A TRINFINITY MINI BOOK

Lessons from the Life of Paul

From persecutor to apostle

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TRINFINITY
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About this book

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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.

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, NASB). 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, NASB).

He also learned a trade as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3, NASB), 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.

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, NASB). He went from house to house dragging off men and women to prison (Acts 8:3, NASB), breathing threats and murder against the disciples (Acts 9:1, NASB).

On the road to Damascus, a light from heaven brighter than the sun flashed around him, and he heard the voice of Jesus (Acts 26:13-15, NASB). 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, NASB).

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;"

Acts 9:15 (NASB)

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

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, NASB). The believers there were afraid of him until Barnabas stood up for him (Acts 9:26-27, NASB). Later he spent years in his home region before Barnabas went looking for him and brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26, NASB).

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

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.

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, NASB). In Philippi he and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail, and about midnight they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25, NASB). 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, NASB). The church met in Jerusalem, and Peter said, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are (Acts 15:11, NASB). 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, NASB). Yet years later Paul wrote, Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service (2 Timothy 4:11, NASB). Broken relationships between believers can be restored.

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 concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:24-28, NASB). 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 power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NASB)

Paul did not depend on clever speech. He told the Corinthians, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2, NASB). When we feel weakest, we are in the best position to depend on God's strength.

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, NASB). He asked Timothy to bring his cloak and the books, especially the parchments (2 Timothy 4:13, NASB). Even near the end, he kept reading and studying.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NASB)

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, NASB).

Paul's life asks me a question. Am I pressing on? He wrote, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14, NASB). That crown is promised to all who love His appearing.

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.

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

1 Timothy 1:15 (NASB)

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