



SUMMER
09

AUGUST 02, 2026

LESSON TEXT
Acts 26:11-29

FOCUS VERSES
Acts 26:16-18
¹⁶But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;
¹⁷Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,
¹⁸To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT
Being in covenant with God gives us a testimony to share with our world.

Paul's Testimony

I WILL
SHARE MY
TESTIMONY
WITH MY
WORLD.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Near the end of the apostle Paul's teaching and preaching, he was arrested on false charges and put on trial. During the trial, he appealed to have his case heard in Rome, giving him an opportunity to share his testimony with Caesar himself. Paul believed the gospel was powerful enough to invite the most powerful man in the world into covenant with God. No one is beyond His reach.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: Describe a time when someone changed your mind on an issue and how they persuaded you.

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to Paul's testimony attempting to persuade his questioners while he was on trial for preaching the gospel.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. PAUL'S TESTIMONY

A. Paul and Festus

DISCUSS: *If you have been falsely accused, how do you maintain your innocence and Christian witness at the same time?*

B. Paul's Message to Agrippa and Festus

C. I will fulfill my part of God's covenant by testifying to others.

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Luke recorded Paul's testimony before Agrippa even though Agrippa was not fully persuaded?*

II. FROM PAUL'S OLD LIFE TO THE NEW COVENANT

A. Paul's Transformation

DISCUSS: *In what specific ways has Jesus Christ transformed your life?*

B. I will share how Jesus transformed my life. **V**

DISCUSS: *What strategies have you found to be most effective for sharing the gospel with others?*

III. THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

A. Forgiveness of Sin

B. Repentance

C. I will teach Bible studies about the new birth.

DISCUSS: *How can you develop confidence to share your testimony and teach Bible studies?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to give us opportunities to witness to others
- For God to give us boldness to share our story

LESSON CONNECTION

1 “This product gives relief from asthma, cough, bronchitis, hay fever, influenza, and shortness of breath. It treats head colds, canker sores, and even bad breath. A product as pure as the water you drink, it is recommended by a medical doctor to those who are interested in keeping or regaining physical fitness.” These advertisements aren’t for cold medicine, cough drops, or the fountain of youth. Instead, they are all slogans from cigarette ads between 1881 and 1931. It may come as a surprise to many that for years, cigarettes were promoted as a health product and recommended by many paid physicians (cbsnews.com, “Outrageous vintage cigarette ads”).

Today virtually all adult Americans are aware of the health hazards associated with tobacco use. However, a decrease in cigarette use and a general turn in public opinion were not the consequence of a single exposing moment. The change was a slow trickle, about fifty years in the making. Beginning in the 1950s, some medical experts asserted that smoking led to health conditions such as cancer. Tobacco companies won most of the lawsuits that followed these claims and largely held their ground until the 1990s. Over the years, more medical studies accumulated and documents were leaked indicating that tobacco companies were aware of the dangerous and addictive nature of their products.

Several groundbreaking trials pushed the case forward. In 1998 attorney generals from forty-six states alleged that tobacco companies promoted hazardous products with deceptive marketing tactics, leading to a massive settlement and the outlawing of false advertising. The next year the US Department of Justice sued several major tobacco companies for fraudulent practices and deceptive marketing techniques that minimized the health risks for users. The case took six years of litigation and nine months of trial, but the companies were eventually found liable. The research and trials against big tobacco have continued to advance, and change has been the collaborative work of a multitude of witnesses (expertinstitute.com, “Expert Witnesses in High-Profile Litigation”).

We often associate the word *trial* with difficult seasons and circumstances, like loss, sickness, or grief. In Acts 26 we will witness Paul on trial for his preaching. In that case a trial denotes being questioned about an accusation. In both cases a trial is an opportunity to bear witness. When we are tested by troubles, troublesome people, or tense situations, it often feels as if our faith is being interrogated.

At times our testimony can seem insignificant or ineffective, almost persuading others instead of fully persuading them. However, our testimony contributes to the slow, progressive work of calling and transformation in the lives of others. Our voice joins in harmony with the voice of the Spirit and a host of believers to call others to a new life in Christ. Like the apostle Paul, our sermon will not always succeed, but the reach of our trial and our testimony is far beyond the moment.

BIBLE LESSON

I. PAUL'S TESTIMONY

A. Paul and Festus

The high priests and Jewish leaders brought Paul before Festus, the governor of Judea, hoping he would send Paul to Jerusalem so they could ambush and kill him. Instead, Festus kept Paul at Caesarea and gave him a fair hearing, calling for the Jewish leaders to meet him and make their case there. The Jewish leaders and their lawyer, Tertullus, came from Jerusalem and made many serious false accusations against Paul, which they were unable to prove. Paul responded that he had not committed any offense against the Law, the Temple, or Caesar. He maintained he was innocent of all their charges.

Festus was hoping to secure favor with the Jews, so he asked if Paul wished to be tried in Jerusalem (Acts 25:9). Instead, Paul appealed to Caesar, restating what Festus already knew: Paul had not done anything wrong to the Jews. Rather than facing the biased council at Jerusalem, Paul chose to face the Roman legal system as a Roman citizen, possibly believing that a Gentile court would be neutral in a matter of a religious disagreement. Through his appeal Paul was spared from the murderous plot of the Jewish leaders and granted the opportunity to testify before high-ranking Roman officials. Soon afterward, the Jewish king named Herod Agrippa II visited Festus and, hearing about Paul's situation, requested to hear Paul's defense.

DISCUSS: *If you have been falsely accused, how do you maintain your innocence and Christian witness at the same time?*

B. Paul's Message to Agrippa and Festus

In Acts 26 we read about Agrippa's interaction with Paul. Paul was happy to share his testimony with Agrippa, a man informed about Jewish customs and traditions. Paul began by establishing his background as a reputable and devout Jew. Not only was he part of the strictest sect of Judaism, the Pharisees, but he was zealous in persecuting Christians, operating under the authority of the chief priests. As someone with an "insider perspective," Paul emphasized that the resurrection of Jesus was the natural conclusion of the Jewish Scriptures, not a contradiction to them. Instead of being judged for real crimes against the Jews, Paul stated, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" (Acts 26:6). Paul's gospel message was biblically-grounded, not self-invented.

Though Paul was defending his innocence, he did not miss an opportunity to shift the focus from himself to Jesus. After sharing his miraculous conversion experience, he proclaimed Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises. Paul then directly invited Agrippa to profess faith, saying, "Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27). Paul gave an altar call to Herod

Agrippa II, hoping he would put all his faith in Jesus Christ. However, Agrippa hesitated and sadly confessed: “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

C. I will fulfill my part of God’s covenant by testifying to others.

Because God has brought us into covenant with Himself through His sacrifice on Calvary, we are His covenant people. He has called us to proclaim the praises of the one who brought us “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Terms like *holy*, *unique*, *special*, and *chosen* are no longer exclusive to the children of Israel; these terms now apply to all the children of God. We are saved from sin and for the purpose of bearing witness to God’s work in our lives. Like Paul seized the moment, shared his story, and called Agrippa by name, we must take advantage of opportunities to witness and personally connect with others as we share our testimony with them.

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Luke recorded Paul’s testimony before Agrippa even though Agrippa was not fully persuaded?*

II. FROM PAUL’S OLD LIFE TO THE NEW COVENANT

A. Paul’s Transformation

From the devoted to the defiant, our testimony is as unique as we are. Paul witnessed to self-righteous Jews and wild Gentiles. Both came from different perspectives and both needed to encounter the power of Jesus. As a promising young Pharisee, Paul was exceedingly zealous for his religious tradition and adamantly opposed to the message of Jesus (Galatians 1:14). He was sincere and persuaded, but he was still wrong.

One day Jesus supernaturally visited Paul on the road to Damascus, with beaming light, a voice from heaven, and sudden blindness. Jesus even called Paul by name (Saul, at the time), so he knew Almighty God knew exactly where he was and what he was doing. In his letter to the churches in the region of Galatia, Paul confessed that the extent of his persecution against the church was “beyond measure” (Galatians 1:13). Though Paul once “made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women . . . to prison,” he eventually testified of the gospel “both to small and great” (Acts 8:3; 26:22).

Paul asserted that God had called him from his mother’s womb to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Though Paul’s lifestyle was completely opposed to his calling, his encounter with Jesus brought him into alignment with God’s purpose. Convinced of the calling on his life, Paul did not seek out human opinions or affirmation from other apostles. Rather, he developed his ministry away from the Jerusalem spotlight. Paul’s authority to preach the gospel did not come from his personal connections; it came from a genuine transformational encounter with Jesus. He could not change his past, but he could and did surrender his past to God’s great mercy.

After his encounter with Jesus, Paul was able to testify from a place of integrity. Paul did not try to avenge himself of the persecution he faced from his Jewish brothers and former Temple associates. Throughout the trial, Paul maintained that he was innocent and had lived above their false accusations. The best charge they could lay against

him was a lie. Paul's friends and foes had to acknowledge a change in his life. When the churches of Judea heard that the former persecutor now preached the faith he once destroyed, they glorified God because of Paul (Galatians 1:23–24). Likewise, our testimony is most effective when our character is consistent with our message.

DISCUSS: *In what specific ways has Jesus Christ transformed your life?*

B. I will share how Jesus transformed my life.

Evangelism techniques and formats are abundant—ranging from street preaching, to door knocking, to social media posts, to the classic church card handout, to inviting your Sunday server at lunch. We can engage the lost using diverse methods to reach different people in different communities. While there is value in the simple act of inviting others to church, our personal testimony has the greatest impact on others. Often the best way to share our story and make a disciple is to practice hospitality and make friends. When we invite people into our lives, sharing God's goodness and genuinely caring for them, we can see the long-term impact of our testimony at work. V

DISCUSS: *What strategies have you found to be most effective for sharing the gospel with others?*

III. THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

A. Forgiveness of Sin

As Paul stood before Agrippa, Paul testified of God's power to forgive sin. Paul stated that God had sent him to the Gentiles to "open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). God delivered Paul to bring deliverance to others.

Sin is the failure to align with God's intended purpose for us. We sin when we transgress God's high moral standard. It is a universal problem, for Paul stated: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). When we testify about God's forgiveness, we do so with humility, acknowledging we need God's grace. Sin destroys our relationship with God, but because Jesus died for our sins, that broken relationship can be restored. We receive God's forgiveness by responding to His mercy in repentance.

B. Repentance

Like Jesus, Paul preached repentance as the only fitting response to God's grace. Repentance involves confessing our sins, but it does not end with a verbal acknowledgment of sin or simply saying "I'm sorry." Repentance is more than an apology; it is a revolution of the heart. When we repent, we turn to God and away from behaviors that are offensive to Him. Paul declared the Gentiles should "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20). Our repentance is made evident by behavior that says we have been changed. Without true repentance, we have no testimony of transformation to share, and our witness can come across as false advertising.

When we repent and are baptized in the covenantal name of Jesus, the Lord Himself cleanses us from sin and gives us a clear conscience (1 Peter 3:21). The Holy Spirit enables us to bear the fruit of repentance, the characteristics of a new lifestyle. Those who have entered into the new covenant are not under the condemnation of the Law, but are led by the Spirit to produce “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23). Just as fruit is the natural product of a tree that is well tended, spiritual fruit is not the result of sheer willpower and human effort but is the natural product of abiding in the Spirit.

C. I will teach Bible studies about the new birth.

Sharing our testimony does not have to be intimidating or complicated. Like Paul before Festus and Agrippa, we can tell our own story of transformation and direct others to the Bible to see how it is applied and fulfilled. Paul received help from God to persevere as a witness, despite the resistance he faced for preaching about Jesus. Before ascending into Heaven, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would give the disciples power, and they would be witnesses around the world (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit still empowers and sustains our witness. Alone, we are just another voice in a world of noise, but with the Spirit’s help, our witness will resound.

After sharing our personal testimony, we can call others to repentance and guide them to respond by teaching them a Bible study about the new birth. In repentance, we turn away from sin and to God, who is willing to forgive us. In baptism, our sins are washed away and the name of Jesus is called over us, giving us a new identity. The Holy Spirit is a promise for everyone, allowing us to experience the indwelling presence of God working in and through us (Acts 2:38–39).

DISCUSS: *How can you develop confidence to share your testimony and teach Bible studies?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how all of us have the ability to share our testimony with others, much like the apostle Paul did.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

James Earl Jones was a renowned actor known for his deep, rich voice. But his strength as a performer was once his greatest weakness. For nearly eight years of his childhood, Jones suffered from a severe stutter and was almost completely mute. Embarrassed to be heard, he limited most of his communication to family members and the cows, chickens, and hogs on the family farm.

Jones recalled his humiliation as a child in Sunday school when he would try to read his lessons, only to be met by roars of laughter from the other children. His fear of speaking in public grew, and he virtually gave up trying to speak by the time he was school age. However, a high school teacher motivated Jones to face his fears. Jones recalled: "I had started writing poetry in high school and he said of one of them, 'Jim, this is a good poem. In fact, it is so good I don't think you wrote it. I think you plagiarized it. If you want to prove you wrote it, you must stand in front of the class and recite it by memory.'"

Because the words were his own, Jones survived his personal poetry recitation and began to develop more confidence in speaking as well as an interest in literary

arts. With time and practice, Jones learned to control his stutter. During an interview, he stated, "I don't say I was 'cured.' I just work with it" (stutteringhelp.org, "James Earl Jones").

Many people are afraid to share their testimony, silencing themselves because they aren't sure how their words will be received. We do not have to be cured of our nervousness to be an effective witness. Like Jones's first poetry recitation, it becomes easier to speak when we share stories and words that belong to us rather than leaning on someone else's formula. No one else can replicate your voice, and no one else can tell your story of God's grace like you can. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the meekest and weakest among us can be the greatest proclaimers.

Testifying about God's grace starts with sharing our story of transformation. Although we once knew shame, now we see God's glory. Our new lifestyle of holiness confirms what we have witnessed. We then connect our stories to the story of Scripture, pointing to the fulfillment of God's Word in our lives, and we invite others to obey the gospel by teaching them about the new birth.