

For Such a Time as This: The Apostle Paul



“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God”
(Rom. 15:17, NIV).

An Apostolic Traffic Lesson

INTRODUCTION

Acts 22; Gal. 1:10–17, 20–24

No U-turn Allowed. That's the one traffic sign that irks me the most when driving around the Miami area. Once my classmates and I planned to go out to dinner to celebrate the completion of our classes. We all hopped into our cars and proceeded to a restaurant in the neighboring town. Somehow I got separated from the group. I knew that if I could turn onto the avenue I had just passed, I could catch up with the others. Rather than cut off traffic, I drove on. However, no U-turns were allowed on that street, and several streets that followed only permitted right or left turns. I never made it to that dinner, because I could never turn back to join my friends.

Fortunately, our Christian walk is not that way. Our God of grace allows us, and even encourages us, to make U-turns when we're going the wrong way.

One example is Saul. His hometown, Tarsus, was a city of international commerce and diverse cultures. He studied under Gamaliel, "a famous Hebrew Scholar."¹ This sharp young legal mind even longed for the day he could be a part of the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin.² Little did he know he would be using his legal skills to defend Christianity. Saul's U-turn happened en route to Damascus on a "Christian hunt." On that road, he encountered Jesus Himself (Acts 22:5–8). He wanted Paul to make a U-turn in his thinking and in his profession (10–16).

There are three observations from the early glimpses of Saul's life that are worth mentioning: (1) No matter how you appear to others today, everyone has a dark side. We are all sinful by birth, nature, and choice, and we are spiritually blind. (2) Regardless of what we've done, we're not beyond hope. (3) Though our past is soiled, we can find a new beginning with God. Christ transformed Saul, gave him a new name, and made him a new creation. It's never too late to start doing what's right.³

This week we'll delve into Paul's life to learn more about how we can follow his example in mission. Thank God for U-turns!

Thank God for U-turns!

1. *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 402.

2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, p. 6.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

Sunday
June 29

How to Be an Extraordinary Missionary

LOGOS

Acts 9:1–9; 22:3–5, 25–29; Rom. 12:2; Phil. 3:1–11

The biblical record of Paul's missionary journeys never fails to inspire. I spent three years overseas as a missionary, and during that time I frequently turned to his story for encouragement. When I felt overwhelmed or discouraged, I'd think, *This is nothing compared to what Paul faced as a missionary.*

What made Paul such an extraordinary missionary? The answer is the focus of today's lesson.

More Than Qualified (Acts 9:1–9; 22:3–5; 25–29; Phil. 3:1–6)

Even prior to his conversion, Paul served as a missionary as he shared his zeal for Jewish law by persecuting and imprisoning followers of the Way. He believed he was doing God's will, and he dedicated his life to this work. But his zeal wasn't enough. He was still confronted on the road to Damascus where Jesus asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4, NASB).

What matters most to you?

Even before this life-changing incident, Paul was a brilliant student of Hebrew Scripture. He was trained by Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people"

(Acts 5:34, NIV). Yet this knowledge, like his zeal, meant nothing. He also appears in the biblical record as a natural leader. He described himself in Philippians 3:5 as a Pharisee. Ellen White tells us he was a member of the Sanhedrin,* which means he had significant influence in Jerusalem. Yet again, this ability was meaningless.

One might argue that his zeal, knowledge, and leadership were beneficial to his ministry after his conversion. He obviously used these gifts God blessed him with to minister to others. He would have been foolish not to. But read what Paul says about these gifts: "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7, NIV).

What Matters Most (Phil. 3:7–11)

Paul's résumé seems to tell us that he was more than qualified for a life of ministry. He was zealous and well educated, and he had strong leadership capabilities. But read what he said about all this in Philippians 3:8. When Paul wrote in this verse about knowing Christ, he was not referring to knowledge gained by sitting in a class or reading a book. He was referring to a knowledge that transforms lives.

Koine Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, has two words that can be translated “to know.” One word is *oida*, which literally means “to see with the mind.” When translated “to know,” *oida* refers to an abstract knowledge. The other word is *ginosko*, which is a knowledge one gains only from experience. Paul used *ginosko* in Philippians 3:8, 10. So, when he said he wanted to “know Christ,” he meant he wanted to live a life in which he experienced a relationship with Christ. He wanted to experience “the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10, NIV). He wanted to experience Christ’s life.

It’s easy to look at Paul and think, *He had it all. He was zealous, intelligent, and a natural leader. No wonder he was so effective!* But then we miss the point. Paul’s experiential relationship with Christ and his desire to understand more of His life is what made Paul an extraordinary missionary.

Live What You Learn (Rom. 12:2)

What matters most to you? You may not serve overseas, but if you share Christ with others through your words, your music, or your example, then you’re a missionary. And as a missionary, it’s important to ask yourself, *What matters most to me?*

What do you depend on when you share your testimony with others? What do you depend on when you study the Bible with a new Christian?

Are you experiencing Christ’s life now? Are you experiencing His power? His fellowship? If not, ask to make His life real to you. Don’t read the Bible the same way you read other books. As you read it, ask yourself, *What promise is God asking me to trust today? What is God asking me to give to Him today? How is He asking me to step out in faith?* Make it a point to daily live what you learn. If you allow Him, God will draw you into an experiential relationship with Him. And through this relationship, He will transform your life.

REACT

1. What talents or abilities do you depend upon for success in your career or in your ministry? Do you feel you depend more upon your talents or abilities than on Christ and His power?

2. Do you know Christ? If not, what’s preventing you? How can you overcome these obstacles and have a deeper relationship with Him?

**Sketches From the Life of Paul* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1883), p. 16.

God's Vision, Our Mission

TESTIMONY

2 Cor. 4:3-7

As Paul searched the Scriptures, he learned that throughout the ages “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.’ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. And so, viewing the wisdom of the world in the light of the cross, Paul ‘determined not to know anything, . . . save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’ 1 Corinthians 2:2.”¹

“I was shown that God would accomplish a great work through the truth if devoted, self-sacrificing men would give themselves unreservedly to the work of presenting it to those in darkness. Those who have a knowledge of the precious truth and who are consecrated to God should avail themselves of every opportunity

where there is an opening to press in the truth. Angels of God are moving on the hearts and consciences of the people of other nations, and honest souls are troubled as they witness the signs of the

“What will be the end of all these things?”

times in the unsettled state of the nations. The inquiry arises in their hearts: What will be the end of all these things? . . . All men and women who are Christians in every sense of the word should be workers in the vineyard of the Lord. They should be wide-awake, zealously laboring for the salvation of their fellow men, and should imitate the example that the Saviour of the world has given them in His life of self-denial, sacrifice, and faithful, earnest labor.”²

REACT

1. Paul had a dramatic conversion experience that radically changed his life. How would you change and reprioritize your life, your way of thinking, and your education if you were “determined not to know anything . . . save Jesus Christ and Him crucified”?

2. What are some things that are holding you back from giving yourself unreservedly to presenting the gospel to others?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 127, 128.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 202.

What Are You Waiting For?

EVIDENCE

Mark 16:19, 20

How did Paul, who had breathed “murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Act 9:1, NIV), become the most compelling apologist for Christ? As incredible as it may appear, Saul (Paul) had an encounter with Christ that transformed his perspective. During a brief “rendezvous” on the Damascus Road, he was compelled by the “evidence” to yield to the promptings of the Spirit; and like Isaiah (6:8), he responded by being willing for God to send him. Afterward, like a skillful lawyer, he presented Christ as the only hope for sinners. When asked to defend himself before King Agrippa, Paul declared unashamedly, “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19, NIV).

Jesus confronts each of us, and like Paul, we must respond—one way or another. Jesus’ order is unambiguous. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NLT). Fulfilling this command is part of our job description as disciples of Christ. And we are to do so with joy and vigor, knowing full well that people are perishing for lack of truth.

It’s your turn and mine. We can’t plug our ears and lock up our consciences against the fact that we are living at the crossroads of the

This is our time.

most breathtaking event to occur since the creation of our world. Jesus is returning, and He wants us to be heralds of His coming.

When all is said and done, we must ask ourselves, What’s the best indicator of our commitment to God? Attending church and being involved with church business is good. But it is not enough of a reflection to those around us who want something stupendous, something that will transform their lives. This vision that one day—soon—Christ will return to take us to heaven with Him must be so strong a motivation that, like Paul, we also will become agents of hope to the world. The lives we help to save may well be ours! This is our time.

REACT

1. When Jesus said His disciples were to go on soul-winning missions for Him, what did He actually mean? In what ways may you be an integral part of this mission to wrest souls from Satan’s grip?

2. If you are preoccupied with something that is hampering your contribution to Christ’s overall mission, what should you do so you can be more like Paul?

Wednesday
July 2

How to Be Better Witnesses for Christ

HOW-TO

Acts 22:3–5; 25–29; Rom. 7:19–25; 11:1; Phil. 3:2; 2 Pet. 1:3–8

Have you ever been totally wrong about something, yet behaved as though you were totally right? The apostle Paul was wrong about what God required of him to the point that he persecuted Christians. When he met Christ on the road to Damascus, both he and his life's mission were transformed. Likewise, when we meet Christ, He transforms our lives and our purpose. We need to ask the following two questions: (1) How did Paul demonstrate the transformation that occurred in his life? (2) How can that help us fulfill our purpose as Christians? Indeed, Paul's example can help us be better witnesses for Christ:

1. *Surrender yourself to be used by God.* Paul gave his life and all the resources he had to teach others about Christ. He gave away the comforts of an ordinary life to do something extraordinary for his Master. We should also allow ourselves to be instruments in Christ's hand in all circumstances so we can help others believe in Him.

God's promises are sure.

2. *Share your testimony.* Nothing can be more exciting than helping someone see a true example of God's power through our own personal experience. Such was the case with Paul: "As he was sent from city to city for his trial, his testimony concerning Jesus, and the interesting incidents of his own conversion, were related before kings and governors, that they should be left without excuse concerning Jesus."* Likewise, we should make it a habit to share our encounters with Jesus, just like the apostle Paul.

3. *Place all your confidence in God.* Our worldly achievements cannot help us in the battle against evil. By nature we are so connected with sin that we can only overcome sin by the power of Christ (Rom. 7:19–25). We can resist temptation and gain victory only by resting all our faith in His power to save.

4. *Believe God's promises.* God's promises are sure. By believing His words, we grow in our relationship with Him. Such growth will show in our attitudes and actions. Our witnessing work will also bear much more fruit in our own transformation (2 Pet. 1:3–8).

REACT

1. Why do you think testimonies are so effective in helping others to see Christ?
2. Take a step back. Do you think people see you as being Christlike? Why or why not?

*Early Writings, p. 207.

Our Greater Purpose

OPINION

2 Pet. 1:3–8

Serving as a missionary teacher in Taiwan was a rewarding time in my life. But it was also filled with numerous challenges; for example, being assigned to teach elementary school physical education even though I'd never quite mastered the basics of baseball!

During this time, I purchased Cece Winans' latest CD. I was especially inspired by a song entitled "Just Like You, Jesus." In this piece, Cece sings, "I wanna walk like You / I wanna talk like You / I wanna live like You / Just like You Jesus. I wanna pray like You / Wanna love like You / I wanna look like You / Just like You Jesus".¹ On days when I questioned my decision to become a missionary, this song reminded me of my greater purpose—to reflect Christ's character to my students.

Similarly, all of us have a mission to reflect Christ's character to those with whom we come in contact. This is no easy task when we consider all of the stressful situations we are in and all the different types of people those situations involve. However, the Lord has promised that if we seek Him through the spiritual disciplines (prayer, worship, etc.), He will give us the strength to persevere in our quest to be more Christlike in our thoughts and actions.

"I wanna look like You."

In 2 Peter 1:3–8, Peter gives us a recipe for cultivating Christian growth. Starting with faith as a base, add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and charity in equal measure. In its own way, each quality is essential for our spiritual development. We must daily seek the Holy Spirit's help in the development of our spiritual life. While God provides the power to run our lives, we choose the direction.² Developing these eight qualities will enable us to continually move forward and to focus upward. As these virtues flourish, we will overcome the temptation and corruption found in the world.³ We may also partake of God's blessings for this life and for the life to come. Finally, in diligently striving to be more like Jesus, we will be compelled to serve others and to spread His good news.

1. Cece Winans, *Throne Room* Sony, 2003.

2. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 2 Peter." Retrieved November 9, 2007 from <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/2peter.pdf>.

3. Ibid.

Friday
July 4

How's Your Serve?

EXPLORATION

Acts 9:3–6; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 12:1, 2; 2 Tim. 3:1–4, 8

CONCLUDE

No matter how sincere our profession of faith, until we meet Jesus, it's entirely possible to have been sincerely wrong. This was the conclusion Saul came to when He met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul's spiritual and legal training, his keen leadership skills, his zealotry for Judaism were useless to God until he encountered Jesus. Following his conversion, Paul delivered his body to Christ, a living sacrifice, determined to share the good news of salvation with all whom he met. The circumstances of our conversion may not be nearly as dramatic as Paul's, but the extent of that conversion will be measured in part by our labor for the lost.

CONSIDER

- Surfing the Internet for a map of the area in Syria where Paul met Jesus. Notice that Paul ministered where he first met Jesus. You don't have to go to another country to be a missionary.
- Researching the missionary journeys of Paul to identify the number of miles he traveled during his entire ministry. What does this say to you about Paul's passion for sharing Christ?
- Memorizing 1 Corinthians 12:1, 2. These two verses capture the heart of Paul's approach to ministry.
- Witnessing to someone today by a kind word, a thoughtful deed, or a prayer—all of which should mention Jesus.
- Organizing a prayer walk in your community. March down each street, pausing to pray at each corner for the salvation of every person.
- Reading Romans 1:20 and observing nature around you. Why did Paul include this idea in his message to the Romans?

CONNECT

The Acts of the Apostles, chap.12.

Martin Luther King Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians" sermon, *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration From the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.*