

Running the Race

A Bible Study of the Life of Paul

By Kay Daigle

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Cover Art

Our beautiful cover was painted by Sandy Sparks (sandysparksart.com) ©2020. Thank you, Sandy, for so graciously sharing your time and talent to paint a picture that so well represents the theme of this study.

Appreciation

I'm so grateful for Irish Kinney and Evelyn Babcock whose input on the consistency of the message and their eye for detail were essential to the editing process.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the women who generously wrote and shared their stories to flesh out the lessons from Paul's life for today's readers.

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Table of Contents

What to Know About This Study Guide	7
Introduction	11
Week One: A Surprising Runner	13
Week Two: A Unique Race	19
Week Three: A Bold Runner	25
Week Four: Paced by the Spirit	31
Week Five: Focused on the Goal	37
Week Six: Running in Community	41
Week Seven: Using Hardships as Opportunities	47
Week Eight: Invested	51
Week Nine: Passing the Baton	55
Appendix	59
Paul's Final Journeys chart	61
Kingdom Prayers	63
Journaling 101	65
Tips for Leaders	69
Works Cited	73
Resources for Leaders	75
List of Charts	
Paul's Early Travels	20
Paul's First Missionary Journey	30
Paul's Second Missionary Journey	36
Paul's Final Journeys	61

What to Know About This Study Guide

Its Format

This study is written with few questions, but they're thought-provoking questions. It requires listening to God through his Word, being directed by open questions, and responding to what you've read and heard by writing down your thoughts.

Each week's study has three parts to make it easy to split it up or do at once, depending on your preference.

See beyondordinarywomen.org for previews of other studies or information about group purchases.

Simple doesn't equate to shallow.

This study demands your involvement. Although the layout is simple, how deeply you go depends on you. As you spend time talking to God and journaling your thoughts, he may lead you to other cross-references, but he will certainly give you insights into the verses. Don't stop with initial surface answers, but ask God to clarify and guide. The time you spend in the scriptures with God gives him space to speak. Listen well, note your thoughts (simple journaling) share them with your small group, and glean from one another's insights.

Studying through three sections a week

If you like doing a little study at a time, each week's lesson is set up in three parts, but feel free to go through it in any way that works best for you. If you prefer daily time in the Word, consider spending two days on each part, writing on the optional starred section the second day. You may be amazed at what you see by reading the same passage twice. If you prefer to do the entire study in one sitting, you may want to read all the passages first and then answer the questions at the end. Of course, it's great to be in God's Word each day, but you may have other ways of doing that. Stick to what works for your schedule.

Additional reading and background information

The lesson provides background information pertinent to your understanding. Feel free to do your own research when you have interest or questions, but the group conversation will be focused on the passages studied by everyone.



A star identifies optional verses or suggested study for those with time and interest. The additional reading will help you wrestle with deeper insights into the passages.

Soul Food

The verses that begin each week's lesson are great choices for memorization and/or discussion.

What you need

- A quiet place, if possible.
- A Bible that you can understand. If you don't have one, ask your group leader for suggestions, or email us at info@beyondordinarywomen.org. Modern versions are available as downloads, through Bible apps, or in print at any bookstore. (We are using the NET Bible at lumina.bible.org, a free online Bible translation with study helps.)
- A notebook, laptop, or tablet to use to record your insights and answers which can easily be taken to your group meetings. If you're using a printed copy of this study, add a piece of paper after each lesson. (See Journaling 101 in the Appendix.)
- The commitment to listen to God and write out what you hear as you read and pray.
- Someone, or even better a group, to discuss this with you and provide support, encouragement, and spiritual challenge.

Best practices for group get-togethers (For more detail see the Appendix & leader videos.)

Plan a regular place, time, and leader.

The leader should—

- read the section "Tips for Leaders" in the Appendix.
- watch BOW's free, short videos: "Tips for Leading a Journaling Study" (<https://vimeo.com/album/4256789>) and the series Listening Well (<https://vimeo.com/album/4065298>). If your group includes Millennials, watch the series "Millennials: The Good, the Bad, and the Ministry" at <https://vimeo.com/album/5118401>.
- start on time, not waiting for late arrivals.
- move the group along, being sensitive to God's Spirit.
- encourage everyone to share without forcing it.
- be a great encourager.
- avoid dominating the conversation.
- keep the focus on the women, not herself and her own thoughts.
- provide time for the group to think and share from their journals.
- contact absent group members to encourage them.
- email the group weekly to remind them of the upcoming meeting, and share her excitement.

As a group—

- come prepared and on time with your study, notebook (journal), and Bible.
- share freely and honestly.
- encourage one another.

- don't interrupt the speaker.
- love one another.
- don't try to fix the other members of your group or their problems by giving advice.
- pray for one another and entrust each other and your problems to God.
- be honest and vulnerable, but wise in how much detail you share personally.
- stay in touch with each other between meetings for support and encouragement.

If your group meets within a larger group in a church setting

- Look for a woman gifted in teaching God's Word to teach a short lesson after the small group discussion. Watch BOW's short, free video "Why Use Live Teachers, not Video?" at <https://vimeo.com/209323216>. (For help in preparing to teach, see our collection of videos at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/bible-teaching/> or contact us at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/contact-alternative/>.)
- Because the discussion isn't about the teacher's comments but focuses on the members' personal study, the discussion should precede the teaching time.
- The teacher may spend 15-25 minutes adding to the background of the lesson, beginning and ending within the allotted time frame. The majority of the time together should be invested in small groups.
- The teacher's role is to clarify and extend what the group has studied, not to retell what they have discussed.

Stories

Each week's study includes a true story that relates to the lesson. Some of our studies have such stories on video, but this study includes them in written form at the end of the lessons. The names have been changed in some cases to protect those involved.

Introduction

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1

Do you not know that all the runners in a stadium compete, but only one receives the prize? So run to win. Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Lessons from Paul—there’s so much to learn!

What’s your impression of the Apostle to the Gentiles? Positive? Negative? Perhaps you think of him as stern and strong, a force to be reckoned with.

When I taught an earlier edition of this study in 2009, a number of people in that group told me that their attitudes toward Paul changed from negative to positive as we dug into his life. It made me sad that somewhere along the way the church has missed teaching the breadth and depth of the great apostle, a true giant of the faith.

I’ve been revising this study as the world deals with COVID-19 and now the United States struggles with racial tension after the unjust death of George Floyd.

The pandemic has been a challenging time that requires many people, perhaps for the first time, to really face their mortality. It may bring opportunities to share the gospel with both our actions and our words. There’s much Paul can teach us about meeting any challenge by living with a focus on God’s kingdom.

Our racial injustices draw me to Paul’s example of speaking boldly for gospel truth by not allowing division within the church between Jew and Greek.

Through this study of Paul’s life, I pray that we will be overwhelmed by the gospel message and the God whom Paul faithfully served.

Kay Daigle

June 2020

Running the Race

Week One: A Surprising Runner

Soul Food

Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14b-17 NLT

To be frank, I'm not a runner, and I have no desire to begin running. But I want to understand it since the apostle Paul often pictures the Christian life as a race, using athletic terminology to represent what it looks like to follow Jesus.

Because considering the lives of other Christians can help us learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, we'll watch Paul run for the next few weeks. Our purpose isn't to learn ABOUT Paul but to learn FROM him about Jesus and how to faithfully follow him.

It's usually best to start a story from the beginning. How did Paul get into this race? That's our topic this week. Even if you're familiar with his story, consider it from the perspective of those who knew him before he encountered Jesus. What a surprise to them that Paul was now running after Jesus!

Part One Study

Who was Paul? What do we know about his background?

The Hebrew name Saul is used in the early chapters of Acts for the apostle we call Paul. Luke, the historian who wrote the book of Acts, refers to him as "Saul, who was also called Paul" (Acts 13:9). Being of the Jewish tribe of Benjamin, his parents named their son after King Saul, the tribe's most well-known member. Saul was his Hebrew name while Paul was likely his Roman ancestral name.¹ Luke began calling him Paul when his ministry focus turned to the Gentile world.

Although he was a Jew, Paul was of the *diaspora*, those born outside of Israel, as he identified himself to a crowd in Jerusalem: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day" (Acts 22:3 ESV). In Acts 16:37 Paul identifies himself as

¹ David B. Capes, Rodney Reeves, E. Randolph Richards, *Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to His World, Letters, and Theology, 2nd Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 41.

a Roman citizen. “Roman citizenship in the provinces in this period was a mark of high status (especially because Paul’s family was from Tarsus, not a Roman colony, and thus must have received it for special service or as freedpersons of a well-to-do Roman.)”²

Tarsus was located in the southeast corner of modern Turkey. With that background, Paul “is thus completely at home in the worlds of both Jewish story and non-Jewish philosophy,”³ making him God’s perfect choice as his witness to the Gentile (non-Jew) world.

Keep that culture in mind as we consider what else we learn about Paul’s background.

Read Philippians 3:5-7 and comment on these questions:

- In that day “a person’s identity was wrapped up in the reputation of his or her family, community, and people group.” Honor from one’s social group defined success.⁴ Why would Paul’s background impress his social group?
- What in your background—family, hometown, education, etc. tempts you to hold on to your “resume” rather than trust God alone?
- What positives in your life have you or would you have to leave behind to fully follow Jesus? Any thoughts about what that would look like?



Research Gamaliel, Tarsus, and/or the Pharisees, recording your thoughts.

Part Two Study

We’ll start this section by reading the first biblical mention of Saul. What seems like only a passing remark at the end of the story of Stephen in Acts 7:58 becomes extremely relevant once Luke begins to focus on Paul’s story later in Acts.

Read Acts 6:8-7:2a; 7:51-8:3. Read also Paul’s description of himself in Acts 22:1-5 and Galatians 1:13-14 as you consider this question:

- Considering Saul’s background and actions, what is most interesting or noticeable to you about him from these passages?

Paul repeats the word zeal or zealous to describe what led him to persecute the church in Acts 22, Galatians and Philippians, (yesterday’s reading). In our day the word means “PASSION, ardor, love, fervor, fire, avidity, devotion, enthusiasm, eagerness, keenness, appetite, relish, gusto, vigor, energy, intensity; fanaticism.”⁵ I generally think of it as passionate devotion, but zeal in Israelite tradition involved “actual violence, not just strong emotion.”⁶

² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 370.

³ N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018), 17.

⁴ Capes, 23.

⁵ Apple Dictionary version 2.3.0

⁶ Wright, 4.

N.T. Wright comments: “. . . one of the solid things that we know about young Saul—[he] followed the ancient tradition of ‘zeal.’ Violence would be necessary to root out wickedness from Israel.”⁷

The Israelite tradition of zeal began with Phinehas, Aaron’s son, whose zealous actions in killing a couple guilty of sexual immorality stopped a plague in Israel’s camp. The other Old Testament zealot was the prophet Elijah. Wright says about his story, “Most of the Israelites had started to worship Baal, a Canaanite fertility god. . . . Step forward the prophet Elijah. He lured the Baal worshippers into a contest that Israel’s God won, and he had the whole lot killed. Once again, great zeal and a great victory.”⁸



Read about Phinehas, “the hero of zeal”⁹ in Numbers 25:1-13, and note God’s comments about his zeal. If time permits, check out Elijah’s victory in 1 Kings 18:20-40. Journal your thoughts.

With all that in mind, write down your thoughts on these questions:

- Obviously zeal for God was considered positive. What motivates such strong emotions? Consider how you confront the idolatry in your own heart and that common to your church culture. What would it look like if you were motivated as Paul was?
- What is God saying to you today?

Part Three Study

Acts picks up Paul’s story again three or four years after Jesus’s resurrection (about A.D. 34).

Read Acts 9:1-19a, and respond to these questions:

- In light of what you’ve previously read about Paul, what does this story reveal about God—his character and/or his actions?
- Meditate on this week’s Soul Food, our verses for this week (2 Corinthians 5:14-17), and write down your thoughts and any parallels you see between your story and Saul’s.
- How do you sense God encouraging you through this story as you look at your own failures and mistakes?



Read one or both of Paul’s own accounts of this event in Acts 22:3-16 and Acts 26:4-23. Journal any additional insights that you gain.

Are you a Christ-follower? If not, God is reaching out to you in his great love. The journey to faith is different for each of us. Some of us, like Saul, are religious and believe that we’re serving God. And yet we don’t believe that Jesus is God himself who became man so he could die and bring us to God, proving his divinity by his resurrection. Maybe you’re sensing that Jesus is who he claimed to be and that he wants you to follow him. He greatly desires that you turn from seeking life apart from him,

⁷ Wright, 29.

⁸ Wright, 32.

⁹ Wright, 31.

going your own way instead of God's. Jesus died to reconcile you to the great Creator God who loves you and wants you to come home to him where true life and peace await.

Talk to God about it, contact your small group leader, or email me at kay@beyondordinarywomen.org.

Each week we share a true story that connects to the week's study. This one is from Kay H.

A Runner's Story: Kay H

Who was it who said, "Our part is to run away from God as far and as fast as we can and God's part is to come after us and save us," or something like that? Well, that's what I was doing and that's what God did. It's surprising that God chose me because before he did I didn't know anything about him and I really wasn't making any effort to find out.

At the time I left home for college I had been to church only a handful of times in my life. I had never even read, much less studied the Bible. My thoughts about God and religion were purely philosophical. I had never heard the gospel, at least that I can remember. I definitely had no understanding of what a "personal relationship with God" meant. In fact, I really had no interest in God at all. Never mind—he was interested in me anyway.

At school I was suddenly surrounded by people who had something I didn't—a relationship with God that was real and personal, based on knowing him from the Bible and a belief in his Son Jesus who died to take away their sin and rose again to eternal life. At first when they tried to talk to me about it, I either ridiculed them or just literally shut the door in their faces. I argued and debated, and I thought I had all the right intellectual answers based on good reason and logic.

My testimony could be something like Paul's: I thought I was pretty smart. In a worldly sense most people might have agreed with me. But God wasn't impressed. He knew my reasoning and logic couldn't come close to his wisdom. Now I see that what was once my greatest source of pride and accomplishment actually caused me the greatest sense of shame and humility. But thanks be to God, he hadn't given up on me and his grace was bigger than my sinfulness, pride and stupidity.

Despite my stubbornness and refusal to listen to most of the people who tried to talk to me, God was breaking down my resistance and beginning to speak to me through a few individuals. Through their prayers with and for me (which I met at first with "Sure you can pray for me. I don't think it will do any good, but if it makes you happy knock yourself out."), kindness, and even time talking to me about what the Bible really says, God eventually showed me that he's real, and it doesn't matter what I or anyone else thinks about him. He also showed me that I'm a sinner and his Son Jesus is the only one who is uniquely qualified to take away my sin, and that he did. It surprised a lot of people when I stood up at a campus evangelistic meeting and declared my faith in Jesus Christ, but it didn't surprise God. He had plans for me.

Would anybody from my past be surprised to see me following Christ and spending my time and energy on his activities rather than the things that motivated me before? Yes, pretty much everyone

who ever knew me would be! That fact has caused some painful conversations over the years, but it's also created some great opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reality of 2 Corinthians 5:17: "So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away—look, what is new has come!"