A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Lessons from the Life of Paul

Hope That Holds · Book 4



From persecutor to apostle

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Introduction

Next to Jesus, Paul may be the most influential person in the history of the Christian faith. He went from hunting down Christians to spending his whole life spreading the gospel. He traveled through Asia Minor and Europe, planted churches, and wrote thirteen letters that are part of our New Testament.

Paul's life shows that no one is too far off track for God to turn around and use. I drifted from God more than once before coming back and serving, so I relate to a man who had to unlearn his pride and start over by grace. I wrote this book for believers who want practical lessons from how God shaped Paul.

This book follows Paul's life from his upbringing to his final days, and draws lessons for our own walk with God along the way. If God could change Paul, He can change anyone.

1 Prepared before he knew it

Paul was born a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, in a family of Pharisees, in the city of Tarsus (Acts 22:3; 23:6; Philippians 3:5, SLB). His Hebrew name was Saul. Tarsus was a center of trade and learning steeped in Greek culture. He grew up speaking Greek, studied the law in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, and inherited Roman citizenship from his family (Acts 22:3, 25-28, SLB).

He also learned a trade as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3, SLB), which later let him support himself as he preached.

Every one of those things would matter later. His knowledge of the Scriptures, his Greek, his citizenship, and his trade all became tools in God's hands. God often prepares us long before we understand what for. Nothing in your past is wasted when it is surrendered to Him.

At 16, I passed the California High School Proficiency Exam early and aced the Air Force tests, expecting a computer job. When they would not give it to me, I walked away and thought my plan was ruined. Decades later, after about 35 years at a public utility and ten years running a computer repair business, I can see how God used those skills in my writing and ministry. God prepares us through closed doors and ordinary jobs long before we see His plan.

2 Met on the road

Saul was zealous for the traditions of his fathers. He stood by approving when Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:58; 8:1, SLB). Saul was "entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he was delivering them to prison" (Acts 8:3, SLB). He went on "breathing out threats and murder against the disciples" (Acts 9:1, SLB).

On the road to Damascus, "a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun," shone around him, and he heard the voice of Jesus (Acts 26:13-15, SLB). Blinded, he was led into the city. There a disciple named Ananias, who had every reason to be afraid of him, went and laid hands on him (Acts 9:10-18, SLB).

> *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this **man** is a vessel of choice to Me, to carry My name before Gentiles and kings and **the** sons of Israel."*
>
> **Acts 9:15 (SLB)**

Paul never got over the grace he was shown. Years later he wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15, SLB). No one is too far gone for God to reach.

My Damascus road did not come with a bright light. It came on May 29, 2020, when my wife caught me drinking. Until that day I was doing well at work and denying I had a problem. Being stopped in my tracks hurt, but it was the mercy I needed. Sometimes God interrupts our path sharply because that is the only way to save us from ourselves (Acts 9:3-6).

3 Years of preparation

Paul did not become a missionary overnight. He spent time in Arabia, returned to Damascus, and after three years went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter (Galatians 1:17-18, SLB). The believers there were afraid of him until Barnabas stood up for him (Acts 9:26-27, SLB). Later he spent years in his home region before Barnabas went looking for him and brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26, SLB).

In Antioch "the disciples were first called Christians" (Acts 11:26, SLB). From that church, the Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work He had called them to (Acts 13:2-3, SLB).

Two lessons stand out to me. God's timing includes seasons of quiet preparation. And every Paul needs a Barnabas, someone willing to vouch for a new believer when others hold back.

Before I translated the Steadfast Literal Bible or wrote my books, I spent years studying Scripture and teaching small groups. There were no shortcuts to learning to handle God's Word carefully. God rarely rushes the preparation when He is building something meant to last (Galatians 1:17-18).

4 Grace for the Gentiles

Paul's travels took him to Cyprus, through Galatia, and later across into Macedonia and Greece. Everywhere he went, some believed and others opposed him. In Lystra he was stoned and left for dead, yet the next day he went on to the next city (Acts 14:19-20, SLB). In Philippi he and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail, and "about midnight Paul and Silas, praying, were singing hymns to God" (Acts 16:25, SLB). The jailer and his whole household came to faith that night.

The biggest battle was over grace itself. Some taught that Gentile believers had to keep the law of Moses to be saved (Acts 15:1, SLB). The church met in Jerusalem, and Peter said, "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we believe that we are saved in the same manner as they also" (Acts 15:11, SLB). Paul spent the rest of his life defending that truth.

Paul also had a sharp disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark, and they went separate ways (Acts

15:37-39, SLB). Yet years later Paul wrote, "Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11, SLB). Broken relationships between believers can be restored.

For five straight years I helped lead youth mission trips to Baja, Mexico, twice a year. We served alongside believers from a different culture who shared the same Savior. Crossing that border is a reminder that the gospel belongs to every nation and language (Acts 13:47).

5 Strength in weakness

Paul's life was not easy. He listed beatings, shipwrecks, dangers from rivers and robbers, hunger, cold, and the daily pressure of care for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:24-28, SLB). He was arrested in Jerusalem, held for two years in Caesarea, shipwrecked on the way to Rome, and spent years in chains.

He also wrote of a thorn in the flesh that God did not take away. Instead, the Lord told him something that has carried countless believers since.

> *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
>
> **2 Corinthians 12:9 (SLB)**

Paul did not depend on clever speech. He told the Corinthians, "I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1

Corinthians 2:2, SLB). When we feel weakest, we are in the best position to depend on God's strength.

In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me, and I had no strength left. A 12-step program and leaning on God day by day taught me that admitting weakness is where real strength begins. God's power shows up clearest when ours runs out (2 Corinthians 12:9).

6 Finishing well

Paul's last letter, Second Timothy, was written from prison in Rome. Many had deserted him, and only Luke was with him (2 Timothy 4:10-11, 16, SLB). He asked Timothy to bring his cloak, "and the books, especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13, SLB). Even near the end, he kept reading and studying.

> *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on **there** is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me in that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:7-8 (SLB)**

Scripture does not record Paul's death. Church tradition holds that he was executed in Rome under Nero. Whatever the details, he had already written, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, SLB).

Paul's life asks me a question. Am I pressing on? He wrote, "forgetting the things behind and reaching forward to the things ahead, I pursue toward the goal

for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14, SLB). That crown is promised to all who love His appearing.

After about 40 years of work and 36 years of marriage, I think more about how I finish than how I started. I have seen people start strong in faith and coast near the end. I want to stay faithful in my marriage, my church and my writing one day at a time. Finishing well is not an accident (2 Timothy 4:7).

Lessons from the Life of Paul

✦ ✦ ✦

Paul went from hunting down Christians to spending his life spreading the gospel. This book follows his life from Tarsus and the Damascus road to his last letter from a Roman prison, and draws lessons on grace, preparation, perseverance, strength in weakness, and finishing well.

Faithful is the word and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.

1 Timothy 1:15 (SLB)

Book 4 of 5 in the collection Hope That Holds

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