



Is Your Life By Accident?

Exodus 4:2: (NASB) *The LORD said to him, What is that in your hand? And he said, a staff.*



Why are you here? Really! Why are you here? Are the events of your life all purely incidental, accidental, or coincidental, or are they observed and reacted to by you with a greater purpose in mind? Is your life a meandering composition of various unconnected circumstances or is it a composition of events that are absorbed and learned from with a specific end in mind? Stay with us as we look into this precious thing we call life and how we handle its bounty!

What is The Most Important Thing?

Someone once said, "Do the most important thing at any given moment." Great! But what is it?

 **Living a life of purpose, more to life than this, Rick Warren, TedTV**

- *Spiritual emptiness is a universal disease. At some point we put our heads on the pillow and think there's got to be more to life than this: get up in the morning, go to work, watch TV, go to bed and go to parties on weekends. This is not living, it is just existing. I believe that you are not an accident.*

The first "Most Important Thing:"

Genesis 1:26-27: (NASB) ²⁶*Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.* ²⁷*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Man was given stewardship to care for the earth. But what should our rule look like?

Having been created in the likeness of God gives insight into the kind of dominion man was to have:

Lamentations 3:22-23: (NASB) ²²*The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail.* ²³*They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*

God's lovingkindness never ceases, so we ought to be like that as well.

This should produce a deep loyalty to our creator:

Mark 12:28-31: (NASB) ²⁸*One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, What commandment is the foremost of all?* ²⁹*Jesus answered, The foremost is, Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord;* ³⁰*and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* ³¹*The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*

 **Inspirational: How great I am, excerpts of Vince Lombardi/Winston Churchill**

- *I firmly believe that any man's finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle, victorious.*
- *Never give in, never give in, never, never, never! In nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.*



Never yield to force, never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

Our loyalty requires action:

1 Timothy 6:11-14: (NASB) ¹¹But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Is THE Most Important Thing YOUR Most Important Thing?

Let's briefly look at a parable to try and figure this out: The Parable of the Talents

WHY WAS THIS PARABLE SPOKEN?

Matthew 25:13-14: (NKJV) ¹³Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. ¹⁴For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

This is a story about stewardship, telling us to be doing "the Most Important Thing" when the master comes back. So what is the most important thing at any given moment?

 Living a life of purpose, leadership is stewardship, Rick Warren, TedTV

- *The stewardship of affluence and the stewardship of influence: Essentially leadership is stewardship. If you are a leader in ANY area - business, politics, a sport, art, academics - you don't own it, you are a steward of it.*

WHAT WERE THEY SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THEIR FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

Matthew 25:16-18: (NKJV) ¹⁶Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. ¹⁷And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. ¹⁸But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

Different individuals received different amounts and were told to work with it. Two had a very good return, but one buried it in the ground to protect it. His "most important thing" was protecting that which he was given. But was that the master's most important thing in giving him that talent...?

 No Excuses Motivation, Part 1, youtube.com

- *(Man bouncing a basketball in the gym) I'm too weak and slow. I'm too big. I ate too much for breakfast. I have a headache. It's raining. My dog is sick. I can't right now. It makes me smell bad. I'm allergic. I'm fat. I'm thin. I would love to really but I can't. My favorite show is on. I've got a case of the Mondays. The Tuesdays. The Wednesdays. Next week. I have a hot date. My mom won't let me. I bruise easily.*



So, in this parable the big thing is investing large worldly sums, each according to their ability. The stewards were supposed to invest it while the master was away. This was why the stewards were there in the first place!

The talent list (what we can do!) is just as long as the excuse list. But it's easier to use an excuse than apply a talent.

WHAT HAPPENED UPON THE MASTER'S RETURN?

Matthew 25:19-23: (NKJV) ¹⁹After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them. ²¹His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. ²²He also who had received two talents came and said, Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them. ²³His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.

Here the lesson is about what the master gave to the individual: The talents could represent our personal potential, opportunities and talents that are easily recognizable as valuable in the eyes of the world. Those who obeyed are simply reporting what they did with what they were given.

Matthew 25:24-25: (NKJV) ²⁴Then he who had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.

Seeing the task from a human perspective, this servant essentially ignores the command and buries the talent in the earth - he buries his talents and opportunities in earthly things and then when called to accountability, he blames the master for his own irresponsibility in stewardship. His job was to use the talent somehow.

So the steward's most important thing was entirely different than the master's most important thing. We should be using our talents in the work of God.

"To whom much is given, much is required."

How do You LIVE your Most Important Thing?

We can achieve greatness in our lives by focusing on our model, Jesus.



Life, purpose, fear and focus, interview with Will Smith



- *Greatness is not this wonderful, esoteric, elusive, godlike feature that only the special among us will ever taste. It is something that truly exists in all of us. It is very simple. This is what I believe and I am willing to die for it. I know who I am, I know what I believe, and that's all I need to know. So from there, you do what you need to do.*

Is there greatness in your life?

Colossians 1:27: (NASB) *to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*



First we need to know what we believe!

Ephesians 1:17-21: (NASB) ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Our focus should be outward, on something bigger than ourselves.

Live on purpose!

Joshua 24:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Commit to what you believe:

Philippians 3:13-14: (NASB) ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.



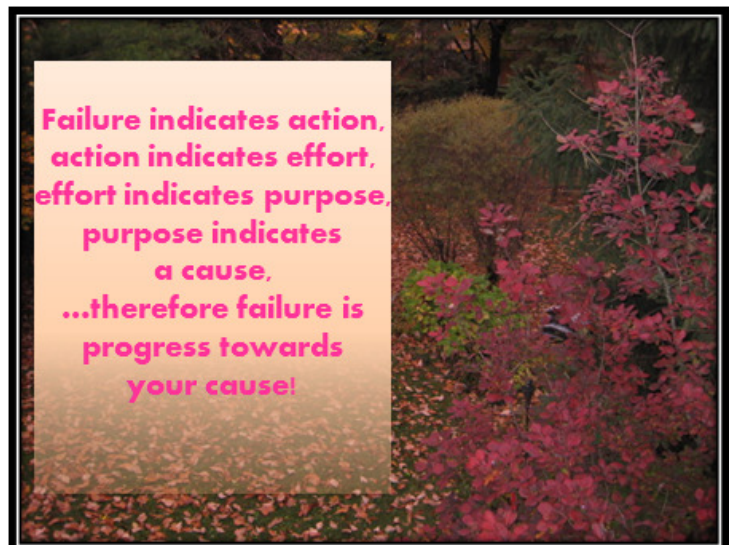
Failure, Nike commercial, Michael Jordan

- I missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I have been trusted to take the game-winning shot... and missed. I have failed over and over again in my life...and that is why I succeed.

Failure is part of the process.

John 4:31-35: (NASB) ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, Rabbi, eat. ³²But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about. ³³So the disciples were saying to one another, No one brought him anything to eat, did he? ³⁴Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵Do you not say, There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.

Proverbs 24:16: (NASB) For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity.





What do you have in your hand?

Our theme Scripture showed Moses with staff in hand. The moral of that story was to use whatever is in your hands in the service of God - our talents and our opportunities.

There are (at least) three things we each have in our hand. (These are adapted from Rick Warren.)

1. Your IDENTITY - who you are daily

 **No Excuses Motivation, youtube.com**

- *After rattling off all of the excuses, the real import is in who cited all those excuses. The man in the video who was dribbling the basketball while speaking ended with the excuse, "my feet hurt." It is then that you see that he doesn't have any legs. He was playing basketball in a wheelchair. Here is a man that has an excuse but refuses to use it.*

What are we doing with what we have been given?

1 Corinthians 1:26-29: (NASB) ²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God.

Remember, it's only through God that there is any greatness at all. If you aren't the most noble or wise person, that's ok, as long as your heart is towards God. The calling is for "regular people."

 **Life purpose: Fear and focus, talent vs. skill, Will Smith**

- *The separation of talent and skill is one of the greatest misunderstood concepts for people who are trying to excel. Talent you have naturally. Skill is only developed by hours and hours beating on your craft. Where I excel is a ridiculous, sickening work ethic. While the other guy is sleeping, I'm working, while the other guy is eating, I'm working. There is no easy way around it. No matter how talented you are, your talent is going to fail you if you are not skilled.*

We might have a talent for compassion, for prayer, or for action along a certain line, but we have to put skill to it. We get that by a "ridiculously, sickening work ethic," according to Will Smith. Our definition of "greatness" is giving glory to God.



Here is an example of how "talent" can only carry you so far:

Matthew 14:24-33: (NASB) ²⁴But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. ²⁵And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

²⁶When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, It is a ghost! And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.

²⁸Peter said to him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. (Peter's "talent" was his boldness - he was able to extend himself more readily than his peers. This "talent" is rewarded by Jesus.) ²⁹And he said, Come! And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me! The "skill" of faith obviously needed to be developed because he waivered. ³¹Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and took hold of him, and said to him, You of little faith, why did you doubt? ³²When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³And those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, You are certainly God's Son!



This drama would serve as inspiration to engage in the work of faith development.

What else do you have in your hand?

2. Your INVOLVEMENT - Where you are daily and what you do to contribute to the world around you

 **Wasting life on the trivial, Author Randy Alcorn, dontwasteyourlife.com**

- *There is a lot in life that is trivial, that is secondary, and I'm not even talking about the bad things. When you think about all of the "things" that we know (he gives the example of sports statistics), none of it is wrong - it's just that if that is the bigger part of your life, you have all of that memorized but you have no time to memorize Scripture, that says that you have used your God given mental abilities and poured them into the secondary, the trivial.*

Are we focused on the things that in the larger picture end up being really trivial? The earthly attractions, while tempting, are *not* the most important thing. Entertaining ourselves, if we have a life driven by a higher purpose, shouldn't be our main focus.

1 Timothy 6:17-19: (NASB) ¹⁷Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.



No matter who we are or what we do, we can adjust our life involvement to give more glory to God. We can get involved in earthly things OR we can get



involved in living with a purpose - even in the common activities - to give glory to God, so that our lives are not by accident.

John the Baptist showed us how to make involvement a Godly experience:

Luke 3:10-14: (NASB) ¹⁰And the crowds were questioning him, saying, Then what shall we do? ¹¹And he would answer and say to them, The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise. ¹²And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? ¹³And he said to them, Collect no more than what you have been ordered to. ¹⁴Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, And what about us, what shall we do? And he said to them, Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.

He had practical advice for every class of person that came to him. These are examples of how "being Christ-like" plays out differently in each of our lives.



No one tells you, you can't, Will Smith in Pursuit of Happyness



- *Don't ever let somebody tell you, you can't do something - not even me. You gotta dream, you gotta protect it. People can't do something themselves, they want to tell you, you can't do it. You want something, you get it. Period!*

Satan wants us to believe that we can't. He wants us discouraged:

1 Peter 5:6-10: (NASB) ⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Here's our answer!

Romans 8:31,37-39: (NASB) ³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?... ³⁷But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We need to apply this in our daily lives and be purposeful in our service to God.

What kind of INFLUENCE do you have?

3. Your influence - not merely your physical influence in the world - but more importantly your spiritual influence as revealed through your prayers, example and integrity



Failure was my strength, Michael Jordan



- *Maybe it's my own fault. Maybe I led you to believe it was easy, when it wasn't. Maybe I made you think my highlights started at the free throw line and not in the gym. Maybe I made you think that every shot was a game winner, that my game was built on flash and not fire. Maybe it's my fault that you didn't see that failure gave me strength, that my pain was my motivation. Maybe I led you to believe that basketball was a God-given gift and not something I worked for every single day of my life. Maybe I destroyed the game. Or maybe, you're just making excuses...*



We may not be the big influencer of our time, but what is to say that we don't have influence on those who influence? Ananias had such an opportunity!

Acts 9:10-17: (NASB) ¹⁰Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Here I am, Lord. ¹¹And the Lord said to him, Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, ¹²and 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.

Ananias was given a very specific task to accomplish - his "here am I Lord" answer tells us that his attitude was already in line with doing what Jesus would instruct him.

¹³But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.

Notice how Ananias says: Saul has done much harm to *your* saints and continues to do so. He knew Saul could have him thrown in prison! His paradigm, though set to follow Jesus' instruction, has come to a point of resistance...

¹⁵But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.

Jesus answers the instruction and gives good reason for Ananias to experience a paradigm shift.

¹⁷So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ananias now does what he would not previously have done and refers to Saul as "Brother Saul!" This was a defining moment for both of them!



Living a life of purpose, living the good life, Rick Warren, TedTV

- *We think that the good life is looking good, feeling good and having the goods. But that's not the good life. I meet people all the time that have those and they're not necessarily happy. If that were true, the wealthiest people in the world should be the most happy, and that I know personally is not true. The good life is about being good and doing good - giving your life away...*

So the good life is a life intentionally lived and given away to a vision that is much bigger than ourselves. The effort and the sacrifice are but a small price to pay for the opportunity to be a part of God's everlasting plan for man. Focus on your opportunities, look at your talents, and develop the skills to make your life of great value.

We want to pursue that which is God-honoring and look at "who I am" and know it is someone God would want me to be. We want to make sure our purpose in life is really important.

Daniel 2:44: (NASB) *In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.*



*So is your life by accident...?
For Jonathan and Rick (and Vicki!) and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



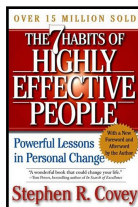
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You may or may not have heard the phrase "paradigm shift." As we look into living with intention, understanding our paradigms becomes an important exercise. Here is a basic look at what a paradigm is:

Paradigm:

1. One that serves as a pattern or model.
2. A set or list of all the inflectional forms of a word or of one of its grammatical categories: *the paradigm of an irregular verb.*
3. A set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline.

Usage Note: *Paradigm* first appeared in English in the 15th century, meaning "an example or pattern," and it still bears this meaning today: *Their company is a paradigm of the small high-tech firms that have recently sprung up in this area.* For nearly 400 years *paradigm* has also been applied to the patterns of inflections that are used to sort the verbs, nouns, and other parts of speech of a language into groups that are more easily studied. Since the 1960s, *paradigm* has been used in science to refer to a theoretical framework, as when Nobel Laureate David Baltimore cited the work of two colleagues that "*really established a new paradigm for our understanding of the causation of cancer.*" Thereafter, researchers in many different fields, including sociology and literary criticism, often saw themselves as working in or trying to break out of paradigms.



(Source: Explanation of a "paradigm" by Stephen R. Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.)

Page 23: ...For our purpose, a simple way to understand paradigms is to see them as maps. We all know that "the map is not the territory." A map is simply an explanation of certain aspects of the territory. That's exactly what a paradigm is. It is a theory, an explanation, or model of something else.

Page 29: ...The term "paradigm shift" was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his highly influential landmark book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn shows how almost every significant breakthrough in the field of scientific endeavor is first a break with tradition, with old ways of thinking, with old paradigms.

For Ptolemy, the great Egyptian astronomer, the earth was the center of the universe. But Copernicus created a paradigm shift, and a great deal of resistance and persecution as well, by placing the sun at the center. Suddenly, everything took on a different interpretation.



Some quick examples of biblical paradigm shifts

The Apostle Peter being told that those things which were unclean under Jewish Law were now clean under Christian Grace:

Acts 10:9-20: (NRSV) ⁹About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³Then he heard a voice saying, Get up, Peter; kill and eat. ¹⁴But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean. ¹⁵The voice said to him again, a second time, What God has made clean, you must not call profane. ¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. ¹⁷Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. ¹⁸They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. ²⁰Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.

We know that this event led to the conversion of Cornelius.

The Apostle Paul's experience (we covered Ananias) at his conversion:

Acts 9:1-9: (NRSV) ¹Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ⁵He asked, Who are you, Lord? The reply came, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do. ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Here is where the "rubber meets the road." All of the changes up to this point for both Ananias and Saul are primarily internal, but this change shows the world your authenticity.

Acts 9:18-22: (NRSV) ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength. ²⁰and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the Son of God. ²¹All who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests? ²²Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Here is the result of this paradigm shift for Paul:

Acts 9:23-27: (NRSV) ²³After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; ²⁵but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. ²⁶When 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. ²⁷But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.