



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 83 “Express Yourself”
By Pastor Jody May 06/16/2024**

Acts 26:1-18 ESV

Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

26 So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

²“I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers,⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Paul Tells of His Conversion

¹²“In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³At 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. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language,^[a] ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But 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,¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that



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they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

[READ THE TEXT]

Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”

People – “Thanks be to God.”

[PRAY]

[INTRO. & BACKGROUND]

Illustration – So I believe it was President Nixon years ago perhaps speaking on the Vietnam War was asked about communication and how did he think he was doing communicating with the nation of the goals and objectives of the war which would lead to his reelection. He commented that when I get tired of saying it to those around me, that’s when I know my staff is finally getting it. When my staff is getting tired of saying it in press meetings that’s when I know the Media is starting grasp it. And when the News outlets seem to be tired of reporting on it that’s when I know the American people are finally getting what I want communicated. For any type of leader this is a huge lesson that when you think you have said it enough you are only just beginning to get across to those you work with what you want to make clear.

For Pastoring it is no less daunting. I could preach the best sermon of my life, say just the right things, give the clearest picture of a text I can, and unless I do that about 20 times on the same topic, you probably won’t remember it. That’s ok because to be changed by preaching that is a long-term effect that takes years of the HS, using a man to lay out God’s Word, communicated for a people at a specific time in a specific community. It’s not about a one-shot cure all, it is more like ongoing inoculations of Gospel truth that people begin to internalize the more they hear it. (Pastor Onan and the other elders will pick up on themes which means you all are about 2-5 years behind that).

Well just imagine if you will the Apostle Paul, preaching for decades on the beauties of the Gospel when he arrives at Jerusalem. Now in the past 10 weeks we have moved forward in time in Acts over 2 years and we have seen



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that same message of the Gospel with Paul’s personal testimony given 3 separate times. It doesn’t mean that he only preached this 3 times, it just means that Luke recorded on 3 separate occasions what he said so that the 1st century Christians would know that the sermons of Paul had the same ingredients no matter who he talked to and no matter how much time elapsed. He’s showing the length and time that Paul preached the same words of life over and over and over again, showing that it takes time for the Gospel to take seed in culture (it took just over 300 years to become the national religion for Rome under Theodosius I).

I can imagine every time Paul is around someone and they show an interest in hearing the gospel that his personal story of how it changed him comes up again, again, and again. Now that brings us to the main point of today that I will give you now, that we will actually learn over the next two weeks.

MP:

The invitation to share the Gospel comes with the need to verbally express what has happened to you.

Every time Paul has given his testimony it is never just about the things that happened on the outside of Paul, (where, when, and whom) but the things that happened within his soul. Students in the room, we just went through this type of testimony sharing this past Wednesday, **people need to hear how Jesus changed your life.** How He showed you your sin, showed you how He was saving you, and how you are now different. When we all can express that well, when you have rehearsed that over, and over, that’s when you are ready to say it multiple times, and then maybe people will start listening to what you have to say. So, **today’s sermon will be on how to express oneself when one gives an account of the Gospel in their life.** But before we get to all of that there is a little background information to our story, I need to give to you first.

We left Paul in 25:12, where he had put Festus into ‘check’ that is he left Festus no options, he appealed to Caesar so to Caesar he must go. Right after that though another ruler came to town for a social visit. In says in 25:13 Agrippa II (son of Agrippa I the man that killed James and of which God slain by worms), a local ruler of what was once NW Israel, along with his half-sister



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Bernice (who he had incestuous relationship with) of which these two players were the siblings of Drusilla that you met a couple of weeks ago. They come for a political visit, a show of allegiances between Rome and the Jewish people of the norther territories. Festus is eager to get Agrippa’s take on Paul because he knows that Agrippa II knows the Jews well and he is informed on what Christianity is. Festus is an out of townner, so he tells Agrippa here’s what I inherited when I moved in. Festus’ main issue that he relates to Agrippa is that I have no idea what to send in my correspondence about Paul!?

Why am I sending him to Rome, Caesar doesn’t want to be bothered with religious squabbles. This is not about a dispute over land or over title but about Paul’s claim that someone named Jesus was raised from the dead, and he was being persecuted over what he believed. Agrippa agrees to the audience and the next day they make a big deal about it, the make a grand entrance for him and Bernice, to play up the visit by which he presents Paul to this power couple and that is where we will pick up in our story today. This is when Paul one more time is going to share his testimony.

[CHALLENGE]

Now we could get lost in this whole idea: oh, great one more trial, one more story about Paul sharing the Gospel, right, I know you have heard it all before. But this is where I would ask you to perk up and pay attention. Rember we are entering the end of Acts, the whole theme of the book has been to help Christians see what it is they are supposed to be doing with their lives. They are to be sharing with others what Jesus has done for them, the Spirit wants to use us as witnesses to the Kingdom of God. Are you up for that? **After preaching through Luke for almost three years and now Acts for almost 2 years, are we ready as a church to put our stories to our lips and to give an account of the faith in our hearts?** Do we have stories we want to share with others about how Jesus has changed us? Are we looking at our lives yet as opportunities to give the good news about God or are we caught up in thinking that life is nothing about going from one struggle to the next trying to survive?

Today if you are ready, I want us all to pay attention to how Paul is sharing his story, what he is communicating, and I want us to develop better skills in



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sharing our testimony. So, every point today is a point of application to show how one should **express themselves** in the giving of the Gospel and how it is played out in your life.

1. Express Mutual Respect for all people.

Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

26 So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

²“I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Right off the bat Paul doesn't blitz Agrippa like he did Felix and Drusilla because he reads the room. He knows the circumstance for the visit, this is a public audience not a private setting, they came to be appreciated and perform political obligations, and they are known for understanding both Jewish and Christian customs. Paul in his day and age was masterful at understanding how to be all things to all men ([1 Cor 9:22](#)), and that is he understood that 95% of the time Christians are called to be nice (to quote Dalton).

Recognize that God may be opening their ability to understand.

- First thing Paul does is **recognize** Agrippa's **ability to understand**, “*I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense.*” While you and I both know that it requires the HS to open the eyes of the spiritual blind, it is ok to recognize that people have the ability to understand concepts, that for the most part they are not stupid, and if they are granting you an audience to entertain your religious beliefs, you should be respectful of that, especially in today's climate of no one wants to entertain anyone else's point of view on religion, morality, and personal beliefs. **The very fact that someone is willing to listen to your faith convictions means that God has already done some leg work to get you there**, let us be respectful of that.



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Recognize the need for their patience.

- Secondly, Paul **pleads for Agrippa’s patience** there in v.3. Agrippa you are going to hear a lengthy and possibly hard to understand thing, please be patient. We need to keep in mind that before we ever came to Christ to hear about a need for Him, to hear about the wrongs committed, and the lack of love in our hearts, it is a good idea to ask for patience as you tell your story. Patience is not natural for people to give, it is required of the speaker to ask for it, it’s not an automatic in our culture, don’t be too prideful about that.

Lately I know I have been facing a little conviction over this myself. I tend to look at people with alternate views from mine as the enemy. One thing that a good sense of nationalism does for you is it means we at least can agree and appreciate our heritage. Now before you say, ***I know BUT***, yes there are those that have no respect for it currently but what I want to remind us of is that people have been led astray and our God is not above bringing people to their senses by Gospel convictions, he’s been doing that for 2,000 years. Family, God still wants to save, and He has plans to save the ‘*most lost*’ for our God loves to glorify Himself that way. He always loves to take Black sheep and turn them white as snow.

Let us all be reminded of our Lord’s words here.

Matthew 6:27,31, & 35-36 ESV

²⁷“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ³¹**And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.** ³⁵But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

The Gospel comes with an invitation to Express your story, and we all need to give it, but let’s remember it first starts off with mutual respect, even when people don’t deserve it. Deliver the Gospel with the display of Mercy in your



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words and **let be God be glorified and kill your Pride that wants to be justified.**

2. Express one’s own Lack of/Receiving of Belief.

⁴“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers,

Now comes the time to do a little associating with your audience. The main issue that anyone has with the Gospel, why it works for some and not for others, is because it all rests on a **Gift of Faith** ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). If you don’t believe in it, you get nothing from it, BUT if you believe in it, you receive everything for all of eternity! The main issue between you and your audience of an unbeliever has nothing to do with ethnic backgrounds, culture, language barriers, or social positioning (rich or poor), which is why a social gospel doesn’t exist it’s a false gospel, the Gospel doesn’t need diversity or DEI to reach people, it just takes faith, and it will answer the desire for equity. So, when we speak to people, we all need to recognize that our number one problem in our lives is **we did not believe.**

Admit you were born into a false system of beliefs.

- Paul states upfront that is he **Admits** he was **born into a false sense of faith**; he admits it was beyond his control. The contrasting point to this loved ones is **he makes no argument** for how you were born equates justification for how you view life. You may be born with, raised up under, the worst morality, an alternate lifestyle, a violent background, an abused childhood, creating different desires in you **but that doesn’t make one less culpable of sin or in less need of saving.** Whatever circumstance one was born into does not justify why you are the way you are; ALL are in need of a Savior.

Paul says I was of the **‘Most Exact’** (in the Greek) of my religion. It means I was at the pinnacle; I was above everyone else in knowledge of God, observing



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what God revealed in the Torah, I lived it out and I preached it and then he says it all changed for my hope was taken out of how I was brought up and put into a promise of God. I was changed when I stopped believing in what men conceive and started believing in what God says, His promises. Paul says it all changed for me when I stopped embracing the work my way of upbringing taught, how I thought it made me ok, my position, my culture, my tribe, and instead embraced what God told me I needed through His Son and what He said made me acceptable. **OK so what else does he admit?**

⁷to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!⁸Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

Admit practicing faith can make people not like you.

- That which all my people long for I obtained in this hope, and what's worst yet, I am discriminated for it, because I found it! In talking about how his beliefs change Paul makes a 2nd **Admittance, I am suffering for my beliefs, I became discriminated against.** For many in our world, they have fallen under the fake gospel that because you were persecuted for your beliefs that makes everyone wrong and you right. The Gospel says we were ALL sinners in need of Grace, but the offer of the Gospel doesn't discriminate on past lives, past beliefs, nor past sins, it is always an offer of new beginnings which come every day ([Lam 3:22-23](#))!

Then Paul wraps up this section on expressing faith, his lack of it and the blessing of gaining it, by relating to those that might feel guilty of persecuting God's people, by saying, "I've been there too."

⁹"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.



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Admit that you too persecuted others for having a different faith.

- Paul **Admits** again that **he persecuted** the only people that shouldn't have **NOT** been persecuted; those that have been found right with God. Nothing says authentic Christian like the admittance of being a depraved sinner, especially those that tried to hurt the people of God. I know what that shame feels like, I have been at times in my life one of the staunchest persecutors of God's people, and that was God plan to save me like Paul, a chief among sinners. He saved me yes because He chose to love me, but He also saved me because in my saving God is most glorified taking a vessel of wrath and using it to be a vessel of Grace.

The great thing about the Gospel, is that it is an offer to all people!

Hebrews 11:6 ESV

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

No one pleases God, from the worst of sinners to the best do-gooders, all of our works are filthy rags ([Is 64:6](#))! Without faith in Him, His Gospel, His Son, His atoning sacrifice, His imputation of righteousness, and His expiation of sin, it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God! You cannot please God without receiving the truth of your depravity and then receiving the full measure of His grace!

Admit to people that you never had the ability to please God when you were lost without His **gift of Faith**. It is a joy and pleasure to admit that about yourself, to express that to others. That confession will definitely get people listening when they see you judge yourself by the same standards that you judge the world.

3. Express that Salvation is dependent on Jesus alone.

Paul Tells of His Conversion

¹²In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³At 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.



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Well, we may not have a Damascus story like Paul to tell our lost friends but we all as Christians should have a story to tell, that if it was not for Christ, working against my will, I would not be here today. There are two claims in this text though that I think we all can make as Christians.

Claim that it takes Divine Intervention to see sin (Regeneration).

- **Paul claims that it took Divine Intervention** to bring him to see his sins. In his own words it took a light brighter than the mid-day sun in the middle east, to shed enough light on his situation, to illuminate what he was really up to. Many of us, that’s our story about us, isn’t it? It took God’s might to shine through the dark spots in our lives to get our attention on who we were and what we were doing to call us to repentance. (story of how I saw my father). By us making the grand but true claims that it took Jesus, against my will, to save me will open up for people that they too have a chance at being saved! Don’t we want that for others?

There is another claim that Paul makes here that all Christians should be able to make for themselves.

¹⁴ 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.’ ¹⁵ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

Claim that it was God Himself you were opposing.

- **Paul claims that the one he was actually opposing was God Himself**, in the personhood of Christ. The one that saved him was the one that Paul was trying to hurt. Oh, how an accurate picture of our lives that is, that one that is trying to do for us the most good is the one that we are most violent against. It shows that there is accountability, there is vindictiveness in us, there is a rebellion against a Holy God, and everyone does it. When we sin against others we are sinning against the will of God.



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Isaiah 43:11

I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no Savior. (If Jesus claims to be the Savior, then He claims to be God)

John 14:6 ESV

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus is our God-King and He is rightly to be praised because while we were still sinners He died for us, He took us back while we were still in rebellion, He washed us of our sins, He showed us our wrongs, He put us on the way.

THEREFORE, exalt the name of Christ to your audience, make much of Him, for you had nothing to do in your Salvation, Jesus is to be valued supremely above all!

4. Express everyone’s need for the Gospel!

¹⁶But 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,

State that the Gospel of Jesus gives us purpose.

- Paul **states** that **Jesus is the one that gives us purpose!** Paul says that Jesus literally said *here, I saved you to make you a servant/minister and a witness to the things, what things – Well, the way I saved you Paul, the way I save all men, the fact I am God, and I save by Grace, **my appearance to you when you wanted me not!*** Paul I am setting you up and out from your Pharisees, I am removing you from those Jews you grew up around, and I am putting you into the world where no one knows your name! Because Paul you don’t need all that to have purpose, your purpose comes from me! Your DNA test will always lead you to the same conclusion, you don’t belong to yourself you belong to me, I am your past, present, and future!

1 Peter 2:9 ESV



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But you are a chosen race, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We all are a people that were CHOSEN, so that we may proclaim His excellencies – that means we tell others how he called us out. We are chosen as priests to share this good news!

Then Paul makes this statement that the Gospel of Jesus separates us out. It culls us from the herds of the world and puts us into His flock to be protected and used for His glory.

¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you

State that the Gospel of Jesus separates us to be Holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16 ESV

¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

We don’t choose this life God does. We can’t run from our destiny, we must embrace it. To be called by God is to be taken out of the purposes of the world and to be used solely for the purposes of God, to be His proclaimers. We are not here to proclaim all that our culture wants us to proclaim, we can’t, we are called to be different than them. Perhaps you have people in your life that need to hear a simple fact like that, *I am sorry I can’t accept what you like, it’s not called intolerance, it’s called being Holy, for my God is Holy, He is not like you.*

Pastors and churches that try to accept all forms of cultural idols into their doctrine that’s actually those Christians that are giving up the command to be Holy. I am sorry if you build a church full of people that look like a world you don’t have Christians, you have a cult. Paul never tolerated the things of the world, he continually tried to expel them from the churches in his letters, that too was a part of his calling.



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¹⁸ 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.'

Paul is like I have a purpose, to serve Jesus as a Holy minister, to open the eyes of people so that they may turn from Satan to God. Look I know it sounds a little old fashion as a Christian to talk about sin and the Devil, but it is all absolutely true. Satan is real and he works to tirelessly lead people away from God. I think another reason that the modern church has a problem with being Holy is that they have forgotten that there is a malevolent, intelligent, personal evil that does not rest and whose sole purpose is to steal glory from God by marring all of creation. Paul states, as should we, that God desires to deliver people through forgiveness and place them into the safe care of Christ.

State the Gospel is the power unto Salvation.

Romans 1:16 ESV

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Family by expressing yourself in your Gospel telling people will see your belief in the power of the Gospel to save, they will see how Jesus saved you and is continually saving you.

MP:

The invitation to share the Gospel comes with the need to verbally express what has happened to you.

Never stop sharing your story, yes it will take numerous times but you all the time that God desires to give to you, to accomplish all the goals he has given you, so be busy about making much of Him, for it is everyone's destiny, those that call themselves Christians to do so.



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[PRAYER]

[CALL TO OBEY]

Elder – Read **John 14:23 ESV**

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him...”

My family let us all strive to be better communicators today of the Gospel of Grace.

[COMMUNION]

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

* The Congregation will stand

Elder – “Christians, what do you believe?”

Congregation – **LBCF chapter 16 section 2 – Good Works
The Results of Good Works, Which Are the Fruit of Faith**

These good works, which are done in obedience to God's commandments, are fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. By them:

- believers express their thankfulness
- strengthen their assurance
- edify fellow believers
- profess the gospel
- answer people who are against the faith
- and glorify God

Believers are God's workmanship and created in Christ Jesus for good works. These good works bear fruit that lead to holiness, and the result of this is eternal life.

3. James 2:18, 22



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4. Psalms 116:12-13
5. 1 John 2:3, 5; 2 Peter 1:5-11
6. Matthew 5:16
7. 1 Timothy 6:1; 1 Peter 2:15; Philemon 1:11
8. Ephesians 2:10
9. Romans 6:22

[OFFERING+LAST SONG] –

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that has chosen us to be a Royal Priesthood of believers proclaiming the greatness of His Gospel.

Go in the name of the Son, that while we were still sinners saved us by Grace, rescuing from darkness, and giving us the eternal purpose of living for Him.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, that opens the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, now go and share your story of the Gospel with your neighbor.