

Your Trial is Your Testimony - Acts 26

Ice Breaker: Who is the most famous, renown, or important person you have met or spoken to? What is the backstory?

Acts 25:23-26:3 23 The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor, I decided to send him to Rome. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27 For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him."

Acts 26:1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 2 "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

1. What did Festus already decide to do with Paul? What was the reason King Agrippa was asked to listen to Paul's defense? What made King Agrippa qualified to help Festus?

2. Why do you think Paul wanted to give defense if he already knew he was going to Rome? Who or what was Paul defending? What did Paul do to prepare for this defense (or offense). (Hint: Look ahead to Acts 26:28-29)

Acts 26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

3. Who do you "pray to God" will come to Christ? (for the sake of the study keep this list short and to specific people)

Exercise: In today's study, we will be looking at Paul's longest and most complete defense of the Gospel. Paul follows an apologetic approach to give his testimony. (Referred to in Zach Flaig's sermon) "A best defense is a good offense" As we look at the different segments, consider one particular person you would like to share the Gospel with and construct a letter or email or conversation that you could use later. Then continue praying for that person. (A worksheet with the questions for the exercise will also be below.)

4 "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. 5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. 6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. 7 This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"

4. What reasons or common connections did Paul use to get the crowd and especially King Agrippa to want to listen to him? (Acts 26:2-7)

Exercise Question #1 – What reason or common connection can you use to open the conversation so that _(Name of person)___ will listen or read through? (This question might be answered last and may be situational. If nothing comes to mind, leave it and ask God help you when the opportunity arises.)

9 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

5. In what way did Paul represent his old way of life as a problem or at least much different than his current life?

Exercise Question #2 - Before (from Navigator Discipleship Tool)

A. Before you met Christ, what were some of your needs, what was lacking, or what was missing in your life?

B. What solutions for your life did you try that didn’t work?

Note: Some of you may have been raised in a Christian home and do not remember exactly the moment you accepted Christ or what your life was like before accepting Christ. In such a case, be honest that you do not know exactly when, but that there was a time you decided to accept Jesus for yourself and not rely on your parent’s faith.

12 “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 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.’

15 “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. 17 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.’

6. What happened to Paul that caused him to consider Christ? How did Jesus say his life would be different?

7. What elements of the gospel did Paul include in his testimony? What does Jesus mean when he said “open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light”?

Exercise Question #3 - How

A. What were the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ?

B. Tell how you trusted Christ, and briefly include the gospel.

19 “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their

repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 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.”

8. How did Paul’s life change after this experience? How is this testimony fulfilling the calling Jesus gave him? In what way does he summarize his testimony and relate it to them?

Exercise Question #4 - After

A. Give an example of how Christ met your needs or how He is now contributing to your life.

B. End with a sentence to the effect that you know that you have eternal life through Christ.

24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

25 “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

9. How does Paul turn from being on the defense to going on the offense?

Exercise Question #5 – How can you change this conversation from defense to offense? (i.e. What do you think about that?, How does that affect you?, Would you like to experience that kind of change? Also, you may be able to help them consider how God can address their needs as he has done for you.)

10. In Paul's testimony above he is emphasizing the difference between his life prior to his Damascus Road experience and his current life by using metaphors of darkness vs. light and insanity vs. sanity. What metaphor, contrast or common experience could we use to help unbelievers understand the change in our life from our conversion experience?

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 After they left the room, they began saying to one another, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

32 Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

11. Here is one Scriptural example that shows us that Paul is continually praying for those who do not know Jesus to become Christians (Acts 26:29). Not only does he pray for them, but he has risked his wellbeing to share his testimony. Paul has turned his trial into a testimony! What can we learn from Paul in our own lives? How can we turn our trials into a testimony?

Preparing your Testimony Worksheet

(Adapted from Navigator Discipleship Tool; Stories of Redemption - Preparing Your Personal Testimony)

Exercise; Consider one particular person you would like to share the Gospel with. Answer the questions below and then construct a letter or email or conversation that you could use later. Continue to pray for that person and for wisdom when to have a conversation with them.

Exercise Question #1 – *What reason or common connection can you use to open the conversation so that __ (Name of Person _____) will listen or read through? (This question might be answered last and may be situational. If nothing comes to mind, leave it and ask God help you when the opportunity arises.)*

Exercise Question #2 - Before *(from Navigator Discipleship Tool)*

A. Before you met Christ, what were some of your needs, what was lacking, or what was missing in your life?

B. What solutions for your life did you try that didn't work?

Exercise Question #3 - How

A. What were the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ?

B. Tell how you trusted Christ, and briefly include the gospel.

Exercise Question #4 - After

A. Give an example of how Christ met your needs or how He is now contributing to your life.

B. End with a sentence to the effect that you know that you have eternal life through Christ.

Exercise Question #5 - *How can you change this conversation from defense to offense? (i.e. What do you think about that?, How does that affect you?, Would you like to experience that kind of change? Also, you may be able to help them project how God can address their needs as he has done for you.)*