



# For the Sake of the Gospel

STUDY GUIDE

**TRUTH**  
FORLIFE

# THIS STUDY GUIDE

contains twenty-two sessions designed to strengthen your resolve and ability to share the good news of Jesus with others. You will get the most out of this study by intently reading or listening to the sermons from Alistair Begg's series *For the Sake of the Gospel* as you progress. Following the later years of the apostle Paul's ministry, you will see how God's steady hand protected and provided for Paul, enabling him to proclaim the Gospel with boldness. The content for each session accompanies a particular sermon Alistair preached on Paul's travels as recorded in Acts 19-28.



FIND ALL 22 MESSAGES AT  
[TFL.ORG/ACTS](https://www.tfl.org/acts).

*For the Sake of the Gospel: Study Guide*  
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The following description of the *For the Sake of the Gospel* sermon series provides a good summary of this study's aim:

*Are you passionate about sharing the Gospel? How willing are you to sacrifice and take risks so that unbelievers may become followers of Jesus and believers may become better equipped to share the good news of salvation? As we consider these questions, we are helped by the example of the apostle Paul, who heroically pursued God's call through all manner of difficulty and throughout the Mediterranean world—all so that others may come to know Christ as Lord.*

*In this series, Alistair Begg follows Paul from Corinth to Caesarea on his final missionary trek and then his dramatic journey to Rome. For the sake of the Gospel, Paul endured trials of every kind, boldly proclaiming the good news and glorifying God even to those who doggedly persecuted him. Throughout his journey, we see evidence of God's grace, providential protection, and provision, which underpinned Paul's confidence and enabled him, as it enables us today, to live out the faith he proclaimed.*

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## Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a brief summary statement or commentary on the sermon, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the sermon and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process the main ideas of the sermon
- 4) Giving Praise:** a hymn that can be committed to memory, incorporated in worship, and used as the basis for prayer about what you have learned and considered



# SESSION ONE

“About Twelve ‘Almost’ Christians” | Acts 19:1–10

## Getting Started

In Ephesus, Paul encountered a group of “almost” Christians—those who had knowledge of God but lacked the essential marks of true conversion. These professing believers are a sobering reminder to us that it is possible to profess faith without possessing it.

If you were asked to give proof of your conversion, what evidence could you provide?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

ACTS 19:4–5

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.”

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5

## Going Deeper

1. What details in Acts 19:1-4 show that the Ephesian disciples were not truly converted?

2. Using John 3:5-8 and Romans 8:9 for reference, explain how receiving the Holy Spirit factors into one's conversion to Christ.

3. In what sense did John's baptism point to Christ? Why was it by itself insufficient for salvation?

4. Based on Acts 2:38, what is the biblical sequence of conversion? How does this passage help us to understand the events of Acts 19:1-7?

5. Alistair highlights four hallmarks that accompany true conversion: repentance, faith in Jesus, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. How are these marks evident in your Christian life?

6. What are some characteristics of the “almost” Christian? How do these differ from those of genuine faith?

7. In his first letter, John identified three marks of assurance: true obedience to God, true belief in Christ, and true love for others. How have you displayed one of these three marks recently? How can you grow in each area?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find—  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

**“JUST AS I AM, WITHOUT ONE PLEA”**

**BY CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT**

# SESSION TWO

“What God Says and Does” | Acts 19:8–20

## Getting Started

Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was prolonged and successful because his focus was simple: He relied on God’s Word to accomplish His work. As Paul proclaimed the good news of Jesus faithfully, God worked among the Ephesians mightily. As in the New Testament era, God continues to work through the transforming power of His Word today.

How has God used His Word to transform, strengthen, or correct you? Give a recent example.

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily

ACTS 19:20

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

## Going Deeper

1. Paul entrusted his plans to God's will (Acts 18:20-21; 19:1). What can we learn from his example in this matter?

2. What were the qualities of Paul's preaching strategy according to Acts 19:8?

3. How did people respond to Paul's message in Acts 19:9? What aspects of his message do you think provoked such a response?

4. In Acts 19:11-12, we see an extraordinary demonstration of God's power. How does 2 Corinthians 12:12 help us understand (a) the unique role of the apostles in particular and (b) this passage in general?



5. True conversion involves external and internal transformation. Reflecting on your life, are there practices or patterns that are incongruent with your new life in Christ?

6. How does understanding the kingdom of God shed light on Paul's message in Acts 19:8? (For biblical teaching on the subject, see, e.g., Ps. 103:19; Dan. 7:14; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 1:3.)

7. Acts 19:8-10, 20 describes how God's Word works. How does God continue to work through His Word in people's hearts and lives today?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me,  
Thy Holy Word the truth that saveth me;  
Give me to eat and live with Thee above;  
Teach me to love Thy truth, for Thou art love.

**"BREAK THOU THE BREAD OF LIFE"**

**BY MARY A. LATHBURY**

# SESSION THREE

“Reaching a City” | Acts 19:23–41

## Getting Started

The Gospel that Paul proclaimed intruded on the economic sanctity and religious proclivities of Ephesus, leading to a citywide riot against him. The certainty with which Paul shared the good news of Jesus even amid intense opposition is instructive for men and women in any generation who seek to make an impact for the Gospel in their own cities.

Consider this question from Alistair: “If the Gospel began to impinge upon the structures of authority and of government and of economics in our city, where and how would it be obvious to men and women?”

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“You see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.”

ACTS 19:26

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11

## Going Deeper

1. What concerns did Demetrius raise concerning Paul's message in Acts 19:25-27? What underlying sins seem to have been present?

2. What did Paul teach concerning idols (Acts 17:24; 19:26)? Why would this view have been particularly troubling to the Ephesian people?

3. Paul proclaimed the truths of the Gospel with certainty. According to 2 Corinthians 5:11-14, what were his motives?

4. How did the clerk calm the rioting crowd in Acts 19:35-40? How is God's providence evident in these verses?

5. In his sermon, Alistair states, “The Gospel is not about the fact that everything is wrong. The Gospel is about the power of God transforming a life.” How can we strike a balance between acknowledging the fallen state of our world and focusing on the restorative power of the Gospel?

6. What can be learned from what Paul *does not* do throughout this account? How is his demeanor instructive for Christians today?

7. What does the description of the rioting crowds in Acts 19:32 reveal about the human condition?

## **GIVING PRAISE**

Let all who name Christ’s holy name  
Give God all praise and glory;  
Let all who own His power proclaim  
Aloud the wondrous story!  
Cast each false idol from its throne,  
For Christ is Lord, and Christ alone;  
To God all praise and glory.

“SING PRAISE TO GOD WHO REIGNS ABOVE”

BY JOHANN JAKOB SCHÜTZ, TRANS. FRANCES ELIZABETH COX

# SESSION FOUR

“Transparency, Integrity, Urgency” | Acts 20:17-24

## Getting Started

In his farewell address to the Ephesians elders, Paul impressed upon them the importance of godly leadership in the church. Reflecting on his own pattern while with them, Paul commended three essential qualities for leadership: transparency, integrity, and urgency. The task of leading others into a deeper experience of God’s grace extends beyond church leadership and to all believers.

Of the three qualities Paul commended, in which do you feel strongest? Weakest?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

ACTS 20:24

“We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:2

## Going Deeper

1. Twice in this account, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that they “know” his manner of life and doctrine (Acts 20:18, 20). Why is it important for leaders to reflect Paul’s sentiment in their own way of living?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-4. How did faithfulness factor into how Paul led others?

3. The apostle Paul “did not shrink” from sharing any of God’s Word with the Ephesians (Acts 20:20, 27). What tempts you to shy away from proclaiming difficult parts of Scripture with others?

4. What does Acts 20:24 reveal about Paul’s priority in his life and ministry?

5. Toward the end of his life, as he faced the prospect that he would “speedily be called home,” Charles Simeon wrote to a friend, “I seem to be so near the goal, that I cannot but run with all my might.”<sup>1</sup> Which areas of your own devotion to the Lord are lagging, and how might you address them?

6. Acts 20:24, 25, and 32 each highlight different aspects of Paul’s message. What can we learn about the good news of Jesus from these varying descriptions?

## **GIVING PRAISE**

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before!  
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;  
Forward into battle see His banners go!

**“ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”**

**BY SABINE BARING-GOULD**

<sup>1</sup> Charles Simeon to W. H. Mitchell, Cambridge, July 28, 1828, in *Memoirs of the Life of Rev. Charles Simeon* [...], ed. William Carus and Charles P. McIlvaine (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 364.

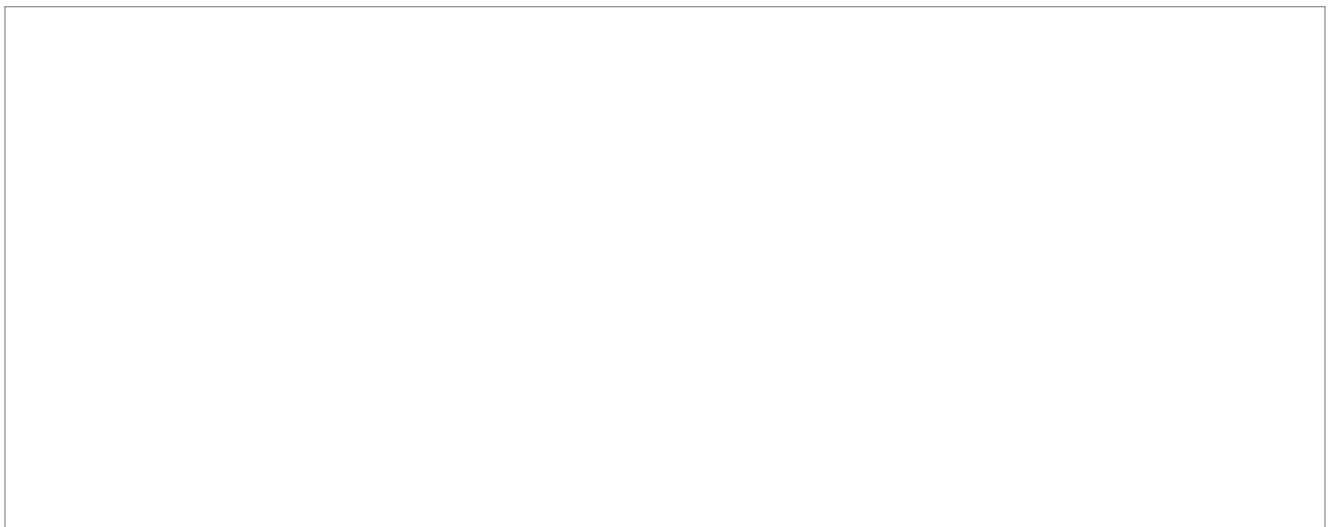
# SESSION FIVE

“A Farewell Address” | Acts 20:25–38

## Getting Started

A person’s final words are often the weightiest. Like a father leaving behind his children, Paul bid the Ephesian elders farewell as he moved on from there to continue his Gospel work. Purposefully chosen and precisely stated, Paul’s words are beneficial to all who would heed them.

Imagine gathering your family or closest friends together, knowing it would be the last occasion you would all be together. What would you want them to know?



### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

ACTS 20:26–27

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

MATTHEW 7:15



## Going Deeper

1. What context does Ezekiel 33:7-9 provide for Paul's declaration of innocence in Acts 20:26-27?

2. Paul reminded the elders that he worked diligently among them (Acts 20:33-34). How do greed and selfishness pose unique dangers to the church, and especially those who work in ministry?

3. What is significant about Paul referring to the church as a "flock" in Acts 20:28? (See also Ps. 100:3 and Isa. 40:11.)

4. Paul warned against false teachers who would infiltrate the church (Acts 20:29). How have you seen false teachers or unbiblical doctrine surface in the church? What should our response to such teaching be?

5. Commenting on Acts 20:29–30, John Calvin said, “Almost all corruptions of doctrine flow from people’s pride; ambitious men will always turn away from the proper purity and corrupt the Word of God.”<sup>2</sup> How does false teaching flow from pride?

6. How does Jesus describe false teachers in Matthew 7:15 and 13:24–25? How can we recognize them?

## **GIVING PRAISE**

Savior, like a shepherd lead us;  
Much we need Thy tender care.  
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us;  
For our use Thy folds prepare.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
Thou hast bought us; Thine we are.  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
Thou hast bought us; Thine we are.

**“SAVIOR, LIKE A SHEPHERD LEAD US”  
ATTRIBUTED TO DOROTHY A. THRUPP**

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Acts*, Crossway Classic Commentaries, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 339.

# SESSION SIX

“Next Stop, Jerusalem” | Acts 21:1–16

## Getting Started

In Acts 21, Luke records what reads like a travel itinerary, with its end destination being Jerusalem. Even this often overlooked portion of Acts contains pertinent truths for believers who engage with it thoughtfully. We see in this section points of application concerning Christian fellowship, the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and God-honoring discipleship.

What are a few good practices for engaging with portions of the Bible that are not immediately clear or striking?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’”

ACTS 21:13

“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

LUKE 9:51

## Going Deeper

1. Using Acts 19:21, 20:16, and 20:22 for reference, answer the following question: What factored into Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem?

2. What parallels can be drawn between Paul's resolve to go to Jerusalem and Jesus' own mission (Acts 21:13; Luke 9:51)?

3. How is Christian fellowship different from other kinds of relationships?

4. What can we learn from the numerous encounters Paul and his company had with other believers in their travels (Acts 21:1-16)? How are the regular rhythms of hospitality and relationship fruit of the Gospel?

5. What convictions are especially important for believers to firmly maintain?

6. The Holy Spirit's guidance can be extraordinary (e.g., Acts 8:29), but it is often practical, as was the case in Acts 21:2-4. How can we train ourselves to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

I obey the Savior's call;  
Now to Him I yield my all.  
At His feet, where others fall,  
There's a place for me.

**"I WILL GO"**

**BY FANNY J. CROSBY**

# SESSION SEVEN

“For the Sake of the Gospel” | Acts 21:17-26

## Getting Started

Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem forced the church to confront the rumors that had spread about his doctrine. Paul’s generous spirit in the face of difficulty was exemplary, reminding us to be resolute on the Gospel and charitable on matters pertaining to custom and conscience. Like Paul, we must be careful to preserve the unity of the church.

What are some examples of Gospel issues on which we should be firm? How about matters of custom or conscience on which we should exercise charity?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God.”

ACTS 21:19-20

“Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

## Going Deeper

1. Paul's report to the church was detailed and God-centered (Acts 21:19). Why do you suppose we tend to focus on our own achievements rather than acknowledge God's hand in them? How can we reverse this tendency?

2. What aspects of the rumor in Acts 21:21 are true, and which are inaccurate concerning Paul's teaching? (See Phil. 3:7-9.)

3. What solution did the church propose to Paul? What wisdom can we learn from his compliance (Acts 21:23-26)?

4. Paul was resolute on the Gospel yet charitable in other matters. How can we achieve this difficult yet vital balance in our theology?

5. It is noteworthy that the church responded with praise to Paul's report rather than with pride or envy of his successes (Acts 21:20). How could we foster this type of attitude in our churches?

6. Read Numbers 6:1-21. What are the components of a Nazirite vow? Why would Paul subjecting himself to it potentially have relieved the tension of the rumor in Acts 21:21?

7. What do you think Paul's attitude was in complying with the vow, and why? (For additional insight, see 1 Cor. 9:19, 23; Phil. 2:1-4.)

## **GIVING PRAISE**

Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed,  
Yet saints their watch are keeping;  
Their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song.

**"THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION"**

**BY SAMUEL JOHN STONE**



# SESSION EIGHT

“Paul States the Facts” | Acts 21:27–22:29

## Getting Started

God’s providence goes before us. This was clearly true for Paul, whose life was threatened in Jerusalem based on lies and slanderous accusations spoken against him. God’s work in Paul prepared him to endure great suffering, and his example is a constant reminder for us that God changes, protects, and guides believers.

What are some practical ways that you can remind yourself of God’s continual care for you, even when you cannot see it?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’”

ACTS 22:6–7

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

ROMANS 13:1–2

## Going Deeper

1. Summarize the key events leading up to the riot and Paul's arrest in Acts 21:27-31. What sins are on display in these verses?

2. How is Paul's attitude and approach in his exchange with the tribune (Acts 21:37-40) instructive for us?

3. Using Acts 21:32 and 22:22-29 for reference, identify how God worked through the Roman law to protect Paul. What implications does this have for our relationship to governing authorities? (See Rom. 13:1-7 for further reference.)

4. What does Paul's suffering teach us about the nature of the Christian life? How can we prepare for hardship and suffering ourselves?

5. The profile of believers is that they are converted, protected, and directed. What is God's role in these works? What is ours?

6. What was particularly provoking about the allegations against Paul in Acts 21:28-29? Was there any truth to them?

7. What does Acts 21:27-36 teach us about the destructive nature of gossip and slander? How should believers address these sins?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Whate'er my God ordains is right:  
He never will deceive me;  
He leads me by the proper path;  
I know He will not leave me.  
I take, content, what He hath sent;  
His hand can turn my griefs away,  
And patiently I wait His day.

**“WHATE’ER MY GOD ORDAINS IS RIGHT”**

**BY SAMUEL RODIGAST, TRANS. CATHERINE WINKWORTH**

# SESSION NINE

“In All Things God Works...” | Acts 22:30–23:11

## Getting Started

Paul’s appearance before the Jewish council reveals the ordinariness of the extraordinary man. Though Paul was pressed on every side with suffering, hostility, and disappointment, his troubles were used for his good and God’s own glory. As God did with Paul, so He does with us. We can be confident that God works for our good in both our trials and triumphs.

How does the promise of God working in all things for the believer’s good bring you comfort in this season of life?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.’”

ACTS 23:11

“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

ROMANS 8:28

## Going Deeper

1. What parallels exist between Paul's setting in Acts 22:30-23:1 and that of our Lord's in Luke 22:66?

2. Commenting on Acts 23:2, John Calvin observes, "The Lord allows wicked people to be so carried away by Satan that they abandon all pretense of fairness and moderation."<sup>3</sup> How does this statement shed light on the possible motive underlying the unprovoked violence against Paul? What does it reveal about human nature more broadly?

3. What tactic did Paul use to escape his trial in Acts 23:6-9? How was this justifiable?

4. The Lord met with Paul in an extraordinary way in Acts 23:11. In what ways does God meet with believers today?

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Acts*, Crossway Classic Commentaries, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 364.

5. How does this account reveal God's extraordinary providence in ordinary circumstances? What promises or commands are implied in it for us?

6. What further insight can we gain from Jesus' words in Matthew 5:39 as we read Paul's response in Acts 23:3-5?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

**"TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS"**

**BY HELEN HOWARTH LEMMEL**

# SESSION TEN

“Nephew and Commander” | Acts 23:12–22

## Getting Started

As Paul navigated hardship and persecution, God did not fail to provide for him—even through unlikely means. God used a young boy, a courteous Roman commander, and a few compliant soldiers to thwart a plot against Paul’s life. Though man’s plans are often frustrated, we can be confident that God’s are not.

How have you seen God’s ordinary providence unfold in your life?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”

MATTHEW 5:11

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.”

2 THESSALONIANS 2:7

## Going Deeper

1. What benefit is there to viewing the unfolding of historical events through the lens of God's providence? Why is it important to think Christianly about history?

2. How does 2 Thessalonians 2:7 help make sense of the conspiracy against Paul in Acts 23:12-15?

3. What is unusual about the means God used to intervene when Paul was under threat (Acts 23:16-22)? What does this reveal about how God tends to work?

4. Why do you suppose God uses hardship to bring about His purposes in believers? How does He use it for His glory?



5. How is this account of God's providential care for Paul an encouragement for us?

6. Jesus pronounced blessing on those who would be persecuted in Matthew 5:11. How was this promise fulfilled in Paul's life? What comfort do the Lord's words bring you?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
In You do we trust nor find You to fail;  
Your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,  
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!

**“O WORSHIP THE KING”**

**BY SIR ROBERT GRANT**

# SESSION ELEVEN

“The Judge Facing Judgment” | Acts 24:1-27

## Getting Started

Paul endured tremendous difficulty for the sake of the Gospel. His resolve to proclaim the good news of Jesus never wavered, as evidenced by his trial before the Roman governor, Felix. Even as his character was impugned and his name slandered, Paul was more concerned with Felix’s conversion to Christ than acquitting his own name.

How did you first come to hear about and know the Gospel?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“This I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.”

ACTS 24:14-16

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

GALATIANS 5:22-23

## Going Deeper

1. How did Tertullus, the spokesman for the Jews, use flattery and dishonesty in his appeal to Felix (Acts 24:1-4)? How are the sins of flattery and dishonesty incongruent with the Christian life?

2. The Jews brought three charges against Paul. What were they?

3. In response to the charge that Paul was a sectarian ringleader, he pointed out several key truths of the Christian faith that prove otherwise (Acts 24:14-15). How might these doctrines help our own efforts in sharing the good news of Jesus and defending the reasonableness of our faith?

4. How can we, like Paul, have a clear conscience before God?

5. Paul reasoned with Felix concerning “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25). Why are each of these three things crucial to any presentation of the Gospel?

6. Why did Felix send Paul away after hearing the Gospel (Acts 24:25)? What might his action reveal about the unconverted person’s response and receptivity to hearing the good news of salvation?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer’s praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!

“O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES TO SING”

BY CHARLES WESLEY

# SESSION TWELVE

“Ready with an Answer” | Acts 25:1-27

## Getting Started

With all of Rome’s power and majesty arrayed against him, Paul was careful to honor the Lord in his defense. The character he displayed and conviction with which he spoke is instructive for believers today. When we face trials ourselves, we, too, should seek to honor Christ in our speech and conduct.

How have you managed recent hardships? What triggers in your life tend to cause you to stumble in your character and conduct?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”

EPHESIANS 6:11

“Even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

1 PETER 3:14-16

## Going Deeper

1. How did Paul demonstrate kindness and humility in his plea to Festus?

2. What principles from 1 Peter 3:14-16 does Paul apply in his defense before Festus and Agrippa? How are these principles useful for us?

3. Using Acts 9:1-8 for reference, explain how you think Paul's conversion might have prepared him to stand before the major leaders of Rome. By extension, why is a high view of Christ and His majesty essential to combatting fear of man?

4. Festus's dilemma in Acts 25:20 was a result of his unwillingness to do what he knew was right. What tools does Ephesians 6:14-17 provide us with to do the right thing in all circumstances?

5. Paul's defense before Festus and Agrippa was a simple example of doing what is right. In what areas of your walk—private devotion, family relationships, vocation, etc.—have you fallen short in doing the right thing? How can/did you address it?

6. Festus's failure of nerve in Acts 25:9 was the result of letting his circumstances erode his convictions. What safeguards can we establish to remain set apart from the world and firm in our Gospel resolve?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

When I fear my faith will fail,  
Christ will hold me fast;  
When the tempter would prevail,  
He can hold me fast!

**"HE WILL HOLD ME FAST"**

**BY ADA R. HABERSHON**

# SESSION THIRTEEN

“Paul Tells His Story” | Acts 26:1-32

## Getting Started

Standing before King Agrippa, Paul told his story. He recounted his former life in Judaism, told of his dramatic conversion to Christ, and argued for the reasonableness of Christianity's claims. At the heart of Paul's story was the hope Jesus provides for men and women everywhere: that Christ died and was raised to save people from their sins.

Write a summary of your conversion story, using the following prompts: What led you to first be aware of God's desire to save you? How did repentance and faith change your old ways of life? What is different about your new life in Christ?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”

ACTS 26:13-14

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 PETER 1:3



## Going Deeper

1. Who were the Pharisees? How does their religious system shed light on Paul's background? (See Acts 26:4-5; Phil. 3:5-6.)

2. What makes Christian hope unique?

3. Throughout his series of trials (Acts 21-26), Paul never wavered from proclaiming the resurrection. What role did this doctrine play in Paul's understanding of the Gospel? (See 1 Cor. 15:17-18.) What about in our own experience?

4. Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, and Ephesians 2:12 are crucial passages that reveal Paul's confidence in the Gospel. Why should we never feel ashamed of the good news of Jesus?

5. Making the connection between Paul's message and our day, Alistair remarks that by nature, "everybody is without God and without hope in the world, and they need ... the story that Paul proclaims." Who in your life needs to hear the Gospel? How might you take a step toward sharing?

6. Recounting his conversion (Acts 26:12-18), what Paul describes is a divine transformation. In what sense are all conversions miraculous and, to some degree, like that of the apostle Paul's?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

**"THE SOLID ROCK"**

**BY EDWARD MOTE**

# SESSION FOURTEEN

“A Man with a Mission” | Acts 26:16–18

## Getting Started

God uses unlikely people to accomplish His work, not the least of whom was the apostle Paul. Though he was formerly a persecutor of Christians, God converted and commissioned Paul to reach the gentiles with the Gospel. Paul's transformation reminds us that God's calling is dependent not on our human abilities but on His own divine authority.

Though Paul's commissioning was unique in that he was an apostle, believers today still share a common charge from our Lord. What are some of the tasks to which God calls and commissions the church?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

ACTS 26:16–18

“Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:3–4

## Going Deeper

1. In Acts 26:16, we read that Jesus appeared to Saul not to execute judgment on him but to save and to commission him. Given Saul's former manner of life, what does this fact reveal about God's character?

2. What does Paul's commissioning have in common with the calls of Moses (Ex. 3:4) and Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10)?

3. How was God's promise in Acts 26:17 to rescue Paul from his adversaries fulfilled according to 2 Timothy 4:7-16? How does God continue to deliver His people today?

4. In his sermon, Alistair states, "We're either those who need to believe in this Gospel and see the truth, or we are those who believe this Gospel and need to go and tell the truth." What might God be calling you to believe or do in response to His Gospel?

5. Paul derived his authority from the one who called him: Christ Himself. How should the truth that our authority to share the good news of Jesus is derivative, not inherent in us, affect how we view our work?

6. According to 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, what is needed for unbelievers to be saved? What takes place after one is converted (Acts 26:18)?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

**“AMAZING GRACE”  
BY JOHN NEWTON**

# SESSION FIFTEEN

“Paul the Preacher” | Acts 26:19–32

## Getting Started

What constitutes good preaching? Some would say that knowledge of one’s audience is essential, while others point to one’s charisma in delivery. But according to Paul’s example, of first importance was the bold proclamation of the Gospel. His preaching was evangelistic and instructive, applicable and pointed.

What is the most memorable sermon you have heard and why?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.’”

ACTS 26:25

“‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”

ROMANS 10:13–15

## Going Deeper

1. How do Romans 10:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 9:16-18 clarify and expand Paul's words in Acts 26:19-20?

2. Commenting on Acts 26:20, Alistair reminds us that “man is not saved *by* his works, but he is saved *for* good works.” What is the difference? Why is it crucial to recognize?

3. Paul described the Christian worldview as “true and rational” (Acts 26:25). What confidence does this provide as we evangelize the lost?

4. How would you describe Paul's burden for the lost according to Acts 26:27-29? How could you grow in your concern for the lost around you?

5. What can we learn from Paul's response to Festus's interruption (Acts 26:25-27)?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

When this poor lisp'ing, stamm'ring tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then in a nobler, sweeter song  
I'll sing Thy pow'r to save.

**"THERE IS A FOUNTAIN FILLED WITH BLOOD"**  
**BY WILLIAM COWPER**



# SESSION SIXTEEN

“He Plants His Footsteps in the Sea...” | Acts 27:1-26

## Getting Started

As Paul sailed for Rome to appear before Caesar, God's providence accompanied him. Navigating a life-threatening storm and dealing with stubborn shipmates, he entrusted himself to God's care. God continues to provide for us as we cling to His promises.

Why is it important to call to mind God's promises in seasons of trial?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“Take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.”

ACTS 27:25

“He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

HEBREWS 13:5

## Going Deeper

1. Paul was on the receiving end of ordinary kindness from his friends (Acts 27:2-3). What role do acts of care and kindness play in the Christian life?

2. What factors went into the passengers' hope of salvation being lost in Acts 27:13-20?

3. Paul addresses the Lord as “the God to whom I belong and whom I worship” (Acts 27:23). What does this statement tell us about our identity and duty as believers?

4. How did God's Word encourage the storm-tossed passengers in the Acts account? How does God continue to use His Word to encourage and embolden us today?

5. Which of God's promises might you call to mind in this season to bring you comfort or courage?

6. What parallels exist between Acts 27:13-20 and Mark 4:35-41?

7. Make this prayer from Alistair your own, writing a few personal reflections or responses below:  
“Forgive us for superficiality and vague generalities. Forgive me for skirting around the issues when I’m tempted to. Help us to see that the affairs of life lead inexorably towards our end. And thank You that Jesus has come into time in order that in time we may know a Savior and a friend and a Lord, and so that we might be prepared for all that eternity will bring. Amen.”

### **GIVING PRAISE**

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

**“GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY”**

**BY WILLIAM COWPER**

# SESSION SEVENTEEN

“... and Rides upon the Storm” | Acts 27:27-44

## Getting Started

With the prospect of a shipwreck looming on the way to Rome, Paul found himself in a crisis of leadership. He had to balance the realities with which he was faced and the certainty of God’s promises to him. But this account reveals that just as God was with Paul, so He will be with all His children who entrust themselves to His providential care.

Describe a difficult time when you have had to entrust yourself to God’s care. What did you learn about God and about yourself?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.’ And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.”

ACTS 27:34-35

“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

LUKE 12:7

## Going Deeper

1. What details does Acts 27:1-26 provide that clue us in to the passengers' physical and emotional states? How do these details provide essential context for verses 27-44?

2. How does Paul's exchange with the soldiers highlight the relationship of divine sovereignty and human responsibility (Acts 27:30-32)?

3. Acts 27:34 echoes Jesus' words in Luke 12:7. What do these passages reveal about God's nature and character?

4. Paul showed his trust in the Lord in both word and action. Why is it important that we are consistent in these two areas of our lives? Put another way: Why must our faith lead to good deeds?

5. What details of the Acts 27 account make verse 44b particularly striking? What does this verse imply about God's Word and work in the world?

6. The members aboard the ship lost all hope of salvation (Acts 27:20). How does the Gospel speak to the despair and hopelessness that resides in all people?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

**“GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY”**

**BY WILLIAM COWPER**

# SESSION EIGHTEEN

“The Bonfire on the Beach” | Acts 28:1-16

## Getting Started

Having arrived safely on the island of Malta, Paul and his companions encountered uncommon kindness from the islanders. God’s providence was on display yet again in these events; however, Paul was under no guise concerning the natives’ spiritual condition before the Lord. Though kind, they, like all people, needed to reckon with the realities of the Gospel.

What are some common (but unbiblical) reasons that people give for thinking they are in good standing with God? Why do these fall short when compared to Scripture’s teaching on the matter?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold.”

ACTS 28:2

“The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’”

LUKE 18:11-13

## Going Deeper

1. Proclaiming the Gospel marked Paul's life and work. Reflecting on Acts 21-28, identify some high points that demonstrate Paul's zeal for the good news of Jesus.

2. How is God's providence on display in Acts 28:1-6? What do these events reveal about God's care for His children?

3. Alistair reminds us that if we are not careful, the kindness of lost men and women may blunt our conviction that they need to know Jesus. Why is morality insufficient to make us right before the Lord?

4. What does Luke 18:10-14 teach us about the righteousness that God requires of His people?



5. Paul went to great lengths (geographically and relationally) for the sake of the Gospel. In this season of life, how might you be best used by the Lord for His purposes?

6. What role does showing kindness play in the believer's life? How is kindness for the Christian fundamentally different than for the unbeliever?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Nothing in my hand I bring;  
Simply to Thy cross I cling,  
Naked come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless look to Thee for grace.

**“ROCK OF AGES, CLEFT FOR ME”**

**BY AUGUSTUS TOPLADY**

# SESSION NINETEEN

“The Last Lap” | Acts 28:7-16

## Getting Started

Now on the final leg of his journey to Rome, Paul encountered both unbelieving natives and fellow Christian brothers. His intentional discipleship with both sets of people is exemplary. Paul aimed to glorify God through his evangelistic efforts and his enjoyment of God’s good gifts.

What are a few of the ordinary gifts God has given you that you might take for granted? How could you give God thanks for those things and enjoy them to His glory?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.”

ACTS 28:14-15

“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HEBREWS 10:24-25

## Going Deeper

1. Paul received hospitality from unbelievers on the island. How does this aspect of his ministry reflect that of Christ's in Matthew 9:10-11 and Luke 5:29-30?

2. Using Acts 3:11-13 for reference, explain the nature and purpose of miracles. How did the healing in Acts 28:8-10 serve a God-honoring purpose?

3. Paul boarded a ship on which idolatry was prevalent (Acts 28:11). How should the Christian life intersect with our unbelieving neighbors' culture? How can we be part of such a culture without becoming polluted by it?

4. How could neglecting Christian fellowship be a sign that our love for the Lord is decreasing?

5. How does the incident in Acts 28:8-10 relate to Mark 1:30-34?

6. What was Paul's response to encountering his Christian brothers in verse 15? Why do you think he responded in this manner?

7. Paul received great honor in Acts 28:10. What are some of the pitfalls to avoid and principles to adopt regarding giving and receiving honor in the church?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

How pleased and blessed was I  
To hear the people cry,  
“Come, let us seek our God today!”  
Yes, with a cheerful zeal  
We haste to Zion's hill  
And there our vows and honors pay.

“HOW PLEASED AND BLESSED WAS I”

BY ISAAC WATTS

# SESSION TWENTY

“Paul Makes the Most of It” | Acts 28:16–22

## Getting Started

Paul did not let his dire circumstances prevent his Gospel influence. Whether chained to a Roman guard or standing before the Jewish leaders in Rome, Paul was faithful to gain a hearing for the good news of Jesus among them. His resolve should urge us to maximize and not squander the Gospel opportunities before us as well.

Considering your routines, relationships, and rhythms, what opportunities might be before you to share the Gospel?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.”

ACTS 28:20

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”

COLOSSIANS 4:5

## Going Deeper

1. How does Paul embody the command of Colossians 4:5 in the Acts 28:16-22 account?

2. What might the Roman soldier have learned about Paul while he was with him in Acts 28:16? How was Paul's life a testimony to the Gospel?

3. What do Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1 reveal about Paul's burden for the unbelieving Jews of his day?

4. How can we, like Paul, lead with love in our engagements with outsiders?

5. Paul refers to Jesus as “the hope of Israel” in Acts 28:20. What does this title imply about Christ’s work?

6. What are some reasons you do not share the Gospel as frequently or freely as you should? Pause to consider how you might avoid ungodly excuses in the future.

### **GIVING PRAISE**

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can be said than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION”

# SESSION TWENTY-ONE

“On a Certain Day...” | Acts 28:23–28

## Getting Started

In the closing verses of Acts 28, God’s promise to Paul that he would testify of the Gospel in Rome comes to fruition. As it so often did, Paul’s preaching included careful explanation of the Old Testament and pointed to Christ as its fulfillment. It was also marked by urgency, for Paul understood that “now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2) for all who would believe.

What are some reasons that our sharing of the good news of Jesus should be marked by urgency?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.”

ACTS 28:23–24

“Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11



## Going Deeper

1. How is God's providence in Paul's affairs evident in Acts 28:23? (See Psalm 139:2, 4 for reference.)

2. What do the words "expounded," "testifying," and "convince" (Acts 28:23) indicate about Paul's approach in preaching?

3. How is being convinced of Christian truths different from being converted to Christ?

4. According to Acts 28:26-27, what is the relationship between God's sovereignty in our salvation and our responsibility in believing the Gospel?

5. Commenting on verse 28, Alistair notes, “We should not be surprised when, in proclaiming the Gospel, division results.” Why does the Gospel cause division? What does this imply about the nature of true, saving faith?

6. What comfort does the doctrine of God’s providence provide you?

7. What was the prevailing Jewish view of the kingdom of God in Paul’s day? How did this view differ from the teachings of both Paul and the Lord?

## **GIVING PRAISE**

Praise to the Lord, who o’er all things so wondrously reigneth,  
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!  
Hast thou not seen how thy desires e’er have been  
Granted in what He ordaineth?

**“PRAISE TO THE LORD, THE ALMIGHTY”**

**BY JOACHIM NEANDER, TRANS. CATHERINE WINKWORTH**

# SESSION TWENTY-TWO

“The End of the Beginning” | Acts 28:30–31

## Getting Started

Acts concludes with Paul under house arrest in Rome—but his circumstances were no hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. Armed with a high view of God’s providence and firm confidence in God’s Word, Paul’s first-century experience was the beginning of a greater story in which the church is to bring the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

As we conclude this study in Acts, what are some tangible ways that you might use your time, talent, and treasure for the sake of the Gospel?

### KEY SCRIPTURES

“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

ACTS 28:30–31

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!”

2 TIMOTHY 2:8–9

## Going Deeper

1. Paul likely wrote Philippians during the two-year span mentioned in Acts 28:30. What was Paul's outlook on his circumstances according to Philippians 1:19 and 2:24?

2. How does Paul's trust in God's sovereignty challenge your own beliefs? Put another way, are there areas in which you do not trust God's plan as you ought?

3. How does the doctrine of God's kingdom intersect with popular twenty-first-century ideas?

4. The spirit of 2 Timothy 2:9 is evident in Paul's Roman imprisonment. How does the truth of this text instill confidence in you to proclaim the Gospel?

5. What principles of Romans 8:28 are on display in Paul himself through the trials of Acts 21-28?

6. Read the following six summary statements found in Acts: 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31. What do these statements indicate about the church's growth and the Gospel's spread in the early years? How can they encourage us today and until Christ returns?

### **GIVING PRAISE**

Let ev'ry kindred, ev'ry tribe  
On this terrestrial ball  
To Him all majesty ascribe  
And crown Him Lord of all,  
To Him all majesty ascribe  
And crown Him Lord of all!

**"ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS' NAME"**

**BY EDWARD PERRONET**

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