



LORDSHIP GENEROSITY

LEADER GUIDE | SESSION 5

Stewarding Our Story



SCRIPTURE TEXT Acts 26:4-23

SESSION IN A SENTENCE If we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we have a story to share.

BIBLE BACKGROUND Some could conclude that Paul was one of the greatest missionaries of all time. He did not, however, start out as a faithful follower of Jesus. Instead, he actively and consistently persecuted those who followed Jesus. His life radically changed when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saved by Jesus, the Apostle Paul's life was radically changed which led him to no longer persecute Christians, but instead he proclaimed the message of salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY We all tend to tell stories. We remember when we were little children and had a special vacation or family holiday. Sometimes we find someone who has not heard our story, and we share it with fondness. If someone is a follower of Jesus, then that person has a story to share as well. Our story may not center around a summer trip to the beach, but it will focus on our journey with Christ and others. Paul, who wrote a large portion of the New Testament, had a story to share about he became a follower of Jesus. His story is much like our stories in that our faith stories describe our lives before coming to faith in Jesus, when and how we came to know Jesus, and how our lives have been changed since we became Christ followers. Today's study will focus on Paul's story so that we can better steward opportunities to share our own story with others.

BIBLE STUDY

Get Your Group Talking

ASK: "If you were asked to share your life story in just two minutes, what would you say?"

Transition to the Bible Study

SAY, "Every story of salvation has three common elements. We have our life before Christ, we have a time in which we came to know Christ, and we have a journey with Christ until He takes us home to heaven. We are looking at the example of Paul, and it begins with his life before knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior."

INVITE your group members to fill in the missing blanks on their listening guide as you share each of the three main points in this study.

POINT 1: A LIFE BEFORE CHRIST

Acts 26:4-11

ASK a group member to **read Acts 26:4-11 out loud.**

⁴ "All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand on trial because of the hope in what God promised to our ancestors, ⁷ the promise our twelve tribes hope to reach as they earnestly serve him night and day. King Agrippa, I am being accused by the Jews because of this hope. ⁸ Why do any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? ⁹ In fact, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ I actually did this in Jerusalem, and I locked up many

of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I was in agreement against them. ¹¹ In all the synagogues I often punished them and tried to make them blaspheme. Since I was terribly enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

GUIDE group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

Commentary

If following Jesus is a journey, then we will all have a time in our lives in which we walked our own path prior to knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior. While we should never glory in our past, we should acknowledge it and thereby help to provide hope to those around us who do not know Jesus. Paul provides us an example of what it looks like to share the story of our past.

The first thing we learn from Paul stewarding his story is that his journey was well known by others. We discover in verse four that the Jews knew his way of life from his youth. Therefore, he could not hide the way he lived out his life. Paul acknowledged that he was a strict follower of his religion as he lived as a Pharisee. In a word, Paul was a legalist. The Pharisees were the ones who not only interpreted the law, but they also added to it and made sure that others followed the traditions the Pharisees propagated. Paul defined himself not only as a Pharisee, but as one of the strictest observers of this religion.

Not only was Paul a legalist, he also actively persecuted those who proclaimed the name of Christ. His story was one of doing “many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (v. 9). He “locked up many saints in prison” (v. 10), and “punished them and tried to make them blaspheme” (v. 11). Paul was not proud of his actions and classified himself as the greatest of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He did not hide from his past as he understood the stewarding of his story would point others to the glory of Christ.

If we have a relationship with Jesus, then we too will have a story of our life before Christ. While we may not have persecuted the church, we will have fallen short of God’s intended plan for us. We, like Paul, should not use our past as a means to glorify a sinful lifestyle, but we also should not hide from it.

Some people may have convinced themselves that they are too sinful, and that God could never save them. If you or people in your group feel this way, let Paul’s story serve as an encouragement. If God’s grace was able to save Paul from a life of legalism, and from persecuting the church to becoming one of its greatest proponents, then His grace is sufficient to save others, too.

DISCUSS: What can we learn about God’s grace when we reflect upon Paul’s story as well as our own?

ASK/SAY: Take a moment to share your story or ask someone in the class to share their story. Make sure to not glory in the sin, but rather point others to a better understanding of the sufficiency of God’s grace.

TRANSITION TO POINT 2: Say, “If this was the end of the story, then Paul would have been left without hope. But his story is not over, and neither is ours. Paul had an encounter with Jesus in which he acknowledged Christ as Lord, and this encounter changed him forever. The good news is that because Jesus was able to change Paul, He is able to change us, too.”

POINT 2: AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

Acts 26:12-18

ASK a group member to **read Acts 26:12-18 out loud.**

¹² “I was traveling to Damascus under these circumstances with authority and a commission from the chief priests. ¹³ King Agrippa, while on the road at midday, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice speaking to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵ “I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“And the Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But get up and stand on your feet. For I

have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

GUIDE group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

Commentary

When we steward our story, we acknowledge our past, but we do not stay in it. We see this truth lived out in Paul's story. Upon acknowledging his past, his story moved to a personal encounter with Jesus in which he began to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Paul and a cohort of people were on a journey in which they had been given authority to persecute followers of Jesus. As they were traveling, Paul saw a blinding light, fell to the ground, and heard a direct message from the Lord. Jesus presented Paul with a question, "Why are you persecuting me?" Paul's actions, which he perceived to be justified based on his religious background, where indeed against Christ and His followers.

As the dialog between Paul and Jesus ensued, Jesus told him to get up and begin a new journey with Him. No longer would Paul be a persecutor of the church. Now, he will be used to open the eyes of others "so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." Paul's life had experienced a complete turnaround. All that he had known and done in his past would not be considered useless. Instead, it would be used

for God's glory.

While we may not be called to share the gospel message to all the Gentiles like Paul, it does not mean that we will not have a dramatic change of direction in life that is similar to Paul's. No longer do we have to live for self; now we live for Christ. No longer are we focused on our own desires; we strive to meet the needs of others. No longer is money, fame, and achievement our goals; now we strive towards leading others to Christ and making disciples of all the nations. We, like Paul, need to steward our story well. When we have an encounter with Christ and submit to Him as Lord, we cease striving after our own desires.

ASK: What are parts of your story that Jesus can use to help others understand the gospel, and how they, too, can become Christ-followers?

DO: Do not assume that everyone in the class knows Jesus as Lord and Savior. Paul thought he was doing the right thing in being a religious Pharisee. Yet the passage teaches that He did not know Jesus as Lord. Take a moment to share the plan of salvation with the class. Point out the fact that Paul had to have a personal encounter with Jesus in which he addressed Him as Lord. Invite those with questions about this to talk to you after class if needed.

TRANSITION TO POINT 3: Say, "Paul Harvey was a famous radio broadcaster who went home to be with Jesus in early 2009. One of his tag lines was, 'The rest of the story with Paul Harvey.' If we are to steward our stories, then we will also have additional stories to tell after coming to faith in Jesus."

POINT 3: A LIFE FOR CHRIST

Acts 26:19-23

ASK a group member to **read Acts 26:19-23 out loud.**

¹⁹ "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. ²⁰ Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and were trying to kill me. ²² To this very day, I have had help from God, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would take place — ²³ that the Messiah would suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles."

GUIDE group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

Commentary

The final step in Paul's stewarding his story was his faithful and accurate proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul did this no matter the circumstances. Once Paul understood that Jesus was Savior and Lord, changing him spiritually forever, Paul was faithful to share the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone; he did this with all kinds of people he encountered throughout the rest of his life. The reason he did this is because he was obedient to the calling that Jesus had placed upon his life to share his story of salvation.

Paul's obedience was not limited by the receptivity

of those to whom he shared the gospel. He pointed out that some people had gone so far as to not only limit his message, but they also tried to kill him in an effort to stop him from sharing the gospel. Their offense at his message, however, did not stop him from faithfully and accurately proclaiming a message of repentance and hope in Christ.

As we have walked through Paul's stewarding of his story, we can see how it relates to us today. When Jesus reveals Himself to us, we have the opportunity to repent from a life of sin and accept Him as Lord and Savior. This action, however, is not the end of our story. At the very least, it is the starting of a new chapter. We, like Paul, need to continue to steward our story by no longer living for self. Instead, we are to live for Christ and share our story with those we encounter. We can easily discern from the life of Paul that not everyone will appreciate our story; not everyone will believe the gospel. But our success is not tied to how someone responds. Instead, our success is tied to our faithfulness to steward the story that He has given us, and to share it often as we encounter people who do not know the Lord like we do.

DISCUSS: How might we redefine success in sharing the gospel?

DO: Lead the class in a brief time of prayer. Thank God for giving His children a story to steward. Pray that those in the class that have a salvation story would be faithful to share it with others. Pray for those who may be more like Paul before he met Christ on the road to Damascus – still in the process of discovering who Jesus really is. Ask God to those people the faith and courage needed to start a journey with Christ.

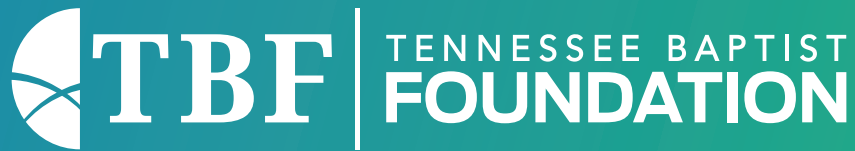
TRANSITION TO NEXT STEPS: The outcome of studying God's word is not merely to gain additional knowledge for the sake of knowing something. The outcome should be to study and apply God's word so that we can live transformational lives in the world and thereby test and prove God's perfect and pleasing will. The next steps listed below are ways to apply what we have learned in today's study.



GUIDE group members to identify which of the following steps they will attempt before the group's next study. There is one step that is easiest, another that is more challenging, and a final one that will challenge even a spiritually mature group member. They are in random order in each session.

- 1. Start your story** – Before we can steward our story of a changed life, we need to be like Paul and start our story of a journey with Christ. If you do not have a story to steward, is it because you have not reached the point of acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Savior? Do not worry, you are in good company. Paul was the same way. If this is you and you want to start a story, then call out to Jesus and ask Him to save you. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and be the Lord of your life.
- 2. Ask God to place someone in your path** – Maybe you identify with Paul later in his story in which he shared the gospel message with people he encountered. If this is you, take time this week to ask God to place someone in your path with whom you can share your story. Tell God that you want to steward your story well; call out to Him to help you with this.
- 3. Thank God for your story** – God does not need us, but He does allow us to represent Him. One way that we can represent Him is by stewarding the stories that He has given us. Take time this week to thank Him for giving you a story to steward. Ask Him for the faith needed to steward your story well.

SUMMARIZE the session: Our stories are rather simple. We have a life before knowing Christ as Lord and Savior. We have a point in our lives in which He graciously revealed Himself to us and we came to understand that we are sinners in need of a Savior. This understanding of our need for Him is not the end, but rather the start of a new chapter in which we live for Him as Lord. Paul was faithful to share his story with those he encountered, and we, too, can be found faithful to share our stories.



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