

Pastor Tom Mortenson

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Now You See Me, Now You Don't, Part 6: Paul's Story

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, I just again thank you for this church, I thank you that you have kept us through this struggle and that you are continuing to bring us back and reunite us and I'm grateful for that. I'm grateful for your church in general and just the gift that it is, the gift that your Son is and the gift that your word is and the gift that your Holy Spirit is, Lord. So this morning we want to tap into all of those gifts. We just want to pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, that you would direct us, that you would grow us in our understanding of you and your kingdom and that it would be of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been doing a series about God's perceived absence or presence. I've been calling it "now you see me, now you don't" because oftentimes our experience with God is just that. God makes his presence known unmistakably and then he appears to disappear. And it occurred to me that many people might be hearing this and wondering, saying, I've never heard God make his presence known

unmistakably in the first place. I've never had that "now you see me" moment. And if that's the case for you, you are not alone. There are many, many folks who come into the kingdom with no fanfare and no particular grand appearance of God. I want to make that clear. I also want to make it clear the fact that God says you don't need a miraculous intervention by God to come fully into the kingdom. Well, actually you do need a miraculous intervention by God but not in the manner in which I think some people are thinking. See, just plain common sense is enough to get anyone to the place where they acknowledge that there has to be a God who created all of this that surrounds us. And God himself makes the case that his genuine revelation of who he is is enough to remove any excuse anyone could claim for believing in a godless universe. This is what God says in *Romans 1*. He says: *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.* What God is saying is you can't stand on his earth and look up into his sky, breathe his air, see his trees, his birds and his insects without arriving by simple common sense at the conclusion that there's a God. God says my attributes are clearly seen in the things that I've made. So that's enough to get you to God, so much so that there is no excuse for anyone else denying God but it's not enough to get you to Jesus Christ, and for that you need special

revelation found in scripture. But the scripture alone without miracles, without fanfare, without a personal confrontation with God is more than enough to lead you to Christ. I mean I mentioned the very beginning of this series sharing the gospel with someone who complained that he had asked for Christ to show himself and come into his life many, many times and as he said, every time, I've asked, zip, zero, nada, nothing. I thought about that question. And I thought my question to his question should have been "what did you expect to have happened?" I mean if we're honest, most of us would prefer something spectacular or at the very least some kind of out of ordinary display of God's power and presence, some kind of miraculous announcement that God is who he claims to be and that he's personally inviting them to accept him as Lord and Savior.

Now I mean I've heard plenty of folks say, "If God would only do a miracle, it would be so much easier to believe in him." And God certainly can and he does use miracles to advance his kingdom but I think even God would tell you that miracles are incredibly highly overrated. They certainly do not provide a guarantee that people will believe. And if we go back to the original record, we find the response of the crowds who actually witnessed Jesus' miracles, that response was highly mixed at best. For most people it only confirmed their inclination to believe or disbelieve Christ in the

first place. I mean just take the miracle that we looked at a few weeks ago. Jesus is feeding a crowd of 20,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. The unbelievers in the crowd are completely and extraordinarily unimpressed. The very next day Jesus confronts them and he says this in *John 6:29*. He says: *"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."* Therefore they said to Him, *"What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD FROM HEAVEN TO EAT.'"* Now you have to understand sometimes the text just does not give you the real sense of what's going on here. This text doesn't convey the gall that this crowd had in addressing Jesus' miracle. I mean, they basically tell Jesus that this miracle, which they had just witnessed the day before, that this miracle couldn't hold a candle to Moses's miracle. Jesus, what did you do? You multiplied some loaves and some fishes. Big deal. You know what our Moses did? What our Moses did was he created bread from nothing and he made it rain down from the sky. So Jesus, we're not that impressed with your miracle, and if you expect us to believe in you, you better come up with something a lot better than what you've done, something that can top our Moses. What's amazing in all of this is that bread from heaven that they're bragging about, that bread was made by Christ, not Moses. Moses was not the creator of the bread. It was Jesus who created it before he had taken on flesh. And we

know that because *John 1:3* tells us that *all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*. That includes the manna that the Son made rain down from the sky for forty years while the Jews were in the desert. So Jesus responds to the crowd and he sets them straight. This is *John 6:32*. He says: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* Well now the crowd thinks that Christ is offering them an endless supply of baked goods. *They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."* Jesus said to them, *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."* Well, when they finally realized that Jesus is offering them himself, they want no part of that. I mean the miracle was all they were interested in. The source of that miracle meant next to nothing to them. Verse 41 says: *So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."*

How many times have I heard someone say "If God would only do a miracle, it would change everything," yet scripture is replete with example upon example of God doing just that, and it changes nothing. Jesus made it clear that miracles had no effect in bringing somebody into the kingdom in a story he once told about a

rich man and Lazarus. If you recall the story, Lazarus is a pitifully poor man and the rich man is filthy rich and he's living in decadence and they both die. Lazarus is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom and the rich man winds up in hell where he is in torment. And Jesus then recounts a conversation between the rich man and Abraham about contacting people who are still alive. This is the conversation in *Luke 16*: *But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'* "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

So what you have here is Jesus, Jesus is quoting Abraham and Abraham says, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead." Well Moses

and the prophets is the equivalent of scripture. It's the Old Testament. So here we have Jesus, he's speaking through Abraham and he's stating that the Bible alone is all you need to be persuaded that Jesus is Lord. You don't need fanfare, you don't need miracles, you don't even need a confrontation from the living God to enter fully into the kingdom. Jesus goes on to say through Abraham that if the scripture doesn't persuade you, even a dead person appearing before you is not going to change your mind. Guess what? That's exactly what we saw in John's account of the raising of Lazarus. Of course this is a different Lazarus, and we all know this story. Jesus's dear friend Lazarus dies and Jesus arrives at the scene some three days later while Lazarus's body is already decomposing, and he commands Lazarus to come forth out of the tomb. And the part of the story that lines up perfectly with what Jesus said through Abraham about the scripture is the reaction that people had to this Jesus giving a dead man life. Quote -- *Abraham said, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'* Jesus said through Abraham somebody raising from the dead is not going to be enough to change their mind, and we see with Lazarus that's exactly what happened.

This is the story of Lazarus's death and resurrection in *John 11*. It says: *Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen*

the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.

Now you might wonder how in the world could somebody see a rotting corpse break forth out of the grave at the command of Jesus and determine that the proper response is not worship, it's murder. I mean you see Jesus raise someone who is clearly dead from death itself and your response is to desperately start searching for a way to kill that guy. I mean these are just hideously awful people. Or are they? Let me tell you something, given the right time, the right place, and the right circumstances, I would have

been right there in the thick of it trying to figure a way to kill this Jesus. Please don't think that you don't have that capacity, because you do. We all do. And here's why we can safely say that salvation itself for any one of us is literally a miracle. God doesn't apologize to all those folks who have not had a "now you see me" moment because he knows they've already received a miracle. The reason why Jesus can insist through Abraham *if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead* is because their ability to hear doesn't come from within us. It is a gift, a miracle, if you will, from God. Jesus said: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* See it's only the grace of God that takes deaf, blind, and broken rebels and turns their hearts upside down so they start loving Jesus. And you and I love Jesus only because God has poured out his grace on us. So if you haven't yet experienced a "now you see me" outward display of God's grace and you love Jesus, trust me, you already received a miracle. Listen to how Jesus puts it in *John 6*. He says: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."*

So so far we have looked at a series of reasons why God might appear to disappear, and that can happen to all of us regardless of our experience of coming to know Jesus. We looked first at this issue of God's agenda as a source of God's perceived absence and we looked at that agenda in Abraham and Joseph's life. Another source of our struggle with God's presence or absence is the fact that for each of us God has not one agenda but two. God's two-fold plan is for us to grow our faith and to grow his kingdom, and sometimes that agenda plays itself out in our lives in ways that are absolutely mystifying. God does appear in our lives and then he appears to disappear, and that's not only how we grow our faith, it's oftentimes God's means to accomplish what he wants to accomplish in advancing the kingdom. I mean just think about Joseph. God never sat Joseph down and said, "Hey, Joseph, I've got great plans for you." He never told him that his agenda was going to take him from the humble life of a shepherd to the vice regency in Egypt so that he could develop a plan to save God's people from starving. God never told Joseph that the agenda was going to require him to be kidnapped, sold, falsely imprisoned, accused of rape, brought before a King as an interpreter of dreams. And all this was according to God's agenda for Joseph's life and for the advancement of the kingdom. And one thing that we noted in all that unfolded day by day is that there was no daily briefing from God. Again for Joseph it was "now you see me, now you don't." And

what God was developing in Joseph was a faith that would enable him to survive the "now you don't" times by simply putting his trust in God.

We also discovered that one of the reasons that God seems to disappear from our lives is because God's perception of time and ours is vastly different. A great deal of our struggle to find God stems from our inability to see time itself from his perspective rather than from our Western way of thinking. We want it yesterday. I mean we looked at God's timing in the life of Abraham. God made a promise to Abraham: You will have a son. He fulfilled that promise some 25 years after he made it and he never once apologized for being late because he wasn't. We have to understand that when it comes to God's timing we have to accept his way of treating time and not the other way around. God took Moses into the desert and went silent for forty years but he was never absent. Every day of that forty years went according to God's plan for Moses including forty years of silence. Joseph sat in a jail cell for two full years even though he was innocent of the crime of rape and that, too, was a part of God's plan. You see the scripture allows us to view these folks from the ten thousand-foot level, so we get to see God working behind the scenes. Abraham and Joseph didn't have that kind of view. I mean for years and even decades they experienced "now you see me, now you don't." And at

street level I'm sure all of them were thinking they'd been abandoned by God when they were not. I mean we in the West are extraordinarily impatient people. And so for us it's very easy to interpret God's timing as God's absence, as God's disappearance, as God having abandoned us when even a quick look that we've been taking at the precious saints of scripture has shown us that that's simply not the case.

We've looked at the issue of God's agenda, we've looked at the issue of God's timing. This morning we're going to look at something that might make us think God is absent as well, might make us think he was kidding when he told us he would never leave nor forsake us. This morning we're going to look at a third cause of God's apparent absence in our life as a means of addressing something that all of us will go through and absolutely none of us want to. It's called "discipline." *Hebrews 12* says this: *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* So we're going to take a look this morning to see how God works out his discipline in the life of Paul. Actually we're going to take a couple weeks to look at this but this morning we're going to start because Paul's life allows us to see God's faith building in action when it comes to God's timing, God's agenda and his discipline. And we choose Paul because Paul had

some of the most extraordinary "now you see me, now you don't" moments in all of scripture beginning of course with his conversion. What a huge "now you see me" moment.

This is the description of Paul's conversion in Acts 9. It says: *Then Saul -- which used to be Paul's name -- then Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he*

said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. I mean it just gives me goose bumps to think of God in heaven tapping Ananias on the shoulder and giving him street directions and saying you got to go find Straight Street which basically what he's doing, but I'm sure it gave a lot more than goose bumps to Ananias because this is like asking a Jew to go out and seek and bless Hitler. "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!"

I think we can all agree Paul has had this amazing "now you see me" experience, but as we follow his life, we see is that what follows next is God's agenda, then God's timing, then God's discipline. Right off the bat God has told us what his agenda is for Paul. He says -- quote -- "this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites." And then shortly after that we get a sense of God's timing in Paul's life. This is again Acts 9. He says: At once -- this is Paul -- At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those

who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him.

Well the text simply tells us after many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him. I think we're starting to see a pattern here. You see Paul in the book of Galatians fills out exactly what "many days" meant. First he describes his rise in the ranks of Judaism, then his confrontation with the living God and then what took place immediately afterwards. This is what Paul said describing that time. He says: *For I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.* Okay. We certainly don't get a lot of details but we do get to know that God took Paul into the desert of Arabia and spent three years training him there. Now is that a surprise? I mean right off the bat we have this agenda. First of all Paul is going to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and there's much that God intends to do in Paul's life that's directed specifically towards that end. Next we have

God's timing. Paul disappears for three years after receiving the gospel, and finally what we're looking at this morning is God's discipline, and we get a hint of that when God says: *"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* Paul suffered greatly but it was all part of God's discipline for his life. No doubt he had many, many opportunities to wonder where, where is God in all of this?

I wondered have you ever wondered that yourself? I mean have you ever had times particularly when you're trying to be a blessing to someone or to some cause and you find that everything, everything is just going down the drain? Plans get turned upside down, your actions get second guessed and your motivation gets misconstrued. Perhaps you feel like saying, "God, I am on your team. Why does it feel like you're not on mine?" If anyone could have felt that way, I suppose it would have been Paul. I mean he's constantly pouring out his heart out for the kingdom and he's constantly getting kicked in the teeth. And he didn't realize it but things were just beginning to go south for Paul. And he was going to get a lot worse than this. Paul's heart and his pride were going to be crushed.

You know the one thing that you can never accuse Paul of was a lack of enthusiasm. Even when he's persecuting the church he does so

flat out, peddle to the metal and he did so because he genuinely perceived these new believers in Jesus as a threat to the religion that he'd been raised in. And just like his fellow Pharisees, he had a zeal but not according to knowledge. And he confessed as much when he said this in Acts 26. He said: *"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities."* Well that very same zeal only now for Christ and his gospel became the hallmark of Paul's approach from the day that he came into the kingdom of Christ, but it was a zeal that went nowhere. In fact things rapidly went from bad to worse after Paul returned to Damascus. This is Acts 9. It says: *When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.* I mean how's that for a classy exit for Paul?

So Paul goes from Damascus to Jerusalem and if anyone had reason to be fearful of heading back to Jerusalem, it's Paul. I mean just

remember the last time that Paul was there. The last time he was there he was still burnishing his reputation as a fearful persecutor of Christians and the church. And Jerusalem is the place where Paul enthusiastically supported the martyrdom of Stephen for the very cause he's now preaching for. And the three years that he spent in this desert training, the only thing that has grown in Jerusalem among Paul's Jewish contemporaries is the notion that Paul is this full blown traitor to Judaism and a sold out follower of Christ. In fact years later in Acts 22 Paul describes for us the mindset of the people that he encountered in Jerusalem at that time. He said this, he said: *"When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him -- that's Jesus -- saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'"* This is God telling Paul get out, they're going to kill you. So here at this point Paul finds himself going from Damascus where his zeal had his contemporaries plotting his death, to Jerusalem where his testimony made him equally at risk, and yet he's not losing his enthusiasm. I mean it never seemed to occur to Paul that things seemed to go much better for him as a persecutor of Christ than as a follower. I mean think about it, as a persecutor, Paul, he had power, he had prestige, he had the privilege of popular opinion thoroughly on his side. And as a new found follower of Jesus he found all of that evaporating. All that

was left was this unreasoned hatred that natural man has for the gospel and a seething hatred of his fellow Jews for this traitor named Paul.

So leaving Damascus he enters Jerusalem knowing that his only hope is this community of new believers that has sprung up that he feels called to. But he's in for yet another surprise. This is *Acts 9*. It says: *And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. Oops. Paul's now literally suspended in midair. He's cut all ties with the past that's now plotting to kill him because the future that God has called him to is the church, I mean it was a future that pulled him into the desert for three full years of training and after cutting all of his ties with the past, Paul now finds a future that wants nothing to do with him. Again and they were all afraid of him for they did not believe he was a disciple.*

That reminds me of a sign that I once saw years ago that said, "the header I try, the behinder I get." That was Paul's life. That's what God's discipline looked like. Now is this any way to treat someone -- quote -- "dearly beloved of God?" Folks, this is an incredibly important question because how you answer that question will define the way you live out your Christian life particularly

when it comes to God's discipline. I mean there's three different responses that most people have to circumstances like Paul found himself in and two of them are disastrous. One of them is true. And the two disastrous responses are variations on the theme that responds to discipline by thinking, number one, God is punishing me for something I did in the past; or number two, God is punishing me for something I've done wrong right now. Let me get something straight right off the bat about God's discipline. You see we think of discipline as punishment, as something to fear. We do something bad, we make someone mad and we get punished as a means of easing the anger of the punisher. For many of us that's all we understand about the concept of discipline. That's not the way God sees it. *1 John 4 says: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.* You see we have no fear because Jesus Christ already was punished in my place. Jesus took on flesh, he lived a perfect life, then he offered that life as a sacrifice for your sin and mine. I mean the punishment for my sin fell on him and not me. And this is not a case of an angry father God punishing a helpless son. The Son as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit were all equally offended by sin and all equally committed to find a way for justice and mercy to meet at the cross. By faith we access that mercy to make Jesus' perfect life our own life before God. He now sees me in Christ as perfect.

And so the concept of God's discipline as punishment is a lie straight from the enemy. I mean Paul had done some pretty bad stuff in his life, he had murdered people for the crime of proclaiming Christ as God. I mean he even acknowledged his sin in *1 Timothy* where he said: *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* So Paul saw himself as the number one sinner but he never, ever ascribed the struggles of his life to God punishing him for stuff that he had done before. See, if you're a child of God, there is nothing in your past that God is punishing you for. He intentionally and by design has forgotten your sins. *Isaiah 43: "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins."* *Micah 7:19: He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

See, Paul understood right from the beginning that he was beloved of God. I mean he understood and he preached it. In *2 Thessalonians*, he said: *But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.* Paul also knew that God wasn't punishing him for the mistakes he was making as a new believer because he

understood the difference between punishment and discipline. Punishment is a means of exacting justice; discipline is a means of shaping and molding thoughts, attitudes and actions. It's what God does in the lives of people he loves. *Hebrews 12* says: *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."* It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Well, next week we're going to dive deeper into Paul's life to examine this third aspect of "now you see me, now you don't."

So far, just to recapitulate so far, we've seen God's agenda first of all on the micro level, it's to put into action *Romans 8:28* which says all things actually do work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. On the macro level it's to use your life and my life in some way to advance the kingdom.

We've also seen God's timing. And we've learned over and over again that it's not remotely what we're used to here in the West. And so next week we're going to focus on God's discipline which is designed to shape and mold us into the image of his Son, the Lord

Jesus Christ. I want you all to understand that we are on a journey and we are on a journey unlike anything you could ever imagine. C.S. Lewis captures the art of discipline perfectly, so I want to leave you this morning with his quote. This is what he says: "We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the 'intolerable compliment.' Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less." Let's pray.

Father, I just I thank you. We started out just thanking you for your gifts and again I just thank you for the gift of your agenda,

the gift of your timing, and the gift of your discipline. Lord, we just again want to explore what you've done in Paul's life, understanding that you are even now disciplining us, Lord, we are grateful for that. We recognize that there are so many pitfalls assigned to discipline and so many ways to think of it as punishment which is not right at all. And I pray as we learn and grow and understand more, oh more about your disciplining us that you would give us the grace, the insight and the wisdom to see your hand in it and to give you praise for it. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.