



IT'S GOD
CALLING



WEEK SEVEN: THE APOSTLE PAUL AND US

We might think it a little presumptuous to place ourselves alongside Paul but remember that God regards us all in the same way. Whatever our background or circumstances, the Bible says that God is no respecter of persons, in other words he doesn't show partiality (Acts 10:34-35). Whether our call is dramatic or just a quiet whisper doesn't matter. What matters is how we respond.

Read Acts 9:1-19

The NLT puts verse 1 like this: *"Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath."* Make no mistake, these were not idle threats. Verse 3 of chapter 8 in Acts tells us that Saul made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. This was Saul who had stood by, looking after the clothes of those attacking Stephen, and watched whilst he was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60). One might wonder if Paul, as he became, ever thought back to that day when this courageous young man saw only the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the God.

- Paul himself of course, suffered terribly at the hands of the Jews and others, but like Stephen, he never wavered in his faith.
- Do we aspire to have that kind of faith and courage? What does it take to get there?

We read how Saul asked for letters from the high priest so that: *"... if he found any of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."* (verses 1 and 2)

"The history of committed Christian community is a story of roads. The first followers of Jesus called themselves "the Way," a name that echoes Jewish halakha, the "way of life" enshrined in the Torah, as well as the disciples' belief that Jesus was "the way" to God the Father."

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The dramatic *Damascus Road* experience of Saul is clearly recounted by Luke in this chapter.



We all know how a great light shone from heaven and that a voice spoke to him, which they all heard but only Paul understood.

- What do you find interesting about Saul's immediate response?
- Saul was given a short, sharp command. Basically, to get up, go into the city and there be told what to do. Surely, there can have been no clearer call than this.
- Can we even begin to understand what Saul must have felt during this encounter?
- One minute Saul was racing to deal with the people of the Way, the next he was blinded and unable to see where he was going and had to be led by the hand.
- What was his immediate response to his call?

He of course, was not the only one called on this occasion. Imagine being Ananias and seeing a vision and being told specifically where to go and who to ask for. He was probably quaking in his sandals, given the terror that this man Saul had created. He questioned what he had heard from the Lord.

- What was the incredible statement regarding the future of Saul? (verses 15 and 16).
- Verse 17 says a lot about Ananias. What characteristics did he demonstrate?
- How do we ourselves, come to that place?

Saul didn't have long to wait for the reality of his future to unfold.

- Who was the man who fought his corner for him?
- Do you know what his name means?
- There can be no doubt that this was one of the most dramatic calls recorded in scripture. But does it make it one of the most important calls?
- What was the immediate aftermath of this call?

Read Isaiah 43:1-3, Revelation 3:20, Isaiah 42:6

Isaiah 43:1-3 But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;

Rev: 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

Isaiah 42:6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ...

- Do you ever have doubts about God's calling on your life?
- If the one who stands at the door and knocks is Jesus, then surely it dispels all doubts.

As Jesus called the disciples and Paul in the New Testament, so he has called us. He gave his life as a ransom for our salvation, and he calls us to take up our cross and follow him.

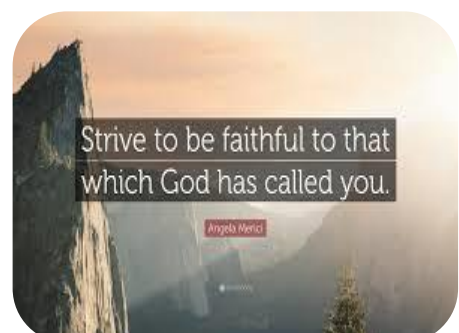
Matthew 16:24-26 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

- What do you understand these verses to mean?
- Is it an easy task?

God has called each one of us to be a follower of Jesus and to win people to be part of this wonderful family of his. However, there are things we should understand about the reasons for our call, in a general sense. See the attached verses. Being a disciple is something active, not passive and we need to understand what God expects of us.

In addition to these things, God has a particular call on each of our lives. There are things that only we, and no one else, can do. Sometimes it is difficult to discern what, in particular, God requires of us, but we should pray about it, talk to mature Christians, read God's word. If we do these things, that call will become clear. Remember we are a part of the Body of Christ, his church, and we are absolutely necessary for its operation and growth.

A common expression in the past describing Christians, was 'Holy Joes', meant in a derogative way. Nothing could be further from the truth. When we look at these scriptures it can seem somewhat daunting, but we must remember what Jesus told his disciples: *Read John 14:15-17.* **We don't have to do it in our own strength.**



Prayer:

Help us Father to both hear and answer your call on our lives. May we follow your instructions and receive the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to do your will.

Amen

These verses, among others, tell us that without any doubt, God has called us. We should learn these verses and imprint them on our hearts.

Proverbs 31:8-9

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; **defend the rights of the poor and needy.***

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

Micah 6:8

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
**To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.***

Mark 16:15

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

1 Corinthians 7:17

Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

Ephesians 4:1-6

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Philippians 2:1-4

*Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. **Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.***

2 Timothy 1:10

*He has saved us and **called us to a holy life** — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

1 Peter 2:9-10

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, **that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 4:10-11

***Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.** If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

God, the creator of the universe, has called us to be part of his work to bring justice and kindness to his creation. What a joy and privilege! But the work ahead is challenging, too, and we're grateful that God is with us. Lord, help us to embrace your calling for our lives with equal parts fervour, wisdom, and humility.