

Introduction:

- This week marks the week that many children will start back to school. Since it is Generational Sunday I am going to pause from the Abba/Father series to speak to our children. I will be sharing from Acts chapter 9, but in light of the subject, I have chosen Acts 9:16 as my text to encourage everyone going back to school: "*And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.*" (Acts 9:16, NLT)
- I have been fortunate in life to only have had to endure minor surgeries. I broke my nose in college and after getting married I had to have it corrected. I also had wisdom teeth taken out. I had a number of stitches put in my thumb while away on vacation. Each one of these events lead the doctor to prescribe pain killers that I would need. Each time I would hear the Docs say something like this: "Go immediately and get this prescription filled. Take them as directed. You want to stay ahead of the pain." When I followed the instructions, I stayed ahead of the pain. When I did not. When the medicine wore off I began hurting.
 - Much of what we learn in life is about staying ahead of the pain.
 - So here's the question: How do we stay ahead of the pain we all will face in life? The answer to this question is preparation. That is what much of going to school is all about... preparation.
 - Sometimes preparation is fun. Like getting ready for vacation. But preparation is not always pleasant. Just ask an Olympic athlete. It is a lot of work, grueling work.
 - It is what Jesus was saying to Paul the apostle in Acts 9:16 "*I will show him how much he must suffer for my names sake.*" Jesus was preparing Paul for his life's calling.
- Lets go back to Acts 9. I want to point out some things in the chapter that are applicable to all of you students going back to school.

I. How Do You Recognize What God Wants You To Do In Life? 9:1-6

- A. If school is about preparation, How do you recognize what God wants you to do in life? The Apostle Paul was very important the early church. He wrote most of the NT. But God had to get his attention, get him positioned and get him prepared (schooled). Two things I want to draw our attention to vss 1-6.
 1. "*He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"*" (Acts 9:4, NLT)
 - a) One of the ways we recognize what we are to do in life is by God calling us to it.
 - b) He can call you into the ministry. He can call you to be a soldier. He can call you to be in business.
 - c) God speaks clearly to Saul after getting his attention. He saw a light, was struck blind, and heard a voice. That is dramatic. Many people have attention getting moments in life. It can be a dramatic encounter with God or it can be a circumstance that leads us to encounter God.

- d) Ie. When I was called into the ministry, I was not even saved. I just knew in my heart, that that was what I was supposed to do in life. It took 5 years before saying yes to God. Saul, heard a voice saying to him...
- 2. The next thing that Saul hears is this: "*Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.*" (Acts 9:6, NLT) God starts playing treasure hunt with Saul. "You will be told what you must do." In other words go and then I will give you more.
 - a) God does not give Saul all the answers at once. Even though He has heard the voice of Jesus talking to him he still has questions. This is part of the process of the journey. Learn to ask lots of questions in life. And do not be afraid of unanswered questions. Don't be afraid of time. Often it is the questions that lead us to our answers.
 - b) In every instance in my life where I am being led by God, I have always had more questions. God hides some things from us so that we will look for the answers. "*It is God's privilege to conceal things and the king's privilege to discover them.*" (Proverbs 25:2, NLT) **What you discover, you remember.** What you discover in life you will remember in life. Ie. Relationship, authority, learning, etc.
- B. How do you know when God is calling/leading you?
 - 1. Some have literally heard the audible voice of God.
 - 2. Others are lead by 'impressions' of the heart. Ie. "I feel in my gut I am supposed to..."
 - 3. Many are lead by desire. I have a desire to for art/creativity, I have a desire to build/engineer, carpenter, architect, I just like helping people, I have a desire to be the most awesome mom, I have a desire to be a soldier.
 - a) Our prior neighbor across the street said, "I always wanted to be a soldier since I was a little boy." He was a Colonel in the army. Desire plays a big part in finding the will of God for your life.
 - b) "*Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.*" (Psalm 37:4, NLT) The secret is to delight yourself in God. Spend time with Him.
 - 4. Sometime other people help us find what we are to do in life. They come with just the right words at the right time and our hearts respond to that word. Ie. John Mongerson, the youth pastor at our church used to talk to me about the call of God on my life. He did not know I had this desire inside. He spoke of ministry and his words were a nudge in that direction.
 - 5. Sometimes we know what we are to do in life because of our passions and burdens.
- C. So, how do you recognize what you are supposed to do in life?
 - 1. Sometimes God calls you.
 - 2. Sometimes your calling calls you.
 - 3. Sometimes your passion and burden calls you.
 - 4. Sometimes others will call you.

5. And when you do not know what to do...go back to the last thing you knew to do.
- D. So to stay ahead of the pain means to prepare well by finding your life calling and going after it! Knowing what God wants you to do and doing it, allows you to live a life of purpose and that is very fulfilling.

II. Realize The Importance of People God Has Put In Your Life

- A. They are in our lives because they desire to teach/train, help, challenge us to excel, and to believe in us. *"Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied."* (Acts 9:10, NLT) Things to note:
 1. God called Ananias too. Ananias was also called by God. God knew him by name. The Bible does not tell us what Ananias did in life but it does tell us that he knew God!
 2. Ananias did not answer, "Who is this?" He knew the voice of God!
 3. Because he was able to recognize God, he was further along than Saul in his relationship with God. This was not to keep Saul down but to lift Saul up.
 - a) God called Ananias for Saul's sake. Ananias was prepared by God to be used by God to prepare Saul. You will have teachers and others in your life that have been prepared by God to prepare you for what you are called to in life.
 - b) Ananias was able to discern the voice of God when Saul could not. Ananias was therefore better than Saul, more skilled than Saul. **You will always have people in your life who are better and more skilled than you.** It is a fact of life. Do not let this fact discourage you. They exist to prepare you to be better. They exist to pull you up to where they are and beyond.
 4. I want you to realize that God has called others to help you get to where He is calling you. Those 'others' could be a teacher, a tutor, a coach, a parent, or a friend. *Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.* (Acts 9:19). A no name group of people, unknown except for the fact that they were all on the journey together, as followers of Christ.
 - a) A group of people all doing the same...growing together.
 - b) Notice that Paul chose to stay with people of like mind.
 - c) There is an old saying that is so true. "Show me who your friends are at school and I will show you your future." Choose your friends wisely. Paul did when he started his walk with God.
 5. We are not together by mistake, therefore:
 - a) Honor the people that God puts into your life to help you, teach you and train you.
 - b) *"Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit."* (Hebrews 13:17, NLT)
 - c) Ie. Mildred Nally

B. Let look at another interaction in Acts 9. Here, Paul tries to make new friends but is rejected. "*When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.*" (Acts 9:26-27, NLT)

1. There is a lot of talk about bullying these days. A bully is one who puts others down. A bully is one who picks on weaker people. A bully finds pleasure in making others look bad and feel bad about themselves. It is the exact opposite of what Barnabas does in our passage. Barnabas is an encourager. Here we find another person 'sharper' than Paul but prepared by God to help prepare Saul for his mission in life.
 2. Lets note Barnabas in our passage. Barnabas believed in Saul when others would not. Barnabas accepted Saul when others rejected him. Barnabas championed Saul and spoke highly of him to help others see who he genuinely was. Barnabas stayed with Saul when others would not. That is real friend. That is a 'big man.' God has prepared people like that for you. And you exist to be that to others. It's how we find success together.
 3. The friendship that formed between Barnabas and Saul would be one for a life time.
Show me your friends and I will show you your future. Barnabas would be the first to take Saul with him on a missionary journey.
 4. You will be forming friendships in school that may possibly last a lifetime. Treasure them.
- C. Realize that your parents are most important people you will have in your life. They are your greatest representatives! They will always be cheering for you. There is no one who wants more than to see you be successful in life than your parents.
1. Learn to trust them. Talk to your parents. If you hear/read anything that does not sound or feel right or make Jesus smile learn to talk with them. You want to be able to have those conversations with your parents. Ie. Daniel kept his faith while being taught a Babylonian system. How did he do that? Lots of conversations with parents before he was taken away.
 2. Honor your parents. Your parents by way of life, experience, and hard knocks have insights that will save you from pain in life.

III. **You create your future with each choice you make. Our lives are shaped by choices.**

- A. The freedom to choose is a gift from God. But with freedom comes much responsibility. That is why so many of our choice are so important. Your parents want you to grow up as responsible people. That responsibility begins now.
 1. Trust is a beautiful thing. It is awesome when your parents trust you. It is binding when they do not. When you make wise choices you show you can be trusted. When

you do not, and trust is broken, it takes time (sometimes lots of time) to earn that trust back.

2. When you honor God, honor your parents and teachers your will make wise decisions that bring them to a place of great trust.
 3. You can choose your friends, they help shape your future. You can choose to eat healthy, that too shapes you and your future. You can choose to live right, bad habits are hard to break and good ones last a life time. Start young.
- B. Choose life. Choose those things that bring life and not death. *“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!”* (Deuteronomy 30:19, NLT) Joshua repeats this later when he knows that he is about to pass away.
- C. Choose the right friends. *“The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.”* (Proverbs 12:26, NKJV)
- D. Choose to live by the Word of God, David did. *“I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me.”* (Psalm 119:30, NKJV)
- E. Choose to live a disciplined life. Honor discipline when you find it at school. Discipline is simply choosing a structure of living that brings forth good fruit. Good study habits, good eating habits, good social habits. Ie. Purpose to be a good friend, even when others are not. Your right choices may be the only right choice some kids will see.

Conclusion:

- School is about preparing for something that God has prepared for you.
- Preparing involves recognizing the people God puts into your life.
- Making wise choices is some of the best preparation you will ever do.
- Life really is fun and this is going to be a great school year for all of you. At the same time I also remember how painful studying was for me. But my mom was always reminding me that I was preparing for my future.
- But if you will understand that you are on a journey through life, and now the years are filled with preparation. If you will choose to prepare well, you will head off a lot of pain that will try to come upon you.
- A great way to start the school year is with God in your corner. Who wants to make Jesus Lord of your life today.