

JEHOVAH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

THIRD QUARTER 2026

BIBLE STUDY

EVERY

WEDNESDAY

7PM

You Tube

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST
(Colossians 2:6-7)

JULY EMPHASIS: Up-rooted and Re-rooted to do the Master's Will: Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens should recognize that God can replace old biases with new, righteous thinking. There is nothing wrong with letting go of old ways of thinking so that we can be re-rooted for righteous service.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Conversion, Re-dedication, Faith, Commitment

LESSON TWENTY-SEVEN: WRONGLY ROOT IN EXCLUSIVENESS

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. The man Saul was very religious, but spiritually in error. How do we help friends and family who are very religious, but spiritually lost?
2. What are some things you've learned from growing that were not correct?
3. How do you help someone who is "sincerely wrong" about God?

TEXT: ACTS 7:55-58

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: YOU CAN BE SINCERELY WRONG

INTRODUCTION: To be "sincerely wrong" means to hold a belief, make a decision, or act with honest, deep conviction, yet still be objectively incorrect, misguided, or deceived. It indicates that good intentions (sincerity) do not guarantee accuracy or truth, and one can be passionately committed to a false premise. The best of us can be sincerely wrong. Sincerity cannot protect someone from the natural or spiritual consequences of a wrong action. The man Saul was very sincere, very committed and extremely zealous, but headed the wrong direction. Truth comes from God, not from our religious system. A person can be sincere and sincerely wrong. Sulfuric acid and water look the same: clear, colorless liquid. One is water, one is deadly poison. If a man drinks a glass of sulfuric acid, believing it to be water, does it matter how sincere he believes? The only hope a person has of righteousness is Jesus Christ. In short, it is possible to have a "sincere heart" but a "wrong head." The lesson is that sincerity matters, but it is not a substitute for truth. This leads us to the man, Saul.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE SINCERELY WRONG, THEY WILL REJECT THE TRUTH. (v. 57)

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. The religious leaders who heard Stephen were furious at the boldness of his testimony. They responded in great anger. Because they refused to accept the truth, they were ready to destroy the truth teller. Unlike the converts in Acts 2:37 who were moved to repentance, the council was intensely enraged and offended by Stephen's accusations. So how did Stephen get here?

Stephen, a follower of Jesus, was defending himself against charges of blasphemy. Instead of a fair trial, his truth-telling caused his accusers to act like a violent mob, leading to his martyrdom. The idea of **gnashing at him with their teeth** can't help but remind us of the imagery of Hell. Seven different times, Jesus described Hell as a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 8:12). These men were prominent, successful, and appeared to be religious; yet they were rejecting God and associating themselves with hell, not heaven. This moment highlights the opposition between the religious elite and the Gospel, setting the stage for the scattering of Christians and the expansion of the church beyond Jerusalem. In the center of hate, malice, jealousy and self-righteous, God has a plan. **Has there ever been a time when you stood up for Christ and there was fierce intense opposition? If so, what were the circumstances and how did you see the hand of God?**

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY MUST REMAIN STEADFAST IN THE MIDST OF GREAT ADVERSITY. (vv. 55-57)

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him . . . Despite the mounting opposition, Stephen remained steadfast. To remain steadfast as a Christian means to hold firmly to faith, convictions, and godly principles, staying calm and stable despite trials or opposition. It involves 1. being rooted in Scripture, 2. trusting in God's strength, 3. engaging in consistent prayer, and 4. staying committed to serving the Lord, knowing that trials test faith and lead to spiritual maturity. We can suppose that Jesus was **standing** here in solidarity with Stephen at this moment of crisis. He does not react impassionate to the problems of His people. We might also consider that Jesus stood to give a standing ovation to Stephen, whose fate made him unique among believers. Among all the followers of Jesus, Stephen was the first martyr. **As Christians, what is one lesson we can learn from this passage?**

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WE CAN SINCERELY ALIGN OURSELVES WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE. (v. 58)

The text says, **“They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.”** The scene introduces Saul (later Paul) as a consenting figure, laying clothes at his feet, showing the blindness of persecutors. Though a persecutor now, this scene highlights God's power to transform even the most fervent enemies of the gospel. **They cast him out of the city and stoned him:** The extent of their rage was shown by their execution of Stephen, which was done without regard for Roman law, and which was performed according to traditional Jewish custom (stoning). **And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul:** Saul stood there as the supervisor of the operation. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had also approved of Stephen's execution. **Young man here** literally means, “a man in his prime.” It certainly does not mean that Saul wasn't old enough to be a member of the Sanhedrin. In Acts 26:10, Paul says *I cast my vote against them*, and the plain implication was that he had a vote as a member of the Sanhedrin. (Blue Letter Bible Commentary) From a young man, Saul, later Paul, was very zealous. Again, he was sincere, but sincerely wrong. God will have to uproot him to replant him in a different place with a different purpose.

Has there been a time when God changed your course of direction in a major way? If so, how did he accomplish this work of grace in your life?

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

JULY EMPHASIS: Up-rooted and Re-rooted to do the Master's Will Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens should recognize that God can replace old biases with new, righteous thinking. There is nothing wrong with letting go old ways of thinking so that we can be re-rooted for righteous service.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Conversion, Re-dedication, Faith, Commitment

LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT: RE-ROOTED BY AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE MASTER

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. As you consider the zeal of Saul, what are some destructive things that have been done in the past in the name of religion?
2. What did God do to get your attention?
3. When God got your attention, how did he change your life?

TEXT: ACTS 9:1-9

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: BROUGHT OUT OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

INTRODUCTION: Saul of Tarsus was born in approximately AD 5 in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (in modern-day Turkey). He was born to Jewish parents who possessed Roman citizenship, a coveted privilege that their son would also possess. In about AD 10, Saul's family moved to Jerusalem. Sometime between AD 15—20 Saul began his studies of the Hebrew Scriptures in the city of Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel. It was under Gamaliel that Saul would begin an in-depth study of the Law with this famous rabbi. There has been some debate over whether Saul was raised in Jerusalem or in his birthplace of Tarsus, but a straightforward reading of his own comments indicates that Jerusalem was his boyhood home (Acts 22:3). We know that Paul's sister's son was in Jerusalem after Paul's conversion (Acts 23:16), which lends weight to the idea that Paul's entire family had moved to Jerusalem when he was young. The historian Luke tells us that Stephen's executioners laid their garments at the feet of Saul (Acts 7:58), who was in full approval of the mob's murderous actions (Acts 8:1). Saul later ravaged the church, entering the homes of believers and committing them to prison. Saul's anti-Christian zeal motivated him not only to arrest and imprison male Christians (the "ringleaders") but to lock up female believers as well (Acts 8:3). Saul viewed the early followers of Jesus as a threat to Judaism.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE PLANS OF MEN AND WOMEN ARE ALWAYS UNDER GOD'S WATCHFUL EYE. (vv. 1-2)

By way of introduction, we are told, "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

Like Saul, each of us may think we know what to do, but sometimes, it all from the flesh. The man Saul was headed in the wrong direction at about 100 miles an hour. **Then Saul:** We last saw Saul in Acts 8:3, where it says that *he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*. Here he continued and expanded this work to the city of **Damascus** (about 130 miles or 210 kilometers northeast of Jerusalem; a six-day journey altogether). **Still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord:** The picture is of an angry, violent man absolutely convinced of his own righteousness. Saul *hated* the **disciples of the Lord**. He wasn't seeking Jesus when Jesus sought him. We might say that Saul was decided *against* Jesus when Jesus decided *for* Saul. Of course, we don't know what **Saul** looked like. An old apocryphal book, dating to the end of the first century, described Paul like this: "A man of moderate stature, with crisp hair, crooked legs, blue eyes, large knit brows, and long nose, at times looking like a man, at times like an angel." (Cited in Gaebelien) He had zeal; he had authority, "**He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus . . .**", and he had support. But he was still headed in the wrong direction. But God! God has another plan.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT SALVATION IS A WORK OF GOD'S WONDERFUL GRACE. (vv. 3-4)

The narrative continues, "**As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'**"

Saul was actively seeking to destroy Christians, yet Jesus intercepted him on his own turf. The light from heaven was not just a sight, but a divine interruption that stopped Saul in his tracks. This highlights that salvation is initiated by Jesus, often arriving at the height of our rebellion or misplaced zeal. **Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven... and heard a voice:** Somewhere outside of Damascus, this **suddenly** happened. This spectacular event must be regarded as unusual. God does not *normally* confront sinners with a heavenly light and an audible voice from heaven. In Acts 22:6 Paul revealed that this happened at mid-day, when the sun shines at its brightest. Yet Paul said that this light was *brighter than the sun* (Acts 26:13).

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT AN ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST CHANGES YOUR LIFE FOREVER. (vv. 5-9)

The light has caused Saul to ask the right question: "**Who are you, Lord?**" Saul asked. The response: "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,**" he replied. The instructions: "**Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.**" Jesus personally identified Himself to Saul, shattering his delusions: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting". This encounter shifted Saul from having head knowledge about Christianity to a saving, personal relationship with the risen Savior. A personal encounter with Jesus changes one's perspective on life and their purpose. The Scripture tells us, "**The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything.**" Saul was struck blind, leading to three days of darkness, fasting, and forced dependence, which allowed him to reflect on his spiritual blindness. His physical incapacity served to humble his arrogant spirit, forcing him to be led by the hand, reversing his power. This highlights that true conversion often requires letting go of our own plans to align with God's purpose.

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST

JULY EMPHASIS: Up-rooted and Re-rooted to do the Master's Will Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens should recognize that God can replace old biases with new, righteous thinking. There is nothing wrong with letting go old ways of thinking so that we can be re-rooted for righteous service.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Conversion, Re-dedication, Faith, Commitment

LESSON TWENTY- NINE: ESCAPING FROM YOUR DAMASCUS

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Who were the people who helped you immediately after your conversion?
2. What became your greatest source of encouragement once you were saved?
3. At the beginning of your journey with Christ, what fears did you have?

TEXT: ACTS: 9:19-25

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: LEAVING THE OLD LIFE BEHIND

INTRODUCTION: The events that happened on the road to **Damascus** relate not only to the apostle **Paul**, whose dramatic conversion occurred there, but they also provide a clear picture of the conversion of all people. While some have an extraordinarily dramatic conversion known as a “Damascus Road experience,” the conversion of all believers follows a similar pattern of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, described in Paul’s own words in **Acts 9:1–9; Acts 22:6–11; and Acts 26:9–20**. Saul’s dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus was the beginning of an incredible journey. And while not all conversions are as startling as Saul’s, each of us is commissioned by Jesus to live in obedience to Him (**John 14:15**), love one another in His name (**1 John 2:23**), “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” (**Philippians 3:10**), and tell the world of the wonderful riches in Christ. **What is your conversion testimony? When did you begin to leave the old life behind?**

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT BABES IN CHRIST NEED HELP. (vv. 18-19)

The text says, “**Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.**”

After his encounter with Christ, Saul needed physical and spiritual renewal. Like Saul, we need the same support: Nourishment (Word, fellowship) and Restoration (healing from the past). We each come or came to God with a past. This past is the story of how we lived before Christ. God is well aware of our past, yet he still calls us on purpose and with purpose. Community is essential to a healthy Christian life. Just as a baby cannot survive and grow without proper nourishment and care, the baby Christian cannot survive and grow without the proper spiritual nourishment and care.

Just like Saul, God prepares us before He uses us and none of us can pour out until God has poured into us. As we look back over our lives, at the time, we didn't see it then, but now we do. God was at work all the time planning and preparing for where we are today. Lane Adams said, "The mature church must assume its role of loving parental responsibility in relation to spiritual infants. It is amazing but true that the average church will often expect more spiritual maturity from new believers than they will from most of their old established members. When such maturity is not immediately forthcoming, then criticism is leveled." **Don't criticize new believers, help them.** What are some ways we can be intentional about this?

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST CHANGES EVERYTHING. (vv. 20-22)

"At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Saul didn't delay—he began sharing Jesus right away. Do you remember your enthusiasm when you first came to Christ? Most of us were just like Saul, we wanted to tell everybody about our newfound faith. In fact, many of us said, "I found the Lord!" But, in reality, God found us; we were the ones who were lost. The text continues, **"All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?'"** In Second Corinthians 5:17, Paul said if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. You and I cannot be new, and no one knows it. **Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.** His message was clear: Jesus is the Son of God. Growth is evident: From confusion → to conviction; from persecutor → to preacher

People were amazed at his transformation. A genuine encounter with Christ produces immediate and visible change.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THERE ARE TIMES WE MUST GET OUT OF DODGE OR DAMASCUS. (vv. 23-25)

Saul's life of Faithfulness led to persecution, not applause. The ones he was killing for are now looking to kill him. The scripture reports, **"After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him."** What an incredible story of God's Divine protection. We are always in God's care, he watches over us day and night, and no one, absolutely no one, can thwart his plan. The Lord gave the disciples in Damascus a creative plan. **"But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall."** God doesn't always remove opposition, sometimes He guides us through it. If you stand for Christ, expect resistance—but trust God's provision. Saul's story teaches us:

- God saves us
- God uses us
- God sustains us

The same God who transformed Paul the Apostle is still at work today. Yield to his authority, to his wisdom and to his way.

How does Saul's journey encourage you thus far? How does it challenge you?

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7)

JULY EMPHASIS: Up-rooted and Re-rooted to do the Master's Will Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens should recognize that God can replace old biases with new, righteous thinking. There is nothing wrong with letting go old ways of thinking so that we can be re-rooted for righteous service.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Conversion, Re-dedication, Faith, Commitment

LESSON THIRTY: THE POWER OF A TESTIMONY

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What does it feel like when someone doubts the genuineness of your faith?
2. Who have been some of your biggest encouragers as a believer in Christ?
3. As a follower of Christ, what are some things that have discouraged you?

TEXT: 9:26-28

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY

INTRODUCTION: The power of testimony lies in its ability to build faith, inspire hope, and validate spiritual or personal experiences by sharing concrete stories of transformation. It functions as a "spirit of prophecy" that encourages others to believe God for similar breakthroughs.

Key Aspects of the Power of Testimony:

Strengthens Faith: Hearing stories of God's actions (healing, provision, restoration) ignites faith, reminding listeners that God can work in their own lives.

Validates Experience: A testimony is an irrefutable personal record of God's work, which is hard for skeptics to argue against.

Connects and Inspires: Sharing stories fosters community and encourages believers in their calling.

Conquers Darkness: Revelation 12:11 emphasizes that victory over challenges is often won through the "blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony".

Encourages Action: Testimonies often serve as a catalyst for others to trust and act on their faith.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS ARE SOMETIMES APPREHENSIVE ABOUT NEW BELIEVERS. (v. 26)

“When he (Saul) came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.” Saul (Paul) has converted, but the disciples in Jerusalem only know him as a violent persecutor. They fear him and reject him. Our past often precedes us. Even when we change, others may still see us through the lens of who we used to be. It's not easy initially to trust someone who has been a mean drunk, a wife beater, a violent drug dealer, etc. I believe that most people are suspect of dramatic conversions. Paul has gone from Christian killer and church persecutor to a preacher almost overnight.

AND . . . The church can sometimes be a place of fear and skepticism toward newcomers or those with troubled pasts. How would you feel and react to a known murderer who was recently released from prison who shared his story of conversion while incarcerated? Would you be okay with him dating your daughter, your only daughter? We have natural inclinations that come because of fear or biases, or even, having a bad experience with a similar person. When we consider the Jerusalem Church and its apprehension about this new young, energetic preacher, don't be too harsh in your judgement, we possibly wouldn't have acted any differently. At least, this group of believers was honest about their feelings. Are we holding onto the past sins of others, refusing to believe in the transforming power of God?

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST BE WILLING TO WELCOME OUTSIDERS. (v. 27)

The man Barnabas was given many encouraging names. Some called him the son of encouragement, while others called him a bridge builder. The Scripture says, **“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.”** Barnabas believed that Saul's conversion was real. He takes a risk, steps away from the crowd, and vouches for Saul. He acts as a mediator and a witness to Saul's transformation. We need "Barnabas" figures in the church today—people willing to encourage, bridge gaps, and believe in potential rather than focusing on reputation. Barnabas (literally "Son of Encouragement") looked past fear and brought Saul into fellowship. **Have you ever welcomed someone into the church that others rejected because of the way the person smelled, dressed, or spoke? Or even someone who has a horrible reputation in the community?** The church needs to welcome those who the world has rejected. Brothers and sisters, we have not thrown caution to the wind, but we, above all people should know that God can change the worst of sinners. **Will you be a Barnabas this week?** Will you help someone, who is skeptical of the church, find their place in the body of Christ?

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WE MUST BE BOLD AND STAND TALL IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION. (vv. 28-30)

So, Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. In verse 28, we are seeing more and more signs of **Evidence of Transformation.** Because of Barnabas' intervention, Saul is accepted, moves freely with the apostles, and preaches boldly in Jerusalem. True conversion leads to authentic, bold service. Saul did not hide his past; he used it as evidence of God's grace to fuel his future ministry. The narrative continues, **“He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”** Hellenistic Jews were Jewish people in the ancient Mediterranean—primarily during the 4th century BCE to 2nd century CE—who adopted Greek language, culture, and customs while maintaining their Jewish faith. Saul again faced persecution and assassination attempts. This became a recurring pattern in his life. The story of Saul's conversion begins with him leaving Jerusalem to persecute the followers of Jesus. It ends with him leaving Jerusalem as a persecuted follower of Jesus. **They brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus:** For his own protection, the Christians in Jerusalem **sent him out to Tarsus.** Somewhere between 8 and 12 years passed in the life of Saul before he again entered into prominent ministry, being sent out as a missionary from the church at Antioch. At that time, it would also be Barnabas who reached out to Saul, remembering him and loving him. **As followers of Christ, we should expect persecution.**

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

AUGUST EMPHASIS: Transforming From Biases in Thinking to Ethical Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom citizens are expected to stand resolute for the cause of Christ when faced with challenges to their evangelism efforts. They should boldly address opposition with the Word of God.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Perseverance, Empowered, Apostleship, Boldness

LESSON THIRTY-ONE: PERSEVERANCE IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. When you hear the phrase “Perseverance of the Saint”, what does it mean to you?
2. What are some of the methods/means God uses to get the Gospel out today?
3. How can Christians work together to get the Gospel to unreached peoples?

TEXT: ACTS 11:19-30

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: SALVATION IS A GIFT BY GRACE, NOT A REWARD FOR WORKS. KEEP PRESSING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY.

INTRODUCTION: The Bible has a lot to say about perseverance in several different contexts. Clearly, the Scriptures teach that those who “overcome” and persevere in the faith will inherit eternal life (Revelation 2:7). This truth is also expressed in Colossians 1:23 where we see that people will be holy, blameless, and above reproach “if they continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” So, all Christians should be in agreement that those who are ultimately saved are those who do persevere and continue to believe the gospel. There are two very distinct views on the issue of perseverance of the saints among Christians. The first is the Arminian view that it is possible for true Christians to turn away from God and not persevere. This is consistent with the concept of salvation which has man’s “free will” at the center of it. It is logically consistent that, if man’s “free will” choice is the determining factor of his salvation, then it would also be possible for that man to later choose to reject God and thereby lose his salvation. However, the Bible clearly teaches that we are “born again” by the Holy Spirit, which results in our coming to faith in Christ. All who have been “born again” do have eternal security and will persevere. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is founded in the promise that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6) and Jesus’ declaration that “all that the Father gives me will come to me” and “I shall lose none of them that he has given me” (John 6:37, 39). Beyond the concept of perseverance in regard to salvation, there are biblical exhortations to persevere in the Christian life.

**1. KINGDOM CITIZENS ARE COMMITTED TO SHARING THE GOSPEL.
(vv. 19-21)**

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among

Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Persecution forced believers to scatter, but they didn't keep quiet. They preached the gospel wherever they went. They moved beyond just preaching to Jews, reaching out to Greeks (Hellenists/Gentiles), signaling a massive expansion in the mission. There are times God uses the scattered church to accomplish great things for eternity. Think about this: **Do we see our personal, professional, or social "scattering" as an opportunity to share the gospel?** What are some other ways God gets out to places we would not otherwise go?

"The Lord's hand was with them," which is the catalyst for genuine conversion. If we are not careful, we will miss the catalyst and only see chaos. **When has God shook up some things in your life?**

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND SPIRITUAL IDENTITY. (vv. 22-26)

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas, a "good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith," to investigate. Barnabas saw God's grace, was glad, and encouraged them to "remain true to the Lord with all their hearts". With a desire to help deepen discipleship among the brothers and sisters in Antioch, Barnabas brought in Saul (Paul), and they taught the church for a whole year. **Are we encouraging new believers to stick with Jesus, or focusing solely on initial evangelism? How can we do a better job discipling young believers today. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."** Encourage young believers.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS ARE CARING AND GENEROUS. (vv. 27-30)

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named **Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.** The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. What does it Mean: This term was likely a nickname, emphasizing their total alignment with Christ over national or religious traditions. When a famine was prophesied, the Antioch church didn't wait for disaster to strike; they immediately planned to help their fellow believers in Judea. Every church should be both caring and generous. Our heart for God is seen mostly clearly through the way we treat brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, and the larger world around us. **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."**³⁵ **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** **John 13:34-35.** Love is not what it says; love is what it does. Here is the million-dollar question: **Does our lifestyle, character, and mission make it obvious to the world that we belong to Jesus?**

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST. (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

AUGUST EMPHASIS: Transforming From Biases in Thinking to Ethical Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom citizens are expected to stand resolute for the cause of Christ when faced with challenges to their evangelism efforts. They should boldly address opposition with the Word of God.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Perseverance, Empowered, Apostleship, Boldness

LESSON THIRTY-TWO: EMPOWERED FOR EVANGELISM

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Who are some of the gifted servants in your congregation?
2. Is fasting still a viable discipline in the modern church? Why or why not?
3. When members are commissioned for evangelism and missionary work, what role should the local church play in the sending process?

TEXT: ACTS 13:1-3

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: EVANGELISM IS A WORK OF THE SPIRIT.

INTRODUCTION: The role of the pastor who specializes in evangelism and/or outreach varies widely from church to church. The person who engages in evangelism and outreach should first be gifted by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:7-8 and 11-13 state, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore, He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive,...And gave gifts to men.’ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Whatever the role and duties of the evangelism/outreach pastor, his/her primary goal should be to equip others for service within the body of Christ. A pastor who specializes in evangelism may go out into the community himself/herself, perhaps in a door-to-door ministry, sharing the gospel of Christ with all he or she meets and inviting them to church. He/she may conduct regular evangelistic crusades or meetings in other areas for the goal of spreading the gospel and calling others to Christ. The evangelism pastor uses the biblical method of evangelism, sharing both the bad news of sin and judgment and the good news of salvation from sin through the shed blood of Christ at Calvary. Outreach is another function of the evangelism/outreach pastor that can have many facets. **Gotquestions.com**

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT GOD HAS PLACED MANY GIFTED LEADERS IN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION. (v. 1)

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. The Antioch church was led by a multicultural group of prophets and teachers (e.g., Barnabas from Cyprus, Simeon called Niger, Lucius from North Africa, and Saul). There is value in shared ministry. Different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (including Manaen, raised with Herod the Great) worked together in complete unity. One of the greatest challenges any church faces is getting different people, personalities and positions to work together.

Why do we struggle to work together? Just a note: **Simeon who was called Niger . . . Since Niger means *black*, he was presumably a black African among the congregation at Antioch, and possibly the same Simeon who carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26).

** Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch . . . This Manaen mentioned here grew up with Herod the tetrarch. This was the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and presided over one of Jesus' trials (Luke 23:7-12). Herod and Manaen grew up together but went very different ways. It's amazing how one person can go right, and the other one wrong.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT FASTING IS STILL A STRONG BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE. (v. 2)

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

The church was actively worshipping rather than passively waiting around.

Fasting shows a willingness to sacrifice physical desires to seek God's presence. It is always important for the church to seek divine direction. Fasting, prayer, and worship are intricate to seeking God. It is in this atmosphere of intense devotion that the Holy Spirit gave clear instructions to separate Barnabas and Saul. The separation of Paul and Barnabas from this congregation in no means signal that they were displeasing God. If we truly understand the ministry of the church, then we understand that the check is called to multiply in every generation. Listen to the command. **Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Every Christian church should be a giving, a going and a sending church.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL CONNECTION WITH THE LOCAL CHURCH. (v. 3)

So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The faith community has a role: The local church didn't just bless the mission; they took an active part in the confirmation through prayer and fasting. Acts 13:1-3 details the launch of the first global mission. This text teaches that a healthy, mission-driven church must prioritize Spirit-led leadership, cultivate a posture of active worship and fasting, and fully empower its members to go wherever God calls them. They were sent with fasting and prayer. This whole work required a substantial dependence on God, and fasting and prayer demonstrated that dependence. The laying on of hands was a formal commissioning to this work. Certainly, Barnabas and Saul were "ordained" before this, but now they entered a different sphere of ministry. Notice that the church in Antioch *sent* Barnabas and Saul out. They were supported and sent by a specific congregation. As far as we know, this had never happened before in the history of the church. Many went out as "accidental missionaries" (as in Acts 8:4 and 11:19) but there was never a concerted and organized effort to win people to Jesus like this. The church at Antioch provides a model for the modern church. Missionaries and evangelists go in the name of the Lord and with the blessings of His people. Every Christian needs a covering. Don't go out alone. The sending church is vital to the success and support of the ministry.

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST. (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

AUGUST EMPHASIS: Transforming From Biases in Thinking to Ethical Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom citizens are expected to stand resolute for the cause of Christ when faced with challenges to their evangelism efforts. They should boldly address opposition with the Word of God.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Perseverance, Empowered, Apostleship, Boldness

LESSON THIRTY-THREE: PAUL, THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How do you handle spiritual differences in the Body of Christ?
2. What can leaders do to unite the Body of Christ?
3. When there is a spirit of peace and cooperation among spiritual leaders, how does this help the church grow and move forward?

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:1-10

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: PAUL EMBRACES HIS MINISTRY.

INTRODUCTION: Paul calls himself “the apostle to the Gentiles” in Romans 11:13. It’s not as though Paul never preached to the Jews—on the contrary, his custom was to preach first in the synagogue when entering a new city (Acts 17:2). And it’s not as though the other apostles never preached to Gentiles (see Acts 10). But in a real sense, Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles was unique. Paul’s mission was to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles: “He chose me to be a servant of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles and to do the work of a priest in the service of his good news. God did this so that the Holy Spirit could make the Gentiles into a holy offering, pleasing to him” (Romans 15:16, CEV). Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles by God’s choice. The Lord Jesus declared that He had a specific mission for Paul: “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles because the bulk of his ministry was spent in pagan lands planting churches among the Gentiles. (Romans 15:24) Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles because he was under obligation to serve in Gentile lands. (Ephesians 3:8)

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE MUST BE PROTECTED. (vv. 1-5)

Context: False teachers (Judaizers) were infiltrating, trying to force Gentile believers to follow Jewish laws (circumcision) for salvation. Judaizers were a faction of early Jewish Christians in the 1st century who insisted that Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to Christianity had to adopt Jewish customs, such as circumcision and strict dietary laws, to be saved. Our Scripture lesson begins . . .

“Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles.

I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you."

Paul refused to allow Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised, resisting pressure to add works to grace. Paul knew that this move was a threat of Legalism: "False brothers" wanted to spy on and destroy the freedom believers have in Christ, turning it into slavery. Because of great need to preserve the pure, unadulterated gospel of grace through faith alone for the church, Paul sought to block salvation through the law or legalistic rituals at every turn. **How can we protect the purity and sacred message of salvation by grace through faith in our generation? When an individual does not accept salvation as a gift, what are some other methods we might employ?**

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE GOSPEL UNITES TRUE LEADERS. **(vv. 6-9)**

As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles, James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised or Jews. There is no favoritism with God. Paul emphasizes that the status of human leaders does not change the truth of the gospel. However, he welcomes the confirmation of his calling by the pillars of the Church. Peter, James, and John recognized the grace given to Paul and the validity of his gospel to the Gentiles. And because of this, they extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas, showcasing that the gospel unites, rather than divides, diverse believers. There is One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism – Jew or Gentile. We must continue to work hard to unite the Body of Christ. Why is this last statement true?

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE GOSPEL TRANSLATES INTO LIFE. **(v. 10)**

Good leadership makes a difference in every generation. These are words of togetherness and cooperation. Listen to the text, **"All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along."** The only instruction from the Jerusalem leaders was to remember the poor, highlighting that true gospel faith works through love. The gospel dictates that the church must not just defend doctrine but also display it through care for those in need. Paul expresses his eagerness to follow this directive, emphasizing that faith is active. It also demonstrates the truth that leaders must also be followers.

Conclusion:

- We must reject any "gospel" that demands works to maintain salvation (Legalism).
- We must uphold the gospel of grace as the core of our freedom and unity.
- We must live out that gospel by serving others, specifically the poor.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL CHANGES LIVES.

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST. (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

AUGUST EMPHASIS: Transforming From Biases in Thinking to Ethical Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom citizens are expected to stand resolute for the cause of Christ when faced with challenges to their evangelism efforts. They should boldly address opposition with the Word of God.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Perseverance, Empowered, Apostleship, Boldness

LESSON THIRTY-FOUR: BOLDLY CONFRONTING HYPOCRISY

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Why is it difficult to confront others when it is obvious that they are wrong?
2. Why do we sometimes join the hypocrisy rather than opposing it?
3. Why do we often ask others to abide by a higher standard of righteousness?

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-14

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: BE FOR REAL; GOD SEES YOUR HEART.

INTRODUCTION: In essence, “hypocrisy” refers to the act of claiming to believe something but acting in a different manner. The word is derived from the Greek term for “actor”—literally, “one who wears a mask”—in other words, someone who pretends to be what he is not. The Bible calls hypocrisy a sin. There are two forms hypocrisy can take: that of professing belief in something and then acting in a manner contrary to that belief, and that of looking down on others when we ourselves are flawed. The prophet Isaiah condemned the hypocrisy of his day: “The Lord says, ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men’” (Isaiah 29:13). Centuries later, Jesus quoted this verse, aiming the same condemnation at the religious leaders of His day (Matthew 15:8-9). John the Baptist refused to give hypocrites a pass, telling them to produce “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). Jesus took an equally staunch stand against sanctimony—He called hypocrites “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15), “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27), and “snakes,”

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS RECOGNIZE THE TRAP OF HYPOCRISY. (vv. 11-12)

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. Peter initially ate with Gentile believers (acting in freedom) but withdrew when Jewish believers arrived, fearing their judgment. Peter’s actions were driven by fear rather than conviction. He feared losing reputation with the legalists, causing him to act out of step with his previous beliefs and behavior. We fall into hypocrisy when we live by "house rules" or social pressure rather than the gospel, creating a double standard in our lives. **Can you recall a time when you joined the crowd rather than standing by your beliefs. If so, what was the outcome?**

The Blue Letter Commentary helps us further: “Though Peter was previously in agreement with welcoming Gentiles into the church without bringing them under the Law of Moses, when Peter came to Antioch (Paul’s home church), it was another story. He refused to associate with Gentile Christians once certain Jewish believers from Jerusalem came. These men were Christians of Jewish background. Paul called them **certain men... from James and those who were of the circumcision**. Knowing their background, Peter knew they would be offended at his fellowship with Gentiles who had not come under the Law of Moses. In their eyes, these uncircumcised Gentiles were not really Christians at all. Therefore, to please them and to avoid a conflict, Peter treated these Gentile Christians as if they were not Christians. **Shame on you, Peter. Have you ever acted like Peter?**

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT INFLUENCE IS A POWERFUL THING; IT CAN EVEN LEAD US TO COMPROMISE. (vv. 13-14a)

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. Peter’s hypocrisy was so influential that it led other Jewish believers—and even Barnabas—astray. The leader’s hypocrisy is a danger to others: When leaders or influencers walk inconsistently with the gospel, it divides the community and confuses believers about the nature of grace. **If a leader does something that disrupts or divides the community, what should he/she do to make it right?** All Christians must take responsibility for their own actions. We must be aware that our behavior influences others. Compromise rarely affects only us; it often carries others into that same compromise. In Numbers 16, we read an account about the power of influence: Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites—Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—became insolent² and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council.³ They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?” **250 men were influenced by a small group of rebels.** Be careful who you are listening to.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THE SUPREMACY OF GOSPEL TRUTH. (v. 14)

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? Improper action must be rebuked. Paul publicly confronts Peter because their behavior was “not in step with the truth of the gospel”. **Is your behavior in step with the gospel?** Paul clarifies that forcing Gentiles to live like Jews (requiring legalistic works) distorts the message that righteousness is through faith in Christ alone. Our lives must align with the gospel. We must reject the need to “earn” God’s love and stop requiring others to meet human standards of conduct before they are welcomed in the church, the family of God. What can we learn from Peter’s mistake? Peter’s mistake teaches us that no one is immune to falling into legalism due to pressure. Paul’s response teaches us that the gospel is worth defending, even at the cost of strained relationships. We are called to stand firm in grace and walk in step with the truth of the gospel, not in fear of men. If the gospel is true—that we are saved by grace alone—our conduct must not imply that we are saved by grace plus works.

**IN ORDER FOR TRUTH TO THRIVE IN
THE BODY OF CHRIST, THEN ERROR MUST
BE CONFRONTED IN LOVE.**

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

AUGUST EMPHASIS: Transforming From Biases in Thinking to Ethical Integrity – Lessons from the Life of Paul

THOUGHT: Kingdom citizens are expected to stand resolute for the cause of Christ when faced with challenges to their evangelism efforts. They should boldly address opposition with the Word of God.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Perseverance, Empowered, Apostleship, Boldness

LESSON THIRTY-FIVE: BEING “ALMOST PERSUADED” IS NOT ENOUGH

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. As followers of Christ, we get caught between two worlds. How have you handled being a Christian when it conflicts with human government?
2. Where have you experienced your faith on trial?
3. In what ways have you witnessed to those with civil authority?

TEXT: ACTS 25:13-27

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: THE CHALLENGE OF LIVING FOR GOD IN AN UNGODLY ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION: There are several different Herods mentioned in the New Testament. All of them are members of the Herod dynasty, rulers appointed by the powers in Rome to oversee Israel. Herod Agrippa II is the one who heard Paul’s defense of the gospel and famously rejected Paul’s appeal to be saved. Herod Agrippa II was only seventeen when his father, Herod Agrippa I, died. He was in Rome at the time and was favored by Emperor Claudius. Claudius kept Agrippa II in Rome for a few more years and then made him tetrarch of the Syrian kingdom called Chalcis and gave him the responsibility to supervise the temple in Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa II eventually gave up the territory of Chalcis but was granted the title of king and given more territory, including all that had been ruled by Herod Philip. Nero later added to his territory, including some of Galilee. Herod Agrippa II lived with Bernice, who was herself in the Herodian line, being a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. She had been married to her uncle, Herod Pollio of Chalcis (not mentioned in Scripture), but after his death moved in with her brother, Agrippa II, in an incestuous relationship.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE WORLD DOES NOT HAVE THE ABILITY TO COMPREHEND THE GOSPEL. (vv. 13-21)

A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul’s case with the king. He said: “There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over anyone before they have faced their accusers and have had an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. When they came here with me, I did not delay the case but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in.

When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so, I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. But when Paul made his appeal to be held over for the emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."

Festus is completely baffled by Paul's case. He expected to find grave political crimes but instead discovered religious disputes centering around "a man named Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul claimed to be alive". Human authorities and secular institutions will frequently fail to understand the true nature of the Gospel. Believers should not place their ultimate hope in the fairness of worldly systems, but rest in the sovereignty of God, who guides our steps even through human confusion. The gospel is not confusing, but our understanding, or lack thereof may bring about confusion. The world often views the gospel as foolishness or a non-essential religious debate, ignoring the supernatural reality of the resurrection.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST RECOGNIZE THE TRAP BETWEEN PEOPLE-PLEASING AND INTEGRITY. (vv. 22-25)

Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself."

He replied, "Tomorrow, you will hear him." 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. 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. 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. Festus admits he finds no capital offense in Paul, yet he feels pressured to appease the Jewish leaders and confused by Paul's appeal to Caesar. He organizes this grand assembly not to administer justice, but to find something to write to Rome. Corrupted people often compromise their principles for human favor and status. We are called to integrity and clean hands, standing firm in the truth rather than altering our convictions to please the "pomp" and approval of the world. God brings about His good purposes even through secular systems and unbelieving authorities. In times of confusion or injustice, trust in God's providence. The "powers that be" are ultimately subject to God's plan, just as they were during Paul's imprisonment. **How have you handled being treated unjustly in the workplace, in the community, or by judges?**

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THE CENTRALITY OF THE LIVING SAVIOR.

(vv. 26-27) 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. For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him." Festus is forced to bring Paul before Agrippa, a king with Jewish knowledge, because he cannot legitimately charge Paul with a crime. The "case" isn't really against Paul, but against his testimony that Jesus is alive. Every person—from the lowest to the highest king—must deal with the person of Jesus Christ. Our lives, like Paul's, are evidence of the truth. When others look at us, do they see the reality of a living Savior, or just a, as Festus viewed it, "a dead man called Jesus"? Like Paul, every circumstance we face is secondary to the reality of the Resurrection. Instead of shrinking back out of fear of consequences, we are called to boldly share our testimony and keep the living, breathing reality of Christ at the center of our lives.

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

SEPTEMBER EMPHASIS: TRANSFORMING FROM COGNITIVE BIASES TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens are expected to maintain unwavering dedication throughout their lives, making engagement in the cause of Christ a continual responsibility. There is no provision for retirement from doing the Lord's work.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Suffering, Revealing, Enduring, Praising

LESSON THIRTY-SIX: SUFFERING FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Most of us have suffered in one way or another. But have you ever suffered for the sake of the gospel? If so, what were the circumstances?
2. What was a difficult time in your life or ministry?
3. When and where have you observed the grace of God in your life?

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 11:25-26

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: MY LIFE IS NOT MY OWN; I AM YOUR SERVANT.

INTRODUCTION: The Bible talks a lot about suffering for the sake of Christ. In the era in which the New Testament was written, followers of Jesus were often ostracized by their own families and communities. Some of the worst persecution came from the religious leaders (Acts 4:1–3). Jesus told His followers, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 5:10). He reminded His disciples, **"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first"** (John 15:18). Second Timothy 3:12 says, **"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** As in biblical times, many Christians today have found that making a public declaration of faith in Christ can result in imprisonment, beatings, torture, or death (Hebrews 11:32–38; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 3:8; Acts 5:40). Often those of us in free nations shudder at the thought, but we feel relatively safe. We understand that there are thousands who suffer daily for the sake of Christ and are thankful we don't have to. But is there only one kind of persecution? Jesus stated clearly what it means to follow Him: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."**

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS EXPERIENCE MANY HARDSHIPS IN THIS LIFE. (v. 25)

The Apostle Paul continues his litany of sufferings for Christ, he reports, **"Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked . . ."** Following Christ does not exempt believers from hardship. Paul faced relentless physical violence and perils. These trials were not signs of God's absence, but badges of faithful obedience. Expect adversity in your Christian walk. Just as Paul endured extreme conditions for the sake of the Gospel, believers must remain steadfast when facing earthly storms. Comfort is not always an indicator of God's will; trials can occur during obedience. At times, Christians act as if, comfort and safety are signs that we are in the center of God's will. The truth is the opposite is often true.

Jesus said, **“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble (tribulations, hard times). But take heart! I have overcome the world.”** John 16:33. **What hardships have you experienced for the Kingdom of God?** Take a moment and consider two Testament servants: Joseph: when you consider his life from 18 to 30 years of age, what persecution, pain and disappointment did he encounter? What about Daniel? As a young man, he was taken to Babylon. What are some of the heartaches and headaches he encountered? What cause us as SOLDIERS of the CROSS to think that everything will be honky dory in this life? As one preacher said, “Pain is a part of the process.”

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS SOMETIMES LIVE THROUGH HELL AND HIGH WATER AND LIVE TO TELL THE STORY. (V 25)

The great apostle continues: **“I spent a night and a day in the open sea . . .”** Paul suffered multiple shipwrecks, including being stranded in the open sea. Yet, in every life-threatening situation, God's grace preserved him. In our deepest, darkest moments—when we feel completely “adrift”—God is our anchor. He never leaves His servants helpless in the deep waters of life. True Christian endurance requires “tenacity,” or grit, to continue despite hostile circumstances. Tenacity is the quality of being determined, persistent, and unyielding in the pursuit of a goal. It represents the mental strength to hold on, overcome obstacles, and refuse to admit defeat, even when faced with significant hardships.

If one word could sum up the nature of the apostle Paul’s commitment to the call of Christ on his life, it would be excellence. Paul desired to excel in everything He did for the Lord (2 Timothy 2:15), so he tackled his God-assigned mission to preach the gospel with all-out fervor, giving himself entirely to the work. He warmly encouraged fellow believers to do the same: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV). When we are committed to the call, then we employ tenacious courage and a spirit of excellence. Like Paul, this individual doesn’t let anything stop him/her, nor does he/she allow circumstances to stop him/her from achieving the goal.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS HAVE LEARNED THAT GOD’S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT IN EVERY SITUATION. (v. 26)

“I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.” Paul faced the painful danger of “false brethren”—those inside the church who undermined the gospel. Paul’s hardships were diverse and continuous, spanning natural disasters, social dangers, and betrayals. His survival proved that his strength came entirely from God. God provides sufficient grace for every specific peril we face. Whether facing literal or spiritual dangers, the power of Christ is most clearly visible through our weaknesses. Paul’s suffering was driven by his deep care for the churches and his desire to present them to Christ. His hardships allowed God's strength to be perfected in his weakness. Our struggles should be purpose-driven, fueled by a “godly jealousy” for the spiritual well-being of others. Paul’s trials serve as a testament to his dedication to Christ, not a complaint. He endured immense challenges for the sake of the Gospel. True spiritual strength is shown not in ease, but by persevering in weakness, relying on God's sufficient grace. We must guard our “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” from internal deception and false doctrines.

IF WE SUFFER WITH HIM, WE WILL REIGN WITH HIM.

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

SEPTEMBER EMPHASIS: TRANSFORMING FROM COGNITIVE BIASES TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens are expected to maintain unwavering dedication throughout their lives, making engagement in the cause of Christ a continual responsibility. There is no provision for retirement from doing the Lord's work.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Suffering, Revealing, Enduring, Praising

LESSON THIRTY-SEVEN: JESUS, NOT "BAR-JESUS"!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Where have you been confronted with spiritual deception?
2. How do two people hear the same gospel message, one believes and receives, while the other rebels and rejects the message?
3. What are some ways we can use history to connect people to the gospel?

TEXT: ACTS 13:6-17

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: EVERYONE WHO COMES TO CHURCH IS NOT A CHRISTIAN; KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

INTRODUCTION: We find the man named Bar-Jesus in the Bible in Acts 13:6–7: "They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God."

The setting of the story of Bar-Jesus is Paul's first missionary journey. Through prayer, fasting, and the Holy Spirit's leading, the church in Antioch had selected Barnabas and Saul, who was also called Paul, to be sent out as missionaries. With them also was John Mark. On their journey, they traveled to Cyprus, Barnabas's home island. When they arrived in Paphos, the western port and capital of the island, they were invited to meet with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who was Roman governor of the region. Filled with the Holy Spirit's power, Paul looked intently at Bar-Jesus and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

Gotquestions.com

THERE ARE PRETEND OR FAKE CHRISTIANS EVERYWHERE.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFRONTING SPIRITUAL DECEPTION. (vv. 6-11)

They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. The apostles encountered Bar-Jesus (Elymas), a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet who actively opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. This is unadulterated truth: The world is often filled with voices that distort the truth. Believers must be spiritually discerning to recognize when deceit masquerades as wisdom. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, confronted the deception head-on. **Where have you seen such deception?** Spiritual battles require spiritual power, not just human arguments. Please do not try to confront spiritual deception in your own strength, wisdom, or power.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THE POWER AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE. (V 12)

The gospel is truly amazing. That’s why the apostle Paul would later say, **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.** The scripture says, **“When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”** When Paul called out Elymas’s deceit and pronounced temporary physical blindness upon him, the proconsul witnessed the clear display of God's power. The truth of God carries divine authority. God's word is not just a suggestion; it demands a response. The result was that the proconsul "believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord." Our primary mission is to boldly present the Gospel message and leave the results to God. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 10, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” **WE HAVE POWER!**

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS LEARNING THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING FAITH AND HISTORY (vv. 13-17)

The story continues, **“From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.” Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country . . .”** Leaving Cyprus, Paul and his companions traveled to Pisidian Antioch. Upon entering the synagogue, Paul was invited to speak. When sharing your faith, it is highly effective to meet people where they are. Paul used an approach tailored specifically to a Jewish audience. Paul began his sermon by recounting God's faithfulness throughout Israel's history—from their time in Egypt to the era of King David. Like Paul, we must discern the spiritual climate around us, speak the truth with the boldness of the Holy Spirit, and be ready for opposition and the move of the Spirit. **QUESTION:** What can we learn from the way Paul and Barnabas continuously delivered the message of the Gospel despite the challenges they faced?

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

SEPTEMBER EMPHASIS: TRANSFORMING FROM COGNITIVE BIASES TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens are expected to maintain unwavering dedication throughout their lives, making engagement in the cause of Christ a continual responsibility. There is no provision for retirement from doing the Lord's work.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Suffering, Revealing, Enduring, Praising

LESSON THIRTY-EIGHT: MAKING KNOWN THE UNKNOWN

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What are helpful tips in cross-cultural evangelism?
2. Why is the declaration of Gospel truth important when reaching the lost?
3. What are some key elements of a gospel presentation?

TEXT: ACTS 17:22-31

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: CIRCUMSTANCES PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR GOSPEL WITNESS.

INTRODUCTION: Allyson Howell Todd shares a touching excerpt:

David Platt went to India and told of his experience on a simulcast in November of 2012, two months before our scheduled flights. We sat on the floor in our Sunday School room and scribbled down notes while we listened to him share of the need for missionaries in India. "Jivan, known as a missionary graveyard," he began. All five of us stopped writing. He continued, "... is experiencing a movement of the gospel. A local pastor told me one in every ten people choose to follow Jesus when they hear the gospel. Baptisms are taking place in the Ganges River; lives are being transformed." I wonder what Nathanael, in John 1, felt when Philip told him to "Come and see" for himself this man from Nazareth. As Nathanael walked with Philip toward Jesus, what was on his mind? Did he question Philip's discernment? Was he nervous his original question would be met with a resounding "no" and all his doubts would come true? Is it even possible that something good, something holy could come from a place no one wants to go? God is working in hard places to change lives and to change communities. Only God knows the results of our faithful witness. Today's lesson takes Paul to a hard place, but God meets him there.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE CREATOR IS SOVREIGN AND SUFFICIENT. (vv. 22-25)

The narrative begins, "Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else."

God is not a local deity confined to man-made temples or shrines. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He needs nothing from us. Instead of God depending on human service, He is the ultimate Giver who supplies all humanity with life, breath, and everything else. Because God is complete in Himself (a theological concept known as *aseity*), As the Architect of the cosmos, God is Lord over all creation. Everything that exists relies entirely on His sustaining power. Rather than God needing anything from humanity, it is humanity that depends on Him for every single breath and moment of existence.

This truth shifts the focus of worship: we serve and honor God not to fulfill His needs, but because we are entirely reliant on His grace. **In proclaiming Christ, we must rely fully on him for wisdom, strength, guidance, and courage.**

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WE WERE CREATED TO SEEK AND FIND GOD. (vv. 26-28)

Sometimes when we are waiting, God moves. God's time is never wasted time. Verse 16 says, "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols." It was during a waiting season that Paul was given the opportunity to preach. Listen to his words, **"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being. 'As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'**" God purposefully created all nations from one blood and set the specific times and places they would live. He established the world so that we would reach out and find Him. Paul notes, "In Him we live and move and have our being." All of this happened while he was waiting for the brothers to catch up with him. This passage highlights a deeply personal, relational reality: you were designed with an inherent desire to connect with the divine. Because God is omnipresent and eagerly waiting to be found, reaching out to Him does not require searching the ends of the earth. Instead, it involves looking inward and recognizing our constant reliance on His sustaining power.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT GOD CALLS US TO REPENTANCE BEFORE JUDGEMENT. (vv. 29-31)

The narrative continues, **"Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."** The call is to turn from false worship and turn to the living God. Because we are God's offspring, we shouldn't reduce the divine to man-made idols of gold, silver, or stone. While God may have previously overlooked periods of human ignorance, the revelation of Christ changes everything. He now universally commands all people REPENT, to turn away from their old ways and turn toward Him. God has appointed a day to judge the world in righteousness through a specific Man, which He proved by raising Jesus from the dead. GOD HAS . . . God has established a specific day where He will judge the world justly through an appointed man. The undeniable proof of this coming judgment—and of Christ's authority—is His resurrection from the dead. Just as surely as He raised Christ from the dead, He will surely judge the world.

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

SEPTEMBER EMPHASIS: TRANSFORMING FROM COGNITIVE BIASES TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens are expected to maintain unwavering dedication throughout their lives, making engagement in the cause of Christ a continual responsibility. There is no provision for retirement from doing the Lord's work.

KEY WORDS/PHRASES: Suffering, Revealing, Enduring, Praising

LESSON THIRTY-NINE: I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. If you knew you would die soon, what are three things that you would share with family or friends?
2. How would you summarize your Christian life in a sentence or a paragraph?
3. What assurances do you have beyond this life?

TEXT: 2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: FAITHFUL AND CONFIDENT TO THE END

INTRODUCTION: In 2 Timothy 4:7, Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." This well-known and oft-quoted passage is quite significant in that this epistle was Paul's last before his martyrdom in A.D. 67. It is a deeply moving affirmation of his unwavering faith and unyielding love for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Greek word *agonizomai*, translated "fought," means literally "to engage in conflict." The word was used in the context of competing in athletic games or engaging in military conflict. Considering that Paul was chained to a Roman soldier when he wrote this epistle, it would have been easy for him to make such an analogy. In fact, he had known many Roman soldiers and during his imprisonment had won a number of them to Christ, some of them members of the Praetorian Guard. Our battle is not with flesh and blood "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." The Christian life is a fight in that Christians face a never-ending struggle against evil—not an earthly military campaign, but a spiritual battle against Satan. This is why we must "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" Without question, the apostle Paul was the consummate warrior, never quitting, never flagging in his zeal for the Lord. FAITHFUL TIL DEATH.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WE MUST PREPARE TO LEAVE THIS WORLD. (v. 6)

The question that is often asked at the beginning of a sporting event is, "Are you ready? The Apostle Paul says, "I AM READY! "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near." Paul recognized his life was nearing its end. He viewed his impending death not as a tragedy, but as a final, deliberate libation poured out for God. The "poured out" metaphor refers to a libation, a cup of wine poured out at the altar as the final part of a Jewish sacrificial offering. Paul views his life and his ongoing ministry as an offering completely consumed and given to God. "

Paul describes his coming death as a "departure," which translates in the original Greek (analysis) to a release from confinement, much like untying a boat from its mooring or striking a military tent. Written while he is imprisoned in Rome, he is not expressing despair, but rather a quiet confidence that his work is complete and he is ready to face eternity. Believers are called to present their entire lives as a continuous, living sacrifice of worship, fully surrendered to God's will. Many of you have had the privilege of being in the room of a saint who is preparing to die. What are some things that the individual expressed in that moment, and what are some things you learned about dying? Paul's life was framed by the words of Romans 8:38-39, For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT IT IS THE FAITHFUL PURSUIT THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE. (v.7)

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Paul uses three powerful metaphors: a soldier fighting, an athlete racing, and a steward guarding a treasure. **"I have fought the good fight;** despite the trials, he endured to the very end. Paul compares the Christian life to a noble, honorable struggle against sin, false teachings, and spiritual adversity. **"I have finished the race":** He views his life's mission as an athletic race, running with endurance to the very end. **"I have kept the faith":** He remained completely loyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ, holding fast to his beliefs despite severe persecution. The Christian life requires effort and endurance. We must not give up when times get dark but instead run our individual race with endurance and unshakeable loyalty to the Gospel. In the very next verse (2 Timothy 4:8), Paul shifts his focus to the future, expressing his confidence that a "crown of righteousness" awaits him and all who eagerly look forward to Christ's return.

The great apostle reminds us in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, That everyone who competes in the (Isthmian) games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS ARE ASSURED THAT THERE IS A RIGHTEOUS REWARD WAITING FOR THEM. (v. 8)

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. In the ancient world, victors in athletic games were awarded crowns made of leaves. Paul uses this imagery to describe the eternal, spiritual reward for a life lived faithfully. Paul views God as the ultimate, fair judge who honors the perseverance of His followers. **"On that day":** Refers to the future second coming of Christ or the final day of judgment. **"To all who have loved his appearing":** Highlights that this reward is not just for Paul, but for all believers who eagerly anticipate the return of Jesus. This reward includes you and me. HALLELUJAH!

According to David Guzik, Paul knew there was a crown waiting for him in heaven, and he was ready to receive it. He was certain of it. There are two main words for crown in the New Testament. One refers to a royal crown and the other to the victor's crown (the *stephanos*). Here Paul referred to the victor's crown — the crown that was essentially a trophy, recognizing that one had competed according to the rules and had won the victory.

QUARTER 3: JULY– AUGUST - SEPTEMBER

2026 THEME: KINGDOM CITIZENS GROWING IN GRACE, ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN CHRIST (COLOSSIANS 2:6-7)

UP-ROOTED AND RE-ROOTED TO DO THE MASTER’S WILL

INTEGRITY LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

JULY 4	WRONGLY ROOTED IN EXCLUSIVENESS
JULY 11	RE-ROOTED BY AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE MASTER
JULY 18	ESCAPING FROM YOUR DAMASCUS
JULY 26	THE POWER OF A TESTIMONY

TRANSFORMING FROM BIASES IN THINKING TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

AUGUST 1	PRESEVERANCE IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION
AUGUST 8	EMPOWERED FOR EVANGELISM
AUGUST 15	APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES
AUGUST 22	BOLDLY CONFRONTING HYPOCRISY
AUGUST 29	BEING “ALMOST PERSUADED” IS NOT ENOUGH

TRANSFORMING FROM COGNITIVE BIASES TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

SEPTEMBER 5	SUFFERING FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST
SEPTEMBER 12	JESUS, NOT “BAR JESUS”
SEPTEMBER 19	MAKING KNOWN THE UNKNOWN
SEPTEMBER 26	“I’VE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT”