

The Hidden Years
Message 03 in the series, "Faith Under Fire"

A. Paul knew what God had called him to — long before he knew how, when, or where it would unfold.

"But the Lord said, 'Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.'" Acts 9:15-16 (NLT)

"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you for a purpose: to make you my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about the other times I will appear to you. And I will rescue you from both the Jewish people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they can turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me." Acts 26:16-18 (NLT)

"Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus." Galatians 1:11-12 (NLT)

- God took Paul to the desert before He took him to the world!
- God took Jesus to the desert before starting His ministry.
- God took Moses to the desert before delivering His people.
- God took Joseph through a desert before fulfilling his dreams.

Note: The desert isn't punishment — it's preparation.

"So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world." 1 Peter 1:6-7 (NLT)

"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing."

James 1:2-4 (NLT)

B. Paul's world-changing ministry didn't develop on a global stage — it developed in his hometown.

"Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord's brother. I declare before God that what I am writing to you is not a lie. After that visit I went north into the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. And still the churches in Christ that are in Judea didn't know me personally. All they knew was that people were saying, 'The one who used to persecute us is now preaching the very faith he tried to destroy!' And they praised God because of me." Galatians 1:18-24 (NLT)

"Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the word of God, but only to Jews. However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord. When the church at Jerusalem heard what

had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.) During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch." Acts 11:19-27 (NLT)

Note: The key to getting where you want to be is being faithful where you are.

"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." Zechariah 4:10 (NLT)

"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'" Matthew 25:21 (NLT)

Note: When your opportunity arrives, be prepared to step into it.

"Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning, as though you are waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks." Luke 12:35-36 (NLT)

"David said to Saul, 'Don't worry about this Philistine. I'll go fight him!' Saul replied, 'You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth.' But David said to Saul, 'I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats. When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I seize it by its hair and strike and kill it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.' Saul said to David, 'Go, and the Lord be with you.'" 1 Samuel 17:32-37 (NLT)

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