

An icon of Saint Paul, depicted with a dark beard and hair, wearing a blue tunic and a red cloak. He is holding a book in his left hand. The background is a textured gold leaf. A faint, reddish-brown inscription is visible in the upper right corner of the icon.

PAUL

An introduction

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOKLET:

Christian theology is meant to be lived. It is in its living that it becomes part of the fabric of who we are.

In each of the following sections, you will find tangible ways of breathing fresh life into old ideas.

Look at each exercise listed.

In each section, try the one that energizes you the most. But don't stop there.

Also try the one that sparks the most discomfort. Through both, you will grow.



Remember that the goal isn't to be successful, but to attend to the emotions that emerge.

When you can, gather with a small group of fellow so-journers to discuss your experience of Paul's theology.

PAUL:

THE PROUD APOSTLE OF JESUS

First known as Saul of Tarsus, Paul devoted his life to the persecution of early followers of Jesus. Scripture says that he “ravaged the church by entering house after house.” After a life-changing encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, Saul dusts off his Roman name, Paul, to devote his life to the Gospel.

Paul, the Apostle of Jesus, was a man of vibrant faith whose words continue to challenge the introspective consciousness of every person of faith. His influence is broad.

But Paul’s teachings, to a 21st century follower of Christ, aren’t always easy.





They challenge our worldview.

They create dissonance with much of contemporary culture.

We invite you through this *Introduction to Paul* to explore anew the broad strokes of Paul’s theology.



JOURNEYS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

-  First Journey
-  Second Journey
-  Third Journey
-  Voyage to Rome

PAUL ON FAITH

Paul's epistles reveals a dynamic personality which encourages many descriptive words: proud, arrogant, strong, courageous, mystical, and as a recent theologian suggested, obnoxious. He claimed the name Apostle despite some resistance from others. He challenged those who walked with Jesus and witnessed the death and resurrection of Jesus, claiming his own authority from his mystical encounters with Jesus. He has been called a traitor by the Jewish leaders and evil by many Muslim leaders.

How you view Paul must begin with how you interpret that dramatic moment on a Roman road when he falls on his knees, blinded by a light. The words he hears from Jesus changes his life and the future of Christianity dramatically and explosively. Paul, as well as Peter and many of the disciples, were the people of The Way, later called Christians. Paul's theological statements dictated the direction of Christianity, but how are his teachings still relevant? How do they challenge a post-theist culture? Have the misinterpretations of his teachings brought about a distrust of our faith and caused people to turn away?

A detailed background illustration depicting the conversion of Paul. On the left, a white horse stands near a stone wall with a small arched window. In the center, a man in a dark robe is shown in a dramatic, falling or falling-back position. On the right, a figure with a halo, representing Jesus, is shown in a circular frame, looking down. The scene is set in a rocky, mountainous landscape.

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Acts 9:1-22.

EXPLORING FAITH:

Create space in your daily routine to incorporate times of silent prayer.

After his encounter with the risen Christ, Paul fasted. Explore the concept of fasting.

Journal about a time when your life direction changed most drastically. Where was God in that?

Remember your first encounter with Christ. Share your story with someone over coffee.

Sit still somewhere in God's creation where you feel at home. For 30 minutes, repeat Paul's first question to Jesus: "Who are you, Lord?" Listen.

PAUL ON LOVE

In many of his exhortations to young churches, Paul articulates over and over the centrality of love to the life of the believer. "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing," he writes to a group of followers in Corinth.

Indeed. Without love, all of this falls apart - all that we endeavour to accomplish, all that we pursue, all that we create.

Without love, all of it is empty.

For Paul, love wasn't something to be received or expected, but something to give - an outward action, unconditionally.

But what was going on with the Church in the 1st century that Paul had to remind Christ's followers of one of their central tenets? And why is it that, two thousand years later, we still seem to struggle to live into the fullness of one of Jesus' most elemental teachings.



KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 13.

EXPLORING LOVE:

Write the word LOVE on a piece of paper. Leave it in a public space for the right person to find. ●

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as slowly as you can, reflecting on the meaning of every word. ●

Think of a time when you felt most loved. Create a similar space for someone else. ●

Mean every word you say for 24 hours. ●

Learn about the *5 Love Languages*. Be intentional about trying all five. ●

For one week, practice the art of assuming the best of others and of their intentions. ●

Find one way to serve someone new. ●

PAUL ON SIN

When someone commits to following Christ, there may become a great chasm between the person they want to be and the person they think they should be as a proclaimer of Jesus. When we catch ourselves doing, believing, thinking or saying something that no longer fits with our understanding of what it means to be Christian, or live the life God would have us live, it can feel like we carry a heavy burden. We become deeply aware that we have failed at being a "good Christian" and an inward battle ensues. This can become just another opportunity to beat ourselves up and stay stuck in the paralysis of shame.

In Romans 7, Paul integrates his own experience of transformation following his encounter with Christ, and shares this with a new band of Jesus followers. He writes as a man, fully aware of his failings, and yet, fully embracing the incongruous gift given to us in Jesus the Christ.

We find in Paul a real fleshy human being, but also a courageous leader who points us in the direction of our own transformation and redemption.



KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Romans 7:14 to Romans 8:2.

EXPLORING SIN:

Acknowledge your shortcomings, and prayerfully
surrender your ways to Christ.

Be less hard on yourself.

Journal your life's regrets. Prayerfully invite God to
show you their significance in your life.

Make an inventory of your relationships. Which ones
are in need of forgiveness - asked or extended?

Quietly review your actions and words of the week.
Which ones brought life? Which ones didn't?

What are your "things you do that you don't want to
do"? Discuss them with a trusted person.

PAUL ON THE END TIMES

Paul believed that Jesus was returning at any moment. His eschatology was influenced by Jewish apocalyptic writing learnt at the feet of his teacher Gamaliel the Elder, a leading authority and advisor within the Sanhedrin (Acts 22: 3). Many have suggested Gamaliel was present, and perhaps a young student called Saul, that dark night in the Jewish Sanhedrin when Jesus stood condemned before the assembly.

Paul's early understanding reflects a man who stood with one hand on the precious teachings of the Torah, but with his face turned towards his other hand pointing forward to a renewed hope. In his early letters, Paul urges the new followers of Jesus to be constantly vigilant. As the years passed and Jesus had not yet returned, he realized the date was not immediate. The timbre of his warnings in his epistles is less urgent, but it affects his theological understanding as related to the covenant. His messages begin to adapt to this growing awareness. This creates some incongruence with his earlier words when he was encouraging people to be ready to meet their reward in death.

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:14-16 & 2 Corinthians 3:1-12.

EXPLORING THE END TIMES:

List 5 things that give you hope in this world,
and 5 things that worry you.
Spend time praying for the items on your list.

Think of one concrete way you can live out
our Church's mission statement.

Read a newspaper, and pray over events in the news.

Encourage someone who you see living the fullness
of who God created them to be.

Walk through your neighbourhood, praying
"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven."

MORE ON PAUL...

Paul the apostle was born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11), South Central Turkey between 5BC - 5AD, 316km south of Aleppo. He grew up in Jerusalem.

Paul's Hebrew name was Saul, quite possibly named after King Saul. Paul means "little."

Paul travelled over 10,000 miles (16093.44 kilometres) in his three missionary journeys between 46AD and 67AD.

Paul was imprisoned four times and tradition suggests he was beheaded in Rome 67AD during the reign of Nero.

Paul was trained as a teenager in the school of Gamaliel. Gamaliel the Elder was a leading authority in the Sanhedrin in the early 1st century AD in Jerusalem.

Wine was a common drink of Paul's day, but it was not the wine of our day. In the Greco-Roman world, pure wine was considered strong and unpleasant, so some Greeks diluted wine with seawater.

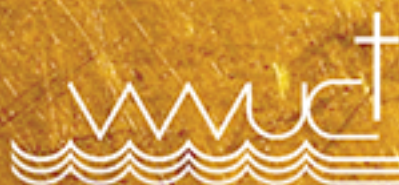
FURTHER RESOURCES:

Marcus J. Borg & John D. Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010).

NT Wright, *The Paul Debate: Critical Questions for Understanding the Apostle* (Waco, TX: Baylor University: 2015).

Wayne A. Meeks, ed., *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York, NY: W W Norton & Co Inc, 2004).

With Love.



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