

“When God Rocks Your World”

Paul’s Conversion

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Sometimes God has to throw you off course to get your attention.

Sometimes when you are going on your way, and asking God to bless YOUR efforts, God stops you, and gets in your way, and rocks your world and lets you know in no uncertain terms that YOUR efforts and Your way have nothing to do with His way.

In Acts 9 we read about how God rocked Saul’s world. Saul was a Pharisee, who actually ended up writing the majority of our New Testament; BUT he started out as the great enemy of the early church. He was: **...a Hebrew born of Hebrews** (Philippians 3:5)

... an Orthodox Jew and also a Roman citizen.

He belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and was probably named by his parents after the OT King Saul who was also a member of that tribe.

Even though Paul was born in Tarsus, which was a center for Greek culture, his parents sent him to Gamaliel – the head of the synagogue in Jerusalem to be trained in the ancestral Jewish traditions of his people.

And he learned that the way of acceptance with God was obedience to the law; not just the written law with its 613 precepts, but the oral tradition, transmitted by generations of rabbis and preserved by the School of Hillel which interpreted those precepts and applied them in detail to every minutia of life.

Paul tells us that under this rigorous law he was:

...blameless (Phil. 3:6)... living before God in all good conscience (Acts 23:1)

Before God rocked Saul’s world any Jew who saw Saul walking by would have declared unreservedly: **There goes a godly man!**

Saul had studied God all his life. He was esteemed by others for knowing and practicing the law so well. He was successful and held himself to high standards of excellence in preserving the tradition of his ancestors.

You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers... (Galatians 1:13-14)

According to the strictest sect of our religion I lived as a Pharisee. (Acts 26:5)

My son used to have a sign on his door that had Yoda the Jedi – the star wars character with the big green ears - on it. (IMAGE)

The poster reads, "**This room is protected by the Force but not necessarily cleaned up by it.**"

Paul was the Protector of the law, but he wasn't necessarily cleaned up by it. In his zeal for the law, and for righteousness he became a murderer.

He instigated the stoning of Stephen – one of the disciples and nodded in approval (it says in Acts 7) as Stephen crumpled to the ground in his own blood.

It is this Saul, breathing murder, filled with hatred on a self-righteous crusade, who begins his journey to Damascus.

He is armed with letters that will give him blanket authority to arrest all people who are even suspect of being Christians, both in the synagogue and in their homes. His effort to persecute is not just impulsive, but it is planned and calculated.

I bet Saul kicked up some dust as he walked down that road. **Saul knew the plans he had for him** – and is

probably even asking God to bless those plans.

And then at noon.... as he is on his way to fulfill the plans he has for him.... God rocks his world.

You kind of get the idea that God was almost stalking Saul; waiting for just the right moment to pounce.

The other day I was taking our three dogs for a walk in a forest preserve near our home. We were in an area that was pretty deserted in the woods and it was just after a rain.

Two of my dogs are very small annoying chihuahua's

Then I have this golden retriever, and I always figure if anything would happen to me, she's got my back.

But that day walking in the woods, I had a very strong feeling that I was being stalked. We had gone further than usual, and I looked at my golden retriever and her ears were back; and my gut was telling me to turn around, and turn around right now

So I scooped up the little dogs and began to walk back to the car and then I saw this...it was huge! (IMAGE)

This is a mountain lion track, and mountain lions do live in the preserve there where we often go...

In fact one of my friends actually had her little dog taken be a mountain lion – who was miraculously recovered –

But I can't tell you how fast my heart was beating

It is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of Almighty God" Kiekegaard once wrote. When God has a plan, it cannot be thwarted; and its not that he stalks us for evil like mtn lion – he stalks for good with jealous love for our hearts; and nothing can withstand his power.

He will rock your world to get to you. Just like he did to Saul

You see I think God has been stalking Paul for a long time, waiting for the right moment to act. (it is hard for you to kick etc.)

He is thrown

to the ground by a light that flashes around him that was far brighter than the noonday sun in the Middle East.

That's actually why the noon hour is mentioned in the account of this experience in Acts 22:6. This light was
brighter than the sun shining in full strength.

And a voice calls to him:

Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me? (Acts 22:7) –

Can you imagine how terrified Saul must have been...

Who are you, Lord?

asks Saul with his face in the dirt.

What an irony! Saul knows this is the Lord – calls him by name - but recognizes in that blinding moment, that he doesn't know who "the Lord" is.

To Saul's question:

Who are you, Lord?

The answer comes:

I am Jesus, who you are persecuting. (Acts 22:8)

What a blow to someone who considered himself to be so righteous! What an affront to Saul's efforts to defend God!

And...this is a great point for mother's day...

Look at who Saul is persecuting when he persecutes the Christians around him

He is persecuting Jesus

Every parent knows that when your kids suffer, you suffer

One Mom told me she was only as happy as her least happiest kid

How true that is for Moms and often for Dads too

But you see that parental connection that Jesus has with his people;

And who among you doesn't recognize the fact that watching someone you love endure pain, is more difficult than enduring pain yourself.

That's kind of the gist here. Jesus is saying – Saul you hurt my people, you hurt me... you are persecuting me!

What humble identification the God of all Creation has with us – his people, the church...

Now it is clear at this point that Paul is not in charge of the plans he has for himself anymore...he has been stalked, God has thrown him to the ground, and rocked his world

In fact, he will never

be the Master of his own life again. The voice of Jesus comes to him once more making this very clear:

Go into the city, and you will be told what you will do. (Acts 9:6)

So this self-made, zealous persecutor, righteous to the nth degree in human effort, so sure of himself and his God-ordained mission, now stumbles into the city, blinded by the light and has to be led by the hand, and must wait to receive instructions. WHAT A SWITCH!

From now on it is God who will tell him what to do, where to go, how to proceed.
Has God ever rocked your world?
You may never have been thrown to the ground by a blinding light...but has God ever shaken up your circumstances a bit?
Allowed things to happen in your life that broke homeostasis?

That weren't necessarily very pleasant things? That even made you ask like Paul did...
Who are you Lord? Where are you Lord in all of this?

Studies show that generally human beings don't like too much change. Homeostasis is something we seek after.

Sameness, predictability, a smooth daily routine means that you are "settled"...you are "secure". You know what to expect.

It's like the temperature in the room. When it gets too cold the heat clicks on, and you hear the heater running for awhile in order to keep everything the same. In order to maintain the feel of the room the way you like it, without too much variation we have automatic temperature control.

Well, the temperature control broke on our fridge once day so we went and got a new one

... And when took out the stuff from the old refrigerator to put it into the new one... all the counters in the kitchen were cluttered with food and the kitchen looked like a bomb had hit it. But I found such interesting things way back in the old refrigerator that I didn't even know existed on this planet!
All kinds of different growth forms that I was unfamiliar with – even though I took horticulture in high school.

Yes- the kitchen was a mess, but we cleaned it all up. We wouldn't have known the dirt was there if we hadn't had to move everything around.... get rid of the old so we could start with the new...

I think this is why God rocks our world.
Homeostasis can keep you from noticing the dirt that is there.
Usually it's dirt that comes from a sense of self-sufficiency, being a master of ones own destiny, able to "handle" life on ones own...Until something breaks down...or God who stalks us all with jealous longing for our hearts...intrudes.

When things get moved around and when our plans don't work out the way we had hoped, we begin to see

things that we didn't see before, and God can clean us up and do a new thing.

After Saul saw the light, and was led into town, he was blind for three days, and did not eat or drink anything.

And he used a man Ananias to go and lay his hands on Paul's eyes and heal them.

Ananias wasn't too sure he

wanted to do this at first. And he has a little chat with God about this.

"God..." he says. "Don't you know who this is? How many people he has killed? How many saints he has destroyed? I just think we should leave him blind. Then he won't be able to find the Christians he wants to murder"

But God says, "Go...this man is my chosen instrument."

So Ananias goes...

And in a huge stretch of faith, as he lays his hands on Saul's eyes...this angry Pharisee who had murdered and imprisoned countless people who Ananias knew and loved...

And in a great reach of grace and probably Holy Spirit inspired forgiveness, Ananias calls him "**Brother Saul**".

A brother.... not the chief Enemy of the early church anymore. Ananias sees Saul differently. And as scales fall from Brother Saul's eyes he too sees things differently – he recognizes that Jesus has called him to live for him – God has rocked his world.

I've noticed that God shakes us up from time to time, when we get too static, too comfortable, by moving things around in our lives.

Its then that we are reminded who it is that is ultimately in control. And we get cleaned up from our pride, our self-sufficiency, our tendency to know the plans we have for us.

I wanted to ask Rosalie to come and share with you today. One of the things she kept saying to me when she was an intern here was this, "I want God to kick my butt"...in other words "Rock my world Lord! Bring it on."

I wanted her to share with you about how God has rocked her world, and how even though she is not a biological Mom, she has become a prime caregiver to some young women at Teen Challenge and has definitely found her call.

But it wasn't easy – God had to rock her world...so she could rock theirs and show them Jesus.