

# The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –  
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

*Vance Havner*

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Text

Acts 9:23-31

Topic

Saul escapes Damascus when he is let down  
in a basket through the wall

Title

*When Life Lets You Down*

**Acts 9:23** Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

**Acts 9:24** But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him.

**Acts 9:25** Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.

**Acts 9:26** And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

**Acts 9:27** But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

**Acts 9:28** So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

**Acts 9:29** And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.

**Acts 9:30** When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

**Acts 9:31** Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Introduction

I'm not sure if Saul was a sarcastic guy. If he was I think that, when asked how his time in Damascus went, he might have said, "*It was kind of a **let down!***"

Get it? Saul was literally **let down through the wall in a large basket**. But figuratively the ministry in Damascus could be seen as a let down. After all, Saul was forced to flee to avoid an assassination attempt.

Jerusalem was a major let down. The apostles initially **did not believe** Saul **was a disciple!** Then after only about two weeks in Jerusalem he was forced to flee again after an attempt was made on his life.

Returning to Tarsus had 'let down' written all over it! Saul had once been the favorite son of the Jews in that city. He was in line to be the next famous rabbi. He was returning home as a despised follower of Jesus Christ.

Saul gives no indication here or in his later writings that he was personally feeling let down. There is no sense of disillusionment or depression; there is no sense of his wanting to quit. He understood that these setbacks and sufferings came with the territory.

These experiences are for our learning. **We** sometimes feel let down in our ministry. We sometimes are let down by other believers. We can even feel as though the Lord Himself has let us down.

In those times we need the encouragement to press forward. These early episodes in Saul's life can give us the encouragement we need.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When You Are Being Let Down Jesus Is Building You Up, and #2 When You Are Being Let Down Jesus Is Building Others Up.

#1 When You Are Being Let Down  
Jesus Is Building You Up  
(v23-30)

Saul was his Hebrew name. In Greek it's Paul. When we left Saul he was preaching about Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus. We pick up where we left off in verse twenty-three:

**Acts 9:23** Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

The **many days** could have been as long as two years. Sometime early in his Christian life Saul spent time out in the desert. He wrote about it in his letter to the Galatians:

**Galatians 1:15** But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace,

**Galatians 1:16** to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

**Galatians 1:17** nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

**Galatians 1:18** Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

**Galatians 1:19** But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Saul was saved on the road to Damascus. He spent a little time there immediately afterward preaching about Jesus in the synagogues. Then he went out into the Arabian desert for a while.

Although in the desert and spending time alone with Jesus Saul wasn't just meditating while dipping fried locusts in honey-mustard sauce! He gives indications in the other letters he wrote that he was busy evangelizing and establishing Churches among the folks who lived in that region.

In verse twenty-three Saul returned to Damascus after his meditation and ministry out in the desert. The local Jews plotted to kill him.

**Acts 9:24** But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him.

They were going to seize him at the **gates** of the city. A decision was reached that it was time for Saul to depart Damascus. But how would they get him out of the city?

**Acts 9:25** Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.

The Greek word for **large** is *longa* and **basket** is *berger*. (Not!). The word for **basket** describes a braided rope. This may have been a large braided basket; or it may have been a net of braided rope – a fisherman’s net.

After three years in and around Damascus Saul was **let down through the wall**. I’m using it as a play on words to suggest that serving God can sometimes seem to be a **let down**.

Listen to Saul’s words in Second Corinthians eleven:

**2 Corinthians 11:23** Are they ministers of Christ? -I speak as a fool -I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

**2 Corinthians 11:24** From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one.

**2 Corinthians 11:25** Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

**2 Corinthians 11:26** in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

**2 Corinthians 11:27** in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -

**2 Corinthians 11:28** besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

**2 Corinthians 11:32** In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me;

**2 Corinthians 11:33** but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

Notice that the escape from Damascus is at the end of this list. The list is probably not in chronological order; but scholars feel that at least some of the setbacks and sufferings Saul mentioned occurred in the first three years of his ministry *before* his escape from Damascus.

If you serve the Lord there will be times that the ministry itself will seem to be a let down. I could personally give you hundreds or maybe even thousands of examples! You begin to wonder if you really heard from the Lord; you begin to doubt your calling; you start to think you’re not affecting anyone or furthering the kingdom of God. You want to quit and just live a quiet Christian life that doesn’t involve serving others.

It is when you are feeling let down in your work that you must remember that **you are the work!** God didn't save you just to get some work done. He saved you to work on you. You are His work; you are His workmanship. He is changing you day-by-day into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

It's nothing for God to grant you success in your serving. It is far more difficult for you to realize that He is your sufficiency in all things.

It's easy to press forward when things are going well. It requires faith to persevere when things are a let down.

Worse even than being generally let down in your ministry is being personally let down by other Christians. Saul experienced an ultimate personal let down upon his return to Jerusalem.

**Acts 9:26** And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

I'm always very careful to not criticize folks in the Bible. In this case, however, *the disciples were blowing it!* You can't tell me that they had no information about Saul's conversion and activities for the past three years. Information didn't travel as fast in those days, but it traveled!

**You** are going to be let down by Christians over-and-over again. **You** are going to let down Christians over-and-over again! It's not a problem unique to the Church. It's a problem wherever people are in relationships with one another. It's just harder when it happens in the Church.

Barnabas tries to help:

**Acts 9:27** But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

We first encountered Barnabas when he was making a generous financial donation to the Church to help the benevolence fund. Now he was building relationships within the Church.

Hey, be a Barnabas! That's a no-brainer.

As wonderful as this was for Saul, there isn't always going to be a Barnabas around when you are let down by Christians. Saul himself, this great apostle, would suffer many personal let downs. Whole Church congregations he had established turned against him. Towards the end of his life he would say,

[2 Timothy 4:10](#) for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica - Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

[2 Timothy 4:11](#) Only Luke is with me...

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that in a few chapters Saul and Barnabas are going to have such a strong disagreement that they split from working together!

What are you going to do when you are personally let down by others? When there is no Barnabas? Or when Barnabas is the problem! A lot of folks withdraw from fellowship. They don't associate with any local Church.

It's not right; it's not biblical. Working through the people let downs is another way the Lord works on you to build you up. Remember that He is conforming you into the image of Jesus. How can you know if you are becoming more like Jesus unless you are treated like He was? - *being changed to bring change* -

Once he gained acceptance, Saul began a ministry in Jerusalem:

[Acts 9:28](#) So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

[Acts 9:29](#) And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.

We first met Saul at the stoning of Stephen. Stephen's ministry was to the **Hellenists**. These were Jews who were raised in a Greek culture. Saul took over where Stephen had left off three years earlier! Apparently there was a vacancy in the ministry to the Hellenists!

Disputing with Hellenists had gotten Stephen killed. Saul knew it better than anyone. It tells you a lot about his heart.

Comparing other Scriptures you learn that Saul was only in Jerusalem for fifteen days. It was long enough for an attempt to be made on his life. To save him and to make life easier for everyone it was decided to send Saul away.

**Acts 9:30** When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

Saul was from **Tarsus**. This would be his homecoming after at least three years. He'd probably been gone longer as he was sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel. According to one timeline he was in his mid-thirties and had been in Jerusalem for fifteen years.

Saul was the most promising young rabbi of his day. He had excelled in zeal for God by persecuting the Church of Jesus Christ. He was the pride of the Jews in Tarsus.

He returned a changed man. Do you think his parents and family and friends and neighbors were excited to know he had turned his back on everything they had invested in him to follow Jesus? Talk about a let down!

Saul would spend the next five to ten years in Tarsus. Where was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that Saul would preach **before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel?**

Sometimes you feel it is the Lord Himself who has let you down. He doesn't seem to be keeping His word to you.

What should you do? Take a look at Saul. Left in Tarsus for a decade or so we'd have to agree it seemed Jesus had let him down. But we see beyond Tarsus. We turn the page and see his missionary journeys and the fulfillment of all that he was promised.

The answer for us when we feel the Lord has let us down is something we can't really do. ***It is to turn the page!*** We need to understand that Jesus is not done with us, not finished working *in* us and *on* us. If only we could turn the page and see the end.

In a sense we can. We know that ultimately we will stand before the Lord. He wants to reward us. It's all you have sometimes! You remain faithful even when feeling let down knowing that Jesus cannot help but finish the good work He has begun in you. If you are at a place like Tarsus it is part of His work on you.

Saul was active while in and around Tarsus. He preached and planted Churches.<sup>1</sup> Keep working for the Lord knowing His is working on you.

One more thing. It's our second point, but it's a quick one because it only involves verse thirty-one.

## #2 When You Are Being Let Down Jesus Is Building Others Up (v31)

There is always something bigger going on around you. You are part of something – *not* the center of everything! As we close we're reminded of the Lord's work in all of His Church on earth.

**Acts 9:31** Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

You'll read in some commentaries that the Churches had peace because its chief persecutor had been saved. Saul had been saved for over three years. His conversion was not the reason for the peace.

Some have suggested a political reason. About this time the Roman emperor Caligula decided he wanted the Jews to put a statue of himself in their Temple. Their attention was drawn away from Christians and on to their struggles against Rome.

God sovereignly decided to grant the Churches peace. It's His Church and He oversees its seasons.

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<sup>1</sup> See Galatians 1:21. In Acts 15:41 it is said Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches." He planted those Churches during his stay in Tarsus.



The Christians are described as being **edified**; as **walking in the fear of the Lord**; and as being **in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**.

**Edified** means being *built-up*. Not numerically; they were growing numerically, but that is why you're told **they were multiplied**. This was a reference to being built-up spiritually.

The Church exists to exalt Jesus Christ. One of the ways we do it is to build-up believers by teaching them God's Word. Whenever I hear that believers are in some trouble in their walk I ask if they've been attending fellowship. Often the answer is "No." As a result they are unprepared for the pitfalls and perils that they encounter.

**Walking in the fear of the Lord** tells us that the believers heard the Word and then obeyed it. They did what God said out of reverential fear for their Savior.

Some of the things you must obey as a Christian are difficult. Good thing you have **the comfort of the Holy Spirit**! **Comfort** is not a soft, cuddly word; it's a strong word meaning *coming alongside to help*. Whatever they heard they could obey because the Holy Spirit came alongside to enable them.

Healthy believers beget other believers. Thus their number was **multiplied**. The Church also exists to evangelize, but its evangelism is most successful on a personal level as each Christian shares his or her testimony while living-out the life in the world.

You will sometimes feel let down. You will sometimes be let down! You will have a Damascus... A Jerusalem... A Tarsus.

You must know that the Lord is busy building you and others. Wait for Him to turn the page. But don't just wait doing nothing. Go on serving Him by faith, with zeal, knowing you will have your reward from Him.