

Traction Gains Momentum Week 7: An unlikely source

This series we are in the middle of is called **Traction Gains Momentum**. This Jesus movement that we are following in Acts was started by Jesus after he was **resurrected**. He gave the **great commission**, the perfect plan. And then he **sent the Holy Spirit**, his presence, to give power to that plan. The result is that **thousands of people** have joined this new group in Jerusalem. It gained traction in order to move out to the rest of the world.

Now that Jerusalem group has momentum as it has begun to **spread through into Judea and neighboring Samaria** as the people are scattered from persecution. We learned last week that **Saul**, this guy who watched the coats and approved of the murder of Stephen, one of their influential leaders, is the **driving force** in this all out persecution.

Here's where the story of this Jesus movement takes an unlikely turn. If it were a movie, you would call it a **plot twist**. We pick up at the beginning of chapter 9.

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Saul is about to take this persecution to a new level. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying

his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. Acts 9:1-19

Their biggest enemy and threat joins their team. And from this point on in the book of Acts, the story of this movement Jesus started, **Saul will be the main character.** The guy who was dragging Christ followers out of their homes and having them arrested is now the person who **will be the catalyst for this Jesus movement going outside of even Judea and Samaria.** Literally it will use this momentum to spread throughout the world.

This is something that happens. A group, company, church, organization, has its key leaders all pulling in the same direction, achieving growth, **and then someone unexpected plays a big role taking them to the next level.** **Momentum comes from unlikely sources.**

In a team sport, like football, baseball or basketball, we call this the X factor. For a team to win many times, they need the X Factor to play a big role. They may get a good game out of their big stars, the people who always do well, but **in some cases, that isn't enough.** They need a big **contribution from an unlikely source.** But then there's that player, who isn't a starter, that does something amazing and unexpected that changes the momentum of the game, giving his team the win.

The church is beginning to live out the great commission and Acts 1:8 by spreading to Samaria. That was **unlikely** since the Samaritans and Jews hated each other. These Jewish Christ followers weren't going to want to go to Samaria and the Samaritans aren't going to listen to a bunch of Jews from Jerusalem talking about how Messiah has come. **Unlikely, and yet it is happening.**

They have momentum. They have turned resistance and persecution into outward momentum. Everything is moving in the right direction. We know who is for us and against us and God is expanding the movement as it stands. And then, boom, we have this story about the most unexpected convert ever who is going to be the one who helps them not stall out in Samaria, but go all the way to Rome.

Saul, who becomes Paul, refers to himself later as "abnormally born" in 1 Cor. 15:8. Saul is saying that he did not have the normal three-year gestation period like the others. 97

In order for that to happen, here's what Saul, soon to be Paul needs to do before he can be the catalyst for growth and momentum. **Jesus must be Lord.**

Listen to verses 3-6 one more time. You can see how Jesus approaches Saul. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Acts 9:3-6

"Saul, Saul" is a double vocative, which is common for the way God's voice was heard often in the **Old Testament**. The blinding light and hearing his name twice tells him that this is the God of Israel.

Then when he asks, "who are you Lord" he is acknowledging that this voice carries authority. It's not time to argue with this voice.

"Why do you persecute me?" Saul is hitting the church, but God is feeling the pain.

Then the one he calls Lord gives direction, telling him to "rise and enter the city". The Lord, the one in authority, has the right to do that. But further he says, "you will be told what you are to do."

This is a conversation that is one-sided. It's not really a negotiation. It's not conflict resolution. There is no give and take where both sides compromise a little. "Ok, I'll stop persecuting your people if you will keep them in Samaria." They don't come to a resolution about how this can be a "win win" for both. These things happen when equals are coming to the table.

Lord, means the one with the right to wield his authority.

It sounds strange but this highly intelligent, capable, educated, and trained man can be an unlikely catalyst only if Jesus is the one in authority. He has to trust Jesus enough to allow him to humble him with blindness, tell him where to go where he will wait for further instructions. It will only work as we see it work if Jesus is Lord, King.

If it's Paul as his own authority over a kingdom he is building, then he won't be able to make it through what is ahead of him. Jesus says, "I will teach him how much he must suffer for me."

Here's what Jesus says. "Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. Matthew 7:21

The reason these people aren't going to enter the Kingdom is that they really aren't allowing him to humble them, tell them where to go and tell them to wait for further instructions. So, how will we be able to tell if he has really allowed Jesus his rightful place as King and Lord in their relationship?

How does someone so unlikely become a catalyst for growth and momentum for the Jesus movement? It begins with Jesus as Lord, which then leads to... **Unconditional surrender.**

At the end of WWII, when what was left of the German and then the Japanese leadership came to the allied forces and surrendered. They were in no place to put conditions on their surrender. This was not a negotiation. **We are going to see next week and in the rest of the book of Acts that Saul has in fact made an unconditional surrender.** But look what he did immediately.

⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Acts 9:8 & 9

These men were with Saul and, without a doubt Saul was in charge of this trip go to arrest Christ followers. That means, without a doubt, that even though he was being led because he couldn't see, **they were taking this very important and powerful man wherever he wanted to go.** He went where Jesus, the one who he called Lord, told him to go.

And what about this three-day fast? I have done a number of 24-hour fasts and I can't imagine a fast without eating or drinking that lasts three days. **This is a guy who is all in. He's serious.**

He was not going to stop his pursuit of God until what was started on the road was completed.

Roy Clements says he does not "use the phrases 'decided for Christ' or 'committed to Christ, though decision and commitment are certainly involved...Conversion is at root not a decision, nor a commitment, but a surrender to the supreme authority of Jesus."

C.S. Lewis describes his conversion this way, "I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

Signs of surrender.

- Stop resisting.
- Tap out.
- Wave the white flag.
- Both hands in the air.

It looks like repentance and it looks like complete allegiance.

He's an unlikely source for momentum and growth and that can only happen when Jesus is Lord, there is an unconditional surrender and you...**Get commissioned.**

Commission = instruction, command, or duty given from one in authority. **Now, because the one in authority has given the task and even where to do it, the one being commissioned carries the authority of the one sending him.**

As Americans we don't like this phrase, "you will be told what to do." v. 6 & 15

Have you ever toured a decommissioned battleship? It's no longer doing what it was originally commissioned to do. Now it is set up to be a **museum**. The guns are still there, the lifeboats are still there, the quarters are still there...but it isn't heading to the Persian Gulf or North Korea, or somewhere in order to fight or be a deterrent.

He's decommissioned from his earlier job of hunting down these heretics and throwing them in jail, so this disease can be snuffed out before it spreads too far. He is a decommissioned Jewish Pharisee. He stops teaching Torah and going to temple. He is no longer the caretaker of what makes you pure and acceptable to the God of Israel. **But he has a new commission.**

I'm thinking that in many cases, as the American church, we have acted as if we have been decommissioned. We are a **museum** that talks about what God has done in the past through his church. We want people like Saul to stop doing the bad stuff and start going to church more often.

Notice the difference of what God says to Ananias about Saul. **¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."**

God picked Saul as an instrument for a specific job. Saul's personality, training and education, cultural background is all a part of God choosing him to go to "the Gentiles" and their "kings". We will find out later that he is a **Roman citizen**, which was a big advantage for doing what he is an instrument to do.

Saul's conversion and commissioning were inseparable. God saved him for a purpose. Saul, who becomes Paul, is the instrument that God used to bring the gospel to use.

Qualifications for apostleship are having seen the risen Christ and given a specific charge. He is raised to the level of an apostle, one who teaches the gospel of Jesus because he heard it straight from Jesus. The biggest enemy and threat is not only on the team, but he is coaching the team.

We use the word calling. We believe that everyone here has a calling. We believe that everybody in this room has a **general calling**. We have been saved in order to be disciple makers. We are wired to be in relationship with others, **helping them to learn how to follow and obey Jesus.**

Now here's where the "instrument" part comes in. We are going to be helping people find how they are wired in a specific way to meet the needs of this broken world.

- Come and See Class in the spring.

An unlikely source or catalyst for momentum and growth has to make **Jesus Lord and King** by **unconditionally surrendering** to Him. Then he receives his commission or his orders. **But, in the Jesus way, everything is through relationships.** Paul not only has a new King who is Jesus, he has a new family or, maybe better put, a new team. He must... **Receive support or encouragement from a new team.**

This following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and committing to his mission is not an individual sport. It's a team sport. **Or if you want to put in other terms,** it's not shredding a guitar solo, but rather being a part of an orchestra where you're not the conductor.

I'm going to read verses 17-19. I want you to circle in your journals or on your outlines the **words that speak of Paul's connection with other Christ followers.**

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled

with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was **baptized**; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. **For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.** Acts 9:17-19

- **Brother Saul**...Growing up, we called everyone brother and sister.
- **Baptized**...This is the public expression of my allegiance to Christ and his church.
- For some days, he was **with the disciples**...

Are these your brothers and sisters? That's the way I feel.

Have you been baptized as a public expression of your allegiance to Jesus and his church?

Are you spending time with these disciples?

Are you positioning yourself for this support and encouragement? **It works best in a relational environment.** Reflecting with others who are learning to obey Jesus.

Steps of Obedience:

Ask the hard question: Could I be an unlikely source of momentum for the Kingdom and this church?

I believe that right now there are unlikely sources of momentum in this room. In the youth ministry, children's ministry.

Let me tell you about my friend Macala Morado. She wouldn't speak or look you in the eye. She was shy and didn't want to come to Sunday night. It was stranger danger when she was approached. I just felt like she was supposed to go on our mission trip to Los Angeles. It didn't make sense, but I asked her and, to my surprise, she said yes. That changed everything. She developed friends and grew in confidence. **She became a leader in our youth ministry.** She is now a youth pastor in Texas with some at-risk kids. She has become this passionate, tough minded leader in a male dominated culture. And she's getting married soon.

Confess my desire for a Savior to rescue me but not a Lord to whom I surrender.

When the one saving you is a king, it's different. It's like the lifeguard who swims out to help you when you are drowning. You have to submit and

stop struggling if you want to be rescued. **Then when you get to dry land, that savior, who is a king, gets to decide what's next.**

Do you want Jesus to be a savior, but not your king? That's what we call **vampire Christians**. I just want a little of your blood to deal with my sin issue and the repercussion of that, but I don't want you to tell me what to do or how to live.

Position myself to give encouragement and receive it.

Ran into someone while I was with a family experiencing a surprising and scary surgery. I told this man that _____ was having emergency surgery. His jaw hit the ground. What I wanted to say was, **you'll never know stuff like this and be able to encourage others** because he keeps God's people at arm's length.

People who are working at Cultivate, with youth or children, young lives, in the jail...these people are in a position where they absolutely have to get encouragement from us.