



Themes and Threads of the Holy Bible: Paul's Epistles

Saul, meaning “asked for” in Hebrew (see Acts 13:9) was born between 10 and 15 AD. A Jewish Pharisee, he was trained by Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel who founded the school of interpretation bearing his name. Gamaliel was one of seven scholars in his nation’s history to receive the title, *Rabban*, meaning “our master.” His teaching was less strict than the school of Shammai. Saul strictly adhered to Jewish customs (see Philippians 3:5) and persecuted Christians with fierce intensity (see Acts 9:1-2; Philippians 3:6). He did so with a pure conscience (see Acts 23:1; 2 Timothy 1:3) until his conversion on Damascus Road, between 33 and 35 AD (see Acts 9) when his name was changed to *Paul*, meaning “little” in Greek. The new apostle would later refer to his persecution of Christians as blaspheme (see 1 Timothy 1:13).

Paul was called by Jesus to evangelize the Gentiles when his position in Christ changed from out to in (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). Consequently, he transitioned from a persecutor of the church to a promoter of it (see Philippians 3:6). Paul’s heart was transformed from hard to soft (see Ephesians 4:2, 18), and his clenched fists became open hands with palms facing upward, a symbol of his dependence on God and his desire to generously share the grace he had received. His theology changed from religion to relationship (see Ephesians 2:8) as his perspective of others was no longer judgmental, but merciful (see Romans 9:15-16). God had opened the eyes of his heart (see Acts 9; Ephesians 1:18). Paul had once thought righteousness could be earned through the pursuit of the law; however, after his Damascus Road experience and subsequent study, he realized it could only be received by grace through faith in Christ (see Ephesians 2:8-10). The result was a transition from death to life offered to anyone who would exercise that same faith (see Ephesians 2:5).

After arriving in a city as a missionary, Paul’s business plan was to first teach in its Jewish synagogues, which were open for people to talk about God 24 hours a day, seven days a week, offering a ready-made pulpit for the evangelist. Next, Paul would implement marketplace ministry by making tents and teaching about God among the people both day and night, many of whom were traveling through the cities where he worked (see 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

The theme of Paul's letters is peace, a theology of reconciliation of man with God that can be lived out in harmonious relationships (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Paul described Jesus as the peace of God (see Ephesians 2:14). He also referenced the Almighty as the God of peace (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23) and the Holy Spirit as providing us peace (see Romans 5:1-5). Paul taught that when we are in a fully surrendered relationship with the triune God, we experience peace within our souls (see Philippians 4:6-7) and are equipped to share the gospel of peace (see Ephesians 6:15).

Early Epistles

Galatians

Date: 45-48 AD

To: Either to the north or south Galatian churches. Paul visited those in the south where he studied eleven years. Galatians originated in France.

Personal: Freedom in Christ (Galatians 1:1-2:21)

Doctrinal: Christ's Atoning Death (Galatians 3:1-4:11)

Practical: Application of Freedom (Galatians 4:12-6:5)

New Life (Galatians 6:6-18)

Key Verses:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Memorize two or more of the key verses from Galatians. Recite them daily, seeing each encounter through the lenses of these timeless truths. You will sense

God's presence and live in His power as He uses you to bring His restoration to others.

1 Thessalonians

Date: 50-53 AD

To: The Church in Thessalonica, a city founded by Cassander, General for Alexander the Great, and named after his wife who was King Philip of Macedon's daughter and Alexander the Great's half-sister. In 146 BC, it became the capital of Macedonia, and by 42 BC, a free city governed by a group of five or six of its own local rulers (see Acts 17:6-8). Just prior to the Paul's writing, he visited and planted the local church during his second missionary journey (see Acts 17:1-10). Its population totaled about 200,000 people. Cabrius was the chief cult of the city, promoted by the wealthy and those ruling it to ensure their power. It also enjoyed a large enough community of Jewish people to support a synagogue (see Acts 17:1).

Belief of God's People (1 Thessalonians 1:1-3:13)

Behavior of God's People (1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:22)

Key Verses:

“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

“Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Faith works. Love labors. Hope endures. When we are in Christ, we experience faith, love, and hope in a spirit of joy, prayer, and gratitude. Is there someone in your life who needs hope only discovered in Christ? Let them see your joy. Pray for them daily to surrender to Christ. Give thanks for your circumstances, including the opportunity to be used by God to draw them to His living hope.

2 Thessalonians

Date: 50-53 AD

To: The Church in Thessalonica

Suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:1-12)

Sin (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

Chosen (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17)

Prayer (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

Work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-18)

Key Verse:

“May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance” (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

When was the last time you had to persevere through a difficult challenge? How did you feel? Is there someone you know who is experiencing a conflict and could use help to endure? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct your heart into God’s love to help them persevere.

General Epistles

Romans

Date: 57 AD

To: Roman believers

Sin (Romans 1:1-3:20)

Salvation (Romans 3:21-5:21)

Sanctification (Romans 6:1-8:39)

Sovereignty (Romans 9:1-11:36)

Service (Romans 12:1-16:27)

Key Verses:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:16-17).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

How bold are you with the gospel of Christ? Are you willing to be used by God to engage in life-altering conversations with those who are outside an eternal relationship with Him? Write your story of coming to faith in 200 words or less. Make a list of names representing those God has intersected with your path. Begin to share your story with them.

1 Corinthians

Date: 55 AD

To: The Church in Corinth, capital of the Roman province, Achaia, considered the most important city in Greece. It had been destroyed in 146 BC by the Roman army and was rebuilt by Julius Caesar. Half the population was enslaved. *Corinthian* meant “to live in looseness, heavy drinking, or immorality.”

Divisions (1 Corinthians 1:1-4:21)

Direction (1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20)

Marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-40)

Church (1 Corinthians 8:1-10:33)

Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:1-34)

Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40)

Eternity (1 Corinthians 15:1-58)

Key Verses:

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

In order to be a good leader, one must be a great follower. Who are you following? How would those closest to you describe your followership and your leadership? When was the last time you said, “I love you,” to your spouse and your children? Covenant with God to end every conversation in your immediate family with these three words.

2 Corinthians

Date: 55 AD

To: The Church in Corinth

Comfort (2 Corinthians 1:1-2:11)

Treasures (2 Corinthians 2:12-5:10)

Relationships (2 Corinthians 5:11-7:1)

Gifts (2 Corinthians 7:2-9:15)

Work (2 Corinthians 10:1-11:33)

Paradise (2 Corinthians 12:1-13:13)

Key Verses:

“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows” (2 Corinthians 1:5).

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

God’s grace in Christ empowers us to comfort those who are suffering because we cannot take credit for the undeserved love He has lavished on us. Who can you comfort with the grace of Christ? Write down that person’s name and schedule a time on your calendar to connect this week.

Prison Epistles

Ephesians

Date: 62-63 AD

To: The Universal Church

God’s Love (Ephesians 1:1-2:22)

God’s Plan (Ephesians 3:1-4:31)

Relationships (Ephesians 5:1-6:9)

Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-24)

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Have you ever considered that you are God’s masterpiece? What has He painted on the canvas of your heart? Some clues lie in your answers to the following questions: What makes you cry? What energizes you? What would you do, regardless of the outcome, because you love it so much? God has uniquely created you with desires and gifts to do good. What can you do today to develop and distribute those gifts?

Philippians

Date: 62-63 AD

To: The Church in Philippi, which consisted of mostly women. Philippi was named after Alexander the Great’s father, Philip of Macedon in 356 BC.

Joy in Suffering (Philippians 1:1-30)

Joy in Serving (Philippians 2:1-30)

Joy in Believing (Philippians 3:1-21)

Joy in Giving (Philippians 4:1-23)

Key Verses:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5).

“And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philippians 3:9).

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Next time you worry, first thank God for the opportunity to find joy in Him, as you identify with the sufferings of Christ. Try the *Philippians 4:13 Experiment* and do everything through Christ, who will restore your heart. Trust in Christ the Giver, not the gifts, by being content enough to give your time, talent, and treasure to someone in need to advance His kingdom. You might give to a church, a Christian school, a youth organization, or even spend time with a young person needing guidance. Worry is the problem; prayer is the solution; and peace is the result, peace with God, peace with others, and peace within ourselves, discovering true contentment in Christ-sufficiency. Fully surrendering our lives to Christ brings us joy that empowers us to trust in the Giver, generously sharing with others in need because we believe in God’s restoration of our hearts and our resources.

Colossians

Date: 62-63 AD

To: The Church in Colossae, a small town east of Ephesus on both sides of the Lycos River. Colossae would be destroyed in an earthquake during Nero’s reign.

Supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:1-2:15)

Scriptures (Colossians 2:16-3:11)

People of God (Colossians 3:12-4:18)

Key Verses:

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Are you holding on to the pain caused by a sin someone has committed against you? Christ paid a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could

not pay. Therefore, let go of withholding forgiveness by surrendering all your heart to the Forgiver in you. He will make you new again and empower you to restore others as you follow Him wholeheartedly.

Philemon

Date: 62-63 AD

To: Philemon, most likely a wealthy member of the Colossian church, regarding Onesimus a runaway slave

Greet with Grace and Peace (Philemon 1-3)

Share Love and Faith (Philemon 4-7)

Welcome, Receive, Forgive, and Restore (Philemon 8-25)

Key Verse:

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (Philemon 6).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

How many times in the last month have you shared your faith? For many of us, the answer is zero. Pray for someone by name, asking God to open a door for you to share the grace and wisdom of Christ within the next thirty days.

Pastoral Epistles

1 Timothy

Date: 63-64 AD

To: Timothy, pastor of the Church at Ephesus, who met Paul during his third missionary journey

Warnings (1 Timothy 1:1-2:15)

Worship (1 Timothy 3:1-4:16)

Attitudes (1 Timothy 5:1-6:10)

The Good Fight (1 Timothy 6:11-21)

Key Verses:

“If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Why is the church so important to God? Read 1 Timothy, make a list of the reasons you see, and then examine how you can serve in your local body of believers. It might be teaching a class, volunteering in a ministry, starting a new outreach, or simply praying for your pastor.

2 Timothy

Date: 63-64 AD

To: Timothy, pastor of the Church at Ephesus, believed to be Paul’s last letter

Doctrine: Foundations of Christian Service (2 Timothy 1:1-2:26)

Duty: Enduring Difficult Circumstances (2 Timothy 3:1-4:22)

Key Verses:

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the LORD out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Would you like to disciple someone? Pursue the righteousness, faith, love, and peace of Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to identify anything in your heart that represents a desire for life apart from Him. After it is revealed, confess the sin and receive restoration to reflect the pure heart of Christ. Next, pursue the heart of

another person for discipleship. Meet weekly for an hour to study the Bible and pray together, so that both of you will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Titus

Date: 63 AD

To: Titus, pastor of the Church at Crete

Church Leadership (Titus 1:1-16)

Righteous Living in the Church (Titus 2:1-15)

Righteous Living in Society (Titus 3:1-15)

Key Verse:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11).

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

Is there anything old in your life you would like to be made new again? Perhaps it is your soul. If so, make today the day you are renewed by the Holy Spirit through a fully surrendered relationship in Jesus Christ. He will use you to bring His hope of eternal life to everyone you encounter.