

## Introduction

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Over the last several weeks in our Acts series, Paul has experienced a series of trials over the span of two-plus years. When he was arrested, Paul stood before the Roman commander, then the Sanhedrin, then Governor Felix, then Governor Festus and now finally he is before Herod Agrippa II, the King. This week we will observe and discuss his fifth trial. By now, we are able to identify similarities to how Paul defends himself and the skill to which he addresses the various leaders and rulers of his day. *This week's questions and spiritual exercise may feel familiar from prior weeks. Perhaps if the Holy Spirit saw fit for Paul to rehash his story multiple times, then it is good for us to do so as well.*

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)*

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Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What did you get into trouble for when you were young?
2. **SERVE DAY is coming up April 9<sup>th</sup>!** Appoint someone in your group (preferably not the Life Group Leaders) to be the Point Leader for your Serve Day project. Also take a few minutes as a group to discuss projects your group might like to do together for Serve Day. There is a list of projects on the last page of these discussion questions. Your group will be able to sign up for projects on the website starting March 6<sup>th</sup>.

## Getting Started

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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. **Due to the lengthy passage of Scripture this week, try reading the narrative in large segments as guided by the discussion questions.**
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## Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What moment or verse in this week's passage left an impression on you?
- 2) The end of Acts 25 sets the scene for Paul's trial along with the formality and pomp surrounding the event. **What do you notice about this scene in Acts 25:23-27? Describe the courtroom spectacle as Luke records it. What is the stated reason for the trial?**

After taking these details into consideration, what can you presume about this earthly king and his kingdom values?

In the first verses of Acts 26, how is Paul still respectful to King Agrippa while also being diligent to the calling from his Heavenly King? Share an example of how respecting authority has been a struggle for you. What were the ways you were or were not able to represent Christ well?

- 3) Paul is given yet another chance to defend the accusations made against him by the Jews. Similar to the earlier trials, his defense consists of sharing his testimony and the message of the Gospel rather than addressing the accusations. He does it in a way that has the most traction for his audience. **What do we know about his kingly audience from Acts 26:3? Review Acts 26:4-23. What elements of Paul's defense would cause King Agrippa to reconsider the fairness of Paul's charges?**

**What customs and questions among the Jews can you identify in Paul's defense? Look for historical facts and references to God's promises. What gives Paul confidence in the Gospel message and passion for his calling to proclaim this message to the Jews and the Gentiles?**

Breaking down the details of Paul's defense is a way for us to effectively construct and communicate our own testimonies. **What about Paul's boldness to advance God's Kingdom on earth encourages you to also join in the work God is doing around you today?**

**What are some things that hinder you from confidently describing your relationship with God to others?** Take time at the end to encourage each other by laying these hindrances before God in prayer.

- 4) As Paul nears the end of his defense, Festus inserts the forthright notion that Paul is out of his mind (v. 24). It is a not-so-subtle reminder that living with Jesus as your King will make you look crazy to the people of this world. **What was Paul's response to this reality? What is your honest reaction to this reality as well? Why is it important for us to remember that our Christian conduct may cause others to think we are crazy; especially in situations of conflict and resolution?**
  
- 5) The echoes of Christ and His sufferings in Paul's trial events are undeniable. In closing, read Luke 23:1-25. **Where do you see similarities between Paul's trials and Christ's trials? How did the study of Paul's defense ultimately point his audience, us included, to Christ? How does your life and testimony point others around you toward Christ?**

### **Prayer** *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

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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

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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. *(This exercise was suggested in week 3. We are repeating the suggestion because perhaps some did not complete it the first time or would like another chance to refine their story.)* **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.**

**Preparing Your Story:** to stretch our awareness of how God has changed our lives. When we prepare our testimony we are ready to share Christ with those around us.

**Exercise 1:** Set a timer for 15 minutes. Capture some key milestones in your journey with Christ. Be as specific as possible. These details can be used to share your story with others.

- Before:
  - Before you knew Christ, what were some of your needs? What was lacking or what was missing in your life?
  - What methods for improving your life did you try that fell short?
  - Where do you see God pursuing you in this time of your life?
- How:
  - What were the circumstances that caused you to consider following Jesus?
  - What made you trust and surrender to Jesus as Lord? (Romans 10:9-10)
  - What has become your favorite Bible verse and why?
- After:
  - Give an example of how God has met your needs – either physical or emotional – since you accepted Jesus.
  - Share about what of your relationship with God you're most grateful for today.

**Exercise 2:** You know your testimony and now you feel prepared to share it with someone else. Who are your people? Identify who you are passionate about reaching no matter the cost. Take time to pray for people by name or by category. Ask God to give you moments to share. Pray for wisdom, guidance and courage to respectfully engage and respond in love.

## Serve Day

**Possible Project Ideas:** These ideas and others will be on the Serve Day website on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

- Camp Sonshine—Landscaping at all 3 locations (3 different groups)
- Asian Cultural Center—Cleaning office space (1 group)
- People’s City Mission—Easter Bash Event for the women and children (2-3 groups)
- People’s City Mission—Serving Dinner (1 group)
- Help Center—Sorting donations/Organizing store (2-3 groups)
- City Impact—Landscaping around building (1 group)
- Salvation Army—Landscaping around building and helping them prepare for Easter (1 group)
- Christian Heritage—Landscaping at property (2 groups)
- Christian Heritage—Building project for the “Light the Night” event (1-2 groups)
- Jacob’s Well—Landscaping at their home (1 group)
- Youth for Christ—Landscaping/cutting down trees on their property (2-3 groups)
- Matt Talbot—Preparing Community Garden (1 group)
- McPhee Elementary—Landscaping around school (1 group)
- Prayer Walks around town in different locations (5-7 groups)
- Park clean-ups at various parks around town (5-7 groups)

### **Propose your own project:**

- Host a free garage sale
- Help with home clean-up or repairs for those who are physically or financially unable to do it themselves
- Host an Easter Egg Hunt in your neighborhood
- Ask a local school how you can help
- Serve a hot breakfast to the homeless downtown
- Do a community trash clean-up
- Host a “block party” with food, games, and music for families
- Ask a local business how you can help
- Bring lunch/treats to your local police or fire station
- Drop off treats or notes to those working in a hospital
- Put together “blessing bags” and deliver to the homeless
- Help prepare a neighbor’s lawn for Spring
- Pass out treats and encouraging notes at UNL
- Host your own BBQ in the park
- Walk a trail and pick up trash
- Host a fundraiser for a cause you are passionate about