

## EXERCISE:

**Study the life and “heart” of Paul.**



*Acts 7:54-60*



*chapter Acts 9, 11:19-30*



*Acts chapters 13,14, 16,17*



*Acts chapters 21,22,23*

## What can you learn from Paul?

Read the four stories and describe what the stories tell us about who Paul was before and after his encounter with God on the road to Damascus?

What do we learn from Paul as he sets about preaching? Take note of how he deals with people and how he handles disappointments.

What do we learn from Paul when he is captured?

Which lesson is it that early Christians need to learn?

## What can you learn from Paul for your own life?



*Acts 14:21,22 and 2 Cor 1:3-10*

Read Jesus' instructions. Now apply it to your own life. Ask yourself the following four questions:

1. Is there a word of God in there for me personally?
2. Is there a promise from the Father for my life?
3. Does Jesus ask me to apply anything to my life?
4. Decide to do something about it and ask Jesus to help you with this.


## Going deeper

In Matt 5:10,11 Jesus plants an important seed for the Jesus culture within the kingdom of God. He tells His disciples that they will be persecuted.

Within this culture the kingdom of God bears fruit.

## What does Jesus mean by persecution because of righteousness?


 1 Cor 4:11-15


 Acts 8:1-4


The early church was known for its good works. The poor receive care, the widows and orphans are looked after too. And the Good News is shared. Yet we read in all of the letters from the apostles that they can expect persecution, oppression and difficulties.


### Blessing

As a follower of Jesus we come in to the blessing of God, just like Abraham. And yet we read that the apostles tell believers that they will face difficult times.


 John 16:33          *Jesus*

 1 Thess 3:2-4      *Paul*

 James 1:2-4        *James*

 1 Pet 4:12-16      *Peter*

### Jesus, our example in suffering

 John 15:18-21


Jesus points out to the disciples that there will always be people who hate Jesus. And therefore they will hate his followers too. Just as He was persecuted, so they will persecute them.

### Contrast: persecution, regard this as a joy.

 1 Thess 3:2-4

The word trials –“thlipsis”, means pressed, stamped, wrung out and smashed. This is what believers can expect. The strange thing is that Paul and the others encourage the believers to respond in the opposite manner; not to stand up for ones own right but to suffer patiently and even more so, view this suffering as a joy to be experienced.

### Persecution has a positive effect.

 James 1:2-4


 2 Cor 1:8-10

In learning about kingdom culture we see that persecution brings out the best in the disciples, namely a dependent character. The life of a disciple is much more focussed on God and far less based on its own ability. Sometimes this leads to miracles occurring, for example when Peter is freed from prison by an angel, and when Paul survives being shipwrecked, and when Tabitha is raised from the dead. But sometimes it all goes wrong. The church in Jerusalem is heavily persecuted, Stephen is stoned to death and many have to flee. A large famine breaks out.

## Peace, joy?


Joy is not the absence of problems and difficulties but the presence of Jesus in those problems and difficulties. He is the one who gives us power, peace and joy.


The disciples have a different attitude to the one the people around them have; instead of moaning and complaining they call out to God to help them.

 *Acts 16:19-35*

In this text we read that Paul is taken captive. Instead of complaining because he is innocent he sings praises to God. The result is an earthquake which eventually leads to freedom and an entire family being saved.

But it doesn't always end so happily.

 *Acts 17:1-9*

 *Heb 11:32-36*

## No punishment

Some people do not respond well to difficulties. They immediately think they are being punished by God or that God no longer loves them. Another response is becoming angry with God and even turning away from Him. This can lead to self-pity or depression.

## What is a good response to suffering?




 *1 Pet 4:12-14*

This is a secret within the kingdom. Despite difficulties and suffering, still being able to rejoice in the Lord amongst the difficult circumstances. This is when God will reveal his glory. Peter said that in these instances the Spirit of the Lord will rest on you.

## Maryam

Rarely have I ever seen someone suffer so badly. Her husband had been imprisoned and was sentenced to many years. She had to care for and look after the three children alone. Her income was minimal. She had been sent away from home many times. Even sent out of the country on two occasions. This is just a short summary of the awful things she experienced. Yet this lady remained an example in hoping in God. Each test just led to her coming out stronger. Sometimes you could see the glint in her face. Often her circumstances took a turn for the worse, but Maryam kept on speaking out that she trusted in God.

## EXERCISE

-  Think about how you respond when difficulties come your way. Do you allow God to help you or do you moan and complain?
-  Ask God to help you in your difficulty and believe God to give you joy instead of sorrow.
-  Discuss with your mentor what your response is to difficulties and pray together for a strong character in order to get through it and to then help support others.

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