

### Immediate yet Transcendent

Unmistakably, Paul is my hero of the faith. His courage, candor, and endurance, in relying on God's grace and power, have shaped my concept of what a believer of Christ is and of what he or she could be in yielding to God. What makes this man so compelling to me? Two of Paul's characteristics are instrumental in forging this claim on my heart: his ability to bond with his reader in immediate, heartfelt fellowship, and his capacity to transcend the deprivation and hardship of the present moment. Underlying both of these aspects is Paul's recognition that he would undoubtedly experience hardship if he chose to walk closely with Christ. And yet when Paul compared those hardships (the beatings, insults, and deprivations) with the joy of knowing Christ, he found that they paled in comparison.

Similarly, undergirding Paul's character and actions lays an additional recognition: Despite Paul's unique calling as the last apostle, we too may share in his ministry, participate in his suffering, know the fellowship of the saints, and experience joy united in Christ.

#### Monday – Paul's Perspective

1. Please read Romans 1:1-2. Paul had a remarkable mentality. Though he was a very learned man, he regarded himself as a servant (literally a slave) of Christ. How was he able to do that?
2. What does Paul say about the gospel in these verses? Why did Paul consider the news about Christ to be such "good news?"

**Digging Deeper** – Paul considered the news about Christ so good, he was willing to suffer deeply for it (consider the introductory comments above). How good would something have to be in order for you to be willing to suffer as Paul suffered? What did Paul know about the Gospel that we may not yet fully understand?

#### Tuesday – Paul's Heart

1. Please read Romans 1:8-13. Paul wears his heart on his sleeve with respect to these new acquaintances; speaking of longing to see them. What seems to be the cause of this longing?

**Text Insight** – Unlike the churches that Paul had established in Corinth and elsewhere, it is unlikely that Paul had ever met the Roman Christians to whom he was writing. The believing community in Rome may have consisted of five or more home fellowships. Mostly they were made up of Gentile members, though Jewish Christians seem to be in attendance too.

2. What would satisfy the longing of Paul's heart?

**Making it Personal** – Our hearts are rarely silent. What have been your heart's longings this past week? What would you say that Paul's longing would be for you concerning your own heart? Pray that the longings of your heart would be offered up to God today, that in opening to him and his purposes for your life, that he could fully grant you the deep desires of your heart.

#### Wednesday – Paul's Bond to Others

1. As we continue to explore the life of Paul, we turn for the remainder of this week to some of Paul's other writings. Please read 2 Timothy 1:3-10 (This letter to Timothy is one of Paul's last, in which he realizes that his own death approaches.)
2. What have Paul and Timothy shared together in the past? How would you describe the nature of Paul's friendship with Timothy?

**Making it Personal** – Various barriers exist in our contemporary context that can limit a similar, deep, authentic bond between believers. What do you think the main barriers are that impede your ability to share open-heartedly at a level such as the one that Paul describes? It is God's will to remove such barriers. Pray that God gives you insight about overcoming or dismantling such obstacles to more genuine fellowship today.

#### Thursday – Paul's Manner

1. Please read I Corinthians 9:1-22. Facing strained relationships with some who were a part of the Corinthian church, Paul responds to those who challenged his credentials as an apostle. In verses 7-12, Paul illustrates his right to be entitled to room and board while working with the Corinthians. Why does he not exercise his right to compensation while he was with the Corinthian Church?
2. Something like a chameleon, Paul acquires various appearances depending upon his social context. How might "becoming all things to all men" affect Paul's social standing in Corinth?

**Making it Personal** – What about us? Which men or women is God calling you to identify with "for the sake of the gospel?" Pray for these who come to your mind.

#### Friday – Paul's Hope

1. Please read Romans 8:18-21 and 28-37. This passage illuminates the hope which propelled Paul forward through his sufferings and difficulties. What stands out to you about Paul's hope?
2. Paul's picture of the future was glorious. What is glorious about the future, according to Paul?
3. Paul was convinced that God's work is always for the good of those he loves. We may make choices that are unhealthy, but God's choices for us are always "good." How did this truth help Paul in his circumstances? How does believing this truth help you in your present circumstances?

**For the Weekend:** Please read about Paul's aim in Philippians 3:10-14. What goals were not integral to Paul's life? What goal is he running after in order to "win the prize for which God" had called him heavenward...? You and I face numerous goals in our jobs, in our friendships and families, and in our own sense of our God-given abilities. As we enter the holiday season and begin to think about the New Year, offer yourself to God in your goal-making for 2007.