

PAUL'S MINISTRY CHALLENGES

II Corinthians 11:23-27



Paul Overcame...

- ◆ Physical Pain (In His Body)
- ◆ Spiritual Warfare (In Prayer)
- ◆ Emotional Battles (In His Feelings)
- ◆ Mental Strains (In His Thinking)

“I have faced danger from my own people...and lived with weariness, pain and sleepless nights.”

(II Corinthians 11:26,27)

Bill Kirk

“MINISTRY CHALLENGES”

Text: II Corinthians 11:23-27

Subject: What Paul’s challenges say to every minister of the Gospel!

Introduction

- Apart from the devil and his own flesh; Paul lists 26 difficulties that he had to deal with in fulfilling God’s will for his life.

Question: Why does God record them?

Answer: To show us that none of his challenges ever stopped Paul from completing his assignment!

(In other words)

1. Every minister will have “opportunities” to respond to.
2. Every minister will have “stuff” to plow through.
3. Every minister will experience “bumps” in the journey.

(And God Reveals)

“If you only travel on the sunny days, you will never get where you are going!”

So here we go!

I’ll list Paul’s ministry challenges with a one sentence description from the Greek word – then highlight the four challenges we often face in our context of ministry. Twenty two of the twenty six challenges we most likely will never face in America. But the other four most everyone will deal with! We’ll conclude with some discoveries that encourage us all as we travel in the journey of ministry.

Paul’s Challenges

1. **“In labors more abundant”** – The word “labors” is the Greek word (KOPOS) which means: hard and strenuous labor that requires a great output of energy.
2. **“In stripes above measure”** – The word “stripes” (PLEGE) means to hit, wound or violently strike. This refers to the physical beatings Paul endured.
3. **“In prisons more frequent”** –The word “prisons” (PLULAKE) describes a place of custody, a prison ward, a jail cell or a place guarded by watchmen.
4. **“In deaths often”** – The word “deaths” (THANATOS) means to be constantly confronted with the prospect of death. Yet, Paul never mentally packed his bags to “check out” for more comfortable territory.
5. **“Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one”** – The whip with three cords (of glass, bone and metal) was a tortuous punishment; 39 x 3=117 lashes times five different occasions is 585 lashes across Paul’s chest, face, back and legs. Yet God’s grace was sufficient for Paul to continue on (without bitterness, blame or anger towards God).

6. **“Thrice was I beaten with rods”** – Means that a man with a metal rod would beat Paul's feet until they were bleeding and maimed. This happened three times to Paul, yet Paul put his shoes back on and refused to whine, get bitter or retreat.
7. **“Once I was stoned”** – Refers to Acts 14:19 when Paul was stoned in Lystra and was thought to be dead as the result. Yet, Paul refused to yield to a “martyrs’ complex” or self-pity.
8. **“Thrice I suffered shipwreck”** – Means that satan tried to hinder Paul and stop him in his work. Paul looked at these delays as an inconvenience, yet faith remained that he would arrive at his God ordained destination.
9. **“A night and a day I have been in the deep”** – The word “deep” (BATHUS) refers to the deepest parts of the sea. For a 24 hour period Paul treaded water – yet his pain could not keep him from boarding the next ship to continue on. That’s right; the past need not rob you of your future opportunities that God has in store.
10. **“In journeyings often”** – The word “journey” (ODOIPORIA) refers to a walking journey and the word “often” (POLLAKIS) means frequently. In fact...Paul walked from Antioch Pisidia to Iconium (Acts 13:5), from Iconium to Lystra (Acts 14:6), from Lystra to Derbe (Acts 14:20), from Derbe to Lystra (Acts 14:21), from Lystra to Iconium (Acts 14:21), throughout the whole region of Pamphylia (Acts 14:24), to Perga (Acts 14:25), to Phenice and Samaria (Acts 15:3), to Jerusalem (Acts 15:4), back to Antioch (Acts 15:22), throughout Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41, back to Derbe (Acts 16:1) and Lystra (Acts 16:1), to Phrygia (Acts 16:6), throughout Galatia (Acts 16:6), to Mysia (Acts 16:8), down to Troas (Acts 16:8), through Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1), to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), to Berea (Acts 17:10) to Corinth (Acts 18:1) from Syria to Ephesus (Acts 18:19), from Caesarea to Antioch (Acts 18:22), all over the regions of Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23), the upper coastlines to Ephesus (Acts 19:1) – all to take the gospel to the Gentile world – without complaint!!!
11. **“In perils of waters”** – The word “perils” (KINDUNOS) means dangerous or volatile situations. The word “waters” (POTAMOS) is the word for river. So Paul took many risks to do the will of God. He must have believed that nothing takes God by surprise – even the many rivers he had to cross.
12. **“In perils of robbers”** – The word “robbers” (LESTES) refers to a bandit or plunderers. This reveals that Paul overcame fear of the unknown, fear of danger and fear of the future.
13. **“In perils of mine own countrymen”**- The phrase “mine own countrymen” comes for the Greek word (GENOS) which refers to the Jews who opposed Paul everywhere he went. They opposed Paul in Salamis (Acts 13:8), Antioch Pisidia (13:45, 50), Iconium (14:2), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonica (17:5-9), Berea (17:13), Corinth (18:12-16). Yes, leaders encounter enemies who seek to do you harm and pollute your spirit with anger and intimidation.
14. **“In perils by the heathen”** – The word “heathen” (ETHONOS) refers to the Gentiles (or anyone not Jewish). This means that Paul experienced great spiritual results in many pagan and demonic cities opposed to the gospel. We have the same gospel and the same God as Paul!

15. **“In perils in the city”** – This reveals that many of Paul’s greatest confrontations took place in major (populated) cities. Paul spent most of his time in the larger population centers – where there was great potential for a large harvest.
16. **“In perils in the wilderness”** – The word “wilderness” is the Greek word (EREMIA) which describes remote, isolated, out of the way places.
17. **“In perils in the sea”** – This refers to Paul’s travels by sea. Three times Paul suffered shipwreck, yet each time Paul overcame the fear of sailing and being adrift again. Paul’s endurance enabled him to fulfill God’s plan and maintain his joy of obedience.
18. **“In perils among false brethren”** – The word for “false brethren” is (PSEUDADELPHOS) which refers to believers who were pretenders and phony with deceptive motives. These false brethren with secret agendas betrayed Paul. Yet, Paul forgave and refused to carry an offense or live in the past.
19. **“In weariness”** Comes from the Greek word (KOPOS) and defines the hardest kind of physical labor. Paul is not boasting, just revealing that the ministry is hard, hard work!
20. **“In painfulness”** – The word “painfulness” (MOCHTHOS) describes the person who is exhausted and depleted of physical strength. It refers to being extremely tired and in need of rest and relaxation.
21. **“In watchings often”** – The word “watching” comes from the Greek word (AGRUPVIA) which refers to Paul’s willingness to “watch” during the night while his team members slept. Yes, Paul was willing to “take his turn” to watch the camp for robbers (and do whatever was required to succeed as a team). What a servant leader!
22. **“In hunger”** – The word “hunger” is (LIMOS) and means to be hungry from a lack of food. This means there were times when Paul simply couldn’t buy food because of ministry responsibilities.
23. **“In thirst”** – Comes from the Greek word (DIPSOS) and means thirsty from a lack of drink.
24. **“In fastings often”** – The word “fastings” is the Greek word (NESTEIA) and means to skip meals voluntarily because of schedule demands. This reveals to us that Paul ate to live – instead of living to eat. Food was not Paul’s #1 priority.
25. **“In cold”** – Refers to Paul’s experience in the sea all night or the cold, damp prison cells.
26. **“In nakedness”** – Refers to Paul’s treading water all night in the deep or his clothes being stripped off during his beatings.

Life Application

While you may not encounter 22 of the 26 challenges listed, you just might face the other four:

1. **Isolation** (“Perils in the wilderness”)
 - ◆ This refers to serving in the “out of the way” places where bright lights are not shining.
 - ◆ Do you feel alone, out of the “mainstream” or unimportant in the grand scheme of ministry?
 - ◆ Do you feel you are in a tough place that is hardened to the Gospel?

- ◆ Are you discouraged in spirit because you don't have a lot of help where you are serving?

Then remember Hebrews 6:10:

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

2. **Betrayal** ("Among false brethren")

- ◆ Have you been wounded by a family member, friend or follower that you trusted?
- ◆ Has someone thrown you "under the bus"?
- ◆ Have you been offended, hurt or surprised by a friend turned enemy?
- ◆ Are you struggling to forgive someone who has offended you?

Remember & Practice

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, sayeth the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

Remember: The only part of you that can be offended is that part of you which has not died!

3. **Depletion** ("In painfulness")

- ◆ Which means to be exhausted and depleted of strength (feeling burnout).
- ◆ Do you need to rest, relax or get away and take a break?
- ◆ Do you need a fresh anointing of fire, passion, strength and joy?
- ◆ Are you emotionally spent or tired or pressed on every side?

This Still Works

"He giveth power to the faint and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." (Isaiah 40:29)

4. **Uncertainty** ("In watchings often")

- ◆ Paul "watched" during his turn of duty in his travels. Why? Because he just didn't know what was to happen or who would try to hurt his ministry team!
- ◆ Paul was "uncertain" as to his future as he traveled to so many dangerous places.
- ◆ Are you like Paul, feeling a little uncertain?
- ◆ Has God been stirring you to climb new mountains?
- ◆ Are you nervous about the path that God is leading you in?
- ◆ Do you sense a nervousness about unknown days ahead?

Remember

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye." (Psalm 32:8)

Oh Beloved

- ◆ Take heart that God knows what He is doing where He has placed you – and He will complete what He has started in you!!!
- ◆ Take heart that the God of Paul is your God today!
- ◆ Take heart in the following wisdom discoveries revealed in Paul's challenges – for you as you labor for God's Glory!!!

Some Discoveries From Paul's Challenges

(That give you strength for the journey)

1. God is not going to call you to an assignment (or place) that you cannot **succeed** in.
2. None of your challenges have to knock you **out** of the spiritual race you are in.
3. Prayer allows God to put something **in** you that is greater than anything that is **around** you.
4. Bad past experiences do not have to rob you of **future** opportunities.
5. You have not been so wounded beyond what God can **heal**.
6. The Holy Spirit that enabled Paul to continue on is the same Holy Spirit that will **sustain** you in every season.
7. You can stand on your own two feet, brush off the dirt, and let the Lord empower you with His strength to start moving **forward** once again!
8. Like Gideon – sometimes you have to go backwards **before** you can go forward!
9. Discouragement is a lie of the devil to blind you in the **present** of what God is going to do in the **future**!
10. Every set-back is a set-up for a **come-back**!

(And Remember These)

- ◆ **You are on a journey, but God has the road map in His hand!**
- ◆ **“The man who has no inner life is the slave of his surroundings.”**
(Henri Frederic Amiel)

Nuf Sed!
Bill Kirk