

*Paul:*  
*The Man and the Message*



*Paul:  
The Man and the Message*



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To the memory of  
Deacon Frank Singer and Marguerite Towns

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,  
even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him  
those who have died.

1 Thess. 4:14



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# Introduction



## An Overview of This Course

Saint Paul is one of Christianity's most fascinating figures. His life story is the stuff of newspaper headlines: "Man claims to hear voice of Christ." "Persecutor of Christians converts to Christianity." "Paul appointed to lead missionary expedition." "Paul's preaching starts city riot." "Paul challenges Peter about Gentile circumcision." "Paul sent to trial in Rome." It can be argued that as the "Apostle to the Gentiles," Paul led Christianity from its beginning as a troublesome Jewish cult to a major Western religion. His impact is so great that he is sometimes called the "second founder" of Christianity.

Paul has also left an enduring mark on Christianity through thirteen epistles that bear his name

in the Christian Testament. Because of these letters, Christians inevitably encounter Paul. His letters are read in liturgical celebrations and prayer services, he is frequently quoted by Christian evangelizers, and his writings are the subject of many Bible study programs.

Yet people who read the epistles of Saint Paul without the help of a good commentary can easily feel like they are in over their head. His letters refer to unknown people and events, use words in ways that do not connect to modern definitions, and use arguments that cause people to shake their head in consternation. A goal of this course is to help young people appreciate Paul despite these difficulties. It introduces them first to Paul, the man, and second to the message he proclaimed.

The first session, “Paul’s Story,” explores the influences that helped form Paul and his message. In the opening activity, the young people give imaginary acceptance speeches, which lead them to reflect on how experiences and people influence a person’s worldview. Then a Scripture search helps them identify the experiences and people who influenced Paul’s worldview. Next, a raw egg and a hard-boiled egg are used to illustrate the changes that a conversion experience can bring about. The account of Paul’s conversion in the Acts of the Apostles is dramatically performed and is followed by another activity highlighting how his life changed after his conversion. The session closes with a prayer service focusing on conversion.

“Paul’s Message” is the title for session 2. The first half of the session focuses on 1 Thessalonians. In this epistle Paul addresses the Thessalonians’ concern over the long wait for the Second Coming of Christ. An introductory game on waiting is used to introduce this concept, after which most of the epistle is read aloud. After discussion a short presentation is given on the literary form of an epistle.

The second half of session 2 starts with an activity to distinguish between authentic Pauline epistles and deuterio-Pauline epistles (those probably written by Paul’s disciples). This is followed by a Scripture study on five major theological themes in Paul’s epistles. The young people work in teams to study one theme and present it to the whole group.

The last session tackles the complex issue of defining salvation and grace. This is a critical theme in Paul’s writings that has influenced Christian thought over the centuries. The challenge in presenting this theme to the young people is, on the one hand, to avoid a simplistic, fundamentalist understanding and, on the other, to avoid an overly complex, jargon-filled explanation. The session helps you do this by using a wall-building exercise to symbolize the experience of separation from God and other people. Then brief scenarios are used to illustrate the things that we need to be saved “from,” and a guided discussion helps the young people explore several aspects of what it means to “be saved.” In the second half of the session, the young people explore how Paul’s writings give direction for experiencing God’s saving power in today’s world.

*Paul: The Man and the Message* is a companion to the Horizons core course, *The Bible: Power and Promise*. Taking the core course before taking this mini-course is not absolutely necessary but is strongly encouraged. *Paul: The Man and the Message* is intend-

ed for use with juniors or seniors who have an active interest in the topic.

The course is intended to be taught as three 2-hour sessions. Ideally, it would be taught in three consecutive weeks. The activities are structured with a group size of five to fifteen young people in mind. If your group size is small, the young people will be working individually instead of in teams for some activities. For larger groups you may have to make some minor adjustments to the session plans. If you need help with this task, consult your program coordinator.

## Background for This Course

### The Adolescent and This Course

The following presumptions about adolescents and the Bible undergird this course:

- *Catholic adolescents want to understand the Bible’s message.* When given a list of possible religious education topics, young people will often choose Bible study. They recognize that the Bible is a special book and an important resource for spiritual growth. Catholic youth may hear about the Bible from their Protestant friends, and they want to learn what their own faith tradition has to say about it.
- *Catholic adolescents want to study the biblical text directly.* For many years they have heard the excerpts from the Bible read at liturgies and prayer services. The religious education books they used as children probably quoted and paraphrased Bible passages. At this point in their life, they want to go to the primary source and read it for themselves. This course offers opportunities in every session for the young people to find and read passages directly from the Bible. And in session 2, nearly one entire epistle is read aloud so they can experience it as whole, not as a collection of short passages taken out of their original context.
- *Older adolescents want discussion opportunities to share their opinions and concerns about religious issues with their peers.* In *Paul: The Man and the Message*, every session has discussion opportunities. These discussions are not led or directed by the teacher but by the young people themselves. The teacher, of course, has an opportunity to

comment when the results of the discussions are presented to the whole group. The participants should not feel that their opinions are being judged or controlled.

- *Older adolescents are becoming interested in discussing theology.* As they grow into their later teen years, young people are more adept at understanding and appreciating the concepts used in philosophy and theology. Although we need to root our “theologizing”—our God-talk—with them in concrete experiences, they can more readily discuss abstract concepts such as salvation, grace, and the Body of Christ. These concepts would have been difficult for many of them to grasp a few years earlier. The second and third sessions of this course provide opportunities for them to do some significant theologizing on these concepts.

### The Theology of This Course

The basic theological concepts and understandings necessary to successfully teach *Paul: The Man and the Message* are contained in the session outlines. However, the following information on the course structure and on the theological issues in each session provide helpful background.

#### Course Structure

Theologians today are discovering that it is impossible to separate what we know of Saint Paul’s personal experiences, the cultural background of his time, and his theological teachings. For Paul, as for any human person, these aspects are all interconnected. Tug on any one and the other two also move. In other words to understand how Paul responded to certain events in his life, we must look at his cultural background and his theological understanding of God and faith. And to fully understand his theological teaching on certain issues, we must also understand his personal experiences and cultural background. That is why the course is structured to deal with Paul’s life experience and cultural background in session 1 before looking at some of his theological themes in sessions 2 and 3.

### Theological Issues in the Sessions

In uncovering the influences on Paul’s worldview in session 1, the primary sources used are the Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s writings. Using these sources presents a few difficulties. The first is that the writer of Acts differs from Paul’s accounts of some details in Paul’s life. For example, Acts 9:27 has Paul meeting with all the Apostles on his first trip to Jerusalem, but in Gal. 1:19 Paul indicates meeting only with Peter and James. The session does not make any reference to these differences, to avoid becoming sidetracked from the primary session objectives.

The second difficulty is that uncovering the influences on Paul’s worldview sometimes requires knowledge of the culture of his time. For example, to know about the Hellenistic (Greek) influences in Paul’s life, you also need to know that Tarsus, where he was raised, was an important Greek city. Expanded descriptions are included where necessary so that you can help the young people make these connections.

In session 2 it is important to keep in mind the connection between the literary form of the Epistles and the theological truths that we can draw from them. Paul’s epistles address specific community concerns, and a study of his responses can reveal his core understandings of God and faith. These core understandings are what the Catholic church teaches as revealed truth. They should not be confused with specific community directions that sometimes reflect the cultural biases of Paul’s time (e.g., women must cover their heads during worship, or wives are subordinate to their husbands). Although this issue is not directly addressed in the session, it could well be brought up by the participants.

Session 3 deals with salvation and grace. Paul has been poorly served by many people who take one part of his teaching about salvation and grace and quote it out of context. We must provide an overall context to answer the question, “Have you been saved?” in a way that does justice to Paul and to Catholic theology. To do this the following concepts are important:

- Salvation is not just a one-time decision. It is reflected in the decisions we make to follow Christ throughout our whole life.
- Salvation is not just a me-and-God experience. We are saved as part of a community of faith.
- We cannot earn our salvation; it is always a free gift. But we cannot be passive in receiving it. We must choose to put our faith in Christ and cooperate with God’s plan of salvation.



## This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as “the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers” (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

*Paul: The Man and the Message* offers a whole session specifically addressing the theme of salvation. The course offers two opportunities for the young people to privately reflect on their need for conversion. Do not misuse these opportunities by treating them as occasions to publicly call a young person to a faith commitment. Be aware of any signs that a young person may be confused or struggling in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ. You may want to approach such a young person privately to offer support and direction.

## Teaching This Course

### A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Paul: The Man and the Message*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

## Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Paul: The Man and the Message* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings of and community climate among the members of the group. High school students are likely to share their thoughts more readily and respond more positively if the space is comfortable and somewhat different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating that type of environment:

**Create a good physical atmosphere.** You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

**Clarify expectations.** At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

## Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This ranges from copying a simple list

onto newsprint to obtaining a video or finding prizes for a game. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

## Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one’s personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it, you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines will help you to share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal “When I was your age . . .” mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

## Using Music

Some of the activities in *Paul: The Man and the Message* suggest using music. No activities in this course require music or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. Circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

**Popular music for prayer.** Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

**Background music for reflection.** Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

**Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer.** Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

### Using This Course as a Retreat

Many of the courses in the Horizons Program can be recast as daylong or overnight programs. It depends on the program, the timing, the leaders, the purpose, and above all the young people themselves. If you want to consider using *Paul: The Man and the Message* as a retreat, consult your program coordinator and together weigh the following advantages and disadvantages:

#### Advantages

- The extended time in a retreat setting would allow for more interaction with the biblical text. For example, the entire Book of Galatians could be read in connection with session 1 (the first chapters are the most autobiographical of any of Paul's writings) and Philippians could be read in connection with session 3.
- Additional time could also be used to explore the difficult passages in Paul's writings, such as the relationship between wives and husbands in Ephesians, speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians, and Paul's treatment of slavery in Philemon.

- A retreat setting allows for extended prayer services. The services could use symbols from the sacraments of initiation and emphasize the sacramental experience of salvation and grace.
- One-on-one time between adults and young people on retreat can open opportunities for talking about the struggles some young people might have about "being saved" or the interpretation of specific Pauline passages.

#### Disadvantages

Though doing *Paul: The Man and the Message* as a retreat has some advantages, it has one major disadvantage that deserves serious consideration before proceeding. The course by its nature is content heavy. Depending on the young people's expectations, a retreat based on this course could seem heavy and overwhelming. Keep in mind that it was designed to work best with juniors and seniors who have a serious interest in the Bible. Additionally, seeking greater theological depth in discussions of Paul's thought could require particularly well-informed leaders.

### Special Preparation Needs

Read through the entire course to get a sense of its plan and progression. Become familiar with Paul's writings by reading through some of his epistles, particularly 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon. Also, peruse the study guides for these letters in a good Catholic study Bible. If you desire more background on Paul and his writings, consider reading one of the resource books listed in the Suggested Resources section, at the end of the introduction.

#### Choosing Bibles

This course calls for a lot of hands-on use of the Bible. You will need to provide Bibles for the young people to use during the sessions. Most parishes have Bibles available for religious education and youth ministry groups to use. When choosing the Bibles to provide, keep the following things in mind:

- They should be an accepted Catholic translation. The New American Bible and the New Revised Standard Version are both recommended. The New Revised Standard Version is a more recent translation and uses gender-inclusive language where appropriate. Having several translations available is helpful for comparing the different wording used to translate the same passage.
- Good Catholic study Bibles would be ideal. Avoid using versions with fundamentalist interpretations and commentary that contradict what is taught in this course.
- You may want to invite the young people to bring their own Bible from home. However, you will still need to have Bibles available for those who do not have their own or who forget to bring theirs.

#### Specific Session Needs

Session 3 begins with an activity requiring about twenty large boxes. Make arrangements for obtaining the boxes if you do not have some readily available.

### This Course and Total Youth Ministry

#### *Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions*

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

### Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Paul: The Man and the Message* can be valuable preparation for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Help the young people develop a greeting card ministry. They can create inspirational greeting cards using verses from Paul's epistles. The cards could be crafted by hand or with the help of a computer and printer. The cards could be sent to parish youth on special occasions like birthdays, the start of school, and so on. Or they can be sent to people who are going through a difficult time.
- Invite members of the parish to an Advent or Lenten youth gathering to talk about how they experience God's saving power. Have them use passages from Paul's writings to illustrate their experiences. You may wish to ask an adult who has been through your parish's RCIA process to talk about their sacramental experience and conversion.
- Direct the young people in creating a 10- to 15-minute play on Paul's life. Let them perform it for younger children as part of a special program. The play might include a series of short scenes depicting some of the major events in Paul's life: the stoning of Stephen, Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, his first missionary journey, his persecutions, his conflict with Peter over the Gentile converts, his imprisonment, and his death.
- Keeping in mind that Paul spent several years of his life in prison, encourage the young people to collect Bibles for prisoners. One method of doing this could be to let the young people sponsor a Bible donation weekend in the parish. Contact your diocesan staff for help with the details in getting the Bibles to prison ministry in your diocese.
- Use some of Paul's images to develop creative prayer services for retreats and meetings. Creative things have been done with 1 Cor. 12:12–31 (one body, many parts), 1 Cor. 13 (love is . . .), Eph. 6:10–17 (armor of God), Col. 3:5–17 (vice versus virtue), Gal. 5:22–23 (fruits of the spirit), and 1 Cor. 9:24–27 (running the race).



- Plan a movie night to watch *Peter and Paul* (see Suggested Resources). The video is available in some parish libraries and even in many video stores. Despite its name, the movie is more about Paul than Peter. It portrays Paul's conversion and ministry and stars Anthony Hopkins and Robert Foxworth. Overall the movie is well done and has some very moving scenes. Unfortunately, it is over 3 hours long. You may wish to take a break between tapes for refreshments and discussion.

The movie contains inconsistencies with the biblical account and some questionable character portrayals that should be pointed out before or after the movie. For example, in the Book of Acts, the original result of the Jerusalem Council was the letter requiring Gentile converts to observe certain Jewish practices. The council never resulted in a complete exemption from all Jewish laws, as depicted in the movie. Some other inaccuracies are that the conflict between Peter and Paul is greatly exaggerated, Peter is portrayed with too much self-doubt, and Luke is too doubting in faith. The study guide listed with the movie identifies these concerns and is strongly recommended as background for the video.

## Family Connections

It is hard to imagine many families sitting down for an invigorating discussion of Pauline theology! But the following suggestions can help create links between the course and the family life of the participants:

- Recommend for family viewing the video *Peter and Paul* (see Suggested Resources).
- Provide some commentary and discussion questions for families on Col. 3:18–21 and Eph. 6:1–4. These passages discuss the relationship between parents and children and can make for interesting family conversations.
- Encourage the young people to take home hand-out 3–B, the Pauline prayer service used as the closing in session 3. Suggest that they invite their family to use the prayer during special family celebrations.

## Goals and Objectives in This Course

### Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

**Goals.** Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator's manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

**Objectives.** Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

## The Goals and Objectives of Paul: The Man and the Message

### Goals

This course has five goals:

- That the young people appreciate Saint Paul's life and ministry
- That they understand the form and intent of an epistle
- That they become familiar with the major themes and key passages of the Pauline epistles
- That they develop a deeper understanding of salvation and grace
- That they come to value Paul's writings as a personal source of prayer and motivation to live the Christian life

### Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the five course goals. The objectives of *Paul: The Man and the Message* follow:

#### Session 1: "Paul's Story"

- To help the young people appreciate the cultural and religious influences in Paul's life
- To examine the impact of Paul's conversion experience on his thought and actions

#### Session 2: "Paul's Message"

- To engage the young people in a study of Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians
- To introduce them to the literary structure of an epistle
- To help them understand the distinction in authorship between the authentic Pauline epistles and those written in Paul's name by his disciples
- To expose the young people to the major theological themes in Paul's writings

#### Session 3: "Salvation and Grace"

- To explore with the young people the themes of salvation and grace in Paul's writings
- To help them develop their answer to the familiar question, "Have you been saved?"
- To demonstrate how Saint Paul's writings can motivate and direct them in responding to God's offer of salvation

## Suggested Resources

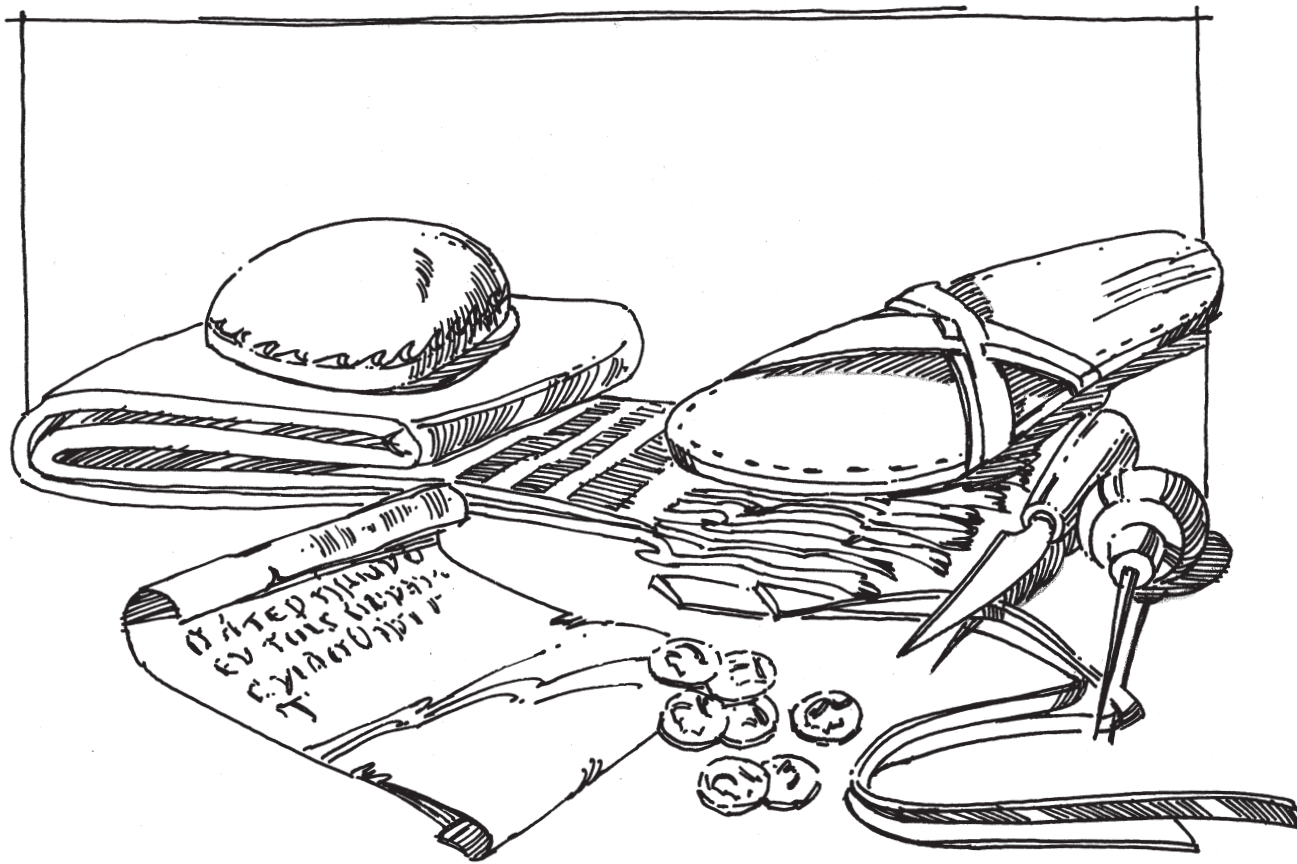
The following resources may provide helpful background and teaching materials:

- Achtmeier, Paul J., ed. *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.
- Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Trans. United States Catholic Conference (USCC). Washington, DC: USCC, 1994.
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995.
- Peter and Paul*. MCA Home Video, 1981. Chronicles the ministries of Paul and Peter until their deaths in Rome. 194 minutes. A study guide is available, and we strongly recommend it. Available from Vision Video, PO Box 540, 2030 Wentz Church Road, Worcester, PA 19490; phone 800-523-0226.
- Senior, Donald, ed. *The Catholic Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Serendipity Bible*. 10th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1996.
- Soards, Marion L. *The Apostle Paul: An Introduction to His Writings and Teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987.



## SESSION 1

## Paul's Story



## Objectives

- To help the young people appreciate the cultural and religious influences in Paul's life
- To examine the impact of Paul's conversion experience on his thought and actions

## Session Steps

- a get-acquainted activity (20 minutes)
- a Scripture search for influences on Paul's worldview (25 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a dramatic presentation on Paul's conversion (15 minutes)
- a Scripture activity on Paul's conversion (35 minutes)
- a closing prayer (15 minutes)

## Background for the Teacher

Saint Paul has fascinated Christians throughout history. The combination of his Jewish upbringing, his exposure to Greek culture, his fiery personality, and his openness to God's grace uniquely prepared him to spread the Gospel. This session introduces the young people to Saint Paul, the person. It examines the people and events that formed his worldview and shows how his conversion changed his understanding of Christianity.

The opening activity has the participants introduce themselves using the form of an acceptance speech. To prepare for this, they reflect on the people and things that have influenced them. This experience prepares them to appreciate the influence of the people and events in Paul's life.

Next, a scriptural search helps the young people put together a portrait of Paul. The purpose of the activity is to enable the participants to discover the influences in Paul's life that contributed to the success of his ministry.

The second half of the session shifts attention to Paul's conversion experience. Using a hard-boiled egg and a raw egg as focusing symbols, the young people reflect on the meaning of conversion. Then two or three of the participants do a dramatic reading of Paul's conversion story from the Acts of the Apostles. Following the reading the young people use the Scriptures to investigate Paul's behaviors and attitudes before and after his conversion. The participants present their findings in a short speech, as if they were introducing Paul at a major conference.

The session concludes with a prayer service on conversion. Journal time and true conversion stories are used to stir the young people's imagination.

Because this session contains a lot of hands-on Bible work, be attentive to the young people's comfort level in looking up passages. Be prepared to help.

## Preparation

 **Materials Needed**

- newsprint and markers
- masking tape
- white, adhesive mailing labels (1-by-3 inches or larger), four for each participant
- pens or pencils
- copies of handout 1-A, "Influences on Saul-Paul's Worldview," one for each participant
- Bibles, one for each participant
- a hard-boiled egg
- a raw egg
- a bowl
- three copies of resource 1-A, "The Road to Damascus: A Scripted Version of Acts 9:1-22"
- copies of handout 1-B, "How Paul's Conversion Changed His Life," one for each participant
- blank writing paper
- items for the prayer space: a large candle; vigil candles (one for each participant); matches; a large, attractive Bible; a small table; and a tablecloth
- one copy of resource 1-B, "A Medley of Conversion Readings"

 **Other Necessary Preparations**

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Make a drawing as described in step A.
- For step D.* Make an *x* on a raw egg with a marker. Recruit and prepare two (if you plan to read a part yourself) or three participants to read the scripted version of Acts 9:1-22 from resource 1-A, "The Road to Damascus."
- For step E.* Prepare to present the summary points on Paul's conversion, using the information presented in step E.
- For step F.* Prepare the prayer space as directed in step F.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches described at the end of this session plan.

## Opening Teacher Prayer

In his writings Paul drew heavily on his personal experience of God. Because of this, many passages in his epistles have a prayerful quality. With some changes and additions in wording, these passages take on the form of personal prayers. The teacher prayers in this course were written in this manner. May they inspire you to make more of Paul's prayers your own.

Before the session find a quiet place to center yourself. Call to mind any worries or concerns that trouble you. Place them in God's hands as you pray the following:

Loving God, send your spirit to help me in my weakness, to carry my prayers to you when I do not have the words to pray, or do not even know what to pray for. For I trust that all things will work together for good for those who love you, who are called according to your divine purpose. If you are for me, who can prevail against me? If you did not withhold your own son, but gave him up for all of us, will you not give me everything else that I need? Who should I be afraid of? I need fear no person, for it is you who justifies, and I believe that Christ Jesus, risen and victorious, intercedes for me at your right hand.

What can separate me from your love? Will hardship or stress or persecution or joblessness or busy calendars or sickness or even death? No, in all these things we are already victorious through Jesus who loved us. Let me be as confident as Paul that neither death nor life, neither spiritual nor worldly powers, neither present nor future events, truly, no force in the universe can separate me from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. (Based on Rom. 8:26–39)

## Procedure

### **A** Get-acquainted Activity: The Acceptance Speech (20 minutes)

*Before the session.* Draw a silhouette of a person on a sheet of newsprint. To the right of the figure, write the following headings: "Family and ethnic heritage influences," "Religious and moral influences," "Influential friends and mentors," "Influential traits and skills." Use handout 1–A, "Influences on Saul-Paul's Worldview," as a model for this. Display your poster on a wall.

1. Warmly greet the young people as they arrive. If they do not already know you, introduce yourself and give a little personal background about your family, your work, your hobbies, and so on.

2. Give each participant four blank adhesive address labels with the backing still attached. Tell the participants to write their initials in the lower right corner of each label. Explain that they are going to introduce themselves to the group by giving a short acceptance speech for an imaginary award they have been selected to receive. Direct the young people to choose an award for themselves that would be personally meaningful. Then tell them to decide who or what to acknowledge in their acceptance speech. Announce that you have created a chart to help them.

Point out the chart posted on the wall and briefly explain the four categories of personal characteristics. Direct them to take a couple of minutes to think of a person or event in each category that has "made them who they are." Tell them to write on each label a category title and the person or event that they think corresponds to that category. Explain that the labels will be their notes when they give their speech.

3. When the participants have completed their labels, ask them to give their speech. Each person is to describe the imaginary award she or he has won and then acknowledge the people or events written on her or his labels. You may want to go first to demonstrate. Feel free to be humorous or dramatic—it will give the young people permission to have fun with this activity. Also, keep your own speech brief, to model what you expect of the participants. Then invite a volunteer to begin. Acknowledge each

person's "acceptance speech" with polite applause. After all the speeches are made, ask the young people to stick their labels on the posted chart—each label under the proper category.

4. Summarize the activity with words like the following:

- We are all influenced by our family, our culture, our religious and moral upbringing, and the development of our personality and skills. This held true as well for the Apostle Paul, the person whose life and message is the focus of the course. Saint Paul was a fascinating person who directly or indirectly was responsible for half of the books of the Christian Testament. In this session you will discover some of the people and events that influenced Paul's life and message.

### **B** Scripture Search: Influences on Paul's Worldview (25 minutes)

1. Give each participant a copy of handout 1–A, "Influences on Saul-Paul's Worldview," and a Bible. Explain that the title uses Saul-Paul because he is referred to by both names in the Bible. It is likely that Saul was his Jewish name and Paul was his Greek or Roman name. This is a clue that Saint Paul had a rich and complex background. Many people and events were influential in forming his understanding of Jesus Christ. We know about these influences primarily through his writings and from stories about him in the Acts of the Apostles. By appreciating these influences on his worldview, we can better understand him and his writings.

2. Divide the group into pairs. Direct their attention to the areas of influence listed to the right of the silhouette on the handout. Note that the list uses the same categories used in the acceptance speech exercise. Also point out that page 2 of the handout offers further information on the categories as they relate to Paul.

Instruct the pairs to look up the Scripture passages listed in the center of the figure. Explain that after reading the passage, they should draw a line connecting it to the influence it most clearly demonstrates. When they are finished, they can read 1 Cor. 9:19–23 and discuss the questions at the bottom of page 1 of the handout.

3. When the pairs are done, call everyone together. Read the correct matches given here and have the young people compare their responses:

- Acts 9:26–27: Friends and mentors (Barnabas)
- Acts 17:16–21: Religious and moral influences (was influenced by Greek culture)
- Acts 18:1–3: Traits and skills (earned a living as a tentmaker)
- Acts 21:37–39: Family and ethnic heritage (grew up in Tarsus)
- Acts 22:3: Friends and mentors (Gamaliel)
- Acts 22:25–29: Family and ethnic heritage (was a Roman citizen)
- Phil. 3:5; Acts 26:4–5: Family and ethnic heritage (grew up in a Jewish family)
- Phil. 3:5; Acts 26:4–5: Religious and moral influences (was a Pharisee)
- 2 Cor. 11:21b–28: Traits and skills (was brave and committed)
- Gal. 3:1–4; 5:12: Traits and skills (had a fiery and passionate personality)

Next, ask everyone to share their responses to the questions at the bottom of page 1 of the handout. Summarize the discussion as follows:

- Paul was a deeply committed Jew. As such he knew the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish Law very well. This enabled him to speak with authority to other Jews, appealing to their scriptures, teachings, and history.
- Paul was born in an important cosmopolitan city of his time. This exposed him to the Greek and Roman worldviews and philosophies. This background gave him a special concern for the salvation of the Gentiles (non-Jews) and gave him the skills to pass the Gospel message on to them.
- Paul had important mentors who supported and encouraged him—both before and after his conversion (which will be discussed in more detail after the break).
- Paul could hold his own in any argument or conflict. He was passionate about what he believed and was not afraid of speaking what was on his mind. When others misrepresented Christian faith or practice, Paul responded courageously in proclaiming and defending the true Gospel message.

### **C** Break (10 minutes)



## **D** Dramatic Presentation: Paul's Conversion (15 minutes)

*Before the session.* Make an x on a raw egg with a marker. Recruit and prepare two or three young people to read the scripted version of Acts 9:1–22 from resource 1–A. (You will need only two student readers if you plan to read a part.)

1. Pass two eggs around the group, one hard-boiled and one raw. Ask the young people to guess which egg is which. After they have had a chance to guess, casually toss the hard-boiled egg to someone across the room for effect. Then break the raw egg into a bowl to prove it is raw. Tell the group that when an egg is heated, it turns from a liquid to a solid. This change in the physical nature of the egg might be called a conversion. Explain that people also undergo conversions, although unlike the physical change in the egg, a personal conversion usually involves changes in beliefs or behaviors. Invite the group into a brief discussion on conversion with the following questions:

- What kinds of conversions do people experience? [Some of the areas of life in which people experience conversion are religious beliefs, political beliefs, moral behavior, and health or lifestyle behaviors.]
- Can you name some similarities between the egg's conversion experience and a human conversion experience? [In both cases the change might not be easily identifiable from outer appearances. An outside influence started the conversion. Both happen when "heat" is applied.]
- Do you know anyone who has gone through a conversion experience? How did he or she change? Have you experienced anything like a conversion yourself?

2. Explain that Saint Paul experienced an important conversion that is referred to several times in the Christian Testament. In the Acts of the Apostles, his experience is told in a dramatic fashion, but the author, Luke, may have embellished the story to emphasize its importance. In his own writings, Paul mentions his conversion with much less detail. In any case we need to appreciate the importance of Paul's conversion experience and its effect on his beliefs and behaviors. Announce that some group members are going to give a dramatic reading of

Paul's conversion story from the Acts of the Apostles. Invite the group to listen prayerfully while the young people you recruited earlier read the scripted version of Acts 9:1–22 from resource 1–A.

## **E** Scriptural Activity: Paul's Conversion (35 minutes)

1. Ask the young people to pair up—preferably with someone other than their partner before the break. Tell them you want to take them back in their imagination almost two thousand years. They will be attending the first Jerusalem Christian conference and have been asked to introduce Paul before he receives the Outstanding Evangelizer of the Year Award. In order to properly introduce him, they need to do a little research. Give each participant a copy of handout 1–B, "How Paul's Conversion Changed His Life." Direct the pairs to find and read the Bible passages listed on the handout. After reading all the references for a category, they should make some notes for that category about Paul's behavior and beliefs before and after his conversion. Based on these notes, they will then write their speech introducing Paul at the conference. The speech should emphasize how Paul's conversion changed him. They will have 20 minutes to complete all this.

2. When the pairs are finished, invite volunteers to choose one section of their speech to read to the group. Make a positive comment on some aspect of each presentation and invite the entire group to do the same. After you have heard comments that cover each section of the handout, open the floor to anyone who has further insights to offer. Make sure the following points are made clearly, either in the speeches or in your comments about them:

- Paul's conversion marked a radical change in his attitude toward Christ and the people who were Christ's followers. Before his conversion Paul believed that the disciples of Christ were a threat to the Jewish faith. He went so far as to work with other Jewish leaders to violently stamp out this "cult" of heretics. (Early Christians kept their Jewish ties and were initially seen as a Jewish cult.) Paul's conversion experience convinced him that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God, the Savior the Jewish people had been waiting for. Paul turned from being a fervent persecutor of Christians to being one of history's most passionate defenders of the Christian faith.

## **F** Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

*Before the session.* Set up the prayer area with a small table; a tablecloth; a large candle; a vigil candle for each participant; and a large, attractive Bible in a modern translation to use as a group Bible. Put a bookmark at 2 Cor. 4:1–6 in the Bible.

1. Invite the young people to move into the prayer area and form a circle. Pass out blank paper. Ask the young people to spend a few minutes writing a response to the question,

- What is one area in my life where I need—or want—to experience change or conversion?

While they are writing, select the readings from resource 1–B, "A Medley of Conversion Readings," that you would like to use and that you have time for. (You will need 5 minutes after the readings to complete a ritual.)

2. When the writing time is over, dim the lights and light a large candle in the center of the group. Place the group Bible near the candle. Ask the young people to cross their arms over their chest as you begin the prayer. Explain that this closed expression indicates the areas in their life where they are closed to God's love and power.

3. Read the stories you selected from resource 1–B. Pause after each reading for a moment of quiet reflection.

4. Turn to the young person on your right and gently open his or her arms, saying as you do so, "[Person's name], may you be open to Christ as Paul was." Invite the young person to do the same to the person on his or her right. This ritual action is to continue around the circle.

While this is happening, begin lighting vigil candles and passing them around the circle until every person has one. Do not rush this; allow time for the ritual opening of each person's arms.

5. When the ritual action has been completed and everyone has a lighted candle, read 2 Cor. 4:1–6. Conclude by praying,

- May God bless us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thank the young people for their participation and wish them a good week.

- As a Pharisee, Paul would have been rigidly committed to following the Law (the name given to biblical laws in the Hebrew Scriptures and all the customs and traditions based on them). His conversion experience convinced him that salvation was a free gift that could not be earned. Perhaps this happened when he realized that his commitment to the Law had not prevented him from persecuting innocent people. After his conversion he was steadfast in preaching that salvation did not come through following the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.
- After his conversion Paul had a passion for preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles (the Jewish name for people who were not Jewish). His passion for their salvation can be partially attributed to his experience of living in the Greek and Roman worlds. Because of Paul's revelation that salvation did not come through following the Law, he insisted that Gentiles did not have to adopt all the Jewish laws and customs (including circumcision) in order to become Christians. This was not a popular view at the time, and Paul even challenged Peter and other important leaders of the early church on this. Because of his commitment to the salvation of the Gentiles, Paul is sometimes called the Apostle to the Gentiles.
- Paul's moral life was also changed by his conversion experience. Before his conversion Paul was filled with hate and was willing to condone violence toward his perceived enemies. Afterward he came to understand Jesus' teaching of love for one's enemies. Even though his writings indicate that he could still get angry with those he felt were hindering the spread of the Gospel, he never resorted to the hatred and violence he had demonstrated before his conversion.
- Not everything about Paul changed with his conversion. He still loved the Jewish people and his Jewish faith. He still was passionate about what he believed. He still was influenced by contemporary cultural attitudes, as is evidenced by his attitude toward women and slaves.
- We cannot be sure exactly what happened at the time of Paul's conversion. Though it is presented dramatically in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's own writings never mention the supernatural details. No doubt his complete understanding of the experience gradually became clearer over time. We do know that after his conversion, he spent several years in Christian communities—time that Paul spent learning the stories and teachings about Jesus Christ.

## Alternative Approaches

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

**For step A.** If your group is larger than ten or twelve, try this introduction technique to save time. Ask the young people to pick something they have on their person—for example, a wallet, a purse, or a key ring—and use it to introduce themselves. A person with a set of keys might say, “This is the key to my house, where I live with my mom and two sisters. This is the key to my car, which is twelve years old and uses a quart of oil every two hundred miles.” This approach will not make the connections to the people and events that influence our lives as well as the get-acquainted activity in step A would, but it will get the session started quickly with a larger group.

**For step D.** If your parish has the video *Peter and Paul* (see Suggested Resources), show the group the section of the video that portrays Paul’s conversion experience on the way to Damascus. Do this in place of the dramatic reading. Preview the video and have it cued up.

**For step E.** If someone in your area has sufficient background on Paul’s life (and a dramatic flair), invite him or her to visit your group as Saint Paul. Instead of the Scripture study for this step, direct the young people to question “Saint Paul” about what he was like before and after his conversion. Direct the young people to refer to the categories on handout 1–B. After about 10 minutes of questioning, have them prepare their introductory speeches. Then invite volunteers to share portions of their speeches and let Saint Paul comment, making the points listed at the end of the step.

## Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.



### Closing Teacher Prayer

Gather your thoughts in silence for a few moments. Reflect on the blessings you have received from your time with the young people. Call to mind any needs that surfaced or concerns that you might have for the young people. Conclude with this prayer based on Paul’s writings:

Your foolishness, O God,  
is wiser than any human wisdom,  
and your weakness, my God,  
is stronger than any human achievement.  
You have chosen what is foolish in the world  
to shame those who boast in their wisdom;  
You have chosen what is weak in the world  
to shame those who boast in their strength.  
You have chosen what is looked down upon  
and even despised;  
chosen people no one would give a second glance  
to humble those whom the world glorifies,  
so that no one can boast in your presence.  
All that I am comes from you through Christ  
Jesus,  
He who is our wisdom, our righteousness, and  
our salvation.  
Teach me the lesson as it is written,  
“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”  
(Based on 1 Cor. 1:25–31)



## Evaluation

After the session take a few moments to evaluate how it went. Think about the following questions and, for future reference, write your answers in the spaces provided.

1. What worked best in this session?

2. What would make this session better next time?

3. How well did the session meet the objective of helping the young people appreciate the cultural and religious influences in Paul’s life?

Poorly ↔ Wonderfully  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Comments:

4. How well did the session meet the objective of examining the impact of Paul’s conversion experience on his thought and actions?

Poorly ↔ Wonderfully  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Comments:

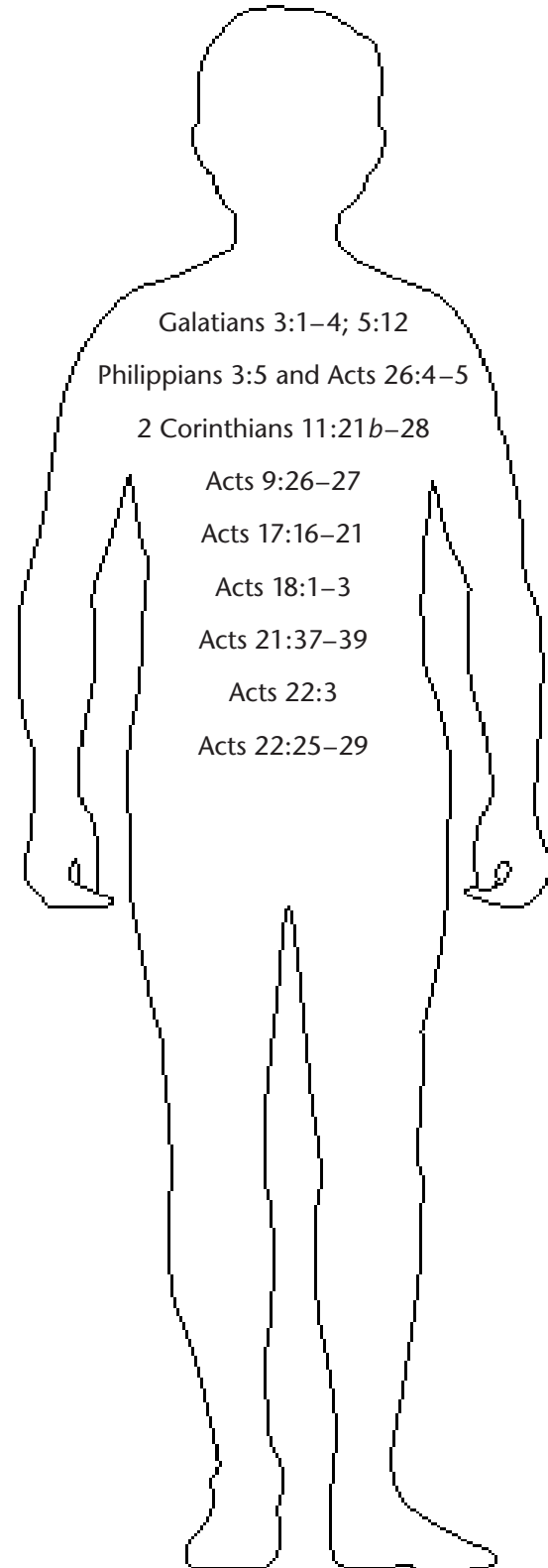
5. Did the content and methods in the session seem appropriate given the young people’s level of familiarity with the Bible? If not, how might you adjust them next time?

6. Did you see anyone having a hard time in the group, or recognize any particular needs of the young people that you would like to follow up on?



# Influences on Saul-Paul's Worldview

After reading each of the Scripture passages listed below, decide which of the influences listed at the right it describes. Draw a line from the passage to the matching influence. See page 2 of this handout for help in understanding the four areas of influence as they relate to Saul-Paul.



## Family and Ethnic Heritage Influences

- Grew up in a Jewish family
- Grew up in Tarsus
- Had Roman citizenship

## Religious and Moral Influences

- Was a Pharisee
- Was influenced by Greek culture

## Influential Friends and Mentors

- Gamaliel
- Barnabas

## Influential Traits and Skills

- Had a fiery and passionate personality
- Earned a living as a tentmaker
- Was brave and committed

When you have finished matching all the passages, find and read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. Then answer these questions:

- What is Paul implying about his background in this passage?
- How did his background help him relate to both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews)?

# Influences on Saul-Paul's Worldview

page 2

## Family and Ethnic Heritage Influences

- **Grew up in a Jewish family.** Growing up in a Jewish family, Paul was familiar with the customs and traditions of Jewish life.
- **Grew up in Tarsus.** Paul did not grow up in a country village but in a major cosmopolitan city. He was familiar with people from other cultural and religious backgrounds, and he would have had a formal education.
- **Had Roman citizenship.** A rare privilege, Paul's Roman citizenship let him appeal to civil authority when he got in trouble.

## Religious and Moral Influences

- **Was a Pharisee.** As a member of this particular branch of Judaism, Saul held to a rigid interpretation of Jewish Law that was respected among many people but in some ways conflicted with Jesus' message.
- **Was influenced by Greek culture.** Saul's education in Tarsus would have included reading and writing Greek and being exposed to Greek philosophy and religion.

## Influential Friends and Mentors

- **Gamaliel.** The Acts of the Apostles claims that Saul received training in Jewish Law and theology under Gamaliel, the most respected rabbi in Jerusalem of the time.
- **Barnabas.** After his conversion Paul spent a lot of time with Barnabas, an early Christian leader whose name literally means "son of encouragement."

## Influential Traits and Skills

- **Had a fiery and passionate personality**
- **Earned a living as a tentmaker.** Paul continued to earn his living as a tentmaker even while on his missionary journeys, so that no one could accuse him of preaching about Christ as a way to make money.
- **Was brave and committed**

# THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS: A Scripted Version of Acts 9:1–22

**Reader 1.** Meanwhile, Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now, as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,

**Reader 2.** “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

**Reader 1.** He asked,

**Reader 3.** “Who are you, Lord?”

**Reader 1.** The reply came,

**Reader 2.** “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

**Reader 1.** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision,

**Reader 2.** “Ananias.”

**Reader 1.** He answered,

**Reader 3.** “Here I am, Lord,”

**Reader 1.** The Lord said to him,

**Reader 2.** “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”

**Reader 1.** But Ananias answered,

**Reader 3.** “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.”

**Reader 1.** But the Lord said to him,

**Reader 2.** “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

**Reader 1.** So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said,

**Reader 3.** “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

**Reader 1.** And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying,

**Reader 3.** “He is the Son of God.”

**Reader 1.** All who heard him were amazed and said,

**Reader 2.** “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the high priests?”

**Reader 1.** Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

## How Paul's Conversion Changed His Life

For each of the three categories below, find and read all the passages listed. Then make notes about what Saint Paul's attitude was like in that category before and after his conversion.

### Paul's Attitude Toward *Christ and Christians*

Passages: Acts 9:20–22 • Acts 22:1–5 • Galatians 1:13–14

*Before conversion:*

*After conversion:*

### Paul's Attitude Toward *Gentiles (Non-Jews)*

Passages: Acts 13:4–50 • Galatians 2:11–14

*Before conversion:*

*After conversion:*

### Paul's Attitude Toward *His Enemies*

Passages: Acts 26:9–11 • Romans 12:14–21 • 1 Corinthians 4:11–13

*Before conversion:*

*After conversion:*

# A Medley of CONVERSION READINGS

Select the readings for the prayer service according to the time you have available and what you believe would most touch the young people in your group. Each reading takes from 1 to 2 minutes.

## A Young Person's Experience

Why do you stand aloof, O God?  
Why do you hide yourself in  
times of trouble?  
(Psalm 10:1)

How long, O God? Will you  
forget me forever? . . .  
How long must I bear pain in my  
soul?  
. . . . .

Consider and answer me, O God:  
give light to my eyes, lest I sleep  
in death.  
(Psalm 13:1-3)

The lines of these two psalms say a lot to me because there have been times when I felt so far away from God, and I couldn't reach God. God wouldn't let me. It was as if God was heading away from me to let me solve the problems, and I didn't know how then.

Now that I am older, I do understand that God wasn't hiding away from me. God was suffering just as much as I was. God was giving me the chance of making my own choices. Now I know that the Almighty never hides from me and will never let me die from sorrow. Jesus is trying to say to me to trust myself as well as to trust him.

(Jeannie Campis, Saint Pius V High School, Bronx, New York, as quoted in Koch, ed., *Dreams Alive*, page 80)

## Charles Colson's Conversion

Charles Colson was President Nixon's hatchet man and was implicated in the Watergate scandal in 1974 that led to Nixon's resignation. This is an excerpt from a book in which Colson describes his experience of conversion.

Tom reached to the corner table and picked up a small paperback book. I read the title: *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis. "I suggest you take this with you and read it while you are on vacation." Tom started to hand it to me, then paused. "Let me read you one chapter."

It is Pride which has been the chief cause of every misery in every nation and every family since the world began. . . . For Pride is spiritual cancer, it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense.

Tom finished the chapter on pride and shut the book. . . . That one chapter ripped through the protective armor I had unknowingly encased myself in for forty-two years. Of course, I had not known God. How could I? I had been concerned with myself. I had done this and that, I had achieved, I had succeeded and I had given God none of the credit, never once thanking Him for any of His gifts to me. I had never thought of anything being "immeasurably superior" to myself, or if I had in fleeting moments thought about the infinite power of God, I had not related it to my life. In those brief moments while Tom read, I saw myself as I never had before. And the picture was ugly.

As I drove out of Tom's driveway, the tears were flowing uncontrollably. . . . And then I prayed my first real prayer. "God, I don't know how to find You, but I'm going to try! I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself over to You." I didn't know how to say more, so I repeated over and over the words: *Take me*.

(Colson, *Born Again*, pages 112-117)

## A College Student's Experience

I grew up in a Catholic family in a small town. As I went through high school I became less and less interested in church. Masses were boring, and my church didn't have any youth activities. School, friends, and work were my whole life. God was just a blip on the horizon. He was probably out there, but he didn't have much to do with me and I didn't have much to do with him and that was fine.

I went to a college far away from home. That far away from my family and friends, I knew there was an emptiness growing inside of me. On the outside everything looked fine, I had friends, I was doing well in school, and I did a lot of partying—of the wrong kind. But something was missing.

In the winter of my second year at college, a friend who had quit the partying scene and joined a Christian fellowship invited me to attend a Bible study he was hosting. I surprised both him and myself by saying yes. They were studying the Gospel of Mark. Again I surprised myself at how much I got into it. The people attending the study were committed Christians, and I was very impressed by them. They were funny, intelligent, open, and truly caring—unlike most of the people I had come across. I found myself wanting to be with them.

At the same time, it seemed like I was seeing the real Jesus for the first time through this Bible study. I had never really read the Bible before. It gradually became clear that I had a choice: either believe that Jesus was the Son of God as the Bible claimed and base my life on his example and teachings, or chalk up the whole thing as an elaborate ruse.

It all came to a head during spring break. Without going into details, I had several painful encounters with friends from high school. I remember stopping my car along the road with tears running down my face. I prayed a deep prayer from the heart, "Jesus, I can't handle this anymore. I'm not sure exactly who you are, but I want to change my life and follow you. Please help me." Jesus answered that prayer, and my life hasn't been the same since.

(Taken from a private journal)

## A Story of Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was an emancipated slave who had many religious visions and mystical experiences. She was also a powerful voice opposing slavery and discrimination against women before and after the Civil War. Before the event described in this excerpt from her biography, she had a powerful vision of her own sinfulness and separation from God. She felt she needed an intermediary, someone worthy enough to approach God on her behalf. Then she had another vision:

"Who *are* you?" she exclaimed, as the vision brightened into a form distinct, beaming with the beauty of holiness, and radiant with love. She then said, audibly addressing the mysterious visitant—"I *know* you, and I *don't* know you." Meaning, "You seem perfectly familiar; I feel that you not only love me, but that you always *have* loved me—yet I know you not—I cannot call you by name." When she said, "I know you," the subject of the vision remained distinct and quiet. When she said, "I don't know you," it moved restlessly about, like agitated waters. . . . "Who are you?" was the cry of her heart, and her whole soul was in one deep prayer that this heavenly personage might be revealed to her, and remain with her. At length, . . . till breath and strength seemed failing, and she could maintain her position no longer, an answer came to her, saying distinctly, "It is Jesus." "Yes," she responded, "it is *Jesus*."

(Kerr and Mulder, eds., *Famous Conversions*, page 115)