

The Weekly Word
September 3-9, 2018

Happy Labor Day, summer is ending and fall is on the horizon. This week we follow Paul as he winds his way toward Jerusalem in chains. Despite the chains, God still rules. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, September 3: Acts 22- My story of faith...

Reading Paul's defense, which really was his salvation testimony, sparked me to recall my testimony of saving faith.

It occurred for me early in my second year of college. I was in a friend's college room when a couple of others showed up. He mentioned that he was holding a Bible study and mentioned that should I close the door as I left. I decided to stay. I don't recall the passage or much of anything he said. What I do remember is that as he sat on his desk he spoke about Jesus as if Jesus was a friend sitting right there next to him.

His references to Jesus were personal. Really, it sounded like his best buddy just came into the room and my friend was introducing his friend, Jesus, to us.

I had been in church all of my life. I knew the story of Jesus. I knew the gospels, epistles and major OT stories. I knew the Apostle's creed and prayers, but I had never met anyone who talked about Jesus in such an intimate and real way as my friend. It blew me away.

I wasn't quite ready to say 'yes' to Jesus that night. In fact I didn't realize I needed to say 'yes' to Jesus. About 2 weeks later, through a series of events that could only have been God's hand, I was on a school sponsored trip rooming with this same friend. Right before bed he grabbed the Bible in the motel bureau and read John 3:16 to me, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* Then he went to sleep and I lay there that night wanting the faith in Jesus my friend had.

No stranger to prayer, I prayed: "Oh, God, what my friend has, I want."

God honored that prayer and I have been on a journey with Jesus ever since.

What's your story with Jesus? It likely will not look or sound like Paul's or mine, it will be unique to you. Can you articulate it?

Think about it...

Lord, thank You for my story. Thank You that You came and entered my life and invited me to journey with You by faith. Thank You for a friend who opened his room and heart to others and was willing to share with us Your story. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, September 4: Acts 23- Following God can be a struggle...

When I think of Paul I generally think of him as a single man, not tied to any family. What freedom this gives. When one hears the call of God to go here or there, you can go.

While this is all true, the incident with Paul's nephew –the son of his sister (16) –caused me to realize that he did have family members, family members who were affected by his imprisonment, trials and persecutions.

We all have a web of relationships that can affect our decision making.

A single friend and colleague of mine has recently decided to move to Asia for ministry. Actually it is better to say he feels called and is following the Lord's direction to move to Asia. His parents don't totally get it. They are Believers but they are also parents and they will miss their son and worry about his wellbeing in that foreign land.

No matter who we are, when we respond to God's call to do something out of the ordinary... move to Asia as a missionary, serve the poor of the inner city, or whatever... there will likely be other voices in our life –well meaning voices –that try to dissuade us.

When I first began traveling to Nigeria some of my family was concerned for my safety. The faith tension we face is following the Lord's leading even when some voices, often from our family, speak against the idea.

Faith decisions affect the people in our family circle. This is simply a fact of following Jesus. My internal struggles have been to honor my loved ones while being obedient to the Lord. This is a tension every Christ follower will face from time to time...

Have you ever felt this tension? How did you react? Were you still obedient? Think about it.
Lord, continue to give me faith to follow Your call no matter what. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, September 5: Acts 24- Time...

Time...

When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison (27). Two years, over 700 days, Paul spent in prison only to have Felix transfer power to Festus...no decision being made so Paul remained in prison.

Time, two years of seemingly wasted time, Paul sits in prison.

God's will can be strange. Prison, sickness, a horrible situation, persecution, all manner of difficulty and yet it is God's will.

Remaining faithful when you don't understand...

I have been there. I suspect we all have been there. And we are in company of great and small alike.

Am I faithful no matter the season of life?

Are you faithful no matter the season of life?

Being faithful in all seasons, that is what God is reminding me about as I consider Paul and the two years that he spent in prison under Felix.

Oh, God, to be faithful in all seasons, good times, bad times and in all the times in between. To be faithful. This is my prayer, prayed in the name of Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

Thursday, September 6: Acts 25- Lord, help me to be faithful...

Two chapters ago, when Paul was arrested, God said to him, *Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome (Acts 23:11)*. Since then we have been reading the account of God bringing to pass His word to Paul.

Writing history, Luke is able to look back and report the various events that took Paul to Rome. Paul, however, had to live it, day by day, year by year. Yesterday two years passed in a matter of a few sentence. Today another 2 weeks pass with Paul appearing before Festus and King Agrippa. For years, Paul has been living with uncertainty, not knowing what would happen around the next corner of life.

Life is like that for most of us. We may not be in prison, living with the treat of death hanging over us but we, too, do not know what tomorrow will bring. Life and health and work can change in the blink of an eye. We are living God's journey for our lives day by day, year by year.

At every point Paul was faithful. Whether traveling and founding churches or now in prison, Paul lived each day with an eye toward being faithful to the Lord. When he had a chance to speak of Jesus, he did.

I am thinking about being faithful as I live my days. I have some idea what will happen today,

Lord, Help me to be faithful.

In all likelihood, today will bring some surprises,

Lord, Help me to be faithful.

If life should turn topsy-turvy,

Lord, Help me to be faithful.

When life is boring and mundane,

Lord, Help me to be faithful.

When times present themselves with opportunities to speak of You,

Lord, Help me to be faithful.

Thank You, Lord, for the opportunity to live... to be a light for You in a dark and uncertain world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, September 7: Acts 26- The miracle of conversion...

I know Paul was an opponent of Christianity. I know Paul stood there when Stephen was killed for his faith. But I never realized how doggedly Paul pursued early Christians. Apparently I never paid attention to verses 9-12.

*I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests **I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities. "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests (9-12).***

I am routinely amazed how I can read the Bible regularly and do so for over 40 years and still discover new things.

Back to Paul, he was a terror for the church. He was out to destroy it. I noted his language,

- *I put many ... in prison,*
- *Many a time I...*
- *I was so obsessed with persecuting them*
- *On one of these journeys*

Paul was a relentless persecutor, believing he was honoring God by what he was doing.

And then God turned him around. Following his encounter with Jesus, Paul put that same energy and drive into bringing people to Jesus that he employed in trying to destroy the church. Paul made a radical about face... such is the miracle of conversion and new life. NO wonder the early church was fearful about Paul when he first came to faith.

This got me thinking about those who are out to destroy the church today. We have legitimate fear of them. They do want to harm Believers. But what struck me is that we need to be praying for their conversion so that their passions against Jesus and his church can be transformed. Like Paul, into passion for the Gospel and its advance around the world.

Too often I let my fear get the better of me. I concentrate on the 'enemy' reality rather than the transforming power of Jesus. And my heart hardens rather than my knees bending in prayer...

Oh, God, give me your eyes. Help me see the value You see in people. Help me to see what true faith in a life can do and the real life change it can bring in all of our lives. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, September 8: Acts 27- Trust is confirmed through obedience...

What a harrowing experience... I have never endured anything close to what Paul and his shipmates endured during that Nor'easter. Through it all Paul maintained his faith. He was resolute in his trust in the Lord.

What an example Paul is to hold on to the Lord through thick and thin.

I have also never had an angel communicate a word from the Lord to me. Angel or not, Paul needed to trust... trust that it was an angel not his imagination and trust that what the angel told him was true.

Trust is confirmed through obedience. Paul obeyed the voice of the Lord, voicing his faith to the others on the ship.

The same God who spoke to and saved Paul and the 276 passengers and crew of that ship is God today. And God continues to communicate with His people. Maybe He will use an angel; maybe God will use a voice in our head or an inner nudge. Whatever His means, God still speaks.

Am I listening and will I obey? These are the two questions that flood my thoughts.

Listen and obey... The words of an old song come to mind. "Trust (listen) and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

Will I listen and obey?... that is the only way to truly walk in faith.

Lord, sometimes I feel like my ears are plugged. I don't hear Your voice. And sometimes Lord I think I need to hear You like others say they hear You.

For 40+ years I have walked with You. You have directed my path. There is always room to grow and learn... so, Lord, continue to speak, continue to guide, and continue to grow my faith so that I can follow You all the days of my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, September 9, 2018, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

[Click here](#) for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.