

**WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?**  
*LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM  
THE LIFE OF PAUL*

**EDDIE ESTEP**



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# INTRODUCTION

## THE C'S OF LEADERSHIP

*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires  
to be an overseer desires a noble task.*

—1 Timothy 3:1

Aside from Jesus Christ, it is hard to imagine that anyone else has had more impact on Christianity than the apostle Paul. Of course, the key to the effectiveness of the church—then and now—is not a remarkably gifted individual. The key to the effectiveness of any church is almighty God. But movements begin with individuals, and God uses Paul to initiate the spread of Christianity.

Paul provides so much for so many: for the theologian, a doctrinal construct; for the preacher, a message; for the missionary, a strategy; for the entrepreneur, a model; and, for the student of leadership, a wealth of leadership lessons and examples for consideration. Excellent leadership qualities are woven through Paul's life and ministry. Richard Ascough and Charles Cotton claim that Paul essentially “wrote the book” on transformational leadership.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Paul gets a bad rap these days from some who view him as intimidating, abusive, discriminatory, and offensive. He was viewed the same way by some in his own day. There is certainly enough material in the New Testament to allow the serious reader to make up her or his own mind on the matter. I'll be drawing from both firsthand accounts (the thirteen New Testament letters

## INTRODUCTION

that claim Paul as the author) and secondhand accounts (Luke's perspective in Acts) in this treatment.

Ever adapting to new circumstances and generating new ideas, Paul's leadership style is incarnational—he lives among the people to whom he ministers and writes. In Paul, one finds leadership genius—passion, strategy, relational capital, vision. Some leaders pray daily for wisdom, grace, and stamina. Paul has all three in abundance.

### The C's

Many years ago, I became aware of the C's of ministry—a list of qualities that could be used to evaluate ministers being considered for pastoral staff positions in the church I was serving. They included:

- **Call:** Does this person have a keen sense that they have been invited to vocationally participate in God's redemptive work in the world?
- **Character:** Is this a person of integrity?
- **Competence:** Does this person have the skill set to do what we are asking and expecting?
- **Consistency:** What is this person's prior record of faithfulness and fruitfulness?
- **Chemistry:** How will this person mesh with the existing team?<sup>2</sup>

Upon becoming an overseer in the denomination I serve, I discovered the C's also provide a helpful framework for evaluating women and men seeking ordination and preparing to give themselves to a lifetime of service to the Lord and his church, as well as for assessing ministers being considered as pastoral candidates in local churches.

As I began to research Paul's leadership style, it occurred to me that these C's of leadership—with some adaptations—provide a fitting structure from which to construct a study of Paul's leadership. Paul's **call**, **connections**, **character**, **competencies**, and **challenges** supply an appropriate framework for consideration.

There are a couple of things to note before we begin. First, for the sake of convenience and consistency, I will use “Paul” throughout the book, rather than switching back and forth between his early name, Saul, and his later name, Paul.

Second, this is not intended to be a theological book, although that is difficult to avoid when considering Paul’s writings. Nor is it intended to be a biblical survey, though Paul’s and Luke’s New Testament writings are the documents of the research. It is intended to be a book on leadership—Paul’s leadership. There is much to learn about leadership from Paul. Let’s dive in.

PART 1

THE LEADER'S CALL

*How a Leader Is Prepared  
and Summoned*

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.*

—1 Timothy 1:12

*More and more it seems to me that about the best thing in life is to have a piece of work worth doing and then to do it well.*

—Theodore Roosevelt<sup>1</sup>

A leader's development is often marked by discernible progression. Metaphors can be helpful in describing this progression, including a seasonal description of a leader's development in terms of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Another helpful metaphor comes from sports: preseason, season opener, mid-season, late season, post-season (retirement). The terms *learning*, *leading*, and *leaving a legacy* also provide a description of healthy leadership development.

In my own leadership, I can look back at how a progression of assignments led to specific parts of my development. In the first assignment I learned to lead; in the second assignment I actually led; in the third assignment I learned to lead *with* others; in the fourth assignment I learned to lead *through* others.

## PART 1: THE LEADER'S CALL

Paul's development as a leader also follows a discernible arc, marked by both places and opportunities. We turn now to that marked progression.



— ONE —

## CHILD OF TARSUS: PRELUDE TO LEADERSHIP

*Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia,  
a citizen of no ordinary city.  
Please let me speak to the people."*

—Acts 21:39

Paul's hometown is no backwoods burg. Tarsus has considerable importance economically and militarily and has become a blend of various civilizations kept at peace under the rule of Rome. Strategically located near a seaport and on a major east-west trade route, the city attracts a diverse mix of international culture and commerce from caravans carrying goods from the Far East to Rome. "Paul was reared amid the busy streets and crowded bazaars of Tarsus," suggests F. B. Meyer, "thronged with the merchants, students, and sailors from all parts of the world."<sup>1</sup> Tarsus is the principal city of the Cilician province. Situated between the mountains and the sea, it lies ten miles inland on the river Cydnus in the southeast corner of modern Turkey. The city stands in a rich and luxuriant plain. To the north rise the snow-capped Taurus mountains. The Mediterranean lies out-of-sight, a half-day's walk to the south.

Leaders are influenced by heritage, early environment, and upbringing, and Paul is no different. Although he is Jewish, Paul's

upbringing in Tarsus enables him to understand and connect with gentiles. While living in a strict and ordered home environment, Paul grows up aware of how the rest of the world works, speaks, behaves, and reasons. He is accustomed to interactions with both Greeks and Romans. Likely Paul speaks Greek—the common language of trade—from his earliest years, has a working knowledge of Latin, learns Hebrew in the synagogue, and speaks Aramaic—the language of Judea (and Jesus)—at home. N. T. Wright observes, “We can safely assume, then, that Saul grew up in a cheerfully strict observant Jewish home, on the one hand, and in a polyglot, multi-cultural, multiethnic working environment on the other.”<sup>2</sup>

Since Tarsus is not a Jewish city but a Roman one, the Jewish inhabitants most likely all live in the same neighborhood, which for them provides an island of purity in a sea of the profane. Living close to one another offers safety and makes it convenient to observe the same religious celebrations and obtain kosher food. Such proximity also helps keep the Jews religiously “in line” because life is lived in full view of their neighbors.

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***Leadership Lesson: A leader's worldview and cultural awareness will naturally be shaped by where that leader is born and raised.***

Paul's initial perspective will be significantly shaped by his childhood context. In addition to being immersed in Jewish culture, Tarsus provides Saul with opportunities to observe multiple other cultures too. Home-town values influence all of us to one degree or another—sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. For some, those values provide a foundation of appreciation for healthy cross-cultural relationships. For others, those values produce at best a narrow understanding of multicultural richness or, at worst, outright prejudice.

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. . . *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel . . .*  
 —*Philippians 3:5a*

Paul is probably a little younger than Jesus of Nazareth, likely born in the first decade of what we now call the first century.<sup>3</sup> He is born to strictly observant Jewish parents who ensure their son is circumcised on the eighth day, as required by the Jewish law.

The Torah commands ritual circumcision of all male Jews, a necessity for admittance to the temple and to synagogues. The commitment to circumcision dates back to God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:10–14. While there are health benefits associated with circumcision, the practice is primarily a visible sign of the covenant and a continual reminder of their heritage. God’s chosen people are to be marked, and it is the duty of a Jewish father to have his son circumcised.

This religious rite becomes a point of contention in the early church, and Paul will extensively address the challenging issue in his writings.

. . . *of the tribe of Benjamin . . .*  
 —*Philippians 3:5b*

Paul is named eight days after his birth, when he is circumcised. His parents’ choice to name him Saul can be traced to his tribal connection. The name is given in honor of the most famous of the Benjamites, King Saul, the first king of Israel. Paul is named as a reminder of his heritage as a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a heritage that Paul never forgets. Years later, he will write to the church in Rome, “I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1).

His parents apparently also give their son the Roman name “Paul.” He is called Paul for the first time in the Bible in Acts 13, when he is on the island of Cyprus. Luke, the writer of Acts, indicates that the names are interchangeable—“Saul, who was also

## PART 1: THE LEADER'S CALL

called Paul” (v. 9)—and refers to him as Paul through the remainder of Acts. And, of course, Paul identifies *himself* as Paul in the many New Testament letters he writes to the various churches he pastors. It is fitting that the one who will become the apostle to the gentiles uses his gentile name.

. . . a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee.

—*Philippians 3:5c*

Paul comes from pure Hebrew stock. His parents are Pharisees, the Jewish party that is most fervent in Jewish nationalism and adherence to the law of Moses. “They lived with a fierce, joyful strictness in obedience to the ancestral traditions. They did their best to urge other Jews to do the same.”<sup>4</sup> Purity is a priority for the Pharisees, who seek to guard their offspring against contamination from anything or anyone non-kosher. The family likely retains the Hebrew language in a gentile environment.<sup>5</sup>

The Pharisees exercise great care in observing the Sabbath law and food restrictions. They scrupulously tithe the produce of the soil and refuse to eat food that is subject to tithe unless the tithe has actually been paid. They hold to a bodily resurrection. Because of their meticulous adherence to the laws of purity and to tithing, they do not associate easily with those who do not adhere. Later in life, Paul tells King Agrippa that he has lived as a Pharisee, the strictest party of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5).

In our day, “Pharisee” has become a synonym for religious pride and even hypocrisy, but in Paul’s day, the Pharisees represent some of the noblest traditions of the Hebrew people, and being one is a badge of honor. There are always cultural pressures that will tempt devout Jews to compromise, but Paul’s people are marked by zeal for Israel’s God, zeal for Israel’s Torah, and zeal for Israel’s purity. Paul himself can claim to be “faultless” with regard to “righteousness based on the law” (Philippians 3:6).

***Leadership Lesson:*** The identity and traditions a leader learns in childhood create a foundational awareness that becomes strongly ingrained.

As children, the stories we hear, the sights we see, the songs we sing, and the habits we learn become shaping influences in our lives. Attitudes develop as knowledge and experience are gained. This will be especially true of Paul, who grows up in a home that is intentionally structured and strongly opinionated about faith and life.

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Nothing is known of Paul's mother. He never mentions her. Perhaps she dies early in Paul's life, and that is why he views Rufus's mother as his own (Romans 16:13). Nor does Paul ever mention a wife. Some speculate that he *was* married but that his wife left him after his conversion to Christianity. He has at least one sister because he has a nephew who will play a prominent role in Paul's deliverance from an assassination plot (Acts 23:12–22).

*And because he was a tentmaker as they were,  
he stayed and worked with them.*

—Acts 18:3

Every Jewish boy is taught a trade, usually that of his father. Paul's father is most likely a master tentmaker. Among the industries in Tarsus is a thriving textile business, producing material made from goats' hair. This becomes the basis of the family business, in which Paul is apprenticed and will practice even after leaving Tarsus. The tents made in Tarsus are used by caravans, nomads, and armies. The family business makes interaction with other cultures necessary, also contributing to Paul's awareness of language and culture.

Throughout his ministry, Paul will earn his own living in the family business. Tentmaking is a portable trade, suitable for an itinerant life. Weaving a dark, coarse cloth from goats' hair will require

a loom but not an established workshop. As long as he has his working tools, Paul can set up shop in any town.

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***Leadership Lesson: Co-vocational (or bivocational) ministry—when the minister gains additional income from another job—continues to be an option and sometimes a necessity for many ministers today.***

In my own leadership context, the number of co-vocational ministers is on the rise as pastors seek additional employment for financial or missional reasons. Such ministers are following in Paul's footsteps. Although it may ease financial burdens for both the minister and the church, co-vocational ministry can also increase time-management burdens for the minister and the minister's family. However, many ministers report increased fulfillment from the opportunity to engage the mission field through additional employment. They cite increased ministry effectiveness as a byproduct of their co-vocational status. Churches are blessed by these faithful and hard-working pastors.

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*This man is a Roman citizen.*

—Acts 22:26b

Paul's childhood provides him the best of two cultures. Not only is he raised with the heritage and traditions of a Jewish family, but he also has Roman citizenship, something he will occasionally use to his advantage. Paul's father is apparently a Roman citizen. As Roman citizens, the family's status will be coveted.

Although it is unknown exactly how Paul's family became citizens of Rome, F. F. Bruce suggests that perhaps Paul's father, grandfather, or great-grandfather performed some outstanding service to the Roman cause.<sup>6</sup> Paul's status as a Roman citizen by birth will benefit him greatly as he travels on his missionary journeys. He will

use his citizenship to escape flogging in Acts 22 and appeal to Caesar in Acts 25.

F. B. Meyer observes that in Tarsus, “Paul became equipped with the prerequisites of a great traveler.”<sup>7</sup> For this there are three necessary conditions: speech, safety, and sustenance. Greek is the common language of the world, and Paul will become as familiar with Greek as he is with Hebrew. All the world is Roman. To be a Roman citizen gives Paul a measure of safety in his travels. It is like having a global passport with significant rights attached. As for sustenance, as long as there are goats nearby, Paul can provide for himself. There will always be demand for the coarse cloth he can produce.

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***Leadership Lesson: God is at work from the beginning in the lives of those whom he calls, preparing them to serve him well.***

God uses it all. Our background and early experiences are made useful for his work. Ascough and Cotton write, “Paul believed that his genetic code, his upbringing, and his training in religion were all part of God’s plan and were intended to lead up to the moment when God would call him to a specific task.”<sup>8</sup> J. Oswald Sanders calls Paul “a world-citizen—a Jew living in a Greek city, and with Roman citizenship. Both by birth and by training Paul possessed the tenacity of the Jew, the culture of the Greek, and the practicality of the Roman, and these qualities allowed him to adapt to the polyglot peoples among whom he was to move.”<sup>9</sup> Growing up in Tarsus gives Paul a multicultural understanding that enables him to contextualize the gospel effectively in his later ministry.<sup>10</sup> May we all recognize that God can use our genetics, upbringing, and training for his glory. God can use any beginning to bring about his perfect end.<sup>11</sup>

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### **Questions for Leadership Development**

1. In what ways has your upbringing—your heritage, traditions, and early environment—prepared you for leadership?
2. How has your worldview been shaped by your hometown?
3. If you don't have one already, what would be your tent-making trade—your non-ministry co-vocation?
4. How has your life begun to counter your cultural conditioning?