BGCC Community Group Guide

Take Heart

November 15th

He Has A Plan For You

Acts 23:11

Jesus encourages Paul to take courage because his work is not finished. The same is true for us: as long as we have breath, we have a testimony to share. Christ stands beside us, strengthens us, and calls us to faithfully proclaim the gospel without backing down or watering down the truth.

Introduction: Courage to Keep Going

Throughout this series, we've seen Jesus tell people to take heart because of what He has done, what He is doing, and what He still plans to do. In this message, we see Jesus encourage Paul with a reminder that his work is not finished.

Paul has endured beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, and constant opposition. Yet Jesus stands beside him and says, "Take courage." He isn't simply telling Paul to survive another difficult day. He's reminding him that he still has a mission: to testify about Jesus in Rome.

Acts 23 comes after years of Paul's missionary work and persecution. He has faithfully proclaimed Christ throughout the Roman world, but his journey has brought him into conflict with religious and political authorities. Even in prison, God has not abandoned His purpose for Paul. Jesus promises that Paul will continue to testify in Rome, showing that the gospel cannot be stopped by difficult circumstances.

Section 1 – Don't Back Down

Scripture: Acts 23:11; 2 Corinthians 11:23–28; Acts 9:15

Key Verse: “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” — Acts 23:11

Summary

Paul had endured extraordinary hardship for the sake of the gospel: beatings, imprisonment, stoning, shipwrecks, danger, hunger, and constant concern for the churches. Yet Jesus comes to him in prison with a clear message: keep going. Paul still has work to do.

Jesus does not promise that Paul's circumstances will become easier. He reminds him that his assignment has not changed just because the circumstances have become more difficult. Paul is called to keep sharing the truth about Jesus, even when doing so costs him.

The same is true for us. We are not promised that faithfulness will lead to earthly success or that everyone will welcome our message. But we are called to remain faithful because Jesus remains faithful to us. Taking heart means continuing to follow Christ and fulfill His calling, even when the road gets harder.

Group Question: Why might Paul have been tempted to give up or change his approach at this point in his ministry?

Personal Relevance

It is easy to interpret difficulty as a sign that we should stop. But *hardship does not necessarily mean we are outside God's will.* We must distinguish between a mission God has given us and the difficult circumstances that come with carrying it out.

Flow Question: How can we know the difference between a situation where we should persevere and one where we need to change direction?

Reflection Question: Is there an area of faithfulness where you have been tempted to back down because it has become difficult?

Section 2 – Share Your Testimony

Scripture: Acts 9:15; Acts 23:11; Acts 26:19–23

Key Verse: “God has helped me to this very day, so I stand here and testify to small and great alike.” — Acts 26:22

Summary

Paul still has a testimony to share. Paul's testimony was not ultimately about how impressive he was or how terrible his past had been. It was about what Jesus had done in his life. He went from persecuting Christians to proclaiming Christ.

Every believer has a testimony. It doesn't have to be dramatic or impressive. We can explain what our lives were like before we recognized our need for Jesus, how we came to trust Him, and how He has changed us. Our stories will look different, but the focus remains the same: Jesus is the one who saves and transforms.

We don't need a platform, a pulpit, or a perfect opportunity to share our testimony. We simply need to be intentional about recognizing opportunities to tell others what Christ has done. Our story belongs to us, and no one can take it away.

Group Question: Why do you think some Christians feel like they don't have a testimony worth sharing?

Personal Relevance

Think through three parts of your testimony:

- **Before Christ:** What did your life look like before you understood your need for a Savior?
- **Coming to Christ:** How did you hear and respond to the gospel?
- **After Christ:** How has Jesus changed you, and what is He doing in your life now?

Flow Question: How might sharing your testimony look different with a family member, coworker, friend, or someone going through a difficult season?

Reflection Question: Who is one person in your life who needs to hear what Jesus has done for you?

Section 3 – Don't Water Down the Truth

Scripture: Acts 24:24–25; Acts 26:24–29; Romans 6:23

Key Verse: “I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen.” — Acts 26:22

Summary

Paul's commitment to the gospel did not change depending on who was listening. When he stood before Felix and Drusilla, he spoke about righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment. Felix became afraid and sent him away. Later, before Festus and Agrippa, Paul again

explained the truth about Jesus. Festus called him insane, but Paul calmly insisted that he was telling the truth.

Paul could have softened his message to make his circumstances easier. These were powerful people who had influence over his future. But he understood that changing the truth to make people comfortable would not be loving them. He cared too much about Christ and about these people to withhold the truth they needed.

Christian love does not mean celebrating sin or pretending that people don't need a Savior. It means offering compassion and grace while remaining faithful to the gospel. We don't have to be rude, arrogant, or harsh, but we must not compromise the truth.

Group Question: Why might we be tempted to change or soften the gospel when sharing it with someone who disagrees with us?

Personal Relevance

The gospel is urgent because the need is real. Sin brings death, but Jesus offers forgiveness and eternal life. We should share this truth with compassion, humility, and genuine concern for the people around us. To alter it or to omit certain truths of the Gospel can cripple its effect on people. For instance, we cannot withhold the reality of judgement and hell because we worry it will turn people away. Though not the focus, it is a real piece of why heaven is so good. We cannot ignore that!

Flow Question: How can we communicate difficult biblical truths with both conviction and compassion?

Reflection Question: Is fear of someone's reaction keeping you from having an honest conversation about Jesus?

Section 4 – Remember That Jesus Is With You

Scripture: Acts 23:11; 2 Timothy 4:17; Matthew 28:18–20

Key Verse: “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed.” — 2 Timothy 4:17

Summary

The same Jesus who stood beside Paul in prison continued to strengthen him throughout his ministry. Years later, Paul could look back and say that the Lord had stood by him and given him strength to keep proclaiming the gospel.

Jesus gives His church the same mission and the same promise. In the Great Commission, He calls us to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey His commands. And He promises, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Our circumstances, opportunities, and life stages may change, but the mission remains. We are called to share the hope of salvation in Jesus and help others follow Him. We can take heart because we do not go alone. Jesus stands with us and strengthens us as we go.

Group Question: How does knowing Jesus is with us change the way we approach the mission He has given us?

Personal Relevance

Some of us need to come to Jesus for the first time, trusting Him rather than continuing to rely on ourselves. Others need to recognize the people God has placed in our lives and take the next step toward sharing the gospel with them.

Flow Question: What keeps us from seeing everyday relationships and conversations as opportunities to share Christ?

Reflection Question: What is one practical step you can take this week to help someone else hear or see the hope of Jesus?

Conclusion: Your Story Isn't Over

Jesus told Paul to take courage because he still had work to do. That same encouragement applies to us. If we have breath in our lungs, our testimony is not over.

1. **Don't back down.** Difficult circumstances do not change the mission Christ has given.
2. **Share your testimony.** Tell others what Jesus has done in your life.
3. **Don't water down the truth.** Love people enough to share the gospel faithfully and compassionately.
4. **Remember Jesus is with you.** He strengthens us and goes with us as we fulfill His mission.

The people around us need the hope that only Jesus can offer. We should want them to have what we have: salvation, freedom, and peace in Christ.

Final Reflection Questions:

- Do the people closest to you know what Jesus has done in your life?
- Are you more concerned with having what the world offers or helping others find what you have in Christ?
- Who might God be calling you to bring to Jesus?

Closing Challenge: Come to Jesus if you have never trusted Him. If you belong to Him, bring someone else to Him. Your circumstances may change, but the mission remains, and Jesus has promised to be with you always.