

THRIVE AT HOME - IDENTITY RESET WEEK 3

Monday – Paul the Apostle – Acts 9:15

If there's a story that demonstrates God's miraculous redeeming power over someone's life, it's the story of Paul. A zealous and powerful man, Paul was a Pharisee who approved the murder of the apostle Stephen and was determined to persecute as many followers of Christ as he could find. But God had other plans.

In His sovereignty and mercy, whilst Paul was on his way to persecute followers of Jesus, God stopped him in his tracks and set him on a different path. It wasn't an easy path. Ultimately, he would end up beaten and in prison. But despite the hardships, God used Paul in such a powerful way that Paul's story has impacted millions and continues to do so today. Through Paul's writings in the Bible, we witness the redeeming power of God. We see the grace-filled power that took a murderous man and turned him into a mouthpiece for Jesus. We see a heart renewed and redirected towards Jesus. And we see a beautiful demonstration of trust and obedience as Paul willingly surrendered his life to Jesus. But we also see hope for ourselves. We see God's unconditional love and heart for His children. If God could turn Paul's life for His glory, He can turn our life around for His glory. If God forgave a sinner like Paul who intentionally set out to stop the spreading of the Gospel, He will forgive us. No matter what you've done, God loves you too much to not forgive you and draw you close. If we ask, He is faithful to forgive and to guide us. Today, may you know the unconditional love and redeeming power of Jesus and know that, no matter what you've done, He's always waiting to welcome you back with open arms.

Tuesday – Paul the Misfit– Acts 9:26

Almost immediately, our newly converted Pharisee took to the local synagogues. He tried convincing the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah they'd been waiting for, but this caused all sorts of confusion. Wasn't this the man who had been trying to persecute Jesus' followers only a matter of weeks before? Next, an unsuccessful assassination attempt drove Paul back to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the welcome wasn't warm. First, he tried to join in with the gathering of Jesus' original followers. However, suspecting foul play, he wasn't able to join with them until Barnabas got involved. Next, he began to interact with the Jews – his own people – but they didn't take kindly to his message. Paul found himself on the outside of both groups and was sent away. With the troublemaker gone, the early church enjoyed a time of peace. It's clear that, from the outset, Paul was a misfit. He didn't gel neatly with any of the pre-existing groups when he came onto the scene. The man from Tarsus was forced to forge his own way, and we can be glad he did. This helped him lead the church through some of its early crises and, in doing so, set an example that remains to the present day.

When we follow the way of Jesus, like Paul, we often find ourselves outside the groups and categories of our world. Can you relate to his experience? If so, how does Paul's example encourage you to stay the path?

Wednesday – Nurturing Growth in the Early Church – Prov 29:25, Galatians 1:11-12, Rom 7:15, 1 Cor 9, 1 Cor 1:10-13

That's a bit odd isn't it? A devotional on Paul's nurturing of the early church matched to a verse likely penned by Solomon in the Old Testament. Aside from Paul regularly quoting authors from the only scriptures available to the church at that time, Paul's messages to the fledgling Christian church featured a powerful mix of encouragement, exhortation and, when necessary, correction. The 'correction' conversation can be hard though. Paul's corrections were always fixed on maintaining the purity of the Gospel message. In his letter to the Galatians (1:11,12) Paul warns the fledgling church that the Gospel is not based on human reasoning, but is a direct revelation of Christ. In other words, don't make it up. Look up. Paul bluntly declares that he doesn't care what people think of him, so long as they have a clear understanding of the power of the Gospel. It's a mistake, however, to confuse Paul's conviction with arrogance. In Romans 7:15, Paul declares that, while his faith in God is unassailable, he is constantly failing at life. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul reminds us that he doesn't view his life as not requiring correction or sacrifice for the Gospel. Finally, Paul passionately reminds the church that any correction should build our interdependence on each other for the betterment of God's work. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul implores the community to be unified in Christ, building one another up in order to do God's work in their world (1 Corinthians 1:10–13). So, when a tough conversation comes your way, bring truth with courage and humility, and fix your gaze on advancing God's work in your world.

Thurs – Power is Made Perfect in Weakness - 2 Corinthians 12:9

In the verses leading up to this passage, we see Paul going through an incredibly difficult circumstance in his life. We don't know exactly what he was facing, but we know he suffered greatly and 'pleaded with the Lord' to take it away from him. Those of us who have found ourselves on our knees pleading for ourselves, or for those we love dearly, will know it is no easy thing to entrust the cries of our heart to our Father in heaven. He hears the cry of Paul's heart and encourages him with the words we see in the passage above. Through this encouragement Paul comes to realise that Jesus' grace really is sufficient for his season of suffering, his shoulders strengthen and his whole perspective begins to shift. Suffering has a way of stripping away all the false ways we can build up our own safety, security and sense of identity in our own accomplishments,

achievements and wisdom. We are left with nothing – but the thing about grace is that it expresses God’s acceptance and pleasure in us. It is His strength, there when we need it and available all the time – what more could we need? It’s a privilege to learn from the wisdom Paul and of all the saints of old who suffered their own trials and hardships and then shared what they learned with us. If you’re going through hard times right now, be encouraged. Jesus hears our cries, and His grace is enough to strengthen our shoulders for even the most unimaginable of circumstances.

Fri - A Devoted Disciple - Acts 20:13-38

This emotional scene is the last of Paul’s itinerant ministry – while a free man, anyway. We learned, from the verses before, that he was determined to reach Jerusalem, even though persecution and imprisonment were sure to follow. With this knowledge, he called his friends, the elders from the church in Ephesus, to speak with them one last time. He shared his reflections, stories and best advice. He wept with them and said goodbye. It was a threshold moment for Paul. To me, this passage highlights the true courage that Paul brought to his ministry. The fact that he was willing to sail towards certain persecution... absolutely. In this moment Paul was releasing leadership of one of his most successful church plants. He was letting go of what was no longer his to hold. We live in a society that says we can have it all. This isn’t true, because as we go through life we often have to leave things behind. Sometimes taking a step forward costs us everything we’ve gained so far. The true mark of a disciple is being willing to take that step, even when it costs us, for the sake of Jesus’ kingdom. Are you holding back from what God is calling you into because of what it might cost? Have you taken that step, but you’re struggling to let go of what’s no longer yours to hold? Take a moment to be inspired by Paul’s example then bring this to God in prayer.

Sat - Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey - Titus 2:11-14, Acts 28, Romans 15:24, Romans 15:28

At the end of Acts, was it really the end of Paul’s journeys? It seems not. Paul was in Rome because he was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. To cut a long story short (see Acts 28), after two years, the charges were dropped and he was free. The book of Acts ends suddenly, and tradition has it that Paul then went on a fourth missionary journey to Spain. It was on that journey he wrote Titus and 1 and 2 Timothy. His intention was to travel to Spain (see Romans 15:24,28). Early church history records his visit and early Christian literature holds that he took the Gospel to Spain. Paul wanted to take the good news of Jesus everywhere. Acts 28:31 says, “[Paul] proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance!” Paul’s priority was to tell people about Jesus and the good news of salvation because he knew what it could do in setting people free. Jesus has changed our lives and we know what a difference He makes to us. Let us be bold to tell others. God wants to use them as He has used us.

EVERY DAY GRATITUDE: THANK YOU GOD MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

*Unpack this past Sunday’s Next Gen lesson at home to help your kids grow in their faith this summer!
Great for the breakfast table or a fun time before bed!*



Monday - Jesus Loves His Friends - John 11:5 – “Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.”

- **Option 1:** Draw your family and friends inside a big heart. Thank God for each person.
- **Option 2:** Text or call someone special and let them, “I’m thankful for you!”



Tuesday - God Is With Us When We’re Sad- John 11:35 – “Jesus wept.”

- **Option 1:** Make a “comfort card” for someone who might be sad or sick.
- **Option 2:** Share about a time you were sad and someone helped you. Thank God for that person!



Wednesday - Jesus Brings Hope - John 11:43 – “Jesus called out, ‘Lazarus, come out!’”

- **Option 1:** Act out Jesus resurrecting Lazarus and wrap up a stuffed animal in a blanket, then “unwrap” it while shouting, “Come out!”. Jesus brings new life and hope!
- **Option 2:** Talk about one situation that feels hard and pray, “Jesus, bring Your hope there.”



Thursday - Thank God for My People - 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – “Encourage one another and build each other up.”

- **Option 1:** Cut out paper leaves and write one friend or family member’s name on each. Tape them on your wall or fridge as a “thankful tree.”
- **Option 2:** Share one way you’ve seen your friends or family show love this week, then pray together: “Thank You, God, for the people You’ve given us.”



Friday - Thank God for My People - Psalm 106:1 – “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.”

- **Option 1:** Share who you are thankful for around the dinner table or in the car on the way somewhere.
- **Option 2:** Make a quick “thank-you high-five.” Trace your hand on paper and write one person’s name inside. Pray: “God, bless them today!”