


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
May 11 - 17, 2008

Acts 9:19-31

Baby leaps

1 Immediately he began preaching

Read. Acts 9:19-21 NLT

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?"

Read. Galatians 1:10-12 Message

Do you think I speak this strongly in order to manipulate crowds? Or curry favor with God? Or get popular applause? If my goal was popularity, I wouldn't bother being Christ's slave. Know this—I am most emphatic here, friends—this great Message I delivered to you is not mere human optimism. I didn't receive it through the traditions, and I wasn't taught it in some school. I got it straight from God, received the Message directly from Jesus Christ.

Think.

- What does Saul do following his conversion experience? How did his conversion change him? How do you account for him jumping with both feet into preaching Jesus so quickly?
- What was the initial response to him in the synagogues of Damascus? Put yourself in one of those synagogues, expecting the great champion of the faith and then hearing his radical about face. How do you think you would have responded?
- What changes did people notice in you following your conversion to Christ? How did they react to you? Disbelief? Amazement? Rejection? Anger? Confusion? Or what?
- Does Saul's passion and zeal put you off or inspire you? Why? Have you been more of a slow burn or like the firing of a rocket booster like Saul?

Pray.

Lord Jesus, fill me with fresh zeal fueled by your grace and a deeper knowledge of Jesus. Thank you that I don't have to fit into anyone's shoes but the ones you are uniquely crafting for me. Let me fill those — and walk and leap and run.

Live.

Spend some time meditating on Ephesians 2:1-10. Take personal inventory of what you were before Christ and what you are now... and celebrate each difference, each change.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

1 Corinthians 15:10

You've probably seen it happen.

Those first precious infant steps — unsteady, tentative, a wobbly stumbling into delighted parent arms.

Not a picture of Saul.

Saul simply decided to skip infancy and shows up taking baby leaps. There's no holding back or finding his feet or taking a careful personal inventory. After three days of anguished blindness following his encounter with Jesus, he is welcomed into the family, receives his sight, plunges into baptism, eats a meal, wipes his mouth, and then shows up preaching Jesus as the Son of God in the very synagogue that was expecting him as its new grand inquisitor.

True enough, by Paul's account, after conversion he went into Arabia — presumably for a desert retreat of sorts — and then returned to Damascus. And whether it was days, weeks, months or even years, his showing up in that synagogue preaching Jesus was sudden enough to qualify for Luke's "immediately he began preaching in the synagogue."

Baby Saul tosses Gerber aside and picks up a steak knife.

Some might argue that he took on too much too soon, that his zeal got the better of him and made a mess for everyone else. That usually is what happens when babies start leaping. But the fact is that Saul's humiliations and hard lessons in those infancy days of his walk with Jesus became Paul's personal badge of honor in later life. The pattern of his later life was established in those days: a pattern of won't-be-silenced-preaching and proclamation of Jesus; of bitter enemies and faithful friends; of narrow escapes and of moving on to preach Jesus another day at another place.

In a Christian culture where grown disciples are often still found rummaging through cushions for pacifiers, perhaps we can learn something from baby Saul.

2) Let down in a basket

Read. Acts 9:22-25 NLT

Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

Read. 2 Corinthians 11:30-33 Message

If I have to "brag" about myself, I'll brag about the humiliations that make me like Jesus. The eternal and blessed God and Father of our Master Jesus knows I'm not lying. Remember the time I was in Damascus and the governor of King Aretas posted guards at the city gates to arrest me? I crawled through a window in the wall, was let down in a basket, and had to run for my life.

Think.

- What is happening to Saul's personal momentum in his preaching? How is this affecting his listeners?
- What plot is made against Saul? How high up does this plot go? How does Saul escape — and how does he view this incident in later years?
- When have you ended up being a "basket case" for Jesus — what have been some of your most embarrassing moments as a Jesus follower?

Pray.

Lord, teach me the difference between being zealous and foolhardy — but let me never fear risking playing the fool for you.

Live.

Risk becoming a basket case for Jesus today.

4) They sent him away to Tarsus

Read. Acts 9:28-30 NLT

So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

Read. Galatians 1:21-24 Message

Then I began my ministry in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. After all that time and activity I was still unknown by face among the Christian churches in Judea. There was only this report: "That man who once persecuted us is now preaching the very message he used to try to destroy." Their response was to recognize and worship God because of me!

Think.

- How is Saul's Damascus experience repeated in Jerusalem? What do the believers there do with him? How do you think they felt at his departure?
- Would you advise Saul to tone down his message or to be more diplomatic? Or was the conflict simply inevitable because of who Saul was?
- How do you know when to speak up (and how loudly) and when to be silent?
- "Their response was to recognize and worship God because of me." Whose life has impacted *you* this way most recently?

Pray.

Lord, help me to lead with my ears, follow up with my tongue, and let anger straggle on in the rear. Help me to listen up and then to speak up as needed.

Live. If someone has inspired you to praise God — tell them!

3) Saul arrived in Jerusalem

Read. Acts 9:26-27 NLT

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

Read. Galatians 1:16-20 Message

Immediately after my calling—without consulting anyone around me and without going up to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles long before I was—I got away to Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus, but it was three years before I went up to Jerusalem to compare stories with Peter. I was there only fifteen days—but what days they were! Except for our Master's brother James, I saw no other apostles. (I'm telling you the absolute truth in this.)

Think.

- How did the believers react to Saul's presence in Jerusalem? How do you think this would have affected Saul? Who "broke the ice" for him?
- When and with whom have you had a hard time being accepted? What happened?
- Who has been a Barnabas for you — befriending you when no one else would?

Pray.

Lord, give me Barnabas eyes and a compassionate heart that has the courage to stand by those who are shut out and alone.

Live.

Befriend an outsider.

5) The church had peace

Read. Acts 9:31 NLT

The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.

Read. Romans 15:4-6 Message

God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus!

Think.

- Does it sound like the church let out a collective sigh of relief after Saul left? Does peace or upheaval tend to follow you into a room? Why?
- What does Luke indicate as the source of the peace experienced by the church at this time? How widespread was this peace? What ingredients of peace does Paul give in Romans 15?
- What does Luke point to as a contributing factor to numeric growth in the church? What commentary does this give us on modern church growth strategies?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, bring your Word home to me in fresh, invigorating ways that releases the aroma of your peace in and through me.

Live.

Take Romans 15:4-6 with you today...ponder it, live it.