

DISCOVER THE
POWER IN THE
PRAYERS OF PAUL

by
David Bordon
with Rick Killian

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PREFACE

The apostle Paul was a man of prayer.

More than any of the first apostles, he had to be. He had not walked with Jesus as the twelve had. He did not have opportunity to see Jesus reach out His hand to heal or hear Him teach with authority, or see Him minister day in and day out, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. Those who walked with Jesus for three years had a tangible relationship with Him, memories to look back on. They had seen miracles and witnessed Jesus' grace and courage on the Cross. They had heard His comforting words and stood watching as their Lord Jesus was caught up into the heavens. But Paul did not. If Paul was going to know Jesus intimately, he would have to meet Him in prayer. What the others had experienced in the natural, Paul had access to only in the Spirit. We learn about the life of Jesus through the accounts of the gospel writers, but Paul's writing teaches us to love a God we cannot see or touch. From him, we learn how to be led by the Holy Spirit.

The depth of Paul's letters to the churches reveals that his prayer life was rich and rewarding. Through his time waiting on God, Paul received revelation and instruction for living the new life Jesus died and rose again to bring us—a life no longer dictated by legalistic interpretations of God's written Word, a life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's writings make up more than two-thirds of the New Testament. While his teachings provide the "how to" and "what to do" of the Christian life, it is his prayers that reveal and call for the "spiritual power" that make you able "to do the right thing" in any and every given circumstance. It is one thing to understand living by the law of love, as Jesus proclaimed, but it is quite another to have the inner

strength to do it day in and day out in a world motivated mostly by self-centeredness and personal hurts. Paul's prayers reveal the spiritual strengths and assets you need to act out divine love in all situations.

Yet Paul's prayers are special for yet another reason. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they literally have the power to help you affirm and boldly confess who you are in Christ. When you pray the prayers of Paul, you are praying God's Word—which is His will—into your life and the lives of others. By their very nature, they are faith-filled, infusing you with supernatural strength and enabling you to pray more effectively. Paul's prayers will challenge you to grow spiritually and see God's plans realized in the lives of those around you. His prayers are aimed at building spiritual vigor—the power Jesus called “virtue”—so that you might become a world-changer. They are spiritual exercises designed to produce spiritual muscle. It is only with this spiritual might that you can live the victorious and supernatural life to which He has called each of us.

For this reason, we are honored to present this book, *Discover the Power in the Prayers of Paul*, to provide you with an opportunity to take a deeper look at the prayers of Paul singularly and as a whole. To do this, we have organized this book into three parts:

PART ONE includes Paul's teaching on prayer, along with an exploration of the themes resident in each major prayer. Our goal is to learn more about what they teach us, what they are asking for, and how they fit into the body of Paul's writing. Various translations are included so you can better see the intricate balance of meaning as well as the context in which Paul presented each one.

PART TWO includes paraphrases of these scriptural prayers so that you can pray them for yourself, your loved ones, your government and

church leaders, your church, community—anyone, in fact, for whom you feel led to pray.

PART THREE is an in-depth look at the life of Paul. This will shed light on why Paul was praying a specific prayer for a particular group of people or individuals.

Paul's prayers reveal overlooked keys to living the extraordinary life in the Spirit that Jesus died to give each of us. It is our hope that as you read, study, meditate upon, and pray these Spirit-inspired prayers, you will understand the depths of God's love for you, discover the grace and power available to you as His beloved child, and increasingly live in the fullness of Jesus' desires for you, your loved ones, and your world.

Part 1 One

PAUL'S TEACHING ON PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

Pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

What Jesus did on the Cross changed everything. Because of the Cross the Holy Spirit could come to live in the hearts of believers—regular people just like you and me. Suddenly there were new rules about how we come to know God, how we hear from Him, and how we serve Him. And certainly the very definition of prayer was altered forever.

Jesus described it this way:

“I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper [Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”

—*John 16:7* NKJV

Jesus proclaimed a radical departure from a religious lifestyle—turning religion inside out. With the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and endue them with power, it was no longer necessary to try to apply outside laws to their hearts, but rather the life of the Spirit within overflows with goodness, changing the world around it. Jesus taught the world what this change would mean and accomplished the transition through His death, burial, and resurrection. Then God called Paul to teach others how to live this radical new way of life.

For many years, Paul’s great, personal zeal for the Law led him to fight against the teachings of Jesus. Even later in life, a devout and fully committed Paul called himself the chief of all sinners, referencing his role as persecutor of Jesus’ followers. It was by divine revelation that he

came to understand the utter failure of the Law to bring righteousness. Now he stands as spokesperson for the new order of believers—those who would know Jesus completely through revelation of the heart. Paul demonstrated that believers can walk in intimate relationship with Jesus. Whereas His disciples walked and talked with Him physically, believers are now able to enter into a spiritual walk—minute-by-minute communication and collaboration with Him through the vehicle of prayer.

If you are willing, you, too, can walk in the world-changing power of God's presence as Paul did. You, too, can find that power through prayer that accesses the deepest, most intimate relationship with God.

“INSTANT” IN PRAYER

One of the first things Paul teaches us is that prayer is much more than a spiritual discipline to be entered into during certain times and seasons. It should instead be as close and as regular as your breath, integrated into every fiber of your being.

In the Old Testament, those who honored and obeyed God found their way to certain places to pray—places where the presence of God was said to dwell, places such as the Temple. However, at Jesus' death, the Bible says the veil in the temple that separated the common people from the Holy of Holies—literally the presence of God—was torn from top to bottom. God's presence on earth was no longer confined to one particular place. As Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit would now dwell in the hearts of believers, those who choose to make Jesus their Lord and Savior.

Jesus gave His disciples the following instruction: “When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:6 NKJV). But Paul captures the essence of the New Covenant in his enlightened words: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). No longer will believers need to find secret places to pray—as Jesus instructed. Instead, believers now have a constant connection. The place of prayer is now within the believer—within you—in every step as you walk out your purpose here on earth.

Jesus instructed His disciples not to be showy in empty prayers, trying to impress others with their religious prowess. Paul teaches that God is now living within, as close and as constant as your breath.

This doesn't mean that there aren't times you shouldn't pull away from this chaotic world to be alone and hear God more clearly. That is truly needed from time to time. However, even in the midst of the chaos and challenges of life, God wants you to know and realize that there is never a time when you are alone, and never a time when the Spirit of God is not immediately present to help you. As breathing is crucial to your life in the natural, so prayer is crucial to your spiritual life.

Paul teaches that God loves you so much that He wants you to talk to Him continually and invite Him into every area of your life—all your joys, sorrows, triumphs, challenges, aspirations, and concerns.

Perhaps this explains why Paul so frequently intermingled his prayers with his writing. They had become as close as his thoughts and flowed comfortably into his letters. It can truly be said of Paul that he “prayed without ceasing.”

A NEW CONNECTION BETWEEN PRAYER AND PEACE

While prayer in the Old Testament was to influence God to move on behalf of those on earth, after the Cross, prayer functioned to bring what God had already done from Heaven to earth by faith. It is now through believing prayer that the kingdom of God on earth—righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost—expands (Romans 14:17). Prayer is your access to all the things of the Spirit—whether it be the fruit or the gifts—a conduit which should be kept open at all times. There is a time for short prayers that might be no more than a sentence long, and there are other times when prayer demands a perseverance and diligence likened to the travail of childbirth (Galatians 4:19). Yet for you, the steadfast believer, both are to end in God’s peace and joy, just as Paul wrote to the Philippians from his prison cell:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

—*Philippians 4:6-7* NKJV

Paul’s “formula” for prayer is very clear. Have a concern? Pray. Right then, right there, and continue to pray until the peace of God floods your soul and you know you have the answer. Then thank God for answering even before you see the physical manifestation of what you’ve asked for.

Perhaps you have time for only a short prayer now—what Pastor Rick Warren calls a “breath prayer.” The answer does not lie in the

length of your prayer or in the amount of time you spend meditating on the problem. The answer for every worry, stress, and anxiety comes from laying it before God and listening to His Spirit for the answer. Pray now and follow up when you can focus on hearing what God has to say to you.

To Paul, this is your way of “continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). Any trouble is a call to pray instantly, any joy a call to praise and thanksgiving. And a prayer that brings in God’s peace is an answered prayer, even if there is no way in the natural that having peace in this matter makes sense. That is why it is called “peace which surpasses all understanding.”

Paul also relied upon the Holy Spirit to know when to pray for others. Repeatedly in his letters, Paul says things such as, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3; see 2 Timothy 1:3), or, “I make mention of you in my prayers.” (See Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; Philemon 4.) Think for a moment about how many people and how many churches Paul had to pray for. Paul’s habit must have been that as he thought of someone, he would instantly “make mention” of them to God. It may have been a short one-sentence prayer or perhaps more, but it seems certain that Paul didn’t stop and pray an hour or so for each person every day.

And Scripture confirms that Paul did not pray for people only when they “needed” prayer. Throughout his letters we see Paul praying for the members of Christ’s church each time he heard reports of their love and faith, good reports, reports that they were prospering. He didn’t wait for prayer requests; instead, he prayed a short prayer, “making mention of them” whenever they came to mind. To think of them was his signal to pray for them. How greatly would such an approach to

prayer for others revolutionize our churches and missions today? Would we pray more for them or less?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER

After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the whole context of relationship with God changed. Obedient devotees no longer lived by the letter of God's Law. Instead they lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. They lived by the Law of Love. After the Day of Pentecost, the changes in relationship with God brought about changes in the way we communicate with Him. Prayer has become an "inside job." The Holy Spirit not only provides the motivation to pray but also the understanding of what and how to pray. As Paul said in his letter to the Romans:

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. *For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us* with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

—*Romans 8:26-27* NKJV (emphasis added)

As a Christian you are quite literally "Spirit-filled." The Holy Spirit dwelling within you helps you as you strive to pray according to God's will. Paul's example here is that as the earth groans to be free of sin and under the jurisdiction of its Creator again, so the Spirit of God makes intercession through you for God's kingdom to grow on the earth. If you will ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in prayer and will yourself be

sensitive to His leading, you can then pray in accordance with His understanding rather than your own. And in so doing, God's vast resources and abilities are applied to your petition. What a promise God has given! He himself will even help you pray as you should.

While many prayers can be short and still powerful (such as Jesus' prayer when He raised Lazarus from the dead)—just two verses long—prayer in the Spirit often takes perseverance and determination. As Paul advised the Ephesians:

My brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.... Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, *being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.*

—*Ephesians 6:10-12, 18* NKJV (emphasis added)

To what end should you be watchful and pray with all perseverance? To the end that you are not struggling against other human beings, but against the principalities and powers who influence them. While God's answer comes immediately, there is a time when persistent prayer is necessary to bring that answer to earth. There is a battle in the heavens to be fought for you just as there was for Daniel:

He said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to

humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

—*Daniel 10:12-13* NKJV

However, for those of us in the church age, it is not an angel who comes to help us, but rather the Holy Spirit himself. How can you fail to take advantage of that kind of help? How can your prayers possibly be ineffective? As Romans 8:31 (NIV) says, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

The Holy Spirit will always lead you to pray according to God’s will, but He has provided yet another tool to help you better understand His will as you pray—the Bible. The Bible was written by many different authors, but they had one thing in common. They wrote down the words given to them by the Holy Spirit—the very same Holy Spirit who indwells and inspires you.

The Bible serves as God’s system of checks and balances, His way of being sure that your prayers are not tainted by the waywardness of your own human mind. When you pray God’s promises back to Him, you can pray with confidence, knowing that you are praying according to His will.

THE ORDER OF PRAYER

While every concern or worry is an instant call to prayer, something that should allow you to live constantly in God’s peace, Paul also

teaches that you should pray for others regularly regardless of your own situation. In fact, Paul urged those to whom he wrote to continually pray for others, including himself, even as he continually prayed for them. He constantly calls for prayer for those sowing the Gospel, as if that sowing would be of little effect unless the ministry fields were first cleared and plowed through prayer. In this Paul indicated another principle of the New Covenant: prayer leads to fruitfulness. That's why Paul instructed believers to always begin prayer in the same way:

I exhort therefore that, *first of all*, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*.... I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

—1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8 (emphasis added)

Why should we pray for our leaders? “That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” Paul wrote these words from prison on the eve of the first major Roman persecution of Christians under Nero as he understood the hindrance leaders could be to the Gospel flowing in any area, and the power they had to obstruct even those living honest and godly lives.

While this may have been especially true when it was written, it is just as true today. We experience this on many levels every day. For instance, in a work environment, telling the truth may get you into more trouble than just going with the flow. And letting others know you are a Christian may make working with them more difficult. Laws governing the workplace may make it difficult to express your faith in Jesus.

In some other parts of the world, matters are even worse. In spite of the extreme persecution suffered by the early Christians, nearly two-thirds of all Christians martyred for their faith died in the twentieth century, not the first! In fact, according to current estimates, more than 435 believers lose their lives every day because of their faith in Jesus Christ.¹ You have more need to pray for your leaders and lawmakers today than ever before—and, not only for those in your own nation but also for those from other nations. In fact, the more you pray for the leaders of other nations, the easier it will be to live a godly and honest life.

PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING

Almost everywhere Paul mentions prayer in his letters, he also discusses thanksgiving, as if the two were inseparable. While prayer may start with supplications (prayers that lay before God “a wanting or a need”²), and then move on to intercessions (“prayer, petition, or entreaty in favor of another”³), for Paul, time in prayer always began and ended with praise and thanksgiving.

In fact, getting to that praise and thanksgiving seems to be the goal of almost everything Paul teaches on prayer. To lay a concern before the Lord is to settle it. Thus prayer always ends in thanking God for the answer. If you are still anxious about something as you pray, your prayer is not yet complete. You need to continue to pray about it until you can earnestly thank God for the answer, as Paul said, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2 NKJV). You might even say he meant you to “be vigilant in prayer until you can give thanksgiving.” A prayer that ends before thanking God for His answer is a prayer without faith. As it says in Hebrews:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

—*Hebrews 11:6* NKJV

If you believe God is, that He is a rewarder, and that He has heard your prayer, how can you end prayer in any other way than by thanking God for the answer? As John said:

This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

—*1 John 5:14-15* NKJV

For God to hear a prayer is for Him to answer it. Thus, praising God for who He is always makes for a good beginning, and thanking Him for His goodness, peace, and answer always closes the door on doubt and unbelief.

PAUL'S HOLY SPIRIT-INSPIRED PRAYERS

Paul wrote his letters to the churches through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, his prayers in those letters are truly the words of the Holy Spirit praying through him. For each thing the Holy Spirit taught through Paul, He quickened a spiritual muscle within the believer—a muscle that would be exercised and trained by reading Paul's epistles. As each need was revealed, Paul was quick to raise it back to the Father in prayer, and those prayers flowed out of

Paul's heart, through his pen, and into his letters to be preserved for us. Today they are just as fresh as they were to those who first received them. Just as God spoke to the new believers in Greece, Macedonia, Asia Minor, and Rome through these letters, He speaks with equal life-giving power and revelation to us today. More than any other books of the Bible, the Epistles are for those living in our time.

As you look at the following chapters, God will encourage you to read, meditate, and reflect upon the meanings of Paul's prayers and begin to pray God's Word back to Him. You can use these prayers as part of your daily quiet times. You, your loved ones, and your world desperately need God's anointing and power. These Holy Spirit-inspired prayers, prayed by you in faith, will prove to be powerful and effective in their working. They contain the power to change your life and the lives of countless others.

Get ready for the God of miracles to work in and through you as you pray the prayers of Paul. Expect a spiritual transformation. Expect to see your world turned inside out. Let God develop in you and through you the spiritual muscle He wants you to have for such a time as this.

chapter 1

GRANT ME A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Ephesians 1:15-23

If you were going to write one final letter to your children, what would you say? What would you write to those who had attended church with you and shared in the vision of reaching your community

with the love of God? What would you pray for them, knowing you would not see them again until you meet in heaven?

No church saw more miracles or matured more quickly than the one in Ephesus. Other than Corinth and eventually Rome, there were no other cities where Paul spent more time in his missionary travels. It was while Paul was in Ephesus that handkerchiefs and aprons were sent to him so that he could lay his hands on them, pray, and then send them out with God's healing and delivering power still held in the fabric (Acts 19:12). It was in Ephesus that the seven sons of Sceva were so impressed by the power of the Gospel that they tried to cast out a demon in the name of "the Jesus whom Paul preaches" (v. 13 NKJV).

Of all the churches Paul planted, it was only the Ephesian elders he summoned to meet him on what he knew would be his last journey to Jerusalem before being sent to Rome as a prisoner. The book of Ephesians was one of the last books Paul wrote, and two of his last three letters were written to Timothy, whom he had left to oversee things there. This includes 2 Timothy in which Paul bid his final farewell, stating he had "fought the good fight, . . . finished the race, [and] . . . kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7 NKJV [insert added]). In other words, Paul had accomplished the mission God had given him on the earth.

In essence, Paul's letter to the Ephesians was just such a last letter to loved ones, and Paul's prayers for them are his longest and deepest. Paul wrote the Ephesians from his first Roman imprisonment with the thought he would never travel east again. Instead, if he had the chance, he would take the gospel west to Spain.

Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians encompasses almost the entire first chapter, beginning with Paul's praise and thanksgiving for all that God had given to believers through Jesus Christ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

—*Ephesians 1:3* NKJV (emphasis added)

Some of the blessings Paul lists:

1. God, before the foundations of the earth, chose us in Christ to be holy and blameless before Him (v. 4).
2. God predestined that we would be adopted as sons and daughters (v. 5).
3. God has made known to us the mystery of His will (v. 9).
4. God has given us an inheritance so that we can be to the praise of His glory (v. 12).
5. God, after we believed the truth of the Gospel, sealed us with the Holy Spirit to mark us as His redeemed possession (vv. 13-14).

At this point in the prayer, Paul switches from praise and thanksgiving to supplication and intercession on behalf of the Ephesians praying: *For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I remember you in my prayers, and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to:*

- (a) *Give you the Spirit, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know him.*
- (b) *Open your minds to see his light, so that you will know to what hope he has called you.*
- (c) *Cause you to understand how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people.*

(d) *Help you to understand how very great is his power at work in us who believe.*

This power in us is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he is above all titles of power in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ's feet, and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere.

—(*Ephesians 1:15-23* TEV) (*verses 18-23* PARAPHRASED)

These four requests summarize what all believers need to know in order to fulfill their mission on the earth—a prayer needed as much for believers today as it was in the first century.

KNOWING GOD

The greatest promise of Christianity is that we can know God.

Think about that for a minute—you and I, puny specks of dust on one of billions upon billions of planets revolving around billions upon billions of stars in a seemingly infinite universe, have been promised that we can intimately know the Creator of it all.

Take a look at these scriptural promises:

“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his

neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' *for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,*" declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

—*Jeremiah 31:33-34* NASB (emphasis added)

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

—*James 4:8* NASB

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and *knows God*.

—*1 John 4:7* NASB (emphasis added)

On the night He was arrested, Jesus prayed for us. What was the first request in His prayer?

"This is eternal life, *that they may know You*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

—*John 17:3* NASB (emphasis added)

As James said, "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss" (James 4:2-3 NKJV). If we feel that we do not know God, then it is either because we haven't ever asked to know Him or have never shown the steadfastness and faith to continue seeking Him until we truly begin the process of knowing Him. The very beginning of eternal life is the initial knowing of God, and that knowing of and learning more and more about God is the quest we will remain steadfast to for all eternity.

Notice though that Paul doesn't pray only that we would "know God," but that we would have "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" in

knowing Him. Thus knowing God would be not only spiritual revelation through the Holy Spirit as Paul experienced in meeting Jesus, but it would also include wisdom. Many ministers teach that knowledge is what we can know in our minds as individual facts and truths; however, wisdom is the ability to successfully apply that knowledge to whatever we are doing. One is of the intellect, the other practical. One is found in the Word of God; the other through the leadership of the Holy Ghost—in essence, it is living by the balance of the Word and the Spirit. Thus Paul is praying that we intellectually know about God, that we spiritually get the revelation of Him, and that we have His wisdom to know what to do to increase His kingdom in our lives and throughout our world.

KNOWING THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING

First Corinthians 13:13 tells us hope is one of the three most lasting things in the universe. In Romans 8:24, Paul reveals that hope is necessary for salvation from a God we have not yet seen—in essence we must first have the hope that He exists before we can have the faith that He does. Without hope, we cannot have faith. As Paul says it, “we are saved by hope” (Romans 8:24). Many ministers in recent years have called hope “the blueprint for faith.” In other words, hope plans, faith realizes.

Until you can hope for something, you have no chance of ever believing that you will one day see it. As it says in Hebrews:

Faith *is the substance of things hoped for*, the evidence of things not seen.

—*Hebrews 11:1* (emphasis added)

Hope creates the vision for what you want to accomplish; faith is the day-to-day walking out of that vision. But without first having that vision, faith has nothing to give substance to. Thus, your faith needs hope in order to work effectively.

According to the dictionary, hope means: “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment,”⁴ or “favorable and confident expectation.”⁵ In other words, even the foundation for your seeking God—your desire to know God as He wants you to know Him—is based in hope. Only if you hope (have a confident expectation) that you can know Him will you ever begin to truly seek Him.

Paul is praying here for our dreams and aspirations to become vivid and tangible. He is praying we will receive the “hope of our calling”—a vision of why God called us before the foundations of the earth.

In other words, he is praying that you will be able to clearly see why—out of all the six billion plus people on planet earth—He called you specifically to accomplish the unique purpose for which He made you, and that you would begin to earnestly expect that purpose to be fulfilled as you follow the leading of His Holy Spirit.

No one starts a journey they have no hope of finishing, but many with hope will finish journeys they had never imagined they would begin. Whatever answer you are looking for from God begins with your hope of receiving that answer. Why not take the time right now to ask God to give you His supernatural hope and fill you with the confident expectation that what He started in you He will complete? Ask Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to revive in you and your loved ones the dreams and desires He placed there and to rekindle the passion for Him and His kingdom that was once burning brightly. The adversary of your soul is determined to steal and extinguish your hope

so that you cannot fight the good fight of faith and fulfill God's purposes for your life. But the "God of all hope" wants to fill you with His joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope and walk in victory. It is time to start praying and believing that hope is yours for the asking—because it is. Don't give up on your dreams, and don't let go of the hope of your calling!

UNDERSTANDING THE RICHES OF OUR INHERITANCE

In Ephesians 1:11 and 12, Paul praises and thanks God for the inheritance we, as believers, have been given through Christ:

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

—*Ephesians 1:11-12* NKJV

Then Paul turns around and prays that we would understand that inheritance:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know ... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

—*Ephesians 1:18* NKJV

What does it really mean to be a child of God?

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and *if children, then heirs— heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

—*Romans 8:16-17* NKJV (emphasis added)

Paul calls us “joint heirs with Christ,” meaning that all He inherited from His Father is also available to us—in fact, it is now ours in Him even as Jesus has already inherited it as He sits at the right hand of the Father.

If we already have this inheritance, then why aren't we experiencing the benefits of it? Paul explains it this way:

The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

—*Galatians 4:1-2*

In other words, until we grow up and realize all we have in Christ, that inheritance will be locked away in safekeeping until we do grow responsible enough to handle it.

Who is the tutor and governor who will take us into that inheritance? As Paul said earlier in Ephesians 1:

Having believed, *you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance* until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

—*Ephesians 1:13-14* NKJV (emphasis added)

The *King James Version* calls the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the “earnest of our inheritance.” Just as a family would put down an earnest-money deposit on a house in order to show the sincerity of their offer to purchase it, so God puts the Holy Spirit into our hearts as a guarantee of our redemption. The Holy Spirit is also there to teach and guide us into all that this inheritance is for us—He is our tutor and guardian—just as Jesus promised:

“When He, the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit], has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that *He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*”

—*John 16:13-15* NKJV [insert and emphasis added]

How do we know when we have grown spiritually mature enough to collect some of that inheritance? Take a look at the order of Paul’s prayer. First he prays for growth in *knowing God*, then for growth in *knowing and realizing our calling*. Then he prays that we would be able to understand our inheritance. So the purpose of our inheritance is clear. It is given to help us *fulfill our calling—or purpose—on the earth*. God made all His vast resources available to Jesus so He could fulfill His mission on the earth, and Jesus has made them available to us for the same purpose: that we might work wholeheartedly, just as Jesus did, to expand the kingdom of God on the earth during our lives here.

And to this very purpose, there was one other thing Paul felt that we needed—not only to understand the riches of our inheritance but also the power behind that inheritance.

UNDERSTANDING THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TOWARD US

Paul's final request is that we would understand “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Ephesians 1:19 NKJV). He spends the last part of this prayer describing that “surpassing greatness”

These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

—*Ephesians 1:19-23* NASB

Just as God raised Joseph from the depths of prison to the second highest position in the land of Egypt, so He raised Jesus from the depths of death—a sacrificial death for our sins—to the highest seat of authority in the entire universe at the right hand of Almighty God. With that act, Jesus also took the keys of hell and death from the devil so that God could now redeem us from the power of sin and adopt us

again as His children. Think about that for a moment. Truly, there has been no greater act of power that has ever taken place in the history of time. And Paul is praying that all his requests here are made in accordance with the working of that strength.

Consider this for a moment: If God is making this power available to you to fulfill your purpose and mission on the earth, what power in the universe can stop you from being all God has called you to be?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The devil's strategy to stop you is simple and obvious. If he can get you to focus on the setbacks you face or your own advancement and individual comfort on the earth—and the little and secondary things of life—he can defeat you. If you focus on the small, he can get you to overlook the great. You will then major in the minor things of life—the selfish things—and accomplish nothing. You will strain at gnats and swallow camels—and in so doing, completely miss God's purpose for your life.

But Paul is praying for you to realize just the opposite. First of all, you must understand how great and loving your Heavenly Father truly is. Second, you must receive hope—a vision—of the great things He has called you to do. Third, you must understand the amazing resources He has made available to you in order to accomplish that calling. And last of all, you must understand the miraculous power that is backing all of these up.

Are you facing physical illness? God raised Jesus from the dead to sit at His right hand in heaven. What illness can stand in light of that?

Are you facing a financial crisis? God raised Jesus from the dead to sit at His right hand in heaven. What financial crisis can stand in light of that?

Are you facing a problem in your family? God raised Jesus from the dead to sit at His right hand in heaven. What family problem can stand in light of that?

You fill in the blank. Now ask yourself what problem can stand in light of the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead to sit at His right hand in heaven?

Paul is praying that you will look at the big picture and see the hope you have in Christ rather than the hopelessness of your present situation. Faith can stretch its legs only when you have enough hope to lift up your head and look into the eyes of the One who has the power to help you. In this prayer, Paul is praying that you will receive a vision for your life, realizing your God-given purpose, and looking to God's greatness and the leadership of the Holy Spirit for its fulfillment.

It may take an instant or months or years to walk out whatever it is blocking your way at the moment, but it all starts with a prayer such as this one. Meditate on these scriptures and pray with Paul that your eyes will be opened to all God is and all that He has for you. That is your first step into His greater things.

PRAYING EPHESIANS 1:15-23 FOR YOURSELF

Father,

In the name of Jesus, I praise and thank You for all of the spiritual gifts You have bestowed upon me in Christ Jesus. I thank You that You have adopted me as Your child, that You have forgiven my sins, that You have promised to let me know the purposes for which You saved me, and the greatness of the inheritance You have prepared for me to accomplish that purpose. I also praise and

thank You for sealing me with Your Holy Spirit to live within me and guide me—that Your fullness will be realized in my life as I follow and learn from Him day by day.

Because of these great blessings, Father, I pray that You will give me a spirit of revelation and knowledge in knowing You. Open the eyes of my understanding so that I will know the hope of Your calling. Help me to understand the riches of the glory of Your great inheritance to me through Jesus Christ because I have believed on and trusted in You. Cause me to come to understand the exceedingly great power You have made available to me to accomplish what You have called me to do.

Father, I thank You that all these things are accomplished according to Your exceedingly great strength—the very power by which You sent Your Son, Jesus, to earth to die on the Cross for my sins, and by which You raised Him from the dead to sit at Your right hand in the heavens, far above any other ruler, authority, power, or kingdom; above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come; with all things under His feet; and as the head of all parts of the universal Church, which is His Body on the earth, left here to accomplish His goals and purposes as His fullness to all humankind.

Amen.

PRAYING EPHESIANS 1:15-23 FOR OTHERS

Father,

In the name of Jesus, I praise and thank You for all of the spiritual gifts You have bestowed upon _____ in Christ Jesus. I thank

You that You have adopted _____ as Your own child, and that You have forgiven all of _____ sins. I thank You for all of Your promises that You will reveal to _____, Your divine purpose and calling for _____ life, and that _____ would understand the greatness of the inheritance You have prepared for _____ to accomplish that purpose and calling. I also praise and thank You for sealing _____ with Your Holy Spirit to live within _____ and guide _____ into all of Your fullness.

Because of these great blessings, Father, I pray that You will give _____ a spirit of revelation and knowledge in knowing You. Open _____'s eyes of understanding so that _____ would know the full hope of Your calling. Help _____ to understand the riches of the glory of Your great inheritance for _____ through Jesus Christ because _____ has believed on and trusted in You. Cause _____ to come to understand the exceedingly great power You have made available to _____ to accomplish what You have called _____ to do on this earth.

Father: I thank You that all of these requests will be accomplished according to Your exceedingly great power—the very power by which You sent Your Son, Jesus, to the earth to die on the Cross for our sins, and by which You raised Him from the dead to sit at Your right hand in the heavens, far above any other ruler, authority, power, or kingdom; above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come; with all things under His feet; and as the head of all parts of the universal Church, which is His Body on the earth, left here to accomplish His goals and purposes as His fullness to all humankind.

Amen.

Part 3

THE LIFE OF PAUL

PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But...it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.

Galatians 1:13-16 NKJV

From what the Bible and history tell us of Paul, he was born in the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia sometime in the decade following the birth of Jesus. He was the son of a Pharisee and raised to be a Pharisee. He was also born a Roman citizen, suggesting that someone in his ancestry had done some service for the Romans worthy of such a reward. According to Jewish tradition, he was “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5). The name he was given was that of another famous Benjamite: Saul, the first king of Israel.

Tarsus was a university town, a center of local commerce, and the capital of the province. As such it was also home to people of many different cultures. Paul grew up speaking and writing Greek as well as Hebrew, and he must have been exposed to Greek and Roman philosophy as well as other Western ways in his education.

While little is known of Saul's earliest years, it seems evident that his education began early—probably under his father's tutelage and in the local synagogue school. As a youth, Paul picked up a talent for leather

working and tent making, probably also from his father. It was a skill that would serve him well in years to come.

At some point Paul outgrew Tarsus and traveled to Jerusalem—in order to further his education as a rabbi and a Pharisee. (It was later in his ministry that his nephew, [“his sister’s son,” (See Acts 23:16.)] warned him that the religious leaders lay in wait to assassinate him.) Saul must have been an excellent student because only the best were privileged to learn “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3), who was “a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people” (Acts 5:34 NKJV).

It would seem that young Saul was an ambitious social climber who used his heritage and upbringing to press his advantage for promotion and authority. He had everything going for him—intelligence, education, ancestry. It wasn’t long before he had climbed to prominence in the ranks of the Jewish religious leadership, and he did so with the blessings of the Romans, who were aware of his citizenship and impressed with his knowledge of their customs. Who better to one day become high priest than a Pharisee who was also a Roman citizen?

The late-second-century apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* describes Saul as a “man small of stature, with bald head and crooked legs ... with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.”⁹ It would seem that what he lacked in height and appearance, even as a youth, he worked hard to make up for in scholarship, determination, and uncompromising pursuit of his goals.

SAUL THE PERSECUTOR

Paul’s early ambitions are perhaps best seen in his zeal to wipe out the followers of Jesus. While we have no record that Saul ever encountered

Jesus or heard Him speak, we do know that he violently opposed the early Christian movement. He also seemed to recognize the advantage his zeal would gain him in the eyes of the Jewish leadership. So motivated was he, that Paul rejected the advice of his own teacher, Gamaliel.

Gamaliel had expressed his thoughts about how the followers of Jesus should be dealt with: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:35-39 NKJV).

Saul was religious to a fault. While he refused to shed a drop of Stephen’s blood at his stoning recorded in Acts 7, he was more than willing to stand by and hold the coats of those who took part—carrying out his purpose while holding carefully to the letter of the Law. He did not have the same problem with throwing believers in prison however, nor was he averse to traveling far and wide to stamp out this new sect.

In a short time, he had built a reputation as a fierce persecutor of Jesus’ followers. It is easy to understand why Saul did not see Jesus as the Messiah. For him religion was a means to an end, a path to his goals of leadership and wealth, and his Messiah would be a conqueror before whom all other nations of the world would bow. This man who died on the Cross without a fight was certainly not worthy of his allegiance.

Still ... all of that changed in a single day.

ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

Saul was on the road to Damascus with letters from the high priest blessing his mission to extradite the Christians from Damascus to jail cells in Jerusalem. Just as they were approaching Damascus, a light from heaven shown down on Saul, blinding him and throwing him to the ground. The great persecutor then heard the voice of Jesus: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4 NKJV).¹⁰

In an instant, Saul realized that the defeated, executed Jesus was no misguided rebel, but the living Messiah. When the encounter was over, Saul rose to his feet and was led to Damascus. No, the others assured him. They had heard a sound but seen nothing.

Saul was no longer interested in capturing Christians and returning them to Jerusalem. Instead, he sat alone, blinded, refusing food and drink. There he remained until God sent a disciple named Ananias to pray for him. Three days after his encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, the scales fell from his eyes and he could see again. Acts 9:18-19 (NIV) says: “[Saul] got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.”

Soon after, Saul began sharing his testimony and preaching in the synagogues of Damascus, loudly proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Saul stayed in Damascus for some time, learning all he could from the disciples there and growing strong in his faith. Scholars estimate that Saul's conversion took place in 34 AD (at most four or five years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ).

According to his letter to the Galatians and Luke's history of the early church in the book of Acts, Paul spent the next three years of his life studying and teaching in Arabia and Damascus. It seems likely that he

spent this time searching the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies about the Messiah to show how Jesus had fulfilled them, as well as studying the life and teachings of Jesus from the reports of others.

Near the end of these three years, he returned to Damascus where “Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ [Messiah]” (Acts 9:22 NASB [insert added]). It was not long before these “confounded” Jews plotted to do away with Saul to shut him up, and he fled for his life. In order to escape, he was lowered in a basket through a hole in the city wall by night to avoid those waiting at the gates to kill him.

From Damascus, Saul returned to Jerusalem. His first attempts to meet with church leaders there were frustrated by his reputation as a persecutor and the suspicion that Saul was trying to trap them only in order to deliver them to the Jewish religious leaders. No one would agree to meet with him except Barnabas, who eventually reconciled Saul with the others and took Saul to meet with Peter and James.

Saul began again to boldly proclaim Jesus as the Messiah throughout Jerusalem, which motivated another plot to kill him—this time by a group of Greek Jews. When the Christian brothers heard of it, they smuggled Saul out of Jerusalem to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. According to Galatians 2:1, fourteen years would pass before Saul would return to Jerusalem.

BARNABAS AND SAUL IN ANTIOCH

In the meantime, other believers were also leaving Jerusalem and Israel because of these persecutions, and one such group traveled to Antioch. Because of their preaching, a revival broke out there among

both the Jews and the Gentiles (this was soon after God had shown Peter that the Gospel was for both the Jews and the Gentiles.) (See Acts 10:1–11:18.) When the church leaders in Jerusalem heard about this revival, they sent Barnabas to investigate.

Upon his arrival, Barnabas found a great hunger for more teaching about Jesus—too much for one man to handle. He went to Tarsus, enlisted the help of Saul, and turned with him to Antioch to continue encouraging the new believers “that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23 NKJV). It seems that it was in Antioch that God first laid a burden for the Gentiles on Saul’s heart, as it was also in Antioch that for the first time followers of Jesus were called Christians. (See Acts 11:26.) Christianity was just being understood as a message of salvation for all humankind.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

During a prayer meeting of the leaders of the church in Antioch, the Holy Spirit set Barnabas and Saul apart for a new work to which God was calling them. (See Acts 13:1-3.) As a result, Barnabas, Saul, and Barnabas’ nephew, John Mark (probably with others not mentioned) embarked on what was to become known as Saul’s first missionary journey. To begin this, they traveled to the coastal town of Seleucia and then by boat to Salamis on the island of Cyprus.

Barnabas and Saul took the message of Jesus the Messiah to the synagogues throughout Cyprus starting in Salamis all the way to Paphos. In Paphos, the Roman proconsul called Barnabas and Saul before him so that he could hear what they were teaching, but a sorcerer named Elymas opposed them and sought to discredit their message before the

proconsul. At this, Saul, filled with the Holy Spirit, rose up and rebuked Elymas, after which the Holy Spirit struck Elymas blind. At this the proconsul believed.

Two other significant things happened sometime around these events in Paphos. The first was that Saul stopped being called by the Aramaic form of his name—“Saul”—in favor of the Roman form—“Paul.” The second was that before this encounter Saul was always listed behind Barnabas, indicating he was following Barnabas’ leadership wherever they traveled. But, Acts 13:13 proclaims the group as “Paul and his company.” It appears that in Paphos Paul took over the leadership of the delegation as Barnabas and the others recognized what God was doing through him.

From Paphos, they traveled by boat to the province of Pamphylia (in what is today the nation of Turkey) and the cities of Attalia and Perga (where John Mark—later author of the gospel of Mark—“deserted” them), then on to the province of Pisidia and the city of Antioch (not to be confused with the Antioch in Syria). It was in Pisidian Antioch that Paul more fully recognized it was God’s calling on his life to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Before when he went to a new place, he would first preach Jesus in the synagogues. But now, he found that unnecessary. Instead, he preached the Gospel wherever he could muster a crowd. Signs, wonders, and healings continued as they went from town to town.

Paul’s message of God’s salvation provided through Jesus Christ met resistance wherever Paul preached it. In Pisidian Antioch, Jews who did not receive Paul’s teachings rose up against him and drove him on to the towns of Iconium and then Lystra in the province of Lycaonia. Eventually his persecutors followed him to Lystra where they mustered

a mob, stoned him, dragged him out of town, and left him for dead. (See Acts 14:19-20; 2 Corinthians 11:25.) The Great Persecutor had become the “Persecuted.”

Paul’s mission on earth was far from over, however, and God raised him up to continue on to Derbe. After teaching there, he returned through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch to strengthen the new brethren in these regions, and later returned by boat to Antioch of Syria.

PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

In Paul and Barnabas’ absence, a dispute had arisen in the church of Antioch about what responsibilities Christians had to Jewish law. Based on what he had learned in prayer and meditation on the scriptures, as well as what he had seen God do in his travels, Paul knew Jesus had fulfilled the purpose of the law, and now salvation was found through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Because of this, he felt compelled to return to Jerusalem in an official capacity, testify of what God was doing among the Gentiles, and establish with the leaders of the church that being circumcised and conforming to Jewish Law was unnecessary to receive salvation.

Thus Paul’s “official”¹¹ return to Jerusalem was to meet with Church leaders in an effort to clarify these points. Peter and James supported Paul’s doctrine of salvation through faith in the “church council” reported in Acts 15 (which probably took place circa AD 50). But, it would take time for the Church to fully deliver itself from the bonds of legalism and sectarianism. After all, these were deeply ingrained parts of their Jewish heritage.

Peter and James suggested that new Gentile believers should be required to follow only certain parts of the law such as abstaining “from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20 NKJV). Yet Paul reports in his letter to the Galatians that “They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do” (Galatians 2:10 NKJV). This is perhaps Paul’s first small step toward the revelation that love alone was the fulfillment of the whole law, as he would write later to the Roman believers. (See Romans 13:10.)

Despite Paul’s best efforts, however, the controversy continued. Sometime later, Paul was compelled to rebuke Peter in Antioch for refusing to eat with Gentile believers. Paul suggested that Peter was simply afraid of the legalists who were contradicting Paul’s teachings and saying that new male believers needed to be circumcised before they could be saved and Jews should not break bread with Gentiles. (See Galatians 2:11-21.)

PAUL’S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

After this meeting in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas returned to teach and preach in Antioch of Syria. After some months there, Paul again felt prompted to take the Gospel westward, but he and Barnabas had a falling out over who should accompany them. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along, but Paul, still bothered by John Mark’s desertion, would not agree. Instead, Paul promoted the idea of taking Silas. The disagreement caused the two missionaries to go their separate ways—Barnabas and John Mark set sail for Cyprus, never to be mentioned in the book of Acts again. Church history holds that John Mark eventually left to travel with Peter, from whose sermons he wrote the gospel of

Mark, while Barnabas, who was originally from Cyprus, was eventually martyred there. Paul and Silas traveled overland through Tarsus to revisit Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Along the way, Timothy joined them.

On this second journey, Paul traveled on through Galatia, but was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to continue eastward, so he and his companions turned north. When they reached Mysia, the Holy Spirit again changed their direction. Instead of continuing north into the province of Bithynia, they headed west and eventually wound up in Troas on the western coast of Asia Minor. Here Paul had a vision:

There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

—*Acts 16:9-10*

From Troas Paul and company took a ship to Neapolis and from there traveled to Philippi, where a church was started in the household of a businesswoman named Lydia. After this, Paul delivered a young slave girl of a spirit of divination, which angered her masters who had been profiting from her fortune-telling. They went to the authorities with their complaints and had Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison. That night they sang praises and thanksgivings to God because they had been counted worthy enough to suffer persecution for doing good. Eventually they were interrupted when an earthquake shook the jail until the doors of the cells sprang open. As a result of this miracle, the jailer and his family were saved.

From Philippi, the two traveled to Thessalonica, where Paul again preached and saw many come to Christ. Yet they were forced to flee by those who were jealous of their faith. From Thessalonica, they went to Berea, of whom the book of Acts tells us:

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed.

—*Acts 17:11-12*

When those who had persecuted them in Thessalonica heard what was happening in Berea, they went to drive Paul out of there as well. But Paul was able to leave Silas and Timothy to further encourage and establish the believers, and he traveled by ship to Athens, where the Word of God met with little response. Paul then traveled to Corinth where he spent the next year and a half (circa AD 53-55) establishing a church beginning in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, a Jew and his wife who had moved to Corinth when Emperor Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome. Eventually Silas and Timothy joined him in Corinth with good news of what was happening in Macedonia. Paul was jubilant to hear of the work the Thessalonians were doing and sent them his first letter. Though there is some scholarly debate on this point, it also seems likely Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians during this stay in Corinth. though some suggest an earlier writing. It is believed Paul's second letter to Thessalonica was also written during this time in Corinth.

From Corinth, Paul traveled by boat with Priscilla and Aquila and landed in Ephesus. Here Paul forcefully preached in the synagogues that Jesus was the Messiah. Some in Ephesus asked that he remain

there and teach them further, but he felt compelled to move on. Leaving Priscilla and Aquila to minister in Ephesus, Paul departed for Caesarea, returned to Jerusalem, and then eventually went back to Antioch of Syria.

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Shortly after his return to Antioch, Paul set out again to strengthen the churches he'd planted in Galatia and Phrygia before returning to Ephesus for two years "so that all they which dwelt in Asia [Minor] heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10 [insert added]). It was during this time (circa AD 57-60) that handkerchiefs and aprons were sent to Paul so that he could lay his hands on them and pray. So potent were his prayers that God's healing and delivering power traveled throughout the region. It was a busy time, but Paul found time to write to the Corinthians while he was there.

The impact of the Gospel in Ephesus was so great that many in the occult gathered their magic books and burned them in a public display of their allegiance to Christ (the value of these books was estimated at 50,000 pieces of silver). In another incident, a group of Jewish exorcists were beaten and left naked by a demonic spirit when they tried to cast him out in the name of "the Jesus whom Paul preaches" (Acts 19:13 NKJV). Finally so many were coming to Christ that those who made their living by producing and selling idols were being driven out of business. As a result, they formed a mob in protest of the growing Christian population and took the issue before the city officials who found that no crimes had been committed and dispersed the crowd.

Shortly before these riots, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus back through Macedonia to Corinth to prepare the way for his return. Paul later followed, exhorting the believers in every town along the way. (See Acts 20:1-3.) Many think that Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians while in Macedonia on the way back to Athens and Corinth. When he arrived again in Corinth, he spent three months there. While he felt compelled to continue on to Rome at the end of that time, he felt he should first return to Jerusalem. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans during this time in the hope that he would soon see the believers there.

Paul then retraced his steps through Macedonia to Philippi from where he sailed to Troas and spent a week. During this stay, on the first day of the week, he went to eat with a group of disciples. Since he was planning to leave the next day, the group kept him teaching until midnight. A youth named Eutychus, who had been sitting in a windowsill listening, fell asleep and tumbled three floors to his death. When Paul saw what had happened, he went to the young man, embraced him, and the youth's spirit returned to him.

Paul's next stop was Mitylene (the largest city on the Greek island of Lesbos), then on to Chios, Trogyllium, and Miletus. In Miletus, the Ephesians elders went to him in answer to his summons, and he told them of the bonds that he knew by the Spirit awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul said his good-byes—certain that he would never travel that way again—and exhorted them to remain strong in the Gospel, acting as shepherds, protecting the church against false prophets and persecutions that would come.

Paul sailed from there for Patara, then Tyre—where he was again warned through the Spirit that bonds awaited him in Jerusalem—then

on to Caesarea. In Caesarea Paul stayed in the home of Philip the Evangelist and his four daughters who were all prophetesses. There Agabus went to him and warned Paul that he would be arrested and imprisoned if he continued on to Jerusalem. But Paul was undeterred. When others wept for him and urged him not to go, he only answered:

“What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

—*Acts 21:13* NKJV

Some days after that, Paul returned overland to Jerusalem.

PAUL'S FINAL VISIT IN JERUSALEM

Paul arrived in Jerusalem for the last time around AD 60. Those in the church—among them James and some of the other elders—welcomed Paul warmly and glorified God when Paul told them of his travels and all who were coming to the Lord in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. When he was done, they warned Paul of the controversy that his ministry was causing among the legalistic Jews. In the hope of appeasing these Jews, James and the others urged Paul to join a group of four who were going to vow a vow to purify themselves. As was the custom, they would shave their heads, go to the temple to pray for seven days, and in the end offer sacrifices of cleansing. They hoped this would show those in Jerusalem that Paul still honored the Law.

However, as the seven days grew to an end, a group of the Jews who had opposed Paul in Asia Minor stirred up the Jews of Jerusalem:

“Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

—*Acts 21:28* NKJV

As a result, a mob seized Paul, intending to take him out of the temple and kill him. Their efforts were thwarted by Roman soldiers who put Paul in chains and demanded to know who he was and what he had done. When no one could give a satisfactory answer, the soldiers assumed Paul was an Egyptian who had recently stirred up an insurrection involving four thousand men. They knew nothing different until Paul spoke to them in Greek and asked them to quiet the crowd so he could address them.

Paul’s desire was to defend himself by telling his testimony and what God had done through him. When the crowd heard him speak in Hebrew, they quieted. Paul told them that he had once persecuted those in the way of Jesus. He also spoke of his conversion on the road to Damascus, how the Lord had healed his blindness, and finally told them that God had called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

At this, the crowd erupted in renewed anger. They cried out, throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust in the air. Soon they were calling for Paul to be slain as a blasphemer. To keep the peace, the Romans hustled Paul back to their barracks where they planned to scourge him until they learned why he had so angered the mob. They had not understood what he had said in Hebrew. At this, Paul asked them about the legality of beating a Roman citizen, and then the commander of the cohort stopped the preparations to scourge Paul. The next day he had Paul released, but not before he called together the chief priests

and Counsel of the Jews so that he could get to the bottom of the matter and find out why they were trying to kill Paul.

Paul again spoke boldly in defense of the truth. But again the chief priests and Jewish leaders were angered. For his own protection, the soldiers removed Paul and placed him in custody. The next night, Jesus appeared to Paul and told him:

“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

—*Acts 23:11* NKJV

Meanwhile, a conspiracy was formed against Paul. More than forty individuals vowed they would neither eat nor drink until he was dead. They planned to call for Paul to be brought to public trial and then take the opportunity to assassinate him. Paul’s nephew heard about the planned ambush, however, and warned Paul and the centurion commander. Paul was taken by military guard out of Jerusalem that very night and presented to the Roman governor Felix in Caesarea.

This gave Paul the opportunity to present the Gospel to Felix as he testified in his own defense. Paul remained in prison there for two years, being taken before Felix often to discuss matters of faith and the ways of righteousness. But Felix was more interested in Paul bribing his way out than in coming to the truth, and in the end, when Felix was replaced as governor by Porcius Festus, he left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews.

When Festus arrived in Israel, Jewish leaders again accused Paul of every crime they could think of, though they could prove none of them. Paul took the opportunity to defend the faith before Festus. When Festus suggested that Paul should return to Jerusalem to be tried, he responded by saying:

“I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.”

—*Acts 25:10-11* NKJV

When Festus had conferred with his council, he agreed: “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!” (*Acts 25:12* NKJV)

Before Paul was to be taken to Rome, King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, arrived for a visit, and after Festus told them of Paul’s case, Agrippa asked if he might hear Paul speak for himself. The following day Paul was again permitted to present an explanation for his faith in Jesus Christ before Festus, King Agrippa, Bernice, local military commanders, and other prominent leaders of the region. Paul spoke eloquently while presenting his case, and in the end, as Festus accused him of being mad because he proclaimed Jesus the first to be risen among the dead, Agrippa admitted, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (*Acts 26:28* NKJV). Others suggested that Paul was innocent and should be released. However, because he had appealed to Caesar, he would still have to be sent to Rome to be judged.

PAUL’S JOURNEY TO ROME

Paul and some other prisoners were delivered over to an Augustan centurion named Julius and put on an Adramyttian ship headed west. Luke and Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, traveled with

Paul and the others. Their first stop was in Sidon, where Paul was allowed to go ashore and receive care from friends. From there the ship sailed north of Cyprus and landed in Myra in Lycia. In Myra, Julius found an Alexandrian ship headed for Rome and put them aboard it.

When they put to sea again, the winds were against them, so they turned south to travel around Crete. They sailed with some difficulties and next put in at Fair Havens on the southern side of Crete. Because the seas were unfavorable for travel, they were forced to stay there for some time. When impatience caused them to sail anyway, Paul warned, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives” (Acts 27:10 NKJV). However, Julius listened more to the helmsman and owner of the ship, and they decided to set out for Phoenix, on the northwest side of Crete—a place that offered a better harbor in which to winter.

A short time later, receiving a favorably moderate southern wind, they set out trying to keep near the shore. However, not long into the trip they hit a violent southeastern wind called the Euroclydon, which kicked up the waves and drove the ship out to sea. The next day only brought a more violent storm, and, fearing they would be driven south onto the shallows of Syrtis in northern Africa, they put down the sea anchor to hold their course steadier, secured the rudder with ropes, and helplessly let the ship be driven along before the winds. The next day they began jettisoning the ship’s cargo in the hope of remaining afloat, and the following day threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. For fourteen days they saw neither the sun nor the stars. They might all have given up hope if Paul had not stood forward and proclaimed:

“Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.

And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.”

—*Acts 27:21-26* NKJV

On the fourteenth night of the storm, around midnight, the sailors felt that they might be approaching shore, so they let down soundings to find the waters growing increasingly shallow. Fearing they would be run aground on some unseen and rugged coastline, they put out four anchors in the stern of the ship and hoped for daybreak. A group of the sailors, hoping to escape with their lives, decided to tell the others they were putting out one of the ship’s boats to lay anchors from the bow. Their intention was to slip undetected from the ship and desert the others. Paul warned Julius of their plan, however, and because they could not sail the ship without these men, he cut the lines to the boat and let it float away before they could board it.

At this point, Paul urged them all to eat the remainder of the provisions so that they might have some strength for the struggle to reach shore that was about to come. He also promised each of them that not a hair on their heads would be harmed. Then he took bread, broke it, gave thanks for it, and ate. When the others had eaten, they threw the remaining wheat overboard in a final attempt to keep the ship afloat.

As dawn lightened the sky, they barely made out what looked to be a beach. They cut the anchors loose, cut the ropes that had held the rudder steady in the high winds, hoisted the sails, and resolved to drive the ship onto the sand. Some short distance from shore, however, they stuck solidly in a reef, and the wind and waves were so violent that they began to pound the back part of the ship into pieces. Fearing their escape, some of the soldiers decided to kill the prisoners and make for shore. However, Julius prevented them, wanting to protect Paul for all he had done. Julius then commanded that all who could swim should jump overboard and make for shore while the rest followed on whatever they could find that floated. Just as Paul had promised, the entire 276 souls on board the ship made it safely to shore.

The group had landed on the island of Malta, and those living there showed them great kindness. To help them dry, they started a fire. When Paul picked up a bundle of sticks to add to the fire, a viper came out of it and fastened itself onto his hand. The islanders suspected that he was a murderer and justice would not allow him to live even though he had just been saved from the sea. However, Paul merely shook the snake off into the fire. When his hand didn't swell and he didn't grow sick from the bite, the islanders began to regard him as a god. Then when Paul laid hands on and prayed for a local village leader's father and the man was healed, all of the sick on the island came to him asking for prayer.

Three months later, Paul set sail for Rome on a ship that had wintered on the island. The locals supplied them with everything they needed for the voyage. From there they sailed north and put in at Syracuse on the island of Sicily, then Rhegium, Puteoli, and on to Rome overland. When believers in Rome heard they were coming, they

went as far south as Three Taverns and Appius to meet them. Paul and his companions rejoiced at their coming.

PAUL'S FINAL YEARS

Upon arriving in Rome (sometime around AD 60), Paul was allowed to find his own residence where he remained under Roman guard. Here he again proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah to the Jewish leaders and all who would come to hear. When the Jews in Rome refused to believe, Paul rebuked them:

“Let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”

—*Acts 28:28* NKJV

The Jews departed, arguing among themselves.

For the next two years, Paul remained in his rented house welcoming all who came to him and freely preaching the kingdom of God and Jesus the Messiah. It is believed that it was during this time he wrote his prison epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, as well as the first two of his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus.

Since this is where the book of Acts ends, there is much conjecture as to what happened in the rest of Paul's life. A common belief is that Paul had two Roman imprisonments. It is believed that Paul was left pretty much to himself except for a guard during his first imprisonment. The second was spent in an actual prison.

Acts indicates that Paul's first imprisonment ended two years after his arrival in Rome—which would have been sometime around AD 62.

Many believe that Paul did further missionary work for the next three years, traveling west perhaps as far as the Spanish Peninsula, but was then imprisoned again upon his return. It was during this last imprisonment that Paul wrote his final epistle preserved in our modern Bible, the letter of 2 Timothy. In it, Paul bid his farewell:

I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

—2 *Timothy* 4:6-8 NKJV

Church history tells us that Paul was beheaded in Rome sometime around AD 66. St. Paul's Cathedral, which still stands in the modern Italian city of Rome, was built to commemorate the location where Paul finally finished his race and went home to his reward.