

# Love Letters

## Introduction

When God has a story to tell, He chooses a man or a woman to live it out. When God chose Saul of Tarsus, the history of the Christian church began to take shape. Unlike the original twelve apostles, who remained closer to their home base of Jerusalem, Saul went out to blaze a trail for the Lord that covered thousands of miles and impacted countless lives for the kingdom of God. Unrivaled in his relentless efforts and passionate pursuit, Paul's proclamation of the gospel message inspired and challenged everyone from the lowliest of slaves to kings and queens in palaces, and heads of state in positions of great power. And for all that Paul would eventually accomplish, the true success of this remarkable servant was cloaked in the certainty that he was nothing—and that Christ was everything!

Throughout the next twenty-three weeks of in-depth study, we will come to know and appreciate the early struggles the churches had to deal with, which helped develop the pattern of sound doctrine and conduct for Christians and church leaders—a pattern that is still in existence today. As we examine these timeless truths with spiritual ears to hear and hearts to obey, God will make Himself known and, along the way, challenge each of us personally to want to impact our world for Christ!

### *Fast Facts ~*

- Paul was a native of Tarsus, born around the time of Jesus. He was brought up in a strict Jewish home and educated in the finest elementary schools. At the age of thirteen, he traveled to Jerusalem to study under the well-known rabbi Gamaliel, receiving training in the Hebrew and Greek languages and culture.
- Both a Pharisee and a citizen of Rome, Paul adopted his father's trade of tent-making in order to be self-supporting as he traveled and ministered.
- Paul's conversion occurred on the Damascus Road around AD 35. He subsequently spent three years in Damascus, where his ministry began.
- He returned to Jerusalem but, after an attempt on his life, the apostles sent him to Tarsus and then on to Antioch, where he taught.
- His first missionary journey took place between AD 46 and 48. He founded the church in southern Galatia, a region of modern Turkey.
- The letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul's first, was written from Antioch in AD 49, to refute the influence of false teachers—legalists—who believed that good works must be added to faith in Christ in order to be saved. Paul's argument was based on the truth that Christians are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ—the free gift of God.
- Paul trekked and sailed the globe to complete three missionary journeys as God's apostle to the Gentiles, leading the way for many to come to know Christ.

thoughts, and personal signature. As you examine Paul's letters this year, see if you can recognize these elements—they are all graciously in evidence.