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**Preparation “Wait”
Acts 9:19-31**

Waiting is one of the hardest things for us to do. We don't like waiting for lines at the return desk. We don't like waiting for the dentist. We don't like waiting for our next birthday or Christmas or the weekend or vacation. We don't even like to wait for a red light...especially if we have a car we know is fast. I remember the guys in high school that had the fast hot cars. Jacked up. Blown out. Big wheels. Thumping stereo. They poured all the money they had from part-time jobs into those machines. They painted and waxed and tuned and tweaked them. And at the stop sign they revved their engines just wanting everyone in the block to know it was a crime to hold them back. It was a shame that the red light, the law, the car in front of them, wouldn't let them loose so they could really show the world how fast they were. They were the fastest thing in town and chomping at the bit to prove it.

Sometimes we in the Christian life are also chomping at the bit, driving hard and fast. We are ready to burn out our tires for Jesus. We look around and see that we are probably the most gifted and talented folks around. Some of us have been gifted and called and we are ready to rev up our engines and let everyone see what we can do for the kingdom of God. But as you can imagine...that is rarely God's plan for a new believer. Even a gifted believer to go shooting off way out in front of everyone. Inevitably they crash and cause all sorts of damage to themselves and others. A lesson we must learn after we come to Christ is that God is more than willing to set us on what looks like the back lot for a long time. God is more than willing to spend years and years of developing and molding and shaping our humility and dependence as He

is one I have found to be far more interested in our holiness and character than in our success and performance. His greatest and best tools he takes time to hone, sharpen and strengthen. God often does this process in an unexpected even obscure place. One of the biggest lessons that God must teach those people He will use, even his most gifted and talented servants, is to humbly come to the place where they can affirm that apart from Him we can do nothing. We must learn the lesson that we are not indispensable to God's program. He does not need our ability, but wants to use us and needs our availability and faithful teachability.

I have given you the main point right up front today. Now where do we see that in the scripture? How does that fit with the flow of the book of Acts. Turn to Acts in your Bibles. We are in chapter 9 of Acts. Chapter nine is the incredible story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who would later be named Paul the Apostle and responsible for writing a large portion of the New Testament. We know what an incredible influence Saul became and the part he played in God's program to reach the world. But it would be a mistake for us to think that what happened on the road to Damascus, the flash of light, the words of Jesus, his call to ministry is a complete explanation of all that explains why this man had such an incredible influence on the world.

It is true that as soon as he was converted by God, he was immediately witnessing in power that Jesus was indeed the son of God and was the Christ, the Messiah that all had been longing for. New believers ought to share the excitement of their new life in Christ with others and tell others about Jesus. But its important for us to know that Saul did not immediately become Paul the Apostle the week after the blinding light. In fact, God would take years to mold and shape this very talented and zealous and eager follower of his. God knew that he must break down years of pride and arrogance before Saul could be used in the most powerful influential way.

At the end of chapter 8 we saw God take Phillip out of a very successful revival going on in Samaria and sent him out into a deserted road near Gaza in order to save just one man. God is willing to go out of His way to save just one person. Chapter 9 we see God can and will save even that person we think would be the most unlikely to become a believer, even one like Saul who was violently opposed to Jesus is saved. This morning we learn how God is willing to put even the rising talented star on the bench until he learns that apart from Him, we can do nothing.

Back to our story in Acts 9. Saul is converted from an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Blinding light knocks out Saul's physical eyesight and gives him time for his spiritual eyes to begin seeing the truth of Jesus clearly. Saul regains his sight, is filled with the Holy Spirit, baptized and has all the essential equipment to go and minister. Once the believers in Damascus get over their shock and praising God about how this powerful arch enemy has come to faith, they are probably saying to themselves. If he is even half as zealous for Jesus as he was against him...watch out. This disciple of Gamaliel. This lawyer with airtight logic. This power house of a speaker is going to blow the world away. Watch out Damascus. Get out the microphones. Turn up the bright lights and call out the television cameras. Here comes Pharisee turned evangelist. Just listen to him preach.

The reader of Acts must be thinking. Here it is. What talent. What potential. What zeal. Now that it's directed in the right way. Watch it rip. And for a few days it does go well. Read v.20 Immediately Saul goes into the synagogues proclaiming Christ is the son of God. People are amazed. Literally they are "struck out of their senses" at the change. READ v.22 I know those early days in Damascus were fruitful, but then God called him away. V.23 says "and when many days had elapsed." Luke here doesn't go into detail of what happened during those many days or where Saul went, so we go to Galatians 1:15-17 and find out Saul spend 3

years in the area of Arabia, an area east of Damascus, western Iraq, southern Syria out alone. "I did not confer with flesh and blood (I did not talk this over with anyone while I was out there, I did not go up to Jerusalem (I wasn't comparing notes with the 12), but I went away into Arabia then returned again to Damascus. Some think that Saul went on an evangelistim trip to practice on people out away from the towns, but I believe that Saul went out to the desert and took the holy scriptures with him and studied them. He knew them well, but now as he went back read through the pages of the Old Testament he saw how Jesus was in and around all through the Old Testament. In the Prophets he read and could now see clearly how they were speaking of Jesus, the Psalms, in the Law and how the sacrifices and offerings were all pictures of Jesus. How even the configuration of the tabernacle all pointed to the life of Christ. He studied for 3 years. Like a seminarian ready to tackle that first congregation, he felt he was ready. Now he knew the stuff and had put it all together. Sure 3 years seemed like a long time but he could see how it was needed. But now he was ready to go for it. He was ready to march back into Damascus and debate and challenge and convert the entire town for Jesus. So we read in v.23 "When many days elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him. A contract out on his life. Secret in fear for his life. His friends help him escape the town by lowering him over the edge of the wall in a basket. The word for basket implies it may have been a big basket made of ropes used to hold fish. We may think that sounds like an exciting adventure. But that wasn't the way Saul looked at it. He had come from Jerusalem to Damascus filled with pride and power, was blinded by the light and saw the light of Jesus. Spent three years out in the desert learning more about Jesus. Came back into town and was rejected and humiliated.

Saul would later look back on this embarrassing event and writes in II Corinthians 11:32 "you ask me to boast about the most important event in my life? If I was to boast it would be about when my weakness

began to be exposed. God knows I am not lying... this was the time when I began to learn I'm weak the night my friends lowered me down over the wall.

I wouldn't have chosen that as the most humbling, weak event in his life. Maybe a stoning? Imprisonment? A beating? Why the wall lowering? Because that was when Saul began to learn the very truth that he records in Philippians "What ever gain I had, I learned to count as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." All the things I wanted to do. All the ways I planned to have things work out were absolutely worthless. I discovered all my talents and gifts he didn't need. All the great things I brought to the table that I thought would bring the success didn't. Scraping down the wall in the middle of the night was the beginning of learning that.

It took a long time for me to learn, but I began to learn that God didn't need my abilities; he only needed my availability. He just need me. He didn't need my seminary degree. He didn't need my family background. He didn't need my knowledge of the Old Testament. God needed my ambition and pride to die I needed to learn what Jesus taught his disciples in John 15 "without me you can do absolutely nothing" Just a couple things. No nothing. We may be able to pull off a lot of things in the eyes of the people around us. People that say wow. Look at how productive that guy is. Look how much that lady gets accomplished. But in the eyes of God there is zero that can be accomplished for His kingdom unless its done in the power and strength of His Holy Sprit. Tough lesson for talented guys and gals to learn and its an easy one for us to forget too.

Saul is not finished in the learning process. V. 26 he heads away from Damascus and heads back down to Jerusalem. READ 26;-30. He may have thought to himself plodding on the road back to Jerusalem. Well things sure didn't work out as well as I thought they would in Damascus. But Jerusalem. Surely I can be that powerful witness I'm

called to be there. Imagine the Pharisee hatchet man who turns to Jesus. Maybe God just wants me to shine for Him at the Palestinian power-center of Jerusalem. That's it.

Wrong. What happens down there? Same thing as in Damascus. He tries to connect up with the believers down in Jerusalem and they are all afraid of him. They remember Saul being the one who hauled off their friends and beat up their sons, and daughter and fathers. They don't trust him and fear he may just be trying to infiltrate their ranks and then pounce in judgment.

Fortunately Barnabas comes to his rescue and sees his true heart. He is willing to forgive and sees the potential in a man like Saul. That kind of attitude is probably what got Barnabas his nickname, "son of encouragement" Are you an encouragement to others? Are you one who is willing to take risks to support hopeful leaders.

I'm going to pick on Kirby a bit here, but there have been some teens in our church most of the people were good and ready to write off as "that guy is so wild he will never make it". That gal has so messed up her life she doesn't have a prayer of ever making a significant contribution to the kingdom of God. But Kirby never would write these young men and women off. He kept after them, kept showing and demonstrating God's love to them sometimes in a way that was pretty straight out truthful. And wouldn't you know it, months later, sometimes years later we see them coming back and coming strong in ministry even. I thank God for the men and women. Youth directors and Sunday School teachers who didn't write me off but kept on taking risks with me to support and encourage me and saw the potential of what could be, not just what was seen right then. You may well have the makings of being a Barnabas and not even realize it. Look for those embers of grace in the lives of other people and do what you can to fan those embers. There seem to be too many people ready with their buckets of criticism to pour out onto the ashes of imperfection. Be a Barnabas whose eye looks for

the potential of God's grace. Barnabas came alongside and "took hold" of Saul and what a pay off on that investment.

v.28 After Barnabas vouches for him before the leaders in Jerusalem, Saul then preaches freely and speaks boldly in the name of Jesus. He argues with the Hellenistic Jews, yes those are the same group of folks he was once a part of who stoned Stephen back in chapter 7. This looks again promising. It looks like the rising star is going to be used by God in a powerful way now in Jerusalem. But no. Another contract out on his life v.29. They are out to kill him again. From Galatians we learn that his stay in Jerusalem lasted only 15 days. That's it.

In Acts 22:17-20 in one of the great defenses of his faith, Saul tells more detail on what happened during this time. V.17 Jesus was saying to me, "Make haste and get out quickly for they will not accept your testimony about me." Lord is saying Paul you don't belong here in Jerusalem. Get out of the city. No one is going to listen to you here.

Saul argues with God. "But Lord don't you understand? I know these people really well. I was once on their side. I can explain the change it was so radical they have to listen. I was persecuting Christians with the best of them. They can't help but hear it. I can make them listen. I can debate them. V.22 Depart. Simply get out of town for I will send you far away to the Gentiles. Saul you don't belong here my primary mission for you is to the Gentiles. I have a different program for you. This may make sense to you to stay here in Jerusalem, but your not running your life any more. Remember Saul you surrendered your sword of control to me back in Damascus. What I have for you is entirely different. You have more things you need to learn from me. You need to learn that all you need is me and me working through you. You need to learn that it is not about your ability, talents and gifts that will make you an effective part of my kingdom, it is about you humbly realizing how dependent you are on my power. Saul, I want to use you in a powerful

way, but you must know that its about me and not you, you are not indispensable to my program.

v.30 we see that the brothers all knew it too and helped him escape to the Mediterranean coastal city of Caesarea and then on to a boat the took him 300miles north to Saul's hometown of Tarsus. They put him on a boat and sent him home. Here is one of the most gifted speakers and lawyers. One of the most talented guys yet to convert. A guy who had been personally commissioned to preach the word to the gentiles by Jesus, and he is sent back home. For how long? I'm sure after a couple of months this Ferrari of a man was burning up his tires just chomping at the bit burn off and out of the there when God gave the green light. But God had him stay in Tarsus not just three months. Not just a year. I'm sure Saul didn't just do his tent making there to support himself. I'm sure he was involved in some sort of ministry. We don't know a lot about what he did during that time. but it certainly wasn't high profile mission trips and powerful evangelistic crusades. Three years stuck back at home? Five years? We know Saul was in Tarsus for at least 8 and maybe up to 10 years. Home is the hardest place to learn anything, except humility. Can you imagine what it must have felt like for Saul of Tarsus to be stuck begin a big red light for 10 years?

God is willing to take his time to teach his most valuable lessons so we can be used by Him in the most effective way. God is trying to teach all of us that all God needs of us is us, you and me available to do whatever it is He wants of us. We must stop coming to him and say, "Ok God here is the deal. This is what I am going to do for you." Instead come to Him saying "God I'm your man, I'm your woman. I'm your teen. What is it you want for me. I want to say yes to you. I'm ready to do it.

If you haven't read ahead, v.31 is the punch line of this passage. What a beautiful reminder for us all that it is not about us but God. The rising star. The famous killer turned convert was ready to march into town and turned the place upside down for Jesus. Instead he was met

with doubt and then acceptance and then 15 days later God sent him out of town. READ Luke adds this very strange twist to his narrative that seems to make the point of the passage. v.31 “and the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, built up and continued to increase.” Just as soon as they got rid of Saul, the church had peace and was built up and growing.

God’s point? None of us are indispensable to the kingdom of God. My ego might think that if I left this church it would all fall apart and suffer. If Kirby leaves the youth group to move on to another ministry it will all fall apart. But it won’t. We may think that we are the only ones who can fill certain holes. But truth be told, the church of Jesus Christ and Yacolt Evfree will go on just fine and may well even thrive without us. It’s about what God is doing and its not about me or you.

Are you feeling like God has placed you on the shelf? Are you feeling like God is holding you back behind a big red light? Maybe you feel stuck behind a line of cars and you are tired of waiting. You want to pull out of the line and go back another way...maybe a short cut. Folks if God is telling you to wait. Then wait. Learn the lessons. He will take you and free you and place you in His perfect timing. God ruthlessly perfects whom he royally elects and he may well take 10, 20 in Moses case 80 years to get the point across and bring you to His place of usability. Are you remaining humble in the process?

Saul got it. A little further down in our story at the end of chapter 11 we see Barnabas is the one to bring Saul back into ministry to help him with the church in Antioch. He was ready for significant ministry and learned the lessons he would later write about, “Without me you can do nothing. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. “Gal 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in (dependence upon) the son of God who loves me and gave himself for me.

With those lessons written across his heart, Paul went out and rocked the world.

Acts 9: 20-30

v. 19a

Several days he was with the disciples. Fellowship. Instruction. Several days sounds like a short time.

20. Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues. You don't have to wait until you're an expert to proclaim Jesus. Even in front of those who seem to know a lot ("synagogue goers") He was converted and went to the heart of where he had lived deceived. Not much need for a lot of lag time between conversion and witness. His message Jesus is God's son. God did do something through Jesus. Salvation is in Jesus.

21. This preaching of Saul's, people can't believe it. Literally "stuck out of their senses" They notice the change in his message. Isn't this the same guy who back down in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name. Isn't this the same guy who traveled all the way up here with the very purpose of arresting them and taking them back down to stand trial before the chief priests? Saul was known. His reputation for being a Christian hater was common knowledge. Fickle? Change of heart? Embarrassed that his life's purpose had taken a 180 degree turn. Is this the same guy?....no its not.

The question on all their hearts was. What happen? Why the change?

Saul kept on increasing in strength. (does that look like confidence. Wisdom? Spirit empowerment? Boldness?)

Confounding the Jews. Baffled. The word describes sand and water being mixed up together in a channel. The Idea of being thrown into a blender and hit mix button. All the things they had placed in neat tidy orderly rows in the minds of the jews there have now been all jumbled up. They had assumed that God did nothing in Jesus, but now Saul was placing out for them some very convincing proofs that this Jesus is indeed the Christ they had all been looking for. If Saul who is sharp and convinced to change, maybe they ought to consider these claims as well.

v.23 Many days elapsed (years??) Luke leaves out three years that Saul spent in Arabia. Paul mentions it in Galatians 1:17. The area was sprasly populated he went there probably to mediatate and study. The Jews now had either converted or collided with the truth. Lets kill him, he is too effective, too damaging.

Get rid of Saul.

Plot becomes known to Saul. The Jews were looking out for him. All the gates were watched, no possible escape.

25. The escape. Disciple friends now let him down over the wall in a basket. Escape in a basket. Moses. Saul entered the city blind and left in a basket over the wall. Interesting ways of traveling past the city gates. He came the persecutor and now fled being the object of persecution.

Continued themes in Acts is the constant opposition to the gospel and the continued way that gospel spreads v.31 despite the oppostion.

Its no use opposing even the worst enemy has come over and changed sides.

26. Saul returns to Jerusalem. He tries to connect up with believers, but they remember their husbands, children, wives that Saul was personally responsible for tossing in jail, killing. They don't forget so easily. They were still afraid of him. The pain was still too close. They believed it was just another one of his tricks to infiltrate and destroy. "I don't trust him. I don't care what they say, I'm not going near him."

They were really saying that they didn't believe that God could change people like that. In Damascus Saul needed a friend of acceptance and found one in Ananias. In Jerusalem the friend was Barnabus who took him in and introduced him to the body of believers.

11:22-24, 30

12:25

13:1-2,50

14:12

15:12,22,25,37

Is it really possible to forgive a former enemy who is now your Christian brother or sister? Consider the cross. Jesus forgave all those who were responsible for putting him to death. Jerusalem believers forgave the man who formerly sought to kill them and did so to their family and close friends. A young man in New Guinea found strength to forgive his father's murderer. Do you know any of this? (Closer Walk p.395 group of believers come together to celebrate communion but the man who walks in killed and ate the body of his father.)

I will forgive and accept a brother that has wronged me?

v.27 But Barnabas. (son of encouragement) took Saul and brought him to the apostles. He told them his conversion story. How he had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus. He vouched for him.

Barnabas believes and loves when no one else will. Perfect love casts out all fear. Barnabas listens to the story. Tells how Jesus spoke to Saul. Tells how he had spoken boldly for Jesus' name in Damascus. So Saul preached freely and boldly in Jerusalem

v.29 The suffering part is coming true. He moved about Jerusalem freely but the Greek speaking Jews wanted him dead. In a sense Saul picked up where Stephen left off remember his debate with the Hellenistic Jesus led to his martyrdom. Saul was there, friends with them. He went back to his old friends and preached the truth.

v.30 The brother heard about it and took him out of the situation sending him away to Tarsus after Caesarea. 300 miles to the north of Jerusalem Tarsus was a well known university city with excellent educational opportunities surpassed only by Athens and Alexandria.

In this passage we see the words of conversion translate into the actions of witness. He was told by Jesus what his mission would be. He himself a Jew but saved on foreign soil would be one who took the message to the gentiles, kings and sons of Israel.

In Damascus, Ananias' initial hesitancy then acceptance. Preaching truth, rejection by Jewish leader. Death threats. Escape. The suffering for Jesus' name promised on the road to Damascus was also coming true. Jerusalem preaching. Death threats. Escape to Caesarea and then Tarsus. Back in home town quite a ways from Jerusalem.

After this section on Paul he doesn't pop back up until chapter 11. Paul slides off the scene and Peter is highlighted. Then Peter slides off again and it's Paul from then on. POINT: God's workmen may change but

God's work never does. In the world of ministry no one but Christ is expendable.

Galatians 1:15-17 Arabia for three years. Time in obscurity. What did he do there? Have you ever felt out sidelined in the desert?

Barnabus had the ability to see beyond his past and see his potential and true heart for God. Is there someone who know who has lost a job, failed at marriage? Rejection? A loner? Outcast? Never gets chosen for the team? Never does a friend reach out. A Barnabas comes alongside the hurting and rejected.

If we had been there in Damascus when saul first came to faith and the response was strong we would have been telling him. Man you are going to be incredible. The hottest thing to move the cause of Christ yet. So go for it. Do it get out there. Let it rip. But Saul was not ready for the front line ministry. God had a long time of preparation for him first. Longer then he or probably anyone would imagine. Gal 1:15 3 years in Arabia. The natural plan would have been promotion, the Lords plan was seclusion.

Promoting of famous people; BJ Thomas.

Alan Redpath said, "When God wants us to do an impossible task, God takes an impossible man and crushes him." Gtod always takes us to the end of ourselves before he uses us.

Moses spent the first 40 years thinking he was somebody and the next 40 discovering he was a nobody. And the next 40 discovering how much God will to use a nobody who is somebody in the hands of God.

God Ruthlessly perfects whom he royally elects.

After Saul is sent off to Tarsus we don't hear again from him for 8-10 years until in Chapter 11 Barnabas does up and asks for help with the church in Antioch.

Part of God's preparation for us to be used in ministry is this: God must teach us that we can do nothing apart from Him. He must strip us of our independence and pride and doing things in the flesh. To learn those lessons only come from failure and insignificance. He will often put us in out of the way places to do his training. He is will to wait a long time to develop. He is rarely in as much hurry as we are. I don't like that.

In service of Christ, no one in indispensable. We may think we are the only ones that can fill a hole. We may think that when we leave it will all fall apart. But truth be told the church of Christ will go on just fine

without you or I. It may well even thrive. Its about God doing it not me.
Sometimes he may put us on the shelf just to remind us of that.