

Teaching Tips

November 6
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.

D. Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

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 Liberating Lesson section.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Do the Application for Activation 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.

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.

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:

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.

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 years old 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.

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 God. 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)

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

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 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 God'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).

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?

Liberating Lesson

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.

Application for Activation

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 God’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 God’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 God'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 God's hand of help in all those events.

More evidence of God's divine help was in Paul's skill in spreading Christ's message. He operated with the confident belief that God 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 God Himself. When we share our faith in Christ's message we can be assured of God's reinforcement of our efforts. Paul was.

This passage tells of an opportunity for Paul to share God'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 God'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 God's 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 God'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 God's 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 God'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 God’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 God’s 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 Angieh 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 God'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.

D. Study the entire text and complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living*® Study Guide.

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 Liberating Lesson and Application Activation 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: "Think of His Goodness to You"

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 God to fulfill His promise.

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 study, fellowship with other believers, and a dogged 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.

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?

Liberating Lesson

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?

Application for Activation

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 God 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 God’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 common 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-ahee**) 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)