

# 40 Days through Acts

## Week Six

Each day's guide is broken into three sections, with a special 4<sup>th</sup> section at the end of each week:

1. **The story for the day.** The entire story of Acts has been divided into 6 week's worth of daily stories. Rather than dividing the daily passages into equal lengths, they are divided into logical story units. Some days will be quite short, others a bit longer; but, hopefully, it will always be a manageable length of passage telling a satisfying episode in the life of the church. For your convenience, we've included the text of the story in the *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996). We've found this translation to be in fresh, modern language that has really helped us to do what we most want to do: enter into the story ourselves. As you read the passage, try to read it from the perspective of the disciples and the other people who interact with Jesus. Really get inside the story. What is it like to go through this experience with these early followers of Jesus?
2. **Points of Interest.** This section briefly explores aspects of the day's story that might be especially interesting or potentially confusing. It offers some historical notes and references that might help to interpret the story, frames some of the issues or questions addressed, and gives suggestions of ways to look at the story and what it might mean for us.
3. **Taking it home.** In this section, we offer some suggestions for how the day's reading apply practically to your life and the life of our church. Each day, we will ask 3 questions:
  - a. **What does Jesus want to do through you?**—During these 40 days, we are all asking God for 'a thousand-percent return' on our lives: when we invest our lives in his purposes, he has told us to expect to see the impact and the satisfaction of our lives multiply by a thousand percent. Each day, we will ask ourselves how our passage helps us to understand how to invest well or what we can expect when we do.
  - b. **What does Jesus want to do through your six?**— In the Cambridge Vineyard, we encourage everyone to have a list of six people for whom they are *seeking spiritual blessing*. These six people are local friends, family members, colleagues, and acquaintances who aren't presently actively seeking God, but in whom we see some spiritual interest, or in whose lives we see God at work. Even if you aren't quite sure there is a God yourself, we encourage you to pray for more spiritual blessing for your six, perhaps saying something like, 'God, I'm not even sure you're there, but if you are, please give more peace to my next door neighbors.' Then, watch and see what happens. It can't hurt. If nothing happens, no harm has been done. If something does happen, your six will have more blessing in their lives, and you will have experienced an answer to prayer.

Over the course of this guide, we will see that Acts makes the stunning claim that God not only wants to bless your six, but he has a high calling on them and a big destiny. Each day, we'll consider ways that we can pray for that destiny to be fulfilled in their lives.
  - c. **What does Jesus want to do through our church?**—God not only has big purposes he wants to pursue through each of us, he also has big purposes for us a church. We'll also pray each day that these dreams God has given us as a community will be fulfilled.
4. **Family Devotional Ideas.** At the end of each week's Bible study guide you'll find a paragraph suggesting themes and ideas you can explore with your children ages preschool through middle school at home. They'll be divided into two mini-sections, one for kids approximately ages 2-7 and one for kids approximately ages 8-12. The ideas apply to the entire week's bible text, so to make the most use of these suggestions you'll want to read them at the beginning of each week.

We owe a debt of gratitude in the formation of this guide to C. Peter Wagner's *Acts of the Holy Spirit* (Regal Press, 2000). Over the course of this guide, we will point out insights which come directly from Wagner's commentary; but it also most certainly influenced our thoughts on Acts more broadly in ways we aren't even completely aware of. If you'd like to read more about Acts, this book would be an excellent place to start.

## Monday, April 26th

### Acts 22:30-23:11

<sup>30</sup>The next day the commander freed Paul from his chains and ordered the leading priests into session with the Jewish high council. He had Paul brought in before them to try to find out what the trouble was all about.

<sup>1</sup> Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God in all good conscience!"

<sup>2</sup>Instantly Ananias the high priest commanded those close to Paul to slap him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup>But Paul said to him, "God will slap you, you whitewashed wall! What kind of judge are you to break the law yourself by ordering me struck like that?"

<sup>4</sup>Those standing near Paul said to him, "Is that the way to talk to God's high priest?"

<sup>5</sup>"I'm sorry, brothers. I didn't realize he was the high priest," Paul replied, "for the Scriptures say, 'Do not speak evil of anyone who rules over you.' "

<sup>6</sup>Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were all my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!"

<sup>7</sup>This divided the council--the Pharisees against the Sadducees--<sup>8</sup>for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection or angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all of these. <sup>9</sup>So a great clamor arose. Some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees jumped up to argue that Paul was all right. "We see nothing wrong with him," they shouted. "Perhaps a spirit or an angel spoke to him." <sup>10</sup>The shouting grew louder and louder, and the men were tugging at Paul from both sides, pulling him this way and that. Finally, the commander, fearing they would tear him apart, ordered his soldiers to take him away from them and bring him back to the fortress.

<sup>11</sup>That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have told the people about me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome."

#### Points of Interest:

- God will slap you, you whitewashed wall!—Paul loses his temper here. It turns out he does not realize he is speaking to the high priest. Paul came to Jerusalem hoping for a warm reception and a quick send off to Rome. Instead, he finds himself imprisoned and interrogated by his own people. Paul considered himself completely faithful to his Jewish identity and yet those Jews in power only persecuted him. He may have been even more angry because it seems that none of the Jewish followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, and there was a considerable number of them, came to his aid.
- Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were all my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!—the Pharisees were a powerful minority on the high council and Paul knew that their theology differed with the Sadducees on some important points regarding belief in the resurrection of the dead and the existence of the spiritual world. Paul decided to divide the high council in order to weaken their case against him. His theology has remained the same as the Pharisees on the important point of the resurrection of the dead. He doesn't mention ways that his theology has evolved from there.
- 'Pharisees jumped up to argue that Paul was all right'—Paul strategy works temporarily. The fight that breaks out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees ends with the Romans intervening. Paul must have been very discouraged: he is saved only because his enemies can't agree.
- 'That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul.'—At what must have felt like one of the lowest ebbs in Paul's life, Jesus appears to him in a vision and encourages him in the mission He has given him. This time spent defending himself and waiting to continue with his life's work, the mission to the Gentiles, must have felt extremely frustrating and potentially depressing for Paul.

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* Have you felt thwarted in the plans you feel God has given you? Paul finds himself in a morass of religious and legal accusations that threaten to derail the clear direction God has given him. He is discouraged and angry. He even loses his temper. Jesus' response is to encourage Paul by supernatural visitation. Where do you feel the need for Jesus' supernatural visitation in your attempts to follow God? Cry out to God until you feel His encouragement.
- *Through your six:* Religious bodies often fight over theology and miss what God is actually doing. Your six may think of religion as a courtroom where participants fight over issues of theology. Jesus cares little about the religious debate Paul was caught between, he doesn't even mention it to Paul, instead Jesus encourages Paul to continue in the work of bringing hope to those who have not yet heard about

Jesus. Pray that your six would have the ability to see the difference between religion and the living Jesus who offers real hope.

- *Through our church:* Even though Paul was in the birthplace of the church, where many devout followers of Jesus lived, there seems to be no one around to help him. There is no mention of local believers praying for him. The issues surrounding his arrest, especially the false accusations that Paul was telling Jews they no longer needed to follow the Law, were so divisive in the Jewish community that Paul is left to fend for himself. Perhaps, it was good strategy on the part of the local Jewish believers or perhaps it was fear. Either way, Paul felt abandoned. The greater church in Boston and Cambridge is currently facing the divisive issue of gay marriage. Pray that whatever stances particular churches take on the issue there would be strong efforts put in to continue to communicate and support one another in the common mission to bring Jesus to this area.

## Tuesday, April 27th

### Acts 23:12-35

<sup>12</sup>The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. <sup>13</sup>There were more than forty of them. <sup>14</sup>They went to the leading priests and other leaders and told them what they had done. "We have bound ourselves under oath to neither eat nor drink until we have killed Paul. <sup>15</sup>You and the high council should tell the commander to bring Paul back to the council again," they requested. "Pretend you want to examine his case more fully. We will kill him on the way."

<sup>16</sup>But Paul's nephew heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul. <sup>17</sup>Paul called one of the officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him."

<sup>18</sup>So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

<sup>19</sup>The commander took him by the arm, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

<sup>20</sup>Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the Jewish high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information. <sup>21</sup>But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to jump him and kill him. They have vowed not to eat or drink until they kill him. They are ready, expecting you to agree to their request."

<sup>22</sup>"Don't let a soul know you told me this," the commander warned the young man as he sent him away.

<sup>23</sup>Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get two hundred soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Also take two hundred spearmen and seventy horsemen. <sup>24</sup>Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix." <sup>25</sup>Then he wrote this letter to the governor:

<sup>26</sup>"From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix. Greetings! <sup>27</sup>This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. <sup>28</sup>Then I took him to their high council to try to find out what he had done. <sup>29</sup>I soon discovered it was something regarding their religious law--certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. <sup>30</sup>But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you."

<sup>31</sup>So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. <sup>32</sup>They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the horsemen took him on to Caesarea. <sup>33</sup>When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. <sup>34</sup>He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. "Cilicia," Paul answered.

<sup>35</sup>"I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive," the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters.

#### Points of Interest:

- 'We have bound ourselves under oath to neither eat nor drink until we have killed Paul.'—Paul has clearly hit a raw nerve for a large portion of the Jewish population. For 40 men to take an oath to not eat until they kill him it means that there is a large latent pool of anger that has built up over Paul's commitment to bring Jesus to the Gentiles. It also indicates that up till now the Jewish followers of Jesus in Judea had been able to keep intact their Jewish religious identities. "Christianity" was still a branch of Judaism. Paul's ministry is making it more and more difficult for this to be true.
- 'Paul's nephew heard of their plan'—there is no indication as to how Paul's nephew heard of the plan, but without this information Paul would have most likely been killed that next day. God seems to be orchestrating Paul's rescue.

- 'I soon discovered it was something regarding their religious law--certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death.'—In this letter from the Roman commander Lysius to the Governor Felix there is no formal accusation. Under Roman law this should have led to Paul's immediate release when he arrived. It seems Felix's higher priority is to not want to displease the Jewish religious leaders. This is reminiscent of the Herod's posture towards the religious leadership.

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* As Paul gets older the opposition to him seems to mount. I believe that this mounting Jewish opposition and the complicity of the Roman government to keeping Paul behind bars must be related to evil spiritual opposition to Paul's successful ministry. Paul's calling, his abilities, his focus and his passion could not be higher at this point in his life. He has reached a true life convergence. Even though the consequences of this seem to keep landing him in trouble it actually seems an incredibly inspiring problem to have – his life is so meaningful that whole groups of men are both trying to kill him and save him! If you dare, ask God for a life of such consequence!
- *Through your six:* 'something regarding their religious law'—the charges against Paul appear as religious trivia to the Roman commander. His contact with the religious authorities has not led him to a deeper desire to know the Living God of the Universe, unlike Cornelius' exposure to Judaism (see Acts 10) which does prepares him for an encounter with the Holy Spirit. Pray that your six would experience good religious exposure that could prepare them for an encounter with the Holy Spirit.
- *Through our church:* As our church grows in effectiveness at reaching people in the Cambridge-Boston area pray for spiritual protection against those forces that would want "to kill" God's work and those doing it!

## Wednesday, April 28th

### Acts 24:1-26

<sup>1</sup>Five days later Ananias, the high priest, arrived with some of the Jewish leaders and the lawyer Tertullus, to press charges against Paul. <sup>2</sup>When Paul was called in, Tertullus laid charges against Paul in the following address to the governor:

"Your Excellency, you have given peace to us Jews and have enacted reforms for us. <sup>3</sup>And for all of this we are very grateful to you. <sup>4</sup>But lest I bore you, kindly give me your attention for only a moment as I briefly outline our case against this man. <sup>5</sup>For we have found him to be a troublemaker, a man who is constantly inciting the Jews throughout the world to riots and rebellions against the Roman government. He is a ringleader of the sect known as the Nazarenes. <sup>6</sup>Moreover he was trying to defile the Temple when we arrested him. <sup>8</sup>You can find out the truth of our accusations by examining him yourself." <sup>9</sup>Then the other Jews chimed in, declaring that everything Tertullus said was true.

<sup>10</sup>Now it was Paul's turn. The governor motioned for him to rise and speak. Paul said, "I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, and this gives me confidence as I make my defense.

<sup>11</sup>You can quickly discover that it was no more than twelve days ago that I arrived in Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. <sup>12</sup>I didn't argue with anyone in the Temple, nor did I incite a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city. <sup>13</sup>These men certainly cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing.

<sup>14</sup>"But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy. <sup>15</sup>I have hope in God, just as these men do, that he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. <sup>16</sup>Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else.

<sup>17</sup>"After several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to aid my people and to offer sacrifices to God. <sup>18</sup>My accusers saw me in the Temple as I was completing a purification ritual. There was no crowd around me and no rioting. <sup>19</sup>But some Jews from the province of Asia were there—and they ought to be here to bring charges if they have anything against me! <sup>20</sup>Ask these men here what wrongdoing the Jewish high council found in me, <sup>21</sup>except for one thing I said when I shouted out, 'I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!'"

<sup>22</sup>Felix, who was quite familiar with the Way, adjourned the hearing and said, "Wait until Lysias, the garrison commander, arrives. Then I will decide the case." <sup>23</sup>He ordered an officer to keep Paul in custody but to give him some freedom and allow his friends to visit him and take care of his needs.

<sup>24</sup>A few days later Felix came with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup>As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified. "Go away for now," he replied. "When it is more convenient, I'll call for you again." <sup>26</sup>He also hoped that Paul would bribe him, so he sent for him quite often and talked with him.

### Points of Interest:

- 'you have given peace to us Jews and have enacted reforms for us.'—this was in fact not true. Felix was a particularly brutal governor. Tertullus was the lawyer hired by the Sanhedrin because of his knowledge and savvy regarding the Roman law system. He clearly displays this here.
- 'we have found him to be a troublemaker'—this first charge accuses Paul of leading a political movement of insurrection against the Roman government, something the Roman government watched vigilantly. Ironically, many Jews especially the Pharisees believed that it was their religious duty to politically oppose the Roman government. This charge was of course false and Paul flatly denies it and asks for Tertullus to present evidence which he of course cannot.
- 'But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a sect.'—Paul admits to the charge that he is part of a group of people with a name, but he does not assent to the name given by Tertullus, the Nazarenes. Paul does not consider this a splinter group but believes that followers of Jesus are continuing in the true tradition of Judaism.
- 'Ask these men here what wrongdoing the Jewish high council found in me,'—in the end they have no case against Paul. They can produce no tangible evidence against him.
- 'He also hoped that Paul would bribe him, so he sent for him quite often and talked with him.'—Felix's interest in Paul seems purely selfish. When Paul first talked with him Felix was terrified, Felix was known to live a dissolute life. But, then Felix thought he might get money out of Paul so he kept inviting him to talk.

### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* Integrity—Tertullus and Felix are both great examples of men with no integrity. Tertullus used his knowledge of the Roman system to try and bring about Paul's death through false accusations. Legal traditions dictated that Felix should release Paul as soon as he saw that there were no real accusations against him, but he does not. At work, at home and in society we are constantly tempted to cut deals, to posture, and to hedge the truth for personal advantage. Spend a few minutes asking God to examine your heart. Are there any areas in your life where there is a lack of integrity? What would it look like to pursue integrity knowing that God is the only one who can truly make your life work?
- *Through your six:* Sometimes Christians are accused of letting others "stomp all over them." What does it mean to "turn the other cheek" if not blind submission to attack? Paul here does not let himself get stomped on just for the sake of getting stomped on. He defends himself with integrity and claims every identity both Roman and Jewish that he can to hold up his case. At other times we see Paul heading right into violence. It seems that instead of following a simplistic moral rule, Paul is a man with a mission from Jesus heading straight for the goal he's been given. At times this requires submission to beatings and at other times this means using every means to get out. Pray that your six would come to realize that following Jesus means following a living being with greater purposes rather than submitting to moralistic rules.
- *Through our church:* Felix was only interested in Paul for his own entertainment and for his own gain. He was not open to hearing about Jesus. Pray for the gift of discernment in our church so that as we all interact with those who don't know Jesus we would know the difference between genuine interest and selfish ambition.

## Thursday, April 29th

### Acts 24:27-25:27

<sup>27</sup>Two years went by in this way; then Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in prison.

<sup>1</sup>Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities, he left for Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>where the leading priests and other Jewish leaders met with him and made their accusations against Paul. <sup>3</sup>They asked Festus as a favor to transfer Paul to Jerusalem. (Their plan was to waylay and kill him.) <sup>4</sup>But Festus replied that Paul was at Caesarea and he himself would be returning there soon. <sup>5</sup>So he said, "Those of you in authority can return with me. If Paul has done anything wrong, you can make your accusations."

<sup>6</sup>Eight or ten days later he returned to Caesarea, and on the following day Paul's trial began. <sup>7</sup>On Paul's arrival in court, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem gathered around and made many serious accusations they couldn't prove. <sup>8</sup>Paul denied the charges. "I am not guilty," he said. "I have committed no crime against the Jewish laws or the Temple or the Roman government."

<sup>9</sup>Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked him, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial

before me there?"

<sup>10</sup>But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty. <sup>11</sup>If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"

<sup>12</sup>Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, "Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you shall go!"

<sup>13</sup>A few days later King Agrippa arrived with his sister, Bernice, to pay their respects to Festus. <sup>14</sup>During their stay of several days, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. "There is a prisoner here," he told him, "whose case was left for me by Felix. <sup>15</sup>When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and other Jewish leaders pressed charges against him and asked me to sentence him. <sup>16</sup>Of course, I quickly pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They are given an opportunity to defend themselves face to face with their accusers.

<sup>17</sup>"When they came here for the trial, I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. <sup>18</sup>But the accusations made against him weren't at all what I expected. <sup>19</sup>It was something about their religion and about someone called Jesus who died, but whom Paul insists is alive. <sup>20</sup>I was perplexed as to how to conduct an investigation of this kind, and I asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem. <sup>21</sup>But Paul appealed to the emperor. So I ordered him back to jail until I could arrange to send him to Caesar."

<sup>22</sup>"I'd like to hear the man myself," Agrippa said.

And Festus replied, "You shall--tomorrow!"

<sup>23</sup>So the next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the auditorium with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in. <sup>24</sup>Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and all present, this is the man whose death is demanded both by the local Jews and by those in Jerusalem. <sup>25</sup>But in my opinion he has done nothing worthy of death. However, he appealed his case to the emperor, and I decided to send him. <sup>26</sup>But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no real charge against him. So I have brought him before all of you, and especially you, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. <sup>27</sup>For it doesn't seem reasonable to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"

#### Points of Interest:

- 'Three days after Festus arrived in Caesarea to take over his new responsibilities'—Felix was never able to decide what to do with Paul and after 2 whole years a new governor arrived, one with a much better reputation as an effective administrator. Perhaps, this is why a new way forward is finally found with Paul's case.
- 'But if I am innocent, neither you nor anyone else has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!'—Paul knows the grave danger he is in if he returns to Jerusalem. Festus continues the tradition of indecisive and fearful (of Jewish disapproval) Roman rulers. Paul's only way out is to appeal to Caesar which he knows as a Roman citizen must be taken seriously by the authorities. It's also the way he will finally go to Rome which has been his long held hope for his next mission trip; this is obviously not the way he hoped to get there.
- 'But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no real charge against him.'—Though sending Paul to Caesar provides a solution there is still the small problem of providing a reason. This language is so reminiscent of the words used in Jesus' trial. Paul's life has come to imitate that of Jesus' in striking ways.

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* 'Two years went by in this way'—sometimes we hit periods in following Jesus where nothing seems to change. The hard things in our lives just don't seem to go away and the vision we feel God has given us seems further and further away. If you are in such a place right now get in a small group (if you are not already in one) and share your situation with your group. Ask for prayer. If you are not in such a place pray that God would prepare you for such times by giving you a "marathoner's" approach to following Jesus.
- *Through your six:* God works through these obvious injustices to bring good to Paul's life and to His cause. God alone sustains Paul through this difficult time. Pray that your six would see God's work in areas of injustice in their own lives and in society and that they would experience God working through them to bring good to others.
- *Through our church:* As many in the early church Paul counted it as joy to endure suffering for the sake of Jesus' cause. Pray that our church would grow in rejoicing in suffering and that we would be found worthy to endure persecution. (Did I just write that???)

## Friday, April 30th

### Acts 26

<sup>1</sup> Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You may speak in your defense."

So Paul, with a gesture of his hand, started his defense: <sup>2</sup>"I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, <sup>3</sup>for I know you are an expert on Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently!

<sup>4</sup>"As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion. <sup>6</sup>Now I am on trial because I am looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise made to our ancestors. <sup>7</sup>In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel worship God night and day, and they share the same hope I have. Yet, O king, they say it is wrong for me to have this hope! <sup>8</sup>Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?

<sup>9</sup>"I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

<sup>10</sup>Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many of the believers in Jerusalem to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. <sup>11</sup>Many times I had them whipped in the synagogues to try to get them to curse Christ. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities of foreign lands.

<sup>12</sup>"One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. <sup>13</sup>About noon, Your Majesty, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. <sup>14</sup>We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to fight against my will.'

<sup>15</sup>" 'Who are you, sir?' I asked.

"And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup>Now stand up! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about other times I will appear to you. <sup>17</sup>And I will protect you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am going to send you to the Gentiles, <sup>18</sup>to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'

<sup>19</sup>"And so, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to that vision from heaven. <sup>20</sup>I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must turn from their sins and turn to God--and prove they have changed by the good things they do. <sup>21</sup>Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me. <sup>22</sup>But God protected me so that I am still alive today to tell these facts to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen--<sup>23</sup>that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead as a light to Jews and Gentiles alike."

<sup>24</sup>Suddenly, Festus shouted, "Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!"

<sup>25</sup>But Paul replied, "I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. I am speaking the sober truth. <sup>26</sup>And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak frankly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner! <sup>27</sup>King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do--"

<sup>28</sup>Agrippa interrupted him. "Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?"

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

<sup>30</sup>Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and all the others stood and left. <sup>31</sup>As they talked it over they agreed, "This man hasn't done anything worthy of death or imprisonment." <sup>32</sup>And Agrippa said to Festus, "He could be set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar!"

#### Points of Interest:

- 'Now I am on trial because I am looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise made to our ancestors.'—Paul's theology was centered on living in an in between time. God did two incredible things in raising Jesus from the dead and in pouring out the Holy Spirit on all who believe in His son, but Paul believed that there was much more yet to come. His hope rested on this future – the return of Jesus and His victorious reign on earth.
- 'Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?'—Paul challenges their core assumptions of God's capabilities. Rather than his belief in the resurrection being incredible he confronts them with the absurdity of having a God that couldn't raise the dead.
- 'But God protected me so that I am still alive today to tell these facts to everyone'—Paul believes every moment of his life is pregnant with God directed meaning. He interprets for his enemies why

he is standing there defending himself, he is there for them to have one more chance to believe in the living God.

- 'Paul, you are insane. Too much study has made you crazy!'—Paul's insistence on a living God who raises the dead and has been working throughout history hits something deep in Festus. He shouts out what is a fairly illogical accusation against Paul. Why would too much study make a man insane? It seems Festus can't handle the life-changing implications of Paul's words.
- 'Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains.'—Paul has nothing more to lose. He is on his way to Rome and there is nothing the authorities can do to him. He gives his all and tries to convince these men of power that they need to bow down to Jesus. Agrippa could sense Paul's passion and obvious attempt to convert him. His question right before this statement was most likely a mocking question. Paul's statement given by anyone but Paul could appear arrogant, but Paul is speaking of the matter for which he has paid dearly.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *Through you:* 'But God protected me'—Paul constantly viewed and interpreted his life as one for which God was deeply involved. It's tempting to think that our lives are mundane events with only occasional bursts of meaning. Paul views every moment of his life as a moment God cared about. Pray for God to give you faith to believe in His involvement in your past as well as your future.
- *Through your six:* For God to work through your six there will come a moment where their mindset shifts from thinking that the resurrection from the dead is absurd to believing that it is absurd to believe in any God that could not resurrect the dead. Pray for this paradigm shifting moment for them and for the radical life that will emerge from living the implications of this belief.
- *Through our church:* Its one thing to believe in the idea of the resurrection of the dead, its another to live as if that is true and to pray believing God is still the God who resurrects the dead. Pray that our church would become a center of resurrection power.

## **Saturday May 1st**

### **Acts 27**

<sup>1</sup>When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of an army officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. <sup>2</sup>And Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a boat whose home port was Adramyttium; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province of Asia.

<sup>3</sup>The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends so they could provide for his needs. <sup>4</sup>Putting out to sea from there, we encountered headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland. <sup>5</sup>We passed along the coast of the provinces of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the province of Lycia. <sup>6</sup>There the officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was bound for Italy, and he put us on board.

<sup>7</sup>We had several days of rough sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed down to the leeward side of Crete, past the cape of Salmone. <sup>8</sup>We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. <sup>9</sup>We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for long voyages by then because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.

<sup>10</sup>"Sirs," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on--shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our lives." <sup>11</sup>But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. <sup>12</sup>And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor--a poor place to spend the winter--most of the crew wanted to go to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure.

<sup>13</sup>When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed along close to shore. <sup>14</sup>But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (a "northeaster," they called it) caught the ship and blew it out to sea. <sup>15</sup>They couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale.

<sup>16</sup>We sailed behind a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat that was being towed behind us. <sup>17</sup>Then we banded the ship with ropes to strengthen the hull. The sailors were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor and were thus driven before the wind.

<sup>18</sup>The next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo

overboard. <sup>19</sup>The following day they even threw out the ship's equipment and anything else they could lay their hands on. <sup>20</sup>The terrible storm raged unabated for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.

<sup>21</sup>No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Fair Havens. You would have avoided all this injury and loss.

<sup>22</sup>But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. <sup>23</sup>For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, <sup>24</sup>and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' <sup>25</sup>So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. <sup>26</sup>But we will be shipwrecked on an island."

<sup>27</sup>About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. <sup>28</sup>They took soundings and found the water was only 120 feet deep. A little later they sounded again and found only 90 feet. <sup>29</sup>At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.

<sup>30</sup>Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the prow. <sup>31</sup>But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, "You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard." <sup>32</sup>So the soldiers cut the ropes and let the boat fall off.

<sup>33</sup>As the darkness gave way to the early morning light, Paul begged everyone to eat. "You haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. <sup>34</sup>"Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." <sup>35</sup>Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. <sup>36</sup>Then everyone was encouraged, <sup>37</sup>and all 276 of us began eating--for that is the number we had aboard.

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

<sup>39</sup>When morning dawned, they didn't recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get between the rocks and get the ship safely to shore. <sup>40</sup>So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore. <sup>41</sup>But the ship hit a shoal and ran aground. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.

<sup>42</sup>The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. <sup>43</sup>But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn't let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land, <sup>44</sup>and he told the others to try for it on planks and debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely ashore!

#### Points of Interest:

- 'we set sail for Italy'—Luke has again rejoined Paul to aid him in his journey.
- 'the officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria'—Egypt was known as the breadbasket of the Roman Empire and this ship was bringing grain to Rome. The broad reach of the Roman Empire and the incredible transportation that connected it cannot be underestimated in contributing to the rapid spread of the early followers of Jesus. All roads, at least in that part of the world, did in fact lead to and from Rome. The other helpful element was the role the Roman army played in keeping the peace. This was truly a perfect time in world history for God to bring his Son into the world.
- 'Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it'—it's unclear but probable that Paul heard from God that it was unsafe to proceed. Why else would an evangelist and tentmaker have knowledge helpful to an experienced seaman?
- 'I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on'—shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our lives.—if Paul's words are a prophetic word from God then things do not bode well. In fact, most of what he predicts does come true except the loss of life.
- 'None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down.'—why does the 'danger to our lives' part of the prophecy not come true though the rest does. One possible explanation is that Paul has been praying on behalf of the whole crew that God would spare their lives. It seems that God has answered his prayers (Wagner, 534).
- 'God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.'—this is language that indicates an answer to intercessory prayer and can encourage us in the power of focused prayer.
- 'the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul'—beyond just the goodness of his heart this seems an obvious tactical decision—don't kill the guy who has God on his side!

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* Throughout the bible God describes himself as the God who wants to rescue us from danger and trouble. Paul hears from God in the midst of a life-threatening storm and then through his

faith he saves many others. As we learn to trust God with our biggest fears and problems and put ourselves in a place where only God can make a difference, we will then be used by God to do the same for others. What might God want you to trust him with today? Your money, your future, your relationships?

- *Through your six:* Julius was used by God because of his kind heart to serve Paul in his journey to Rome. God will often use people with open hearts to forward his work. Pray for your six that even as they begin to consider Jesus they will become partners (even if unintentionally) with those pursuing Jesus' cause.
- *Through our church:* Hearing God's voice and allowing it to guide our decisions is not an easy thing to do. Paul's example seems instructive. Tell others what you think God is saying and then pray like crazy for God to act. Even if at first people don't listen soon it's clear who is hearing from God. Pray for an increased desire for God's voice in our church.

## Sunday, May 2nd

### Acts 28

<sup>1</sup>Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. <sup>2</sup>The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us and warm us.

<sup>3</sup>As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, fastened itself onto his hand. <sup>4</sup>The people of the island saw it hanging there and said to each other, "A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." <sup>5</sup>But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed. <sup>6</sup>The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.

<sup>7</sup>Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us courteously and fed us for three days. <sup>8</sup>As it happened, Publius's father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. <sup>9</sup>Then all the other sick people on the island came and were cured. <sup>10</sup>As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people put on board all sorts of things we would need for the trip.

<sup>11</sup>It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island--an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead. <sup>12</sup>Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. <sup>13</sup>From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. <sup>14</sup>There we found some believers, who invited us to stay with them seven days. And so we came to Rome.

<sup>15</sup>The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

<sup>16</sup>When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

<sup>17</sup>Three days after Paul's arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders. He said to them, "Brothers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman government, even though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors. <sup>18</sup>The Romans tried me and wanted to release me, for they found no cause for the death sentence. <sup>19</sup>But when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar, even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people. <sup>20</sup>I asked you to come here today so we could get acquainted and so I could tell you that I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel--the Messiah--has already come."

<sup>21</sup>They replied, "We have heard nothing against you. We have had no letters from Judea or reports from anyone who has arrived here. <sup>22</sup>But we want to hear what you believe, for the only thing we know about these Christians is that they are denounced everywhere."

<sup>23</sup>So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's house. He told them about the Kingdom of God and taught them about Jesus from the Scriptures--from the five books of Moses and the books of the prophets. He began lecturing in the morning and went on into the evening. <sup>24</sup>Some believed and some didn't. <sup>25</sup>But after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: "The Holy Spirit was right when he said to our ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,

<sup>26</sup> `Go and say to my people,  
You will hear my words,  
but you will not understand;  
you will see what I do,

but you will not perceive its meaning.

<sup>27</sup> For the hearts of these people are hardened,  
and their ears cannot hear,  
and they have closed their eyes--  
so their eyes cannot see,  
and their ears cannot hear,  
and their hearts cannot understand,  
and they cannot turn to me  
and let me heal them.'

<sup>28</sup> So I want you to realize that this salvation from God is also available to the Gentiles, and they will accept it."

<sup>30</sup> For the next two years, Paul lived in his own rented house. He welcomed all who visited him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the Kingdom of God with all boldness and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

#### Points of Interest:

- 'they changed their minds and decided he was a god.'—Paul's supernatural resistance to snake bites leads the locals to deify him. The animistic pagan mindset unaffected by monotheistic Judaism leaves plenty of room for many gods and local deities.
- 'Then all the other sick people on the island came and were cured.'—As with many tribal cultures around the world the most effective tool of evangelism is power ministry involving healing and deliverance. This was no small event—it says that *all* were healed. What a day and what a stretch for all of us with a mindset so thoroughly influenced by Western modernistic assumptions of the totality of the natural world.
- 'The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us'—Paul is not the only effective missionary from the early church. The church in Rome is quite strong and clearly sending out its missionaries by this time. This must have been a huge comfort to Paul.
- 'Three days after Paul's arrival, he called together the local Jewish leaders.'—though he can't go to them Paul continues his strategy of preaching to the local Jewish people first.
- 'the only thing we know about these Christians is that they are denounced everywhere.'—a more accurate translation reads 'concerning this sect', which is consistent with the early movements sense that it was simply fulfilling God's purpose for Judaism.
- 'For the hearts of these people are hardened'—Paul is quoting an Old Testament prophet predicting what Paul has now found to be true of many of his own people. Paul must have spoken these words reluctantly and solemnly. What a warning! To think that we can get to a place where our hearts are too hard to receive what God has for us.
- 'this salvation from God is also available to the Gentiles'—the assumption of the day was that Jesus had died for the Jews to inherit the salvation promised by God. The great leap was to include the Gentiles in this salvation which Paul spent his life doing. Its tempting today to believe that salvation is for all those cultures that have been traditionally Christian. Paul would have exhorted us by saying: The salvation from God is also available to \_\_\_\_\_ (name any group of people or any person that does not follow Jesus). There are no boundaries for God's salvation – cultural, political, religious or national. God is actively pursuing every person on earth!

#### Taking it home:

- *Through you:* Paul finished well. Despite harassments, persecution, internal disagreements, abandonment Paul continued to trust God and to push ahead with the mission God had given him. As we end the 40 Days of Faith what will it mean for you to finish well not only this 40 Days but in life. What do you want Jesus to do through you? Ask God once again to sharpened and focus your "1,000 Percent Return Dream" Vision Statement. Examine your statement and ask God to help you live it out.
- *Through your six:* Pray for the condition of your six's hearts. Pray that God would soften their hearts and make them receptive to all that He has for them.
- *Through our church:* As we pursue God's dreams for us individually and corporately pray that God would raise up more and more faithful followers of Jesus willing to give up their lives for God's purposes. Pray that they would do this out of a sense of God's overwhelming goodness to them personally.

#### Week 6 Family Devotional Ideas:

Please see accompanying sheet on Acts table for **Week 6 Family Devotional Ideas**.