



# 17 | ACTS 9:1-19

## PAUL'S GROWTH IN GRACE

*When each member of the church grows, the church is blessed and multiplies.*

### Outline

1. **A NEW FAMILY** (9:17-19)  
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*The Love of Jesus*  
*The Love of the Father*  
*Love Poured into Saul by the Spirit*  
Family Loyalty  
Family Life
2. **A NEW FAITH** (9:20-22)  
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3. **A NEW FIGHT** (9:23-25)  
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4. **A NEW FRIENDSHIP** (9:26-30)  
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Redeemed Friendship  
Reliable Friendship
5. **A NEW FUTURE** (9:31)

### Call to Worship

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. <sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord! ... <sup>3</sup> Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. —Psalm 33:1-3

### Songs

*Blessed Be Your Name*  
*It is Well with My Soul*  
*Christ Our Hope in Life and Death*  
*All is Well*  
*In Christ Alone*

## Announcements

**WELCOME:** We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

**GIVING:** You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees (use secretary@livinghopechurch.net). We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center. Malachi 3, "Test me in this" Proverbs: "**Give of your firstfruits.**" We believe blessing comes by putting God first.

**BUDGET VOTE:** We will be voting on the budget today after our service.

**NEW SERIES:** We have four more messages in our first part of Acts, and then we will begin a new series

**FRIEND DAY:** Please invite friends and family for our Friend Day on August 22! We will have an evangelistic message with a clear Gospel message.

**TESTIMONIES AND BAPTISMS:** Join us August 8 for testimonies and baptisms. If you would like to follow the Lord in baptism, please let an elder or pastor know.

**PROLIFE MINISTRY:** Join Pastor Matt and Cheryl Lozada each Friday morning from 7am to 9:30am (or any time you can give) for our prolife ministry. We need people to be present and pray. There is no need to speak or say anything as others are able to communicate. The address is 203 East Irving Park Road, Wood Dale, IL 60191. Please join us. Saturdays are also available.

**VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL** is coming quick! Please **register today** either on our website or at the Welcome Center. August 2-6, 6:30-8:30pm, nightly. If you would like to **serve in VBS this year (ESPECIALLY MEN)**, please fill out the sign-up sheet on the Welcome Center. Our mandatory leaders meeting will be on **Saturday, July 24 at 10am**, lunch will be provided. If you have any questions, please see Emily Tiberi. Also Chick-fil-a donated \$580 from their spirit night to our VBS – praise God!

**INSTALLATION OF PASTOR SALGADO:** We are delighted with the Lord giving another gift to our church in Pastor Salgado. We will install him as Pastor of Hispanic ministries on August 29, as well as a fellowship meal to follow.

**SUMMER FELLOWSHIP MEAL:** We will be having a Summer Fellowship after the service on Sunday August 29. Please bring a main dish and a side or dessert. We will be outside weather permitting, so bring a change of clothes and something comfortable to sit on.

**FATHER/SON/DAUGHTER CAMPOUTS:** Mark your calendars for our Father-Daughter Campout on August 20-21 and our Father-Son Campout on September 10-11. Both will be held at Waterfall Glen in Lemont. Campers must arrive before 7pm, when they close the gate to the campground. Bring your camping gear, food, drinks, and some good shoes for a nice hike! More info to come.

## Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called "Life on Life Discipleship." Our title this morning is: "Paul's Growth in Grace".

God has called every Christian everywhere to grow in Christ. Christians are predestined to be "conformed to the image of Christ" (Rom 8:28-30). Repentant faith in Christ produces a renewal of the mind. We are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit of God. That union makes us uncomfortable with sin, hungry for the truth, and loving the fellowship of fellow believers.

All these things are like the sun and water that enrich the soil of our hearts and help us grow. We see this in the conversion of Paul. In this passage, we are going to see five pillars of growth for every Christian. If you want to grow as a Christian, you have to start here, where the apostle Paul started.

The first pillar we see is that Saul of Tarsus has a new family, a forever family in Christ. I have a very hard time with anyone who calls themselves a Christian who has isolated themselves from the Body of Christ. A Christian who isolates themselves is either very sick spiritually or is just pretending to be a Christian. A robust, growing Christian has a deep desire to be with their forever family in Christ in a local church.

Key thought: When each member of the church grows, the church is blessed and multiplies.

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## 1. A NEW FAMILY (9:17-19)

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Christian growth takes place in a family that is diverse, from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. We have unity because of our union with Christ, through the Father and by the Spirit.

Just like we don't choose our children, but each is given to us as a gift, so we don't get to choose who is in the Body of Christ. So it was with Saul of Tarsus. He was a terrorizer of the church. We are introduced to a previously unknown believer named Ananias who is sent to welcome this terrorizer of God's church and invite him to come into the kingdom of God and receive him into God's family. Ananias welcomes Saul and calls him "brother."

### FAMILY LOVE

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in salvation. We see this as Saul is welcomed into the family of God by a believer that until now is completely unknown.

#### *The Love of Jesus*

We see here the love of Jesus. Saul had put his faith and trust in the true Messiah on the Damascus Road. Though Ananias was surely terrified that Saul could be putting on a ruse in order to trap him, he believed Saul's faith was real. God had said that this man had not only come to Christ through faith, but he was a "chosen instrument"—an apostle to the Gentiles (9:15).

**Acts 9:17a** | So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him...

Those who put their faith in Jesus are now believers. Salvation is not by works, but by faith in the righteousness of Christ. God told Ananias to seek out Saul because he had now put his faith in Christ. Ananias was to lay hands on Saul, indicating **God's authenticating of Saul's faith**. Do you think this might have been hard for Ananias? He had heard about Saul laying hands on countless believers to **destroy** them. Now Ananias was to lay hands on Saul to **confirm** him?

We must learn to love those whom God loves. They have come to Christ from afar off. God's conversions are often surprising to us. **We may be surprised at who God saves,**

**but God is not.** He only saves sinner. Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:32). Paul later said, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim 1:15). Ananias laying hands on Saul indicated that Saul's faith in Jesus was genuine.

**Ananias believed in the reality of Saul's conversion.** What a delightful greeting he gave him—"Brother Saul." The man who had been his enemy was now a brother in Christ. Only the power of God through the Holy Spirit can bring about a change like that.

Ananias was no great pillar of the faith, yet he was the first to greet the one who would become the great apostle, Paul. Ananias would demonstrate the forever family love and acceptance that we should have for all believers. Remember, Ananias had argued with the Lord. "This man has terrorized the church." Nonetheless, he obeyed the Lord.

### *The Love of the Father*

**Acts 9:17b** | Ananias ... entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul..."

It was like the Father in heaven was saying, "This one is mine. Go lay your hands on him. Claim him for my kingdom!" Saul was now an adopted child of our heavenly Father, a brother in Christ. The first contact the saved terrorist had with the church was the kindly touch of a fellow believer's hand. **The first words he heard from another believer's lips was the lovely word "Brother."** "Brother Saul." It must have gone straight to his heart. **This was Saul's introduction to his new family.**

From the Christian perspective, and especially within the fellowship of the church, we must be prepared to accept a new believer as they are, and not concentrate on what they were before Christ saved them. What are you now saint? You have the **stamp of the Father's love** on you. You are a brother or sister in God's forever family. All believers have had their past wiped out. If God accepts that person, let us accept him, or her, as a brother or sister in Christ.

### *Love Poured into Saul by the Spirit*

**Acts 9:17c** | "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The Spirit was about to put his stamp of approval onto Saul's faith. Saul was now to be **filled with the Holy Spirit.** Spirit baptism is the sign of our union with Christ. **The Spirit pours God's love** into our hearts.

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. —*Romans 5:5*

All who are born again are the Temple of God's Spirit.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? —*1 Corinthians 6:19*

The **agent of salvation** is the blessed Holy Spirit, but the Spirit uses **human agents** to fill up and pour out. Don't tell me you are filled with the Spirit if you won't give the gospel to the lost. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14). You are a human agent of

the Holy Spirit. The part Ananias played in the conversion experience of Saul illustrates what a great privilege it is to be used of God in bringing someone to know Christ as their Lord and Savior. Ananias was God's instrument, not only to restore Saul's physical sight, but also to give him spiritual sight into the truth of salvation. Saul was 'filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9:17). From the human standpoint we can say that Ananias was the man who gave Paul to the church, and to the Gentile world.<sup>1</sup>

The great mark of salvation is the fellowship and togetherness that the Spirit brings to every believer by uniting them to the Body of Christ. Ananias rightly called Saul "brother." Saul was not part of God's forever family. Every Christian longs to gather with God's family. Saul knew he was not alone. Dear saint, you are not alone. You are part of God's family.

### FAMILY LOYALTY

**Acts 9:18** | And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized.

There is a loyalty in every believer that we show to Christ and to our forever family through baptism. Something like literal scales fell from Saul's eyes, and his blindness is removed, and his eyes opened. The first thing he saw was the face of a Christian brother. He knew enough of Christian life to know that he had an obligation to identify himself with Christ and the family of God's people by being baptized.

Outside of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the baptism of Saul of Tarsus in Damascus was, perhaps, the most remarkable and startling single baptism in the whole course of Christian history. His baptism was like God raising the flag of victory over the one man most zealously opposed to Christ on the earth at the time.

Baptism publicly proclaimed him a member of the new and noble family of twice-born children of the living God.<sup>2</sup> That wouldn't have been at all popular or accepted among his closest friends and family. Baptism is not just an immersion into the family of God.

**Sometimes it means losing the love and acceptance of your own family and friends.** But our true family is our forever family in Christ.

### FAMILY LIFE

**Acts 9:19** | And taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

This fellowship with believers in Damascus is a wonderful evidence of genuine conversion. John says,

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brothers. —1 John 3:14

Love and **fellowship with Christ's body is a sure sign of conversion** and growth in a true child of God. Those who make excuses for missing the gathering of the saints are either woefully immature or sadly deceived about their salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Williams, *Acts: Church on the Move: An Expositional Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Leominster: DayOne, 2004), 101-102.

<sup>2</sup> J. Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 9:18.

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## 2. A NEW FAITH (9:20-22)

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Christian growth takes place by preaching the faith of Christ to ourselves and to others.

Real discipleship takes place as we immediately evangelize others. We can simply give our own testimony like Paul did, proclaiming Jesus as the true Messiah, King of kings, the Son of God. When we preach to others, we are also preaching to ourselves.

### PREACHING THE FAITH

**Acts 9:20** | And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Saul was a trained theologian, but he had no heart of compassion for others, until now. **He had been driving by the Law, and all the Law can do is crush.** The grace of Christ had now captured his heart. Grace enlivens and does ten times what the Law could hope to do. Grace brings life. Now that Paul was born again, he wanted "every creature" to know that Jesus is the Son of God. Saul was no man to sit still even though he had just been introduced to Jesus. He seems to have wasted no time in making his way into the synagogues. "Jesus is King!"

The term "Son of God" does refer to his deity, but it mainly refers to his position as Messiah, God's ultimate King: a reference to Psalm 2. The Messiah in Scripture is the figure who is "King of kings and Lord of lords." There in Psalm 2 we are told to "Kiss the Son" or pay homage to him. The best way to do that is to proclaim him to the lost.

Every child of God has a clear view of who Jesus Christ is. He is Lord of all.

### PROVING THE FAITH

It wasn't Paul's preaching that was challenged, but his reputation. Can God really save someone who was so vicious toward the church? The answer is a very loud, "Yes!"

**Acts 9:21-22** | And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

The text says that Saul not only "increased in strength" but also that he "confounded the Jews... **proving** that Jesus was the Christ." We can picture what happened. News of his arrival would cause an immediate stir. Here was the greatest teacher of the Sanhedrin, armed with documents demanding full cooperation of the faithful in the task entrusted to him of rooting out heresy. The ruler of the synagogue would be deferential and certainly be honored for him to teach. It was not every day an accredited agent of the Sanhedrin crossed the threshold of the Damascus synagogue. Saul would be given the chief seat. Every eye would be on him. Some would gaze at him with approval, others with apprehension. In due course Saul would beckon for the Scriptures to be handed to him. He would stand and read a passage, hand back the scroll, and face the congregation. A hush would fall. Now it was coming—a denunciation of the new sect.

But instead, taking the reading of the day as his text, Paul preached Christ to the people, proving that Jesus is the Son of God. Their astonishment must have known no bounds. <sup>3</sup> The term “Son of God” gives us a clue what text he might have preached from Psalm 2.

I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” <sup>10</sup> Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup> Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. —*Psalm 2:7-12*

This is one of those “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess” kind of texts. Bow before Christ. Kiss the Son. Worship him. Pay homage to him. That’s what we need to preach. **A vital sign of real growth in the Christian life is when you see everyone as a soul that needs Christ.** Do you have a heart that breaks for the lost?

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### 3. A NEW FIGHT (9:23-25)

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Christian growth takes place as we persevere and fight in a daily spiritual warfare.

If you aren’t facing satanic harassment or persecution, then you are not growing. When a tree grows, it has to persevere through the elements, the rain and snow, the hot and cold weather. It has to be able to take the howling winds. But it grows. We move forward in growth as Christians, not by looking to ourselves and “white knuckling” it. We look to Christ, and we persevere in spiritual warfare.

#### A SECRET FIGHT

**Acts 9:23** | When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him.

Of course, the Jewish leaders of Damascus **plotted to kill Saul**, just like they had plotted and succeeded in murdering our Lord Jesus.

The battle is real. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. Our real enemy is even more secret and unseen than the Jews who wanted to kill Saul. We face the same enemy. The devil is on the prowl. If you don’t face spiritual warfare against the battle, that might say something about the side you’re on. All true Christians suffer persecution. Sometimes it’s persecution from people. But there is constant persecution from the demonic world. The only way around it is to look to the cross of Jesus in faith. Put on the whole armor of God.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God. —*Ephesians 6:11-13*

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<sup>3</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 9:20.

We are the church militant on earth. We are in a warzone. Prayer is your walkie talkie. The word of God is your sword. It's not enough to know the word, you have to walk in the word. Wielding the word of God is the only way to make the enemy flee so you can win the fight.

### A SPOILED FIGHT

Of course, we already know we have the victory. Saul realized this. The enemies of Christ plotted to kill Saul, but Saul is spared. Let's read about it.

**Acts 9:24-25** | Their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,<sup>25</sup> but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

God allowed this plot to be known by Saul, even though many were waiting to execute him by the main city gates. So Saul decided to go out a different way with help from fellow believers, who lowered him down through an opening in the wall. He descended in a basket through the wall.

The Bible encourages us to remember that "the battle is the Lord's" (2 Chron 20:15) and "greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4).

The Lord has already won. Yet we need to **expect to fight constant daily spiritual battles** as you grow in Christ. The only "big deal" in life is knowing Christ and walking with him. Everything else when it comes to us, our personal comfort or reputation, we can sacrifice. **His unrelenting love is better than anything this life can offer** (Psa 63:3).

Saul escaped with his life through the wall in a basket. No matter what we lose, even if it is our life, we must always remember that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. That's where true happiness and joy is found.

### *Arabia*

We don't read about it here, but upon escaping Damascus, Paul spends about three years learning from the Lord personally in the desert of Arabia. **According to Galatians 1:15-18, he left Damascus and went into Arabia**, which may mean the surrounding desert countryside. We have no idea how far south into the Arabian Peninsula Paul may have wandered, but we know he later returned to Damascus. Galatians 1:17-18 says that "after three years" he went to Jerusalem. Saul wanted new friendships in Jerusalem, but he didn't find them there.

**Acts 9:26a** | And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him...

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## 4. A NEW FRIENDSHIP (9:26-30)

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Christian growth takes place in the midst of real friends, not all of whom are accepting of us. We are all growing. We all are porcupines. Growth takes place when we are humble enough to love all those who are born again, even when they are hard to love.



The book of Acts is all about life-on-life discipleship. A huge part of discipleship is real friendship. At times people will say, "Pastor Matt I really want discipleship." **What you are asking for is someone to come and speak into your life, and you speak into their life.** You have to pursue that. The pastors and elders will do their best at pursuing people, but we will fail, just based on the sheer magnitude of trying to shepherd every person in the congregation. It is every believer's responsibility to seek out discipleship, and that means friendship. Often we find when we follow Christ, we lose our friends in the world and even our family. When Saul was saved, most in the church wanted nothing to do with him.

### REJECTED FRIENDSHIP

**Acts 9:26** | And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

It's true that the saints opposed Saul when he became a believer because, as verse 26 says, "They were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple."

I get that. **The same thing happened in our own church.** God saved a man from **Saudi Arabia** and made him an evangelist and had him be a member of our church. At first there was **great resistance** to him. There was fear. There may still be fear. But that is a greatly immature faith. We are called to receive a brother, no matter what his previous sins were. So, yes, God wants to save **jihadi Muslims and make them followers of Christ.** We have to have open arms for all who come. **"Such were some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

### A REDEEMED FRIENDSHIP

**Acts 9:27** | But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

I understand that some will reject the harder cases when they come to Christ. That's just immaturity. But we need to have those mature believers, like Barnabas, who will teach us how to love through their actions. When all rejected Saul, Barnabas was there as the "son of encouragement" to really comfort him and support him and speak up for Paul. Barnabas had witnessed Paul's strong preaching in the name of Jesus when they were in Damascus.

We all need a Barnabas in our lives that can encourage us and walk alongside us. All of us need a Paul that can pull us up when we are weak, hold us accountable, and be firm with us. And we all need a Timothy in our lives that we can pull up and encourage. When you teach others, you are also teaching yourself. That's redeemed friendship.

Barnabas, "the son of encouragement," threw caution to the wind, sought Saul, heard him out, and was convinced of the genuineness of his faith. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 139.

## A RELIABLE FRIENDSHIP

Friendship in the Lord is forever. It's the most reliable friendship we can have. The place where Paul had once bound Christians and stoned them, he is now preaching Christ.

**Acts 9:28-30** | So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.<sup>29</sup> And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.<sup>30</sup> And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

We can imagine the heightened emotion when those who had received floggings at Paul's orders gave him the kiss of peace and then, they shared bread and wine affirming their union with each other and the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Christ can do that! That's our forever family and forever friendship we have in Christ.

And when the Hellenistic Jews wanted to kill Paul, the brothers in Christ protected him. He goes from preaching to persecution. How unusual the Christian life is. There is so many ups and downs in the Christian life that we need friends. We can't do this alone.

During Paul's ministry years, sometimes there were successes, sometimes there were failures, and sometimes there were quiet times. We do not hear from Saul again for ten years—until Barnabas comes to Tarsus to ask him to help with the work in Antioch.<sup>6</sup>

Are you experiencing the ups and downs of the Christian life? You need the brothers. You need fellowship. You need the Body of Christ.

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## 5. A NEW FUTURE (9:31)

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When real Christian growth takes place, the entire church grows and multiplies, and the future of the world is changed.

**Acts 9:31** | So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Paul now goes off stage until he reappears in 11:25f. But an important point has now been achieved in Luke's story. All the preparations have been made for the decisive step forward in the mission of the church which took it to the Gentiles. So Luke pauses to give a general summary of the situation.<sup>7</sup>

Saul was moved out of harm's way. He went off to his home city of Tarsus. God multiplied the peace of the church. There were many signs of true growth for God's people: peace in the church, the fear of the Lord, the comfort of the church, and a multiplication of new believers. I want to see that. That's the sign of real growth and maturity in the church.

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<sup>5</sup> Pollock, *The Apostle*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 139–140.

<sup>7</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 186.

*Conclusion*

Are you growing into the image of Christ? Is there fruit? The answer is not to get self-focused and try to turn the Christian life into a self-help program. The answer is to look to Christ alone.