

BECOMING A CATALYST

INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF PAUL



GENE GETZ

 SERENDIPITY
HOUSE

 MEN
of PURPOSE

Becoming a Catalyst: Insights into the Life of Paul
© 2005 Gene Getz

Published by Serendipity House Publishers
Nashville, Tennessee

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, without express written permission of the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed to Serendipity House, 117 10th Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37234.

ISBN: 1-5749-4225-5

Dewey Decimal Classification: 248.842
Subject Headings:
PAUL, APOSTLE \ MEN \ CHRISTIAN LIFE

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible®*,
Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

To purchase additional copies of this resource or other studies:
ORDER ONLINE at www.SerendipityHouse.com;
WRITE Serendipity House, 117 10th Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37234
FAX (615) 277-8181
PHONE (800) 525-9563

 **SERENDIPITY®**
H O U S E
1-800-525-9563
www.SerendipityHouse.com

Printed in the United States of America
10 09 08 07 06 05 04 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CONTENTS

LESSON	TITLE	PAGE
1	SINCERELY WRONG	8
2	INSIDE AND OUT	16
3	THE METAMORPHOSIS	23
4	FINDING A BRIDGE	30
5	STRANGE HOMECOMING	38
6	SEEING BEYOND THE FAMILIAR	48
7	PREPARATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY	57
8	BREAKING THROUGH	66
9	THE SECOND WIND	74
10	ORIENTATION	82
11	A MAN OF CONVICTION	91
12	TO FINISH WELL	100

BECOMING A CATALYST

INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF PAUL

The term “catalyst” has its origins in the scientific community. A “catalyst” is typically understood as being something that brings about change—usually profound—through a chemical reaction. Change occurs at several junctures in our lives and each profound shift, be it physical, emotional, or intellectual, will usually have a catalyst.

Shortly after I became a Christian, Paul became a catalyst for my life. I will never forget one of my first encounters with this dynamic Jew-turned-Christian. I was a 16-year-old junior in high school, and I had secured a copy of Dr. Kenneth Wuest’s commentary on Philippians. With my Bible in one hand and Wuest’s explanation in the other, I studied this letter word for word and sentence by sentence.

I was struck by the Greek word *koinonia*, a term Paul used to describe the Philippians’ generosity. The “good work” God had begun in their lives (1:6) related directly to their sacrificial spirit in supporting Paul financially. This truth put me on a path in my heart and soul to be a generous Christian. I was a teenager when I learned this lesson from Paul and now, as a senior citizen, I can report that God has never let me down.

My next significant encounter with Paul, the catalyst, occurred two years later. I was 18 and a student at Moody Bible Institute. Since I had been reared in a religious environment that mixed faith and works for salvation, I was not sure that I had eternal life even after I became a Christian.

Early one morning, as I was sitting in my dorm room reading Paul’s letter to the Romans, a very pointed question jumped off the page and confronted me: “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35). Like a cool, calm breeze from heaven, the realization swept over me that I too had been made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ, just as Abraham had been (Rom. 5:1). I have never forgotten that moment of insight. As a catalyst will, it changed my life.

A couple more years went by before I had my third life-changing experience with the Lord through Paul’s New Testament letters. I was involved in radio ministry in Billings, Montana. Someone had given me the book *Disciplined by Grace* by John Strombeck, an exposition of Titus 2:11-14.

I had boarded the train in Chicago for a 16-hour trip across the great northwestern states. I opened Strombeck's book and began to read and reflect on what he had to say about Paul's words to Titus. Somewhere between Chicago and Billings, I began to comprehend my freedom in Christ. At the same time, I was deeply challenged never to use this marvelous freedom "as an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). On the contrary, this new spiritual insight motivated me to respond to God's grace with love and holiness.

The lessons that flow from Paul's life and ministry are intensely convicting, motivating, and very practical. Join me in this study and come to know Paul as a catalyst. Then you, too, can respond to his exhortation to the Corinthians: "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

While this Bible study may be used individually, it is designed to be used within the context of small groups. Each group meeting should include all elements of the following "three-part agenda."

Icebreaker: Fun, history-giving questions are designed to warm up the group and build understanding between group members. You may choose to use all of the Icebreaker questions, especially if there is a new group member who will need help in feeling comfortable with the group.

One of the purposes of this book is to begin and to then solidify a group. Therefore, getting to know one another and bonding together are essential to the success of this effort. The Icebreaker segment in each group session is designed to help you become better acquainted, greatly enhancing your group experience.

Bible Study: The heart of each meeting is your examination together of the Bible and the key "Principles to Live By" that are drawn from it. This section emphasizes understanding what the Bible says and applying its truth to real life. The questions are open discovery questions that lead to further inquiry. Reference notes are provided to give everyone a level playing field and provide deeper insights into the biblical story. The questions for each session build on one another. There are always Going Deeper questions provided. Be mindful to always leave time for the last of the Questions for Interaction. You may elect to use the optional Going Deeper questions to lead you in applying what the group has learned. This segment also satisfies the desire for more challenging questions in groups that have been together for a while.

To help your men connect as a group, it is important for everyone to participate in the Bible study. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Participants should strive to make all of the other group members feel comfortable during the Bible study time. Because we all have differing levels of biblical knowledge, it is essential that we understand and appreciate the personal context from which each one of us responds. We don't have to know much about theology and history to bring our own perspectives to bear on the truths contained in the Scriptures. It is vital that you keep encouraging all group members to share what they are observing as you work through these important Bible passages.

Caring Time: All study should lead us to action. Each session ends with prayer and direction in caring for the needs of individual group members. You can choose between the various questions provided, or use them all.

Small groups help the larger body of Christ in many ways: caring for individuals, holding one another up in prayer, providing emotional support, and bringing new men into the church family. Each week it is important to remember to pray for those whom God would bring to your group.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Begin by reviewing the following ground rules and talk about the importance of “sharing your story” (see below).

GROUND RULES

- **Priority:** While you are in the group, give the group meeting priority.
- **Participation:** Everyone participates and no one dominates.
- **Respect:** Everyone is given the right to his own opinion and all questions are encouraged ... and respected.
- **Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in the meeting is never repeated outside the meeting.
- **Empty Chair:** The group stays open to inviting new men to every meeting. Keeping an empty chair in your circle symbolizes those men you need to invite.

- **Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other in time of need—even in the middle of the night.
- **Advice Giving:** Unsolicited advice is not allowed.
- **Mission:** We agree to do everything in our power to work toward starting a new group—a vital part of our mission.

SHARING YOUR STORY

These sessions are designed to encourage group members to share a little of their personal lives each time the group meets. Through a number of special techniques, each member is encouraged to move from low risk, less personal sharing to higher risk responses. This helps develop authentic community and facilitates care-giving within your group.

It is only when group members begin to share their own stories that the group bonds at levels deep enough for life-change to take place.

SINCERELY WRONG

WELCOME _____

It is unlikely we will ever meet someone whose sincerity prior to conversion is greater than Paul's. Neither will we meet anyone who is so woefully mistaken and misguided as he. Many people make bad decisions and choices due to wrong motives. They know there is something bad about what they are doing. Not so with Paul. He could say, "It was out of ignorance that I had acted in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13). With all his heart, he thought he was right. One of the greatest lessons we can learn from Paul's life is that it is possible to be very earnest and fervent in our beliefs and behavior and still be completely wrong.



ICEBREAKER _____

Probably every man in this group has come to question and rethink some aspect of the religious, political, or racial values handed down to him by his family heritage. Sometimes, such reevaluation forms part of the reason for teenage rebellion. It can also happen as a result of higher education. Other times, this may occur as the result of some crisis later in life.

1. When you were a boy, which of these characters were you most disappointed to discover wasn't real? How did you make this unhappy discovery?
 - a. Santa Claus
 - b. The Easter Bunny
 - c. The Tooth Fairy
 - d. Spiderman
 - e. Other _____
2. When you were a teenager, what family belief, tradition, or practice embarrassed you most?
3. As an adult, what belief that you learned from your family and once held zealously have you abandoned?



BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Paul—or Saul of Tarsus, as he was known in Jewish circles—first appears in the pages of Scripture guarding the clothes of those who stoned Stephen in Acts 7:58. Through the course of Acts and the letters of Paul, we can pick up various hints about Paul’s earlier life and the events that led up to his dramatic encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

A Sincere Jewish Heritage

[I was] ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

Philippians 3:5-6

A Prestigious Roman Citizenship

²⁵ As they stretched him out for the lash, Paul said to the centurion standing by, “Is it legal for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and is uncondemned?”

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went and reported to the commander, saying, “What are you going to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.”

²⁷ The commander came and said to him, “Tell me—are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes,” he said.

²⁸ The commander replied, “I bought this citizenship for a large amount of money.”

“But I myself was born a citizen,” Paul said.

Acts 22:25-28

A Persecutor of the Church

³ He continued, “I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today, ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women in jail, ⁵ as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. Having received letters from them to the brothers, I was traveling to Damascus to bring those who were prisoners there to be punished in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:3-5

⁸ Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some from what is called the Freedmen’s

Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and disputed with Stephen. ...¹² They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came up, dragged him off, and took him to the Sanhedrin. ...

⁵⁸ They threw him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ They were stoning Stephen as he called out: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”

⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin!” And saying this, he fell asleep.

¹ Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. ² But devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. ³ Saul, however, was ravaging the church, and he would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.

Acts 6:8-9,12; 7:58-8:3

⁹ In fact, I myself supposed it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus the Nazarene. ¹⁰ This I actually did in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ In all the synagogues I often tried to make them blaspheme by punishing them. Being greatly enraged at them, I even pursued them to foreign cities.

Acts 26:9-11

A Gracious Forgiveness

[I was] ¹³ one who was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. Since it was out of ignorance that I had acted in unbelief, I received mercy.

1 Timothy 1:13

PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY _____

Most of us have grown up with some ideas about religion that we need to square with the Word of God. Maybe our church was exclusive and critical of other faith traditions. Perhaps we grew up in circles that believed all religions are paths to the “one God known by many names.” On the other hand, we may have been taught to scoff at belief in God. Whatever your family’s spiritual belief system, you had the choice of embracing it eagerly, warmly, or coldly. Paul’s example offers warnings to those of us who tend to go overboard in our religious zeal.

PRINCIPLE 1

WE CAN BE INTENSELY ZEALOUS ABOUT OUR RELIGIOUS OR PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS AND STILL BE SINCERELY WRONG.

Paul grew up in Tarsus, a city with about 500,000 inhabitants that was also the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province in eastern Asia Minor. Tarsus was a “free city” within the Roman Empire so its citizens enjoyed imperial citizenship. In addition to the rights and privileges associated with Roman citizenship, Paul received rigorous instruction in the local synagogue along with other young men from Jewish families and learned the trade of tentmaking.

Around the age of 13, Paul went to Jerusalem to receive intensive rabbinic training from Gamaliel, the leader of the Hillel school of Pharisaic thought. He would have finished this training before his twentieth birthday and then no doubt ministered in a synagogue in Tarsus. When we first meet Paul, he is in Jerusalem and is probably about 35 years old.

Paul was terribly frustrated with the numerical growth of those proclaiming to be disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. His anger grew as more and more fellow Jews defected from the teachings of Moses. Consequently, he wholeheartedly approved the execution of Stephen and launched an all-out war against Jews who declared their allegiance to Jesus. He began “ravaging the church.” He would “enter house after house” in order to “drag off men and women, and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). Soon he took his campaign to other cities of Judea. Eventually he struck as far afield as Damascus, until the Lord stopped him in his tracks.

Though most of us who grow up in a free society do not act on our religious convictions to the same degree as Paul, we can become very opinionated about our beliefs. This often happens when we have been taught a certain belief system from childhood.

Remember that Paul’s attacks were not against the pagans in the Roman Empire, but against his fellow Jews who had departed from what he believed was the straight and narrow path. Similarly, religious leaders today can become very hostile toward people who leave their folds. Sadly, many believe they are right, but like Paul, they are sincerely wrong.

PRINCIPLE 2

WE CAN BE EXTREMELY ARTICULATE OR WISE AND STILL BE SINCERELY WRONG.

Paul was a gifted and highly educated product of two cultures. He learned theology from the synagogue schools of his boyhood and from the rigor-

ous curriculum of Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, but he also knew the literature and philosophy of paganism. He could refer to relatively obscure authors to establish common ground with the intelligentsia of Athens. However, he was still spiritually blind until he encountered Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road.

In many cases, an extensive education can actually contribute to having a closed mind regarding God's revelation. The reason is simple. The more we learn, the more we can be in bondage to our own egos. Paul recognized this after his conversion when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1).

Does this mean that all education is evil, as some religious groups believe? The answer is a decided no. We need more scholars who are Christians. But on the other hand, Paul warned against the negative influence of "human wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:12-13). James echoed this same concern when he wrote about "wisdom" that "is earthly, sensual" and even "demonic" (Jas. 3:15).

Paul also had some straightforward and enlightening words for non-Christians. He remembered well his own unconverted state of mind. "The natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Cor. 2:14).

QUESTIONS FOR INTERACTION

1. In our age of tolerance, people sometimes say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." What's right about that statement? What's wrong with it?
2. Why did Paul have reason to be confident of his education and the opinions he held (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:5-6)?
3. What did Paul think he was doing when he persecuted the church of Jesus Christ (Acts 22:3b-4; 26:9; Phil. 3:6)?
4. What measures did Paul employ to oppose the church (Acts 22:4-5; 26:10-11)?
5. In reality, what was going on in the spiritual realm when Paul engaged in persecution?
6. How was Satan able to convince Paul that he was serving God, when in fact he was attacking the people of God?

7. How does Satan convince Christians today that they are doing the right thing by attacking fellow Christians who disagree with them?
8. What are some of the consequences of being sincerely wrong? What consequences have you faced because of being sincerely wrong?

GOING DEEPER

9. How would you go about talking with a fellow believer whom you're convinced is sincerely wrong about an important belief?
10. How would you want to be approached by someone who felt you were sincerely wrong about a belief or behavior?
11. What Scriptures should we keep in mind when approaching a brother in Christ who is sincerely wrong in belief or behavior?
12. What is good about being reluctant to confront a brother we think may be sincerely wrong? What is bad about such reluctance?



CARING TIME

It can be overwhelming to study the life of a person like Paul. Here was a high-energy man on a fast track to prominence, prestige, and power. He had the right credentials, the right connections, and all kinds of confidence. Then when things blew up in Judaism, he just took off and made a big noise in the Christian community. Can we really relate to such a larger-than-life character? Even when he was wrong, he was so sincere about it that it puts most of us to shame.

As we study Paul's life and ministry, let us pray for one another with zeal and sincerity. Let us learn from Paul how to follow God's truth and purpose for our lives.

1. Which of these statements best compares you and Paul?
 - a. I'm a high-energy, high-drive guy bent on getting tasks done, very much like Paul.
 - b. I'm more relationship-oriented than task-oriented, but I'm a go-getter.
 - c. I'm much more laid-back than Paul, but I like to be around heavy hitters.
 - d. I want a quiet life. Guys like Paul intimidate me. I avoid them.

2. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses associated with what you revealed about yourself in question 1?
3. How do you tend to protect yourself when you feel someone is being critical of you? How will you react in this group if someone should confront you about your beliefs or behaviors?

NEXT WEEK

Next week we will look at how God intervened in the life of Paul and brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ. At the very height of his career as a persecutor of Christians, Paul abruptly changed sides and joined those he had violently opposed. Like so much about this man, Paul's conversion was such an overwhelming, supernatural experience that it dramatically illustrates important truths about our own conversions.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

ACTS 6:8-9,12; 7:58-8:3; 22:3-5,25-28; 26:9-11

6:9 the Freedmen's Synagogue. The Freedmen were former Roman slaves (or their descendants) released by their masters and granted Roman citizenship.

7:58 John 18:31 indicates the Sanhedrin did not have the legal right to carry out capital punishment, so this may be an act of mob violence. However, Acts 26:10 indicates that perhaps by this time Pilate's ability to control the Sanhedrin had drastically weakened and it indeed took capital cases into its own hands. Saul, Jewish men commonly had a biblical name given at birth and a Gentile name they adopted for use outside the Jewish community. Saul was named for the first king of Israel, the most famous Old Testament Benjamite. Among the Gentile churches, he would be known as Paul (Latin: Paulus).

8:1-3 Some biblical scholars don't think Acts 26:10 is sufficient evidence that Saul belonged to the Sanhedrin, but he quickly became the leading figure in a violent persecution of the church.

8:3 ravaging This word is used to describe how a beast rips the flesh off its victim. Saul's persecution led to other Christians being condemned to death as well (9:1-2).

22:3 Jewish man ... brought up in this city. Although a citizen of Tarsus by virtue of his birth, Paul had spent most of his teen years in Jerusalem. Acts 23:16 implies that Paul's sister and her family lived there. **Gamaliel.** Gamaliel was a highly respected Pharisee, head of the Hillel wing of this sect. To have received an educa-

tion from this man was to have had access to the best possible Jewish education (5:34). **our patriarchal law.** Paul emphasized that he too had a lifelong knowledge of and respect for the Law.

22:4 this Way. Unique to the Book of Acts as a name for Christianity (19:9,23; 24:14,22).

22:25 Flogging was a severe punishment since leather thongs weighted with pieces of bone, metal, or rocks were used as the whip. Roman citizens were protected from punishment without trial and were sheltered from this particular form of punishment no matter what; therefore, Paul once again brought up the matter of his Roman citizenship (16:37).

22:28 I bought this citizenship for a large amount of money. Citizenship was not supposedly a matter of money, but of birthright or notable service. However, bribes and other means of influence were also ways of gaining the privilege. **I myself was born a citizen.** Paul's response turns the tables on the commander. His citizenship was not a matter of bribery at all, but of natural right.

PHILIPPIANS 3:5-6

3:5 eighth day. It was on the eighth day after birth that a Jewish baby boy (as opposed to an adult proselyte) was circumcised. Paul was a true Jew from the time of his birth. **the tribe of Benjamin.** The members of the tribe of Benjamin constituted an elite group within Israel. **a Pharisee.** He was one of the spiritual elite in Israel.

3:6 as to zeal, persecuting the church. Zeal was a highly prized virtue among the Jews. Paul had demonstrated his zeal for the Law by ferreting out Christians and bringing them to trial (Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-11). **blameless** To the best of his ability, Paul tried to observe the whole Law. Taken together, all these attributes mean that Paul was in every way the match of his Jewish opponents in Philippi who belittled his qualifications to speak authoritatively about spiritual issues. He had lived at the very pinnacle of Judaism.

1 TIMOTHY 1:13

1:13 blasphemer. Paul had denied Christ and tried to force others to do the same (Acts 26:11). **a persecutor, and an arrogant man.** He had actively opposed the church—searching out Christians, arresting them, throwing them in prison, even voting for their deaths. **it was out of ignorance that I had acted in unbelief.** Paul is not saying that he had received mercy because he was without guilt. All he is saying is that he acted “unintentionally” instead of “defiantly,” using a common Old Testament distinction (Num. 15:22-31; Luke 23:34).