



NG Study Guide: Acts 21:37-22:29 :: “The Power of Your Story” [5.21.23]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: The essence of your story in Christ (testimony) is: what it used to be like, what happened, and how it is today. Five times in the New Testament Paul’s testimony is recorded (Acts 9, 22, 25-26, Philippians 3, 1Timothy 1), because your story is a powerful tool to reach others for Christ. Learn to share your story with others as we consider Paul’s testimony.

Subject: Paul shares his testimony (before the Jewish mob)

Object: Share your story

Context (21:37-40): *Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?” He replied, “Can you speak Greek? 38Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”39But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people. 40So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in Hebrew:*

Paul wanted to speak in his defense and proclaim the gospel despite the hostile Jewish mob. Paul was accused of bringing Gentiles (non-Jews) into an area next to the temple restricted to Jews, and teaching Jews not to follow the laws of Moses.

A. Paul’s life before Jesus (1-5)

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” 2And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: 3“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. 4I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

1. Commonality (1-3)

Paul shows respect by referring to the mob as *brethren and fathers* (1). He is letting them know that they have a common connection. He speaks to them in a common language, *when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent* (2). When sharing your story with someone who doesn’t have a biblical worldview, seek a common language. Avoid “Christianese” (e.g. “I was lost in my trespasses and transgressions living in darkness”). Note common identity. Here, Paul declares, *“I am indeed a Jew...”* (3) as he establishes a common identity with his audience. When your identity or experiences have a common nexus with the people you are talking with help them to understand the connection.

2. Credibility (3-5)

Paul was raised in Jerusalem and was a disciple of the famed Rabbi Gamaliel (3). Paul reminds his audience of that he was as zealous for God as the angry mob (3); and how he notoriously persecuted *this Way* (Christians) imprisoning them and seeking death sentences (4-5, 1 Timothy 1:13). Paul's description of his former attitudes and actions provide credibility as he will later describe the transformation through Christ.

B. How Paul received Jesus as Lord (6-13)

1. Paul's encounter with Jesus (6-7)

"Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 7And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

Paul described the events which occurred about twenty years before. He was traveling to Damascus with arrest warrants against Christians (5) when he saw a great light from heaven shining brighter than the noon sun (6). Paul fell to the ground presumably from fear and/or reverence (7). Paul then heard a voice saying to him, *'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'* (7). Note, Jesus' relationship to His Church is such that persecution of Christians is persecuting Jesus Himself.

Consider how you encountered Jesus and recognized that He is the Messiah (Christ). It may be dramatic, but it need not be. You should be comfortable telling your story because it is a powerful tool to share Christ and His gospel.

My encounter with Jesus occurred when I was an adult. I was invited to attend Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, and was given a Bible to use that had an index of Messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament fulfilled by Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. As I contemplated how statistically remarkable this was I began to realize that Jesus must be the Messiah.

2. How Paul yielded to Jesus (8-13)

So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9'And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. 10So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' 11And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.12"Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, 13came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

Paul asks, *'Who are You, Lord?'* (8). Paul realizes that his encounter is with the Divine. Paul had previously considered Jesus a teacher or philosopher. As A.W. Tozer observed, "The most important thing about you is what you think about God." The response is, *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting* (8). Paul realized that Jesus is alive (resurrected). Paul asks, *What shall I do, Lord?* (10). He is acknowledging Jesus as Lord, and is yielded to Jesus as reflected by obediently going to Damascus as instructed (10-11), and Ananias refers to Paul as *brother* (13). Paul was blinded by the revelation of God's glory (11), but then his sight was miraculously restored (13). My experience of yielding to Christ occurred soon after the realization that Jesus is the Christ. I was at a College and Career Bible Study at Calvary Costa Mesa, and the pastor was doing an overview of the Book of Hebrews, and I prayed to receive Jesus as Lord. I remember a feeling of indescribable peace and wholeness that I had never known before.

C How Jesus changed Paul's life (14-21)

1. Called to share experience with Christ (14-16)

Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Ananias encouraged Paul that he was chosen to know God's will, See the Just One (Jesus) and hear him (14). Paul was called to be witness to all men of His experiences with Jesus (15). Then Paul was baptized as a symbol of forgiveness of sins, and identification with Jesus death, burial, and resurrection (16).

2. Called to serve Christ (17-21)

Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning

Me.' So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.

Paul returned to Jerusalem three years later (Galatians 1:18). Jesus warned Paul to leave Jerusalem quickly (17). Jesus foretold that they would not receive from Paul which surprised Paul because of his former zeal in persecuting (19-20).

Jesus foretold that Paul's ministry would be far from Jerusalem (i.e. outside Israel) to Gentiles. The one who was persecuting Jesus, was transformed to share Christ and His gospel with Gentiles (Acts 13-20).

D. The response (22-29)

And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" 23Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, 24the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. 25And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"26When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman." 27Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." 28The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." 29Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

1. God will use your unique personality and experiences

When the Jewish mob heard that Paul was called to Gentiles they sought to harm him. The Roman commander likely doesn't understand what Paul or the mob are saying unless he spoke Hebrew/Aramaic; but based on the mob's reaction he assumes Paul is a serious offender. He planned to whip Paul to get a confession (24). Yet, Paul was a Roman citizen and could not be beaten without a trial (24-29). Roman citizenship could be a reward for special service, could be purchased at a high price like the commander, or by birth like Paul (28). Paul's unique background as a Jew who knew the Scripture and a Roman citizen was used by God mightily to advance the gospel. Yet, just as Jesus foretold Paul's ministry was predominantly successful among Gentiles, and less effective among the Jews. So, be prepared to share your story in Christ, and be prepared that not all you share with shall receive the gospel.

Study Guide Qs:

Q1. Q1. Briefly describe what your life was like before Christ.

Q2. Briefly describe how Christ was revealed to you and how you yielded to Him.

Q3. Briefly describe how Christ has changed your life.

Q4. Briefly describe your experience sharing your testimony.

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a helpful resource from Focus on The Family for sharing your story: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/bring-your-bible/share-your-faith-story-tips-for-creating-your-testimony/>

2. Here is a helpful resource from The Gospel Coalition for sharing your story: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sharing-your-testimony/>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Pray for God to open doors for you to share your testimony with neighbors where you live, work, school, play and worship.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.