

Acts 9:19b-31
Not A One-Man Show
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Intro:

The apostle Paul had what we would call, a dramatic conversion story (9:1-31). It was captivating. Combine that with a strong personality—maybe an “A-type”.

Anyone with popularity and strong personality will need to fight extra hard at not becoming a One-Man- show. I think Paul was aware of this, and you can hear he heart ...

(1 Cor 15:9-10)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Main point: *Whatever Jesus calls us to do, he provides the necessary grace to do it.*

This account in Acts shows us that the apostle Paul is not going to be a one-man-show. *He is deeply aware of his need for grace and his need for others.*

Likewise, we all are deeply in need of grace and the help of others. None of us are one-man (woman) shows. They don't exist in the Christian life.

Let's turn and look at necessary grace, keeping in mind that
Whatever Jesus calls us to do, he provides the necessary grace to do it.

Necessary grace in boldness (20, 27-28)

- Here is a foretaste of what Paul's service to Christ will look like.
- It doesn't take Paul long to start sharing his new faith.
- According to Gal. 1, Paul also spent time in Arabia during this period.

- V20 notes that “immediately” Paul begins to proclaim Christ in the synagogue. Even though Paul is a missionary to non-Jews, he sees Jews as getting a priority of the gospel preached - (Rom 1:16) “to the Jew first...”

- We need to remember he had a very robust knowledge of the Scriptures. He was not biblically illiterate.
- Later Paul tells Timothy (1 Tim 3:6) that new converts are not ready to be elders.

Paul as an emerging early leader is an exception, not the rule.

- Later Paul tells Timothy (1 Tim 3:6) that new converts are not ready to be elders.
- After leaving Damascus, Paul is taken to Jerusalem (27-28)—what catches Barnabas’s attention is Paul’s boldness. The word for bold —occurs 7 times in Acts. That gets our attention.

Jesus expects his followers to be bold. It’s not a personality but a calling, and empowering.

- The boldness led to Paul proclaiming Jesus as the Son, and proving he was the Christ (Messiah).
- The origin word behind “proved” means to bring something together as a unit. Paul’s MO would be to show the OT promise alongside of its fulfillment in Christ.

Boldness involves knowing the Word well.

There is an irony in everything that has unfolded. Paul is a man who respects authority (Rom 12); he gets commissioned by an authority to harass Christians. But now a higher authority—the Lord Jesus Christ—has commissioned him. He has a new mission.

What motivates boldness?

1. The Spirit of God
2. But also the authority behind the commission (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus is head of the church.

Boldness in sharing the gospel is one of the signs we don't think we are one-man show. It shows that we've submitted and put ourselves under a higher authority, the Lord Jesus Christ. We take his command seriously to go and make disciples of all nations.

Which means that our silence or passivity is probably more indication of a one-man show mentality.

Necessary grace for protection (23-25)

- Twice, there is a real, credible threat to Paul's life—in Damascus and Jerusalem. And both times Paul is delivered.
- This again is part of the calling that Jesus has on his life (v16).

But note how he is delivered...not by an angels *but disciples*.

Disciples had his back.

- Let's zero in on the Damascus escape (23-25)
 - The Jews were plotting to kill Paul
 - God graciously made him aware
 - (v25) The disciples make a plan of his escape
- Houses sometimes were built into the city wall. Apparently either a disciple had or knew of a house located here.

This is no one-man show...Paul leans heavily on disciples for help.

Apply: Surely, these men are not major players, but they had a significant role to play. *They were God's means of Paul staying alive.*

- Note, the text says they are "his" disciples. Paul had personally invested time and energy with these guys. We don't know a single name, but they are critical.

Don't be discouraged if your role and calling is more "behind the scenes". Your role is still maybe more critical that you realize.

Other disciples are often the means of our protection. Sometimes it's physical, like here, or the Ten Boom family during the Holocaust. Sometimes its spiritual protection. I have a friend with a really strong personality who personally went to a church member's house when that man had moved in with his girlfriend. Out of love, he told the man he was not leaving unless he was going to move out.

That's a basket-lowering disciple.

Over the past 10 years of being in ministry and preaching, there have been a handful of people who tell me sincerely that they pray for me daily. That's also a basket lowering love.

I take this very seriously. If someone came up to me and said that they would either pay for an all-expense paid trip to Israel for me and my wife, or commit to pray daily for me the rest of my ministry, I'd take the prayer. It's basket-lowering love.

Only God knows how many times disciples have "lowered the basket" and protected me by prayer. And this is not just for the preaching pastor—it's all of us elder/shepherds, we covet your prayers.

—Finally, the basket incident reminded Paul how totally dependent we are on the Lord.

(2 Cor 11:32-33)

"³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands."

Our boast is not that we are one-man shows, but we are weak and always in need of Christ's power working through us.

Necessary grace of friendship (26-27)

- After the escape, Paul returns to Jerusalem; about 3 years after his conversion.
- He is met by a lot of natural skepticism. *It takes a lot of grace to overturn a negative reputation.
- We can't blame them. Is Paul giving lip-service just to spy to find who all the Christians are and turn them in?

- In steps Barnabas.

Barnabas is a “son of encouragement”

- Here we see him live up to his name. He encourages the apostles to give Paul a chance, give him a hearing.
- Barnabas acts as a mediator, peacemaker, encourager. He acts like Christ. He becomes a friend to Paul. He becomes a friend who, like Jesus said, is willing to lay down his life (Jn 15:13)

Apply: Again, this is also the opposite of a one-man-show mentality. Simply put, we need friends to survive spiritually.

Prov 18:24 “there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother”

Prov 17:17 “A friend loves at all times”

Apply: Do you see spiritual friends as a “necessary grace”?

Who is your close spiritual friend? Do you have one? Who do you intentionally go out of your way to love and encourage?

Friendships do not happen passively. You can’t sit on your hands and have spiritual friends. Barnabas did not.

Scripture says that Jesus offers us his friendship

(Jn 15:14-15)

“¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

Do you have the friendship of Christ? He invites you to it. Taking his word and saving promises by faith alone, resting in his grace, following in obedience, we become friends.

There is nothing more meaningful and fulfilling than that!

Necessary grace with direction (29-30)

- Finally, Paul finds grace in direction.

- Often, we think that direction in life is something *we have to find out, and that we determine*.
- The reality is that sometimes circumstances (God decreeing them), forces a certain direction.
- Again, there is a plot to kill.
- And again, we see disciples stepping in. Not through a basket deliverance, but “sending him to Tarsus”.

We are not sure how it all played out—but the text shows us that this was not Paul’s doing; not his strategic thinking. *It was disciples caring for and loving a brother, and a strong leader humble enough to listen.*

Apply: When we are seeking the will of God in our life, how much direction do we seek from other believers? Do we think we know best?

- ****Note that all this grace comes through relationships, specifically through other disciples.**

Everywhere Paul went, he sought to link arms with other disciples.

Finally, we know this is not a one-man-show...we don’t hear about Paul again until 11:25 when Barnabas has to go looking for him at Tarsus.

This section is summed up, not with our focus on any man...but on the work of the Spirit (31)—a report of a healthy church: peace, strength, encouragement from Spirit, godly, and growing.

****I find it helpful that the last word in this section is not about Paul...but a *focus on the church*.**

Conclusion

“True conversion always issues in church membership.” —John Stott

It’s fitting that today we welcome new members to our church today. I think that joining a church is making a public statement that we are not a one-man show.

Christ has a calling on our lives, but we are in deep need of *grace, and each other*.

(Heb 10:24-25) "Let's consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another."

We are not called to navigate the life of discipleship alone. We are not one-man-shows.