

Devotions for May 30 – June 5, 2011

Monday, May 30, 2011: Paul – Pre-Conversion Daily reading: Acts 8:1-3

His name is Saul, and he is dedicated to persecuting Christians. He is born in Tarsus, a city well known for its intellectual environment. He is raised in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel,” one of the great teachers of Judaism. After Stephen’s death, Saul goes on a rampage, persecuting and executing Christians wherever they can be found. Saul aggressively seeks to eliminate this new religion from the face of the earth. It’s hard for us to imagine the social and political climate of Saul’s day. The harshness in those communities is not common to our experience. What can you learn from Saul? In your prayers, ask God to give you faith that can transform your life.

Tuesday, May 31, 2011: Paul – Conversion Daily reading: Acts 9:1-19

Saul’s conversion to Paul dramatically changes the course of his life. He goes from persecuting Christ-followers to boldly proclaiming that Jesus is exactly who he says he is. He is struck blind while traveling to Damascus, and this dramatic life experience is the building block for his faith, and his proclamation of faith. This is complete change! This is a complete turn that no one could have predicted. Paul sees the resurrected Christ just prior to becoming blind. For us, transformation may or may not be this dramatic. Regardless of the scale, each of us is transformed on a daily basis. What kind of change and transformation do you need? Ask God to show you where you need transformation, and then pray for that change to happen, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, June 1, 2011: Paul – Testimony Daily reading: Romans 1:1-7

Here Paul relays his convictions and new-found beliefs regarding the risen Christ. Paul describes himself as a servant of Christ, one called to be an apostle, and one set apart for the gospel of God. Paul describes Jesus as the promised one, the Son of God, with the lineage from David, the one declared to be the Son of God in whom we receive grace and apostleship. If you read on in this chapter of Romans, Paul continues to describe in increasing detail the post – conversion beliefs that motivate his ministry. An interesting idea in this text is that Paul received the Gospel from a personal revelation of Jesus, not from the teachings of any human being. Too often, we might look to another human to teach us what we need to know. True faith transformation comes from a personal encounter with Jesus. How can you personally encounter Jesus today? Ask God for a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

Thursday, June 2, 2011: Paul – Early Ministry Daily reading: Galatians 1:1-24

In Galatians we get a glimpse of Paul’s perspectives on faith and life. These ideas represent a total change in his concept of the Messiah and the ethnic superiority of the Jewish race. Chapter 1 truly reads like a letter detailing the day-to-day activities of a traveler on a missionary journey. Paul argues with himself, out loud, about the struggles he’s facing. Am I pleasing God or people? Am I being faithful to the one who gave himself for us? Do my struggles and persecution have any meaning? Paul wonders all of these things. Have you ever struggled with these questions? Paul is a person we can look to when we want to understand transformation, struggle, and persecution. What do you struggle with? Ask God to help you answer the very difficult questions in your life.

Friday, June 3, 2011: Paul – Seed Planter Daily reading: Acts 13 and 14

Paul travels all over the known world, on many journeys, to plant new seeds of faith and, in doing so, plant new churches. These are three separate journeys: 1.) Antioch to Cyprus, through southern Asia Minor, and back to Antioch. 2.) Jerusalem around the Mediterranean, visiting churches in Tarsus, Derbe, and Lystra. 3.) To Galatia and Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece and back to Caesarea. But even more important than the cities and the dates is the passion with which Paul travels and preaches. This is difficult ministry. These travels are not easy, and the work is often contentious and difficult. What kind of passion will you need to be a better seed planter? Ask God for a new passion that motivates your ministry.

Saturday, June 4, 2011: Paul – Persecution Daily reading: Acts 22:22-29

Paul’s preaching gets him in trouble over and over again. Many plots are made against him, especially by the Jews who feel betrayed by his newfound faith. He is beaten and imprisoned. He is persecuted continually on his journeys. He is stoned in Lystra for healing a crippled man. He is dragged out of cities and left for dead. Beatings, ridicule, prison, and persecution are daily occurrences for Paul, but he keeps preaching the good news he knows to be the gospel of Christ. We don’t need to endure much to be faithful followers of Jesus. Where might you be bolder with your faith, and risk the ridicule of others in doing so? Ask God for strength to proclaim the risen Christ with new passion and motivation.

Sunday, June 5, 2011: Paul – Arrest and Death Daily reading: Acts 28:28-31

During his life, Paul spends roughly 5–6 years in prison. He arrives in Rome about 60 A.D. and spends two years under house arrest. While Paul greatly influences the Roman church, it is already established before he arrives in Rome. He has written his letter to the Romans before he visits the city. We’re not certain how Paul dies, but tradition says he is beheaded by Nero near the place of his house arrest. He is said to be entombed at the Basilica of St. Paul in Rome. One has to admire Paul’s persistence and determination in the face of intense persecution, house arrest, and imminent death. We must wonder how we would have responded in a similar situation. In your life, what is pressuring your faith? As you pray through today, ask God for the kind of persistence and faith exhibited by the apostle Paul.