



# The Call

## The Life and Message of The Apostle Paul Study Guide—Week 1

**September 11, 2022 – *Called to Follow Christ: Paul’s Background, Conversion, and Early Ministry***

**Scripture: Selections from Philippians, Acts and Galatians**

[And Paul said,] “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia... a citizen of an important city... I was circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews ... brought up in [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law ... I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age... and being zealous for God... persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison.”

**From hate-filled persecutor to powerful preacher**

**MONDAY 9.12.22 Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-9, 20-22**

A man with the Hebrew name Saul entered the book of Acts as almost a bit player, holding other people’s coats. He quickly became prominent as a driven, deadly persecutor of early Christians. A stunning encounter with the risen Christ utterly changed his life. Before long, he began using his Roman name, Paul (cf. Acts 13:9). He remained passionate and driven, but now as a preacher arguing persuasively that Jesus was, in fact, the long-awaited Messiah.

- In Saul’s background, nearly every person he respected, from the high priest down, rejected Jesus and saw Christians as a threat to God’s truth. No wonder he set out, with great passion, to destroy a faith he saw as seriously wrong. Did your background and training make it easy or hard for you to believe in Jesus? How well are you able to understand and relate to people with backgrounds different from yours?
- Paul did not think his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus was “just a vision,” an illusory, inward incident. He believed he’d met the risen Christ just as “really” as any other apostle (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5-9). At the end of her song “Redeemer,” Nicole C. Mullen said, “He lives (I spoke to Him this morning).” How easy or hard do you find it to believe Jesus is truly risen and alive? What evidence or experiences most strongly nudge you toward sharing Paul’s faith?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you called Saul, and that call changed his life. He went on to change millions of lives by his preaching and writing. Give me listening ears and an open heart in this series, so that Paul may change my life for the better. Amen.

## **Paul: “passionately loyal to God”**

### **TUESDAY 9.13.22 Acts 22:1-21**

Years later, Paul’s travels preaching Christ all over the Roman Empire had made him some very obsessive enemies. Seeing him in the Temple in Jerusalem, they stirred up a mob scene so violent that Roman soldiers had to rescue Paul (cf. Acts 21:27-36). But, far from intimidated, Paul saw this as a chance to tell the mob of his life-long passionate loyalty to God, and the meeting with Jesus that changed his life.

- A common rabbinic prayer, one Paul himself had undoubtedly prayed during his early life, said, “Lord, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile.” The mob in Jerusalem was angry because Paul had spent years preaching to Gentiles, a mission he said God gave him. Who are the people you’re thankful you aren’t? How can you apply the principle of Paul’s mission and play a part in helping God to reach those people?
- Paul told of a Christian named Ananias who conveyed God’s call to him. Acts 9:10-18 also told the story, but more from Ananias’ point of view, showing the courage and faith it took for him to go to a man who had come to town to imprison and maybe kill him. Has God ever called you to do something good that nevertheless scared you and called for some courage? If God called you to an “Ananias” mission today, how do you believe you’d respond?

**Prayer:** Lord, if Ananias had said “no,” I suspect you’d have found someone else to reach out to Paul. But Ananias would have missed the chance to be part of something great. Help me not to miss your call, or to fail to answer. Amen.

## **“A revelation from Jesus Christ”**

### **WEDNESDAY 9.14.22 Galatians 1:11-24**

Paul did some of his first church planting work in the region of Galatia (see map). Then he learned that other teachers had gone to Galatia, and were telling his Gentile converts that Paul’s gospel was incomplete because he did not enforce Jewish ceremonial laws or require Gentile men to be circumcised (cf. Galatians 4:10, 5:2). In a spirited, emotional response, Paul insisted that he got his gospel directly from Christ, not from human sources.

- Paul told his Galatian readers that, ironically, he had been more zealous for Jewish rituals than his critics, and that he had learned that type of religion from human teachers. The good news of grace he preached, he said, was what came through “a revelation from Jesus Christ.” In what ways has God changed or totally re-oriented your thinking? Was that process easy, or did you have to “wrestle it out” with God?
- Paul quoted Christians in Judea: “The man who used to harass us now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy” (verse 23). Luke told more about that part of the story. The Judeans accepted Paul because Barnabas, whom they did trust, vouched for Paul’s honesty (cf. Acts 9:26-28). How can you be a “Barnabas,” supporting others and smoothing the way for them to do the ministry work God has called them to?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, at times it’s still tempting for me to think that my own good deeds will be enough to impress you, to win my salvation. Keep me grounded in the good news you revealed to Paul, and trusting in your grace rather than my goodness. Amen.

## **Spiritual lineage, not genetic**

### **THURSDAY 9.15.22 Romans 11:1, 9:1-8**

Paul loved his Hebrew heritage. Seeing many of his people (though certainly not all of them) reject Jesus as Messiah hurt him. He wrestled with the question, “Had God rejected God’s people?” He found a key in the Genesis 21 story of Abraham’s two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Both were genetically Abraham’s children, but only Isaac was the son of promise. Their story showed, Paul said, that “descent” from Abraham was spiritual, not just genetic.

- Scholar William Barclay said Paul concluded “there is more to Jewishness than descent from Abraham, that the chosen people were not simply the entire sum of all of Abraham’s physical descendants.” Paul also told his Galatian converts that “if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). How much do you understand about the Hebrew, Old Testament roots of your faith? How might you learn to know and value that more highly?
- Have you ever had—perhaps have now—someone you care about deeply who just doesn’t see the same importance of faith in Christ that you do? Does that cause you grief or concern, as it did Paul? Is there any part of your family or faith heritage that you care about, and yet have felt the need to move away from? Paul loved God, if anything, even more passionately as a Christian than as a Pharisee. What underlying, deeper parts of your heritage can you honor even if you live them in a different way?

**Prayer:** Lord God, it’s remarkable to trace my spiritual family tree all the way back to the great patriarch Abraham. You worked to bless the world through him and his descendants. Since I’m one of those descendants, please bless the world through me. Amen.

## **“For the sake of Christ”**

### **FRIDAY 9.16.22 Philippians 3:5-7**

Paul loved the members of the church he planted in the city of Philippi (see map). But there, too, other teachers followed him, selling the “gospel” of salvation by obeying ancient rituals. In answer, Paul wrote if we could save ourselves by religious performance, he’d be glad to put his record up against anyone. But those religious “assets” no longer mattered. He “wrote them off,” and trusted in Christ’s grace.

- Paul used an accounting metaphor. He listed all the spiritual “assets” the false teachers wanted the Philippian Christians to accumulate, and said he already owned every one of them. But he didn’t see them as “pluses” at all, not when compared to Jesus, his Savior and Lord. What human status symbols or accomplishments do you take the most pride in? How easy or hard is it for you to “write them off,” and to find your ultimate identity and confidence in your status as a child of God?
- Methodist scholar Maxie Dunnam wrote, “It is not the external things that count, but what has happened and is happening inside... Paul chose not to boast except about what Christ had done for him.” What has Christ done for you? In what ways has that reshaped your external behaviors, not so much by your own teeth-gritting effort, but as a change coming “from the inside out”?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to join Paul in focusing all of my love, all of my confidence, all of my faith on you. Be the eternal “asset” in whom all my trust resides. Amen.

## **“I’m the biggest sinner of all... but I was shown mercy”**

### **SATURDAY 9.17.22 1 Timothy 1:12-17**

In what was probably one of his last letters, Paul recalled his days as a persecutor and described himself as “the biggest sinner of all.” But he did so, not with self-loathing or despair, but simply as a way of bearing witness to the amazing difference God’s mercy had made in his life. “Our Lord’s favor poured all over me along with the faithfulness and love that are in Christ Jesus” (verse 14).

- Paul never forgot who it was who had called him to his ministry: “He [Christ Jesus our Lord] appointed me to ministry even though I used to speak against him, attack his people, and I was proud.” Do only a few people, who have dramatic experiences like Paul’s on the road to Damascus, receive a divine appointment to ministry? Paul didn’t think so. He told the Philippians that they were all his “partners in the ministry of the gospel” (Philippians 1:5), and urged the Romans to render their “appropriate priestly service” to God by using the gifts God had put in each of their lives. In what ways has God appointed you to ministry? How are you responding to that appointment?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I may not be “the biggest sinner of all,” but I’ve done plenty of things that disappointed you and hurt others. Thank you for showing me mercy, and calling me into your service. Amen.

**Family Activity:** God has called each of us to follow and serve him in some way. In the Bible, Paul received a call to follow God and share Jesus with others. Discover how God is calling your family to serve. Draw a picture of a large gift on a piece of paper. Invite each person to share pictures or words representing abilities, skills and gifts each family member has that could be used to serve and share Jesus with others. Also include ways your family has served others in the past. When everyone is finished, discuss what theme stands out. Choose one way your family will answer God’s call to serve and select a date on your calendar to live it out. Pray and ask God to help you answer God’s call in your lives.



# The Call

## The Life and Message of The Apostle Paul Study Guide—Week 2

**September 18, 2022 – *Called to Go: Paul’s First Missionary Journey***

Scripture: Acts 13:1-4a

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went.

**“We would go to the Gentiles”**

**MONDAY 9.19.22 Galatians 1:13-2:10**

Paul wrote to his converts in Galatia about a part of his life the book of Acts did not include. He did not start working right away as a traveling evangelist. He spent time praying and studying to think through the meaning of his encounter with Christ (and did some preaching in Syria and Cilicia—1:23). Only then did he meet with the Jerusalem Christian leaders. Paul had once thanked God he was not a Gentile. Now they agreed that God had sent him to those very Gentiles, a calling that re-shaped the emerging church.

- Paul’s references to “three years” and “fourteen years” are enigmatic enough that scholars have always struggled to identify an exact chronology. Nor can we be sure of exactly what he did during that time span. But it’s clear that Paul (and his Lord) were more patient than we often are in our “immediate gratification” culture. When have you had to wait for something you wanted right away? In what way(s) are you having to wait today for God to act in your life?
- As a Roman citizen born in Tarsus, and a rabbi trained in Jerusalem by the eminent teacher Gamaliel, Paul knew both the Greco-Roman and Hebrew cultures as few people in his time did. How did that background prepare him for the mission to which God called him? In what ways do you think his ambitious temperament, once turned to God’s purposes, might also have qualified him for this groundbreaking mission?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, after you called Paul, he knew when to wait and prepare, and when to move forward boldly to carry out your calling. Give me that same wisdom and pacing in my life and service to you. Amen.

## **Paul and Barnabas “sent off”**

### **TUESDAY 9.20.22 Acts 13:1-6, 13-14**

Before leaving earth, Jesus laid out for his followers a vision of an ever-expanding global mission (cf. Acts 1:7-8). Antioch, in ancient Syria, was a large city, and an important community of Christians was growing there. But Antioch couldn't be a stopping point; it needed to be a launching pad. So the Holy Spirit moved the Antioch church to send Paul and Barnabas out into the wider world.

- Paul must have known Abraham's story, in which God said, “Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). He may not have been bothered when the Holy Spirit just told the Antioch church to appoint him and Barnabas “to the work I have called them to undertake” without filling in any details. How well are you able to trust and follow God even when God does not lay out all of the details in advance for you?
- Though confident God had called him to spread the gospel to the Gentiles, Paul did not make a beeline for Rome or Athens. In a sense, he “practiced his trade” first on the island of Cyprus and in the important but less visible Roman province of lower Galatia (see map). When is there value in “starting small,” even on important missions? Do you believe there are times when it is vital to make an immediate, large impact?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you called Paul and his friend Barnabas to launch out to brand new areas, places where there weren't any Christians at all. In whatever ways you call me to “new territory” in my life, help me to listen and respond. Amen.

## **“Overflowing with happiness” even when opposed**

### **WEDNESDAY 9.21.22 Acts 13:44-52**

Moving inland from the city of Perga, Paul and Barnabas came to a city in Pisidia that was also called Antioch. Paul's preaching of Jesus packed the local synagogue (with both Jews and Gentiles), but it also aroused jealousy and opposition. So he and Barnabas moved on from there to the city of Iconium (see map)—but they did so, Luke wrote, “overflowing with happiness.”

- Facing jealousy and enmity from the Pisidian Antioch synagogue leaders, Paul and Barnabas quoted Isaiah 49:6 to show God's desire to reach all nations. What factors do you think led many to ignore that passage (and many others in the Hebrew Scriptures) and fight so hard against preaching to the Gentiles? Do Christians today need to overcome any similar habitual, “embedded” boundaries in order to fully obey God's call to mission?
- Jesus said, “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. Be full of joy and be glad” (Matthew 5:11-12). Can that kind of joy be “faked,” or were Paul and Barnabas truly “overflowing with joy” as they were forced to move to a different city? In what ways can you make that kind of joy a reality in your heart, even when people oppose your faith?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you didn't promise me that things will always be easy, but you did say I can have your peace and joy even when things are hard. Help me keep attuning my spirit to yours, to make that more and more a reality. Amen.

## **“They continued to proclaim the good news”**

### **THURSDAY 9.22.22 Acts 14:1-7**

In Iconium, many people (“Jews and Greeks”) became Christians through Paul’s preaching. He and Barnabas “stayed there for quite some time.” But opposition built once again. The irony was that unwittingly, Paul’s enemies kept spreading the gospel. This time their plotting drove Paul and Barnabas on to the cities of Lystra and Derbe (see map).

- Luke chose expressive language—he said Paul and Barnabas were “confidently speaking about the Lord.” Even when they felt they had to flee to Lystra and Derbe, they “continued to proclaim the good news.” In what ways did their trust in Jesus sustain their resilience in the face of opposition? In what parts of your life would you like to ask God to help you be resilient like the apostles were?
- In verse 5, Luke wrote that some Jews and Gentiles “hatched a plot to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas.” Paul had approved of Stephen’s stoning (cf. Acts 7:55-8:1), and scholar William Barclay said, “What was proposed in Iconium was nothing other than a lynching.” What do you think led Paul and Barnabas to choose to move on to other cities, rather than retreating to the safety of Antioch? How would you respond if you realized people wanted to kill you for your faith?

**Prayer:** Lord God, you change my life, and our world, for the better. But not everyone wants their life or their world changed. Give me the courage to stand for you even when others don’t welcome your good news with open arms. Amen.

## **“God had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles”**

### **FRIDAY 9.23.22 Acts 14:19-28**

In Lystra, the plotting against Paul became action. “They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead.” Luke didn’t explain how it happened, but wrote, “When the disciples surrounded him, he got up and entered the city again.” After preaching in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas went home—amazingly, by way of Lystra, Iconium and the other Antioch, encouraging the Christian converts in each city. When they got back to Antioch in Syria, they reported, not mainly their troubles, but “how God had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles.”

- Paul appointed elders for each church. Scholar N. T. Wright said, “All Paul did was to come through town, a few days or weeks after his first preaching, to appoint ‘elders,’ to fast and pray and lay hands on them, and then to move on. Apart from the odd letter, and a follow-up visit in a few years’ time if they were lucky, that was it. They were on their own. But they weren’t, of course. The whole movement . . . is built on the belief that Jesus is Lord over the church as well as the world, and that by his spirit he calls, he equips, he guides, he warns, he rebukes, he encourages. It’s his business.” How about in 2022—are the pastor, staff, lay leaders and members of Chesterton UMC “on our own”? If Jesus is Lord over this church, in what ways do we experience that?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I ask you anew to be the Lord of my life. I ask you to be the Lord of my church. I ask you to give me ears to hear your leading, and hands willing to do what you call me to do. Amen.

## “How can they hear without a preacher?”

### SATURDAY 9.24.22 Romans 10:12-15

Paul stated a fundamental premise behind all of his missionary preaching in verse 12: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all.” Many of his contemporaries disagreed strongly. But he pointed to their own Scriptures, quoting Joel 2:32 in verse 13, and Isaiah 52:7 in verse 15. God wanted to reach everyone in the world, he said. And how were all those people going to hear about God’s love, about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, if no one went and preached to them?

- For us, the main divisions are not between Gentiles and Jews (though we should get rid of any lingering anti-Semitic attitudes or practices). But disparities in educational level, income, social prestige and other factors block many people from feeling welcome in the church. And too often, Christians (intentionally or not) adopt an “if you build it, they will come” attitude: “We’re here every Sunday—it’s not our fault if they don’t come.” Paul’s challenge resonates: “How can they call on someone they don’t have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven’t heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” What role can you play in taking the love of Jesus outside the walls of the church? Will you do it?

**Prayer:** O God, I’m so grateful that your love has found me, and is reshaping my life day by day. Help me not to hoard that love, but to find ways to use my gifts, talents and contacts to share your love, to be a bearer of good news. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Paul’s missionary journey carried him many places as he shared the good news of Jesus and His love. Gather your family for a local “missionary” drive. Before you leave, select a few places you would like to stop and share God’s love in some way. Would you like to take treats to firefighters or police officers and thank them for their service? How about praying for local store owners as you shop? Could you offer to do some yard work for a neighbor? Maybe you could visit a lonely neighbor or those in a nursing home. You might also want to walk through your neighborhood praying for your school and places of worship. Pray and ask God to help your family be missionaries, sharing God’s love wherever you go.



# The Call

## The Life and Message of The Apostle Paul Study Guide—Week 3

**September 25, 2022 – Called to Suffer: Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (Part 1)**

Scripture: Acts 16:6-10

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

**How are Gentiles (and Jews) made right with God?**

**MONDAY 9.26.22 Galatians 2:11-16**

As more and more Gentiles followed Christ (chiefly in the Galatian churches Paul planted), the question arose: did they need to adopt all the religious rites Jewish Christians followed? In Antioch, Paul wrote, even Peter and Barnabas were intimidated and stopped eating with Gentile Christians. Paul found that outrageous and destructive. Faith in Jesus, he said, not identical ritual behaviors, was the reality that united all Christians.

- For Paul, this issue struck at the core of the life mission he believed Jesus had called him to carry out. If “pure” Christians should avoid contact with second-class Gentile Christians, then in effect Gentiles weren’t really welcome at all in God’s family. But that was nonsense, Paul insisted, because “no one will be made righteous by the works of the Law.” Which “works of the Law” are you or other Christians you know tempted to trust in? What helps you to avoid rank ordering other Christians from “excellent” to “not so good”?
- Paul wrote that Peter “began to back out and separate himself, because he was afraid of the people who promoted circumcision.” Apparently Peter was willing to hurt Gentile believers in order to avoid incurring censure himself from some of the critical believers from Jerusalem. When have you faced disapproval from some Christians because of your desire to include other Christians in your circle of fellowship and support? Did you have more courage than Peter, or not? Would you today?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, “righteous” people criticized you a lot. You cared about them, but you never let their criticism stop you from also caring about the people they thought unworthy. Grow in me that kind of compassionate, warm-hearted stubbornness too. Amen.

## **What matters: “you are all one in Christ Jesus”**

### **TUESDAY 9.27.22 Galatians 3:26-29, 5:1-6**

The Jewish Christians who followed Paul to Galatia claimed the Bible required men to be circumcised to join God’s family (cf. Genesis 17:10-14). No doubt some Galatians thought, “Why not hedge our bets? We’ll trust in Jesus AND follow the rituals these other teachers tell us to carry out.” But Paul was emphatic: there was no splitting the difference. “Faith working through love,” not ritual purity, was what mattered, and no one could trust in them both for salvation.

- Scholar William Barclay summed up Paul’s words this way: “To Paul all that mattered was faith which works through love. That is another way of saying that the essence of Christianity is not law but a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The Christian’s faith is founded not on a book but on a person; its dynamic is not obedience to any law but love to Jesus Christ.” What choices and actions help you build and maintain your personal relationship with Jesus?
- The kind of Christianity the “Judaizers” wanted inevitably had strong cultural and ethnic implications. But Paul, himself born in that ethnic group and culture, said, “Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise.” Do you ever struggle to accept believers in Jesus who come from some ethnic, cultural or denominational background different than yours? How can we all learn to more fully live into our common identity as “Abraham’s descendants”?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you that I get to belong to you, to be an heir according to your great promises. Thank you for the widely varied family of which that makes me a part. Amen.

### **A faith free of behavioral barriers**

### **WEDNESDAY 9.28.22 Acts 15:1-2, 5-20**

The debate reflected in Galatians grew so heated that the church at Antioch sent a group to Jerusalem to settle the issue. The apostles and others met to decide: could Gentiles be Christians without keeping Jewish laws? One side argued that the Law of Moses must be a fixed point. Peter, Barnabas and Paul simply testified to seeing God at work in the lives of Gentiles who didn’t follow that law. In the end, James quoted Amos 9:11-12, and said it showed that God wanted Gentiles welcomed without lots of extra rules.

- The Jerusalem Council led to broad agreement more than “binding legislation.” Scholar N. T. Wright wrote of the decision: “This looks strongly like a way of saying something to the Gentile Christians out in the wider world while really saying something to the Pharisees back home: ‘Look, it’s all right. Admitting these Gentiles who have believed won’t mean a total collapse into idolatry and immorality. It needn’t result in chaos or church/synagogue disputes.’ It wouldn’t be the last time an agreed statement from a church body was designed more to send out signals than to become part of a code of law.” (Paul, in 1 Cor. 10:25-27, later modified some of the guidelines about avoiding food offered to idols.) How could the spirit of the Jerusalem Council guide us today when we face issues on which Christians honestly differ?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for the inclusive wisdom, and the principled flexibility, to which your Spirit led the early Christians. Help me, and all our church leaders, to keep growing in those same qualities today. Amen.

## On the road again

### THURSDAY 9.29.22 Acts 15:36–16:5

Once the Jerusalem Council decided Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised, Paul was eager to travel and preach again. Barnabas was, too, and wanted to take John Mark (his cousin—cf. Colossians 4:10) with them. Paul disagreed strongly—John had deserted them on the first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:13). Instead of using up their energy fighting with one another, they multiplied their outreach. Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus; Paul took Silas to Derbe and Lystra, and there recruited Timothy, who became a trusted protégé.

- What a blow it would have been to the early church if Paul and Barnabas had stayed in Antioch feuding, trying to get church members on their side of the disagreement. What inner qualities did it take for them to “make lemonade out of a lemon,” turning their one evangelistic team into two? Paul later seems to have reconciled with John Mark (cf. 2 Timothy 4:11). What helps you leave past differences behind, and focus on building God’s kingdom even with those you may have disagreed with?
- Barnabas helped Paul (cf. Acts 9:26-28). Barnabas believed John Mark deserved a second chance. Paul took Silas, and then Timothy, under his wing to instruct and model for them. Who has inspired, encouraged and helped you? Do they know how much you appreciate that? Who can you encourage and help by sharing what you’ve learned?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I may not travel as many miles in my life as Paul did. But help me, as you did Paul, to make every day a journey deeper into your grace, an opportunity to spread your love to everyone I meet. Amen.

## Taking the gospel into Greece

### FRIDAY 9.30.22 Acts 16:6–15

In some way (Luke didn’t say how), the Holy Spirit seemed to put limits on Paul’s work in Asia Minor. Finally, in the port city of Troas, Paul had a vivid vision of a man from Macedonia (see map) asking him to come there and help them. So Paul and his companions left promptly for Macedonia, taking the gospel for the first time into a part of Europe.

- Paul usually began preaching in the synagogue—but Philippi, though sizeable, had no synagogue. So Paul found a place of prayer by the river, and spoke with the women who met there. Lydia, “a dealer in purple cloth” (i.e. high end fabric in royal colors), was one of his first converts. Paul baptized her and her household, and she offered her hospitality while they were in Philippi. How good are you at moving into unknown territory (physical or mental) if that’s what it takes to carry out God’s mission for you?
- A fascinating detail occurred in this reading. In verses 7-8, the writer spoke of Paul and his companions as “they.” But after the dream, verse 10 said, “WE prepared to leave for the province of Macedonia.” With no elaborate fanfare, Luke told his readers that he joined Paul’s group in Troas. How did the use of “we” highlight the trust Theophilus (cf. Acts 1:1-2) (and we) can have in the eyewitness quality of Acts? How did the writer’s refusal to use “we” except when it was accurate stress the writing’s integrity?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you may not call me to cross an ocean to Macedonia. But nearly every day you bring me into contact with someone like Lydia who doesn’t know you. Keep me as ready to share you in new “territory” as Paul was. Amen.

## **A jailer finds spiritual freedom**

### **SATURDAY 10.1.22 Acts 16:16–34**

After Paul and Silas had been in Philippi for several days, they were put in prison (ironically, for setting an exploited woman free). Around midnight, in stocks in prison, they were praying and singing hymns. Luke reported that an earthquake shook the prison (again with no further explanation). Paul and Silas calmed their jailer's fears (if a Roman jailer let prisoners escape, he usually suffered the prisoners' penalty), and led him and his family to new life in Christ.

- Okay, let's think about this—"Around midnight, in stocks in prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns." To what extent can you deal with even a long line at the store or the DMV office by praying and singing hymns (inwardly if not outwardly)? In what ways does Paul and Silas' example provide a benchmark to help you assess how much room you have to keep growing toward spiritual maturity?
- After the earthquake, Paul's jailer prepared to kill himself rather than face the sentence of any prisoners he let escape. Scholar N. T. Wright said his question in verse 30 meant, "Will you please tell me how I can get out of this mess?" Paul and Silas' reply—"Believe in the Lord Jesus"—reached beyond his immediate concern, and spoke to the whole broken, lost mess we humans face. It's a basic question each of us has to answer: do you believe in (not just "about") Jesus?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, from Lydia, a wealthy merchant, to a desperate, nameless jailer, you were (and are) the final answer to the whole spectrum of human need. I trust you to be the ultimate answer to all of my needs, too. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Sometimes people in churches hurt one another. It is important to ask forgiveness when we sin against someone. As a family, take a handful of coins in a container to a nearby fountain. Ask each person to take one or more coins. Explain that this is a time to tell God "I'm sorry" for any sins committed. Ask each person to individually pray (aloud or silently) "Lord, I am sorry I ..." and confess his or her sins to God. Then toss the coins into the water. Invite family members to dip their hands in the fountain for a quick washing. Finish by praying, "Thank you, God, for the gift of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Amen." Make sure to also ask the ones who were hurt by your words or actions for forgiveness.



# The Call

## The Life and Message of The Apostle Paul Study Guide—Week 4

**October 2, 2022 – *Called to Love: Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (Part 2)***

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1, 4-7, 13

If I speak in tongues of human beings and of angels but I don’t have love, I’m a clanging gong or a clashing cymbal... Love is patient, love is kind, it isn’t jealous, it doesn’t brag, it isn’t arrogant, it isn’t rude, it doesn’t seek its own advantage, it isn’t irritable, it doesn’t keep record of complaints, it isn’t happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things... Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love.

### **Not Giving Up**

#### **MONDAY 10.3.22 Acts 17:1-9**

After Paul and his companions suffered a brutal beating and imprisonment in Philippi they didn’t return to Syrian Antioch and safer land. Instead, they proceeded on the Via Egnatia roadway into new territory. One hundred miles later they arrived in the socially diverse city of Thessalonica. Although they stayed in the city only a few weeks, their proclamation of Jesus the Christ evoked strong reactions. Many believed and committed their hearts and lives to Christ while others violently rioted.

- Paul and his team were accused of “turning the world upside down” (verse 6) with the good news that Jesus is Lord – not Caesar or anyone else. How do you see the gospel, Christianity, or our church challenging people of power and cultural norms today?
- Men and women were inspired by the Holy Spirit and by Paul’s example to give their lives for the cause of Christ. Jason became a target of the angry mob when they couldn’t get their hands on Paul. Even the emerging faith of Jason – perhaps as new and small as a mustard seed - was enough in God’s mighty power to give him courage to persevere. Jason joined Paul in Corinth (Acts 20:1-3) and is named in the letter to the Romans (Rom 16:21). In what area of your life do you need more courage to follow Jesus?

**Prayer:** God on the move, you provided the courage for Paul, Jason and others to not quit in the face of hardship, rejection and suffering and to move ahead into unknown territory for your sake. Help me to have courage to follow you in faith and love anywhere you lead. Amen.

## Nothing God Directs Is Wasted

### TUESDAY 10.4.22 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:12

Paul's time in Thessalonica was short and included more suffering. However, he realized that with the power of the Holy Spirit his visit "wasn't a waste of time" (2:1). God can do extraordinary things in impossible circumstances. Many people believed in Jesus and began to imitate Jesus by imitating Paul and his teammates. So much that the new converts were willing to suffer greatly at the hands of their fellow citizens just like the Lord Jesus and Paul suffered. In turn, they became good Christian examples to many others across the region despite public pressure to stop.

- How many characteristics of a faithful worker can you find listed in chapter 2:1-12? In what ways do you imitate Paul's manner in ministry? Who are the more mature believers that you look to as examples for how to be a loving spouse, parent, employee, boss, neighbor, friend, and citizen? Consider that there are likely people looking at you as their example of what it means to be a Jesus-follower. Do they see a person of love, although imperfect?
- Paul loved the Thessalonian Christians deeply, like a mother or father. Soon after he left them, he sent Timothy back north to "strengthen and encourage" them in their faithfulness (3:2). After Timothy returned to Paul with a good report, Paul wrote this letter to continue the encouragement. He lifts them up with prayers of thanksgiving, by reminding them of how they received the Holy Spirit and their past works of love, and with assurance that Jesus will come again. What gives you fresh encouragement? Who needs encouragement?

**Prayer:** Jesus, our faithful witness of God, grow in me a heart that loves people so dearly that I would tell them the words Paul told the Thessalonians, that they are my joy and crown of boasting. Amen.

## The Open Hearts in Berea

### WEDNESDAY 10.5.22 Acts 17:10-15

When Paul arrived in Berea, 50 miles south of Thessalonica, he found people more open to his evangelistic message. The Bereans wished to hear Paul speak daily, not just once a week on the Sabbath. They also examined the scriptures for themselves to see if what he claimed was true.

- When new ideas or practices are presented we should all be Bereans. Consulting the scriptures can help us avoid gullibility and unnecessary resistance. God's power through his living word is a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105) guiding us in the ways of truth, love and mercy. How is God's Word shaping your attitudes and choices this week? What step can you take to become more familiar with the scriptures? Notice that the questioning Bereans searched for answers together. Who are the trusted believers in your life who help you grow like Jesus and hold you accountable in faith?
- Paul was forced to leave Berea because he was pursued by agitators from Thessalonica. Do you have something following you that prevents you from living a life worthy of God's calling (1 Thessalonians 2:12)? Jesus frees those bound (Luke 13:16), lifts the weight of all sin (Matthew 11:28) and unhinders his children (Mark 10:14).

**Prayer:** Freedom-giving God, grant me an open mind and heart like the Bereans that I might be more receptive to your radical love in action and live for you abundantly and unencumbered. Amen.

## **Paul's sermon in Athens**

### **THURSDAY 10.6.22 Acts 17:16-34**

Driven from Berea by agitators, Paul continued South to Athens, the Greek capital (see map). As he waited for Timothy and Silas to rejoin him, he preached to the novelty-loving Athenian philosophers. Even there, he won some converts.

- Some people would expect the apostle Paul (and all Christians after him) to denounce the Athenians as pagan libertines and idolaters, going straight to hell. Compare the respectful, inclusive tone of Paul's actual sermon with that stereotype. (In verse 28, he even quoted a Cretan philosopher named Epimenides and the Stoic poet Aratus.) What can you learn from Paul about how to share your convictions with others?
- Luke, maybe with a wry smile, wrote that the Athenians and their foreign guests "used to spend their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the newest thing." To them, Paul's message seemed very novel. Is it possible that, in an increasingly un-Christian world, the "novelty" of the good news might initially intrigue some people more than its antiquity?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, when Paul preached in Athens, he was able to quote Greek poets and Cretan philosophers. Help me to know the culture around me well enough to use it to communicate, without selling out my faith to that culture. Amen.

## **An 18-month stay in Corinth**

### **FRIDAY 10.7.22 Acts 18:1-18**

From Athens, Paul went on to Corinth (see map), a large seaport known for all the vices typical among idle sailors throughout history. Yet God told the apostle that he had "many people" there. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers, who became dear friends and co-workers (in Romans 16:3-4, Paul would write that they had "risked their own necks" for his life). He ended up staying in Corinth for 18 months.

- After Paul preached in Corinth for a while, some synagogue members (by now predictably) "opposed and slandered him." He "left the synagogue," but remarkably, "Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household came to believe in the Lord." Jesus told Paul in a dream, "Don't be afraid... I'm with you." How does it change your outlook in difficult, scary situations to have a sense that you're not all alone, that Jesus is with you? Where do you need God's comfort and courage right now?
- When Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, they were all far from home. He'd come from Athens, and faced hostility in Corinth. Priscilla and Aquila were recent exiles from Rome at Emperor Claudius' orders. Most often God works through people. How did God use the close friendship that developed to strengthen all three people to serve Jesus more effectively?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, guide me as I keep building my ability to trust that you are always with me. And make me the kind of friend who can help and support someone else in serving you more faithfully. Amen.

## **“The greatest of these is love”**

### **SATURDAY 10.8.22 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, 12:31-13:13**

Even though Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth, the Christians there had many struggles to grow beyond the self-serving, immoral culture that surrounded them. In a later letter to these Christians, Paul warned against the sexual immorality of their city. And, aware that they were dividing into factions striving for superiority, he penned his profound picture of what unselfish, enduring, God-sourced love looks like.

- Many first-world Christians, like many first-century Greeks, prefer a “head” oriented faith, which coolly analyzes religious ideas and avoids emotional expressions. Yet in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul called love “an even better way” [than relating solely through our strongest abilities]. Without love, he said, being able to “know all the mysteries and everything else” lacks eternal value. What makes God-given love “the greatest of these”—greater even than hope and faith? What does it mean for you to love God “with ALL your heart, with ALL your being, with ALL your strength, and with ALL your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27)?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, I want to love as you love, but every day I fall short of that ideal. As your love surrounds me daily, help me to trust it and keep growing toward the kind of love you call me to live. Amen.

**Family Activity:** After his own encounter with God, Paul followed his call and preached to thousands of people about Jesus’ love and grace. God also calls each of us to share the love and grace of Jesus. Purchase a sketch book or journal for the family. Decorate the cover, and title the book, “Jesus is Alive!” or “Jesus Shows His Love!” Invite each family member to write or draw about when they see Jesus’ love and grace displayed in the world around them and in their own lives. Include everyday moments as well as more unique happenings. Review the book as a family on a regular basis and share stories with one another. Then, like Paul, share the good news of Jesus you have personally experienced with everyone!



# The Call

## The Life and Message of The Apostle Paul Study Guide—Week 5

**October 9, 2022 – Called to Give: Paul’s Third Missionary Journey**

Scripture: Acts 18:23; 19:1

After some time there [in Syrian Antioch] he left and traveled from place to place in the region of Galatia and the district of Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples...[then] Paul took a route through the interior [of Asia Minor] and came to Ephesus.

### **The Holy Spirit—active agent of new life**

#### **MONDAY 10.10.22 Acts 18:23, 19:1-7**

Do you recall that on his second missionary journey, Paul wanted to go to Ephesus, but the Holy Spirit somehow kept him from it? He tried again on his third journey, and got there. Early on, he met some disciples whom John the Baptist (or a follower of his) had baptized. They didn’t know about Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Paul showed them that John had pointed forward to Jesus, and that the Holy Spirit’s power continues Jesus’ work in giving us a new inner life. Baptized in the name of Jesus, they began to experience that power.

- John the Baptist’s ministry was powerful (cf. Matthew 3:1-12), and not everyone who heard him or whom he baptized was present when he baptized Jesus. It makes sense that there were people who accepted John’s message about repentance, but didn’t know all about Jesus’ life, teaching and resurrection. How fully do you understand your faith? What helps you to keep deepening that understanding, and experiencing the Spirit’s life-changing power?
- Scholar N. T. Wright noted, “Luke does not say that tongues always accompanies such baptism.” (In fact, he wrote the opposite in a letter to Corinth—cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27-30.) Wright added, “The main thing Luke is doing in this story is to introduce Paul’s work in Ephesus, and to show that ... he was concerned with the spirit’s powerful work both in the lives of individuals and out into the wider community.” When have you sensed the difference between ministry or service done with purely human effort, and that done when the Spirit’s power is present?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me, not just to repent over and over, but to keep growing through the power of the Holy Spirit working in my heart and my life. Amen.

## Two years of preaching in Ephesus

### TUESDAY 10.11.22 Acts 19:8-17

Ephesus was a major travel and commerce center (three main Roman roads ran through the city). Paul preached there for two years, first in the synagogue, then in Tyrannus' lecture hall. Luke said that after two years, "everyone living in the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the Lord's word." Some traveling exorcists tried to "borrow" Jesus' name as a gimmick. The results showed clearly that "Jesus" was not a magic word, but a real Lord to take seriously.

- Luke's description of Paul's ministry showed the presence of what we call "knowing God" ("convincing arguments"), "loving God" ("the Lord Jesus in the highest regard") and "serving God" ("unusual miracles" of healing). In what ways have you been able to include all three dimensions in your faith journey? If one or two are weak, how might you allow God to strengthen them in you?
- Earlier in Acts, Luke told of a man named Simon who offered to buy the apostles' power for his own use (cf. Acts 8:9-24). Here the exorcists just assumed that "Jesus" was a magic word—that all they had to do was repeat it, without any understanding or life commitment. Have you or someone you knew ever tried to invoke the name of Jesus to bail you out of a problem or crisis without a life commitment to his lordship?

**Prayer:** Living Lord, sometimes I'd like your power to work on my problems or challenges. Remind me that what I need most is your power at work inside me, rather than on the things outside me. Amen.

## Choosing the gospel over sorcery

### WEDNESDAY 10.12.22 Acts 19:18-22

As in most major cities, many Ephesian citizens held political or economic power. Some also sought to exercise a more mystical kind of power, through the dark arts of sorcery or magic. But a greater power—the greatest power—had come to town. Luke wrote, "The Lord's word grew abundantly and strengthened powerfully." One sign was that people who believed Paul's message then got rid of sorcery scrolls worth roughly 50,000 days' wages!

- Jesus often stood what seems to us like economic "common sense" on its head (cf. Matthew 6:25-34, Luke 19:1-10). There's no hint that the Ephesian believers thought of re-selling their sorcery texts to others, despite their great value in a world where scrolls were hand-copied rarities. Have you ever had to "burn" anything of value in order to follow God faithfully? If so, was it worth whatever the economic cost?
- Ephesus (and the whole Greco-Roman world) had limited medical expertise, even less emotional awareness, and served a pantheon of fickle gods who seemed to harm humans more than they helped. Finding Jesus' power, many of them broke cleanly from their past. Scholar William Barclay wrote, "It is all too true that many of us hate our sins but either we cannot leave them at all or we do so with a lingering and backward look. There are times when only the clean and final break will suffice." Is there any place in your life where you need to make a clean, final break from something hurtful and wrong?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Ephesus was a center of power, and Paul a traveling, tent-making preacher. Let his power, your power, be the kind of power I seek, a power that can truly change the world by changing hearts. Amen.

## **A riot about Artemis (or about money)**

### **THURSDAY 10.13.22 Acts 19:23-41**

When some Ephesians burned their costly sorcery scrolls, they set the stage for real trouble. Some Ephesian silversmiths who made profitable temple and goddess statues were furious. They rioted because Paul taught, “Gods made by human hands aren’t really gods.” Their leader Demetrius claimed their protest was about reverence for the “great goddess Artemis” (verse 27). But his real concern showed in verse 25: “you know that we make an easy living from this business.”

- The theater in Ephesus seated about 25,000 people, and it was full of angry people shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Yet Luke wrote, “Paul wanted to appear before the assembly.” In this case, disciples and government officials kept him from taking the risk, but Paul wanted to seize any chance to talk to people about Jesus. What risks of any kind are you willing to take for Jesus? Have you ever been like the disciples and government officials, helping someone else avoid a foolish risk?
- Demetrius cleverly exploited the human tendency to favor what is “ours” over anything we see as “foreign.” To his fellow craftsmen, he talked about profits, but he got the mob to defend “their” local goddess Artemis. Have you ever seen hometown pride or patriotism turn into a mindless, irrational defense of “ours” over “theirs”? How can we love our city and country without absurdly assuming that “ours” is always better, just because it’s “ours”?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, keep me from becoming a Demetrius, protecting his profits by appealing to the worst in people. Help me keep growing like Paul, a person passionately committed to serving and sharing you everywhere. Amen.

## **Revisiting Macedonia and Troas**

### **FRIDAY 10.14.22 Acts 20:1-12**

After the riot led by silversmiths, Paul left Ephesus. He spent three months in Macedonia and Greece, strengthening the churches there. He was determined to go to Jerusalem, taking an offering from the Gentile churches to help poverty-stricken Jewish Christians as a sign of the unity of all believers (cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9, probably written from Ephesus). In Troas, God’s power used Paul as its instrument to give life back to a young man who fell after dozing off during a long discussion.

- We sometimes picture Paul as a “lone wolf,” a solitary hero. In verse 6 of today’s reading, Luke listed the names of six different people who were traveling with Paul at this time. It turns out Paul was a team builder and tireless mentor. He knew he had much to share with others, and that he needed them to help make his work effective. How good are you at enlisting the gifts of others to work with you in serving God?
- Luke wrote that in Troas Paul, in “a discussion” (don’t you wish Luke had said what it was about?) talked “until midnight,” and then “right up until daybreak.” Yet when the young man Eutychus fell asleep and took a potentially disastrous fall, Paul didn’t scold him, but called on God’s power to restore him to life and health. Next time you get restless because a sermon has gone beyond 20 minutes, remember Paul at Troas!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, guide me to the people who can make my service stronger. Keep me aware of the people I can bless, encourage and guide on their journey. Let your life-giving power flow through me. Amen.

## **Paul's heartfelt farewell to the Ephesian elders**

### **SATURDAY 10.15.22 Acts 20:13-38**

As he set out for Jerusalem, Paul asked the Ephesian church elders to meet him in a nearby port city. He reviewed the essential principles of his time with them, and urged them to keep on serving Christ as faithfully as he always tried to. It was an emotional meeting. Paul had a strong sense that his enemies were likely to be stronger in Jerusalem than in any of the other cities where he had preached. The Ephesians wept as he told them, "I know that none of you will see me again."

- Paul wrote to the Corinthians (again, probably from Ephesus) about a crisis in Asia in which he was afraid he might not survive (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:8-10). Luke didn't describe that crisis in Acts, but he quoted Paul as saying in this farewell speech, "I served the Lord with great humility and with tears in the midst of trials that came upon me because of the Jews' schemes" (verse 19). Then Paul added, "I'm going to Jerusalem. I don't know what will happen to me there. What I do know is that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city that prisons and troubles await me" (verses 22, 23). Remember, people who change the world don't quit. Where is God calling you to exercise perseverance and hope in the face of difficulty right now?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for standing by Paul, whose life and writings bless and inspire me. Give me something of his courage and faith, as I do whatever you set before me. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Paul taught people about the Holy Spirit, who was the ultimate source of his power. Explain to your family that the Holy Spirit is like the wind. They are both with us always, but we can't see them. However, we can see and feel what they are doing. Go outside for a walk together. Talk about the sounds and movements the wind is causing. Spend some time in prayer as you experience the wind. Remind everyone that the Holy Spirit is God's presence with us, and will only move in ways that are good and helpful to us. Encourage your family members to remember the Holy Spirit whenever they feel the wind. Thank God that the Holy Spirit is always at work bringing God's goodness to the world.



# The Call

## The Life and Message of The Apostle Paul Study Guide—Week 6

**October 16, 2022 – *Called to be Faithful: Paul’s Death and Legacy***

Scripture: Acts 21:12-13

We and the local believers urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul replied, “Why are you doing this? Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I’m ready not only to be arrested but even to die in Jerusalem for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus.”

### **Paul taken into protective custody**

#### **MONDAY 10.17.22 Acts 21:27-40**

When Paul got to Jerusalem, the church leaders asked him to show that he was not trying to tear down the Law of Moses. They asked him to take part in a Hebrew ritual (cf. Acts 21:20-24), and Paul agreed willingly. Ironically, during that ritual some of his enemies from Asia saw him in the Temple. They wrongly assumed he had taken a Gentile into the area set aside for Jews only, and urged the crowd to kill him. Only prompt action by Roman soldiers saved Paul from swift, violent death.

- As when the Ephesian silversmiths rioted (cf. Acts 19:30), Paul didn’t want to run, but asked to speak to the angry crowd. The Roman commander, with his soldiers at hand, let him do it. We read Paul’s Acts 22 speech during the first week of this series. He did not win the crowd over. Was it worth having a chance to “plant seeds” in people’s minds, even if he did not convince them on the spot? Paul fought the faith before he accepted it. Might that have played a part in his wish to speak even to angry enemies?
- It’s easy to see the overblown tone of the claims Paul’s enemies made in verse 28. Paul cherished his Hebrew heritage, and did not teach “against” the Hebrew people, their law or the Temple. When have you seen others exaggerate the position of people they disagree with, creating a straw man that is easier to discredit? Are you able to differ with someone without falsely portraying or exaggerating what that person believes?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Paul’s final journey began as he tried to follow a course that would make peace with his enemies. Give me a heart that firmly stands for truth without taking pleasure in creating negative feelings. Amen.

## God protected Paul—through people

**TUESDAY 10.18.22 Acts 23:6-31**

Like many Romans, the commander who rescued Paul from the mob by arresting him was at a loss to understand Jewish religious arguments (which included, in his view, the Christians). He called the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin) together, and asked Paul to speak to them. Knowing firsthand how divided the council members were, Paul cannily called on his history as a Pharisee. They got almost as angry at one another as they were at him.

- Things looked glum for Paul. But verse 11 said, “The Lord stood near Paul” (a dream? Luke wasn’t any more specific), and God’s message was, “Be encouraged! Just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so too you must testify in Rome.” Have you ever received a word of support at a time when you really needed it? How can you keep the “ears” of your heart open to recognize God as the ultimate source of such messages?
- Verse 16 said, “Paul’s sister had a son who heard about the ambush and he came to the military headquarters and reported it to Paul.” Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “This tells us ... something we didn’t know and would love to know more about. Did Paul have lots of family members in Jerusalem? Were they Christians? How much contact did he have with them? Were they ... supporters of what he was doing or embarrassed by the attention he was drawing to the family? We know none of this.” We do know God worked through Paul’s nephew, and his alert ears, to save Paul from a deadly trap. When have you seen God work through people, sometimes unexpected people?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, thank you for preserving Paul to preach in Rome, to write his prison letters, to expand further his voice and his impact on the church and the world. In safety or in peril, please let your power work through my humble life and labor, too. Amen.

## Paul, Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar

**WEDNESDAY 10.19.22 Acts 25:9-12, 26:1-32**

Paul stayed in Roman custody for two years, safe from plotters (cf. Acts 24). Then a new Roman governor, Porcius Festus, saw it as good politics to please the Jewish leaders by sending Paul back to Jerusalem. But that journey still risked ambush. Paul, born in Tarsus and therefore a Roman citizen, used his legal right to appeal to Caesar. This assured him a trip to Rome under Roman protection (albeit as a prisoner). His strong testimony to Jesus triggered strong reactions in Festus and King Agrippa (a great-grandson of Herod the Great).

- In Acts 26:8, Paul posed a question that is still fundamental for Christian witness: “Why is it inconceivable to you that God raises the dead?” Some unbelievers might say, “I’ve never seen it happen.” But we believe all kinds of things about our world and universe that we’ve never personally observed. Can you trust as strongly in Jesus’ resurrection as Paul did? How can you, in love and concern, pose the question he posed?
- We sometimes say, “God doesn’t call the equipped.” It’s true that God isn’t dependent on our human abilities or credentials. But Paul’s final journey showed God using Paul’s training as a Pharisee, his Roman citizenship by birth, and his passionate Christian witness—a strikingly unique set of attributes that Peter, John or James would not have had. What qualities do you bring to your service for God that may allow you to serve in ways others might not be able to?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as I read this story, I’m not sure I could carry out the hugely challenging mission you gave Paul. But I do ask that you’ll guide me and strengthen me to do the tasks you set before me each day. Amen.

## **Paul arrived in Rome, not sure what lay ahead**

### **THURSDAY 10.20.22 Acts 28:1-16, Philippians 1:12-26**

Sent off to Rome on a Mediterranean sailing ship, Paul experienced a shipwreck (cf. Acts 27:13-44). Paul and his guards wintered on Malta (see map). The next spring, when he reached Rome, a company of Christians welcomed him. From Rome (cf. Philippians 4:22), Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi about his God-based confidence, both in life and in death.

- We've read that Paul invested time and effort in major cities like Corinth and Ephesus. Now he saw first-hand the results of that focus. He had never been to Rome, yet as he arrived, Luke wrote, "the brothers and sisters there heard about us, [and] they came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us." Imagine the flood of satisfied joy reflected in the words, "When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and was encouraged." When have you seen the time and effort you invested in others make a difference, perhaps larger than you ever dreamed? In what people or godly causes are you currently investing?
- Writing Philippians, we believe, from a prison cell (not reflected at the end of Acts), Paul summed up his attitude: "Living serves Christ and dying is even better." Many of us can affirm the first part of the sentence; the second part may be more of a challenge. Hebrews 2:15 said by dying and rising again, Jesus "set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death." Clearly that was true for Paul. Has Jesus' presence set you free from the fear of death? In what ways is it liberating to surmount that fear?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, you taught Paul how to treasure every moment of this earthly life, and to use it for you, without fearing its inevitable end. Help me to keep growing into that attitude toward all the parts of your gift of life. Amen.

## **Paul's house arrest and resurrection message**

### **FRIDAY 10.21.22 Acts 28:17-31, 1 Corinthians 15:1-20**

Paul reached out to the Jewish leaders in Rome. As in most other places, he got at best a mixed reaction. He quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, and told them that salvation was also going to the Gentiles. Based on Acts 28:20, and Paul's earlier embrace of the Pharisees' belief in the idea of resurrection, Jesus' resurrection must have been central to his appeal. He probably used language much like that in chapter 15 of his letter to Christians in Corinth.

- Why did Paul speak to the Jewish leaders in Rome? Hadn't he learned by now that that wasn't likely to work? For Paul, this was personal. In his letter to Rome (written before he ever got to that city), Paul wrote, "My heart's desire is for Israel's salvation. That's my prayer to God for them" (Romans 10:1). Are there people you care about that you're tempted to give up on, who just aren't going to share your faith? How can Paul's example encourage you to keep seeking loving ways to share?
- Review Paul's list of eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. For Paul (and, ultimately, for all of us) the resurrection's reality was a matter of life and death. Rome would have loved to disprove the apostles' claim. But they couldn't produce Jesus' corpse, and their deadliest threats couldn't stop the witnesses from insisting, "It's real—I saw him risen with my own eyes." How close or far away are you from being able to join Paul in affirming, "IN FACT Christ has been raised from the dead"?

**Prayer:** O Jesus, you walked into the darkest, deepest place we face—into death itself—and then you emerged, alive and victorious. Thank you for winning that victory, which I could never have won for myself, and then sharing it with me. Amen.

## **“I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith”**

### **SATURDAY 10.22.22 2 Timothy 4:6-13, 16-18**

In a moving letter, Paul asked Timothy to come to him before the Romans executed him. The requests for the cloak and the scrolls, “especially the parchments,” show Paul’s human frailty and his resolve to keep learning and growing right to the end. We don’t know if Timothy made it—but we know Paul’s unsinkable faith still inspires Christians around the world. As scholar N. T. Wright said, “The picture we get, as we take leave of this intimate and personal letter, is of a man facing serious trouble and likely death, beset with problems and anxieties, but who nevertheless remains determined to bring every single aspect of his life into the orbit of the gospel itself, the royal proclamation of Jesus as Lord. He lives in the present world, Caesar’s world, as already a cheerful citizen of the world to come, Jesus’ world.”

- You may feel as though you have only a few years left to serve God in this life, or you may have reason to look forward to many decades of faithful service. Is the present course of your life such that you are confident that, when it ends, you will be able to say, “I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith”? If not, what “mid-course corrections” do you want to make so that Paul’s words can also become your personal testimony?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, whether you use me to reach thousands of lives, as Paul did, or just to be a faithful friend who keeps a cloak and some scrolls safe, as Carpus did, work in my life to make this world a better place. Keep me on course to finish this race in triumph. Amen.

**Family Activity:** Even in Paul’s darkest times, he believed deeply in the hope of Christ’s resurrection. With the long, dark nights of winter approaching, consider how you will keep Christ’s hope and light alive in your homes and hearts. Maybe you can light candles and remember Christ is the Light of the World. Share the light of Christ by serving a neighbor or a person in need. Let God’s Word light your path by reading Scripture each day—choose to memorize a verse each week as a family! Light up your home with the hope of Christ by sharing joy, laughter and encouragement with one another. Pray for God to fill you with hope and light even in the darkest of times, and then share that light with the world!