

## Taking the Lead

### Acts 27:27-28:31

#### Learning Objectives

- Identify the ways that Paul led in a “secular” circumstance and what enabled him to do so.
- Understand how God has called us to lead in the situations we encounter.

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**Pray for your time together as a group.**

**?** What are some of your expectations about good leadership? Do they change in different situations? In what ways?

**Read Out Loud: Previously In Acts:** After many delays, we find Paul in the final stretches of his journey to Rome to stand trial. This is part of the fulfillment of God’s promise to him in Acts 23:11, “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’” He is a prisoner, with no authority or status amongst those around him. Despite these circumstances, we find Paul leading with confidence and peace.

#### **Read Out Loud: Acts 27:27-28:10 (NIV)**

<sup>27</sup> On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. <sup>30</sup> In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. <sup>31</sup> Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

<sup>33</sup> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything.” <sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” <sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. <sup>37</sup> Altogether there were 276 of us on board. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

<sup>39</sup> When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup> Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind

and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

<sup>42</sup> The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. <sup>43</sup> But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. <sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

28<sup>1</sup> Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. <sup>3</sup> Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. <sup>4</sup> When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." <sup>5</sup> But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. <sup>6</sup> The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

"Christians, by their constructive and meaningful actions, can bring hope to others and thus help transform society."  
-NIV Application Commentary:  
Acts, Ajith Fernando, pg 618

<sup>7</sup> There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. <sup>8</sup> His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. <sup>9</sup> When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. <sup>10</sup> They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

### Leader vs. Participant

? What are some of the key differences between a leader and a participant? What are some ways that a person can move from one role to the other?

*Leaders' Note: This may seem like a silly question to ask, but we want to emphasize that it only takes a few steps to switch roles, and it oftentimes is more about an attitude than an official position.*

*Possible Answers: Leader takes initiative, generates new ideas and discussion, makes decisions etc.*

*Participants follow, etc. Can move from one role to the other when given authority by someone else, choose to step up in the moment, have specialized knowledge/skills to offer, etc.*

? Let's make a chart! How does Paul's response to these challenging situations differ from that of the sailors and Islanders?

*Possible Answers in italics below.*

Paul	Sailors and Islanders
<i>Peaceful</i>	<i>Fearful</i>

<i>Focus on preserving others' lives</i>	<i>Self-preserving</i>
<i>Confident in the Lord</i>	<i>Panicked</i>
<i>Looks to the Lord</i>	<i>Trusting superstitions or other gods</i>

? Who do you identify most with in this story? Why?

*Possible Answers: I'd be like the sailors and forget to use practical sense. I'd be like Paul--calm and rational in a crisis.*

? In what ways do we see Paul leading in this passage? What stands out about his leadership style?

*Possible Answers: Paul exemplifies Christ, attending to people's physical needs before ministering to them spiritually. Providing practical advice (e.g. not letting the sailors leave, eating). Brings encouragement and hope. Offering the gifts he has (healing).*

*It's not forceful. He speaks to their needs before his own agenda. He uses discernment.*

? How is this similar and/or different from the ways we have seen him lead throughout the book of Acts? What makes this situation unique?

*Possible Answers: We see one example of his leadership in his conflict with Barnabas (Acts 15). In both situations he speaks with wisdom provided by the Holy Spirit. Some situations for Paul are more about leading on theological and church issues; this one is more of a happenstance and/or "secular" situation. His main point is not to evangelize or correct misguided theology. He has no authority in this situation, yet still rises to the need for practical and clear leadership. A couple of other places where we see him lead in Acts are 16:25-40 and chapter 19.*

"We will look at this passage, then, to find significant things about leadership in what we might call 'secular' situations, which are the situations in which Christians find themselves in most often. Paul was an agent of hope, a wise person, one who had an attitude of servanthood, and one whose testimony was clear and appropriate. Paul also found encouragement from fellow Christians amidst the strain of the challenges facing him."

*-NIV Application Commentary: Acts, Ajith Fernando, pg 616*

? Optional: What appeals to you about Paul's leadership? Why?

? Why might the centurion have been willing to save Paul?

*Leaders' Note: It may be helpful to refer to verses earlier in this chapter, covered in your last study.*

*Possible Answers: Because he had shown himself trustworthy, he was confident that none of them would be harmed, they had formed a relationship.*

? How might their relationship be a good model for our relationship with those in leadership over us?

*Possible Answers: We should seek to build relationship with those in leadership over us, not for our gain but for theirs. We should respond with respect, putting others interests before ours and trusting the Lord.*

? Optional: In what ways might Paul have more directly shared the Gospel in these situations? Why do you think he chose not to do so?

*Possible Answers: He could have shared a more direct a Gospel but he knew his audience and what would connect best. He listened to the Holy Spirit and wasn't afraid to change his style and approach if that would change the impact.*

? From Paul's example, we see leadership meaning affecting people through your personal sphere of influence. With that definition in mind, in what areas of your life are you a leader?

? How can we discern what it looks like to share the Gospel in the context of those areas?

*Leaders' Note: If you don't have time to get to this wrap-up section, consider sending it out to your group members for reflection throughout the week.*

Optional Transition: This will be our last study in Acts, so we're going to spend the remainder of our time wrapping up this book. Let's first read the rest of our passage.

## Acts Wrap-Up

### Read Out Loud: Acts 28:11-31 (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. <sup>12</sup> We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. <sup>13</sup> From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup> There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup> The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. <sup>16</sup> When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

<sup>17</sup> Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. <sup>18</sup> They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. <sup>19</sup> The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own

people. <sup>20</sup> For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

<sup>21</sup> They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. <sup>22</sup> But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

<sup>23</sup> They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. <sup>24</sup> Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. <sup>25</sup> They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

<sup>26</sup> ““Go to this people and say,

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

<sup>27</sup> For this people’s heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.’

#### What Happens To Paul?

“Ancient writers agree that [Paul] died in Rome--probably beheaded, as befitted a Roman citizen--at the time of Nero. But others say that he undertook some journeys that are not mentioned in Acts, including one trip to Spain...At best, all that can be said is that nothing is known for certain between the end of the book of Acts and Paul’s death during the reign of Nero.”

-*The Story of Christianity*, Volume 1, Justo Gonzalez, Pg. 36

#### Where’s Verse 29?

Some manuscripts include here: *After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves.*

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<sup>28</sup> “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” <sup>29</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

*Leader’s Note: Paul is quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 in this passage.*



How does this passage serve as a fitting conclusion for this book?

*Possible Answers: This passage shows God's sovereignty, as well as other similar themes that we've seen throughout Acts, in using Paul to preach to people; as a Roman citizen, he was able to appeal to Caesar and be shipped to Rome (and allowed to continue his ministry in Rome with minimal guard), and as a respected Jewish rabbi, he is able to engage the Jewish leaders and show them both how Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture and why the message will be expanded to the Gentiles. Despite the delays, Paul still reached Rome before any negative reports about him did. This enabled him to speak the truth freely to the Jews there, and to present a persuasive and clear argument to large numbers of people, many of which came to believe, and even those that did not were still affected. Paul had TWO YEARS to preach and share the truth of Christ, "with all boldness and without hindrance!" (vs. 31)*

? The ending of Acts can feel abrupt. Why might Luke have chosen to wrap up the story of the early church in this way?

*Possible Answers: It wraps up the journey Paul took to Rome. It ends with the same emphasis it has had for the entire book--the Gospel is being proclaimed! It's hopeful--despite prison, hardship, and other roadblocks, the Gospel is going forward and reaching those who don't yet believe.*

? What is one thing that God has taught you through our study of Acts? What does it look like for you to continue living out this truth?

*Possible Answers: Answers will vary.*

#### **For Discussion and Accountability**

? How can you lead with hope, wisdom, and servanthood in your roles at work? At home? In other situations?

? Are you using your leadership opportunities for the Gospel? Are you being discerning and sensitive in the ways you share the Gospel?