

Lesson 10





Where We're Going

We will gain insight into the depths of Paul's religious convictions and why his convictions were beyond compromise, as well as learn how to handle ourselves even in the midst of the most seemingly dangerous opposition when standing firm on our Christian values and beliefs.



A Cause to be Crazy

William knew the conversation with his two coworkers was taking a turn for the worse. He tried to change the discussion by directing their attention to the food and ambience of the restaurant. "How's your food, Amber?" he asked. Amber chewed and swallowed a mouthful of chicken fettuccine alfredo before she answered, "It's delicious! You chose a nice place, William. I knew you would."

"Speaking of choices," Paul snickered,

"Anybody choosing to leave the dog pound next year?"

Amber covered her mouth so she wouldn't spit out her iced tea while laughing. "Paul, you are silly. The dog pound?"

"That's what I call the school since this new principal came in and put us on short leashes," Paul continued. "Not to mention that the students act like stray animals."

"Paul, you are so crazy, but you are so right," Amber said. "I won't be here next year. I've already put in my transfer request for Southside High."

"Good for you! I'm putting mine in next week. I'm tired of being at a school where the crime rate is higher than the graduation rate. We do more disciplining than teaching. Don't you agree, William?"

"No, I do not. This is going to sound crazy, but I love Westside High. Sure, it's got problems, but what school doesn't? Yes, we deal with fights, gangs, pregnancies, and dropouts, but take a realistic look at Southside High. It's considered the best school in the district, but they have major issues also. Just in the last year, three-star football players were arrested, their basketball coach was suspended pending an investigation, and the principal was fired."

"Well, I'd rather deal with that than feeling as if my own life is in danger every single day," Amber said.

Having lost his appetite, William spread a napkin over his unfinished meal. "Don't fool yourself. The grass is not always greener on the other side. I was crazy about Westside High when I was a student here, and I'll be crazy about it until the day I die."



Real Talk

1. In what ways can sharing your testimony, while you share your faith, help win others to Christ?
2. What conviction was William standing for? Was he right in taking a stand?
3. It can be difficult to disagree with friends or colleagues about something that a group feels. How do you deal with it when you disagree with a group on something important?



The Players

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.



Backstage

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



Make It Stick

“But Paul replied, ‘I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. What I am saying is the sober truth.’” (Acts 26:25, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

Acts 26:19 “And so, King Agrippa, I obeyed that vision from heaven.

20 I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do.

21 Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me.

22 But God has protected me right up to this present time so I can testify to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen—

23 that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God’s light to Jews and Gentiles alike.”

24 Suddenly, Festus shouted, “Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!”

25 But Paul replied, “I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. What I am saying is the sober truth.

26 And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak boldly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner!

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do—”

28 Agrippa interrupted him. “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?”

29 Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains.”

30 Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left.

31 As they went out, they talked it over and agreed, “This man hasn’t done anything to deserve death or imprisonment.”

32 And Agrippa said to Festus, “He could have been set free if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar.”

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.



Combing Through

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

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

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).



Diving Deeper Quiz

1. If you found yourself in a situation similar to Paul's, what are some of the possible challenges that you might face in an effort to stand by your convictions?
2. In today's passage, we see Paul display great boldness and courage. Where do you think he obtained the ability to be so bold and courageous? Explain.
3. Do you think Paul was afraid? Is there any indication in today's Scripture that he was fearful?
4. Consider that although Paul was addressing King Agrippa, his prayer was not only for him, but so that all who were listening would be saved. How should this change our perspective as we share our faith with others?



Next Steps

1. Reflect on experiences you have had or have seen of someone else to take a stand on their convictions. How did the situation play out? What did you learn from the experience?
2. Write a list of convictions you would stand for publicly despite opposition. Why are they important to you?



Say Word?

Agrippa. uh-GRIP-uh.
Judea. joo-DEE-uh.

SWAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

There is something about boldness and fearlessness and being free enough to speak what is on one's mind that warrants freedom.—
Cornel West





3 Rules to Follow When Dating Gets Serious



By Allen Reynolds

Dating is one of the most widely thought and talked about topics among young adults. But unfortunately, it is one of the least talked about subjects in churches. The lack of conversation can stem from social stigma (church leaders don't want to talk about it), demographics (people in congregations are not dating for one reason or another), and even theology (the

Bible doesn't explicitly talk about dating the way we do today). These conversations are more relevant than ever as millennials and Gen Z are waiting longer to have committed relationships and more intentionally approaching marriage if they plan to get married at all. Here are three rules to follow as a believer when dating gets serious.

1 Do they have their own relationship with Jesus?

This is probably the most important question for believers trying to find a potential mate. There are people who are not followers of Jesus who have wonderful relationships and marriages. However, people who are following Jesus have an established set of values, vision for healthy life, and hopefully a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that are key in allowing relationships to thrive. If a person isn't seeking Christ for themselves and is in a relationship with someone who is a believer, it is a set up for challenges down the road. Your spouse cannot be dependent on you, their friends, family, church, location, or anything else to maintain their connection with God. If they do, when people falter and places change their faith will be challenged. When changes and challenges arise, how can you two get back on the same page? How will you discern what

is next? How can you show love in the process? It is more likely that the challenges just become an ongoing battle of your desires vs. theirs that leaves both of you wounded.

2 Do you have a friendship?

Friendships are an expression of mutual respect and godly care between two people. If there is not a mutual respect, a view of one another as equals, or a history of godly care that isn't dependent on your romance it is a setup for struggle in your relationship. A lack of mutual respect is a breeding ground for dysfunction in your relationship. When people are healthy friends they expect mutuality and they have intimacy in shared knowledge and care for one another. When a friend makes a mistake most of the time they can forgive, move past it and keep

"If there is not a mutual respect, a view of one another as equals, or a history of godly care that isn't dependent on your romance it is a setup for struggle in your relationship. A lack of mutual respect is a breeding ground for dysfunction in your relationship."

being friends because there is a belief that they care. Yet in romantic relationships, this often gets missed and it becomes a game of “*prove you love me*” with fear, lack of mutuality, and limited resilience.

3 Do you have a shared vision of family?

When couples attend premarital counseling this is one of the biggest issues that they work through. Some couples unfortunately have not talked about or really come to agreement on a shared vision of family until they are getting married. It can lead to pain and heartache if one spouse wants multiple children and the other doesn't want children at all. Should both people work? Is career advancement or family stability more important? What do we do when an elderly parent or loved one needs help or becomes ill?

What does it mean to be a family? These are all questions that our own families shape in us - we need to have respect and mutual vision as we both become part of each other's family and take the steps to build a new one.

Early on in a dating relationship it's great to simply have fun and learn compatibility. But when things get serious and head toward marriage we have to ask different questions. These questions and others helped me distinguish the fun dating relationships I had from the serious relationship that is now my happy marriage. These are just a few important rules to follow and questions to ask. But if we are willing to answer the hard questions we can build a better foundation to turn our temporary romances into lasting loving relationships.



Lesson 11





Where We're Going

We will recognize how Paul's faith in God enabled him to remain calm in the midst of a storm, develop a greater appreciation of how our relationship with God helps us cope in times of crises, and become motivated to create and always have a plan of action, based on prayer and faith, to manage when we're bombarded with stressful circumstances.



Hard Times

For as long as Amber could remember, she was the sibling who always did the right thing. On the other hand, her sister, Tasha, never seemed overly concerned with too much of anything. Amber attends church regularly, serves on several ministries, and faithfully gives tithes and offerings. Tasha usually sends her tithes and offerings when she drops her kids off at Sunday School.

Amber knew it was wrong to envy her sister, but every time she got into a tough situation, it was hard not to. Things never seemed to stress Tasha the way they did Amber. Amber got her first job at age 15. Tasha has successfully convinced her husband that bills are men's work. Amber has two college degrees, Tasha has two adorable children. Tasha is the last person Amber would ask for a favor, but if she doesn't get \$300 by the weekend, the annual fundraiser dinner she sponsors for her French class at Westside High wouldn't happen. Thoughts of the restaurant Bon Appetit had never crossed Amber's mind until dinner last week, when her colleague William had asked her, "What will you tell, God when you stand before Him to give an account of your ministry at Westside?"

Amber's students had raised several hundred dollars that afforded them new textbooks, field trips, events, and membership in national French organizations. Though she knew God would be pleased with her efforts, she felt He'd love it more if she finished what she started, no matter how difficult and impossible it seemed. With anxiety and hesitation, she eventually dialed Tasha's number. Her sister answered on the first ring. Tasha started the conversation by saying, "Hey, I was just thinking about you and for some reason I had your fundraising thingy on my calendar. Are we doing that this year? You know everybody is asking if my famous Westside quiche will be on the tables. Plus, my hubby has decided to make a generous donation."

Amber sighed with relief and thanked God for being so faithful to her. Tasha continued by saying, "I'd be more than glad to help you ... with one condition. I've never been as different or distant from you as you seem to think. All I ask is that you start believing in me like I believe in you and know you can count on me in both good and bad times."



Real Talk

1. How does your relationship with God affect your response to crisis situations?
2. Why was Amber afraid to talk to Tasha about what she needed?
3. How can we approach challenges with faith instead of negativity?



The Players

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.



Backstage

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.



Make It Stick

“The others held onto planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore.” (Acts 27:44, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

Acts 27:1 When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment.

2 Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a ship whose home port was Adramyttium on the northwest coast of the province of Asia; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province.

27:33 Just as day was dawning, Paul urged everyone to eat. “You have been so worried that you haven’t touched food for two weeks,” he said.

34 “Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish.”

35 Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it.

36 Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat—

37 all **276** of us who were on board.

38 After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

39 When morning dawned, they didn’t recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get to shore by running the ship aground.

40 So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore.

41 But they hit a shoal and ran the ship aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.

42 The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn’t swim ashore and escape.

43 But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn’t let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land.

44 The others held onto planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore.

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.



Combing Through

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.



Diving Deeper Quiz

1. What verses in today’s passage allow you to clearly see Paul’s faithfulness to God, even in this life-threatening crisis?
2. How long had the people with Paul been fasting? What prompted the fast?
3. Paul received a word from God that encouraged those onboard the ship. What did God promise? What didn’t God promise?
4. Do you think God would have spared the lives of the 276 people on the ship if Paul wasn’t onboard? Support it with Scripture.



Next Steps

1. Reflect on times you have faced a crisis or a challenge with an uncertain outcome. How did you respond?
2. How can you be intentional about responding to difficult situations with prayer, reaching out for help, and faith in God?



Say Word?

Adramyttium. ad’ruh-MIT-ee-uhm.
Aristarchus. air’is-TAHR-kuhs.
Macedonian. mas-eh-DOH-nee-uhn.
Thessalonica. thes-uh-LON-nay-kuh.

SWAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.—Martin Luther King, Jr.

