

BGCC Community Group Guide



Acts: Testify

June 21st, 2026

When Life Goes Off The Rails

Acts 23

Section 1 – When God's Plan Doesn't Look Like Your Plan

Acts 23:11

"Take courage! For as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

Summary

Few things are more frustrating than watching carefully made plans fall apart. We make career plans, family plans, ministry plans, financial plans, spiritual plans...yet life often takes turns we never expected.

That's exactly where Paul finds himself. For years he had sensed God leading him to Rome. He had prayed about it, planned for it, and anticipated opportunities to share the gospel there. Yet instead of boarding a ship as a missionary, he finds himself sitting in a prison cell as a prisoner.

From a human perspective, everything appears to be going wrong. He's been falsely accused, beaten, arrested, and caught in political and religious conflicts beyond his control. Yet in the middle of that confusion, Jesus appears and gives him a simple reminder: *God's plan has not changed.*

One of the most difficult lessons in the Christian life is learning that God's plan and our expectations are not always the same thing. We often assume that obedience should lead to

smooth circumstances. Scripture repeatedly teaches otherwise. Joseph was sold into *slavery*. Moses spent forty years in the *wilderness*. David was *hunted* by Saul. The apostles were *persecuted*. Even Jesus walked the road of *suffering and crucifixion* before resurrection.

Charles Spurgeon once said, "*God is too good to be unkind and too wise to be mistaken.*" Sometimes we only understand His purposes after walking through seasons we never would have chosen ourselves. (Listen to "If It Was Up To Me" by Ben Fuller)

Group Question

Why do you think we often assume that difficulties mean something has gone wrong spiritually?

Personal Relevance

Most people can identify a season where life took an unexpected turn. A job loss, a health issue, a broken relationship, a disappointment, or a failure can make us wonder whether God is still working.

Yet Paul's story reminds us that obstacles do not automatically mean we are outside God's will. Sometimes they become the very means God uses to accomplish His purposes.

Flow Question

When life becomes difficult, what is your first instinct: trust, fear, frustration, or self-reliance?

Reflection Question

Can you identify a difficult season that later revealed God's purpose or faithfulness in a way you couldn't see at the time?

Section 2 – God's Sovereignty in the Middle of Chaos

Acts 23:11a

"Take courage!"

Summary

The remarkable thing about Jesus' appearance to Paul is not merely what He says—it's when He says it. Jesus speaks before the assassination plot is uncovered. Before Paul knows what comes next. Before circumstances improve. Before there is any visible solution.

That is often how God works. We want clarity before trust. God frequently calls us to trust before clarity.

The sermon highlighted an important question: *Was God surprised?* The obvious answer is no. God was not surprised by the riot, the arrest, the threats, or the imprisonment. What looked like chaos to Paul was already under God's sovereign authority.

This does not mean God causes evil or delights in suffering. Rather, Scripture repeatedly shows that God can use even sinful actions and painful circumstances to accomplish His purposes. Joseph summarized this beautifully when he told his brothers, **"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good"** (Genesis 50:20).

"God would never permit evil if He could not bring good from it." - Augustine of Hippo

The Christian's confidence is not that life will always make sense. Our confidence is that God remains sovereign even when it doesn't.

Group Question

What is the difference between believing God is in control and actually trusting Him when circumstances are painful?

Personal Relevance

Many believers agree with God's sovereignty in theory but struggle with it in practice.

It's easy to say God is in control when things are going well. It's much harder when prayers seem unanswered, relationships remain broken, or suffering lingers longer than expected.

Faith often grows most deeply in those moments when we choose to trust God's character despite incomplete understanding. And it is most tested in the same moments.

Flow Question

What situations tend to challenge your trust in God's sovereignty the most?

Reflection Question

Is there an area of your life where you are demanding answers from God when He may be asking you to trust Him instead?

Section 3 – Living with Hope While You Wait

Acts 23:11

"As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

Summary

One of the strongest ideas from the sermon was the distinction between wishing and biblical hope.

In modern culture, hope often means uncertainty: *"I hope things work out."* In Scripture, hope is confident expectation rooted in God's promises.

Paul's hope was not passive. Even while imprisoned, he continued doing what God had called him to do. He preached to guards, officials, rulers, and anyone else willing to listen. He could not control his circumstances, but he could control his faithfulness.

That is a powerful lesson for believers today. Many people spend years waiting for the perfect opportunity, the perfect circumstances, or the perfect season to serve God. Paul shows us a different approach. Instead of waiting for ideal conditions, he remained faithful exactly where God had placed him. Other areas of life work the same way. "If we wait for perfect conditions, we'll never move." - Justin Honey

As William Carey said, *"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."*

Hope is not sitting still. Hope is moving forward in obedience while trusting God with the results.

Group Question

What does it look like to faithfully follow God when you don't know what comes next?

Personal Relevance

Many of us spend a lot of energy focusing on what we cannot do because of our circumstances. Paul focused on what he could do. He couldn't control his imprisonment, but he could testify. He couldn't control political decisions, but he could remain faithful. He couldn't control his future, but he could trust God with it.

The same is true for us. While we may not control every circumstance, we can choose faithfulness.

Flow Question

What opportunities for obedience might you be overlooking because you are focused on what you cannot control?

Reflection Question

If God has you exactly where you are right now for a purpose, what might He be inviting you to do in this season?

Conclusion

Acts 23 reminds us that God's plans are often bigger than our plans. Paul thought he was traveling to Rome as a missionary. God was sending him there as a prisoner. Paul saw obstacles. God saw opportunities. Paul experienced confusion. God remained completely in control.

The same truth applies to us.

- The unexpected diagnosis.
- The lost job.
- The broken relationship.
- The unanswered prayer.
- The failure we regret.
- The season of waiting we never wanted.

None of these things surprise God.

As the sermon reminded us, God accomplishes His will His way. The twists and turns of life do not derail His purposes. In many cases, they become the very tools He uses to shape us for what lies ahead.

"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." - Corrie ten Boom

As you close today, consider these questions:

1. Where am I resisting God's work because it doesn't match my expectations?
2. What circumstance am I viewing as an obstacle that God may be using as an opportunity?
3. How can I remain faithful where God has placed me right now?