

Jacob's Well**Lesson Title:** The Life of Paul—Faithful When Powerless

Key Concept: Paul was highly influential in the early church, and examples from his life still guide us individually and as a church body. Paul's imprisonment demonstrates that when we are powerless against forces around us, we can still be effective witnesses.

**Scriptures:**

⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸in the future there is laid up 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 loved His appearing.
(2 Timothy 4:6–8 *New American Standard Bible*)

Context Scriptures: Acts 21–28

**Lesson Thoughts:**

Just as Agabus prophesied, Paul was bound and thrown into prison after his arrival in Jerusalem, being mistaken as an Egyptian terrorist. He appealed to the authorities several times and defended his belief in Jesus and his resurrection from the dead, but to no avail. Finally, after being imprisoned for two years, his case was brought before Governor Festus and King Agrippa. Paul's passionate plea almost persuaded King Agrippa to become a Christian. But when all attempts failed, Paul appealed to Caesar, costing him his freedom.

On his way to stand before Caesar, Paul, along with other prisoners, was caught in a violent storm and lost at sea. Morale on the ship was low, so with God's encouragement, Paul urged the guards and prisoners to eat to keep up their strength and not despair; they would see Rome. When the ship washed up on a sandbar, the guards prepared to kill all the prisoners before they escaped. But Paul had found favor with the centurion in charge, who allowed everyone to

Jacob's Well

jump ship and swim safely to shore. Then a venomous snake on the island bit Paul, which the superstitious locals believed was righteous judgment for a murderer. Paul was miraculously protected, which made the islanders believe that he was a god. Paul took the opportunity to witness, healing the sick and winning the favor of the locals, who helped him and his fellow prisoners get on a ship to Italy. Paul was greeted with fanfare along the way, and a great number of believers and Jews wanted to hear from this dedicated man. Paul spent the next two years under house arrest, preaching and proclaiming with boldness the gospel to all who would hear.

While this was not Paul's only time of imprisonment, it was one of his longest. Throughout this unpredictable period, his example of steadfastness and tenderness toward his captors is a powerful reminder to all disciples of the character we need to display even when we are in a position of powerlessness. Paul preached the gospel on a prisoners' ship, shipwrecked on an island, and under house arrest. His circumstances did not dictate whether he was going to bear witness of Jesus Christ. The mission was clear no matter how hostile the world around him became. Even later, when Paul knew he was not getting out and would be executed, he remained faithful. Writing to his son in the Lord, Timothy, Paul affirmed that when everyone else abandoned him, Jesus would stand by his side till the very end and reward him for his commitment. Even powerless and held captive, Paul fulfilled his mission and finished the race God had set before him.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Share a time when life circumstances were out of your control. What similarities does this time have with Paul's story?
- 2) If asked about your faith by a powerful politician, how would you respond?
- 3) How do circumstances around you affect your commitment to God?
- 4) Share a time when you felt life was pressing against you. How did you encourage yourself in those moments?

Jacob's Well

Notes and Reflections

- 1) Paul was alone in prison and begged Timothy to visit him since others close to him had forsaken him and God. If all those around you turned their backs on God, how would you respond? How would it impact your relationship with God?
- 2) In Acts 21–28, the author is making a case that Paul is our example of what disciples should do when they are powerless against the world around them. Do a slow read of this passage through this lens.

Jacob's Well

Notes and Reflections, cont.