

A stylized graphic of a road intersection. A solid line representing a road enters from the left and curves to the right. A dashed line representing a road enters from the top and curves to the left. A small vertical line with a horizontal crossbar, resembling a traffic light or a signpost, is positioned at the intersection point.

Intersections

*Slowing Down for Meaningful Connection and
Deeper Community*

B1 Study | Intersections

Slowing Down for Meaningful Connection & Deeper Community | Acts 9:1-31



Let's envision together a busy intersection. What do you notice? Likely a few things like cars, crosswalks, and signals to stop and go. Some intersections mark the heart of a city, and many have corners where people gather to meet, socialize, or eat together. Intersections can also be symbolic - representing the places our lives connect and intertwine with others. These kinds of intersections represent something God, our Maker, is incredibly passionate about: The connection of people.

We are going to spend time in this B1 study discovering what He has to say about *meaningful* connections with one another. There are a lot of "one another" commands in the Bible that can lead us into deeper community with others. Most of these "one another" commands in the New Testament were written by Paul— a man who had a life-changing intersection with Jesus. (Yes, he actually met Jesus on a road! And the crazy thing was, it was *after* Jesus had died and resurrected and *during* the time Paul was persecuting the Church!) His life is going to show us that walking with Jesus leads us to others. Paul didn't just *meet* others, he connected with them deeply. He lived out the mission Jesus gave to us all in Matthew 28:19. I love the AMP version that says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [help the people to learn of Me, believe in Me, and obey My words]..."

Life as a Christ-follower was not meant to be lived alone. Life with Jesus involves intersections. We have to fight the temptation to be too busy to connect with others because if we don't *stop*, we will miss the people God intends for us to meet. Likewise, if we are too still and don't *go*, we'll miss the people God has set in our path for us to love!

In this study, we're going to take a look at four (4) monumental moments in Paul the Apostle's life that led him into deep community with others. At each stop, Paul found a relationship he needed. These are relationships we need too! Before we go any further, let's take a moment to think of where *you* are right now. Are you walking closely with Jesus? Next, think of the people in your life. Who's before you (someone pouring into you)? Who's alongside you? (friends that encourage you to follow Jesus) Who's behind you (someone you're pouring into)? If you don't have one or more of these kinds of relationships, now's a great time to ask God to use your time in this study to help you identify them! He's big enough to intersect your life with the people you need and teach you how to connect with them meaningfully.

PAUSE AND REFLECT: What are you hoping to take away from this study?

Before we break down the Scripture into smaller sections, let's read it all the way through one time first. Read Acts 9:1-31. What stands out to you in this passage?

STOP ONE | Paul meets Jesus

Before you hop in your car and head off on a road trip, what's one of the first things you need to do? Ensure you have the gas you need for the journey! In order to **go**, we must first **stop** to fill our tanks. And not just with any kind of gas. We need the right kind of gas for our car!

In today's passage, we find Saul (later known as Paul) traveling down a road. He's not driving a car. He's walking by foot. But his spiritual gas tank is filled up with the wrong stuff. He's headed to do some bad things to some people Jesus loves. Saul is introduced here as someone who was breathing murderous threats against followers of Jesus. He journeyed to visit with the high priest (top of the religious food chain here) and request letters granting him permission to arrest anyone following "the way" of Jesus. Let's take a look.

Read Acts 9:1-9. What stands out to you in these verses?

This scene takes place after the killing of Steven, a well-known and beloved disciple of Jesus, of which Saul was an observer. This wasn't Saul's first rodeo either! Up to this point, he had been actively persecuting the church; imprisoning both men and women (Acts 8:1-3).

Then the most epic thing happens! On the road to arrest Jesus' followers in Damascus, Saul encounters Jesus in a blinding light. This monumental encounter will eventually lead him to see the world through entirely different eyes. The people he was going to harm would soon become people he would live to love (more about this later).

It was God's nature to choose to meet Saul on a road, and not just any road, but the road he was traveling down to harm God's very people. God's love and mercy are on full display here - towards His people and also toward Saul (the chief of all sinners, 1 Tim 1:15). Please don't miss this important part either. Jesus didn't meet Saul in a temple (a place Saul would have frequented). He met him right where he was on the road to Damascus with letters of persecution in hand. Jesus wasn't waiting for Saul to have it all together. No, He met Paul at his worst moment! He wants to meet you **as you are also, right where you are.**

There is one final thing I want us to clue in on here. Read verse 4 again. Who does Jesus say Saul is persecuting? _____

Isn't that wild! Jesus is so intimately connected with his followers that he tells Saul to persecute his people is to persecute Him! This is the kind of closeness Jesus desires to have with us. (John 17:21) The words "in Christ" (referring to God's people) appear over 50 times in the New Testament! And guess who wrote them? Paul! (formerly known as Saul.)

Before we are able to **go** and meaningfully connect with people, we must first **stop** to ensure our spiritual gas tanks are filled up with the right stuff. Have you ever had a moment with Jesus that led you to recognize Him as Savior and Lord? If not, if you feel moved, would you stop now and let Him know you want to have that moment with Him? If you've had that moment with Jesus, let us remind you your relationship with Him doesn't exist inside a one-stop shop. It's an ongoing relationship - He's ready to fill our tanks for what each day requires - fill-ups of His love, peace, & joy!

PAUSE & REFLECT: How's your relationship with Jesus? Is your spiritual gas tank full? If not, what do you need to do to ensure you have what you need each day?

DIG DEEPER: Did you know Paul the Apostle wrote most of the New Testament books of the Bible, including 1 Corinthians? Tucked in towards the end of the book is one of the most beautiful passages in all of the Bible. It's about the kind of love God demonstrates towards us so we can go and love others with it. It's the kind of love that draws us in deeper with others and brings us great joy! Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. What stands out to you in this passage?

STOP TWO | Paul meets Ananias (Wise Counsel)

Roads take us to and from places. They've been a form of navigation since the beginning of time. The earliest followers of Jesus traveled up and down roads encouraging the church and growing in deep community with them. We were intended to do the same. At the end of the roads we travel, we find people – at the grocery store, the gym, school, and work.

At the first stop of this study, we saw Paul's life intersect with Jesus on the road to Damascus. We find his next big stop in Acts 9:10- 22 when his life intersects with a man named Ananias. Let's read about it now.

Read Acts 9:10-22. Bookmark this passage. We'll be referencing it throughout this section. What stands out to you in these verses?

A few things we can conclude about Ananais:

1. Ananais knew the Lord. Today's passage introduces Ananias as a disciple. He knew the Lord, and the Lord knew him. As we saw in section 1 of our study, if we want to connect meaningfully with others; it starts with knowing Jesus.
2. Ananais was a minister. The Greek word for minister, *diakonos*, is the same word used for servant throughout the New Testament of the Bible. Maybe you're familiar with the term servant, but the word minister seems new or a little foreign to you. In the Old Testament, the priests who served in the temple were also seen as ministers.

Look up 1 Peter 2:9. Who does this verse say we are? _____

This verse uses the words "royal priesthood." This means we are today's ministers. To minister means to serve one another, build up, and encourage. This is what God was sending Ananias to do. This is what He is sending us to do each day as well. This kind of connection with others brings our hearts great joy! It zaps feelings of apathy, loneliness, and sadness.

3. Ananais felt afraid. In verse 13, Ananais gives God his big "But!" It was very human of Ananais to be afraid of Paul. Paul had been murdering Christians for goodness sakes! Sometimes we can be afraid as well, or at the very least resistant to befriending or encouraging the people God's placed around us. Ultimately, it is Ananais' relationship with Jesus that moves Him past his fear.

Read Acts 9:15 again. Who is Saul to the Lord? _____

The man Ananias feared was God's chosen instrument. Paul would go on to build up and encourage the church in phenomenal ways. He's the author of most of the books of the New Testament. What might God do through the people we encourage and invest in?

4. Saul needed Ananais. Read Acts 9: 17 again.

Why does Ananias say the Lord sent Him? _____

Paul needed Ananias. We need people in our lives as well. Specifically, Ananias acted in obedience as he helped Paul regain his sight. Sometimes, we can't see what we need to see. God places people around us to help "open our eyes" and make sense of things we don't fully understand.

As we close our time in Acts 9:10-22, consider this: **Paul went from a life-altering encounter with Jesus to being with and needing others. In the next section, we're going to discover Paul being sent to others.**

PAUSE & REFLECT: Paul needed Ananias to regain his sight. Throughout our lives, we are going to need people like Ananias. Do you have someone like that right now? Who might be some people God has placed in your life for you to learn from?

DIG DEEPER: In our key scripture, Paul was in the process of taking off his old self and putting on a new self. This "new self" is what would transform Him into someone who would grow to love others deeply. Read Colossians 3:1-17 (written by Paul). What does it look like to put off the old self?

Put on the new self?

STOP THREE | Paul Meets the Apostles (Road Buddies)

Do you ever wrestle with feelings of loneliness? You're not alone. It's a common struggle today, but it doesn't have to be! God made us to be relational beings (which is why loneliness feels so uncomfortable). Even more than that, as followers of Jesus, we have become part of the body of Christ. This means we were meant to be so well-connected with each other we move in unison to accomplish one overall mission – to take the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth (starting right where we are, in our own little part of the world).

Isn't it wild to consider this mission started thousands of years ago with a small huddle of people who'd given everything to Jesus? In the next 9 verses of our key scripture, Paul's life intersects with the *apostles*. Let's read about it!

Read Acts 9:23-31. What stands out to you in these verses?

Did you notice that another term besides “apostle” was used? “Disciple?” Let’s take a moment to better understand the difference between the two terms. According to GotQuestions.org (a great tool you can use!) every apostle was a disciple, but not every disciple was an apostle. In Scripture, the term apostle is used to differentiate between those who were tasked with a special assignment, such as establishing the church and equipping believers from those who were followers of Jesus. The twelve disciples (minus Judas who betrayed Jesus and was later replaced) were all considered to be apostles. So was Paul.

Paul had not been a follower of Jesus long when he met these apostles. To them, it must have seemed like just yesterday that Paul was seeking to kill or imprison these very men! No wonder they had a hard time trusting his word at first in verse 9:26! Don’t fly through this section without taking time to consider Paul sitting with these apostles. Did he feel ashamed? Unqualified? Uncomfortable? How badly did he want them to trust him? How much did it hurt when he saw that they were afraid of him?

Life with people can be messy. Our emotions and assumptions *can* hinder us from connecting deeply with others and doing meaningful work for Jesus. But it doesn’t *have* to be this way. For Paul, he had Barnabas. Not much is said about the conversations that took place around this pretty intense meeting. But even in the little glimpse of it in verses 26-27, we can see that Barnabas **valued the mission over the emotions and assumptions** about Paul. Barnabas vouched for Paul, giving the rest of the men confidence that Paul was on the same mission as them.

We must let the mission be more important to us than our assumptions and emotions about people. When we give God full permission to transform our hearts and prioritize inviting others to go “on mission” *with* us, something incredible happens! It’s as if taking our eyes off of ourselves and what we are doing, feeling, or saying helps us see life from a bird’s eye view. God gives us a much grander perspective. The churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were impacted GREATLY by this intersection in Paul’s life. Let’s end by rejoicing in what we see happen here in verse 31.

FILL IN THE BLANK: ACTS 9:31 (ESV)

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had _____ and was being _____. And walking in the _____ and in the _____ of the Holy Spirit, it _____.

PAUSE & REFLECT: In what ways do you allow emotions or assumptions about people stop you from connecting more deeply with the people God's placed around you? In what ways might God be calling you to be more like Barnabas?

DIG DEEPER: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-14. What "one another" commands do you see here? What else does this passage teach you about God and others?

STOP FOUR | Paul Meets Timothy (Apprentice)

When you were little, maybe you used to enjoy dressing up like a superhero or a princess. Or maybe you would do things like dance around in your mom's shoes. Kids often emulate their heroes or role models.

Prior to his encounter with Jesus, it's likely Paul had some influential role models. Many biblical scholars believe it's likely Paul was enamored by a man named Phinehas of the Old Testament. Grieved by the unrighteous living of God's people, Phinehas killed a man. (Num 25:7-13) Phinehas' understanding of righteousness was to slay those who weren't living wholeheartedly for God.

Similarly, *in the name of righteousness*, Paul felt the need to persecute Christians. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road points him in a new and needed direction. The only one who needed to die was Jesus. Now Paul was to live for him, which meant he would need to get some new role models. We've talked about them in the past 3 sections of this study – Jesus, Ananias, the apostles.

At this final stop in this study, we're examining Paul's relationship with a young man named Timothy, whom he met in the city of Lystra. It's not far-fetched to think that Paul must have quickly become someone Timothy looked up to. Maybe he'd even heard of Paul before he arrived in his hometown. Let's take a look at a couple of passages to learn more.

Read Acts 16:1-5 & 2 Timothy 1:1-5. Bookmark these passages. We'll be coming back to them throughout this section. What stands out to you in these passages?

What can we learn from Paul & Timothy's relationship:

1. Timothy's reputation mattered. Read Acts 16:2-3 again. Why did Paul want Timothy to join him on their missionary journey? _____
2. Timothy trusted Paul. We don't know exactly what Timothy thought of Paul, but it's safe to presume that he looked up to him. It says a lot about Paul that Timothy was willing to leave his home and be circumcised!
3. They had a father/son relationship. Read 2 Timothy 1:1-2 & 5 again.

How does Paul refer to Timothy? _____

Not just a child, but "beloved" child. Paul had great affection for Timothy, which came out of God's love for Timothy. Beloved child is what God calls us. (1 John 3:1) Paul was taking the love He received from God and extending it to Timothy. This is the kind of love and affection God desires us to have for one another as well.

Then, did you catch who's missing in verse 5? Timothy's father was not mentioned. Having Paul as a spiritual father likely meant even more to Timothy because he lacked spiritual guidance from his biological father.

4. Paul prayed for Timothy. 2 Timothy 1:3 again.

When does Paul remember Timothy in prayer? _____

Praying for others connects us more deeply to others because we begin to sense God's heart for them. This is another way that our relationship with God helps us grow towards and with others.

5. Timothy brought Paul great joy. 2 Timothy 1:4 again.

What does Paul remember? _____

Paul and Timothy shared tears together. This lets us know honesty and vulnerability were part of their relationship. They endured hard things together. And by doing so, they experienced joy.

PAUSE AND REFLECT: Who are you looking up to? Who's looking up to you?

DIG DEEPER Read Phil 2:19-24. What stood out to you in this passage?

TAKEAWAY

We want to walk away from time in God's Word. What are you taking away from this study that you need to remember in the days ahead?

What is a brave step God is asking you to take?

We hope that you enjoyed this study! Scan the QR code to discover more content in the Intersections series! Although we don't charge to access our content, we ask those who use our content to consider showing us some love on our *Give* page. It's how we keep growing and going!

