



What does the Scripture say?

A Life Devoted to Christ 1 Timothy 1:1

Introduction:

As we begin our journey through the book of 1 Timothy, we need to focus on the very first word of the book. It's actually a proper noun, a name. The word is "Paul" who is the author of the book and probably the most well-known Christian who has ever lived.

While we can't exhaust everything the New Testament teaches us about Paul in one message, we can identify three major contours of his life. These three major contours are Paul – the Persecutor, Paul – the Preacher, and Paul – the Planter. These three major contours each have an application to our lives. Paul – the Persecutor tells us something about God's Grace, Paul – the Preacher tells us something about the Gospel, and Paul – the Planter tells us something about Christ's Great Commission. God's grace, the Gospel, and Christ's Great Commission impact every life (not only Paul) which is truly devoted to Christ.

1. The Persecutor

One of the well-known facts about Paul's life is that he was a persecutor of the Church before he became a Believer in Christ. Three key texts tell us about his life as a persecutor.

First, when Luke tells us about the execution of Stephen in Acts 7:54-8:1, he also tells us that those who stoned Stephen to death "laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58) and that when Stephen died, "Saul was there, giving approval to his death" (Acts 8:1). So our very first introduction to Saul (also called Paul) is a young man who gave his approval to the execution of the first martyr of the Church, Stephen.

Second, when Luke tells us about Paul's conversion in Acts 9, he also tells us three things in this chapter which give us insight into Paul's life as a persecutor of the Church.

To begin with, Luke describes Saul/Paul as "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1) and that he was on a journey to imprison Believers, men or women (Acts 9:2). Luke's description of Paul's activity here is a mission to seek and destroy. Just as Paul as a Believer embarked on missionary journeys abroad as a preacher to spread the Gospel, he set out on journeys abroad as a persecutor to silence the Church (Acts 26:9-11).



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Next, when Luke tells us about Ananias' fears concerning Saul/Paul, we learn that Paul's reputation as a persecutor preceded him. He was known as a person who harmed God's saints and was determined to shut them up (Acts 9:13-14).

Lastly, when Luke tells us that Paul wanted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, "they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple" (Acts 9:26). Yet, after Barnabas personally stood up for Paul, he was received by the disciples, and Luke tells us that "the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace" (Acts 9:30). The implication here seems to be that since Paul was converted and no longer breathing out his "murderous threats" against Christians, the Church experienced a time of peace.

Third, Paul also comments about his life as a persecutor which may indicate to us how he seemed to carry a burden about this from his past. For example, in **1 Corinthians 15:9**, he writes, "*I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*"

So it's clear that our first impression about Paul from the New Testament is that of a persecutor, and we can draw an application from this for our own lives. The application focuses on God's grace. Simply put: If God's grace could save a persecutor and transform him into a preacher, there's hope for all of us! This is precisely a point Paul makes in **1 Timothy 1:15-16**: "*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*" Regardless of how deep and crimson sin's stain is on our soul, Christ's blood can wash it white as snow! The hymn-writer captured this truth powerfully in the verses of *Wonderful Grace of Jesus*:

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, Greater than all my sin
How shall my tongue describe it, Where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden, Setting my spirit free
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me*

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, Reaching to all the lost
By it I have been pardoned, Saved to the uttermost
Chains have been torn asunder, Giving me liberty
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me*

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, Reaching the most defiled
By its transforming power, Making him God's dear child
Purchasing peace and heaven, For all eternity
And the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me*



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2. The Preacher

The second contour of Paul's life which is as equally well-known as the first contour is the fact that he was a preacher. Paul's own words at the conclusion of his testimony in **Galatians 1:22-24** sum-up this point best: "*I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'* ²⁴ *And they praised God because of me.*"

God's grace transformed Paul from a persecutor to a preacher! As mentioned above, just as Paul formerly traveled on missions to persecute the Church, he now traveled on missions to preach and build-up the Church.

The application of this point for our lives is clear. Our lives should be devoted to proclaiming the same message of the Gospel to the whole world which God has used to transform us. This was Paul's focus as a Believer, and it should be our focus as well. We should ask God to burn into our hearts the same words Paul pens concerning his passion to preach the Gospel.

For example, in **Acts 20:24** Paul says, "*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*" In **Romans 15:20** Paul says, "*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.*" Paul speaks of an all-consuming compulsion to preach the Gospel in **1 Corinthians 9:16** when he says, "*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*"

Why should Paul and every other Believer devote their lives to proclaiming the Gospel? Paul fittingly answers this question for us when he writes in **Romans 1:16-17**, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'*" Obviously, we devote our lives to proclaim the Gospel because this is the message of God's saving grace to change lives both now and forever for His glory.

The Gospel, the Good News, is what Jesus said He was anointed by the Spirit of God to preach in Luke 4:18, and according to Mark 1:15, this is exactly what Jesus did preach! The Gospel is simply the "Good News" of how Christ came into our world to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) through His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Since we have all sinned and fall woefully short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), Christ took our sins upon Himself when He died to pay sin's penalty on the



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cross, and He offers us His perfect righteousness in sin's place (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we repent and believe in Christ by God's grace (Mark 1:15), we are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9). Of course, everyone who is truly saved by God's grace is transformed into new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) whose lives show God's on-going work of grace in their lives as the Lord finishes the good work He began in them (Philippians 1:6). Again, we devote our lives to proclaim this message because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

3. The Planter

We use the word "planter" to describe the final contour of Paul's life for three reasons. First, Paul described himself as one who "plants" God's "seed". In **1 Corinthians 3:6-7** Paul writes, *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."* In other words, Paul viewed himself as someone called by God to sow the seed of God's message and work into others, and God was the One who really made the seed grow.

Second, Paul planted the seed in individuals directly. For example, Timothy was a young man whom Paul met on his second missionary journey and disciplined for God's Kingdom purposes (Acts 16:1-3). In fact, the whole book of 1 Timothy is Paul's instructions to Timothy as he continues to lead the Church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3).

We can also expand Paul's work in planting the seed in others to encompass people whom Paul would impact indirectly or through Timothy. For instance, in **2 Timothy 2:1-2** Paul tells Timothy: *"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."* Clearly, Paul understood that his investment in Timothy's life should not end with Timothy; rather, Paul intended for Timothy to take his teachings and share them with others. In this way, Paul would have a direct impact on Timothy and an indirect impact on others for generations to come.

Third, Paul planted Churches. As Paul traveled on his missionary journeys, he preached the Gospel. As some people believed the Gospel, Paul encouraged them to continue walking with Christ side-by-side with other Believers in the context of the Body of Christ or the local Church. For example, when Paul and Barnabas decided to embark on their second missionary journey, Luke tells us what their purpose was in **Acts 15:36**: *"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.'" Of course, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over who should go along with them, and they eventually went their separate ways. But Luke tells us this about Paul's journey in **Acts 15:41**, *"[Paul] went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."**



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A key idea to note here is that “the brothers in all the towns” mentioned in Acts 15:36 is a parallel thought with “the churches” mentioned in Acts 15:41. Basically, we see clearly in these two verses that Paul was planting local Churches, organized groups of Believers who were an expression of the Body of Christ.

All of these aspects of Paul’s life as a “planter” combine to bring one particular point of application to our lives. We should be focused on Christ’s Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). As individual Believers, we should be committed to investing our lives into teaching others both at home and abroad who will then be equipped to teach others. As a Church, we should be committed to seeing the mission and ministry of the Church flourish both at home and abroad.

There are many practical ways Churches can engage in a “planting” focus. Our multi-site strategy to reach out to our communities and beyond, for instance, is a way we can easily see how God can reproduce us to sow the seed of the Gospel into the lives of more people.

Conclusion:

While Paul was an individual Believer whom God used in unique ways at the particular time and places where he served, the applications we can draw from his life are appropriate for every Believer today. Our lives should be devoted to Christ by being examples of God’s life-transforming grace, by being ambassadors of Christ who proclaim to the Gospel to everyone, and by being obedient disciple-making disciples who are devoted to fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission. This is a life devoted to Christ!