

Mission Possible

“Too Legit to Quit”

Acts 9:19-31 AMPC

One word from God can literally change our life forever. The Word of God is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword, and God wants us to say, *“I need that - that’s for me!”* We should also look at the life of Paul in the Book of Acts and say, *“I need that in my life!”* God wants to make us “too legit to quit” right now. Legit means “genuine, true - to be conformed to legal standards - conformed to *God’s* standards.”

Nothing can stop us when the force of Truth and grace is unleashed in our life. It’s like a sharp knife slicing through adversity, opposition, set-backs, disappointment, abandonment, rejection and disillusionment. None of that can stop us when God makes us too legit to quit.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 NLT

“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.”

There is a *purpose* to the trouble we face - to the fact that we’re called to be identified with the very suffering that Jesus went through. It doesn’t stop there, that’s just where it *starts*. It’s the trouble, perplexity, disillusionment, sense of abandonment - of being hunted down - all the things that come at us and against us that set the stage for the grace of God to take effect in our lives.

If we don’t allow God to set the stage with a bit of trouble, then we will never see and experience the magnitude, the force, and the power of the grace that he wants to show us. It’s when we first identify with him and his suffering that we also get to participate with him in his grace and his life, and we can’t be stopped. We need to let God work his process in us in the way that he wants to that will take us to the place where we literally can’t be stopped.

How compelling would it be to a lost and dying world if we were Christians who couldn't be stopped no matter the adversity because of the force of his grace alive on the inside of us? This is what we see in the life of Paul when God hit the re-boot button in his life and afterwards he went into a legitimizing journey with God that lasted fourteen years - and *Saul* (meaning *borrowed*) became *Paul* (which means *small or humble*).

Saul, before being knocked off his high horse, was living on a *borrowed* faith - a borrowed righteousness - a borrowed sense of legitimacy that he got from his religion teachers and not from *God*. But then a process was started when he became Paul as he realized that the smaller *he* got, the bigger *God* got in his life, and the more he became *humbled* under the mighty hand of God, the more God began to *exalt* him and to pour out his grace on his life until he became the greatest of all the apostles.

If we think that's just for Paul, then we've missed the reason for the whole Bible. It got written down because we need that. It's through the *suffering* that we share in Jesus' death so that the *life* of Jesus might also be seen in *us*. This is why Jesus told those who wanted to be his disciples to count the cost before following him. There's going to be a cost for us to be made *legit*. We have to come and *die* if we want to have real *life*.

Our old life has to go before we begin to experience the life that he wants to give. God will supply all the grace that's necessary for radical change in our life if we'll just cooperate with him with a little bit of our own faith. What has Christ cost us so far? If it doesn't cost us *something*, it won't last - it's not the *real deal* - it won't prove to be *legit*.

He bids a man come and die - but if we do, we'll experience the very life and the grace of God. The whole idea of baptism is that there's death before new life - that what goes *into* the water stays there, and what comes *out* is something totally new and different. A process of legitimacy has begun, where we go from "Saul" to "Paul". Though it might not be instant - whether it takes us many years or the rest of our life - he's doing a work in us as we allow him to work that legitimizing process.

Only God can legitimize a person. We can't do it ourselves, and no other person on earth can make us legit. There's no teaching we can sit under, no affirmation we can get from anybody - only God can legitimize us. Paul started out *very* legit in man's eyes, but he realized that he had to start completely over - from the *beginning*.

1 Corinthians 15:8-10 NKJV

“Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

God always had in mind what he was going to do through Paul. As much as Saul resisted him, God never gave up on him.

Acts 26:14 AMPC

“And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice in the Hebrew dialect saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick [repeatedly] against the goads [offering pointless resistance].’ ”

God had a plan and he wasn't deterred even in the face of Paul's rebellion. Some of us are doing what's hard right now, but it can get a lot easier if we could just recognize the program that God's had for us all along and let the grace of God hit us. God hasn't been waiting for some random day to help us, he's actually been here the whole time, and maybe it's us that are resisting and kicking against the goads.

Galatians 1:15 NIV

“when God who set me apart from my mothers womb...”

Paul realized after all that time he spent resisting God, that he had been set apart since before he was even born.

Acts 9:19-21 AMPC

“And after he took some food, he was strengthened. For several days [afterward] he remained with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, saying, He is the Son of God! And all who heard him were amazed and said, is not this the very man who harassed and overthrew and destroyed in Jerusalem those who called upon this Name? And he has come here for the express purpose of arresting them and bringing them in chains before the chief priests.”

The force of grace just started *exploding* out of Paul because he had an encounter with Jesus, and that one encounter with the real living God was enough to supersede and override decades of prior training that he had in error.

Paul didn't need a lot of time to figure it out, he just went there and started proclaiming Jesus because he *knew* that's what he needed to do. He had already had a permanent radical change in his life from one encounter with God that totally dumbfounded everyone around him - a complete 180-degree life reversal in only a couple of days.

This is what it looks like when God's grace really hits a human heart - it slices through *everything*. When we get a taste of it, we'll want *more*, because it's like power from Heaven exploding out of our soul, changing the very nature of who we are from the inside out with a confidence, boldness, courage, clarity, and focus like we've never had before.

This is the Christian life, and we should desire it and claim it as our own. There's no life in just going to church and doing the religious thing - that's a waste of our time. But, if the *grace* hits us, it's *over* - for us and everybody we encounter.

Acts 9:22 AMPC

"But Saul increased all the more in strength [divine enablement], and continued to confound and put to confusion the Jews who lived in Damascus by comparing and examining evidence and proving that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah)."

The grace of God doesn't just make us emotional, it actually gives us the clarity to be able to bring evidence and to prove that what we believe is true. God hasn't called us to stand on etherial nothingness, he has established Truth in the earth, and there is *evidence* that Jesus is real. There is evidence that God is at work and we can *prove* it when we're in cooperation with him.

God isn't trying to *hide* anything - he *created* everything - and it all points to *him*. The more time Paul spent with Jesus, the more real he became to Paul, and the easier it got for him to prove who Jesus was. Paul knew the scriptures backwards and forwards, and yet somehow he had missed the fact that Jesus was on *every page* of it, and God was able to show him what he had missed the whole time.

Paul began to prove to people and confound them with logic, truth, evidence, and wisdom. Where are the Christians in the Church doing that today? We *walk* by *faith*, but there's a whole lot of proof and evidence too.

Paul spent most of his first three years in the desert alone with Jesus. After we come to Jesus, step-two for us is to also go into the wilderness with him. We must recognize the fact that he's the One that's brought us there to begin the legitimizing process in our life - to get us ready for all that's to come and all that he created us to do from before we were even born.

We each have a destiny in God. Sometimes we need extended time being refined, trained, prepared, and legitimized, establishing our dependency and relationship on him alone, and on nothing or no one else before we're ready for what he has for us. If we don't recognize that, we won't be too legit to quit.

The in-between and the wilderness is the most important time in the development of the Christian life. It's what casts the dye, sets concrete, fortifies endurance, strengthens the will, establishes trust in the right place, and shakes loose the need of all the wrong things and wrong people, because we easily cling to things and people for what we're *supposed* to get only from God. God was breaking Paul from all of this so he wouldn't quit later. God is about the long-game with us - he wants us to endure to the *end*, not just make us happy *today*.

Galatians 1:11-12, 15-17

"Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ... But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace. Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus."

What Jesus revealed to Paul lined up exactly with what he had taught Peter and the Apostles, though they never met. Paul didn't get his *own* thing. Peter was later dumbfounded by Paul's insight. We have the same access to God that Paul did through the Holy Spirit. We have the same opportunity to step into God's presence - to come before his throne and sit at his feet like Paul did. God has torn the veil and made himself available to us, and we have no excuse not to get to know him.

Scripture says that we're to draw near to God and he will draw near to us. Paul experienced that and *that's* how he became who he was. It wasn't his pedigree, it was the grace of God at work on the *inside* of him. This is why knowing God personally versus knowing about him from other people makes all the difference. This is what keeps us in for the long-haul and makes us legit.

Philippians 3:10 NIV

"I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."

John 17:3 NIV

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Sometimes it takes the wilderness to get us to be quiet enough, still enough, and undistracted enough to actually get to know him, not just being busy and working for him. Many have fallen away from the faith because they "never knew him" - they never intimately and personally knew Jesus. They never stopped long enough to get in his presence and sit at his feet and let him speak to them, change them, and pour his grace into them for the long-haul so they wouldn't quit.

God doesn't want others to mediate and stand between us and him. There's a massive difference between knowing God for who He really is versus knowing God as we've heard or were taught or that makes sense to us. For Paul, there was a level of pride from self-seeking that had distorted his image of God even though he had the scriptures - and it took an encounter with God to correct it.

Acts 9:26 AMPC

"when Paul had arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate himself with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe he really was a disciple."

Paul's call was not immediately received or recognized and was often pushed back on. Unbelievers were trying to kill him and believers were afraid of him being a double-agent. The red carpet might not be rolled out for us as Christians, but that's a good thing! The sign that we're legit is not when *people* say we are, it's when God says we are. The sign of God's favor is not when people are *applauding* us, but more often it's when they reject us.

Acts 9:27-29 AMPC

"However, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and he explained to them how along the way he had seen the Lord, Who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached freely and confidently and courageously in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out [as one] among them at Jerusalem, preaching freely and confidently and boldly in the name of the Lord..."

In a moment of time, Paul's status with people did a 180 because God sent Barnabas to intervene and change it. No *Paul* or *Saul* can exist or function without a *Barnabas*. Barnabas had the gift of encouragement - the supernatural ability to bridge the gap between people, and to help them be strengthened, inspired, encouraged, and given what they needed to keep on going. It was literally the grace of God at work in Barnabas' life - the spiritual gift of encouragement.

Barnabas was given his name because it meant "son of encouragement". The Greek word for *encouragement* is "paraklesis". The Holy Spirit is called the "Paraclete" or "One called along side to help". That means when somebody encourages us in the Lord, it's the actual true and pure function of the Holy Spirit working *through* them. Encouragement is the base-level identifier of who the Holy Spirit is and how he works in our lives, and the *gift* of encouragement is one of the most undervalued secret weapons the Church has.

If it weren't for Barnabas and the gift of encouragement on his life, Paul would've been stopped dead in his tracks right there, and his destiny never would have come to fruition. It was encouragement that unleashed Paul to become who God called him to be. He couldn't do it on his own. We now live in a day and age and a Church where criticism, negativity, gossip and slander abound, but encouragement is in short supply - and without encouragement *none* of us will make it.

The Spirit of encouragement on a person's life breathes the very life and grace of the Holy Spirit into the lives of others. It is the gift of God and we need to step into that for other people because *they* need it, especially our leaders and pastors if they're to make it. Encouragement comes to *us* as we give it to *others*. If we lack encouragement, we're to commit to relentlessly *giving* it and being willing to go to bat for those who labor in obedience to Christ, especially those lacking an advocate. The role of the Holy Spirit is as "the Advocate". If we as the Church would continually ask the Holy Spirit how we can encourage the right people at the right time around us, we would be unstoppable and impenetrable by the enemy.

1 Corinthians 12:18-22 NLT

"But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.' In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care."

Colossians 3:3 AMP

"For you died [to this world], and your [new, real] life is hidden with Christ in God."

Have we surrendered yet to the call to the wilderness? Have we put aside the need for the approval and affirmation that comes from all these other places, and just said, *"God, I need You?"*

Encouragement from God comes on the heels of fully surrendering our need for approval, likes, clicks, and acceptance from all other arenas of life. It's when we are most seemingly cut-off, abandoned, and alone in the wilderness that encouragement of the Lord comes in unexpectedly. We surrender the need to go and get what we want and need for *ourselves*, and we just get with him in the *wilderness* - then he can bring his encouragement, and *that's* what will sustain us and make us legit... *too legit to quit!*

Prayer

Father, in Jesus' name, we thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the conviction in our hearts that we need more of You. We want to know You before any thing or anyone else.

God, we want to make it to the end. We want to be too legit to quit. Holy Spirit, visit us - fall on us - and bring the same grace that transformed the life of Saul, and may it transform our hearts. Hit us with Your Spirit and power, and revolutionize us from the inside out.

Lord, we surrender to it by faith. In Jesus' name. Amen