

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (PHILIPPIANS 1:12, NIV).

Bible Study 71

Prison: The Plan of God

BY BOB UTLEY

Read Acts 21:17-26:32.

Why was Paul arrested in Jerusalem? (Acts 21:17-36) _____

What did he tell the mob at his arrest? (Acts 22:1-21) _____

What did Paul discuss with Governor Felix and his wife? _____

What did Paul tell King Agrippa and his wife about in Acts 26? _____

These chapters deal with Paul's trials during some of his years in prison. It seems so wrong that God's powerful servant would have to "waste" time in prison. How could God allow this? Believe it or not, God didn't just allow it; He wanted it! This was exactly His plan for Paul—so he could speak to the highest leaders of the Mediterranean world of his day.

What did God tell Ananias about Paul? (Acts 9:15) _____

How did Luke summarize Paul's imprisonment? (Acts 28:31) _____

What did Paul say about his prison experience?

Philippians 1:12-14 _____

2 Timothy 2:9 _____

2 Timothy 4:16-17 _____

Paul was physically attacked and imprisoned unfairly. Things looked really bad. But that was how God would get him to Rome. God's will was for Paul, an excommunicated rabbi, a tentmaker, to speak to powerful political and religious leaders. He would be put on trial where he would take the opportunity of his legal defense to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. What a great idea! Notice how this worked out.

Name the groups or individuals Paul was able to preach to in each of the following trials and difficulties during his imprisonment.

Acts 22 _____

Acts 23 _____

Acts 24 _____

Acts 25:1-12 _____

Acts 25:13-26:32 _____

Acts 28:1-10 _____

Acts 25:11; 26:32; 28:19 _____

Acts 28:17-28 _____

Acts 28:1,6,30; Philippians 1:13 _____

Sometimes we are discouraged about the difficult or unfair circumstances of our lives. We wish things were different. But wait, maybe *on mission* Christians are exactly where they should be. We are in the hands of a loving, purposeful God. He has called us, gifted us and is using us for His kingdom. The old saying "Bloom where you are planted" is true.

Are you experiencing problems right now that could actually be spiritual opportunities? If so, how can you use them for God's purpose?

Notice how Paul repeated his personal testimony several times in Acts. Check this by looking at Acts 9:4, 22:7 and 26:14. These passages show how Paul used his own personal experience as a witnessing tool.

Write your personal testimony in a brief form and memorize it so you can share your faith in Jesus with others. The following will help you get started!

Remember how you felt before you became a Christian. Were you afraid of death? Did you feel alone and without purpose in life? Were you afraid of failure? Tell a little about your life before you met Jesus.

When did you realize your need for Christ? How did you come to know Him as Savior and Lord? Include Scripture passages that were meaningful to you in making your decision (e.g., John 3:16, Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23 and 10:9-13). Explain clearly about sin, grace and forgiveness in words your friends can understand.

Identify specific ways Jesus has changed your life since you became a Christian and what He is teaching you now.

When sharing Christ with people, invite them to personally receive Jesus' gift of salvation by praying to Him. Write a simple prayer that expresses repentance and receiving Christ by faith.

Of course, your testimony will be structured slightly different as you share it with different people in different situations. That's what Paul did. He structured his presentation of the gospel to his audience.

Practice sharing your testimony with a friend and use his or her suggestions to improve it. Then go out and prayerfully look for opportunities to share it with others.