

There are certain things that happen that can change our lives forever. Maybe you have had a chance meeting with someone who became your lifelong friend, or you took a class that introduced you to something you never thought you would like or you picked up a new hobby that has become your passion. Moving out of the house for the first time, joining the military or heading off to college can be life changing events. Getting married, having your first child, moving to a different city or starting a new job can be life changing too. As significant as these events can be, nothing compares to the changes Jesus makes in us. Some people are turned off by Jesus. Others are turned on by God’s love in Jesus Christ.

The Pharisee Saul who became the Apostle Paul had both experiences with Jesus. Paul was an outspoken enemy of Jesus and the Christian faith. He gave his approval to the stoning to death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The book of Acts tell us, “Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers.” (vs. 1) He got permission to go to Damascus to arrest any of Jesus’ followers there and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Saul was “Christian Enemy #1.” His goal was to wipe out Christianity all together.

But Saul had a totally unexpected encounter on the Damascus Road. Acts tells us, “A light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” “Who are you, lord?” Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!” (vss. 3-5) Saul didn’t see that coming.

Meeting Jesus changed everything for Saul. When he got to Damascus, a Jesus follower by the name of Ananias was sent to restore Saul’s eyesight that he lost when Jesus appeared to him and to tell him that he had a new mission. When Ananias objected, God told him, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.” (vs. 15)

Because Ananias’ life had been changed by Christ, he listened and did what God asked him to do. Acts tells us what happened when the two men met. “So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.” (vss. 17-18)

Saul’s life was changed that day. It would never be the same.

1. Saul the Jewish Pharisee who set out to destroy Christianity became Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles who risked his own life to bring the Gospel message to people in modern day Turkey, Greece and Rome.
2. Saul who believed God’s promises were exclusively for the Jews made it his personal mission to proclaim that God’s love was for all people.

3. Saul who lived under Jewish rules and rituals taught that Jesus Christ had opened the kingdom of God to all people and wanted to have a personal relationship with everyone.
4. Saul who thought that obeying the law and working to earn God's favor were all important believed and taught that people are made right with God by faith through grace, not by the things that we do.

Why do we say that Jesus changes everything? Because He does! Sin brought death into the world. Jesus paid the price for sin on the cross and rose from the dead to restore life to all who turn to Him in repentance and faith. Jesus did for us what we could never do: forgive sins and restore us to a right relationship with God. Jesus gives us His Holy Spirit who calls us to faith, helps us to become more like Christ and gives us special gifts to be used for the good of all. Jesus gives our lives meaning because we are loved by God. Jesus gives our lives purpose to serve others and point them to Christ. Jesus gives our lives direction and calls us to follow Him.

The Bible verse that Grace chose talks about the difference God makes in our lives. Psalm 27:1 reads, "The Lord is my light and my salvation – so why should I be afraid?" She wrote this in her personal statement of faith, "Ever since that talk (with her mom) I cemented my relationship with God. I started telling Him about everything: my fears, doubts, school and sports."

Jesus does change everything for us. I doubt if many of us have had a "Damascus Road" type of experience. I know I have not. But I do know that God placed his name on me in the waters of baptism and adopted me into His family. The Spirit led me to confess my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. He may have done the same for you.

Instead of living just for ourselves, we live to the glory of God and to let the light of God's love shine through us to others. So instead of looking to be in a position where other people serve us, we look for opportunities to serve others regards of their ethnic background or social economic status. Instead of wondering if we have enough faith, we look to the power of the Lord God we turn to in faith. It is not about how much faith we have. It is about who we have faith in.

Brynn stated her confidence in God with these words. "Who has stuck with me every day?" The answer is God! God is my source of strength when I am scared or nervous." That explains why she chose the words of Joshua to be her personal Bible verse. "Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Instead of going along to get along, we have been given a new life in Christ. The Apostle Paul urges us, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Romans 12:2 NLT)

The early Christians made it their personal priority to follow Jesus. Jesus said that He is the Way. So the early Christians were called “followers of the way.” Acts describes the first Christians this way. “All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42 NLT)

Kaden wrote about the purpose God has given him. “I think God’s purpose for my life is to follow Him and to teach others about Him so that more people have the opportunity for eternal life with Him.” His Bible verse tells us where the power comes from to do this. “For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”

Like those early followers of Jesus, we need to

- Let Jesus show us the way
- Walk with Him in faith
- Invite others to join us in following Jesus
- And stay on the right path with Jesus