

“*The Spirituality of Paul* is needed in the ongoing conversation about spiritual formation and Christian spirituality. Les Hardin, a fellow pilgrim and friend, writes with clear prose, Spirit conviction, and a voracious appetite—like Paul—to imitate Christ. Les resembles Paul in many ways: tough-minded, tenderhearted, Scripture-grounded, Jesus-tethered, and holy habits-anchored. With grace and freedom, Les offers a book worthy of reading and living. I, for one, am grateful.”

—J. K. Jones, director of the MA in Spiritual Formation,
Lincoln Christian University, Graduate Division, Lincoln, IL

“Written with Hardin’s trademark wit, *The Spirituality of Paul* is at turns deeply personal and scholarly. Hardin offers a corrective to the caricatures of Paul we often see, presenting him as a real man, whose own spiritual struggles were like our own, and whose example can guide us as we pursue our own spiritual disciplines. Accessible to the general reader while copiously footnoted for the scholar, *The Spirituality of Paul* is an excellent read for Christians seeking to grow in spiritual maturity.”

—Dr. Richard Scott Nokes, professor of medieval literature, Troy University

“Dr. Hardin takes us not only on a journey through the life and faith formation of perhaps the greatest leader in the first century church, but also on a personal journey into the life of the believer. Using Paul as a model for all of us who call ourselves Christ-followers, we gain insight and appreciation for the practices, struggles, and commitments of the Christian life; even engaging suffering as part of the road to Christlikeness. The book reflects both Dr. Hardin’s capabilities as a scholar of the New Testament and his embrace of a distinctively Christian spiritual formation. *The Spirituality of Paul* challenge its readers to a deeper walk with Christ through a significant engagement with the life and faith of Paul.”

—James Estep, professor of Christian education, Lincoln Christian Seminary

“Les Hardin provides a wealth of insight into the spiritual life of the apostle Paul. He is indeed well suited to do so, having previously published *The Spirituality of Jesus* (Kregel, 2009). Defining spirituality as an ongoing ‘practical partnership with the Spirit,’ he elaborates nine prominent features of what he calls Paul’s ‘Jesus-style spirituality.’ Written in an engaging, energetic style, this book is grounded in academic study, ministerial experience, and the author’s own spiritual journey.”

—Jeff Miller, PhD, professor of Bible, Milligan College

“Thoroughly informed, clearly conceived, and warmly presented, Les Hardin’s *The Spirituality of Paul* will bring insight to those who want Christian spirituality made accessible. Writing with a scholar’s knowledge and a disciple’s experience, Hardin vividly describes Paul’s spiritual disciplines as they emerge from his life and letters. As much an introduction to Paul’s thought as a guide to spiritual growth, *The Spirituality of Paul* is a model of exegetical fidelity, pastoral integrity, and personal honesty. It is a worthy follow-up to the author’s *The Spirituality of Jesus* but readily appreciated by those who have never read its predecessor.”

—Jon Weatherly, professor of New Testament and dean of the
College of Bible and Theology, Johnson University

"*The Spirituality of Paul* provides unique insights into Christian spirituality, which is only accomplished by being both intensely biblical and intensely practical. As with his previous work, *The Spirituality of Jesus*, Dr. Hardin masterfully integrates the disciplines of New Testament studies with spiritual formation to provide much more than a simple how-to on spiritual disciplines; rather, it brings Christian spirituality to life by drawing from the amazing spiritual journey of Paul—a preeminent example of what it means to be Christlike. Deep, yet accessible, this work will be helpful to anyone seeking to pursue a thoroughly grounded spirituality."

—Brian D. Smith, PhD, president of Dallas Christian College

"In *The Spirituality of Paul* Les Hardin cuts through the mystery surrounding contemporary Christian spirituality. Instead of whatever feels spiritual, he provides a biblically based guide to the ways in which Paul partnered with the Spirit to be shaped into the image of Jesus. So just as Paul imitated Christ, the reader may learn Paul's practices to also become 'spiritual'—like Christ. Hardin's extensive reading, coupled with accessible prose in a practical arrangement, make *The Spirituality of Paul* useful for individual study or Bible classes and a rich resource for the recovery of biblical Christian spirituality.

—Dr. Glenn Pemberton, author of *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms*

"Dr. Hardin's work is a graceful balance of simple and scholarly insight into the not-so-Pharisaic spiritual disciplines of this much-beloved ex-Pharisee."

—Rebecca Owens, professor of English, Boise Bible College

"This book is a welcome companion to Hardin's *The Spirituality of Jesus*. Using our knowledge of Paul from his letters and from Acts, Hardin compiles a very practical and eminently readable study. Hardin's topical organization of Paul's teaching highlights both the theological backgrounds of Paul's thought, and the ethical implications for the modern reader. Hardin's conversational style expertly mixes within his presentation of both historical and autobiographical illustrations. The tone of the work is most inviting.

"This book will serve very well for teaching adults (Hardin's acknowledged gift) and as a welcome supplement for an undergraduate course on Paul. The topical layout would also work admirably for a series of weekly Bible studies.

"I heartily recommend this book. This is no elitist scholarly tome, but a very accessible look into this important topic. Hardin regularly points the reader to further literature, and provides a helpful bibliography, as well as explanatory footnotes."

—Thomas Scott Caulley, associate professor of Biblical Studies,
Kentucky Christian University

"Who better to imitate in spiritual formation than Paul? Both well-informed and written in popular style, this latest volume by Hardin fills a unique niche among books written about Paul or his writings. It could be a great first book on Paul or complement a substantial library on Paul."

—William R. Baker, professor of New Testament, Hope International University;
editor, *Stone-Campbell Journal*

The
S p i r i t u a l i t y
of
P a u l

Partnering with the Spirit in Everyday Life

LESLIE T. HARDIN

 **Kregel**
Publications

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*For my parents
Tom and Judy Hardin
who have believed in me
from the beginning*



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Acknowledgments



■ BOOKS, LIKE CHILDREN, ARE BEST RAISED in community. Raise children with no social interactions among others their age and they're bound to exhibit personalities that are withdrawn, self-consumed, and out of touch with reality. The same would be true of this book were it written with no communal context, no interaction from others. "Two heads are better than one, even if one is a goat's," my grandmother used to say. She was right, and I want to acknowledge the other "heads" that have kept this project from being so "gruff."

My thanks go out to Dennis Hillman and the good folks at Kregel for allowing me to work on a follow-up project to *The Spirituality of Jesus*. They have challenged me in a gracious and loving manner at every step along the way.

Several of my colleagues, students, and friends deserve mention for helping me with the manuscript at several points: Chris Arnold, Roland Howard, Rebecca Owens, Anthony Smith, and Garret Thompson. In their various ways, each of them provided research assistance and a critical eye to help me articulate my thoughts without being divisive in my language. Linda Stark and Marla Black, our librarians here at Johnson University Florida, have helped tirelessly in acquiring the necessary resources to complete this project. My wife Kara read nearly every chapter of the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. To these, my friends and colleagues, I offer my gratitude for their collaboration on this project. Any others who were involved whom I did not mention

have failed to appear here only by accident. After this book is printed, I will remember them and be grateful.

Two perfunctory matters deserve attention here, both of them pragmatic issues of communication. First, the person about whom this book is written is known in the Scriptures by two names: one Hebrew (Saul), the other Greek (Paul). In order to maintain consistency, and in order to avoid confusion, I will refer to him always as “Paul,” even when referring to the Acts narrative in which his Hebrew name appears.

Second, this book is about Christian spirituality and spiritual formation, and I primarily use two terms to describe it: “spirituality” and “Spirituality.” I tend to use “Spirituality” when the work of the Holy Spirit is clearly in view in my mind, and “spirituality” when a more generic inner disposition (even sometimes a disposition reflective of the Spirit) is in view.

I have kept the citations from the original Greek and Hebrew to a minimum, using them only when necessary to keep the argument flowing in a credible way. My audience was never the scholarly community, so I have tried to keep technical jargon to a minimum.

This book is dedicated to my parents, Tom and Judy Hardin. For as long as I can remember they have encouraged me to pursue my dreams and ambitions, believing that nothing was out of reach. As I have pursued those goals they have been supportive, kind, and helpful in many ways. They have demonstrated through the years a kind of faithfulness to Christ and his Church that is akin to that of Paul—fleshed out in the midst of everyday life and responsibilities. They inherited this legacy from their own parents, who were themselves pillars of holiness, friendship, and responsibility.



“Imitate Me”: Paul and the Practice of the Spirit

■ OF ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, Paul confounds my expectations and understanding more than anyone. I understand Nicodemus—religious leader, curious about Jesus, but not wanting to get too close for fear that Jesus might just be another Satan-sent devil masquerading as an angel of light. I can identify with loud-mouthed Peter, swearing up and down that he’d never deny Jesus, only to have his failure displayed in Scripture for all eternity. I can even wrap my mind around the thief on the cross, having nowhere left to turn for hope except to the obviously innocent man crucified there beside him. These guys I understand.

But Paul frustrates me. Paul was so committed to Jesus that he seemed unwilling to compromise with those who had different ideas— even different ideas *about the same gospel*. The Judaizers in Galatia were advocating a belief in Jesus, as was Paul.¹ But he had little respect for them and told the Galatians to have nothing to do with them.

He also often seems to contradict himself. At one point he counseled young women and widows not to marry and to remain single like himself (1 Cor. 7:8), but later said, “I counsel younger widows

1. Of course, this is a gross simplification of the facts. Their gospel was that the realities of life in the Jewish Messiah Jesus could only be experienced as a Jew. Therefore, Gentiles needed to be circumcised and obey the ceremonial elements of Sabbath-keeping, food laws, and Jewish holy days.

to marry” (1 Tim. 5:14). At one point he told the Galatians “there is neither . . . male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), but told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:33–35) and Timothy (1 Tim. 2:12) that women were not permitted to teach or exercise authority in the corporate gathering of the local church. Paul spoke in tongues, apparently more than the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:18), but downplayed tongue-speaking among them to curb its use in their assembly. He taught his converts that the Law had been “nailed to the cross” with Christ (Col. 2:14), but consistently made sure that his converts knew the Old Testament. He refused to let the Galatians be circumcised to appease Jews (Gal. 5:2), but circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3) and shaved his own head for similar reasons (Acts 21:20–26). The more I study Paul, the more he confounds my expectations and understanding.

I’m not alone either. Peter, the apostle to whom Jesus gave the “keys of the kingdom” (Mt. 16:19) and Paul’s fellow apostle, admitted that he had a hard time understanding Paul: “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16).

Of course, these dichotomies are only part of the story. The discrepancies are only *apparent* discrepancies on the surface, and any good student of the New Testament understands that behind each of the aforementioned items there were contextual, historical, and theological reasons behind Paul’s actions and exhortations. Scores of books have been written on Paul and his letters, each trying to make sense of them. But the multitude of books on Paul has largely been either historical or theological. They either seek to retrace Paul’s steps and illustrate his ministry against the backdrop of the Roman Empire (history), or they attempt to systematize Paul’s teaching into a unified body of doctrine (theology). Both approaches are necessary, for to understand Paul we must come to grips with the world he lived in and the message with which he transformed it.

But there’s another side to Paul that has been neglected. Rather than thinking of Paul as a theologian and apostle, perhaps it’s time to approach Paul as a disciple of Jesus, as a Spirit-filled man practicing the Spirit as Jesus did, and as someone

who lived an authentic Christian life. "Paul repeatedly emphasized the concrete shape of life in the Spirit,"² says Meye, and described the Christian experience as a life of "practicing the Spirit."³ "Practicing the Spirit" is the language of spiritual discipline. So this book seeks to uncover the ways that Paul imitated Jesus in every-day appropriation of the Spirit. What were the disciplines Paul was engaged in? How did they help him in his quest to become more like Jesus? In Paul we find a true brother, a sinner who received grace, and a man honestly trying to become increasingly like Jesus (Phil. 3:7-11). Here is a man we can relate to in spirituality and Christ-likeness.

What Does It Mean to Be "Spiritual"?

Before we can begin, we must lay the foundation of what we mean by the term "spiritual," for there is great disagreement regarding the use and definition of the term. Carl Henry articulates the confusion best:

Yet if one asks what spirituality is, one is likely to be met by a sidelong stare, as if this question would be raised only by a religious nincompoop, or could be answered by an assortment of examples without any clear definition.

To be sure, so we are told, spirituality has something to do with spirit, but just what is intended by spirit in this context is often obscure. Talk of spirituality will evoke such identifiers as the sacred, the religious, the transcendental, the charismatic, the

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2. R. P. Meye, "Spirituality," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 913.
 3. *Ibid.*, 909. "Practicing the Spirit," for Paul, meant "a comprehensive pattern of action governed by one's basic perspective."

saintly, the pious. Semantic multiplication does not stop there either. Verbally, all is fuzz.⁴

If you're confused about what it means to be "spiritual," it seems you're in good company.

Part of the problem lies in the diverse opinion about who, exactly, takes the lead in spiritual development. Does God take the lead, beckoning our faithful response? "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). Or does spiritual growth begin with our own initiative, with spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, and worship, which the Spirit resonates with and rewards? Does the effort we make provide the ideal conditions for the Spirit to work transformation in our lives? "Come near to God and he will come near to you" (Jas. 4:8). While Paul certainly had religious experiences (which we will explore in just a moment), authentic spirituality in the biblical tradition involves *more* than experience alone and includes an element of praxis. Richard Foster's classic, *Celebration of Discipline*, first drew our modern attention to the spiritual disciplines as those tools which lead to transformation. Practicing spiritual disciplines puts us in a receptive position to receive fresh "grace" from the Spirit.⁵ Dallas Willard also conceived of spiritual formation as the intertwining of grace and effort.⁶ Their work has tempered our desire for religious experience, restoring a more balanced view which

4. Carl F. H. Henry, "Spiritual? Say It Isn't So!" in *Alive to God: Studies in Spirituality Presented to James Houston*, eds. J. I. Packer and Loren Wilkinson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 8.

5. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 7: "Then is it not logical to conclude that we must wait for God to come and transform us? Strangely enough, the answer is no. . . . God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."

6. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22–23. For Willard, Christian spiritual formation is a "Spirit-driven process," but one that is not passive. It is a "conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ" (22).

includes our own human responsibility for spiritual formation.⁷ With slight nuances of difference, these authors caution us not to put all of our eggs in the experiential basket, but to swing our pendulum back in the direction of "faithful response." Someone must take the lead, and God acts, to be sure. Our response, then, becomes the basis of an ongoing partnership, as Evan Howard has noted: God acts, we respond, then God responds to our response.⁸ This is a true give-and-take relationship between the believer and the Spirit (i.e. partnership).⁹

This idea of partnership is, in fact, exactly what we find in the biblical text regarding transformation. With deference to the problem of human responsibility and divine sovereignty, Scripture consistently demonstrates that God and his people must work together to bring about personal spiritual transformation.

Probably the best (and most misunderstood) place to start is Philippians 2:12-13. Paul encourages the Philippians to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), but not alone, "for it is God who works in you" (Phil. 2:13). Their "accomplishing" or "production"¹⁰ of salvation is only a faithful response to God's "working in" their hearts for his

7. It was this overemphasis upon spiritual *experience* to authenticate both conversion and ministry that caused early Restorationists like Barton W. Stone to return to a more biblical model (faith, repentance, confession, and baptism). For a more detailed accounting, see James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994), 33-45; James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only: A History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1962), 83-96. The demand among modern evangelicals for religious experience as a necessary component of salvation in Christ was one of the main foci of Scot McKnight's addresses for the Parchman Lectures at Baylor in 2011.

8. Evan Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 195-228, esp. 204 ff.

9. Leslie T. Hardin, "Is a Pauline Spirituality Still Viable?" *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 8 (2015): 132-46.

10. These are the possible ranges of meaning for "work out." See W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, "katēgazomai," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 421.

will and purpose. God works in, we work out. The same partnership is articulated earlier in the letter, as Paul prays for God to increase their knowledge and understanding of the faith, expressing itself in love (Phil. 1:9), but for the express purpose of believers “discern[ing] what is best” and reckoning themselves pure and blameless (Phil. 1:10). Partnership with God is in view in Paul’s letter. It is no less on display in Galatians, where Paul simultaneously prays that Christ would be “formed” within them (Gal. 4:19), while encouraging them to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16, 22–25), avoid carnal living (Gal. 5:17, 19–21), and continue to do good (Gal. 6:10). Again, partnership best describes Paul’s view of spirituality.

Partnership is not simply Paul’s new covenant way of appropriating the Spirit. His understanding of partnership with God was developed from Scripture, including the Psalms. Those who refuse to walk in the way of the wicked and delight themselves with the knowledge of God (Ps. 1:1–3) find themselves blessed by God and afforded his protection and care (Ps. 1:3, 6). Those who have “clean hands and a pure heart” and sanctify their speech and worship (Ps. 24:3–4) receive blessing and vindication from God (Ps. 24:5), and find the privilege of standing (not kneeling or groveling) in his presence (Ps. 24:3). The renewal of the covenant in Deuteronomy 29 is based on this kind of partnering with God—the extension of the grace of the covenant by God (Deut. 29:12–13) and the faithful response of his people to abide by the terms of the covenant (Deut. 29:9, 18–28).

Jesus seems to speak about his own relationship with the Spirit in terms of partnership. Acknowledging that the Spirit was upon him (Lk. 4:18), he expressed it in tangible ways, including “preach[ing] good news to the poor” (Lk. 4:18), resisting temptation (Mt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13), and casting out demons (by the Spirit of God, Mt. 12:28). Although the Spirit is yet to come in John’s Gospel, Jesus’s relationship with the Father in that Gospel is described as being lived in the Spirit of God.

Indeed, the relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit in the Gospel of John (and in Jesus's life) is so intimate that articulating differences between them seems trite. Jesus sees himself sent from the Father (i.e., the Father's "apostle," or "one who is sent"), carrying out his will, serving as God's extension among his people.

So it seems best for our quest to view an authentic, biblical spirituality as a *practical partnership with the Spirit* who is already at work. The Spirit of God is at work in my heart, and the disciplines I practice set the conditions for the Spirit to have free reign in my life. Yes, Jesus is the vine, and God is the gardener (Jn. 15:1). But the disciplines I engage in till the soil and fertilize it, so that the Spirit can produce fruit in my life. This is how I see Jesus practicing his own spirituality, and the same seems to be true for Paul. It's the everyday stuff of life, done in conjunction with the Spirit and in accordance with his leading, that produces wholeness and vibrant friendship with God.

Paul, Vision, and Imitation

The problem we run up against with Paul, though, is that he was a visionary who regularly had intense religious experiences. He had visions of the Lord and of heaven, was the subject of prophecy, and often spoke in tongues. No discussion of Paul's spirituality can ignore the ecstatic experiences that accompanied his life in the Spirit. Paul's Christian life began in a vision of the risen Jesus (Acts 9:3–8, 22:6–11, 26:12–18),¹¹ and the Spirit continued to give him specific direction about his evangelistic ministry long after this. He was once prevented by the Spirit from

11. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 74–75, duly noted that Paul's repeated explanation for his sudden conversion from persecutor to preacher was a claim to have seen the risen Christ. The study of the experiential aspects of the early Christian church (i.e., phenomenology) have been adequately explored by Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

entering Bithynia, and was instead prompted by the Spirit to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10). Jesus and the Spirit appear to him with specific instruction or encouragement in several places in Acts (18:9–10, 20:22–23, 23:11, 27:23–24), and by his own admission he was given visions of things in heaven that no mortal was permitted to speak of (2 Cor. 12:4).

But Paul also counsels his readers *against* being enamored with ecstatic experiences. Some of Paul’s opponents were using “vision” and “revelation” to manipulate his converts into obeying ceremonial Jewish traditions. If so, then Paul’s citation of Isaiah 64:4—“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9)—and his occasional statements that God is unable to be seen (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17, 6:15–16) seem directed particularly *against* those who claim to have had legitimate visions of God.¹² Paul himself was caught up into the third heaven, but refused to tell what he saw there or to manipulate his readers with it (2 Cor. 12:1–10). For Paul, ecstatic experiences alone did not constitute an authentic, Jesus-style spirituality.

Here with Paul we encounter the same dilemma we encounter when ascertaining the spirituality of Jesus. Miracles, healings, and exorcisms were part of Jesus’s expression of life in the Spirit of God, but they were unique to his role as Israel’s Messiah. He was uniquely indwelt by the Spirit (Lk. 4:18, 21) for a particular role and function. I realize that speaking of it that way brings a whole host of questions, and I have tried to deal with them in an honest way elsewhere.¹³ What is important to note in regard to Jesus (and will most certainly help us with Paul) is that these experiences were not the basis of Jesus’s spirituality. The foundation of his spirituality was what he did *on an everyday*

12. Michael Goulder, “Vision and Knowledge,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17, no. 56 (1995): 63.

13. See Leslie T. Hardin, *The Spirituality of Jesus: Nine Disciplines Jesus Modeled for Us* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 13–25; and “The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15 (2012): 217–227.

basis: common routines like prayer, corporate worship, Scripture study, casting down temptation, etc. These everyday experiences were more normative in Jesus's life than the exorcisms, healings, and miracles—which the Gospel writers record in such detail precisely because they were so extraordinary for the covenant community. His ecstatic experiences (miracles, healings, supernatural events) were done with power freely given to him by the Spirit, and they were unique to him. I haven't been able to raise the dead or walk on water (unless it's Michigan in February), and neither have you. This kind of miraculous view of spirituality as an everyday routine is out of reach for those of us who are not gifted with the apostleship of the Twelve or given the keys to the kingdom. It's those routine disciplines of Jesus's life, not the ecstatic experiences, which call for imitation.

And so it is with Paul. Ecstatic experiences were certainly a part of Paul's spirituality, and we could make a case that they were just as normative for him as they were for Jesus. But just as the Spirit's manifestation in Jesus's life was unique to his role and purpose, so also the Spirit's manifestation in the life of Paul may have been unique to his role as apostle to the Gentiles, emissary of the risen Jesus, and founder of the new covenant community. Gordon Fee helps us understand why imitating Paul in ecstatic experiences can be problematic.

In this context we should perhaps also include one of the dimensions of Paul's Spirituality that is most difficult to evaluate, the place of visions and revelations. We know about these only because Paul is stepping over onto the Corinthians' turf momentarily in order to persuade them that it is totally inappropriate to use such experiences to authenticate his—or anyone else's—apostleship (2 Cor. 12:1–10). What we need to note is that Paul clearly affirms that he has had such experi-

ences and apparently has had them often; but he disallows that they have any value at all in authenticating ministry.¹⁴

It's possible that Paul saw himself as the unique counterpart of the Suffering Servant¹⁵ (something to which we will return later), and if so, the uniqueness of the Spirit's expression in his life is commensurate with Jesus's experience. As it was with Jesus, so it is with Paul: Ecstatic experiences, though they be tantalizing, do not constitute the warp and woof of Christian spirituality.

So we look to Paul's routine, everyday expressions of spirituality to answer the question, "How can I be spiritual like Paul?" Several times Paul tells his converts, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. Phil. 3:17, 4:9; 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7). It seems arrogant in our individualistic society to hear someone say, "become like I am," but it would not have been deemed so in Paul's churches. Paul's calls to imitation are neither self-serving nor power plays intended to marginalize those who disagree with him.¹⁶ They are the exhortations of a man wholly committed to Christ, calling other believers—particularly his own converts, who knew him and trusted him—to live in the Spirit in ways that Paul is humbly willing to model for them. We also look to Paul, not because he is a saint, but because he knew firsthand what it meant to live life in the Spirit, to partner with the Spirit in everyday living in order to be conformed to the image of Christ. We look to him because he knew what it meant to be spiritual, as Jesus was, in real and honest ways.

14. Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 149.

15. Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 171–172.

16. This is the position of Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 89–136, who holds that Paul's exhortations to imitation are nothing more than power plays, intended to homogenize the community of faith.

Some Limitations

We've noted that Paul was a spiritual man, and that in some respects his spirituality manifested itself in visionary and ecstatic experiences of the Spirit. But those experiences were not universally normative, and the things that call for imitation were more mundane than mystical. It's almost time to consider exactly what those routine matters were. But there are still a few things that need clarification. Before we proceed with our quest we must stop and address some idiosyncrasies of a study of this kind and, in particular, this book.

What we know of Paul's spirituality must be gleaned from Paul's Epistles and the latter half of Acts. Paul's letters contain *some* biographical references, but they are scant and occasional. Paul's purpose wasn't to write an autobiography with the hope that it would correct problems in the churches. He wrote occasional letters to the churches in order to correct their problems, and sometimes autobiographical references furthered his argument along. Add to this that it was uncustomary in the ancient world to freely talk about your own innermost thoughts and feelings, to speak in such a way as to distinguish yourself from the crowd,¹⁷ and our quest becomes even that much more difficult. So we will have to examine the things that are plainly evident in what Paul *does*, what he *says* about life in the Spirit, and the reflection of his personal devotion that shows up in his letters.

When we refer to Paul's Epistles we specifically mean those books that bear his name in the New Testament: Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Savvy readers will notice that Hebrews is not included here. In spite of testimony from the early church fathers that Paul *may* have been the author,¹⁸ and even though Hebrews bears similar linguistic style

17. Witherington, *The Paul Quest*, 79.

18. Eusebius says, "Paul's fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed," (*The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson (New York:

to the writings of Paul's secretary Luke,¹⁹ most scholars (conservative and progressive) are reluctant to attribute to Paul's hand the letter to the Hebrews.

So Where to Now?

Now that we have identified the purpose of this project and set some foundational ground rules, it's time to begin. I've identified nine spiritual disciplines in Paul's life that deserve further study and consideration of Jesus-style spirituality: prayer, evangelism and proclamation, disciple-making, corporate worship, Scripture study, holiness, caring for and building up other believers, using spiritual gifts to edify the body, and perseverance under suffering. It's not an exhaustive list, and some of the things that you might expect to find here are not developed, either because they don't receive much attention by Paul (and Luke) or because I have adequately covered them elsewhere.²⁰ But primary for Paul were the disciplines of prayer and evangelism. Paul was above all things a prayerer and a preacher of the gospel, and those two things often worked together to allow the Spirit to direct him where to offer the gospel next. Paul spent time in corporate worship, as was customary for ancient Jews. But Paul's discussion of worship is nuanced by the various problems he was forced to deal with among his congregants who neglected the fact that Jesus was actually present with them as they gathered. As Jesus trained disciples, so did Paul. He didn't do much

Penguin Books, 1965), 3.3.5), which seems to include Hebrews. He notes in that passage that some have disputed the Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

19. The suggestion that Luke may have translated Hebrews for Paul goes all the way back to Eusebius (*History of the Church* 3.38.2). Luke may have transcribed 2 Timothy at the end of Paul's life ("Only Luke is with me," 2 Tim. 4:11). J. D. Quinn, "The Last Volume of Luke: The Relation of Luke-Acts to the Pastoral Epistles," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978), 63–67, notes several characteristics shared in common between Luke-Acts and the pastoral Epistles, which suggests that Luke may have been involved in composing them for Paul.
20. I am thinking here particularly of the disciplines of simplicity, submission, and fellowship meals. See my book *The Spirituality of Jesus*.

without taking a few people along, so we will have to spend some time discussing his habit of disciple-making.

The role of Scripture deserves significant attention in any discussion of Paul's spirituality for, as Jesus did, Paul learned it from an early age and was soaked in it. He consistently appeals to Scripture, even though his letters are primarily written to Gentiles. Holiness is expected among Paul's converts, and having been trained in holiness as a Pharisee, Paul was able to appreciate Jesus-style holiness without pushing the boundaries as far as his Jewish-Christian opponents. Paul believed that every Christian was endowed by the Spirit with spiritual gifts, and he trained his converts to use them to edify the entire church. Paul was willing to suffer for his Lord, and his discipline of perseverance in the face of suffering will yield rich application for the modern church. Finally, once we've considered what there is to know about Paul's spiritual discipline, we will be in a position to put the components all together in a comprehensive Pauline spirituality—alongside some elements of spirituality that, for whatever reason, don't find a prominent place in Paul.

I've often read the portrait of Paul in Acts and thought in surly fashion, "I wish I could be like him." Perhaps you've felt that way about him at some point or another. If so, I think that what you'll find here is encouraging and revealing, and will bring you around to the conclusion that it's possible to imitate Paul, as he imitates Christ, in living an authentic, vibrant, Spirit-filled life.