



Explosive Impact • SHARING YOUR STORY • acts 26:1-32 • 11/18/2018

Main Point

Paul's example in Acts 26 of sharing his testimony can be an example to us on how to communicate the gospel to those around us.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some taboo topics for conversations these days?

Why do you think discussions about religion and faith are so controversial?

When meeting new people, talking with acquaintances, or even conversing with close friends and family, we know that there is a limited list of “safe” topics. You can always talk about the weather. You can always ask, “What do you do?” when referring to jobs or hobbies. Family discussions are usually acceptable. But don't you dare talk about politics or religion. At least, that is what our culture has determined to be off-limits in order to preserve civil discourse.

But for believers in Jesus Christ, the taboo topics of religion and faith must be faced head-on. If we believe God created the world and its inhabitants to have a relationship with Him, then we must facilitate that connection as much as it is within our power. If we believe that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners, then we must help sinners see their need for salvation and introduce them to Jesus to receive the forgiveness we all need. If we believe that unbelievers are destined for eternal punishment in hell, then we must encourage and plead with them to turn from darkness and to the light of Christ. Sharing Jesus with an unbelieving world is risky, but based on the truth that God has revealed to us in His Word, that risk is worth it in order to see people saved.

But how do we share the gospel with others? One way involves sharing your own testimony of receiving the gospel by faith. The apostle Paul gives us an example of this in his defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Acts 26:1-11.

How does Paul describe himself before coming to Christ in faith?

Paul was clear before King Agrippa that he was a known member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of Judaism at the time. As such, he took it personally to stamp out the belief in Jesus as the resurrected Son of God, the Messiah sent to save His people from their sins. So he persecuted Christians: He imprisoned them, tortured them, and gave his approval to their execution. He even traveled abroad in order to find and punish Christians.

Looking back on his life as a Pharisee who hated Christians, Paul described himself as the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). It is easy to see why, but he rehearsed this past as a part of his testimony not to bring attention to himself but to show how far and how deep God's grace goes. "But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:16). God's grace is sufficient to save every sinner, and rightly understood, in the eyes of God, apart from Christ, we all stand condemned as the worst of sinners.

How would you describe yourself before coming to Christ in faith?

Sharing the gospel centers on who Christ is and what He has done for us in saving us from our sin. But that doesn't happen in a vacuum; the gospel intersects with the lives of sinners. Those who have been saved by faith in Christ have experienced God's grace and turned from their life of sin. There should be a clear "before" and "after" distinction in the lives of Christians. It isn't an easy step, and this doesn't mean we are free from the struggle against sin, but there ought to be growth, like the development of a child learning patience and self-control as one grows older.

People come to faith in Christ from a variety of backgrounds and at a variety of points in their lives, and you never know the full background of a person with whom you are sharing the gospel. A "sensational" past is not the point of this part of a testimony. Honesty regarding our past, at appropriate levels based on your audience, reflects a changed heart. Often we want to hide who we were, but the gospel of Jesus Christ liberates us from fear of judgment and shame.

| Ask a volunteer to read Acts 26:12-18.

Put yourself in King Agrippa's shoes listening to Paul. How would you have responded to Paul's testimony of interacting with Jesus on the road to Damascus?

Why does the gospel of a crucified and resurrected Savior sound so unbelievable?

Once again, Paul has a "sensational" story to tell about his interaction with Jesus on the road to Damascus. A bright light. A voice. A rebuke. A mission. If we're honest, we can admit how fantastic this story sounds, and imagine Paul recounting this as part of his defense to King Agrippa for the Jews' accusations against him. Was he going for the insanity defense? No, he was being truthful and clear about the lengths Jesus went to call him from darkness to light.

Paul preached the gospel of Jesus crucified and raised from the dead. In his own day, this was foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews, yet this was his faithful message to the end of his life (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Our experience with the gospel and sharing the gospel with others will likely seem foolish and crazy to some, but this is our story, this is our message. We shouldn't sensationalize our past, but neither should we downplay the weirdness of Jesus revealing Himself to us in the gospel.

How would you describe the circumstances of your coming to faith in Christ through the message of the gospel?

| Ask a volunteer to read Acts 26:19-32.

How does Paul describe his mission and his message?

Jesus called Paul to be an apostle of the gospel to Jews and significantly to Gentiles. He was to preach the truth of Jesus to his own people and to cross societal boundaries in order to preach to those who worshiped other gods. He called people everywhere to repentance, to turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and to live repentant lives. And he was clear about the suffering of the Messiah, knowing it was God's plan communicated even throughout the Old Testament. This gospel message is the light of God to a dark world.

How did people respond to the message that Paul preached?

How can we expect people to respond to the gospel message when we share our own testimony?

We cannot control how people will respond to the gospel. We pray for faith to arise in those who hear the message of Christ, but we must also pray for our own hearts to respond with gentleness and compassion, no matter what the response of the other person. Paul knew the message of the gospel comes with consequences in this world. If Jesus suffered, then His messengers can expect to suffer, too. Whether easily or with

difficulty, Paul's heart was to see people saved by the good news of Jesus. To honor Christ, we must give our own defense of our gospel hope with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:13-17).

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

With whom can you share the gospel of Jesus Christ in the coming days, and how can you prepare yourself to share your own testimony of coming to faith through the gospel?

How can your small group help you prepare your testimony, pray for you, and hold you accountable to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone this week?

What steps will you take to respond to others with gentleness and respect for the honor of Christ?

Pray

Ask the Lord to help you put together your personal testimony to communicate the gospel to those around you. Pray for boldness as you share the gospel with someone new this week.

Commentary

| acts 26:1-32

26:1 This is Paul's third apologetic or defensive speech in Acts; see 22:1; 24:10.

26:2-3 Paul began his *captatio benevolentiae* by flattering Agrippa about how fortunate he was to be making his defense before an expert in Jewish customs and laws.

26:4-5 My youth indicates that Paul had lived in Jerusalem since his teens. All this time his way of life had been known and seen by others, and he lived by the strictest party of Jewish religion, the Pharisees. In this way Paul painted a portrait of his character for Agrippa.

26:6-8 Paul distilled the entire controversy down to his hope of the promise made by God to raise the dead. More than a mere tactic to pit Pharisees and Sadducees against one another, this was an accurate assessment of the Jewish complaint against Christianity: that Jesus was raised from the dead and that faith in Him as risen Lord gives eternal life.

26:12-18 This is the third and final account of Paul's conversion in the book of Acts (Acts 9:1-7; 22:6-11).

26:14 Only in this account of his conversion did Paul say the voice from heaven spoke to him in the Hebrew language. "Hebrew" may literally have been Aramaic, the common tongue of the first-century Jew. It is hard

for you to kick against the goads probably meant that Paul should not resist the divine force that was moving him in a new direction.

26:16-18 These three verses are not included in the accounts of Paul's conversion in chapters 9 or 22, even though the mention of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was a message given to Ananias in Damascus (9:15; 22:15). Many scholars believe the essence of Paul's mission to the Gentiles was revealed to him at the time of his conversion. Certainly these three verses summarize Paul's ministry to both Jews and Gentiles.

26:19 "I was not disobedient" is a spectacular understatement in light of Paul's faithfulness to God's calling, even through remarkable hardships.

26:20-21 Paul's faithfulness to "the heavenly vision" (v. 19) was the very reason the Jews seized him and wanted him dead. Thus Paul's stance is reminiscent of the one taken by "Peter and the apostles" in 5:29, where they said, "We must obey God rather than men." This is living out the principle Jesus taught in Mt 10:28.

26:22-23 Paul emphasized that the message of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection matched OT teachings. He probably had in mind such prophetic passages as Isa 52:13-53:12.

26:24 Festus took Paul to be mad because of talk about resurrection and Messiah, Jewish beliefs that seemed foolish to the Gentile world.

26:25-26 As evidence for his good judgment, Paul pointed out that the major events of Christianity had not taken place in a corner, out of sight and scrutiny. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were all public and could not have escaped King Agrippa's notice.

26:27 Paul played to the king's Jewishness. If Agrippa was a good Jew, he should have accepted the prophets and their message about Jesus.

26:28 Scholars disagree over whether Agrippa's response was sarcastic anger, a jest, or a sign that Paul's logic was close to persuading him.

26:29 Paul's rhetorical skills were at their best as he concluded his speech. His confidence in Christ was such that he wished that all who listen could become as him, except for the chains.

26:31 Objective judgment could lead to only one conclusion: Paul was innocent. But Paul's life was held in the service of the Lord, not the judgments of men.

26:32 The charges against Paul were found to be groundless before both Roman and Jewish authorities. Nevertheless, Paul's appeal to Rome put his case in a special category that must be discharged by Caesar himself.