

LESSON 12

Paul: Bold for the Gospel

Acts 20:22–24

But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

Acts 20:24

Class Overview: Paul's life was characterized by courage, endurance, and unshakable conviction. Once a persecutor of Christians, he became the gospel's greatest messenger. He endured beatings, imprisonments, and persecution, yet his passion never faltered. In Acts 20, Paul addressed the Ephesian elders, knowing he was heading toward danger in Jerusalem. Yet he proclaimed that his life had only one purpose: to complete the work Jesus had given him. This lesson calls on us to examine what drives our lives. Paul's example shows that courage doesn't come from strength but from surrender. When we value Christ above all else, fear loses its power. A bold faith is not reckless, it is rooted in grace and driven by mission.

Class Objectives: By the end of this class, you should be able to—

1. Understand the context of Paul's message to the Ephesian elders.
2. Identify the source of Paul's courage and confidence in the face of suffering.
3. Recognize that gospel boldness grows from deep conviction and eternal perspective.
4. Learn how grace and mission shaped Paul's purpose.
5. Commit to living courageously for Christ, regardless of cost or consequence.

Introduction

PAUL'S JOURNEY OF FAITH WAS ANYTHING BUT EASY. From the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus, he knew that following Jesus would bring suffering. Yet he never turned back. Whether before kings or in chains, his message remained the same: "*Jesus Christ is Lord.*"

In Acts 20, Paul was traveling to Jerusalem, fully aware that hardships awaited him. The Holy Spirit had warned him that imprisonment and persecution were certain. Yet rather than retreat, he pressed on. To the elders of the church in Ephesus, he spoke with deep conviction: "*I am compelled by the Spirit . . . not knowing what I will encounter there, except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me.*" (Acts 20:22–23).

Most people would have turned back. Paul kept going. His courage wasn't based on optimism, it was grounded in purpose. He said, "*I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus.*" For Paul, the mission outweighed the risk. He lived and breathed for one thing: to proclaim the gospel of God's grace. Boldness for Christ comes from conviction. When the love of Christ defines us, fear loses its grip. The more we understand God's grace, the more courageously we can share it.

Historical Background

Acts 20 records Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders during his third missionary journey. He was traveling from Corinth to Jerusalem with financial aid for the poor believers there (Romans 15:25–26). On his way, he stopped at Miletus and called for the elders of the church in Ephesus, a congregation he had served for three years.

Paul's message to them is filled with deep emotion and concern. He revisited his time among them, recalled the hardships he endured, and warned about false teachers who would come. But his focus was not on himself; it was on the gospel and the faithfulness it calls for.

Paul understood that suffering awaited him in Jerusalem, possibly even death. Still, his resolve was unwavering. The phrase "*I am compelled by the Spirit*" (v. 22) reflects his obedience to God's guidance, not his

personal desire. For Paul, obedience was more valuable than safety. His confidence did not rest in his ability to persevere but in God's faithfulness, who called him.

Throughout his ministry, Paul endured significant trials: stoning, imprisonment, rejection, and betrayal. But rather than break him, these experiences strengthened his reliance on grace. The same grace that saved him on the road to Damascus supported him through every hardship. By the time he addressed the Ephesian elders, Paul had learned that courage isn't the absence of fear, it's the choice to obey God despite it.

Courage Flows from Conviction

Paul's boldness wasn't reckless emotion; it was rooted in conviction. He understood why he lived and what mattered most. *"I am compelled by the Spirit,"* he said, *"not knowing what I will encounter there."* (Acts 20:22). That phrase reveals the source of his courage: obedience to God's will. Paul wasn't motivated by comfort or safety but by the certainty of his calling.

Conviction provides direction. Many people act based on preferences, doing what feels right in the moment. Paul lived with purpose. His conviction about the gospel gave him clarity, even when the future was uncertain. He knew hardship was coming, but he refused to let fear control his decisions. The Holy Spirit had repeatedly warned him that "chains and afflictions" awaited, yet Paul kept moving forward. He had already counted the cost, and his mind was made up.

This kind of courage doesn't come from personality; it comes from perspective. Paul understood that his life belonged to Christ. When he said, *"I consider my life of no value to myself,"* he wasn't being careless about life; he was being clear about priorities. To him, living for Christ was worth any suffering. He later wrote, *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."* (Galatians 2:20).

Conviction stems from a relationship. Paul's courage didn't come from self-confidence but from genuinely knowing the Savior. He had seen the risen Lord and experienced the transforming power of grace. That

experience settled his allegiance in his heart forever. Once grace captures someone's heart, fear loses its grip.

For us, Paul's example is both inspiring and convicting. The world around us often values comfort, security, and approval. But courage for the gospel demands a conviction deeper than those things. It means obeying God even when it costs us friends, reputation, or safety. True conviction says, "My purpose is greater than my pain."

The courage to stay strong doesn't come from removing fear; it comes from focusing on something greater than fear. He wasn't fearless; he was faithful. The Holy Spirit urged him to move forward, and that was enough.

The same Spirit still empowers believers today. When we understand who we belong to and our purpose, courage naturally follows conviction. Like Paul, we can say, "*None of these things move me.*" Our calling to spread the gospel surpasses any threat the world can present.

Grace Gives Strength to Endure

Paul's courage was fueled by something deeper than determination; it was rooted in grace. He said his mission was "*to testify to the gospel of God's grace.*" (Acts 20:24). Grace wasn't just his message; it was his motivation. Every trial he faced, every hardship he endured, became another opportunity to demonstrate what God's grace can do in a surrendered life.

From the start of his ministry, Paul understood that following Christ would involve suffering. Jesus had told him, "*I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.*" (Acts 9:16). Still, Paul never complained or backed away. He saw grace not to avoid pain, but as strength to endure it. Grace didn't make his journey easier; it made him steadfast.

Throughout his letters, Paul described grace as the sustaining power of his ministry. When he faced weakness, he heard the Lord say, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). That truth became his anchor. Grace didn't remove the burden; it gave him the strength to carry it.

Paul's endurance wasn't due to mere willpower; it was the result of faith. He trusted that whatever he faced was under God's control. Every beating, imprisonment, and rejection served as a reminder that God's strength was sufficient. That's why he could write from prison, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" (Philippians 4:13)

Grace also brought joy to Paul during difficult times. In Acts 16, he sang hymns while in jail. In 2 Corinthians, he described his hardships as "light and momentary troubles" compared to eternal glory. His outlook was shaped not by pain but by promise. Grace helped him see beyond the immediate to the bigger purpose.

For us today, this truth remains: the same grace that saved us is the same grace that sustains us. We may not face persecution like Paul did, but we all encounter pressures that test our faith. The answer remains the same: depend on grace. When life feels overwhelming, when the cost of faith seems high, remember that the God who called you will also carry you.

Grace doesn't mean life will be easy. It means God will be enough. Paul endured because he never stopped relying on the One who met him on the Damascus road. Every challenge became an opportunity to show the sufficiency of Christ. If you want lasting courage, anchor your heart in grace. Let God's mercy be your motivation and His strength your support. Like Paul, you'll find that grace doesn't just save you; it keeps you standing when everything else gives way.

The Mission Matters More Than the Cost

Paul's words in Acts 20:24 summarize his life: "*My purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.*" That sentence explains why he was fearless. His purpose was clear. His mission, to proclaim the good news, was worth more than comfort, safety, or even life itself.

Paul knew what awaited him in Jerusalem: imprisonment, persecution, and suffering. But he wasn't motivated by self-preservation; he was motivated by obedience. He had surrendered the right to control his own life the moment he met Christ. Everything after that moment was lived for one purpose: to complete the work God had assigned him.

This mindset shaped Paul's entire ministry. He viewed every situation as an opportunity to share the gospel. When imprisoned, he preached to the guards. When shipwrecked, he encouraged his shipmates. When faced with opposition, he reasoned with his accusers. Paul couldn't be stopped because his life wasn't focused on avoiding hardship; it was focused on spreading truth.

The secret to his courage was perspective. He saw suffering as temporary and reward as everlasting. He wrote later, *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."* (Romans 8:18). The mission gave purpose to every hardship. When your life's goal is eternal, no earthly cost feels too high.

Paul's determination challenges modern followers to consider what truly motivates us. Too often, we allow fear, convenience, or comfort to shape our obedience. But Paul reminds us that the gospel is worth everything we have. The Christian life isn't about saving ourselves; it's about giving fully for the sake of Christ.

Near the end of his life, Paul could say with confidence, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* (2 Timothy 4:7). That statement wasn't pride, it was peace. He had done what God called him to do. His life, though full of suffering, was a story of victory because it was spent for something that lasted.

Paul's example shows us that true boldness isn't reckless, and sacrifice isn't a loss. When our goal is to glorify Christ, every act of obedience is a gain. The courage to endure comes from understanding that the cost of following Jesus is temporary, but the reward lasts forever. Like Paul, we must decide what matters most. When Christ and His gospel become our highest purpose, we'll find strength to keep going, no matter the cost.

Lesson Summary and Reflection

Paul's life illustrates what it means to live with unwavering focus on the gospel. From the moment Jesus met him on the Damascus road, everything changed. His plans, priorities, and ambitions were replaced with a single passion, to complete the work God gave him. Even as suffering and death approached, Paul continued with joy because his purpose was clear, and his confidence was in Christ.

First, *courage comes from conviction*. Paul didn't act on impulse but with purpose. He was "compelled by the Spirit," not driven by fear. His bravery was rooted in clarity; he knew who he served and why. Conviction provides direction. When God's will is our foundation, we stop asking, "What will this cost me?" and begin asking, "What will glorify Christ?"

Second, *grace provides strength to persevere*. Paul faced numerous trials, beatings, imprisonments, and betrayals, but he never gave up because he depended on grace. The same grace that saved him also empowered him. He discovered that weakness was the very place where God's power proved to be the strongest. Grace didn't take away his suffering; it redeemed it. Through everything, Paul's life proclaimed, "Christ is enough."

Third, *the mission is more important than the cost*. Paul's eyes were fixed on the finish line. He understood that his calling was greater than his comfort. The gospel was worth any sacrifice. For him, to live was Christ and to die was gain. This perspective frees us from fear. When eternity shapes our priorities, we can serve boldly, love deeply, and endure faithfully.

Paul's example challenges us today to evaluate what motivates us. Do we prioritize ease or mission? Are our choices driven by comfort or conviction? The gospel calls us to join Paul in proclaiming that our lives have one ultimate purpose—to testify to the grace of God.

Key Truths

- Boldness for the gospel comes from deep conviction, not emotion.
- Grace is both the message we share and the strength we stand on.
- Obedience to God matters more than personal comfort or safety.
- Eternal purpose gives meaning to temporary pain.
- A faithful finish is the genuine measure of a life lived for Christ.

Conclusion

Paul's life was filled with hardship, but it was never empty. Every step, every scar, every sacrifice pointed others to the Savior. His courage didn't come from self-confidence; it came from knowing his mission and trusting God's power.

The same call that compelled Paul still calls us today: to live boldly for the gospel of grace. The world needs to see us as people who value Christ more than comfort, who obey God regardless of the outcome, and who finish their race with faith and joy.

When we live with that kind of focus, fear loses its grip, and our lives become living testimonies of grace. Like Paul, may we say, *"My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for the work assigned to me by the Lord Jesus."* That is the boldness that changes the world.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Acts 20:24 (CSB) — *“But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God’s grace.”*

Paul saw his life through the lens of mission, not self-preservation. For him, every breath was an opportunity to proclaim God’s grace, regardless of cost.

Weekly Challenge

1. Clarify Your Purpose.

Write out in one sentence what you believe God has called you to do in this season of life. Ask Him to renew your conviction to live that purpose daily.

2. Pray for Courage.

Each day this week, pray specifically for boldness to speak or act for Christ—even when it’s uncomfortable. Ask God to give you Paul’s heart for obedience.

3. Depend on Grace.

Reflect on how God’s grace has strengthened you in past challenges. Thank Him for sustaining you and trust Him for the strength you’ll need ahead.

4. Take One Gospel Step.

Share your faith in a simple, genuine way this week: through a conversation, an invitation, or an act of service that points others to Jesus.

5. Evaluate Your Priorities.

At week’s end, ask: “What matters most to me, comfort or calling?” Pray for a heart that values the mission more than the cost.

For Discussion

1. What truths or convictions give you courage to live boldly for Christ?

2. How does Paul's example challenge the way you handle fear, pressure, or hardship?

3. Where do you need to rely more on God's grace instead of your own strength?

4. What might it look like in your life to value the mission of Christ above personal comfort?

5. How can you help encourage boldness and endurance in others who are serving alongside you?
