

- Growing up, my parents loved watching the show Extreme Makeover Home Edition. That show was just ridiculous. The renovators and builders would take something that was old and rundown like this old rickety cabin and somehow they would turn it into this unbelievable castle of a log cabin. The show was certainly worthy of the name extreme.
- Did you know that there is an extreme makeover in the Bible? There absolutely is and it is the makeover that we see take place in the life of the Apostle Paul who was formerly known as Saul the Pharisee. Let's examine the extreme makeover from Saul to Paul and see what lessons we can learn from it as we strive to live for our Lord in this life.

I. The extreme transformation of Saul into the Apostle Paul.

A. Saul was formerly a persecutor.

1. He details his Pharisee pedigree in **Philippians 3:5,6** and even admits to his persecution of the early church.
2. During the stoning of Stephen, he was present and the robes of the murderers were laid at his feet. (**Acts 7:57ff**)
3. He went on from there to be an intense persecutor of the church in Jerusalem. (**Acts 8:1-3**)
4. He even desired to take his persecution on the road to Damascus. (**Acts 9:1,2**)

B. He became a believer upon seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus.

1. The Lord showed Himself to Saul on his way to Damascus. He is blinded for 3 days without eating or drinking and he only prayed. (**Acts 9:3-9, 11**)
2. Ananias goes to Saul and commands him to get up and be baptized to wash away his sins. (**Acts 9:18; 22:16**)
3. Saul immediately joins himself with the disciples in Damascus and they have to sneak him out of the city because the Jews wanted to kill him for treason against their faith. (**Acts 9:19-25**)
4. Upon returning to Jerusalem, Saul tries to join himself with the church there but they are afraid of him because of his past actions. Barnabas vouches for Saul before the Apostles and he is accepted by them. (**Acts 9:27,28**)

C. Saul hits the ground running as a proclaimer of God's name.

1. We see him preaching first in **Acts 9:20**, "**he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the Son of God.**"
2. Upon coming to Jerusalem, he continues to preach boldly in the name of the Lord. (**Acts 9:27, 28**)
3. He even got into it with the Hellenistic Jews, to the extent that they wanted to kill him right there. (**Acts 9:29**)
4. The disciples found out about it and they send him away and during this time there was great peace in the church as it was growing and being build up. (**Acts 9:30,31**)
5. Saul's is eventually known as Paul in **Acts 13:9**, and he goes from that point on to go on 3 preaching trips (1st-Acts 13,14; 2nd-Acts 15-18; 3rd-Acts 18-21) and writes at least 13 letters to different churches and individuals.

II. Lessons we learn from Paul's transformation.

A. No past is too much to overcome.

1. Paul came from a very troubled past. Sometimes, people don't obey the Gospel because they feel as if they've done too many bad things.
2. Paul referred to himself as the worst of sinners because of his past but he didn't let his past hinder him, instead he used his past to motivate himself to do good for the Kingdom. (**I Tim. 1:12-16**)
3. Have some of us done some pretty bad things? Quite possible. You might not think they you can be saved because you've done so many bad things. You might think of yourself as a really terrible person.
4. The good news is that you are the exact type of person that Jesus came to this earth to save. He came to save sinners and reconcile them back to God. He did it for Paul and He did it for us, as well.

B. The Gospel has great power to change.

1. This truly is the most extreme of transformations for Paul to from where he was earlier in his life to where he was at the end of it able to say the things he did to Timothy in **II Tim. 4:4-8**.
2. That transformation is exactly what the Gospel has the power to do. (**Rom. 1:16**)
3. The grace of God can change the worst of sinners into faithful disciples that can do good for the Kingdom. (**Titus 2:11-14**)

C. God can use us, regardless of our baggage.

1. If the story of Paul teaches us anything... it should be that anyone who comes to God in trusting faith can be saved and do great things for God's Kingdom.
2. Through the conversion of Paul, there is no telling how many souls came to obey the Gospel. There's no telling how many of those people taught others about the Gospel.
3. There are many examples, today, of men and women who have come from rough past that have been made useful for the Kingdom. I can think of one brother particular that grew up in California gangbanging, fighting, and selling drugs and ended up in prison for some of that stuff. He came to know the Gospel and he's now working to learn how to become a preacher.
4. I've heard stories of countless other men who we're from denominations or even came from atheism that obeyed the Gospel and are now Gospel preachers and church leaders.
5. The point is this... if you truly want to do whatever you can to serve the church in whatever way possible, then you can do just that. No past is too much to overcome. You can be useful for the kingdom of God. The harvest is white but the laborers are too few. **(Matt. 9:37)**
6. Let us not be held down by our past. Paul was able to get past his and we absolutely can do the same thing. We serve a merciful God that is willing to have compassion on those who turn to Him and forgive us of our sins. **(Psalm 103:10-13)**

Extreme Home Makeover was able to do some pretty drastic renovations with homes. However, none of them measure up to the transformation that we see in the life of the Apostle Paul. He did a complete 180 from persecuted Christians to making them. May God help us to use his example as a means of encouragement to make the decision to follow Him regardless of our past. No person's past can hold them down from obeying God. It is just a decision and will of mind to commit your life to Him. Paul did it, and so can you.