

Transformation's First Steps: Humility

The Life and Ministry of Paul—part 2

July 3, 2016

DAY 1: Humbled

1. Last week we read of Saul's past severe persecution of Christians, and then, Saul's sudden and dramatic conversion to Christ!

2. Today, we pick up the story at the tail end of his conversion story, out on the Damascus Road. Jesus Christ continues to speak to Him.

Acts 9:6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

3. Do you find it odd that God only gave Paul instructions that were vague? Nothing specific?

4. Why do you think God gave Paul such simple and vague instructions?

Acts 9:7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

5. It was part of God's plan to blind Paul for three days. Why do you think this was important? What was God trying to do in Paul?

6. Do you have this picture in mind?

- Paul gets up from his hands and knees on the dirt road.
- When he opens his eyes he can't see a thing.
- He has to be led by hand into Damascus.
- He is only given very vague directions.

Acts 9:9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

7. Paul is absolutely humbled. He now realizes that he has been horribly wrong about Jesus Christ, and about the violent persecution he has leveled on Christians. He is led to a house in Damascus where he begins to fast.

8. God often works in our lives to produce humility, to get us off our "high horse" and our "we sure know everything" attitude. This is what the bible calls brokenness. It is the first step in spiritual growth. Has God been bringing brokenness in you?

DAY 2: Ananais: On a suicide mission?

1. While Paul is being led to Damascus, God is speaking to one of his children in Damascus.

Acts 9:10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ *The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.*

¹² *In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."*

Acts 9:13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

2. To Ananais, this seemed like a suicide mission!

3. The equivalent would be if you lived in the Middle East. Osama bin Laden has traveled to your city, and God tells you to go to the house where he now is. What would you be thinking if you have been given *that* mission???

4. Ananais was quite hesitant! He needed some prodding...

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

¹⁶ *I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

5. Did God answer Ananais' fear?

6. Instead of alleviating his fears directly, God showed Ananais the purpose of Paul's mission!

Acts 9:17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it.

Acts 9:17b Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 9:18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

7. What was the first thing Paul did after receiving his sight?

8. Why was that important?

9. Once again, what do you think God is doing in Paul through these last three days?

DAY 3: Paul's mission

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

Acts 9:16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

1. It's interesting that before Paul gets his "marching orders" from the Lord, God gives the call to ministry through Ananais!

2. To help Ananias get moving, the Lord adds significant information and the importance of his mission. Four specific items constitute God's call to Paul.

a. "Chosen instrument—Hand-picked.

b. The gospel would spread into the Gentile population.

The gospel was spreading through the Jewish population, first in Jerusalem and then back to the countries from which Jewish pilgrims for Passover were returning, but now as Christians. But how do you get the gospel outside the Jewish culture and into the hated Gentile world? God would use Saul to start the ball rolling!

c. The gospel would be taken to the kings of the Gentiles.

d. The gospel would continue to spread through the Jewish population.

3. The last part of Paul's call to the ministry is found in verse 16. Go back and read it carefully.

4. This may be a "stunner" to you.

5. Apparently, the first step in world evangelization is what? Suffering! How often do we see in the stories of bible characters how suffering is a part of life? We fall to pieces when we suffer. But suffering is God's refining method of character –building, value-shaping, heart-transforming.

6. Suffering should not come as a surprise to any of us. Take heart!

DAY 4: Sharing the message of Jesus

1. Paul can now see.

Acts 9:19 ...and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

2. It doesn't take Paul long to start sharing his faith! He heads to the synagogues.

Acts 9:20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

Acts 9:21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

3. What is the response of the listeners? Why are they so astonished?

4. The Greek word, "astonished," means "dumb-founded" plus "ecstatic."

5. What is the essential message Paul is preaching? (Look back at verse 20).

Acts 9:22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

6. "... that Jesus is the Christ," meaning, promised Messiah sent from God. This had been prophesied for centuries, and had finally been met fully in Jesus.

7. In verse 22, underline the words that demonstrate God's ability to use Paul.

8. "Proving" – Greek word used for knitting together multiple strands, like a braid. The idea is skillfully woven together.

9. Ask God to open doors for you to share the message of Jesus with someone.

DAY 5: Preparation

1. A most remarkable thing happened to Saul almost immediately after his conversion to Christ. He was whisked off to the desert of Arabia-- for three years!!!

2. Let's pick up his story, as he tells it to the Christians at Galatia, years later.

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Gal. 1:11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.

¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased

¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man,

¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Galatians 1:18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days.

3. Paul “goes off the radar” for three years. These three years are years of preparation and character-building.

4. For years, Saul had built his life around winning the applause of men. What happens to a man who's built his life around winning the applause of men and is now in the desert of solitude for three years? That old drive to exalt self was getting starved to death.

5. It's hard to encompass just what a meteoric, seismic change occurred with Saul. Saul's world changed from:

- “Religiosity” about God to personal relationship with God.
- “Earning your way” to God to receiving mercy from God.
- Believing he was persecuting chief sinners to being the chief of sinners.

6. What happened in solitude. He meditated on the Old Testament scriptures, seeing them for what they were meant to do— lead him to see his need of God, lead him to see his sin and repent; lead him to see the wonder of God's mercy, and then to ponder his call to preach the gospel of the grace of God.

7. Is God trying to build depth of character in you? Are you in the scriptures as you should be?