

(SLIDE#1)

I'm kind of a Paul guy. Not to say I don't enjoy the other biblical writers, I do, but I love how straight forward and practical the Apostle Paul was in his writing. I love that almost two thousand years later, his words continue to speak into our culture and shape us as followers of Jesus.

One of the things that I appreciate about the Apostle Paul was humility. He didn't allow his role as an Apostle to cause him to puff up with pride. He certainly could have. He's written more bible than anyone else. Yet he referred to himself as the **(SLIDE#2)** "least of the apostles" due to his role in persecuting the church. Towards the end of his life goes even further. In his letter to Timothy, he said **(SLIDE#3)** "*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—to which he adds "of whom I am the worst."* Talk about humility.

Yet in spite of his humility, there's also a boldness to his writings. Specifically, there's a challenge he laid down in a number of his letters—in 1 Corinthians it appears similarly in two separate places **(SLIDE#4)** "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*" Some translations phrase it "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Essentially: do what I do. Most of us are much more comfortable with the idiom: "do as I say, not as I do." Follow my words, follow my best intentions, follow me on a good day—but not my actual day to day. Paul is telling them, what you've seen from me, as I've tried to model the life of Jesus for you – let that be your guide in how you live.

We're wrapping up our series, with a message today on "Sharing Our Story" and I want to encourage you to take Paul's advice. We are going to look at the way that he shared his story in a couple of places in the book of Acts, and I want you to apply that in your own life – That is, I want you to follow Paul, and imitate him in terms of his message, his method, and his manner.

Will you turn with me to the book of Acts chapter twenty-six? Let's start there. I wrestled with this, whether to read the whole passage or not. And I decided if I try and read through the entire chapter, some of you are going to fall asleep...maybe more of you than usually sleep.

If you brought your bible this morning, leave your message notes in it right here in chapter 26, so you can come back to it this week and read it on your own. In our Life Groups, we're going to look at a few more passages in Acts and then Romans, so your right there all ready to do your homework.

Before we dig into the text, let's talk context. In Acts 26, we're going find that the Apostle Paul was in prison. No surprise, he spent a fair amount of time there. It was good thinking time, good writing time. As Pastor Rick shared a couple of weeks ago, sometimes it presented Paul with a great opportunity to share his faith.

He had been initially arrested in Jerusalem. That is where he should have been tried. But there was a plot that was discovered, a conspiracy of some forty men had planned to kill him, in fact, they swore off of food and water until they did so. I'm not sure how that worked out for them? Probably not too good. To keep him alive long enough to be tried Paul was taken to a place called Caesarea, he remained there in prison for two years.

In our passage, Paul is appearing before the Roman Procurator Festus, and King Agrippa and his sister Bernice. More or less these were the power players in the region. They were the

Rome appointed administrators. They would have been robed in purple or scarlet and crowned to show off their royalty. They would have been surrounded by all the highest ranking men of the region. Anyone who was anyone in the city would have been there. But this wasn't a trial. It was more show than anything else. Festus had already concluded to send Paul on to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. Festus called Paul in as a form of entertainment, to please his guests. He was a curiosity, a spectacle to them. Why was this little man creating such a stir in Jerusalem? They got their popcorn ready and gave Paul the floor.

In Paul's younger days, was a student of the Jewish traditions and the Tanak, what we know of as the Old Testament. Paul had incredible potential, and he was known to many in Jerusalem as a rising star under the renowned rabbi Gamaliel. Everyone expected great things from him. It would be like a kid here in Eagle Rock, who starts at varsity quarterback his Freshman or sophomore year, and the division one scouts start to come and check him out. He's leading his team deep into the playoffs. Everyone in the area would know of this kid and expect greatness from him. That's Paul. When he says you know me from my upbringing in verse 5-6, that's what he's referring to.

He goes on to say (SLIDE#5) ***"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth."*** He speaks of how under the authority of the chief priests he threw followers of Jesus in prison, and then he consented to their death. He hunted them from city to city. And then, on the way to Damascus, picking up at verse thirteen: (SLIDE#6) ***"About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'*** (SLIDE#7) ***"Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. (SLIDE#8) I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'***

Remember what I said we're doing at the outset. We're looking at Paul's message, method, and manner. (SLIDE#9) Paul's message is Jesus Christ. Sure, Paul is telling his story, he has to in this context. It's why Festus and Agrippa brought him in to speak to them in the first place. But Paul is making sure that whether they realize it or not, are going to the story of Jesus. Let me walk you through this a little bit, to show you what I mean. In verse six, Paul says (SLIDE#10) ***"And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today."*** What is his hope? What is Paul's hope? It's Jesus? It's for Paul's proclamation of his hope in Jesus the Messiah, as the fulfillment of God's covenant promises that he was on trial. In verse seven and eight (SLIDE#11), he bring up the hope in the resurrection. Why is he talking about the resurrection? Because of Jesus. He didn't just die on the cross. He rose from the grave and not just a spirit. He was flesh and blood.

In verses nine through eleven, he's talking about his zeal to persecute Jesus and then as we just read, in thirteen through eighteen Paul shares his encounter with the risen Jesus. In verse twenty-two and twenty, this one's really clear (SLIDE#12) ***"But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond***

what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” Paul’s message from the beginning to end is Jesus. Which sounds a lot like what he said in his letter to the Corinthians (SLIDE#13) **“and so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**

A lot of times when we have the opportunity to share our story. Whether it's a co-worker, who asks “why do you spend so much time at church?” Or a family member that says “man, you’ve changed, what’s happened to you?” In those moments it’s so easy to get a little tongue-tied or focus on the wrong thing. But we shouldn’t over complicate it. If you ever went Sunday school, you know the answer is Jesus. Knowing what problems you had before, what sins you were bound to, that’s not the best part of your story. The great church you belong to now, pretty good, but still not the best part of our story. The best part of your story and mine is that we have a God that loved us so much – that he did not hold our sins against us, but sent his one and only son Jesus to take our sins upon himself, and die on a cross so that we could be restored to him. The reason that Paul preached the cross, again and again, is because of how it communicates how serious our sin is, and how abundant of God’s love is. That’s the message of Jesus and the cross.

Because Jesus’ death on the cross, we can receive forgiveness. We become a new creation and are adopted into God’s family, to spend eternity with him in his Kingdom. When someone says what happened to you? The answer is as simple as Jesus died on a cross for me, I’ve been forgiven, and I’ve been made new. You might add, I’m just trying to live a life thank you in response. You’ll probably want to talk at some point about forgiveness, repentance, about resurrection and eternity. Those are in Paul’s speech as well, you can find them in there. But don’t bury the lead. Don’t miss the one message that matters. That as a sign of his love God, God sent his son Jesus.

Let’s talk methodology. The first thing that I would say about (SLIDE#14) Paul is that he’s opportunistic, isn’t he? I wonder how many of us, standing before Festus and Agrippa would think awesome “I have a captive audience to share the gospel with all of the power players in the region.” Most of us are thinking, how do I get out of this? Not because we’re overly selfish, it just never occurred to us that God could work through us in a situation like that. In Ephesians, Paul says (SLIDE#15) **“Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.”** The key here is the word “thoughtlessly.” We have to start living with our radar up and our eyes open for those gospel opportunities. What if we started living with a belief and expectation that our God is excited to provide us with opportunities and open doors to tell others about him?

I have to tell you it’s more than just recognizing the opportunity. There also something to be said for being prepared for it. That’s what our memory verse tells us (SLIDE#16) **“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”**

A few of years ago, my wife and I were living in Pasadena. And we were really committed to trying to live out tangibly Christ’s command to love your neighbor as yourself. So

we had a Christmas party, and we invited all of our neighbors over. Leading up to this Kristen and I were praying, "God give us an opportunity be witnesses." Everyone came, and at one point we were all sitting in our family room, and one of our neighbors stated, or I guess, asked. Andrew, you're a Pastor, there got to be a story there. Talk about t-ing one up for you. I mean we had been praying for this. And here was the biggest softball question. And I shared my testimony, and everyone was so moved in their hearts, and there were tears, and the Spirit descended, and then one of my neighbors said hey here's some water out front, what should prevent us from being baptized? That's not at all what happened. I totally choked. To be honest, I can't even recall what I said. I just took for granted that if the opportunity presented itself, I could answer. The reality is if it's not something you're doing every day. It's probably something you should prepare and practice.

If you've got your bibles open, will you flip over to Acts seventeen, verses one and two? It says **(SLIDE#17) "When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures."**

Do you see what it says at the beginning of verse two? **(SLIDE#18) As was his custom.** You know what that means? It means Paul had a regular way of doing this. You could say that he had a strategy. Sure there were times like when he was in prison, or when he was on trial...opportunities that he used. But he wasn't beholden to opportunities. He didn't just wait for open doors. **(SLIDE#19)** He shared the gospel **intentionally**. He proactively went to a place, for a purpose.

What if we identified a couple of places in our lives where we said, "I'm going to be more intentional in this place." When I walk into this place – I know – this is where I'm seeking to share the good news. It could be the gym for you. You go the same time every week, see the same people. Maybe with a little intentionality, God can use that. Maybe you always go to the same Starbucks, you don't always see the same customer, but you see the baristas every morning. What if you decided, this is going to be the place where I'm intentional? Sure we take hold of every opportunity, but we don't have to wait for them. We can make them too.

In your worship folder, there is a card...unless you dropped yours on the way in. It says my three. One of the ways that you can be intentional in sharing your faith is to begin a regular habit of praying for the unreached people in your life. In Acts 26:29, Paul makes pretty clear that **(SLIDE#20) praying for the salvation of others is a pretty consistent part of his methodology.** We can and should pray for the unreached in our lives that God would soften their hearts and that God would open doors to share the good news with them. To that end, I want to encourage you to fill out you're "My Three" and keep it in your Wallet as a daily reminder to pray and to be on the lookout for God answering that prayer.

I want to wrap up talking about Paul's manner in sharing his faith and the way that we should do so. It's pretty well stated in the second half of our memory verse – remember Peter said **(SLIDE#21) "always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have. But to do so with gentleness and respect.** Paul's manner with which he shared the message of Jesus was with **(SLIDE#22) gentleness and respect.**

There's a story in Acts chapter 19 of Paul's time in Ephesus where he spent two years living and preaching. Verse twenty tells us that the Word was spreading with power. It was

spreading so much so that those who made a living off of making idols, saw that people were leaving their idolatrous way. They recognized that this was going to seriously threaten their bottom line. They began a riot, that threw the whole city into an uproar. The crowd gathered, and it was an official from the city, who came to Paul's defense. There's no indication that this man was a believer or even a friend of Paul's. In all likelihood, he was a worshipper of the very god that Paul defied in proclaiming the gospel. In Verse thirty-seven the official said **(SLIDE#23)** **"You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess."** He defended Paul's manner because it was unimpeachable. He spoke the truth, but he did it with gentleness and respect.

I wonder how many of us would ever be defended by those we disagreed with?

Let's pray that God would teach us that lesson.