes some people against others. Second, partiality often results in self-doubt and insecurity. Third, partiality devalues humanity – ones who were made in the image of God – and attempts to sinfully reorient a person’s significance through the preferential treatment of another.

The Proverbs remind us that, *“to show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong.”*¹⁴ Favoritism is not situational wisdom, and it is not rightly held priorities. It is a sinful lowering of the standard for how God’s love would compel His people to live. As followers of Jesus, let us resolve to deal in justice and truth, not in partiality.

BIG IDEA: Partiality should hold no place in the heart and actions of a believer.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What is the gospel and how does it challenge the very essence of partiality in the heart and life of the believer?

- **Questions:** In your own words, what is the difference between doing someone a favor and displaying partiality? Is there a healthy form of partiality and an unhealthy form? Why or why not? Explain your answers to share with your LifeGroup.

¹⁴ See Proverbs 28:21 for reference.

Week 7: Acts 25:1-12

Day 4: Living Happily Ever After

READ: Acts 25:6-12 and Romans 8:31-39

EXPLORE:

“They all lived happily ever after. The end.”

Certainly, this is a phrase you are familiar with. There is no doubt that you have either read or heard this statement countless times at the end of a movie, a piece of literature, or an audible story. This famous expression of *“living happily ever after”* first appeared in the 1700’s and it has concluded stories ever since.

Although the sentiment is undeniably popular, Paul seemed to actively reject the idea. After the apostle made his case, he said, *“If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”*¹⁵ Paul seemed to be okay embracing what could have been perceived by others as the *“not so happily ever after.”*

At the core of the phrase *“they lived happily ever after”* is the God-given design within all of humanity for permanence, significance, and even that which is transcendent. From a deep desire for death to not have the proverbial final word, we erect wishful phrases and construct plotlines in which death is suspended indefinitely. Paul was not afraid of death. This was made crystal clear through his life. He was confident in the God who, in Christ, had made a way to conquer death and give everlasting life.

Allow me (Stephen) to remind you briefly of what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome. After reminding his audience that the church is often sent into the world as sheep to the slaughter, he wrote, *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors*

¹⁵ See Acts 25:11 for reference.

through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁶

Every time we encounter the idea of “*living happily ever after*” we should be challenged to think about how we might best communicate the eternal hope of Christ beyond this life not only to those around us, but to our own souls as well. May we, as the church, be a people who look fearlessly upon death as a statement of our confidence in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross and in His victory over the grave.

BIG IDEA: Paul was able to embrace faithful witness and fearless death because of an eternal hope made available in Christ.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How do you think you could share your faith with others who have desires for afterlife, but no concrete hope for eternity?

- **Question:** Would you describe the ultimate end of the biblical story in Scripture as an example of “*happily ever after.*” Why or why not? Explain your answer using the biblical text.

¹⁶ See Romans 8:31-39 for reference and its surrounding context.

Week 7: Acts 25:1-12

Day 5: Timing is Everything

READ TOGETHER: Acts 23:11, Psalm 27:14, Proverbs 15:22

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Timing is everything...

This phrase is used in almost every area of life. We hear it in sports, business, and finance, as well as many other areas of life. In the Scripture we've been studying this week, the apostle Paul appeals to Caesar with just the right timing. His request is granted, and Paul will testify in Rome just as the Lord told him.

Festus, the new governor of Jerusalem, has just arrived and the religious leaders immediately lay out their case against Paul. They have been waiting for two years for Paul to be killed and their fervor has not diminished at all. They ask Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem because they are planning an ambush to kill him on the way. Thankfully, Festus says that Paul is being kept in Caesarea and that they would need to go there in order to bring any charges against him.

The Jews did go up to Caesarea and brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them. Paul also gave his defense claiming that he did nothing against the law of the Jews, the temple, or against Caesar. This whole episode was just like the trial before the previous governor, Felix. Things were getting nowhere in Paul's case.

It was at this point that Paul decided to appeal to Caesar. The lower Roman courts could not decide on Paul's case. The Jews just wanted to

- **Question:** After reading Acts 25:23-27, what stands out to you and why?

- **Question:** Why do you think the Holy Spirit, through the author Luke, chose to preserve this story and dialogue in the Scriptures throughout time and for us today? Why might this scene be valuable for the church?

Week 8: Acts 25:13-27

Day 2: The Paradox of Progress

READ: Acts 25:13-27

EXPLORE:

If it feels like our study of Acts has slowed down, then you are not alone. No, it does not feel slow because you are impatient or easily bored. Certainly, you could be both impatient and easily bored, but that is not necessarily the reason why this section of Acts can seem slow. Allow me (Stephen) to explain.

Slow-motion videos are only captivating when the event they replay is truly remarkable. Videos of a diving catch or a cheetah sprinting are mesmerizing in slow-motion because there is a lot to see. Watching grass grow in slow-motion is quite a different story. When something is incredible and significant, a slow-motion replay is necessary. That is the case of Acts 22-26.

For the past few weeks, we have been observing Paul make his defense before different political and religious leaders. Ironically, we have been reading large sections of the biblical text and the flow of the storyline can still appear slow. A good student of Scripture ought to ask the question, “Why did the author, Luke, chose to slow down the story of the early church to focus intently on Paul’s time with Tertullus, Felix, Festus, and now Agrippa with Bernice?”

In a very real sense, Acts 24-25 serve as a slow-motion, deep dive into the geographic expansion of Christianity and the intellectual case for the gospel. There are crucial details in early church that we must learn to appreciate from the seemingly mundane and slow-paced details.

One of the first things we ought to appreciate is the continually affirmed innocence of Paul of wrongdoing before the Jews and Romans alike. The growth of the Christian faith and its expansion toward Rome did not exist because of manipulation or coercion, but because of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in and through people who were far from God

and now commissioned into His service. Paul's innocence is a reminder that his seemingly undesirable position existed not because of his wrongdoing, but because of God's good plan.

Whether the religious and political opponents of Christianity were acting from a place of obligation or opposition, Acts 24-25 reminds us that God is accomplishing His purposes even when it is hard for us to perceive. The slow-motion recounting of Paul's trials is intended to reveal how paradoxical progress can often seem. It was precisely when Paul seemed to be going nowhere, that a way forward was being prepared. God's faithfulness in the life of Paul is designed to remind us of the God who is working His will and accomplishes His purposes even when the progress appears impossible.

BIG IDEA: Progress can seem slow, but God is still at work.

APPLY:

- **Question:** If the pace of Acts seems slow, be reminded that it might just have felt slower to the apostle Paul. When in your life have you experienced less than preferable timing that turning out to be beneficial?

- **Optional Question:** Pace is an often-unexplored literary feature of Scripture. What are other examples in the biblical text of literary pacing and why might they be significant?
 - a. *Example:* The pace of the last week in the life of Christ is slowed in each of the four gospels because it is incredibly important that we see our Savior clearly leading to the cross.

Week 8: Acts 25:13-27

Day 3: Shining the Light of the Gospel

READ: Read Acts 25:13-27

EXPLORE:

The passage this week contains a subtle but profound transition in the persecution of Paul. As Festus is laying out this perplexing case for visiting King Agrippa, he remarks that he was surprised that no accusations of evil had been made against Paul. Instead, his accusers *“had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.”*¹⁷ This development makes a massive statement about Paul’s manner of living. The Jews had indeed made accusations against Paul’s character.¹⁸ These accusations, however, had proved unsuccessful in light of how Paul lived. This is a concept that must not be overlooked.

Paul lived in such a way that made the gospel the focal point of his life and ministry. Paul regularly taught that our lives as believers should be a living testimony to God and the new life He offers in Christ.¹⁹ In fact, Peter, teaching the same principle, recognizes Paul’s emphasis on this topic.²⁰ Scripture is clear, the light of the Gospel is to shine through in our lives. Yet, how often is the gospel light in our lives veiled by other things?

When we lose our temper, we veil the Gospel light that is to shine through us.

When we get distracted by materialism, we veil the Gospel light that is to shine through us.

¹⁷ See Acts 25:19 for reference.

¹⁸ See Acts 21:28; 24:5-6 for reference.

¹⁹ See Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 1:27-30; and Philippians 2:14-16 for reference.

²⁰ See 2 Peter 3:14-15 for reference.

When we compromise our morality to watch or participate in things that are not edifying, we veil the Gospel light that is to shine through us.

Make no mistake. Paul was not perfect. Yet his accusers could find nothing evil in his life to accuse him of. Without the distraction of personal shortcomings, the claim of Christ's resurrection was highlighted to Paul's accusers and to the officials before whom he stood. It is really important that we allow this reality to sink into our minds and find its home in our hearts.

What are the veils in your life that keep people from seeing the Gospel light in you. We may proclaim Jesus with our mouths, but what does our way of life say?

BIG IDEA: The apostle Paul's life highlighted the claims of Christ's resurrection.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Meditate on Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 1:27-30, and Philippians 2:14-16.

- **Activity:** Ask God to show you the veils in your life that hinder the gospel light from coming through.

- **Question:** How will you address the veils that God has shown you?

Week 8: Acts 25:13-27

Day 4: A Ready Defense and the Centrality of Christ's Resurrection

READ: Acts 25:13-27

EXPLORE:

This section of Acts leads us into Paul's speech which will take place in Acts 26. According to many biblical scholars and theologians, this speech forms the climax of Paul's defense of the faith through his testimony. Before we get to this powerful moment, however, we need to consider a few important details that exist in the background. For today's study we will focus on two specific elements that are crystalized in the witness of Paul. They are the resurrection of Jesus and the value of having a ready defense for the Christian faith.

The Disagreement about the Resurrection of Jesus:

When Festus presented Paul's situation before Agrippa, his presentation of Paul and his Jewish opposers was relatively fair and balanced. In a summarizing statement Festus said, "*Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.*"²¹ Fundamentally, everything in the Paul's argument hung on the historical reality of Christ's resurrection. Festus was unsure about how to proceed, but he was not confused about the nature of their disagreement.

As followers of Jesus, our faith hangs on the historic reality of Christ and His bodily resurrection over the grave. We have covered this truth extensively on multiple occasions in our study of Acts. A balanced defense of the Christian faith will include a proclamation of Christ and His victorious resurrection from the grave. In a sense, it is a very real shame that Festus seemed clearer on the epicenter of the Christian discussion than do many today. The centrality of Christ's bodily resurrection ought not be missed in this text!

Having a Ready Defense for the Christian Faith:

²¹ See Acts 25:19 for reference.

A second theme that appears in this section is the significance of having a ready defense of Christianity. There are certainly occasions in which we may be prompted by the Holy Spirit in accordance with God's Word to speak truths we have not prepared or studied. However, this assurance of God's work should not keep us from diligently preparing a reasonable defense for the faith we proclaim. Christians are fundamentally called to be prepared in the sharing of their testimony and in the defense of their faith. Our diligent preparation does not preclude us from being flexible in the moment. In fact, I have found that preparation enables God-honoring adaptability in defending the Christian faith.

The beautiful and climactic defense before Agrippa arises amidst the backdrop of Paul's consistent, diligent preparation for the moment at hand. We would do well to keep the resurrection central and possess a ready defense for the gospel.

BIG IDEA: Keep the resurrection central and be ready to embody and communicate your faith.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How can you diligently prepare to share your faith without becoming rigid and formulaic?
- **Activity:** As Christians, we ought to be well-rounded in our ability to defend the Christian faith. Create a list of common objections to Christianity you've heard and plan to study areas in which you are weak.
- **Activity:** Spend time researching arguments for the resurrection of Christ.

Week 8: Acts 25:13-27

Day 5: Festus Needs Help

READ TOGETHER: Acts 25:13-27, Acts 9:15-16

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Festus is the newly installed procurator or governor over Judea. The seat of government is in Caesarea. Festus is new to working with the Jews and his most important case at the beginning of his term is the apostle Paul. Festus needs some help in this matter. Fortunately for him, Agrippa comes to pay him a visit.

Agrippa is the great grandson of Herod the Great. He is a Jew and a king of Rome. Agrippa knows much more about the Jews than Festus does. Agrippa and Bernice come to Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus on his new appointment. After some days Festus laid Paul's case before Agrippa and he tells him how has responded thus far.

First on his (Festus's) visit to Jerusalem, he had heard the Jews accuse Paul and request his condemnation, but he denied their request since Roman custom allows the accused to make a defense. Secondly, when the Jewish leaders came to Caesarea, he discovered that Paul was not being charged for crimes against Rome, but with religious offenses. Thirdly, since he did not know how to investigate these questions, he asked Paul if he wanted to be tried in Jerusalem, but Paul appealed to Caesar, and Festus granted his appeal. Intrigued by Paul's case, Agrippa requested to hear Paul himself, and Festus agreed.

Agrippa and Bernice come into the assembly with great pomp. You could say they were really feeling themselves. In their own minds they

get to do important things and rule on important cases. But as we know, it is the Lord himself who is orchestrating all these matters.

Festus then brings Paul in, and he shares his opinion on the apostle. Festus found that Paul had done nothing deserving of death. Paul appealed to Caesar and Festus had agreed. However, Festus did not know what to write to Caesar concerning Paul. Therefore, he wants the assembly to hear Paul's case, especially Agrippa, so that he would have something to write to the emperor.

God himself was orchestrating all these events. It was no accident that Agrippa came to visit Festus. It was no accident that Agrippa would hear from Paul himself. Paul would once again have the precious opportunity to share the gospel with aristocracy for the glory of God.

BIG IDEA: Agrippa will hear Paul for himself to address his own curiosity and help the new procurator Festus.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why do you think Agrippa wanted to hear from Paul?

- **Activity:** List other royal officials in the Bible who requested help.

- **Question:** With vv. 1-18 in mind, how do you think you would have responded to Paul's conversion story?

Week 9: Acts 26:1-18

Day 2: Confessions from a Recovering Legalist

READ: Acts 26:1-32

EXPLORE:

You will notice that this week that we are focusing on the first portion of Paul's Christian defense in Acts 26:1-18. That is because there is so much incredible detail in this climactic moment that we will need to unpack as a church. Even though we are focusing only on the first portion this week, it is highly encouraged that you spend a little extra time today reading all of Acts 26. Today's writing is shorter to hopefully give you time to read the whole text.

When Paul was finally given an audience and permission before Agrippa, he shared his story. He shared the good, the bad, the ugly, and even the complicated. He lived as a Pharisee in the strictest section of the Jewish faith. Even though he had grown up zealous and legalistic toward the faith, he had encountered the Christ whom he previously persecuted. Now, before Agrippa Paul was communicating as a former legalist. Legalism is the belief that a person is accepted by God and not opposed by Him because of their ability to keep the law. Paul's defense before Agrippa is a confession from a recovering legalist whose life had been radically changed by the promise of God which was fulfilled in Christ.

Paul's assertion before Agrippa and the accusatory Jews was once again that Jesus was the fulfillment of what had been promised by God long before. Ironically, the people of Israel and Paul himself had been surprised by the very Messiah for whom they had prayed. Besides the Sadducees, the Jews believed in the resurrection, and they fervently hoped for it. However, unlike Paul, the Jewish opposition did not believe that their resurrection hopes were inaugurated in the person and work of Jesus.

Because of the grace of Christ which had been so greatly lavished upon Paul, he was not willing to avoid his past any more than he was willing

to stay enslaved by it. As a recovering legalist, Paul was deeply interested in helping people understand that looking to anything or anyone other than Jesus to be made clean and acceptable before God was empty.

Charles Spurgeon once compared the person who embraces a works-based salvation to a blind horse going around and around on a mill. No matter how hard or quick the work, the effort would only produce fatigue without fruit. Ultimately, the person who seeks to earn their own salvation will either falsely inflate their own self-perception or they will be moreover convinced of their utter and final failure. The gospel speaks a profoundly better word into the human condition. Paul had encountered it and he was exhorting others to reject anything less!

BIG IDEA: As a recovering legalist who had been changed by the grace of Christ, Paul was willing to boldly and tactfully share his story.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In your heart and life, where have you wrestled with tendencies toward being legalistic in believing your law-keeping would justify you before a perfect and holy God?

- **Activity:** Read Acts 26 in its totality

Week 9: Acts 26:1-18

Day 3: Responding Rightly to Correction

READ: Acts 26:1-18

EXPLORE:

One key factor that determines someone's spiritual maturity is their ability to humbly respond to correction. Everyone makes mistakes, but not everyone responds well to correction. In Paul's retelling of his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, we are reminded that one of the first words spoken to the apostle was a corrective one.

After having been asked by Jesus about why he was persecuting Him, a declarative word of correction was given. Jesus said, "*It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*"²² This phrase may be lost on us, but it would have been a clear, convicting word for the apostle-to-be.

In the ancient world and many agrarian cultures still today, a goad (*kentron*) is used to move livestock. A goad is a stick with a sharpened point which would poke livestock in the right direction. There was a popular Greek proverb at the time about goads which would have hit a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of Paul's Gentile audience at the time. It makes sense then that Paul would mention this part of his conversion story that was omitted elsewhere.

In the ancient mindset, the idea of kicking against the goads was connected to the resisting destiny and the futility of fighting against God's will. With this context in mind, we can see that Paul was intending to communicate to his audience that God was at work in this moment of correction. Like throwing a pebble into a roaring waterfall to stop it, Paul was futile in his ability to stand against the will of God for his life. Paul wrote later in Galatians 1:15-17 that God had set him apart from

²² See Acts 26:14 for reference. This is the only time in Scripture that Paul mentions this detail in the retelling of his conversion story.

birth and that God had revealed Jesus at the right time so that he would be able to preach to the Gentiles.²³

Paul did not just receive a challenging word of correction, he responded rightly to it! In a recent sermon by Pastor Josh Sharpe, he communicated that a fitting response to God is submission and surrender to His will. Unfortunately, many of us live out struggle instead of willing submission to the creator and sustainer of all things. Jesus's words to Paul on the road to Damascus and the response that followed should remind us to respond well to correction.

BIG IDEA: Spiritual maturity necessitates a right response to correction from God often through others.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How would you rate your ability to respond to correction? What is your initial response and how might you improve to become more fitting?

- **Question:** Why do you think Paul mentioned this corrective word from Jesus in his testimony here and not at any other point in Acts?

²³ See Acts 5:39 for our first discussion on the unstoppable will of God in the development of His church.

Week 9: Acts 26:1-18

Day 4: Double-Blind Study

READ: Acts 26:12-18

EXPLORE:

On the road to Damascus, when Saul saw a light from heaven, the Lord turned him from darkness to light, and sent him to be a witness to the Gentiles, so that they also would turn from darkness to light. Until Saul saw the light, he didn't know he was in darkness. Until the Lord blinded him, he didn't know his eyes were closed. Saul thought he was serving God as he persecuted Christians, little knowing that he was under the power of Satan.

So, it was with the Gentiles to whom the Lord sent Saul. Their eyes were shut, they were in darkness, and they were under the power of Satan. The Lord sent Saul *"to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God."* Often, the first move in receiving true sight involves the crucial realization of blindness apart from Christ.

So, it is with people today. Although they don't realize it, those who are not trusting in Jesus are in darkness and under the power of Satan. Worse yet, we Christians often forget that many of our friends, relatives, and acquaintances are blind and under the power of Satan. We think they're doing alright. This dynamic reminds me (Jonathan) of what is called a double-blind medical study in which both those who need the cure and those who have the cure are willfully blind. We might ask, "Just because a person has established a bedrock faith in something or someone other than Jesus, does that really mean they are under the power of His enemy?" The Scriptures speak clearly to this reality in I John.²⁴

Although it is difficult to accept that many around us are in Satan's power, this is what the Bible teaches. For continued study on this, I John is an excellent place to study.²⁵ We who have turned from darkness to light need to open our own eyes to Satan's grip on people's lives. As you recognize the gravity of their situation, you will be a witness like Saul. The Lord will send you *"to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in"* Jesus.

²⁴ See Acts 26:18 for reference.

²⁵ See I John 1:6-8; 2:9-11; 3:8-10; 4:3, and 5:18-19 for references.

BIG IDEA: Although the whole world is under Satan's power, your faithful witness can be used by God to turn people from the power of Satan to God.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Based on the verses quoted from 1 John, list the differences between walking in the darkness and walking in the light.
 - **I John 1:6-8** ⁶ *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* ⁷ *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.* ⁸ *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*
 - **I John 2:9-11** ⁹ *Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.* ¹⁰ *Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.* ¹¹ *But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*
 - **I John 3:8-10** ⁸ *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.* ⁹ *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.* ¹⁰ *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*
 - **I John 5:18-19** ¹⁸ *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.* ¹⁹ *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*
- **Activity:** Spend time in prayer.
 - If you have not done so, confess your sin before the God and believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.
 - Pray that God would give you words, discernment, and courage to testify about Jesus to a person that is not living under the lordship of Jesus. Pray also for God to open their eyes.

Week 9: Acts 26:1-18

Day 5: A Life Account

READ TOGETHER: Isaiah 25:8, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

One of my (Sabino's) favorite movies is Shawshank Redemption.²⁶ I like the biblical themes, the cleverness, but most of all the storytelling. The main character, Andy Dufresne, is great at telling his own story. You get sucked into the story and you are on the edge of your seat to find out what will happen in the end. However, Andy is not the only great storyteller. The apostle Paul was great at giving a biographical account of his life.

Paul begins his story by talking about his youth. He was known by the Jews even as a youth probably due to his abilities as a student of the law. They knew that he was a member of the Pharisees who were the strictest sect of Jewish religion. Paul is making the point that the accusations of him profaning the temple or going against the law were invalid since he had lived his whole life as a strict adherent to the law.

Paul states that the reason he is on trial is due to the hope in the promise made by God to the fathers of the faith. Paul was talking about the promise of resurrection that God had made to the people of Israel. Paul is saying that his faith is in line with the Law and the Prophets. He asks this thought-provoking question in verse 8, "why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead"? The Jews confess that there is nothing too hard for God and they believe in resurrection

²⁶ To clarify, themes in this film are appropriate and suitable for all ages.

of the dead. Therefore, the resurrection of Christ should not be such a stumbling block.

But then Paul confesses that he also was once convinced that he should oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. He did so in Jerusalem and even persecuted them to foreign cities. He did all those until Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul has just brilliantly communicated his history and conversion story to King Agrippa. He did so by demonstrating that he was not opposed to the law or to the Jewish people. In fact, he was only following the law as it predicted resurrection from the dead.

BIG IDEA: Paul tells his story to defend himself and to persuade people to believe the gospel.

APPLY TOGETHER:

- **Question:** Why is it important for Paul to prove that he was not opposed to the law or the temple?

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus rises from the dead before everyone else?

- **Question:** Why do you think Agrippa responded to Paul with his question in v. 28? *“In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”*

- **Question:** When Paul chose to willingly appeal to go before Caesar, do you think he was aware that he would have otherwise been eventually set free? Why or why not?

Week 10: Acts 26:19-32

Day 2: How God helps...

READ: Acts 26:19-32

EXPLORE:

Have you ever encountered a person who seemed unbreakable? I (Stephen) am not asking if you have encountered an individual who was like a brick wall. No. I am asking if you have ever met a person who seemed to epitomize resiliency and trust. They are unbreakable.

When I read and reread Paul's speech in front of Agrippa, I am struck by how seemingly unbreakable Paul was in his ministry. At one point in his defense, Paul said, *"For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass."*²⁷ I want you to notice that in consecutive thoughts Paul affirmed that his life was threatened and that he had constantly received help from the Lord. If you are anything like me, I was astounded by the fact that Paul could unreservedly proclaim the help of God amidst such an intense experience of hardship and adversity.

It is ironic, but more profoundly gospel-centered that Paul was able to announce his God-given help throughout life and ministry. His assertion ought to invite us to ask the wonderful question, "How is it that God helps when it seems like rather constant adversity?" It is to this question that we now turn.

Paul knew well what many Christ followers have come to realize. Sometimes, the help of God comes through escape, and, on other occasions, it comes through endurance. On an earthly, experiential level, Paul had consistently encountered the gracious, helping hand which is often expressed through His people. On an eternal level, Paul had experienced a help which did not just speak into his circumstance, it

²⁷ See Acts 26:21-22 for reference.

exceeded his environment altogether. Ultimately, Paul's assurance of divine help was not rooted in circumstance, but in God Himself revealed in Christ.

Paul continued his thought saying, *"That the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."*²⁸ Paul refused to misinterpret the help of God by falsely attaching it solely to his circumstance. Ultimately, the supreme example of this truth was displayed in the preeminent help of God displayed in Christ on the cross. May we be a people who cling to and daily live from that saving help of Jesus.

BIG IDEA: The gospel ought to encourage us to daily see the helping presence of God in our lives and beyond.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In some cases and for some people, remaining hopeful in difficult circumstances can seem disingenuous. How can we maintain a genuine and authentic hope in God when life is challenging?

²⁸ See Acts 26:23 as a continuing thought on the assurance which was expressed earlier in v. 21. Many scholars have labeled Acts 26:23 as the Christological center and climax of Luke and Acts.

Week 10: Acts 26:19-32

Day 3: Rational Faith

READ: Acts 26:24-25

EXPLORE:

Has anyone ever thought you were crazy? I (Jonathan) have been called “religiously insane.” One non-Christian friend told me he wondered if I was delusional for having an “invisible friend.” Another acquaintance asked if I had an especially difficult childhood; How else could an otherwise intelligent person believe in Jesus? I had a college professor who openly mocked born-again Christians for “talking to Jesus.” (*I’m from Connecticut. Does this happen in Texas?*)

In Acts 26:24, upon hearing Paul proclaim Christ’s resurrection, Governor Festus declared Paul insane. Festus made no attempt to refute anything Paul said. He was “at a loss how to investigate such questions” (25:20). He knew from experience that it was impossible for the dead to return to life. Case closed. It only remained to ascertain why Paul would make such an incredible claim. Was Paul a religious huckster, peddling empty promises for personal gain? Based on Paul’s willingness to suffer personally for the gospel, Festus knew that wasn’t the case. Was Paul a simpleton, gullibly swallowing superstitious fairy-tales and passing them on to others? Far from it; Festus recognized Paul’s “great learning.” In fact, groping for an explanation for how someone so brilliant and well-educated could believe in Jesus, Festus concluded “your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” For Festus to reach *this* conclusion, to declare that Paul was insane *because of* his great learning, not *in spite of* it, Festus must have recognized in Paul an Einstein-level genius, perhaps the greatest intellect he’d ever met.

Festus’ dismissive attitude toward Christianity is popular today. Just as Festus called Paul crazy without studying his claims, the loudest voices in our culture prefer name-calling to truth-seeking. Belief in God is “delusional.” Christians are “anti-science,” “backwards,” “narrow-minded bigots,” “oppressors,” “homophobes/transphobes,” “cultural imperialists,” “religious nuts,” and of course, “crazy.” We do not wish to

be called such things, but remember Jesus' words: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (Jn 15:18).

Was Festus, right? Had Paul crossed that fine line between genius and insanity? Paul simply responded, "I am not out of my mind... but I am speaking true and rational words." Paul said earlier, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" (26:8). God "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17). If God can create the entire universe, why can't he raise a dead man? No-one else has ever gotten up from the grave by himself. If it were a common occurrence, there wouldn't be anything remarkable about Jesus' resurrection.

Our faith is blind in the sense that "no one has ever seen God" (1 Jn 4:12). "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 20:29). Our eyes cannot presently see God; that's why we need faith. However, our faith is supported by so many lines of evidence that it's impossible to list them all here. This is why our faith is "true and rational."

BIG IDEA: When we, like Paul, speak "true and rational words," many like Festus will grope for excuses to dismiss us as crazy or worse.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What name have you been called because of your faith? "Your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).
- **Question:** On a scale of 1 - 10, how certain are you that Jesus rose from the dead? What are some reasons that you believe and/or doubt? Discuss your doubts with a Christian whose faith is strong.
- **Apply:** Watch the movie "The Case for Christ." Read "More Than a Carpenter" by Josh McDowell, and similar books. Watch Lifepoint Unfiltered recordings online.

Week 10: Acts 26:19-32

Day 4: “Have You Been Persuaded to Be a Christian?”

READ: Acts 26:26-32 and Luke 21:10-19

EXPLORE:

Before telling King Agrippa of his conversion experience, Paul begged him to listen to his defense patiently. This King Agrippa was the man whose great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle James. Given Agrippa’s family track record, Paul might have paused just a little. However, because Paul knew the importance of giving his testimony to a king, Paul did not hesitate. Paul explained how he had lived as a Pharisee, the strictest of the Jewish religious parties, persecuted the saints, punished, and tried to make them blaspheme, and even cast his vote to put the Christians to death. Paul was very zealous for God against these Believers in Jesus until the day he received spiritual eyes by being blinded on the road to Damascus, by that same Jesus. This heavenly vision of the Light and voice of Christ, was Paul’s conversion opportunity and he took it. At his transformation, Paul began to spread the Gospel message, as courageously and boldly as he had once before persecuted others for doing the same. Now, the apostle was on trial because of the very hope in the promise made by God to the Jewish fathers. It was for this very hope, Paul now stood accused before the King. Because of his great desire that all men everywhere, “should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance”, Paul preached the Gospel message when it was convenient and even when it wasn’t.

Festus, a Roman who perhaps wasn’t aware of what had happened with Jesus and the early Christian movement, accused Paul of being crazy. However, Paul knew that Agrippa had heard the historical facts concerning Jesus and his resurrection power. These things of Christ must be dealt with by those who knew the facts.

At the end of his discourse before King Agrippa, Paul made a very bold statement: “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” King Agrippa had a reputation as a faithful man. The customs and controversies of the Jews was especially familiar to the king. Surely, he had heard of the suffering of Jesus being the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets! But sadly, Agrippa’s response was to ask Paul, “*In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?*” The idea behind this question is that there seems to be a little distance between the might King and Christianity. However

close Agrippa came to becoming a Christian, it wasn't close enough.

Almost being a Christian means that you almost have eternal life and will almost be delivered from God's judgment. Almost is not close enough. Indecision is a form of a decision. Agrippa seems intrigued, but admitted that he still rejected the truth. To that, Paul answered, "*Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.*" Can you hear the passion in Paul's plea for Agrippa and all those hearing his voice, to experience the true life that is found in Christ alone?

When Paul recounted the words of Jesus on the road to Damascus, proclaiming what a follower of Jesus does (Acts 26:18), Agrippa wanted no part of it. The cost was too much for him. He didn't want to turn from darkness to light. He didn't want to turn from the power of Satan to the power of God. He didn't want to receive forgiveness of sins, God's way. He didn't want a place among God's people. He didn't want to become one of those set apart by faith in Jesus, suffering the consequences of chains like Paul was wearing.

Why was Agrippa almost persuaded? Why did Agrippa stop short of salvation? Maybe it was his position and power. Maybe it was Bernice, his wife, who was a sinful, immoral woman. Maybe the cost of losing an immoral wife, friends and lifestyle was too much for him. Maybe it was because of Festus sitting there who would accuse him as Paul of being crazy.

With just a recant, Paul could have been released and lived the rest of his life free of chains, on earth. However, the conviction Paul had received on the road to Damascus sealed his fate to live and to die for the cause of Christ. Paul showed that although he was in chains, he had more freedom in Jesus than any of the high and mighty ones listening had.

BIG IDEA: There are no "almost" Christians in eternity with God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What "chains" define your life? Are you chained to darkness and the power of Satan or, are you chained to Christ, set apart to do His will, as a willing servant of the King?

- **Question:** Have you decided to follow Him wherever He leads you, no matter the expense?

Week 10: Acts 26:19-32

Day 5: An Eager Evangelist

READ TOGETHER: Psalm 34:8, Romans 10:15

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EXPLORE TOGETHER:

The apostle Paul was an eager evangelist. In many ways he had to be. God had powerfully commissioned him on the road to Damascus and he tells King Agrippa, *“I was not disobedient to the vision.”*

Paul began evangelizing in Damascus, right after his conversion. From there he went to Jerusalem and all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles. He didn't discriminate against anyone. It was for this eager evangelism that the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him.

Now Paul is eagerly evangelizing to King Agrippa and the whole assembly. In the middle of his evangelism Festus cries out that Paul is out of his mind. But Paul is not deterred, as he tells Festus that he is speaking true and rational words. None of what he is saying is out of the ordinary for his Jewish faith. Then Paul presses into King Agrippa because he knows that the king is aware of these things and that he believes the prophets. Agrippa is taken off guard and asks Paul if he thinks he can persuade him to be a Christian in a short time. Basically, Agrippa is saying that Paul seems to be moving too fast.

But Paul doesn't think so. He wants everyone in the room to become as he is (a Christian), except to be locked up. The apostle Paul wants the whole world to become like he is and shouldn't this also be true of us? How can we get a hunger for evangelism like the apostle Paul?



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