

How To Get Started or Jump Started in the Christian Life

(Acts 9:18-31)

The evening I got saved here at Gospel, a godly deacon came up to me and said, “Now you need to get baptized.” What he was saying in essence is, “You need to get started off on the right foot in your new Christian walk.”

Paul had several persons in his life as well who encouraged him to get started correctly and biblically. The first person was Ananias.

Paul travelled to several important places in his early years as a new believer and at each of these locations he took his first baby steps as a babe in Christ. All believers need to take these same baby steps to grow as newborn babes in Christ.

In Acts 9:18-31, we will highlight the first 10 years of his Christian life from the age of 35-45. Paul travelled to Damascus, Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem, and finally to Tarsus.

1. He was Baptized at Damascus (Acts 9:18-21)

- A. He was baptized and joined the church in 9:18. Paul received his sight and was immediately baptized even before he ate after three days of fasting. He took care of his spiritual needs before his physical needs. Why is this important? Because this is what Jesus taught in Matthew 28:19-20.
- B. He joined a small group in the church in 9:19. Why is this important? Because Jesus created a small group with His 12 disciples and Paul also surrounded himself with godly friends. The best way to fulfill the “one another” commands in the NT is through small groups.
- C. He also started witnessing at Damascus in 9:20-21. Paul did not wait until he was thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures. Paul preached Jesus as the Son of God. This is the only time in Acts that this title is given to Jesus. Paul used it often in his epistles: He used this title of Jesus frequently in his epistles (Rom. 1:3-4,9; 5:10; 8:3, 29, 32; 1 Cor. 1:9; 15:28; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 4:4, 6; 1 Thess. 1:10). Before his conversion, Paul thought Jesus was a blasphemer, now Paul knows He is the Son of God.

He witnessed as a brand new believer. Paul was like the Samaritan woman in John 4:28.

I witnessed to first person after I got saved on my 18th birthday. Later I was able to win him to Christ. I had lunch with him several weeks ago and he reminded me of that.

2. He Grew Spiritually in Arabia (Galatians 1:17)

In between 9:21 and 22, Paul travelled to Arabia according to his testimony in Galatians 1:11-17.

- A. Paul retreated to Arabia for spiritual growth to allow God to fully reveal the gospel to him as Paul discusses in Galatians 1:11, 12. Paul now read the OT with a new set of eyes.
- B. Paul went to Arabia near Sinai according to Galatians 4:25. Paul states his visit to Arabia in the context of not consulting with flesh and blood. Sinai would have been the appropriate place to retreat. Sinai was sparsely populated and here God gave the OT law (which Paul would have to rethink).

Many times new converts need to be reprogrammed in their thinking. We have to unlearn the importance of religious works and learn the importance of God's grace. Paul had all of religious baggage to unpack.

- C. Paul grew in those 2 to 3 years as Acts 9:22 shows. He increased in spiritual "strength" and his ability to defend the faith. The word for "strength" is the same as in Ephesians 6:10. These two thoughts are connected. Paul grew spiritually strong which resulted in his defending the faith. In 9:20, Paul is a witness. Three years later after intense study, Paul is an apologist.

He was able to "prove" that Jesus was the Messiah. When he was first converted he preached Jesus was "the Son of God." This knowledge is absolutely necessary for salvation.

But now three years later he is able to prove from the OT Scriptures that Jesus is the OT predicted Jewish Messiah. The word "proving" is the Greek word *sumbibazon* which means to join together. Paul joined together to OT prophecies concerning Christ with their fulfillment to prove Christ was the Messiah. Possibly he linked Isaiah 7:14 with the virgin birth of Jesus in Matthew 1:23 and the Micah 5:2 with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and Isaiah 53 with Jesus' death on the cross.

Christians should "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).

The Mormon Church is filled with former Baptists. 40 percent of all Mormon converts are former Baptists. There are 231 Mormon converts each day from the Baptist faith.

- D. Paul paid a price for his bold witnessing in Acts 9:23-25. Paul adds few details in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 about his escape. Gentiles not just Jews were offended at Paul's witnessing. He was lowered through a window in a house built on the wall to escape his martyrdom.

William Barclay put it this way: "No one persecutes a man who is ineffective and who obviously does not matter. George Bernard Shaw once said that the biggest compliment you can pay an author is to burn his books. Someone has said, 'A wolf will never attack a painted sheep.' Counterfeit Christianity is always safe. Real Christianity is always in peril. To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest of compliments because it is the certain proof that men think we really matter" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 77).

3. He Fellowshiped with Strong Believers in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29)

Jerusalem is where it was happening spiritually. Jerusalem was the epicenter of a great revival. In Galatians 1:18, Paul tells us that he wanted to go to Jerusalem to meet Peter the spiritual leader of early Christianity. Paul saw the need to have spiritual friends and mentors in his life.

But Paul was initially not welcomed (Acts 9:26). The disciples were possibly afraid Paul was a wolf in sheep's clothing. Maybe Paul had been in hiding for three years so he could secretly invade the church.

Barnabas was the successor of Ananias in Acts 9:27. Where Ananias left off Barnabas picked up. Barnabas was living up to his name in Acts 4:36: Son of Encouragement. Paul adds in Galatians 1:15-17 that Barnabas introduced Paul to Peter and James. Paul was able to spend 15 days with Peter, the leader of the church.

Barnabas did not hold Paul's past against him. Barnabas was not like us when someone gets saved or starts coming to church whose background is not perfect as if our background is perfect. We are more like the Pharisees in John 8 who wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery instead of like Christ who accepted her and said, "Neither do I condemn you go and sin no more."

Barclay makes another good application: "The world is largely divided into people who think the best of others and people who think the worst of others; and it is one of the curious facts of life that ordinarily we see our own reflection in others, and we make them what we believe them to be" (page 78).

4. He Served God in Difficult Circumstances in Tarsus (Acts 9:30-31)

Just as the result of Ananias' ministry in leading Paul to get baptized, join the church and a small group resulted in Paul witnessing, and the result of Paul's spiritual growth in the Word in Arabia resulted in witnessing, the result of Barnabas encouragement resulted in Paul witnessing even more in 9:28-29.

Each time Paul witnessed, however, he had strong reactions against him. This time Paul has to be sent back home to Tarsus in Acts 9:30-31. These are the silent years in Paul's life. Paul was in Tarsus for approximately 7-10 years.

Back home Paul experienced rejection from his family. We learn this from another testimony of Paul's in Philippians 3:8. Most likely Paul's wealthy dad who was a staunch Pharisee who paid for Paul's tutoring to become a Pharisee disowned his now Christian son. There was no Welcome Home Son banner hung across main street in Tarsus.

Paul also experienced rejection in his witnessing. Paul lists his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23-24. The sufferings listed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 are not found anywhere Acts. These are

called synagogue punishments. Paul probably preached in the synagogues in Tarsus and received from the Jews five lashings (40 stripes save one) which was a form of synagogue discipline.

Let's think of the important people God used in Paul's life:

1. Stephen was a witness to Saul of Tarsus in Acts 7.
2. Ananias was Paul's first friend as a Christian who helped Paul take his first baby steps as Christian of getting baptized, joining the church and a small group.
3. Barnabas took over where Ananias left off and aided Paul's continued spiritual growth.

This adds new meaning to Paul's insight in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I have planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase." Who planted in your life? Who watered what was planted? Whose ministry in your life has God given the increase?

In whose life am I planting? In whose life am I watering so God can give the increase?