

The Discipline of Disciple-Making: Paul: Used by God to Change the World

Acts 28

God wants to use people. He provides everything needed. All God wants is willingness mixed with humility. When He finds that mix there is no limit to what God can do.

GOD WANTS TO USE US

Paul is an example of the limitless ways God can, did, and continues to use Paul. As God already told us in 1 Chronicles 16:9, His eyes are searching today, as they have always been, looking for those who will seek Him wholeheartedly. God found a whole-hearted servant in Paul. Just the fact that we are reading this account is quite a testimony to what God can do if we invite Him to control our lives.

From conversion to martyrdom Paul never ceased to serve God. Though Paul like all of us was born a sinner, when he got saved he never seemed to coast. Instead, in his own words, he “ran the race” and “sought the prize”, and “finished the course”.

As we come to the end of Acts, and look at the final of the 22 salvation accounts, we have the opportunity to look through this scene at the most amazing life recorded in the New Testament and one of the two most amazing humans ever described in the Bible.

Join me in Acts 28:23 as we first read this final Gospel explanation.

Acts 28:23-31 (NKJV) So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he **explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God**, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying, ‘Go to this people and say: “Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.”’” 28 “Therefore let it be known to you that **the salvation of God** has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 **preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

First note with me the final Gospel explanation in v. 28-31. We can say that Paul explains that:

SALVATION IS: ENTERING & LIVING IN GOD'S KINGDOM

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO (PAUL): is the final Gospel Message in Acts where salvation is described as coming into God's Kingdom. The opening salvation message in Acts was: *repent*; and the concluding message is: *enter God's Kingdom*, both rarely if ever used today.

Acts 28:28-31 (NKJV) “Therefore let it be known to you that **the salvation of God** has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 **preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Paul's final proclamation of salvation is so simple (entering & living in God's Kingdom); and Paul's final proclamation of salvation is so connected to Christ's preaching of the Gospel. Jesus often equated salvation to “entering” the Kingdom¹. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3,5 that unless a person is born again, they cannot see or even enter the kingdom of God.

Here is Acts 28, Paul is at the end of his public ministry. We have no more detailed accounts of his travels after this. We have no more eyewitness accounts of how he preached the Gospel. Paul's life in the spotlight of Scriptures is coming to a close. How does God close the curtain on Paul's public ministry life? Basically we can say that Paul was doing the same thing he had always done:

PROCLAIMING CHRIST

Paul is sitting inside a house somewhere in Rome: the most powerful city in the world.

Paul is waiting to be brought before Emperor Nero: one of the most depraved and cruel men in history.

Paul is sharing the Gospel with everyone he can: inviting each to enter the Kingdom of God through the only Door, Jesus Christ. That is how the Book of Acts ends. But what had started in Acts 1, and went onward to Acts 28, is still unstoppably going onward today.

Think about it, we are each connected to Acts 28 in some way through Paul. Nearly every one of us were led to salvation, trained, taught, and encouraged through some part of the New Testament that Paul wrote. So as the curtain closes on Paul in the Book of Acts, pause with me and note the elements God has emphasized for us, about Paul's life.

¹ Mt. 19:24, 21:31; Mk. 9:47, 10:23-25; Lk. 18:24-25; Jn. 3:5.

PAUL: THE MAN, THE MISSIONARY & THE MESSENGER

The best way to summarize Paul's life, and get some very powerful truths to challenge our lives is to follow the pattern before us in the Bible. Acts introduces us to Paul, and then the next 13 Epistles, (from Romans to Philemon), are written by Paul.

A SNAPSHOT OF PAUL'S LIFE

Most of us know a great deal about Paul, but often we don't have the time to stop and put all of the pieces together. From this book of Acts we can see nearly the entire life of Paul. For a moment, join me in a snapshot of the life of Paul. Paul's life dominates the second half of Acts. Peter is primarily seen in Acts 1-12, with Saul/Paul variously mentioned in Acts 7-9, 11-12.

In Acts 8:1-3 Paul is introduced as the adversary of Christ's Church. Then in Acts 9:1-22 Paul is saved laying in the dust at Christ's feet, called personally by Christ to ministry and commissioned; and then trained in secret alone with Christ in the desert.

Paul stands out unique among all of the Biblical servants of God. In fact the Lord calls Paul His "chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15) to proclaim the Gospel before Gentiles, kings, and Israel. That means both normal humans, and those in special, powerful positions. Paul was called to share the Gospel with everyone possible; and he did.

In Acts 9:23-30; 11:25-30 Paul is "taken" on and discipled by Barnabas.

Then, from Acts 12:25 onward, Paul dominates the Book of Acts, and the ministry that Jesus Christ left for His Church to do in the world. No one worked more tirelessly, widely, and at such personal cost than Paul, who goes on three missionary journeys, plus a journey to Rome that total 3,590 overland miles, plus 5,560 over seas miles.

Then he goes to prison for four years, stands trial, and is released for a final journey.

Then Paul is captured, imprisoned, and according to church history, executed as a Roman citizen by beheading, just outside the city of Rome at Nero's command.

THE DIMENSIONS OF PAUL'S LIFE

So we can simply say that God reveals three dimensions of Paul's life that can impact ours today. Note them with me.

Paul: the Man God Prepared. Acts 8-12.

Paul: the Missionary God Sent. Acts 13-28.

Paul: *the Messenger God Used.* Romans through Philemon.

First, note with me:

PAUL THE MAN GOD PREPARED

When God saved Paul in Acts 9, He was saving the modern day equivalent of an Ivy League scholar, with the personal discipline of a Special Forces Commander, all rolled up into Communicator that could speak and write in a way that captured people's hearts and minds.

Paul was one of those unbelievably gifted, talented, and packaged type of guys. But:

God doesn't need scholars, as He is All Wise.

God doesn't need discipline, because He is All Powerful.

God doesn't need communicators, because His Voice is Inescapable.

God can use those qualities; but He doesn't need them. So to get Paul to where He could use him, God had to prepare him. Paul's preparation for ministry is actually the longest segment of his life. God takes 14 years to prepare Paul for a nearly non-stop 10 years of public ministry.

If you take the normal conservative dates for Paul's life and ministry, and map them out across the pages of Acts you can see how much time it took to get Paul ready. We can see the following stages of Paul's life:

Stage-1: Saved on the Road to Damascus AD 33

Paul is saved on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). Most date this about AD 33.

Stage-2: Trained in Arabia AD 33-35

Paul is trained for perhaps two years by Christ in Arabia (between Acts 9:22 and 23; see Galatians 1:17-18), in the Nabatean region to the south and east of Damascus.

Stage-3: Home to Tarsus AD 36-43

Paul comes back so enthused that his enemies plot his death (Acts 9:23-30), so he is sent home to Tarsus. Paul is off the record for as much as six years while he grows, suffers, studies, and serves in his hometown. Barnabas comes looking for him in Acts 11:25.

Stage-4: Discipled at Antioch AD 43-46

Paul gets to see the greatest days of the church as Barnabas mentors Paul in ministry at Antioch (Acts 11:26-30). It is during this time that God has prepared Paul enough, and in Acts 13:1-3 God signals that it is time. Paul is ready to be launched, and the church sets apart Paul & Barnabas for ministry. This begins the second dimension of Paul's life.

PAUL THE MISSIONARY GOD SENT

Paul never stopped serving God. This journey was just an enlargement of all Paul had been trained to do. Paul was a non-stop ambassador for the Gospel, who for 30 years traveled for Christ, lived for Christ, and proclaimed Christ.

Stage-5:	1 st Missionary Journey	AD 47-49
Stage-6:	2 nd Missionary Journey	AD 50-52
Stage-7:	3 rd Missionary Journey	AD 52-56
Stage-8:	Caesarean Imprisonment	AD 56-58
Stage-9:	1 st Roman Imprisonment	AD 59-62
Stage-10:	Release, Final Journeys & Execution	AD 62-67

LESSONS FROM PAUL'S LIFE & MINISTRY

Study All You Can

Preparation is Vital:

Think 3 years in Arabia

Philippians 3:10 "that I may know Him"

Wait for God's Timing

Growth Takes Time:

Think 7 years in Tarsus

Philippians 2:5 "let this mind"

Learn from a Barnabas

Everyone Needs Discipleship:

Think 3+ years in Antioch

Galatians 2:20

Run the Race

God Can Do So Much in Short Order:

Think 10 years in Missions

Philippians 3:14 "press towards the prize"

Learn Contentment

God Can Use us Anywhere:

Think 6+ years in Prison

Philippians 4:11 “learned to be content”

Love Jesus More than Everything

No One is Indispensable:

Think Prison, Loneliness & Death

2 Timothy 4:6-8 “finished the race”

There is one final dimension to Paul’s life, during all the missionary journeys, imprisonments, releases, trials, and uncertainties we see:

PAUL THE MESSENGER GOD USED

Paul never stopped communicating God’s Truth. Paul was an instrument in God’s Hands to his dying days: he spoke and wrote, he preached and taught, he mentored and trained; and by God’s grace, he continues to do so even to this day through his epistles.

As I read these snippets from Paul’s inspired communications, preserved for us by God, think of how many ways God has used Paul in your life.

Romans 5:1-5

1 Cor. 1:2

2 Cor. 5:21

Gal. 2:20

Eph. 1:3

Phil. 1:21

Col. 1:15-16

1 Th. 2:13

2 Th. 1:7

1 Tim. 1:15

2 Tim. 4:6-8

Titus 3:5

Philemon 1:7

Paul, used by God to change the world, and to touch our lives even to this day!