



THE LIFE OF
PAUL

FAMILY DEVOS

Saul's Conversion

Scripture: Acts 9:1-19 (see also Acts 8:1-3)

Memory Verse: Matthew 4:16

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

For My Family:

Who is the one person you could never imagine becoming a Christian? If you had asked the believers living in the time of the book of Acts, I bet they would have said Saul of Tarsus. After the death of Stephen, one of the leaders in the early Church, Saul went after any Christian he could find. He would throw them in jail, beat them up, and sometimes even have them killed (Acts 8:1-3). No one could have expected what was about to happen to him.

One day, on his way to arrest more Christians in the city of Damascus, he saw a bright light and heard a voice asking why he was persecuting Him (“persecuting” is when someone tries to harm Christians because of their faith). The risen Lord Jesus had appeared to Saul! Jesus commanded Saul to continue to Damascus, where he would be told what to do. Saul was left blind by this encounter and had to be led by hand to Damascus, where he didn't eat or drink for three days.

The Lord then spoke to a Christian named Ananias in a vision and told him to go to Saul and pray for him to receive his sight back. Ananias couldn't believe it! He was supposed to pray for *Saul*, the one who was persecuting Christians everywhere? Hadn't he come to Damascus to arrest the Christians? But the Lord told Ananias that He had a special plan for Saul. He was going to use Saul to preach about Him all over the world. Ananias obeyed, and he went to see Saul. Once Ananias prayed, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he believed in Jesus and was baptized.

No one could have guessed it then, but the man who had just gotten saved and had once been the great persecutor of the Church would end up being the greatest missionary in Church history. Saul (whose name would later be changed to Paul) would travel across the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel and planting churches, not to mention writing at least 13 books of the New Testament. Over the next several weeks, we are going to study the life of Paul and see how God used him to change the world.

Perhaps there is someone you know that you could never imagine getting saved. Maybe you've been praying for a family member, friend, or neighbor for years, but they just won't believe in Jesus. Don't give up! If the Lord could save Saul, He can save your loved one too. No matter who they are or what they've done, God can still forgive them if they put their faith in Jesus. So keep praying and sharing God's love with them!

Questions for Young Children:

What was Saul like before he met Jesus?

What happened to Saul on the way to Damascus?

What did Jesus tell Ananias to do?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

How would you have felt if you were Ananias and the Lord asked you to pray for Saul?

Why do you think the Lord would choose to save someone like Saul?

Is there anyone that you could never imagine becoming a Christian? Pray for that person to believe in Christ.

New Man, New Message

Scripture: Acts 9:20-31

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

For My Family:

What is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to you? What did you do after it happened? Didn't you want to tell everybody and anybody that would listen? That's exactly what Saul began to do. Saul's life had been radically changed. He had been dead in his sin, but now he was alive. He had been blind (both spiritually and then physically), but now he could see. He was a new creation in Christ Jesus. Instead of persecuting Jesus, now he serving Him! Jesus was alive and had spoken. Saul didn't waste a moment. Immediately he began to go to the synagogues (which are like church buildings for Jews) and declare that Jesus was the Son of God! That Jesus was alive!

As you would expect, the Jews were amazed. Saul had been hunting down followers of Jesus and throwing them and their families into prison, or worse! Now he was saying that *he* followed Jesus and that Jesus was God. When we give our lives to Jesus, we are born again, a new creation, and people should be able to see that there is something different about us. Even if we don't tell others about who Jesus is (which we absolutely should), they should be able to see who He is in how we treat one another and hear Him in how we speak. As we follow Jesus and listen to and obey the things He tells us in His Word, we begin to look less and less like people who don't know Jesus and more and more like Jesus Himself. In other words, knowing Jesus changes us, and it shows the world around us that He is real.

The Jews weren't the only ones who were amazed. When Saul came to Jerusalem to join the disciples, they were afraid of him, not believing that he was a changed man. It is important for us to know that God's love can reach even the most wicked heart. If He can save us, He can save anyone, and we shouldn't be surprised or suspicious when someone we never imagined coming to Jesus gets saved. Barnabas sets a good example for us follow. He believed Saul and introduced him to the apostles, who heard how God had transformed him and had already begun to use him for His glory. This was a great encouragement to all the churches, and we too should be encouraged when people give their lives to God. The churches welcomed Saul into their family, even though he had probably torn some of their families apart. And so it was that the very man who had done everything in his power to destroy the church became a man who God began to use to build the church up and cause it to grow, boldly sharing the good news of Jesus with any who would listen.

Questions for Young Children:

What did Saul begin to do after he became a Christian?

What are some things that you could do and say to show the world that Jesus is real?

What was the name of the man who welcomed Saul when all the other disciples were afraid of him?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

What are some excuses that Saul could have used NOT to tell others the truth about Jesus?

Why did Saul include that Jesus was the Son of God when he preached in the synagogues?

If someone didn't know you, and they could see a recording of a day of your life, would they be able to tell that you were a follower of Jesus?

Saul's Commission

Scripture: Acts 13:1-12

See also Acts 11:25-30; 12:25; Matthew 28:18-20

Memory Verse: Matthew 28:19-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

For My Family:

After his conversion and initial preaching ministry in Acts 9, Saul spent about 10 years in Tarsus. We don't know very much about his time there, but no doubt God was preparing him for what was ahead. His story picks up again in Acts 13, with Saul serving in the church at Antioch with a group of four other men. As these men prayed and fasted, the Holy Spirit commanded them to separate Saul and Barnabas for a work He had called them to. The other men prayed and fasted over Saul and Barnabas and then sent them out to go wherever the Spirit might lead them. On this journey, Saul began using his Roman name, Paul, which he would go by for the rest of his life.

Paul and Barnabas sailed for the island of Cyprus and preached about Jesus all over the island. When they got to the town of Paphos, they met an important government official named Sergius Paulus who wanted to hear more about God's Word. But Sergius Paulus had a friend named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas) who was a sorcerer. The sorcerer didn't want Sergius Paulus to believe the message and tried to turn him away from the faith. This angered Paul, so Paul called on the Lord to curse this man with blindness for trying to keep someone from coming to the Lord, and Elymas became blind. Upon seeing this, Sergius Paulus believed in the Lord.

The Lord had called Paul and Barnabas to be missionaries. A missionary is someone who goes to another country or culture to preach the Gospel (the message that Jesus died and rose again so that your sins can be forgiven and you can be with Him forever). Paul would end up spending the rest of his life as a missionary, a journey which we will look at over the next several weeks of our devotions.

While you might not be a missionary, every Christian is supposed to do the work of a missionary and spread the Gospel wherever they go (Matthew 28:18-20). At your school, in your neighborhoods, at your activities, and even among family you may know unbelievers who need to hear the message of Jesus. In addition to sharing the Gospel yourself, you can support missionaries by learning about who they are and where they are serving the Lord, and then praying for them. You could even write them a letter, send them an email, or give them financial support. When you support missionaries through prayer or other ways, you are helping to spread the Gospel all over the world.

Questions for Young Children:

What did the Holy Spirit ask Paul and Barnabas to do?

What did Paul do to Elymas the sorcerer?

What is a missionary? What can you do to help missionaries?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Being a missionary is just one way to fulfill Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28:18-20. What are some things *you* can do to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Do you support or pray for any missionaries? If you don't know any, do some research. Go to missions.ccphilly.org to learn more about some of our church's missionaries and commit to praying for one.

Miracles and Madness at Lystra

Scripture: Acts 14:8-20

Memory Verse: Romans 10:17

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

For My Family:

Paul and Barnabas had been journeying from city to city declaring the good news of Jesus Christ. As they go, God was granting “signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” In today’s story, a man is healed who had been crippled since birth! It’s important for us to note the order of these events: First this man heard Paul’s message, then he received what Paul was saying by faith, then he was healed. He didn’t tell Paul that he would believe what he was saying if he could prove it by performing a miracle. It was as God’s Word says: faith came by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Paul saw that this man had faith to be healed and commanded him to get up. Not only did he get up and walk, but he leaped about (as I’m sure any of us would)! However, his hope wasn’t in his new legs. He had already received the greater gift through believing Paul’s message.

God still performs miracles today. Maybe you have experienced this personally. The danger comes when we make miracles our focus and we are distracted from God’s Word. The purpose of miracles was to emphasize and prove God’s Word. There is nothing wrong with thinking about what it must have been like to see Jesus or experience His miracles, but it’s wrong to think, “If only God would show me a miracle, then I would believe in Him.” Faith doesn’t come from seeing miracles, or else everyone who had been with Jesus would have been saved! Faith comes by hearing and receiving the Word of God, and there is even a special blessing for those who have not seen and yet believe (John 20:29).

Unfortunately, the crowd at Lystra only saw the miracle and refused to hear the message. While they began to worship Paul and Barnabas as Greek gods, Paul and Barnabas pleaded with them to stop, explaining that they had come to tell them about the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. The crowd wouldn’t listen, and things continued to get worse as certain Jews seeking to stop the spread of the Gospel persuaded the crowd to kill Paul! They stoned Paul, dragged him outside of the city and left him for dead, but God still had work for Paul to do. God raised Paul up and he walked right back into the city.

Talk about a rough day at work! It’s hard for us to imagine what it would be like to live like Paul did, but God has a plan for us just like He had a plan for Paul. God may not be calling you to another country just yet, but He is calling you to read your Bible and know Him more. Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples” (John 8:31). Faith continues where faith began. Let God’s Word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Psalm 119:105), guiding you through each and every day.

Questions for Young Children:

What miracle was performed in the city of Lystra?

How did the crowd respond to this miracle?

Where does faith begin? (Romans 10:17)

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Why is hearing God's Word more important than seeing miracles?

Do you think it might have been tempting for Paul and Barnabas to accept the crowd's worship? Why or why not?

We see read about plenty of miracles in the New Testament. Why don't we see as many miracles today?

Splitting Up

Scripture: Acts 15:36-16:5 (See also Acts 13:13)

Memory Verse: Psalm 133:1

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

For My Family:

In our last two studies, we looked at the events of Acts 13-14, which are known as Paul’s first missionary journey. In these chapters, we saw how God used Paul and Barnabas to preach the Gospel and plant churches throughout the land of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Paul and Barnabas made a great team, and on this missionary journey, God was able to use them in powerful ways to lead many people to Christ.

Eventually, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to tell their home church about the great things the Lord had done on their trip. But after they had been there a while, the Lord put it on their hearts to go back to the mission field. Barnabas went to Paul and asked if he wanted to go back to the churches that they had started to see how they were doing. Paul agreed, and it appeared as though this great team would be out sharing the Gospel again. Unfortunately, there was a problem.

On their first trip, Paul and Barnabas had brought along Barnabas’ cousin, Mark (also known as John Mark). However, in Acts 13:13, we read that Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas and had left in the middle of their first missionary journey. The Bible doesn’t tell us why he left, but apparently Paul was not happy about it. Barnabas insisted that they bring Mark with them again for their second journey, but Paul refused. After Mark had let them down once already, Paul was not going to allow him to do it a second time.

What happened next was tragic. Rather than being able to sort the issue out, the argument between Paul and Barnabas was so severe that they ended up splitting up and forming two different teams. Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul went with a man named Silas and went to Lystra and Derbe (the cities we learned about in our last devotion). While there, he met Timothy, a young man who also joined Paul’s team.

This story shows us two things. First, it is an absolute tragedy when Christians argue and fight with one another. The issue of whether or not to take Mark on their journey was an important one, but it certainly wasn’t worth ruining the friendship and unity Paul and Barnabas had formed. We might not always agree with our brothers and sisters in Christ, but as Christians, it is important to maintain unity and continue to love one another even when we disagree. The second thing to notice is that God can use everything, both good and bad, for His glory. It wasn’t a good thing that Paul and Barnabas fought and split up, but God used it for good, and as a result, there were now not one but two missionary teams spreading the Gospel.

Questions for Young Children:

What were Paul and Barnabas fighting about?

Who did Barnabas take to go on his missionary journey? Who did Paul take?

Have you ever got into an argument with another Christian? What happened? Was the fight resolved? How?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Was the discussion of whether or not to bring John Mark along an important issue? Was it worth fighting over? Why or why not?

Why do you think it's important for Christians to be unified?

God used Paul and Barnabas' disagreement to spread the Gospel further. Has God ever used a mistake you made or a problem you had for good?

Closed Doors

Scripture: Acts 16:6-15

Memory Verse: Isaiah 55:9

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

For My Family:

Have you ever had one of those days when it feels like nothing was going your way? Maybe you were even trying to do something nice for someone, but it just didn't work out. How did you feel? Were you frustrated? Confused? Angry? Perhaps Paul felt this way in today's story. If you remember from last time, Paul had just been in a fight with his friend Barnabas, and as a result they split up and formed two separate missionary teams. Barnabas took his cousin, John Mark, and Paul went with Silas and was later joined by Timothy and Luke. Paul's team first visited the churches he had planted on his first missionary journey, but soon they decided to preach the Gospel in new places.

Paul wanted to go to Asia (which is not the continent we refer to as Asia today, but a region in western Turkey), but something unexpected happened: the Holy Spirit wouldn't let his team go. This must have been confusing for Paul and his team. Why wouldn't the Holy Spirit allow them to go? Wasn't preaching the Gospel in Asia a good thing? Paul then tried to go north to an area known as Bithynia, but again the Holy Spirit wouldn't allow it. Imagine how you would feel in this situation! Paul was trying to tell these people about God, but God wasn't letting them! Soon enough, however, they would learn why.

One night, Paul had a vision of a man from a place called Macedonia asking them for help. Paul and his team then journeyed to Philippi, the capital city of Macedonia, and stayed there for several days. On the Sabbath day, Paul and his team went to the riverside, where there was a prayer meeting. Paul met a woman named Lydia who sold purple dye. Paul explained the Gospel message to her, she believed, and she was baptized. Paul then stayed longer in Philippi and continued to preach, but we'll learn more about that next time.

In this story, Paul was trying to do a good thing. He wanted to share the Gospel with people, but the Lord was preventing him. You also might experience situations when you have a desire to do a good thing, but God “closes the door” on that opportunity. It may seem strange or confusing to us, and we might wonder why God won't allow us to do it, but when we face closed doors, it's important to remember that God has a plan. He is wise. He knows what He's doing. Who knows if Lydia ever would have heard the Gospel if Paul had gone to the cities that he wanted to go to? And as we'll see next time, there were other people that God wanted to save in Philippi. So when your plans don't work out or God “closes doors” in your life, trust God. He knows what He's doing, He has a plan, and His ways are always better than our ways.

Questions for Young Children:

What kept happening when Paul tried to preach in Asia and Bithynia?

What did Paul see in his vision?

Who did Paul meet at Philippi? What happened to her?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

How do you think Paul and his team felt when God prevented them from going to Asia or Bithynia?

Why do you think God didn't allow Paul to preach in those places?

Have you ever experienced a "closed door" (a situation where you wanted to do something, but God did not allow it to happen)? How did you feel? Why do you think God gives us "closed doors"?

Set Free

Scripture: Acts 16:16-40

Memory Verse: John 8:36

“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

For My Family:

Have you ever been in a situation that you wished you could get out of, or a situation that didn't feel fair? How did you respond? Paul and Silas were led by God in a dream to go to Macedonia to share the Gospel, but soon found themselves badly beaten and imprisoned for obeying God and doing the right thing! Their response was very interesting. They didn't complain. They didn't question God. Instead, they prayed and sang hymns, trusting that this was part of God's perfect plan. It's important to remember, as we learned last time, that God doesn't always do things the same way we would do them, but His ways are always best.

Some of the prisoners may have thought Paul and Silas were crazy, but they soon received a shock when an earthquake shook the prison, opened the doors, and made their chains fall off! It was so strange that no one even got up to escape. As the guard of the prison woke up, he saw the open doors and feared everyone had escaped. Paul called out to him and showed him love even though he was his enemy. No doubt Paul was beginning to understand why God had wanted them in Macedonia and allowed them to be thrown into prison. God wanted this man and everyone else in the prison to see that all of them needed to be set free, not from prison, but from sin and death. There was something about these men and what God had done in the prison that brought the jailer to Paul and Silas in desperation, asking the most important question anyone can ask: “What must I do to be saved?”

You see, even though Paul and Silas had been the ones in chains, their hearts were free and knew that God was in control. And while this guard watched over the prisoners and had freedom to come and go, his heart was actually bound in chains. Everyone in this world has sin in their hearts, and sin is like an unbreakable chain that holds us prisoner. One day, unless something or someone is able to free us from those chains, everyone will pay the price for sin: death.

But Jesus came to set the prisoners free, and those He sets free are free indeed! He is the chain-breaker and death-destroyer! He lived a perfect and sinless life, then took the punishment for everyone else's sin so that all who believe in Him could be forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life! He paid the wages of sin (death) so we could receive the gift of God (eternal life). But there is only one way to receive this gift. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Everyone needs to be saved, and everyone needs Jesus to save them. You need Jesus. What must you do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

Questions for Young Children:

What did Paul and Silas do when they were in prison?

Why do you think none of the other prisoners tried to escape?

What must you do to be saved?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

How could Paul and Silas praise God even when they had been mistreated for doing the right thing?

What was it that led the jailer to ask Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?"

Do you think it was tempting for Paul and Silas to escape once their chains were off and the doors were open? What would have (and wouldn't have) happened if they did?

God's Word Rejected and Received

Scripture: Acts 17:1-15 (See also Mark 4:3-9, 13-20)

Memory Verse: Mark 4:20

“But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

For My Family:

As Paul and Silas continued their missionary journey, trouble still followed them. They left Philippi and traveled about 100 miles to a city called Thessalonica. They were only there for three weeks, but in that time, “a great multitude” believed. Those who did not believe were angry at Paul’s message. They stirred up an angry mob to get rid of Paul and Silas, accusing them of causing trouble, turning the world upside down with their message that Jesus was King. Jason, one of the new believers, made a payment to the rulers of the city, promising that Paul would leave to prevent more riots and trouble. Paul would later write to the new believers in this city and we still have those letters today: 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Paul and Silas went away by night to another city called Berea. Again, they shared the Gospel in the synagogue, and these Bereans “received the word with all readiness.” Like the good soil in the parable of the sower, they accepted God’s Word into their hearts, but they didn’t take Paul’s at his word. They “searched the Scriptures” to find out if the things Paul was saying were really true! You don’t have to believe everything people tell you about the Bible. You can go look for yourself! The Bereans did this every day, and as they studied God’s Word for themselves, “many of them believed.”

We can learn an important lesson from the Bereans. We shouldn’t necessarily believe everything we hear. When you sit in church, or with your family for devotions, you should read God’s Word for yourself and see that what you are being taught really matches up with what the Bible says! This doesn’t mean teachers aren’t important. They are! That’s why Paul left Silas and Timothy behind, so they could continue to teach the Bereans God’s Word and answer all their questions. So be a Berean! Read the Bible and study it every day. When you do, God’s Word will transform your life to look like Jesus.

The men who were stirring up trouble accused Paul of turning the world upside down, but they had it wrong. They were the ones who were upside down! God’s Word helps us see things as they really are. There are many who think they are alive, but are dead in sin, many who think they are free, like the jailer, but are held captive by sin. They walk around on their hands with their feet in the air and tell you that you are the one who’s upside down! This is sad, but it shouldn’t discourage us. Instead it should lead us to pray for the truth of God’s Word to transform the lives of those who reject Him, and encourage us to, like the Bereans, continue to read God’s Word every day, study it, and accept it. As we do, we will only learn more and more that it is exactly what we need to help us believe and to keep on believing.

Questions for Young Children:

Who followed Paul and Silas to each city? What did they do?

What big lesson did we learn from the Bereans' example?

How can you study God's Word even if you can't read yet or don't understand all the words?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

What was the result of the Bereans searching the Scriptures for themselves?

Why isn't it enough for us just to read or listen to God's Word?

What does God's Word bearing fruit in our hearts look like?

The Unknown God

Scripture: Acts 17:16-34

Memory Verse: Jeremiah 10:10a

“But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.”

For My Family:

In our last study, we saw Paul teaching in, and then getting chased out of, Thessalonica and Berea. When the Jews came for Paul in Berea, he fled to Athens, but Silas and Timothy stayed behind to continue the ministry for a little while longer. Meanwhile, Paul went to the city of Athens and waited for them there.

While he was there, Paul noticed something about the city: it was filled with idols! The people believed there was a god of thunder, a god of the sea, a god of the sun, and more. In fact, the people of Athens believed in so many gods that they worried there might be a god they had forgotten, so they even built an altar to “the unknown god.” That way, if they had forgotten a god, they could worship him too.

Seeing all these people worshipping false gods made Paul very upset, so he began to do what he did everywhere else: he preached the Gospel. The philosophers (men who thought they were very smart and tried to figure out the mysteries of the universe) heard about Paul and asked him to explain what he believed, and so he did. He told them that they were right about one thing: there *is* a God they had forgotten about, and He is very different from the idols that they worshipped.

Paul’s sermon focused on explaining who this “unknown God” is. He told the people of Athens that God created everything (vs. 24), that He doesn’t live in a man-made temple (24), that He gives life to all things and has created every nation and group of people (25-26), that He is not far from any of us (27), and that He is not made of metal or stone like their idols (29). Paul then called them to repent of their sins and turn to the Lord. Some made fun of him for these beliefs, others were uninterested, but a few believed and were saved.

Our world today is actually a lot like Athens. There are many different people who believe all sorts of things. There are some people who follow religions like Buddhism or Islam and believe in gods other than the God of the Bible. Other people don’t believe in any kind of god at all. They might believe that the most important thing in life is to be happy, make money, or even do good deeds. The problem is, none of these beliefs can save a person from their sin or give them eternal life. Only faith in Jesus can do that. As Christians, it is our job to teach them about the true and living God. Of course, in order to tell others about what God is like, we first need to know ourselves who God is, what He is like, what He has done, and what we need to do about it. The answers to all these questions can be found in the Bible. So study the Word, then go out and tell others about our wonderful Lord!

Questions for Young Children:

What job did Paul do to provide for his needs?

What promise did God make to Paul?

What does God want you to remember when you are afraid?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Who did Paul meet when he arrived in Corinth? Do you think that was a coincidence? Why or why not?

How does God want us to do our work?

What difference does it/should it make in your life to know that God is always with you?

A Message from the Lord

Scripture: Acts 18:1-11

Memory Verse: Matthew 28:20b

“And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

For My Family:

We learned from today’s passage of Scripture that Paul was a tentmaker by trade. Not all of his time was spent preaching the Gospel and writing books of the Bible. Much of Paul’s time was spent making tents, working with fabrics, gathering needed material, etc. We don’t often think about this, but even the apostle Paul had to work hard to provide for his daily needs. He was busy working a regular job during the week.

This is important for us to remember because it reminds us that we can bring glory to God in the everyday things we put our hands to, whether that’s doing chores, schoolwork, or anything else. God cares about the work we do. He also cares about how we do it. Paul would write to the Colossians, whatever we do should be done with all our heart, as unto God and not to men (Col 3:23). Paul saw his work as an act of worship, not something to complain about. Let’s remember that the next time we are told to do our chores or our homework! All our work can be done with a good attitude with our best effort because it is all unto God, and He deserves our very best. After all, that’s what He gave for us!

We also learned about a new city today. Paul left Athens and continued to the city of Corinth, which desperately needed the light of the Gospel. The people of Corinth were very wicked. They worshipped idols and were involved in all kinds of sin, but when Paul started sharing the Gospel, people believed and were saved! But as with cities Paul had been to in the past, some of the Jews opposed his message, so Paul began focusing his attention on the Gentiles (people who aren’t Jewish).

As he did this, Paul received a timely message from the Lord in a vision. “Do not be afraid... and do not keep silent.” Do you ever get afraid? Even the apostle Paul felt afraid sometimes. Remember, he had been chased out of cities by angry mobs and badly beaten and mistreated where he had already shared the Gospel. Maybe Paul thought, “Everywhere I share God’s message, people attack me!” That’s a scary thought! If he didn’t share God’s message, maybe people wouldn’t attack him. That would certainly be tempting.

But God gives Paul just what he needed when he needed it. Paul needed the same thing we need when we’re afraid: God’s Word! God promised Paul His presence and protection and told him to “speak... for I am with you.” God’s presence gives us courage. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Knowing that Jesus is with us should give us courage to tell others about Him, and if God ever feels far away, we need only remember His promise. Remember, He is with you. *Always.*

Questions for Young Children:

What job did Paul do to provide for his needs?

What promise did God make to Paul?

What does God want you to remember when you are afraid?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Who did Paul meet when he arrived in Corinth? Do you think that was a coincidence? Why or why not?

How does God want us to do our work?

What difference does it/should it make in your life to know that God is always with you?

Spirit-Powered

Scripture: Acts 19:1-20

Memory Verse: John 14:16

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.”

For My Family:

How you ever tried to use a flashlight with no batteries? You could have the nicest flashlight in the world, but without the power source, it can't do anything. The Christian life is like this. We are only able to follow Jesus if we have the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us. (It's important to point out in this analogy that the Holy Spirit is not just a power source, like a battery. He is a living being, the third Person of the Trinity, who gives believers the power to live for the Lord.) In today's story, we will see people who received the Spirit, Paul working by the power of the Spirit, and a group that tried to live without the Spirit.

The first part of our story is in Acts 19:1-7. Paul journeyed to Ephesus and met twelve men who had been baptized by John the Baptist, but had never received the power of the Holy Spirit or heard about Jesus. When Paul heard this, he told them about the Lord and baptized them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit fell on them, they began speaking in different languages miraculously.

In verses 8-12, we see that the Holy Spirit was working powerfully through Paul in Ephesus. For two years, he preached in Ephesus about the Lord, and later on in the chapter we find out that many in that city believed. To accompany his preaching, the Holy Spirit did many miracles through Paul. In fact, the Spirit was working so powerfully through him that the dirty rags he was using when he worked were being used to heal people and cast out evil spirits. It's important to point out, this was not because Paul was so great or powerful. These miracles were happening because the Holy Spirit was working through him.

However, not everyone was working by the power of the Spirit. Verses 13-17 tell us that there were seven brothers who saw that Paul was doing miracles, and they wanted to do miracles too. The problem was, they didn't have the Holy Spirit inside of them. They tried casting out an evil spirit in the name of Jesus and Paul, but because they didn't have real faith in Jesus or the Holy Spirit living inside of them, the spirit beat them up and they ran away. The people of Ephesus took notice. Many of them burned their old magic books as they realized that they needed the Holy Spirit and that no other power was good enough.

We all need our walks with the Lord to be Spirit-powered. Everyone who believes in Jesus has the Holy Spirit living inside of them. The Spirit gives us power to live for the Lord, obey God's commands, and share the Gospel. He leads us, teaches us from God's Word, and shows us right from wrong. When we trust in our own strength, we won't be able to please the Lord, but by the power of the Spirit we can live the Christian life.

Questions for Young Children:

What happened after Paul baptized the twelve men?

What strange thing were people using to do miracles?

Why was Paul able to do miracles but the seven brothers weren't?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

What do you know about the Holy Spirit?

Read John 14:15-17, 25-26; John 15:26-27; and John 16:12-15. How does the Holy Spirit help us live the Christian life according to these verses? Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit doing these things in your life?

Riots and Revivals

Scripture: Acts 19:23-41

Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 4:2

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”

For My Family:

As we saw last time, God was doing amazing things through Paul during his time in Ephesus. People were getting saved, miracles were being done, and many of the Ephesians had burned their books of magic so they could follow the Lord. What an exciting time that must have been! However, not everyone in Ephesus was happy about what was going on.

In Acts 19:24, we are introduced to a man named Demetrius. Now Demetrius was a silversmith, and he made his money selling idols of the false goddess Diana (some Bibles might say “Artemis”). But because so many people were becoming Christians, no one was buying his idols anymore. Paul was bad for business! So he gathered the other idol-makers of the town and convinced them that they needed to deal with this problem. If Paul kept preaching the Gospel, pretty soon nobody would be worshipping Diana and all of them would be out of a job, so they formed an angry mob.

This mob grew quickly, to the point where verse 29 tells us that the whole city was filled with confusion. Two of Paul’s friends even got caught up and taken by the mob. Paul, who was always ready to preach the Gospel in any situation, wanted to go to the crowd and talk to them, but his friends wisely pointed out that this might not be such a good idea and begged him not to go, and he listened.

The mob began to spiral out of control. For two hours, many of them were chanting, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” while some didn’t even know why everyone was gathered. Finally, the town clerk (a city official) spoke to the mob and told them that they had to stop. If they didn’t, the Romans might hear about it and send an army to break up the mob and take away their freedom. The mob listened to this advice, and the people returned home.

As we’ve seen throughout this series, sometimes when Paul came to a city, many people got saved and there was a great revival. Other times, riots broke up and Paul had to flee for his life. In fact, there were plenty of times, like in Ephesus, that both happened. But Paul didn’t let the riots scare him or discourage him from sharing the Gospel. He preached about Jesus and trusted God to take care of the rest. The same way, when we tell others about the Lord, we will face all different kinds of reactions. Some may believe, others might not. We could be made fun of or rejected. But whether or not people listen when we share the Gospel, we can’t give up or be discouraged. We need to share the love of Christ wherever we go and trust God to take care of the rest.

Questions for Young Children:

Why was Demetrius angry at Paul? What did he do in response?

Did the angry mob discourage Paul from wanting to preach the Gospel?

What happened to the mob in the end?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Do you think Demetrius and the idol-makers actually cared about Diana?

What do you think they were really upset about?

Why don't you think Paul gave up on preaching even when people rejected his message? (Hint: think about how Paul got saved and what he was like before he was a Christian.)

Have you ever faced pushback or consequences for sharing your faith? How did you respond?

Raised from the Dead

Scripture: Acts 20:1-12

Memory Verse: John 11:25

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.’”

For My Family:

Paul had been in Ephesus for two whole years, but after the uproar his presence had caused, he knew it was time to depart. He gathered the disciples (followers of Jesus) and embraced them. They had become his family and it was sad to leave them. Maybe you know what it's like to move away and say goodbye to good friends. You don't know when or if you will see them again. Paul did this again and again as he traveled: making disciples, teaching them God's Word, then leaving to do the same thing somewhere else. The church grew rapidly because of this, but having to say so many goodbyes must have been hard. Back then, they didn't even have phones! This is why Paul wrote so many letters. Thankfully, we know that for those of us who follow Jesus, every goodbye is really just a, “See you later.” One day, we will all be reunited in glory, never to be separated again, and what a day that will be!

After Paul left, he gained some new traveling companions, one of which was Dr. Luke, who wrote the book of Acts. We always know when Luke has rejoined Paul because he switches to the pronoun, “we.” As you can imagine, there's little that would impress a doctor more than someone who had died being brought back to life. Paul was in Troas, and the disciples were gathered on the first day of the week (Sunday). They met in the evening because Sunday was a workday, but that didn't stop them from gathering to hear Paul teach!

Paul didn't have long in Troas and had a lot he wanted to say! A young man was so tired that he fell asleep while Paul was teaching. Normally, this wouldn't be an issue. Maybe you have even fallen asleep in church before! But you've probably never fallen asleep in the opening of the third-story window. The young man fell to the ground and Paul rushed down the steps to find him dead! But Paul had faith that God would raise him, and God did! He not only raised him from the dead, but healed his body. No broken bones, no bleeding, he just got up, came inside, and Paul got right back to teaching.

I'm sure everyone was wide awake after that! As you can imagine, the disciples “were not a little comforted.” That means that they were very comforted, and no doubt very encouraged. God was with them. The God who raised Jesus from the dead had raised this young man. But most of the time people die and God doesn't raise their body back to life, and this is sad for us. But Paul would later write that we don't sorrow like those who don't know Jesus, because Jesus *does* raise from the dead, even if we don't see it happening. When a follower of Jesus dies, they immediately go to be with Him, and we are comforted knowing that one day we will join them. This is the very reason Jesus came: to give everlasting life!

Questions for Young Children:

What was the name of the young man who fell asleep?

What did Paul do after the young man was raised from the dead?

What does God want us to remember when people we care about die?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Why did Paul only stay for short amounts of time in the cities he traveled to?

Why do you think God raised Eutychus?

When was a time that God really comforted you? (Parents, if they can't think of a specific time help them remember or share a time from your life when God has comforted you.)

A Lasting Impression

Scripture: Acts 20:17-38

Memory Verse: Acts 20:35b

“And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

For My Family:

Do you know what it means to leave an impression on someone? Imagine that you are walking past a sidewalk where fresh cement has been poured. It’s so soft that you could push your hand into it. If you did, an impression of your hand would be left for all to see, and they would know something about you by what they saw. Paul had left an impression on the Ephesians. For three years he served the Lord in Ephesus, working with his own hands, declaring the good news of the Kingdom of God, teaching the church the whole counsel of God, and warning them of dangers to come. Long after Paul left, the impression of what he did and said remained. Impressions can be good or bad, but we can learn from Paul’s example of how to leave a good and godly impression everywhere we go.

One of the things that stands out as we read Paul’s testimony is that he was a giver. He reminded the church elders of this as he said goodbye, encouraging them to follow his example and remember the words of Jesus, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” Paul didn’t just preach this, he lived it! He humbly served the Lord and the church throughout his time in Ephesus, even through difficult trials. “I kept nothing back that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you... I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” What he had received from the Lord he freely gave without seeking anything in return. Like a runner who collapses from exhaustion after crossing the finish line, having given everything to win the race, Paul had given his all in Ephesus, and no one could deny it.

Paul’s ability to make a good and lasting impression on the Ephesians was rooted in his obedience to God’s Word. God had called him to “testify of the gospel of the grace of God,” and he would do that no matter the cost. Nothing could move him from his goal, and the Ephesians took note of this. As they walked with the Lord, they remembered how Paul had lived among them, and that encouraged them to live the same way: boldly sharing the Gospel, and doing all they could to help one another and meet one another’s needs.

What do people remember about you? Does your example encourage them to follow Jesus? Have you shown others God’s love? Are you a giver, or have you been selfish? Have you been unkind? None of us are perfect, but it’s important to know that the things you say and do matter to God, and they matter to those around you. Each interaction we have is kind of like wet cement. It soon dries and whatever we said or did cannot be undone. An impression is left, for better or for worse. What kind of impression will you leave on those around you today? Ask for God’s help to leave an impression that will point others to Him.

Questions for Young Children:

What are some examples of how we can make good impressions that point others to Jesus?

What are some examples of how we can leave a bad impression?

What did Paul do and say that helped his ministry continue even after he was gone?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

What does it mean to leave an impression on someone?

What can we learn from Paul's example?

Do you remember a time when you left a bad impression on someone? How did that feel and what was the outcome?

Do you remember leaving a good impression on someone? How did that feel and what was the outcome?

Committed

Scripture: Acts 21:1-14

Memory Verse: Philippians 1:21

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

For My Family:

For today’s Scripture, reading you may find it helpful to look at the maps in the back of your Bible (if your Bible has them) and find the map entitled “Paul’s Missionary Journeys” for a helpful visual aid as you read where Paul’s ship stopped or passed by. Paul was coming to the end of what is known as his third and final missionary journey. He had several travel companions at this point, including Dr. Luke, the author of the book of Acts. Unlike many of the missionaries we may think of today, Paul never stayed anywhere for very long. Instead, he traveled from city to city, sharing the Gospel of Jesus as he went, and the people who decided to follow Jesus became the church in that particular city, often meeting in people’s homes. Sometimes Paul would stay to teach and encourage the new church, while other times he would leave a trusted companion to do the same as he continued on.

Paul was journeying by ship toward Jerusalem, desiring to get there in time for the feast. He believed the Holy Spirit was calling him there (Acts 20:22-23), and this is important to keep in mind as we read today’s verses because again and again, Paul is going to be warned about trials he will face in Jerusalem and urged by his friends *not* to go.

It seems that everywhere Paul and his companions stopped, they were able to find fellow believers, one of which was Philip the evangelist, who was last seen spreading the Gospel in Acts 8. This just goes to show that the book of Acts hardly tells us all of the details of the early church, and it will be interesting to hear all of the untold stories as we sit and talk to people like Philip in heaven. The Gospel was spreading far and spreading fast. The church grew the same way then as it does today! “The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47), and most often He uses us to accomplish this! We may never have our stories recorded like Paul, but God knows our names and will reward us just the same as we faithfully live in obedience to His Word and tell others about Him.

Paul was committed to doing just that, even if it cost him his life! Do you know what it means to dissuade someone? It means to try to convince someone not to do something that they have decided to do. If I told you that suffering and trials would be waiting for you if you ever went to Ohio, you would probably try to avoid going there. Paul was warned repeatedly that he would meet trouble in Jerusalem. Even Luke begged him not to go, but he went anyway. He wasn’t going because he liked suffering. He was going because he loved God, and the Spirit had told him to go. Better to suffer in obedience to the Lord than live comfortable lives in disobedience to Him. His companions finally said, “The will of the Lord be done,” and that’s where God wants to lead us today. What God wants is always better than what we want, and the heart that fully trusts Him can freely say, “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

Questions for Young Children:

What city was Paul traveling to?

Why did Paul's friends ask him not to go to Jerusalem?

What was most important to Paul, even more important than his life?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Why wasn't Paul dissuaded from going to Jerusalem? Do you think this was easy for him? Why or why not?

How committed are you to following Jesus? (This is a very personal question. The goal isn't guilt or embarrassment, but an honest self-assessment. Would I really be willing to follow Jesus at any cost?)

It seems Paul was led by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. How can you know for certain what God is calling you to do?

Trouble in Jerusalem

Scripture: Acts 21:16-36

Memory Verse: Galatians 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

For My Family:

There are two things that you will find helpful to remember as we read today’s passage. The first is that Jerusalem (along with much of the world at the time) was under Roman rule. This meant that the Jews paid taxes to Rome, had Roman government officials in their cities, and had Roman soldiers who enforced the law.

The second thing to keep in mind is the difference between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). The Jews were God’s chosen people—the Israelites. They followed the law as given to them by God through Moses, and had many traditions and customs that they had followed for hundreds of years. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, some of those traditions and laws were no longer required, like the entire sacrificial system! All of that had been to point to their need for the coming Savior, the perfect Sacrifice, Jesus Christ.

This was a difficult message for the Jews to receive. Jews and Gentiles had always remained separate in all their dealings. Even in the temple, the Gentiles were forced to keep at a distance in the outer courts, while Jews could enter in. There was a literal wall that had been built forbidding the Gentiles to enter any further into the temple on pain of death! But Paul’s message to the Gentiles was that Jesus had broken the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles. All people now had access to God through the gift of His Son, but the Jews were pressuring Gentile believers to follow Jewish traditions, spreading rumors among Jews that Paul was telling people to do away with Moses and the Law altogether.

Sometimes, even though you do everything in your power to make peace, people will still be angry with you, but that doesn’t mean we should stop pursuing peace with everyone (Hebrews 12:14). Paul was gladly received by the church at Jerusalem and told them everything God had done through his ministry to the Gentiles. He even gave them a gift from the Gentile churches and agreed to go through a Jewish custom at the temple in an effort to remove the tension between Jews and Gentiles. Rumors had been spread about him that weren’t true (maybe you know what that is like) but Paul took action to make for peace.

Sadly, we see these divisions today, even among fellow believers. We see it on the news and maybe have even experienced it ourselves. It’s really hard and very sad. As Christians, we know that there are really only two types of people in the world: believing and unbelieving. And one of the ways God shows those who are unbelieving that He is real is by bringing those who believe in Him together in love. What we have in common (Jesus) is way bigger than all of our differences, and what we have in common (Jesus) is strong enough to keep us together even when our differences try to push us apart.

Questions for Young Children:

Why didn't the Jews get along with the Gentiles?

Why didn't the Jews like Paul's message?

Who is bigger than all of our differences?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

There was great tension between the Jews and the Gentiles in the early church. Do you see anything like this in the world today?

What did Paul do to try to relieve the tension among Jewish believers?

What is God's answer to the things that divide us?

Paul's Message to the Mob

Scripture: Acts 21:37-22:29

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

For My Family:

Our last devotion ended with Paul being taken by the Romans from the midst of an angry mob. As they were taking him into custody, we learn that the Romans thought he was an Egyptian rebel who had been causing trouble in the city. Have you ever been mistaken for someone else? Paul told them that he was actually a Jew from Tarsus and asked to speak to the crowd who had just been trying to kill him.

We would call this message Paul shared with the Jews his testimony. When Christians talk about “sharing their testimony,” what they are talking about is simply sharing their Jesus story: when they decided to follow Jesus, and what their lives were like before and after that decision. All of us have unique testimonies about how and when we began to follow Jesus. Maybe it happened at VBS, on a retreat, or with your family at home. Whatever the case, though the specific details may be different, we all have this in common: before Jesus, our lives were one way, but when we began to follow Him our lives were changed.

Paul's life before believing in Jesus was very religious, as are many today, and as were many in the crowd he was speaking to. People often think that if they do good things, go to church, read their Bible, or even if they have godly parents, they are good with God. But *all* have sinned, and it is only through grace we are saved. We can't earn our salvation. Going to church and knowing our Bible is not enough. We have to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Paul was born a Jew, grew up in Jewish tradition, was taught by a famous Jewish Rabbi (teacher), and was zealous (passionate) for God. This passion caused him to persecute followers of “the Way” (Christianity), arresting and even killing those who believed and spread the news that Jesus was alive and all could be forgiven through Him. But the Jesus Paul thought was dead had literally knocked him to the ground, blinded him, and spoke to him. Paul learned that he had been wrong, and immediately became a follower of Jesus.

What Paul was called to do after meeting Jesus on the road is the same thing we are called to do today: know God's will, see Jesus, and hear His voice, so that we can be His witnesses to everyone around us. How do we know, see, and hear God? Through His Word and the work of His Spirit all around the world! As we read and obey God's Word and are filled with His Spirit, He transforms our hearts and minds to live for Him and show the world around us that He is real. You may not have been knocked off a horse by a blinding light and thundering voice from heaven, but I promise you that what God has done in your life is just as amazing, and God wants you to share that with the world.

Questions for Young Children:

What was Paul's life like before and after meeting Jesus?

How do we know, hear, and see God today?

Did the crowd receive Paul's testimony? Why?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Why didn't the Jews receive Paul's testimony?

Why can't you do anything to earn salvation?

How has your life changed since you decided to follow Jesus?

Good Works, Bad Hearts

Scripture: Acts 22:30-23:10

Memory Verse: 1 Samuel 16:7b

“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

For My Family:

In our last study, we saw Paul share his testimony with the Jewish crowd. This mob didn't like what Paul had to say, and so the next day the Roman commander brought Paul to trial before the Jewish religious leaders: the Pharisees and Sadducees. Now we often think of the Pharisees and Sadducees as the “bad guys” in Scripture, but this is not how the people in Paul's day viewed them. These religious leaders were seen as godly, spiritual men known for doing good works. However, as we will see in today's story, while these men seemed good on the outside, they were not so holy on the inside.

When Paul got to the trial, he was excited for the chance to defend himself and explain the Gospel to these important men, but as soon as he started talking, the high priest ordered someone to smack him in the face. Clearly these men didn't want to hear what he had to say! They wanted to get rid of this man who told people to follow Jesus rather than them. In response, Paul called the high priest a whitewashed wall—a wall that is beautiful on the outside, but hides a much darker reality inside. Basically, Paul was saying that even though the people thought these men were righteous, God saw the wickedness of their hearts.

Paul realized that these men weren't going to listen to what he had to say, so he started talking about something the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed on: the resurrection. The Pharisees believed that people are resurrected and go to heaven or hell when they die, but the Sadducees didn't, and Paul's comments led to a huge fight! Paul had to be removed from that room and returned to where the soldiers were keeping him.

In the Gospels, Jesus also criticized the Pharisees and Sadducees. He called them hypocrites (people who pretend to be one thing but are really another) who did good deeds for the wrong reasons. They would pray long prayers, donate lots of money, and do good deeds not because they wanted to please God, but so that people would look at them and admire how holy they were (see Matthew 6:1-18). They were prideful men who cared more about what other people thought about them than what God thought about them.

The Pharisees and Sadducees should serve as a warning to all of us. While it's important to do good things, the reason we should do them is to please the Lord, not to look spiritual in front of other people. God doesn't just see our actions. He knows our hearts and sees our motivations for doing things. We should do good things, but we should do them because they are right and please God, not because they look good in front of other people.

Questions for Young Children:

What did most people think the Pharisees and Sadducees were like? What were they actually like?

What did the high priest tell someone to do to Paul?

Does God care about our actions, our hearts, or both?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Read Matthew 6:1-18. According to Jesus, what was the problem with what the Pharisees and Sadducees (whom He refers to as “hypocrites”) were doing? What should we do instead?

Have you ever done a good thing for a bad reason (for example, in order to make other people think you are godly)? Why is that wrong?

Plans and Promises

Scripture: Acts 23:11-35

Memory Verse: Romans 8:31

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

For My Family:

It had been a difficult few days for Paul. He had been attacked by a mob in Jerusalem, captured by the Romans, and given an unfair trial by the Pharisees and Sadducees. He tried to share the Gospel twice, first to the mob and then to the religious leaders, but neither time was his message received. This must have been a challenging time, but the Lord came to Paul that night and encouraged him, telling him that he would get the chance to share the Gospel in Rome (Acts 23:11). This message did more than simply lift Paul's spirits. It was a promise that no matter what happened to him, he would make it to Rome and be able to share the Gospel there.

It didn't take long for this promise to be put to the test. A group of over forty Jewish men plotted to kill Paul. The plan was to trick the Roman soldiers into bringing Paul to the chief priests for another trial. Once the Romans brought Paul out, the men were going to ambush him and kill him. They were so committed to this plan that they all made a promise not to eat or drink anything until they got him. They were serious! It seemed like they would surely succeed, but there was one problem with their plan: God had a different plan.

Now Paul's sister heard about this plot, and she sent her son to warn him. Paul called one of the soldiers, and the soldier brought the boy to the Roman commander. Paul's nephew explained the entire plot, so the commander assigned 470 soldiers to guard Paul on his journey to Caesarea. There, he would stand trial not before the Jewish religious leaders, but before the Roman governor, Felix. The commander wrote a letter to Felix explaining why he had sent Paul to him, and Felix agreed to hear the case. Imagine the looks on the faces of those forty men who had planned to kill Paul when they saw almost 500 soldiers guarding him. They didn't stand a chance! God had protected him.

God promised that Paul would preach the Gospel in Rome, and so nothing could prevent that from happening. It didn't matter if forty thousand men were in on the plot. God's promises cannot be stopped! The Bible is filled with promises God made to people, families, countries, and even the whole world, and not one of those promises has ever been broken. God has made promises to us as well. He promises to always be with us, that nothing can separate us from His love, and that He will come again for us so that we can be with Him forever. Not one promise of God has ever been broken, and so we can trust that all His promises to us will come true as well.

Questions for Young Children:

What did the Lord tell Paul to encourage him?

What did the forty men plan to do?

How did God protect Paul?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Unbelievers might say about this story that Paul got lucky and that God had nothing to do with Paul being rescued. How would you respond?

What are some other examples in Scripture of promises God made that came true, even when it seemed impossible?

What promises has God made for us today?

The Dangers of Procrastination

Scripture: Acts 24

Memory Verse: John 16:8

“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

For My Family:

Let's take a moment to review how Paul came to stand before Felix, the Roman governor. It all started with a lie. Soon after Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went to the temple, where he was accused of taking a Gentile beyond a wall that separated Jews from Gentiles. The crowd erupted into an angry mob that tried to kill Paul. He was rescued by the Romans and would remain a prisoner of Rome until the end of the book of Acts with a promise from the Lord that he would go to Rome. Paul's words were rejected by the crowd, and the Sanhedrin wouldn't even hear what he had to say. So now he stood on trial before Felix, the Roman governor. Felix the procrastinator.

Do you know what a procrastinator is? It is someone who puts things off until later. Maybe you have done that with chores or homework. It never ends well. Felix is one of the Bible's most well-known procrastinators. Felix listened to Paul and was curious to hear more. Felix and his wife both sat and listened to Paul talk about the importance of having faith in Jesus Christ. Paul talked to them about righteousness, self-control, and warned them that Jesus would come again to judge the world. As Paul spoke, Felix became afraid, for he was a wicked man, but instead of giving his life to Jesus, he told Paul to go away until there was a more convenient time. Sadly, that time would never come. Felix would be replaced by Festus, who we will meet in the next chapter. There is no doubt that God loved Felix very much. He is not willing that any should perish! God gave him every opportunity to believe in Him, but Felix decided to procrastinate. He kept putting salvation off until it was too late.

The Bible says, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). If you aren't a follower of Jesus, don't procrastinate. The time is now! But for those of us who do follow Jesus, there is also a valuable lesson to learn about procrastination. People put off doing all kinds of things for all kinds of reasons: pride, anger, laziness, inconvenience, etc. For example, God's word tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger (Ephesians 4:26). This means that if you are angry with someone, go to them and try to make it right before the day is over. Another example might be that if you have wronged someone, go and ask for forgiveness immediately. Every time we read God's Word, we are given the opportunity to take action, or to put sometime off. God calls us to obey Him, seek Him, and share His message with others now. We don't know if there will be a later. He is coming soon! There will never be a better or a more convenient time to follow and live for Him than right now.

Questions for Young Children:

What does “procrastinate” mean?

Who procrastinated in today’s story?

Have you ever put something off/not done something right away?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Why do you think Felix sent Paul away?

Why do people procrastinate?

Is there anything that you have been putting off that you need to go and do?

A Man of Integrity

Scripture: Acts 25:1-12

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 2:15

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

For My Family:

At the end of Acts 24, we read that Paul was in custody for two years after his trial before Felix. At the end of that time, Felix was replaced by a new governor named Festus. However, while there was a new governor in charge, little else had changed about Paul's situation. He was still a prisoner. The Jews still wanted to get rid of him. We even read in Acts 25:3 that they were still plotting to kill him, asking Festus to bring him to Jerusalem so that they could ambush him. But despite all these difficulties Paul faced, there was something else that hadn't changed: God's promise that Paul would get the chance to preach the Gospel in Rome.

Festus didn't fall for the religious leaders' plot to ambush Paul, but he did want to figure out why the Jews wanted to kill him, so he arranged for Paul to be put on trial again so that he could decide the case. Festus invited the chief priests to Caesarea, and they accused Paul of many serious crimes, but without any proof. Paul again argued that he had broken neither the laws of Rome nor the laws of the Old Testament and that he was innocent of everything they were saying. Still, Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor, so he asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and be put on trial there. Paul likely knew this was a trap, so he did something that he had the right to do as a Roman citizen: he asked to go to the emperor in Rome, the most powerful ruler in the world, and make his case there. Festus declared that Paul would indeed be sent to Rome to go on trial before the emperor.

Paul was unafraid to stand before Festus because he knew that he had done nothing wrong. He made sure to always do what was right and follow the laws of those who were in authority over him. Of course that doesn't mean he never sinned, but he did make it his aim always to do good and obey the rules. Another word for this is integrity. Because Paul lived with integrity, he knew that the religious leaders couldn't prove what they were saying because he hadn't done any of it. Even if Festus had believed them and Paul was punished, he knew that God was the true Judge who knows all truth, and He would judge Paul with justice. As believers, we also should live with integrity. That means obeying the authorities that God has placed over us, such as parents, teachers, and other adults, and doing our best to do the right thing at all times. When we live with integrity, we don't have to fear getting in trouble because we have done nothing wrong. Even if we do get in trouble, when we have integrity we know that God will make all things right in the end.

Questions for Young Children:

Did Paul really do the bad things the chief priests accused him of?

Who did Paul ask Festus to send him to?

What authorities has God given you to obey?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

What does the word “integrity” mean?

Why do you think Paul asked to go to Rome?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17. According to these verses, what will happen if we have integrity in front of unbelievers? (Note: In these verses, “Gentiles” refer to unbelievers.)

Before Governors & Kings

Scripture: Acts 25:13-26:32 (Matthew 10:16-20)

Memory Verse: Matthew 10:19

“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak.”

For My Family:

The rest of Acts 25 records a meeting between Festus and Agrippa. Festus needed to give a report to Caesar about the accusations brought against Paul, and so far he didn't have any real evidence that Paul did anything wrong (because he didn't). You don't just send someone to stand on trial before the most powerful man in the world for no reason, so Festus recruited the help of King Agrippa, who was more familiar with the Jews and their customs. This is King Herod Agrippa II. His great-grandfather was the Herod who spoke to the wise men and tried to get rid of Jesus after He was born, his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded, and his father was responsible for the death of the apostle James. The Herod family was no stranger to the recent history of the Jews concerning Jesus and His followers, and it was before King Agrippa that Paul was brought to tell his story (Acts 26).

Try to picture the scene in your mind. There sat King Agrippa, in “great pomp.” This means he was richly dressed and stood out as someone who is very important and powerful. He was sitting in a large room surrounded by other important and powerful people, when the door suddenly opened, and there appeared someone in the doorway not looking very important or powerful at all, but things aren't always what they seem. God is not impressed with the outward appearance, but with our hearts. The talking stopped and the room fell silent as all eyes turned to see the apostle Paul being led through the door by Roman guards. The only sound in the room was the rattle of Paul's chains as he walks. Agrippa then invited Paul to speak, and Paul began to give his testimony.

Isn't that amazing? Paul was a prisoner, but his imprisonment presented him with the opportunity to share the Gospel with these men that he may have never met as a free man. It was all a part of God's perfect plan, not just for Paul, but for Agrippa and everyone else in the room that day. As we faithfully follow and live for Jesus, He will give us opportunities to share the Gospel with all kinds of people. Some may be wealthy. Others may be poor. Some may have already heard about Jesus (like Agrippa), while others may not know anything about Him. Some may think you we crazy (like Festus did Paul), while others may hear what we have to say. God does have a plan for you, but it's important to remember that you are also a part of His plan for someone else. He planned for you to be in your family. Out of all the places in the world you could have grown up, He chose right here. Out of all the times in history, He chose you to be alive right now! His plan is perfect! Wherever you are, He put you there to share the Gospel with those around you. Pray for an opportunity to do that today!

Questions for Young Children:

Why was Paul a prisoner?

Who did Festus invite to hear the apostle Paul?

What did King Agrippa do after he heard Paul's story?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

Have you ever shared the Gospel with someone? How might you do that?
(Imagine that someone comes up to you and asks you, "Why do I need Jesus?")

You might give the testimony of what God has done in your own life. What is your testimony?

Why don't we have to worry about what we will say if we stand before governors and kings for the following Jesus? (Answer in Matthew 10)

Journey to Rome

Scripture: Acts 27:1-38

Memory Verse: Proverbs 3:5

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;”

For My Family:

The last few years had been crazy for Paul. He had been attacked by a mob in Jerusalem, taken prisoner, put on trial before two different governors, and appealed to have his case heard before Caesar. Through it all, he held on to God’s promise that he would preach the Gospel in Rome. Because Paul had appealed to Caesar, Governor Festus sent him to Rome so that he could stand trial. Today we read about his journey.

Paul and some other prisoners were put on a boat to Rome under the command of a centurion named Julius. The boat reached a place called Fair Havens on the island of Crete late in the fall, and there Julius had a decision to make. It was dangerous to sail in the winter, and so Paul recommended that they stay at Fair Havens until the spring, but the sailors wanted to go a little further before stopping for the winter. Now Julius liked Paul and had formed a bond with him, but he listened to the sailors’ advise instead of Paul’s. After all, it didn’t make sense to listen to a prisoner rather than professional sailors. However, this decision proved to be a disaster, and the boat was caught in a massive storm. For three days the boat was tossed around in the sea, and the crew had to throw all the cargo overboard.

Even though the men hadn’t listened to Paul and even though they were in a storm, Paul was not afraid. God had promised him that he would preach the Gospel in Rome, and so nothing could keep that from happening. He told everyone else onboard that even though they had ignored his advice, God had sent an angel to promise that they would all make it off the boat alive. They continued their journey, sailing for almost two weeks before reaching land. During that time, Paul had gone from a prisoner on board to giving Julius advise about what to do. He even warned Julius of some sailors who were trying to escape.

From a worldly perspective, Julius’ choice to listen to the sailors rather than Paul made a lot of sense. After all, who would you listen to for advise about sailing, a sailor or a prisoner? The problem was, Paul’s message was really from the Lord, and so Julius wasn’t actually rejecting Paul’s word, but the Lord’s. We should learn from his mistake and follow the Lord’s commands, even when they don’t make sense to us or someone tells us that we should do something different. Despite Julius’ bad choice, God was merciful to him and the rest of the crew. He had made a promise to Paul that he would make it to Rome, but the Lord didn’t have to rescue any of the others. Yet God showed mercy for Paul’s sake and saved not just Paul, but everyone on board. Even when we make mistakes, our God is merciful.

Questions for Young Children:

What did Paul say Julius should do? What did the sailors say?

What happened to the boat when they decided to keep sailing?

When people tell us to do one thing but God commands us to do something else, who should we listen to?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

If you were in Julius' position, who would you have listened to? Why?

Why do you think the Lord decided to have mercy on Julius and the sailors?

Have you ever been in a situation where something seemed like the smart thing to do, but it wasn't what God's Word said? What did you do?

Shipwrecked

Scripture: Acts 27:39-28:10

Memory Verse: Proverbs 16:9

“A man’s heart plans his ways,
But the LORD directs his steps.”

For My Family:

After two weeks of being lost at sea and tossed around by a violent storm, the ship Paul was traveling on was finally in sight of land, but as they made for the shore, their ship got stuck on a sandbar. The waves were so big and powerful they began to beat the ship to pieces like a battering ram and everyone had to abandon ship. Those who couldn’t swim used broken boards to keep themselves afloat as they made their way to shore. As always, God’s promise proved to be true (they always will). All 276 passengers had survived. God had also promised Paul that he would go to Rome, but that didn’t keep the enemy from trying to stop him. Paul went from one danger to another. The journey was far from easy-going. But even though dangers come, God’s will is always the safest place for us to be.

Paul had escaped the storm at sea, but as he was gathering sticks to add to the fire a poisonous snake jumped out and bit his hand! The natives on the island immediately came to the conclusion that Paul must be a criminal and was getting what he deserved, but when he didn’t die, they changed their minds and decided that he must surely be a god. This reminds us of the crowd at Lystra back in Acts 14 who also declared Paul and Barnabas to be gods. We can imagine how Paul reacted. He didn’t accept those claims. Instead, he pointed them to the true and living God.

God’s purposes for the storm soon became clear. While Paul was staying at Publius’ house, he prayed for and healed his father, who had been very sick. Word quickly spread across the island and everyone who was sick came and was healed! If they thought Paul was a god after shaking off the snake, they must have really believed he was after he began to heal the sick, but we have read enough about Paul to know how he would react to this.

No doubt as people were healed, Paul told them about Jesus, the Son of the only true God who had also healed many people during His earthly ministry. It was this God who was responsible for healing them now! Surely Paul told them that it was God who had brought him to Malta so they could learn that God wanted to heal more than their physical bodies. He wanted them to know their sins could be washed away through Jesus’ death and resurrection! I’m sure we will meet many of those natives in heaven one day. They can fill in the missing details for us when we see them, but for now, be sure to keep your eyes open when things don’t go as planned. Don’t complain. Pray! God wants to use the things we would call inconveniences for His glory and purposes.

Questions for Young Children:

What happened when Paul was putting the sticks in the fire?

What did the natives think about Paul when he didn't die?

Why did God bring Paul to the island of Malta?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

We know that God has His plans and purposes in every situation, even shipwrecks! How should that affect us when we don't like our circumstances?

We are in a spiritual war. There is an enemy. How should this affect how we live each day?

Why don't you think we see as many miracles today as we see in the Bible?

Paul In Rome

Scripture: Acts 28:11-31 (also see 2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 2:14

“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.”

For My Family:

After spending the winter in Malta, Paul was once again on his way to Rome. Some Christians heard that Paul was coming and went to meet and welcome him as he was getting closer to the city, which was a great encouragement to Paul. We should always be on the lookout to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. There are so many things that can discourage us in the world. Our words are powerful. There are a lot of hearts that are heavy with worry, anxiety, and fear, but Proverbs tells us that a good word makes the heavy heart glad (Proverbs 12:25). Maybe you can encourage a missionary family today! Head over to <http://missions.ccpilly.org/supported-missionaries/> to learn how.

As God had promised (Acts 23:11; 27:24), Paul finally arrived in Rome. He met with the Jewish leaders and told them his story. The Jews who had originally accused Paul never sent word to Rome, but these Romans Jews had at least heard of the recent spread of Christianity. Paul talked with them from morning until night about who Jesus was and how the Old Testament pointed to His coming. This created division and arguing among the Jews, as it had in other cities. Some believed and some did not. Paul quoted Isaiah and told them that some people hear but don't understand, and some see but don't perceive. Jesus tells us in the parable of the sower that this is because some people have hard hearts that won't receive God's Word, and John 3:19 says that men love darkness rather than light. They don't want to turn from their sin because they enjoy doing bad things! We are reminded that only God can transform people's hearts and draw them to Himself (John 6:44).

During the two years Paul was a prisoner of Rome he wrote Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Though we aren't told in Acts, it is believed that after Paul stood before Caesar Nero, he was released and continued to travel and share the Gospel until he was imprisoned by Rome a second time. During his second imprisonment he was not given the same freedom as before, and many of the Christians who were a help to him abandoned him. It was during this time that he wrote the letters to Timothy and Titus.

History tells us that sometime around AD 67, Nero had Paul put to death, but the story of Acts (God's story) continues. The Gospel has spread all over the world and still transforms lives today! God is working through you and me and Christians all around the world! Like Paul, everywhere we go, we give off the fragrance of Christ. Some receive it, and others reject it, but our goal remains the same: to live for Jesus day by day, share His love with the world around us, and to one day stand before Him and hear Him say, “Well done!”

Questions for Young Children:

What was Paul's reaction when the Christians met him on his way to Rome?

Paul preached the Gospel, not only to the Jews, but to who else?

Did God's work stop after Paul died?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

How did the Jewish leaders in Rome react to Paul's testimony?

What does it mean to have a hard heart and how can we guard our own hearts from growing hard?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 and explain what it means to be the fragrance of Christ. What do you think it means to be the aroma of life to some and the aroma of death to others?

Faithful to the End

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6-22 (also see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 4:8

“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

For My Family:

The last written words of Paul are found in his second letter to Timothy, which was written during his second imprisonment in Rome. This was different from his first imprisonment, when he was able to rent a house and have a lot of company. Now he was alone and in need. Prisoners back then were dependent on the support of friends and family to provide what they needed, like food and clothing. If no one was able to bring these things to Paul, the guards would just let him die! So he asked Timothy to come quickly, because Demas had left him and the only company he had left was Luke. He also wanted to be sure to get his cloak before winter came. Paul was a man with needs just like us! But take note that he wasn't complaining. His eyes were fixed on his upcoming departure.

It is a very hard and sad thing when someone we love dies. But as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, we don't sorrow as those who have no hope. As a matter of fact, Paul refers to death in that letter as sleep, as Jesus did with Jairus' daughter. Here, he refers to his death as his "departure." If you go to an airport, there will be a whole list of dates and times for upcoming "departures," flights that are leaving to go somewhere else. As followers of Jesus, we too will depart one day. Death is not the end. In many ways, it's only the beginning. Yet everything we do here and now will affect what our lives will be like in eternity. This is why we should strive to, like Paul, fight the good fight. To run the race well. To keep the faith! One day we will depart to be with the Lord, and when we see Him, He will give a crown of righteousness to all those who have love His appearing. What a day that will be!

Paul wasn't perfect, but he fought hard and ran well, even when the people around him didn't. He was able to do this, not because he was strong, but because what strength he had was found in Jesus: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Even when no one else stood with him, he could go on living for the Lord, knowing that the Lord stood with him and strengthened him. Not only that, but the Lord delivered him from every evil work and preserved him for the heavenly kingdom. At the very end, Paul had no words of praise for himself. He knew that if it hadn't been for the Lord's help, he couldn't have done any of the incredible things he did for the Lord. God calls us to follow Him, but He also gives us the help we need to do so. Never forget that you need Him, and when you feel alone, know that He stands with you and will give you strength.

Questions for Young Children:

What did Paul want Timothy to bring to him?

Why did Paul call his death a departure? Where was he going to depart to?

Was Paul ever alone? Who stood with him, even when his friends left?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

How is being a Christian like running a race and fighting a fight?

Running and fighting are active things. What does this teach us about what our lives as followers of Jesus should look like?

What does it mean and look like to “love His (Jesus’) appearing?”