

Galatians

Unbound, Unchained, Unbroken

Week 2 | Galatians 1:11–24

Lisa Scheffler, author

Welcome back to the Engage God Daily for Week 2 of Galatians: Unbound, Unchained, Unbroken. Did you check out our new audio version last week? Give it a listen and tell us what you think! bit.ly/EngageGodDaily

We all have a story

Have you ever heard, “Christianity isn’t a religion; it’s a relationship”? The Christian faith isn’t founded on a set of principles or a list of rules; it’s foundation is a person — Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. Being a Christian means having a relationship with Jesus.

In the same way that parents have a unique relationship with each of their children, God has a unique relationship with each of us. You may have met Jesus during a crisis, when you were at your lowest point. Or maybe your mom, dad, or vacation Bible school teacher introduced you to Jesus when you were a child. You may have experienced a sudden, dramatic awareness of his presence, or slowly become acquainted with him over a lifetime. Maybe your journey with Jesus hasn’t yet begun, but you’re considering it. Every story is unique.

The Apostle Paul has one of the more remarkable faith stories in the Bible. He uses elements of his story in his letter to the Galatians, but does so for a very specific purpose. This week and next, we’re going to learn a little more about Paul’s story and how he uses it persuade the Galatian Christians. We’ll also contemplate how we can have meaningful conversations with others where we share elements of our own faith journey so that people might experience Christ through us.

Day 1

Paul brought the gospel to the region of Galatia during his first missionary journey, but later, the churches he planted began questioning the message he shared. After Paul’s departure, a group of missionaries came with a gospel that added to Paul’s by going back to some of the requirements of the Jewish law. They questioned Paul’s authority and motives as well as his message.

If you'll recall from last week's reading, Paul found it necessary to defend his apostleship and the gospel he'd taught. He insisted that the message came directly from God and that any other version of the gospel, and the people who spread it, must be condemned in the strongest terms. He disputed their accusation that he was a "people pleaser," and instead claimed he was a servant of Christ. Paul's frustration in those verses practically leaps off the page.

As you'll see in the passage we'll look at this week, his exasperated tone begins to give way to strong, firm argumentation as Paul seeks to re-establish his credibility. He's determined to help the Galatians understand the truth of the gospel he first preached to them.

As you read through the entire section of Galatians that we'll focus on this week, notice how Paul reminds them of parts of his own story to convince them of his sincerity and his gospel's authenticity.

Read

Galatians 1:11–24

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

²¹ Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

²⁴ And they praised God because of me.

- What was Paul's past like? Who and/or what changed him? For what purpose? What was the result according to verse 24?

- What argument is Paul making to convince the Galatians that his gospel is the true gospel? How is he using his own story in that argument?

Respond

The Lord intervened in Paul's life and changed him completely. When we put our faith in Christ, that's what the Spirit does. You don't have to have a story as dramatic as Paul's to recognize the ways the Spirit has and is calling you and enabling you to become more and more like Jesus. He works to transform our lives and gives us meaning and purpose. This week, we want to meditate on our own personal "God stories" and think about the ways Jesus has changed our lives so that we can encourage others to allow him to change their's.

In prayer, reflect on your faith journey, asking the Spirit to bring to mind specific ways he's been present in your story and praising him for what he's done. If you have a hard time thinking of things, pray over that too. Invite the Spirit to transform you and commit to cooperating with him in the work he wants to do.

Day 2

Lisa Scheffler, author

What is the gospel? We talk about our faith in it. We are encouraged to share it. But how well do we understand this "good news" and all its implications? What does it mean for us as individuals? How does it affect relationships, communities, and even the whole cosmos? Paul's letter to the Galatians will help us answer these kinds of questions. Because what we believe about the gospel has a profound effect on every aspect of our lives.

Paul dedicated his life to proclaiming the gospel and insisted that this was not a message he made up, or re-worked to benefit himself or please others. He received it directly from Jesus Christ.

Read

Galatians 1:11–12

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

- What is Paul hoping to convince the Galatians of? Based on these two verses, what two objections is he responding to?

Reflect

Paul had come to the region of Galatia proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God, Savior, and Lord over the entire world.

One commentator helps us outline the gospel that Paul shared. From Acts and Paul's writings, we know that there are at least three dimensions:

- Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone, "in fulfillment of the revelation given through Moses"
- A person becomes accepted by God solely by faith, "apart from living in accordance with the law of Moses"
- This acceptance and church participation is open as much to Gentiles as it is to Jews.¹

Through Christ, all of God's promises were fulfilled. By putting their faith in him, all people, whether Jew or Gentile, could have their sins forgiven and be made right with God. By God's grace, they would receive the Holy Spirit and could enter the Father's eternal, covenant family, finding peace with God and each other.

After Paul's initial visit to the region, many people responded and committed to following Jesus Christ. But this other group of missionaries, Paul's opponents, came to the region with a different gospel. While they believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that allegiance to him was required, they also preached adherence to the Mosaic law.

According to these missionaries, to be included in God's covenant community, males needed to adopt the sign of the Abrahamic covenant and be circumcised, and then all converts had to follow the dietary restrictions and observe the Sabbath and other holy days outlined in the Torah. These were the same stipulations required by the law for people converting to Judaism. In the minds of Paul's opponents, pagan Gentiles basically needed to become Jews in order to be saved by their Messiah.

Paul is outraged. For Paul, to add anything to Christ's sacrificial death was to say that it was insufficient. But before Paul can argue this point, he has to deal with some of the attacks against him.

Paul's claim is that his gospel, which was being called in question by his opponents and being deserted by the Galatians, "was neither an invention (as if his own brain had fabricated it), nor a tradition (as if the church had handed it down to him), but a revelation (for God had made it known to him)."² Paul is not defending his reputation for his own sake, but because he wants these Christians to return to the true gospel.

God gave Paul a unique role to play in the formation of the church. He had the authority of an Apostle and the revelation he received from God was special. Yet, sometimes people in our own day will claim direct revelation from God. How are we to respond to them? There is a massive theological debate in Christian circles about whether God still speaks today, and

¹ Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 63.

² McKnight, 64.

that's too big a topic for us here. But we can learn something from Paul right here in Galatians to help us answer this question.

Paul claimed that he received the gospel as a revelation from Christ and did not get it from other people. He insisted that it was a message independent from others, but not from the Word of God. Paul saw Christ's gospel as fulfilling the Jewish scriptures, not departing from them. Paul quoted the Old Testament extensively in his sermons and writings. He did so right here in Galatians. So, one way we can evaluate anyone who claims a revelation from God is to ask the question: Does it fit with God's revelation, as revealed in his Word? If it doesn't, we can immediately dismiss it. If it does, other follow up questions will need to follow.

Respond

Tomorrow, we'll get into the autobiographical part of Paul's letter, so let's continue to reflect on our own stories. Over the next two weeks, let's all take some time to write out a few "God stories" — these can be how you met Jesus, a way that walking with him has changed your life, or whatever the Spirit brings to mine. As you reflect on them now, worship God for what he has done in your life! We want to be able to share our stories during meaningful conversations where we help people recognize that they are known and loved.

Day 3

Lisa Scheffler, author

How easily are you influenced?

A few months ago, my husband, who loves to grill on his Big Green Egg, began watching YouTube videos that explained different barbecue techniques. Shortly after that, packages began showing up with new gadgets and gizmos, and spices and rubs that were "must haves." Apparently, these online pit masters often have sponsorship deals.

One day as he opened the door to pick up another box that had been delivered to our front step, we both laughed, he shook his head and said, "I'm discovering that I'm highly susceptible to advertising." Although I've thoroughly enjoyed all the food he's been grilling with the help of these new products, he wasn't wrong. Maybe the package deliveries will slow down after this revelation.

If we're honest, we could probably all find areas where we are easily influenced, but hopefully not in ways that move us away from truth that really matters. The Galatian Christians had allowed themselves to be influenced by missionaries proclaiming a different gospel. In today's passage, we'll see how Paul uses his own story to convince them that they have been misled.

Read

Galatians 1:13–20

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

- What parts from his past is Paul emphasizing? Why do you think that is?

Reflect

It's not hard to imagine a young Paul hearing the stories of the mighty prophets like Elijah or of heroes of Jewish history like the Maccabees and imagining himself becoming like them. They were strong, brave, and bold — willing to stand up for God's truth and fight zealously for God's honor. And for a while, that's exactly what Paul thought he had grown up to be. He was a Pharisee, one of the religious elites who strictly followed God's law and sought to keep the Jewish nation pure from pagan influences and false Messiahs.

Of course the problem with being strong, brave, and bold is that you can exercise those traits for the wrong cause. And that's exactly what Paul did. Wishing to cleanse the nation from the dishonorable and blasphemous idea that the Messiah could be a crucified carpenter from Nazareth, Paul viciously persecuted the early church. Then God intervened.

Paul (called Saul) was traveling on the road to Damascus where he had planned to seize any Christians he found and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem (take a moment to read the whole story in [Acts 9:1–9](#)). That was strong, brave, and bold, right? But before he got there a light from heaven knocked him off his feet and he heard the voice of Jesus — the true Messiah. God's Son was revealed in him (verse 16). According to Paul, his calling was an act of grace (verse 15) — a pure gift from a good and loving God who transformed Saul the persecutor into Paul the Apostle.

Everything changed for Paul. He realized that the purpose God had for him was nothing he could have imagined. He was to preach the Jewish Messiah to pagan Gentiles. He would not use his strength to stone heretics, nor would his boldness and bravery be backed up by the power or authority of the religious establishment. The Holy Spirit would empower and direct him to be strong, brave, and bold to do the true work of God — spreading the good news of

Jesus Christ to the nations of the world. Paul became an itinerant teacher who went from town to town proclaiming that Jesus was the good and loving Lord who died for sins, conquered death and was bringing people together into one family. And for all the hardship, his life couldn't have been more satisfying.

After his encounter with the resurrected Jesus, we can imagine that Paul needed time to work this out, to hear from God, and under the guidance of the Spirit, rethink everything he'd learned from the scriptures in light of this new revelation. According to verse 16 he went to Arabia. The exact place and timeline have been lost to history, but we do know that it was important to Paul that the Galatians know he hadn't gone to Jerusalem. Why? Because Paul is stressing his independence from human leaders and his dependence on God. If anyone's gospel came from men, it was his opponents. Paul's came directly from God himself.

Paul eventually does go to meet with Cephas (Peter) and Jesus' brother James. Both of these men were significant leaders of the early church, and their acceptance of Paul as a brother in Christ, and their acknowledgement that his mission to the Gentiles was of God were important. But neither of these great men, who'd lived alongside Jesus during his earthly life, sought to alter Paul's gospel. Because it was *the* gospel.

The Galatian Christians had allowed themselves to be influenced by the wrong people. Paul's dramatic conversion from religious elite to slave for Christ emphasized why. Paul had given up things the world thought were important — status, strength, position, respect — to help people find and follow Christ. That made him someone the Galatians could trust.

Respond

How did you meet Jesus? As you think about your story, thank God for revealing himself to you. He saved you! Take time to praise him today. Then tell someone your story — a friend, your child, your spouse, someone in your small group. Then ask them about their story. Have a meaningful conversation. Rejoice together over the grace-gift God has given you.

If you haven't put your faith in Jesus, let today be the day you later tell people about! Talk to him right now, confess your need for him, and commit yourself to following Jesus. Tell a Christian friend about your decision, and let them help you with your next steps.

Day 4

Lisa Scheffler, author

Don't you love a good redemption story? Arrogant doctor is humbled by a medical mistake and devotes his life to a clinic for the uninsured. Unfaithful wife is caught in her adultery, but seeks forgiveness, repents, and is reconciled to her husband. Drug addict steals money from everyone, including his parents, but when he's arrested they are the ones who bail him out, and he finally goes to rehab to get clean.

We love to see sinners turn their lives around, but it's even better when God gets the glory. Why? Because then more and more people will hear of the amazing goodness and grace of God and turn to him.

As we've seen, Paul is emphasizing elements of his story that help him make his case to the churches in Galatia. He wants them to trust in the credibility of his message by insisting that it comes from God. That it's through Jesus Christ that all people can find redemption .

Before we get there, we're going to review 1:15–16

Read

Galatians 1:15–16

¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

Galatians 1:21–24

²¹ Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

²⁴ And they praised God because of me.

- Why did people praise God because of Paul?

Reflect

God revealed himself to Paul, and the persecutor of Christians became one of the most important Christian leaders the church has ever known. That's quite a redemption story!

Yet as dramatic and significant as Paul's story is, it is one of many redemption stories that Paul witnessed and was a part of during his ministry, and they all had the same source. We saw yesterday that in [1:15](#), Paul says that God "*called me by his grace.*" This echoes what he says in [1:6](#), that the believers in Galatia were "deserting the one who *called* you to live in God's *grace.*" A Pharisees turned Apostle and ordinary believers of every ethnicity are all called by God's grace. Impeccable keepers of the law and pagan Gentiles all need the grace found in Jesus Christ to be redeemed. The law saves no one.

Grace is one of those fuzzy, churchy words that people use without necessarily being able to define. The Greek word *charis* means grace, but it also means gift. In Paul's day, gifts were regularly given to create and strengthen bonds of loyalty between people. When a wealthy

person of high status gave a gift to someone of lower status, each knew the gift could never be reciprocated in kind. So, a certain amount of loyalty and allegiance to the giver was assumed.

No one is higher or more generous than God. We can never repay his gift, and he doesn't expect us to try. Grace is the generous gift of God's abundant, redemptive favor to human beings who are not worthy, creating a relationship of love and loyalty between God and his people. His grace is sufficient and can turn the worst sinner into a beloved child.

Paul used to persecute the people he later joined in fellowship. His transformation was hard to believe and even harder to explain, unless you understood the grace of the Father, the revelation of the Son, and the transforming power of the Spirit.

Paul preached faith in Jesus Christ, the only one who can save. Paul's story caused people to praise God. Our stories will as well.

Respond

Jesus showed up in Paul's life, and he was never the same. People praised God because no one could deny the transformation. As you think through some of your own "God stories," is there one that comes to mind that reminds you of God's transforming power? Share that with someone you know so they can praise God with you!

Day 5

Lisa Scheffler, author

Happy Friday! We've arrived at Day 5 of our second week studying Galatians. What is God revealing to you through his Word? Spend some time with him today, asking him to guide you to apply what you've learned.

Reflect

Take a final look at [Galatians 1:11–24](#). This passage begins what many commentators call the autobiographical section of the letter.

It's important to pay attention to the flow of Paul's thought as we move through the book. So ask yourself, what did Paul share about his past and why did he share it?

Now think about what you learned about Paul this week. What does his dramatic conversion tell you about God?

Connect

Paul was fundamentally changed by his encounter with Jesus – his beliefs changed, the way he saw the world changed, and his life’s mission and calling changed. Paul’s attitude toward outsiders changed. He no longer looked down on Gentiles, but saw them as potential brothers and sisters in God’s eternal family.

Paul dedicated his life to spreading the gospel. He lived his calling and didn’t let the Roman authorities or angry mobs deter him. He faced beatings, imprisonment, and even a ship wreck, yet he kept finding ways to get to the next place to proclaim the gospel, all while looking after the churches he planted, helping them understand how to live out the gospel.

Paul saw a brand new path for humanity – as N.T. Wright often says, “a new way of being human” – where he encouraged people to put aside sinful, selfish, and harmful ways of being, not by strict adherence to the law, but by embracing life as a “new creation” led by the Spirit.

Jesus changed everything for Paul. There wasn’t a single corner of his life that the Spirit failed to get a hold of.

You don’t have to be a Pharisee who persecuted Christians for that to be true of you as well. The Spirit wants to change you from the inside out. The way of Jesus doesn’t come naturally to us. We don’t want to forgive people who aren’t sorry or pray for our enemies. We don’t want to lay down our rights for the good of another or serve people we consider unworthy. We value money, comfort, and other people’s opinions far more than we should. But we can have faith that the Spirit wants to heal our hurts and break us free from sin. When we confess, repent, and believe, he will give us meaning, peace, and purpose.

This week, as you’ve thought about your story, you may be disappointed in the progress you’ve made. You may feel like you have a long way to go. God placed us in a family so we can find help, accountability, and encouragement. We don’t give up. God certainly doesn’t give up on us. His love is too vast. So let’s put our faith in the gospel every day and cooperate with the Spirit as he transforms us into the image of Christ.

Respond

Take some time in prayer and ask God two questions:

- What do you want me to take away from what I’ve studied this week? What do you want me to remember?
- What do you want me to do with that learning? What is the one, next, right step that you want me to take?

If you’re not where you want to be spiritually, confess that to the Father today. Ask him where to begin as you seek to be transformed by the Spirit. Reach out for prayer from a trusted friend or family member.

If you haven’t taken the time to reflect on some of your God stories, do so today. Find someone to share one of them with and ask them about their story.

Coming up next week...

Coming up next week, we'll continue to see how Paul shares his story and talk about how we can share our own stories as a way to help point people to Jesus.