

LIFE OF PAUL SERIES

The Growing Believer

Acts 9:19-25

Notes

Spiritual growth is not an accident. It is intentional. You must intend to grow. You must make a choice to grow.

I don't know how to say it any clearer than this. You are as close to Jesus Christ as you choose to be.

If you are not growing spiritually don't blame your wife or husband or kids or parents or pastor. Don't blame your job or your schedule.

You are as close to God as you choose to be.

Christian growth takes place as we are intentional about fellowshiping with God and others, investing in personal and corporate discipleship, devoting our lives in ministry, and willful disciple-making.

Often, we find ourselves wondering why we are not where we would like to be with Christ; wondering why more is not happening in our lives, or why more is not taking place in the community, state, nation, or world for Christ.

The answer is more personal than we would like to believe. The answer is us.

The problem is not that God does not love us or the lost; not that he has not fully provided for us.

If we are honest with ourselves the problem is that we are not intentional about growing as a believer in Jesus.

Let me ask you, "Are you where you want to be in your walk with Christ?" "Are you where God wants you to be in your walk with Christ?"

Walking with and growing in Christ is hard and takes practice and patience.

You will have times when it is easy, times when it is difficult, and times when it is downright impossible.

We will see this as we continue walking through Acts. We find ourselves still in Chapter 9:19-31.

Today, as we continue to walk with Paul, we will learn a few simple things we can do which can assist us in growing up in Christ.

We must remember, growth does not happen by accident, or does it happen by good intentions.

Growth takes place through intentional obedience to Jesus.

¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; ¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹ All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" ²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

²³ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰ But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

Remember who Paul was before he came to Christ. He was a Jewish zealot; a learned man, taught by the brightest Jewish scholars and leaders. He was a Pharisee. He was a man who was the greatest persecutor to the church.

Coming to Damascus from Jerusalem to arrest Christians and send them back to Jerusalem to stand trial. (when he encountered Jesus, life could not be the same)

On the way, Jesus showed up-Don't you love that!!!

As we see in our text there are several aspects of the life of Saul in relation to his growth as a believer that are applicable to us today.

Christian growth takes place as we are intentional about

a. The Growing Believer Will Be Obedient in Following the Commands of Jesus (v. 18-19)

¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; ¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened.

The grace of Jesus compels us to surrender to him as Lord.

The scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Now notice this and I don't want us to rush pass this important point.

The first thing he did upon regaining his sight and gaining his senses was to do what? Be baptized. Why?

If we go back to Jesus' instructions in **Mt. 28:19-20**, "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I commanded you...*"

Paul began his Christian walk with an act of obedience. He obeyed the commands of Jesus.

Jesus said to be baptized and Paul followed his commands.

Why is baptism important? Baptism does several things for the new believer:

- Joins them to the community of believers, both local and universal
- Identifies them with the death and resurrection of Jesus
- Is a testimony to others and a witness to your new life in Jesus

Paul began his new life with obedience, and he continued on to follow the rest of Jesus' words by placing himself in the context of others so he could be discipled in Jesus

Maybe you have never followed through with baptism. Why?

Maybe you are afraid; you are waiting on something; you think you have to be a certain level of Christian; it's been too long, and it would just be embarrassing now.

I can promise you, no matter your status, no matter your length of time as a believer, if you follow through with baptism you will hear nothing but shouts of "hallelujah" and "amen" coming from your brothers and sisters.

Paul's act of baptism also demonstrates to us the necessity of continued obedience as a believer.

The believer who is consistently disobedient to Christ's commands without conviction has reason to question his/her salvation.

The call to Jesus is not a call to escape hell, but a call to be in relationship with the person who created you; who intimately designed you; who loves you beyond compare; who desires to spend the rest of time eternal with you.

Coming to Christ demands our all. Easy believism has harmed many folks and gives many people a false sense of salvation.

Being in a relationship with Jesus is about being in a relationship with Jesus.

Our relationship, while an intimate one, is also a relationship of obedience.

What about you? Would you describe your relationship with Jesus as one of obedience?

What is holding you back from full obeying the commands of Jesus in your life?

Jesus said if we love him, we will obey his commands.

May our lives be that of continual obedience to him who gave his all for us.

A growing believer who is growing in Jesus will be growing in their obedience to Christ.

b. The Growing Believer Will Consistently Be Equipped in the Community of the Body of Christ (19b; 27)

^{19b}Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,

²⁷But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Saul lets us know he was with the disciples in Damascus for several days.

Let's just pause and appreciate how amazing this is. Before his conversion these people were hiding from Saul and now, they are welcoming him into their homes in fellowship and discipleship.

In classical Luke style he says, in the second half of verse 19, that Paul was with the disciples for "several days."

This several days was actually about 3 years.

If we flip over to **Gal. 1:17-18** Paul lets us know what was taking place during these "several days" and how long the time was.

¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

¹⁸Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

In Galatians 1 Paul is defending his apostleship to the church and in doing so, he lets them know that when he met Jesus and was saved, he did not go immediately to Jerusalem to be approved by the other apostles.

Instead he spent time with the believers in Damascus, went to the Arabian desert to be with Jesus in solitude, and returned again to Damascus with the believers before going to Jerusalem.

Paul spent an intense 3 years being discipled by other believers before launching out in full ministry.

If you desire to grow in Christ, it is imperative that you are planted in a large and small community.

Notice what Paul did after his salvation. After Ananias prayed for him and he regained his strength, he stayed with other believers.

This one verse gives us several principles here.

Why do you think Paul needed to stay with other believers? Could it be the fact that he was a new believer and he needed to be discipled in Christ by those who are more mature than him?

Paul knew, as well as did Ananias, that Paul needed discipling, encouraging, and strengthening. He remained with other disciples in order to be strengthened and built up in Christ.

Part of growing up in Christ is being with other believers for the purpose of learning the Word of God, discussing life in relation to the Bible, praying for one another, and encouraging one another.

It is very hard, if not impossible to live the Christian life apart from other believers.

The manner in which Jesus has designed his church is that we are to be in deep and abiding relations with him and with other believers.

We gain strength from one another.

We benefit from studying God's Word together. (Like in Sunday School)

Studying and praying with other believers is critical to the growth of the individual and the church.

In a sense the world is a dangerous place for a growing believer. The world is continually trying to attack us and even our own mind is trying to overtake us.

We must consistently place ourselves in the context of the community of the church so we may be equipped for ministry.

Secondly, and this can be inferred from Acts 2:42-47 in which the believers were growing in Christ through practicing the spiritual disciplines.

During Paul's time with the believers in Damascus and in the desert, he spent time in the Word, in prayer, and with others.

This shows us that if we desire to grow in Christ, it is imperative that we are practicing personal spiritual disciplines.

What about you? Are you being equipped in Christ? Are you taking advantage of the many opportunities for growth here?

Part of our mission here at FBCD is to equip every member for the glory of God. We desire to see you grow in Christ.

c. The Growing Believer Will Engage in Ministry and Missions for the Glory of God (v. 20;22;28)

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

²⁸ And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

Luke gives us a quick synopsis of Saul's ministry in Damascus and Jerusalem.

He says in verse 20 that while in Damascus he went to the synagogues (churches) and proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God.

Again, in verse 22, he tells us that Saul was confounding the Jews by proving Jesus was the Messiah.

Then, in verse 28, while in Jerusalem, Saul went about the city (and you know he knew the city) and was speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

To be a Christian who is growing in Christ, we will be serving others through serving the body and sharing Christ with the lost in our community.

We must be in regular ministry with other believers.

And how do we find ourselves in regular ministry with other believers?

By serving in the local church.

Let me show you how big of a problem this is:

- 15 million SBC members
- 5 million avg. Sunday attendance
- Avg. church member attends 2 times a month

This does not look, nor sound like a church who is following after the chief Servant.

How can we say we are following Jesus when we avoid the very thing he did for us-serve?

When we avoid ministry, we are sacrificing the blessings and joy of following Christ and we are simultaneously robbing our brothers and sisters of our love and gifts and we are keeping the love of Christ from the lost.

If Jesus stands as the husband and the church is his bride, and you as an individual are part of the spiritual marriage, are you honoring Christ as the head of the church?

We suffer as individuals when we do not serve and participate in regular ministry in the church.

- Don't know how to serve
- Don't know how to be humble
- Don't know how to practice meekness
- Don't know the blessing of working with other believers
- Don't know the blessing of working for Jesus
- Don't know the blessing of being committed to something bigger than yourself

We suffer as a church when believers do not serve and participate in regular ministry.

- Limits our programming
- Limits our effectiveness in our discipleship
- Can't be as affective in ministering to our community
- Can't be as effective in spreading the gospel around the state, nation, world

It is imperative that we have a passion and conviction to serve Christ by serving his church

What keeps us from serving? What keeps us from ministering in the body?

Why will we not make the commitment? Why must the church suffer for worldly commitments, or if we are honest, lazy and complacent attitudes?

Notice this in verse 21, *“All who heard him were amazed. Isn’t this the same man who was arresting Christians just a week ago?”*

You see, when service and ministry become part of your life as a growing believer, people begin to take notice.

Paul’s life echoes James’ words **2:17**, *“Faith without works is dead and useless.”*

Something changed inside Paul that made him want to serve others, that made him want to build up the church, that compelled him to tell the lost about Jesus.

A growing believer will be a believer who is serving in and committed to ministering in Jesus’ church.

d. A Growing Believer Will Experience Persecution for Loving Jesus Above All Else

Paul’s life was empowered by God and his life and ministry flourished.

His preaching became more and more powerful, so much so that those who were once on his side decided to kill him.

It became so bad that they were plotting on him at the city gates in Damascus.

His friends heard of the plan and lowered him out of the city one night.

This is vitally important for us to hear. This truth may keep you from growing in Christ.

The more time you spend with Jesus, the more you allow him to change your life, the more time you grow in discipleship, fellowship, ministry, service, and evangelism the more the world will take notice and hate you.

You need to be aware and ready, that living for Christ, truly living for Jesus will not make you popular with the world. Maybe even friends and family.

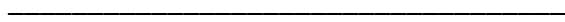
To grow in Christ means that you will have a different worldview, moral, and ethic than the world.

And tolerance is not enough any longer.

The world will not tolerate you and your Christianity because Christ is an affront to all the world’s darkness.

We are called to transform this dark world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And as we grow in Christ, we will naturally begin, through the power of the Spirit, to transform the world around us for the glory of Christ.



Growth in Christ is not optional nor accidental for the redeemed.

What does it mean to grow up, really? It means such things as being fully developed, having marks of wisdom, not just knowledge; the self-discipline and commitment of an authentic walk with Christ seven days a week; the determination to obey God and to submit to the truth of His Word at any cost; the ability to nourish myself as an individual believer in God's Word; the compassion to reach out and care for other people whose needs are different from my own; the willingness to share in the responsibilities of the church, and the intentionality to share the glorious gospel with others.

Just like plants, we need to take inventory and find those areas of our lives we need to prune and the areas we need to feed and water.

What areas of your life need pruning? What areas of your life need feeding and watering?