

Acts 9: Lessons from the Launch of Paul's Ministry

A visual exploration of transformation, hidden chronologies, and the architecture of Christian community.

The forgiveness of God coupled with the acceptance of God's people provides healing for lost people.

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August 16, 2026



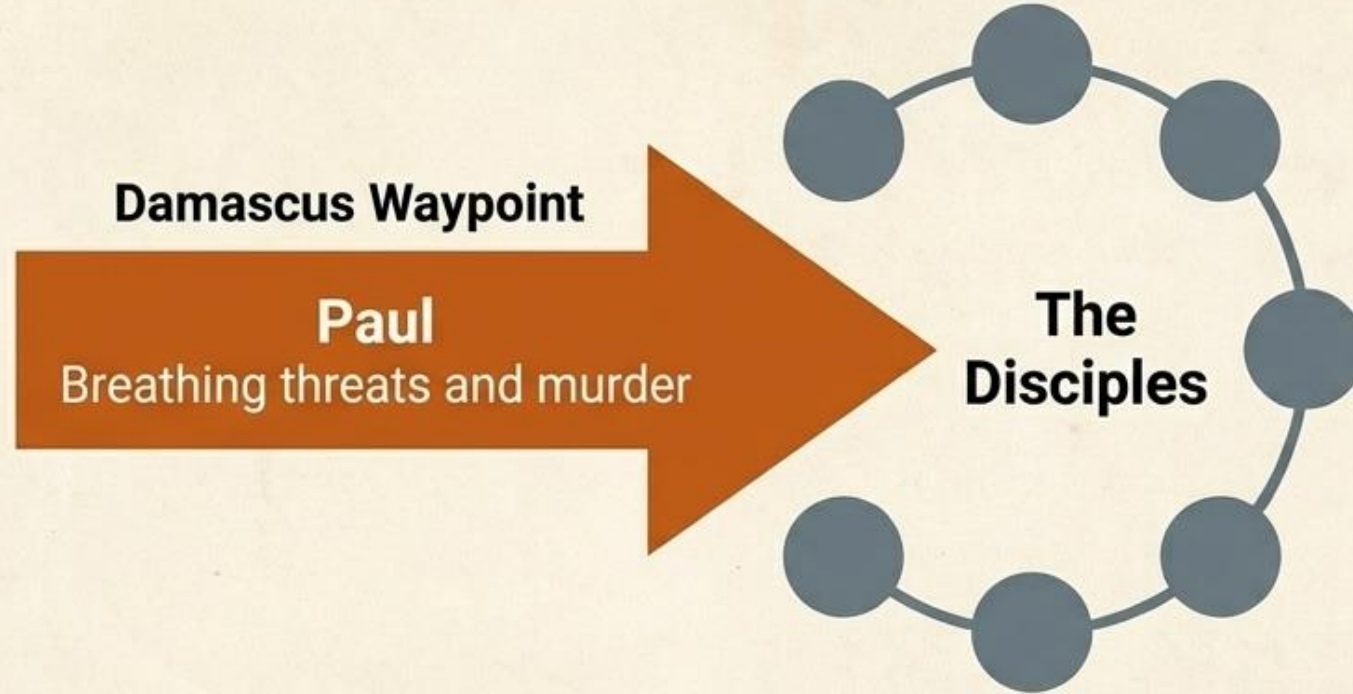
19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,

Acts 9:19

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Damascus: Love in the Face of Offense



Saul traveled to Damascus specifically for them—to bind them. Yet, directed by God, Ananias calls him “brother” and the disciples host him.

Diagnostic Question: Do we love people in the face of personal offense, or do we use their sinful behavior to justify our own lack of love?

20 and immediately he began to
proclaim Jesus in the synagogues,
saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Acts 9:20

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The Persecutor

The Preacher

Intent: Bind the Church and drag them to Jerusalem.



Total Life Transformation

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

People who are truly set free by the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot help but tell others about it.

Action: Proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues (Greek: *kerysso* - to herald important news publicly).

People who are set free by
the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
can't help but tell others
about the Gospel!

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:15

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**Paul heeded the call of
God on His life.**

When God transforms a
person's life, he or she
responds in gratitude and
heeds His call on their life.

He is the Son of God.

The Singular Message

Paul's message was built entirely on the bedrock of Matthew 16:
"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God... and upon this rock I will build
My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

It is noteworthy that Luke described Paul as preaching Christ as “Son of God.” This is the only occurrence of the title in all of Acts, and yet for Paul it was a central concept. In fact, Paul connected the term “Son of God” with his call as an apostle in Gal 1:16 and in Rom 1:1–4.27 Luke’s close connection of this term with Paul’s conversion and call would seem to be a rather accurate reminiscence of Paul’s distinctive views.

-Acts (The Former Persecutor’s Witness to Christ (9:19b

21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”

Acts 9:21

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22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 9:22

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The Greek word means to join or put together and seems to picture his assembling Old Testament texts to demonstrate how Christ fulfilled them.

No wonder the Damascene Jews were astounded and totally unable to respond to the skillful interpretations of the former student of Gamaliel.

-John Polhill, *New American Commentary*

**The Old Testament is
relevant today!**

23 When many days had elapsed, the
Jews plotted together to do away with
him,

Acts 9:23

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24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

Acts 9:24

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The Persecutor Becomes the Persecuted

To escape the ethnarch of Aretas who was watching the gates day and night, the disciples lower Paul through an opening in the wall in a large, flexible woven basket (typically used for fish).

epiboule: A secret, wicked plot or conspiracy against him.

anaireo: To eliminate, take out of sight forever, or murder.

For I will show him how much he must suffer
for My name's sake. (Acts 9:16)

25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

Acts 9:25

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32 In Damascus the ethnarch under
Aretas the king was guarding the city of
the Damascenes in order to seize me,
33 and I was let down in a basket
through a window in the wall, and so
escaped his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:32–33

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Arabia & Petra: Fulfilling the Call in the Shadows

The Mandate

Paul immediately acts on Acts 9:15—to bear the name of Jesus before the Gentiles.

The Consequence

Promulgating a non-Nabatean religion draws the attention and ire of King Aretas IV (ruler of Nabatea from 9 B.C.E. to 40 C.E.).

Core Insight: God transforms a life; the believer responds in gratitude by heeding the call, regardless of the obscurity of the location or the immediate danger.

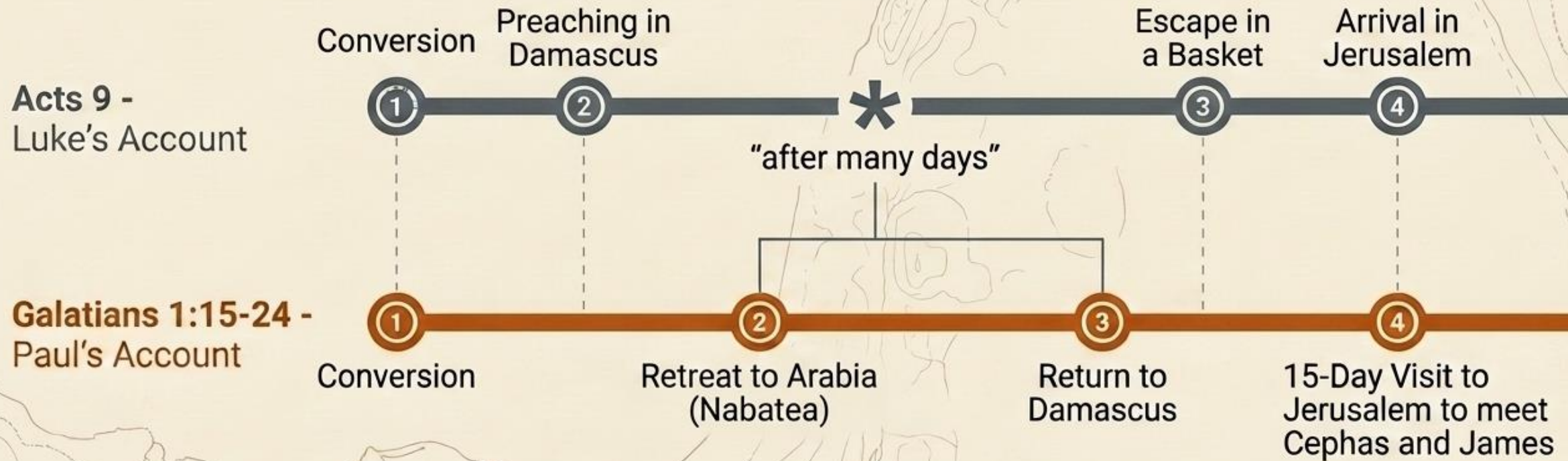


Galatians 1:15–24 presents Saul's own account of these early years and contains facts not found here in Luke's account, for each author has a different purpose in his writing. When the two versions are correlated, the order of events may likely be as follows:

1. Saul is converted (Acts 9:1–19)
2. Saul preaches in Damascus (Acts 9:20–22)
3. Saul resides in Arabia (Gal. 1:17) (Likely Petra, the capital of Nabatea)
4. Saul returns to Damascus (Acts 9:23–25)
5. Saul visits Jerusalem the first time, then goes on to Caesarea, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 9:26–30; Gal. 1:18–24)

-Evangelical Commentary on the Bible (B. The Conversion of Saul (9:1–31))

Dual-Track Harmonized Timeline



The Unseen Gap

Luke's "many days" actually encompasses a three-year span. Paul did not immediately rush to Jerusalem; his early ministry was forged in the deserts of Arabia.

15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased

16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Galatians 1:15–19

NASB95

22 I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ;
23 but only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.”
24 And they were glorifying God because of me.

Galatians 1:22–24

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26 When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

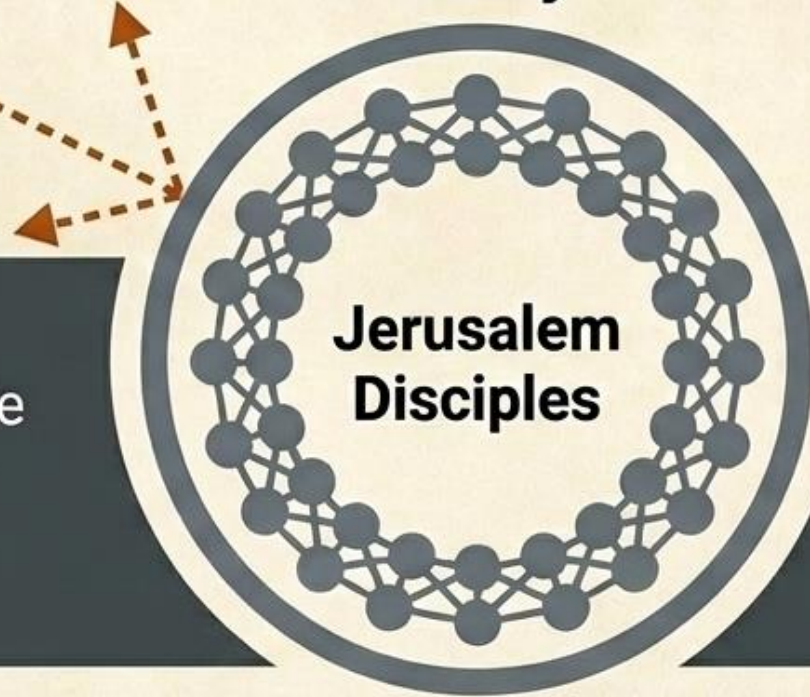
Acts 9:26

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Jerusalem: The Barrier of a Terrible Reputation

Network Rejection

Paul ●



The Attempt

Paul attempts to associate (Greek: *kollao* - to attach oneself, establish a relationship).

Jerusalem Disciples

The Reaction

But the disciples react with fear (Greek: *phobeo* - anxiety/apprehension).

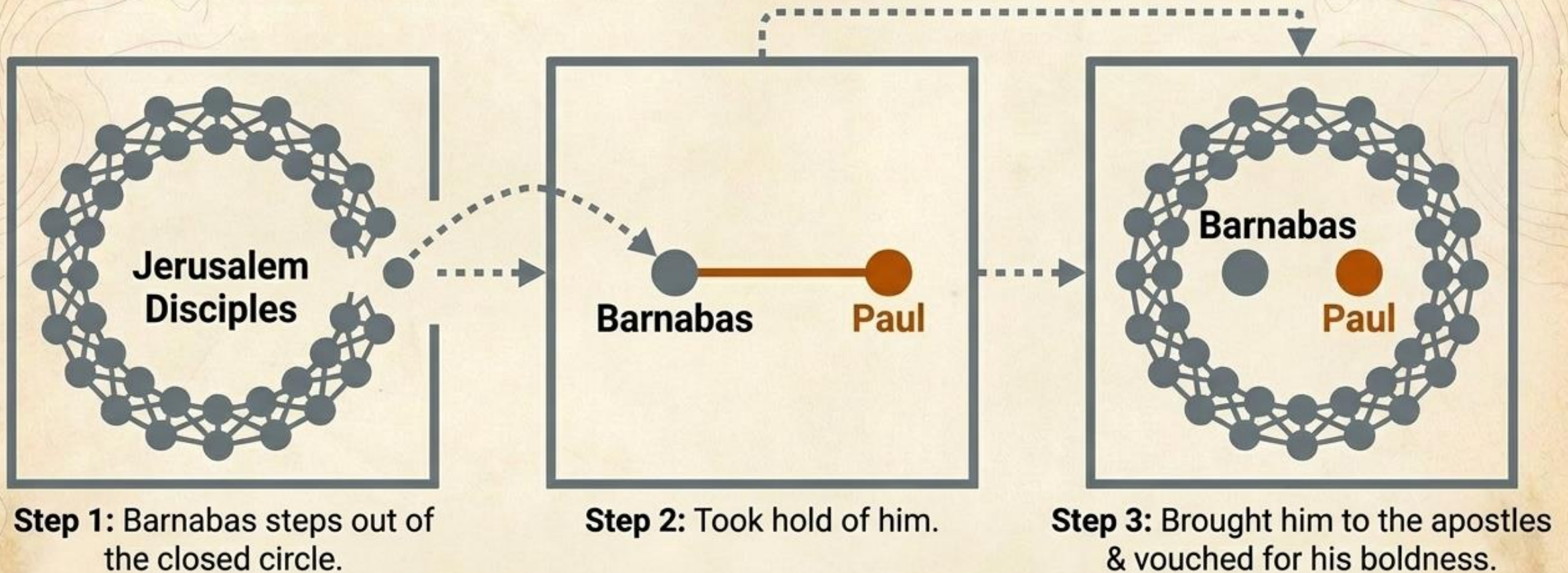
Core Insight: Even three years later, the trauma Paul inflicted made natural integration impossible. They fundamentally doubted his status as a *true mathetes* (disciple/student).

27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:27

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The Ministry of the Advocate



Core Insight: Sometimes our loving acceptance is the necessary bridge to Jesus that others desperately need to see.

Diagnostic Matrix: Hospitality vs. Assimilation

Hospitality	Assimilation (The Barnabas Model)
Focus: Creating a friendly atmosphere.	Focus: Establishing deep connection.
Action: Saying hello, offering a warm greeting at the door.	Action: Taking someone under your wing, providing personal introductions, inviting them into a home/LIFE group.
Result: The guest feels welcomed but remains independent and on the periphery.	Result: The guest is structurally integrated into the core discipleship community.

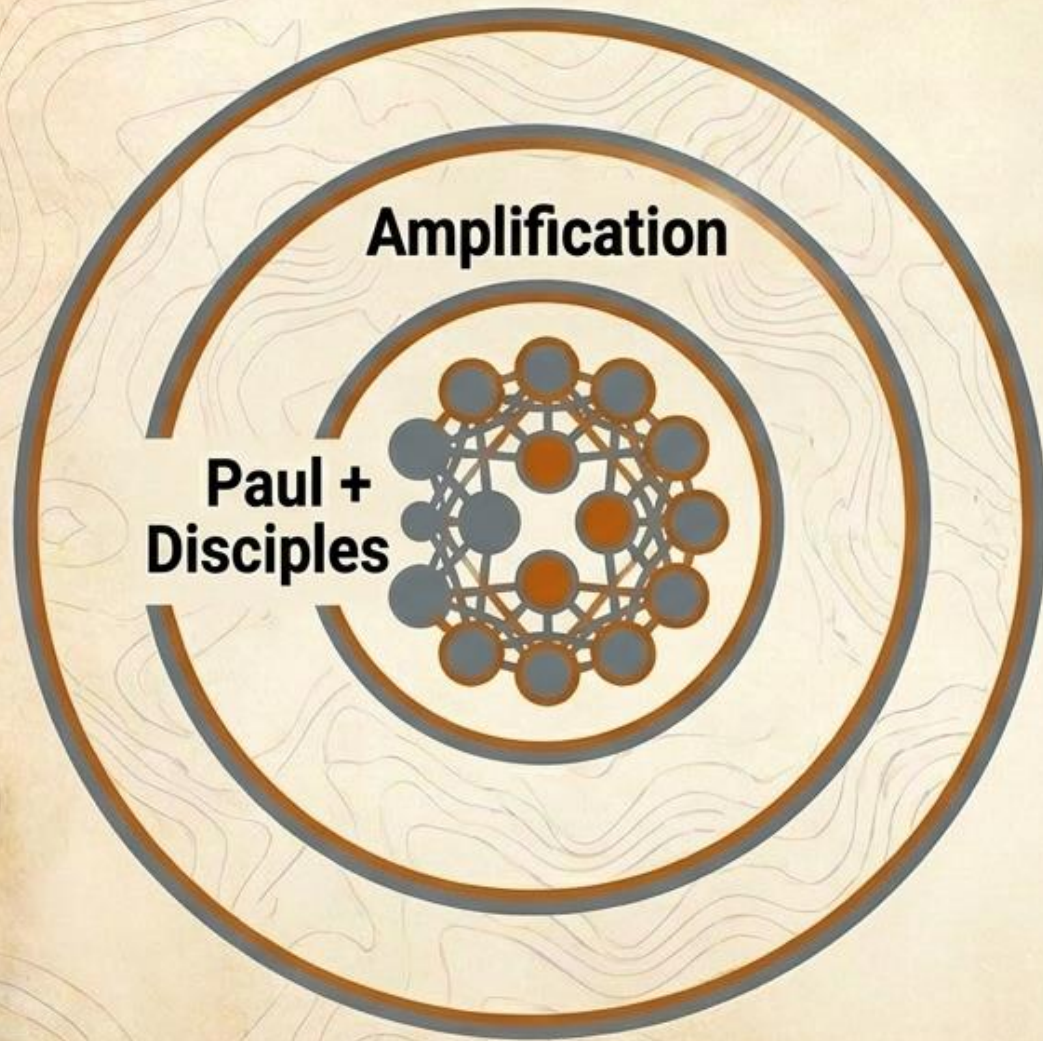
Are we merely providing a friendly atmosphere, or are we actively assimilating people into the Body where their faith can explode?

28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 9:28

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Boldness Born in Community



Once accepted by the brethren, Paul moves freely in Jerusalem. He begins arguing with the Hellenistic Jews—picking up the exact mantle of Stephen, the very man whose martyrdom he likely oversaw (Acts 6).

Core Insight: There is a profound boldness that only comes from having a secure support system. We cannot stand boldly against the world if we are not unified internally.

29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.

Acts 9:29

NASB95

30 But when the brethren learned of it,
they brought him down to Caesarea
and sent him away to Tarsus.

Acts 9:30

NASB95

Protection by the Brethren

When new death threats arise, the assimilated community protects their own. They spirit Paul away to safety in his hometown of Tarsus.

Core Insight: Without this community, the greatest missionary journey in church history might have ended in Jerusalem before it truly began. The Church needs Paul, but Paul desperately needs the Church.



Church, we **NEED** each other!

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

Acts 9:31

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He is the Son of God.

The Singular Message

Paul's message was built entirely on the bedrock of Matthew 16:
"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God... and upon this rock I will build
My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

A unified church of surrendered
Christ-followers, full of the Holy
Spirit, will grow and increase.

The Blueprint of a Gospel Launch

**Pillar 1:
Obedience**
(Ananias going
to the enemy)



**Pillar 2:
Transformation**
(Saul becoming
a new creation)

**Pillar 3:
Assimilation**
(Barnabas bridging
the gap)

God orchestrated these three distinct, required responses to safely launch Paul. Missing any single pillar would have stalled the mission.

Locating Yourself in the Story



Have you been deeply transformed by the Gospel (like Saul)?



Are you actively assimilated into the community, or just hovering on the edges?



Are you acting as a Barnabas—building a bridge for someone else?

Imperfect people in passionate pursuit of God and others.
We need you; you need us; we need each other.