



Who Was Paul and How Should We Understand His Epistles?



By Mel Lawrenz

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Besides Jesus, no single figure was more influential in the beginnings of Christianity than the apostle Paul. Of the 27 books of the New Testament, 13 are attributed to Paul. Take a look at a Bible map showing the missionary journeys of Paul, and you will

be astonished to see the territory he covered—not just geographically, but culturally as well.

He was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, and he became an impassioned member of the Pharisees (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:4-5; Acts 23:6). He came

from the city of Tarsus, grew up in the midst of Greco-Roman culture, and was a Roman citizen. This remarkable background meant he was able to speak the gospel into urban settings. He was comfortable in Jerusalem, but also capable of moving into places like Crete, Greece, and Rome. His adaptability was amazing. He spoke with magistrates and philosophers and tradespeople.

His strong views about faith in Christ were most certainly tempered by his dramatic conversion. In the New Testament there is no more radical story of personal change than the story of the young man who was drafted by his fellow Pharisees to actively investigate and prosecute the early followers of Jesus. He stood by as the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was stoned to death. But while traveling to Damascus in Syria to find and



St. Paul preaching to the Romans

(Continued on page 2 - ST. PAUL)

The Apostle Paul — a So-So Preacher?

(Continued from page 1 - ST. PAUL)

arrest more of Jesus' followers, he had a supernatural encounter with Jesus and would soon undergo the utter change of mind and heart, which in his epistles he describes as conversion or repentance.

It wasn't easy for the other apostles to accept this persecutor in their midst, much less endorse him as a teacher. But with the passing of years, Paul eventually set out on his first great journey with a few close companions in tow.

There is quite some variation in the epistles of Paul. Four are called his "prison epistles" because he wrote them from prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). The stress of being in prison comes through at points. For instance, while writing the epistle to his dear friends at Philippi, he believes he may be close to execution.

Of these four, one is written to one person about a runaway slave (Philemon), whereas another, Ephesians, seems to have been written for a whole region of churches.

Three of the epistles, written very late, are usually called "the pastoral epistles" because they contain instructions to Paul's companions Timothy and Titus on how to protect order, harmony, and correct teaching in their churches. Not surprisingly, these are epistles that church leaders look to in shaping ministry roles in congregations. The qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1), for instance, describe essential leadership character and are easily applied in our own churches today.

Romans is a powerful, comprehensive description of the whole of the gospel. It covers creation, sin, redemption, and eventual restoration. The special issue of righteousness and grace is emphasized in Romans, as

it also is in the epistle of Galatians. First and 2 Corinthians offer great insight into an apostle trying his best to respond to tensions in a troubled church, to challenge bad values, and to call people to action. There is a special poignancy in 2 Corinthians as Paul describes his own hurt through the efforts of those trying to discredit him, and his anxiety about his relationship with the Corinthian church. Here we see the humility of Paul, even as he describes himself as unimpressive

in physical appearance and unremarkable as a public speaker. Now that is astonishing to read! The apostle Paul, a so-so preacher.

What should we bear in mind as we read and try to comprehend the epistles of Paul?

In order to understand the epistles of the New Testament, we must begin with context. Every epistle was written to a specific audience and for a

(Continued on page 4 - ST. PAUL)

Class of 2015

*The Alleluia Community School announces its
Commencement Exercises
Sunday, the thirty-first of May, Two thousand and fifteen
at two o'clock in the afternoon
Aiken Technical College
2276 Jefferson Davis Highway
Graniteville, South Carolina*

Reception following ceremony

Candidates for Graduation

*Daniel James Allison
Theresa Anne Almeter
Paul Ethan Balducci
William Red Conkright
Deanna Nicole Doughty
James Abraham Dresser
Matthew Peter Eyrich
Andrew John Fowler
Faith Elisabeth Harmon
Bernadette Marie Hartney
Sarah Ann Meredith
Sean Patrick Sullivan
Therese Elena Visintainer
Ryan Matthew Wilby*

As We Move Into Summer: What Do I See, and What Do I Have?

From the Handmaids

Children are eagerly eyeing the calendar looking forward to that blissful day when school is no more and summer begins. Mothers, on the other hand, may have a different take on the change of seasons. Oh, we look forward to the end of school. No more homework! No more lunches to pack! But contemplating twelve wide open weeks with soaring temperatures and little structure can make even the most enthusiastic among us gulp just a little.

Last week the Support Group Heads' wives, the Assistant Support Group Heads' wives, and the Handmaids met to brainstorm ideas for planning a summer full of fun, togetherness, service, and growth in the Lord. We generated a ton of ideas.

We briefly mentioned a word Sue Garrett received years ago while looking out her backyard: What do I see, and what do I have?

To begin, here are a few general thoughts:

Prayer

Incorporate simple prayer routines into your summer plans: reading Bible stories in the morning, going to weekday Mass a few times per week, praying on the way to swim team. Veteran moms suggest that simple prayer has a better chance for success than a more complicated plan.

Have a Rough Schedule

Breakfast, prayers, housework.

Swim practice, housework, reading Morning Mass, chores, playtime.

Ellen Mongan once shared a simple summer routine. Her family would straighten the house twice per day – at 9: a.m. and again at 5:30. In between these times, she let the house go and didn't worry about it.

During summer at Dan and Marie Almeter's, the house was closed until noon. The family had prayers and chores in the morning. Swimming and biking and friends were welcome in the afternoon, but the mornings were for family only.

Bob and Kathy Visintainer would declare the first week of vacation a freebie – sleep in, minimal chores, no summer homework. After their week off, they would institute a loose summer schedule.

Another family focused less on the clock, but more on what needed to be done, stressing "work before play" with their kids.

Have a Plan for Electronics

You might need to write it down. One family limits gaming to an hour per day on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Another mom with older kids collects phones, ipods, and laptops at 9:00 each night. While she initially met with grumbling, after a while the kids would show up at her bedroom door and deposit their gear at the assigned time. A family with a more technical bent makes gaming a family event.

Invite Others

As you're headed to the lake or the movies, think about someone in your child's class who gets overlooked or a member of your support group who doesn't get out much or a single brother or sister who hasn't seen a Disney flick in a long time. Give them a call.

Set Goals With Your Children

Another pearl of wisdom from Ellen Mongan is to set goals: one spiritual, one practical, one fun. Spiritual goals might include reading a part of the Bible or cultivating a certain fruit

of the Spirit. Practical goals could include summer school work, typing, driver's ed., or potty training. Fun goals could include art or basketball camp, learning an instrument online, learning to bake or sew. Many moms mentioned that summer is a great time to teach household jobs that can be overwhelming in the hurly burly of the school year – cooking ten simple recipes, basic sewing, running a washing machine, mowing the lawn.

We also brainstormed activities and excursions. Here are a few ideas:

Free Activities

- The downtown public library has tons of DVDs – movies, TV shows, and documentaries.
- The park and splash pad behind the Columbia County Library is shaded and fun.
- The Augusta Canal has a bike path. It's beautiful, mostly shaded, and free!
- Phinzy Swamp is close by, partially shaded, and free.
- The North Augusta Greenway offers a smooth, mostly flat surface for young kids on scooters, Ripstiks, or bikes. Walking the main loop takes about an hour (with dawdling kids). There are beautiful river views, turtles, and once in a while a deer – this is a gem.
- Plan a slip and slide day in one of the common yards.
- Invite friends over for board games.
- Host a Lego competition.
- Camp in your backyard. Little kids don't care that it's not Yellowstone.
- Visit all the parks in the CSRA.
- Plan a visit to the fire station.

(Continued on page 4 - SUMMER PLAN)

Fashion a Summer that is Holy and Fun

(Continued from page 3 - SUMMER PLAN)

- Host a book or Bible study for your child and his or her friends.
- Join the summer reading program at the library.
- Pick a day each week to spend a broiling afternoon watching old movies.

Nearly Free Activities

- Hit happy hour at Sonic.
- Check out the summer movies at the Regal. During June and July, the Regal offers kids' movies for \$1 at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
- Bowling at Fort Gordon is \$1.25 per game on Mondays. Plan a little extra time because security at the gate can change. Last year Brunswick Lanes offered free bowling with paid shoe rental. With a little research, you can pass an after-

noon in an air-conditioned bowling alley for very little money.

Excursions

- Go to the Atlanta Aquarium on the bus.
- Plan a weekly lake trip with your support group or other families.
- Check out cabins at nearby state parks.

Focus on Skills

- Teach basic carpentry.
- Host a cooking school.
- Do arts and crafts projects to use as Christmas presents.
- Write your Glory Run letters!
- Find one of many, many free and fun typing programs online.
- Plan and plant a garden.
- Teach dancing, manners, sports, cake decorating.

Service

- Look into Habitat for Humanity
- Volunteer at the Master's Table or the Food Bank.
- Be a mother's helper.
- Be a candy striper.
- Look around your support group for an older brother or sister, a mom with lots of littles, a pregnant sister, someone rehabbing from surgery.

Keep in mind Sue's word: *What do I see? What do I have?*

Some of us look out and see three non-swimming preschoolers and do not begin dreaming about day trips to the lake. But meeting a few other moms in K-block for a morning in kiddie pools would provide fun and fellowship.

Some moms research every Vacation Bible School the CSRA has to offer. They and their kids do better when everyone is on the go.

Another mom shared that just having finished nine months of school and sports, she is NOT looking for more organized activities, but envisions more time with the nuclear family and an opportunity to serve the sister next door who is pregnant and juggling lots of littles.

Summertime will look very different depending on our life circumstances, our personalities, our health, and our finances.

Our recent consultation included a word from Chuck Hornsby: "Fashion yourselves so that the important things are not neglected." Together let's fashion a summer that is holy and fun.

Understanding St. Paul

(Continued from page 2 - ST. PAUL)

specific purpose. If we dig around, we can figure out what false teaching the book of Colossians is countering, what slavery looked like, what family life was like, what the features of the culture were at the time. Then we can ask: "What universal and timeless truth is the author drawing on, truths that apply to us today?"

We may not "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16) today, but Christian grace and civility still apply. First Peter 3:3 recommends not wearing gold jewelry because in that culture it was ostentatious to do so. Today, avoiding ostentatiousness still applies, though having a gold ring or a gold cross does not rise to that same level. Having elders oversee the ministry of churches today still applies,

although having one man appoint them (as Paul instructed Timothy to do) isn't typically the method of selection that is used.

The epistles extend the richness of Holy Scripture, and they remind us once again that the word of God is truth in relationship.

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