



The Early Years

- Paul's name at birth was Saul, after the first king of Israel
- Born between 5 BC and 10 AD in Tarsus (present-day Turkey)
- Paul was Jewish, but raised in a predominately Gentile city
- Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:26)
- Paul was a trained tentmaker (Acts 18:3)
- Paul was very well educated

Like Paul, your childhood, education, and early life experiences shape your personality and have a direct impact on your life.

Think About It

How might God use the puzzle pieces of your life—
your childhood, education, family, passions, religious background
—to accomplish His purposes?

Saul the Persecutor

- We meet Paul (Saul) for the first time in Acts 7, two years after the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
- By this time Christianity claimed several thousand adherents.
- A man named Stephen was a leader in the Christian movement. Jewish leaders arrested, tried, and convicted him of blasphemy.

[They] dragged [Stephen] out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul...Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. Acts 7:58; 8:1a (NLT)

- Paul (Saul), a “young man” at the time, gave his approval.
- From that time, followers of Jesus were severely persecuted.

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. ...But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. ...Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their

cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. Acts 8:1b, 8:3, 9:1–2 (NLT)

- Paul (Saul) was on the fast track to a seat on the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council). He was out to make a name for himself.

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation, and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. Galatians 1:14 (NET)

The Call to Follow – On the Damascus Road

...I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³ when at midday along the road...I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. ¹⁴ When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting...’ Acts 26:12–15 (NRSV)

Like Paul, God frequently prods you and me. God prods us to LEAD us, GUIDE us and MOVE us in the direction of His will. He prods us to get our attention, and although we are able to resist the prodding, God is persistent. Are you paying attention? Is God prodding you to move in a different direction? It’s miserable to kick against the goad of God.

- Paul was temporarily blinded by the bolt of light.
- His traveling companions took him to a house on Straight Street, and he stayed there three days unable to eat or drink.
- At the same time, in a vision, God was prodding a man named Ananias.

The Lord said, “Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. ¹² I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again.”

¹³ “But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! ...” Acts 9:11–13 (NLT)

- Reluctantly, Ananias went to the house where Paul was staying.

...“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Acts 9:17–18 (NLT)

Think About It

Who are the Ananias-like people in your life?
Who needs you to be like Ananias in their life?
Have you surrendered your will to God’s will?
In what ways are you “kicking against the goad” of God?