

# READING PLAN: PAUL

## Day One

*Read Acts 9:1-30*

I hate being wrong. I hate admitting mistakes. How many are with me on this?

It's tough to put so much work into something, whether it's a belief or a project, and find out you've actually been believing or living a lie. In today's passage, Paul is confronted with the lie he'd been living. Thankfully for us, he admitted his mistake and made the changes necessary to course-correct his life.

Paul grew up climbing the ladder in his religious society and would have been considered a Pharisee - a strict follower of Jewish laws. Most of the Jewish leaders did not believe in Christ as the Messiah. Paul stood by approvingly as an angry mob took Stephen, one of Jesus' followers, and stoned him to death. Paul personally put many of Jesus' followers in prison, and when they were facing a death sentence he cast his vote against them. He went from town to town wreaking havoc on Christ-followers.

Acts 9 described in detail an encounter that Paul (at that time called Saul) had with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus confronted him, called him personally to follow Him, blinded him, and gave him very specific instructions on what to do next.

It was the kind of wake-up call Paul needed.

Paul was misguided in his efforts to please God. He did everything right according to the rules but totally missed out on the relationship. Paul repented of his life of legalism and now led the way to help people live a life based on God's love and forgiveness. He went on to write much of the New Testament while living a courageous life for the sake of the Church. Despite hardships, beatings, and jailing's, Paul obeyed God, and God used him in a huge way to build the church.

### Questions:

1. How would you feel if you suddenly discovered that what you had fought for and staked your life on was wrong? How long would it take for you to recover?
2. Who in your life has helped you to come to understand the truth about Jesus? What was your wakeup call like?
3. Paul obeyed God and God used him in a mighty way. What kept Paul going? What keeps you going? How can God use you in a mighty way?

## Day Two

### *Read Philippians 3*

What's the most extreme thing you've ever done? Would you consider yourself a safe person or more of an extreme person? Even when we tend to be safe in different parts of our lives, there are times when we are so passionate about something, we will go to extreme lengths to make our point.

Before Paul really understood who Christ was, he looked at the group of people who followed Jesus as a threat to the church he knew, and he did everything he could to stop Jesus' teachings from spreading. With the same intensity he had opposed Christ, Paul now promoted Christ as the only way to God. He committed himself to take the message of Christ boldly to everyone who would listen. He willingly suffered many hardships and abuse for the sake of Christ. Paul's passion as he proclaimed Christ's message was consistent: he would boldly share the truth with everyone and reason with anyone who would oppose it.

Paul's life was a life of extremes. He opposed Christ's people to the extreme, then he met Christ under extreme circumstances, and he became an extreme proclaimer of Christ's message. He had such an extreme change that his name was changed—he was no longer Saul of Tarsus, but Paul the champion of the Church. His life as the first and foremost Christian missionary continues to have a profound impact on the church as we know it.

#### Questions:

1. What appeals to you about Paul's intensity?
2. What things in your life are you pursuing intensely that are not that important and possibly are distracting you from pursuing Christ?
3. What does it take for you to keep your focus on Christ? What do you rely on to help you maintain your focus and intensity as you follow Christ?

## Day Three

*Read Acts 17:16-34*

Paul's ministry involved traveling from city to city proclaiming Jesus as Messiah and establishing local churches. Many people came to trust Christ and the Church grew rapidly. After a successful visit to Berea, Paul decided to go to Athens and spread his message to the people there.

Paul and his companions had to be feeling good as they journeyed to Athens. For all practical purposes, they had just hit a home run for the kingdom of God in Berea. Most people would think, "Let's go do it the same way in Athens as we did in Berea." But not Paul.

He knew that the message of God's love and forgiveness was the same everywhere. But people are different. Paul spent time studying the Athenians and observed what made these people tick. He knew about their polytheism (a big word that means believing in many different gods) by observing their many statues and temple gods. They even had a statue that read, "To an Unknown God" just in case they missed a god they weren't worshipping and made that god mad. Crazy!

Paul was invited to the Areopagus, a place where the best and brightest gathered for discussion. They wanted to hear more about Jesus.

When Paul addressed the crowd, he said, "Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with the inscription: 'To an Unknown God'. Now what you worship as unknown, I am going to proclaim to you." Paul went on to tell them about God, and even among a tough audience, some believed Paul's message that day.

Paul connected with the people of Athens, and in turn, they were able to connect with God. He had discovered what made the people of Athens tick, and he used what they knew as truth to connect them with the everlasting truth of Jesus.

### Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul congratulated the Athenians on their religious enthusiasm even though they believed differently than them? What lost people in your life might need to be treated as friends rather than opponents?
2. What has been your view about methods for sharing Jesus with others? Do you seek to understand then share or do you have one way only that you use?
3. What should you do to get to know the people in your life that you want to share your faith with? How will that affect the way you present the message of Christ?
4. When you know people believe differently than you, are you tempted to treat them as opponents or friends?

## Day Four

### *Read Philippians 2*

One of the coolest attitudes a person can have is humility. Although it may be funny and entertaining to watch a prideful person display their arrogance, humility is much more attractive. You might get a kick out of watching a WWE wrestler beat their chest, pump their fists in the air and talk smack to their opponent, we don't want to hang with those people on the regular. Give me a person who is thoughtful and interested in my well-being and not simply their own.

At first glance, you might think Paul is the former guy. After all, he comes from a well-known and respected position as a religious leader. The guy was a church celebrity that people feared and stood in awe of.

Even as a Christ-follower, people stood up and took notice of Paul. He worked tirelessly, wrote continually to encourage and teach churches all over the region, and wasn't afraid to call you out if your actions didn't match your words.

So it may come as a surprise when you read Paul teaching the lesson of serving people.

That shouldn't surprise us, however. Paul simply took his words directly from Jesus' actions. Paul didn't serve people because it got him noticed. He didn't have an attitude of serving to make up for all the times he demanded things from others. He simply taught that "your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:5)

Within his strong personality and excellent leadership skills, he knew serving people had to be at the center of it. Jesus was polarizing. He was a tremendous leader. But, he did it with a heart to serve people into the Kingdom.

Your attitude should be the same - regardless of your giftedness and talents.

#### Questions:

1. When it comes time to do manual labor, do you tend to take charge and watch, or get in there and get your hands dirty?
2. Why do you think serving is held in such high esteem to Jesus?
3. How can you serve this week with absolutely no strings attached or no ulterior motives?

## Day Five

### *Read 2 Timothy 4*

Paul's intensity is unmatched when it comes to the Church and advancing the cause of Christ in the world. His passions for God matched his words and actions. He considered his life worth very little if he was not achieving the mission that he was handed from the Lord.

He was also strategic - most of his ventures focused on key cities where many different types of people lived. The message of Christ would be heard and then taken all over the world from these places.

When a church was starting, Paul stayed around to guide its growth. He treasured deep relationships, like the ones with the elders in Ephesus where he would revisit again and again. He also knew he could not do his work alone. He invested time into other men who would carry on the work that he started - men like Titus, Timothy, and Silas.

Paul was not a superhero - he was just a man who lived his life fully devoted to God. He endured hardships, beatings, and jailing's, and was even shipwrecked. He spoke in front of many high-ranking officials, scholars, and even kings. In front of King Agrippa, he told his story, and when the king asked if Paul was trying to persuade him to be a Christian. Paul quickly replied, "I pray that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am." He passionately challenged others to stand firm, hold on to the faith, and win the race set before them.

Paul had chosen Timothy as one of the people who would continue the work he started. In some of Paul's last writings, he encouraged his young mentee, Timothy to "Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:5)

He then sums up a life of following Jesus and pursuing the expansion of the Church in the form of a challenge for Timothy to follow him:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race and I have kept the faith, now there is a crown of righteousness waiting for me, but not only to me but also to you."(2 Timothy 4:7)

What a way to end! I can only imagine what it would feel like to be able to say those final words. I can only imagine the significance of those words to Timothy as he began his own legacy of ministry. The once-misguided Pharisee, Saul, ends up as the apostle Paul - Champion for the Church.

#### Questions:

1. What is your dream for the Church? Do you have one? What role do you think God wants you to play in that dream?
2. When you are tempted to give up on what God has called you to, how do you push through the challenges of hard times and difficult relationships?
3. Who in your life do you think you could encourage or mentor to become a champion of the faith? What would investing in that person look like for you?