

February 19/20, 2022

Paul: Pawn or Participant?

Daring to Be the Church Series

Acts 25:1-22

Pastor Ryan Harmon

Well, what a good thing! What a good thing to make a joyful noise to the Lord together. I don't know about you, but sometimes when I walk into church, sometimes I don't necessarily feel like singing a joyful noise. I was talking with a friend yesterday that has had an incredibly bad week, and I imagine that if he walked in, he might not be feeling like singing a chorus like that. But that is exactly why it's so good that we gather—to be emboldened by the voices of believers next to us, to be reminded of who God is—and that's appropriate for us this morning. It's appropriate for me, because my honest statement to you to begin this morning is that this has been an interesting week. ...it's been an interesting week. Really, it's been an interesting two years, hasn't it? I think it's safe to say that if you look back over the past two years, one thing that you should have become pretty acquainted with, is the idea that our world is very, very complex, isn't it? If the past two years did not impress that upon you, I would hope the past week did. And I'll be honest with you, there are times where, in the midst of that, what I want to do is say, “Can we just rewind the tape? Can we just go back?” As the father of an 11-year-old, a 7-year-old, and a 5-year old, there is a big part of me that wishes we could live in a world that was simple and neat, and clean and easy, instead of increasingly complex. But that's not the world we live in, is it? We live in a world that is becoming more and more complex...more and more complex. And the one thing I can say safely for all of us sitting here this morning is, “If you have breath in your lungs, God has called you to this moment...He has called you to this moment.” So, the question that we have before us as the people of God, as the church—the issues as I see them—are these: In the midst of an increasingly complex and even hostile world, how are we to respond as the people of God? And the second question is this. “Is there yet room for hope...and where do we find that hope?”

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have your Bibles, turn to Acts, Chapter 25. That's where we're going to continue this morning, picking up, of course, right where Bryan left off last week, after Acts 24. I hope, as we've been walking through Acts, especially last week, I hope one of the things that's been impressed upon you is the fact that the first century church lived in an incredibly dark and complex world. All you had to do was listen to Bryan unpack the whole ordeal between Drusilla and Agrippa, and Felix and all these people. I mean—incest! It's just a dark time. Rome was a killing machine. Judea itself, that region, was a breeding ground for political terrorists. That was happening all the time, insurrections. These were dark times. These were difficult times. And sometimes when we think back to that first century, I can start to think of it as pretty antiseptic, pretty clean. But that's not the case at all. The church was growing and flourishing in the midst of an incredibly complex time. One missiologist wrote a book about that early church, and he called it the spontaneous expansion of the church, because that's precisely what was happening. The church was exploding onto the scene in the midst of a culture that hated them, and that gave them zero benefits. It's important for us to remember that as Americans. Historically, and even up to this present moment, the church has grown the most, the church has flourished the most, when it had the least. And that's an important thing for us to remember because God and His Church cannot be stopped. And that's what we've seen on display in the book of Acts.

So you remember last week in chapter 24, we saw Paul before an incompetent proconsul, Felix, and Paul was accused of wrongdoing that he did not do. And in the same way that Jesus' trial before the Roman leaders and the Jewish leaders, was what could easily be called a gross miscarriage of justice, Paul, now twenty-five years later, was experiencing the same type of unjust treatment. The Jewish leaders wanted Paul dead, off the scene, and the Roman proconsul Felix wanted to appease those Jewish leaders. And so, towards the end of his time in office, before Nero removed him, Felix decided just to sit on his hands, and he kept Paul in prison for two years. And in time, Felix was replaced by Festus, a new proconsul. And so Paul once again enters into a new trial with a new Roman leader. That's right where we pick it up in chapter 25, verse 1:

Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him, requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (*at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way*). Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there's anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him." (*NASB, Acts 25:1-5)

So again, like we said, Festus had just become proconsul and a major part of a proconsul's job (a proconsul was essentially like a governor) was to keep the peace, make sure things stayed quiet, make sure things in their little corner of the Roman Empire kind of stayed out of view. The last thing you wanted, if you were a proconsul, was for Nero, or whoever was Caesar, to catch wind of what was going on in your area. You wanted to stay out of view—neither seen nor heard. That was your goal. And so Festus, it appears, was a rather competent proconsul who certainly seems better than Felix. We don't know a lot about him. He only was in office for about two years; he came into office around 59 or 60 AD and then left office in 62, and we don't know exactly why. But we do know, even from this little episode, that he was a pretty efficient leader. He became proconsul, became governor, and immediately went to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish leaders three days later. He got right after it, and he went up to Jerusalem because he knew it was an important part of his job to make sure that what was happening in Jerusalem didn't bother him too much, didn't become too big of a problem for him. So, he essentially went up to Jerusalem to tell these Jewish leaders to behave. And when he got up to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the Jewish leaders had an issue they wanted to address, didn't they? There's this guy named Paul that they wanted to deal with. The Jewish leaders were hoping to take advantage of Festus' newness to the role—maybe his naive approach to things—maybe he didn't know a whole lot about what had happened with Paul. And so they hoped to take advantage of that moment and get Festus to grant them Paul, so they could get him to Jerusalem, either to hold a mock trial or just to kill him along the way. Now we have to stop for a second and say: Paul has been living rent free in the hands of these Jewish leaders for two years! Paul is on house arrest in Caesarea when a new proconsul comes in, and what is the first thing that the Jewish leaders would like to bring before him? "Hey, there's a person that we want. We know he's in jail, essentially, but we still want him."

Last week in my Life Group, we were talking about how we respond when people let us know we are wrong. And we sat and talked a little bit about how, "Oh, we're so good at that, you know, we feel like we're pretty good at that." But then we started talking about how do we respond when someone honks at us when we don't get off the line at a green light quick enough? And of course,

all of us did not like that moment, right? We don't like it when people essentially let us know they aren't too happy with us; they don't care for us too much. It's safe to say these Jewish leaders hated Paul's guts and they wanted him dead.

There's an old pastor joke that one of my favorite authors used to say that is funny but is also true. He said, "Hey, if you're in your church and someone, either someone in your congregation or someone outside your congregation, hates your guts, you should be so thankful, because you've found a great opportunity to grow." What! an opportunity to grow? So and so hates my guts! Grow in what? Well, grow in my capacity to just focus and reflect on the fact that God's opinion of me is what matters. How about that? Grow in my capacity to love my enemies, right? Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, and he also tells us to love our enemies, and I'm sure for Jesus' disciples, that was a hard teaching. It's a hard one for me to comprehend. But I imagine Paul, in this moment, saw how much he is hated. And I wonder how he is going to respond.

So we're going to see soon enough, but in the end, Festus declined the offer of the Jewish leaders. He wouldn't send Paul to Jerusalem, but they could come down to Caesarea, and they could try him there if they wanted to. And of course, they did. So, continuing in verse 6:

After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him, which they could not prove, while Paul said in his own defense, "I've committed no offense, either against the Law of the Jews, or against the temple or against Caesar." (Vs. 6-8)

So Festus spent about a week and a half in Jerusalem, surely making the rounds with different people of prominence, letting them know his expectations. Then he returned to Caesarea. The Jewish leaders came with, and a trial was launched almost immediately. Just try to imagine with me, the intensity of this moment for Paul. He walks into the area where this trial would take place and his accusers gather around him, surround him, and begin to issue slanderous false accusations at him. Luke says, **Serious charges which they could not prove**—lies, injustice on full display. So how will Paul respond?

Well Paul, it appears, with an abundance of calm, with patient endurance, like a solid oak in the midst of an incredible storm, offers up his defense, and he cites three things that tell us a little bit about what he was accused of. First, he makes it clear he had not violated the Law of the Jews. Now we know, just from a quick kind of glance at what we've seen so far in Acts, that Paul had been bending over backwards to ensure that he did not violate and offend the Jews as he was working to minister among them. In fact, we see Paul surrendering his rights. He is not bound in any way, because of his freedom in Christ. He is not bound to the Law as the Jewish leaders think he was. And yet he submitted; he surrendered those rights for the sake of the gospel over and over again, making every attempt to make no offense, so as not to put up a stumbling block for the Jews. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul describes his strategy among the Jewish people. He says this: *To the Jews, I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law.*

His constant aim was the advancement of the gospel, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, and he was willing to set aside rights that were absolutely his in Christ, for the sake of that proclamation, for the sake of the advancement of the gospel, even keeping certain laws that he did not have to keep, but the Jews wrongfully thought he had to. Just an incredible act of humility by Paul over and over again. That was his first defense, “I didn't violate the law.”

Second, he makes it clear he did not abase the temple, and the temple, of course, was the center of Jewish religious life and also national life. A statement against the temple was essentially a statement against God Himself, and Paul makes it clear he did no such thing. He did not abase the temple, did not violate any part of the temple.

And finally we come to the crux of the issue: he said he did nothing against Caesar. Now here we get to the big accusation, because a violation against Caesar—an act of sedition—is something that proconsul Festus could not ignore. That was an offense that was punishable by death, and Roman law could not let it stand. And so Paul makes it incredibly clear, he did no such thing. In fact, we have seen he has been incredibly respectful to the Roman authorities throughout this whole ordeal over and over again. Now, interestingly, in bringing this charge against him, the Jewish leaders may have shot themselves in the foot, because it opened a door. It opened an opportunity for Paul to shrewdly take advantage of...and we're going to see that in just a moment. But the first question is, “How will Festus respond to Paul's defense?” Verse 9:

But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these *charges*?”

Festus was torn. On the one hand, like Felix before him, he wanted to do the Jews a favor. He wanted to give them a gift to appease them, to keep them happy. But he also did not want to engage in a gross violation of Roman law and of justice. And he knew the accusations against Paul were not legitimate. So he was torn, trying to keep everyone happy and trying to gain favor for himself, to make his life easier. And so he essentially acquiesces and passively says, “You know what, Paul, maybe we should just go up to Jerusalem. Maybe that's the best way to handle things.”

I just want to stop for a moment before we continue on, and just try to zoom out for a second, just try to think for a moment about what this scene and what this entire ordeal for Paul must have looked like from the world's point of view. For two years, Paul has been in prison, wrongly accused, but Paul essentially has been passed back and forth as a bargaining chip between corrupt leaders. It seems as though he is nothing more than a pawn in a political game. Paul is used and abused by the system, injustice after injustice. Now we, of course, have the benefit of knowing how the story ends. Today is not the end of the series in Acts. We've got some more weeks. We know that Paul gets to Rome. If you didn't know that, I hate to spoil it for you, but he does get there, and so we know this isn't the end. But sometimes our point of view can keep us from entering into the drama of the moment. And certainly if you are in that moment, and you're looking at this through the world's eyes, it looks as though Paul is the loser and the church is losing. The church is not advancing at this moment.

And imagine being a Christian in 60 AD. You're only about 25 to 27 years after the death of your Lord at the hands of the same leaders. The Romans and the Jews did this to Jesus. And then, not

long after that, Stephen was killed. And then briefly after that, the Apostle James was killed. And then the great persecutor of the church, Paul, suddenly becomes a Christian. You think “Okay, the tide is now turning.” But then what happens? The same thing. Paul is thrown in prison, wrongly accused, unjustly held, slanderous things said about him that could not be upheld in court. And yet, here he sits on the doorstep of martyrdom. From the world's point of view, it would be hard to argue that the kingdom of God is advancing at this point.

But there's a good lesson in this for us. See, we don't look at the world through worldly eyes, do we? No! The kingdom of God is different; the nature of the kingdom is that sometimes it advances with a loud shout—Paul is knocked off a horse on the road to Damascus. But sometimes the kingdom of God advances subtly, quietly, in hard to discern ways. That's sometimes how the Kingdom works. Do we have eyes for it? Rome and the Jewish leaders thought putting Jesus on the cross was the end of it. That was the great victory for them. “There, we dealt with Jesus.” But God, being who He is, and His kingdom being what it is, takes what appears to be loss, and turns it into an incredible gain, a paradigm-shifting moment for the entire world. The world looks at Paul, and they see a pawn, but Paul was no pawn. He was an active participant in the very plans of God, the very mission of God—the advancement of God and His Kingdom! Not a pawn, but a partner. Not a pawn, but a participant in the work of God. Paul walked with hope. Paul responded with calm repose. We just saw that, and the question is, “How?” And here is where we find our key and the answer. Paul was living in a different world. Paul was living in the Kingdom. Paul knew that the Kingdom is a perfectly safe place to be. Paul knew that with God, God will be victorious, essentially and ultimately. He was living in the Kingdom and therefore he knew that God was able to accomplish His will, even when it seemed that things were going very, very poorly. We don't look at things through the world's eyes. From the world's eyes, Paul is a pawn, but through the Kingdom lens, he is a participant in what God is doing. So, supplied with that faith, Paul responded to Festus' offer. Verse 10:

But Paul said, “I'm standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to *the* Jews, as you also very well know. If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is *true* of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then when Festus had conferred with his counsel, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.” (Vs. 10-12)

Paul saw what was happening. He saw that Festus was caving under the pressure. He knew that the Jews wanted to kill him. He was very aware of that. But he also understood the mission of God, and he was partnering with God and what God was doing. He also knows that Jesus Himself told him, “You will go to Rome.” And so, as we watch Paul here, we have to be astounded. We have to admire his incredible discernment and shrewd assessment of the situation. This is Paul, the astute minister of the gospel, skillfully walking through a moment where circumstances are far from ideal. But Paul, the full participant in God's Kingdom work, plays this trump card that he knew could not be ignored. And ultimately playing this card—appealing to Caesar—would put him in front of the most powerful man in the world and grant him an opportunity to declare the truth of the gospel to Caesar himself. That's what he did when he said, “**I appeal to Caesar.**” And appeal to Caesar was the right of every Roman citizen. It's just like our capacity, our freedom to appeal through the court system, all the way up to the Supreme Court. And Paul knew he could

have done this at any moment, but he waited for just the right time. And at the right time, before Festus, he played this card and he knew that Festus had to grant this appeal, and granted it is just what Festus did. Paul has his ticket to Rome. The gospel would go before Caesar himself. In this text, the 22 verses we're looking at today, this is actually the high point, the climactic moment of this text. And this change is what's going to follow in the chapters that we will walk through in the weeks to come, as we watch and go with Paul on this journey to Rome. This is the climactic appeal. The gospel will go to Rome.

Before we continue on, before we finish out this text, I wanted to stop for just a moment and reflect on a few things that I think are relevant for us today. First thing, I think it's important for us to be reminded of, and we need to be reminded of this again and again, is just how the Kingdom of God works. We need to be reminded of this as an encouragement, but also as a caution. See, we need to make sure as believers, as God's people, that as we seek to advance God's purposes, we must resist the urge to do it according to the world's methods. We can't adopt the posture of the world. We can't battle like the world wants to battle. What do I mean by that? Well, look at Paul. Look at the way he walked through this moment. He endured, with patience, the injustice he was suffering. In the face of this vicious, slanderous, lying attack, Paul responded with repose, with calm, with patience. How did he do it? I don't think he had a lot of candles in his jail cell to help him calm down. He wasn't drinking chamomile tea. I've heard that helps you calm down. I don't think any of that was the case. We said before, Paul was living in a different world, and he believed that God was his vindicator. God was his judge. God would lift him up at the proper time. His faith in God produced in him a confident patience that was able to bless when others cursed. Remember Jesus on the cross, "*Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing?*" How did he do that, but that he was grounded in the goodness of God.

We have to be so careful in these complex days to not fight as the world fights. As we proclaim Jesus, Church, let us do so in the very spirit of Jesus. You remember in Galatians that Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit. He says *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. That's the character of a Christian. That's what the Spirit is producing in us. Paul acted shrewdly, absolutely. He acted with wisdom, but he did so in the Spirit of the One he proclaimed, not invalidating the very goodness of Jesus, but in the way he proclaimed Him, he proclaimed him in the Spirit and manner of Jesus. So what does that mean? Does that mean, as some take it to mean, that we do nothing as believers? Well, of course not. It doesn't mean that we do nothing. When the world gets complex—and it appears that unrighteousness is going to swallow up righteousness—we don't do nothing. We can act. We don't need to be pawns in the system and just say passively, "Okay, I guess that's just the way it's going to go." That's not what Paul did. Paul understood the Roman legal system. Paul knew the Jewish leaders he was working with; he understood the players and during that tribunal, he navigated that system with incredible shrewdness. It was a thing to behold. He didn't just passively acquiesce.

Remember Jesus' words to His disciples when He sent them out on mission? He said, "*I'm sending you out, so be as shrewd as serpents, but as innocent as doves.*" That's us—shrewd and innocent. Jesus also told His disciples that when they go before authorities, don't worry about what you will say because the Spirit will come and will inform you as to what to say. And in Paul, in this moment, in all these episodes, we see all of this at work. Paul shrewdly navigates this situation, shrewdly

appealing to Caesar, being led by God to use the very system that is holding him in jail, to advance the purposes of God. This is not Paul the tool. This is Paul, the player, Paul the participant.

We need to be wise as Christians. We need to use means made available to us. That might be what some feel called to do in the foyer today. That's okay. But we can't place our trust in the system, and we can't embrace the spirit of the world. Let us never do that. We must move forward in the Spirit of Christ, shrewdly, but also innocently. To be shrewd is to be wise, while not compromising on the truth. Paul used the system; he didn't trust the system. Our trust must be in God. Paul also acted with innocence, incredibly respectful, never embracing the tone of his accusers. See, the world thinks attack is the way to win. Attack is what must be done. But we reject that. That is not the way the Kingdom works. The world thinks unceasing pressure is the way the conversation should take place. But that's not the way of the Kingdom. Does it seem at times that the system is working against God's purposes? Yes! But will we be people that have faith that can look back and say God used a corrupt Roman legal system to advance His end. We will keep our faith in God. We will not be filled with anxiety about these things. We will keep our trust in God. So, where do we have our eyes? On our circumstances? On our systems? Or on our God, who is able. It is clear where Paul had his eyes, where Paul's confidence was found. Church, let it be the same for us.

Now, as I said, this is the climactic moment in this passage. But the story is not quite done. In fact, next week we're going to continue in this very scene. And Festus' work is not quite done. Even though he knows Paul is going to go to Caesar and to Rome, he has to explain to Caesar exactly what is going on and why he is sending Paul. We've already seen Festus is pretty confused. But, fortunately, some help is on the way, to help Festus figure out what he can say to Caesar. So let's read these last nine verses, ultimately setting us up for next week. Vs. 13

Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying "There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix; and when I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me. When the accusers stood up, they *began* bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting, but they *simply* had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there still trial on these matters. But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." Then Agrippa *said* to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him." (Vs. 13-22)

Next week, you shall hear him. So Festus summarizes the case. But I do want to make note of one thing. See, as confused as Festus was right in the middle of his summary, he comes to a point that is incredibly important. And it is really a key to the whole argument and a key to the whole reason

that Paul was able to walk with such faith. Right there in the middle, this all came down to what Festus called, (Here's his quote) ...**a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.** Festus was confused, but he at least had the insight to catch the main point. Paul was living in a different world. A world where a dead man rises and reigns is a different world. Believers, we live in a different kind of world. And Paul was living in a world where, sure, Festus might be the proconsul, Agrippa might be a king, Nero might be Caesar, but Jesus was *the* King sitting on *the* throne, overseeing *all* things. That's the world that Paul was living in. He was living in the Kingdom. And yes, to those not looking for it, to those not having eyes to see it, to those not seeking the kingdom, it might go by unnoticed.

But for those of us that follow the risen Lord, we live in light of different realities, that enable us to walk with hope. We don't *see* as the world *sees*, and therefore we don't *live* as the world *lives*. We live in complex times. I don't think that's really debatable. And it's easy to wish it would just go away. But these are the very times that God has called you and me to. He's called us to no other. And God has worked in the midst of incredibly complex times, times much darker than these. There are places in the world where God is doing incredible things in circumstances so bad, it's hardly imaginable. And He will do it again, because that is who He is. In the midst of a complex and hostile culture, how are we to respond? Well, like Paul, we live from a different world. We are Kingdom people, and so we reject the ways of the world. We reject the ways that the world thinks we should operate. To *Dare to Be the Church* is to live from a different reality, to be a participant in the very plans of God. It's to believe that even when circumstances tempt us to think that maybe Jesus isn't in charge, to reject that temptation. To say, "I know He is, and I know His Will, will be done." Does that mean we do nothing? No! We can act. We just don't trust our actions. We trust our Lord. And when we respond, we refuse to do so as the world does. We refuse to embrace violence and vengeance. We embrace shrewdness and innocence. Let us move forward in the Spirit of our Savior, the Spirit of our Lord. We act but we do so in a way that demonstrates where our trust lies. Our trust lies in God. What if things get worse? I've got to be honest. I think they might. If you read the Bible, it certainly says things will get worse. But even then, we still know that God is in charge. Even then we know that the Kingdom will continue to advance. We can look at Paul and we can see his faith. Paul lived from a different reality. He experienced the goodness of God in the midst of injustice. He walked in that confidence as he dealt with the world bent on killing him. So, the question for us is, "Will we embrace the same confidence? Will we press forward in the same Spirit? Church, brothers and sisters, Lincoln Berean, let it be so of us!

Our Father, all of our confidence is in You, not in our wisdom, not in our actions, but in You. Help us to be filled with confidence that You are working; even when it seems that things are going poorly, to trust that You are working. By your Spirit, help us to do that. And, Lord, as we navigate our complex world, let us do so, informed with the wisdom granted by the Spirit and in the character, Jesus, of You Yourself, do that by Your Spirit, we pray. For the sake of Your name, for Your glory. We pray these things in Your name, Amen.

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Winter 2022 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

Acts: Daring To Be The Church // February 19/20, 2022

Paul: Pawn or Participant? // Acts 25:1-22

Introduction

For two years Paul has remained imprisoned in Caesarea without being given a trial. We might imagine him becoming fatigued and frustrated with the process, but Acts 25 gives a glimpse into Paul's focus and faith once again: he is a man on mission to stand before the ruler of the land to give an account of King Jesus.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What book or story has had the biggest impact on you (aside from the Bible)?

2. Is it possible to be both strong *and* submissive? Give an example of something or someone with that quality.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Invite someone to read the passage in the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What part of the sermon this week had an impact on the way you view the circumstances you find yourself in today?
- 2) Read Matthew 10:16-20 as Jesus explains what awaits those who are sent out in His name. **How have you seen Paul respond in the way Jesus instructs his followers?**

Based on what Jesus said in verse 19-20, what can we assume about Paul's speech and conduct?

Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit giving you words and wisdom to stand up for or share about your faith? Share about that in your group.

- 3) Throughout the book of Acts, Paul has articulated the purpose of his mission (as seen in Acts 19:21; 20:22-24; 23:11). In our passage this week, he again shows that comfort and ease are not his goal, but faithfulness to the call of God to proclaim the gospel to Caesar most certainly is. **What are some possible reasons for Paul to spend so much of his ministry waiting in a jail cell?**

Paul's apparent defeat (imprisonment) by the rulers of the world were instead used by God to expand His kingdom. **How have you seen God use a delay or defeat in your own life to cause refinement of your purpose or to expand His kingdom?**

If you're in a season of waiting right now, what might God be asking you to patiently pursue?

- 4) Just a few years before this ordeal, Paul wrote an encouragement to the church in Corinth. Read his words in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10. **What are the qualities that mark those who “in everything have commended” themselves as servants of God?**

Based on that, how would you summarize Paul’s view of suffering?

Help each other identify one or two practical ways you can begin to view suffering as Paul did.
(Hint: the Personal Spiritual Exercises we give each week might give you some ideas.)

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves – mind, body, spirit – we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in your Life Group, take a few moments to share how either of these exercises may have changed your outlook on your daily life.**

Soaking In The Word – to listen, feel, experience the Words washing over you. For most of us, learning is the goal when we read scripture, but in this context, we simply want to hear what God is saying.

Exercise 1: Philippians 1:12-20 records some of the benefits Paul has received by living on mission. Read those verses simply to hear the passion and praise that flows from the Holy Spirit in this account.

Exercise 2: Read Psalm 24 (or listen on a Bible app if you have one) for 5 days in a row, perhaps from different versions. Make notes about what you hear in the words each time you listen. Do you notice any patterns or repeated themes?