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Poiesis to improve life satisfaction: A study of the effect of personal nostalgia about God of the Apostle Paul

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What is often discussed about the Apostle Paul is his thoughts, vocabulary and literary style. His physical appearance and illness are left out, and some even consider them too speculative and useless. In our opinion, discussing his physical appearance and illness is also important to understanding his theology, especially regarding his view of God based on his past traumatic experiences. We create the idea of his traumatic experiences related to his physical appearance and illness through the theory of 'compensation' developed by Alfred Adler. The concept of 'compensation' appears in many parts of Paul's letters. What causes him to interpret these negative experiences differently is his knowing of God (Phlp 3:8) – which we call personal nostalgia about God. What made him know God even more was the idea of *poiesis* explicitly mentioned by Christ Jesus on the road to Damascus (Ac 9:3–6).

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study examines the factors that led to an improvement in Apostle Paul's life satisfaction regarding his past, marked by psychological difficulties, considering Alfred Adler's concept of compensation – difficulties stemming from his physical appearance and illness. This study draws upon the disciplines of biblical hermeneutics and psychology – specifically, the concept of nostalgia and Adler's concept of compensation.

Keywords: *poiesis*; nostalgia; compensation; knowledge of God; the Apostle Paul.

Introduction

Paul, the apostle, is the most influential of Christ's apostles in the history of Christianity. Based on Romans, several great figures in Christian history were influenced and moved by the letter (cf. Marshall, Travis & Paul 2002:105). In addition to this most influential letter, 12 other canonical letters are also associated with him. Therefore, based on observations of many paintings and the actors cast in various films depicting his life, it is not surprising that Paul's physical appearance was generally constructed ideally and authoritatively. So, what was the actual physical condition and appearance of the Apostle Paul? Did this also influence his behaviour?

Luther (1883:1245) once expressed his view of the Apostle Paul's appearance, '*Ego credo Paulum fuisse personam contemptibilem, ein armes, dirs menlein sicut Philippus*' [I believe Paul was a contemptible person, a poor, wretched little fellow like Philip], and it is in line with the views of the majority of interpreters (Malherbe 1986:171). However, interpreters are generally reluctant to go beyond that. The literature that consistently appears in discussions of the Apostle Paul's physical appearance is the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (*AP*). One part of this book (AP 3.3) contains a description of Paul by Onesiphorus, 'a man small of stature, bald-headed, a crook in the legs, healthy, a brow meeting in the middle, a small nose, a gracious presence' (cf. Barrier 2009:73). With 'crook in the legs' [ἀγκύλον ταῖς κνήμαις – *agkulon tais knemais*], his gait was certainly not like that of ordinary people. Another description is the view that concludes that Paul suffered from a disease like epilepsy (cf. Best 1987:118; Bruce 1982:209; De Souza et al. 2024; Hughes 1962:442; Martin 1986:414) and poor eyesight (Longenecker 1990:290). In addition to physical illness, some interpret the metaphor 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7) as a kind of mental illness, such as periodic depression or hysteria (cf. Belleville 1996:304; Best 1987:118). Furnish (1984:548), for example, explicitly states, 'The most widely held view, at least in modern times, identifies Paul's thorn in the flesh as some kind of physical or perhaps mental illness'. Unfortunately, because it is considered too speculative, interpreters have left it open and unexplored.

By the information mentioned above, Paul's physical appearance is certainly not ideal for modern humans in general. It is therefore understandable that some Christians feel that such descriptions are overly exaggerated or even demeaning. Several interpreters reject the physical description, or

even accept it in part, but reject it if it is said to be bad for Hellenistic society. By examining several classical works on the physical appearance of figures or heroes in the Hellenistic era, Malherbe (1986:174) concluded, 'It is clear by now that Paul's hooked nose, bowed legs and meeting eyebrows were not unflattering features in the context in which the Acts was written'. Regarding the illness mentioned by Paul in Galatians 4:13, Louis (1997:420) even stated, 'It is useless to speculate about the nature of Paul's sickness'.

In our view, Paul's physical appearance and his illness (cf. Gl 4:14), which could have led to his being despised and humiliated, are also important for understanding his theology, especially his understanding of God. From there, we can trace his role as a believer and as an apostle in relation to his bitter past. Unfortunately, it is uneasy to find an exploration of Paul's theology that begins with physical or even mental issues.

The description of his physical appearance and his illness that could potentially cause him to be insulted and belittled (cf. Gl 4:14) had indeed affected the way others viewed him and his feelings (the way he viewed himself). Therefore, it is not impossible that other people's views gave rise to bad or even traumatic past experiences, which ultimately led to negative compensation in his thoughts and behaviour. In his several letters, he was aware of several problems and physical weaknesses. Based on several 'bitter' events he experienced in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, his physical appearance and illness even worsened, 'Though our outer nature is wasting away' (2 Cor 4:16). He also realised that his illness had become a trial for the congregation he led (cf. Gl 4:14). His transformation from Saul to Paul did not change any physical appearance or his illness; on the contrary, it got worse. So, what changed after he became Paul and became an apostle who actively carried out God's mission?

What has changed is the way he assesses his bitter past experiences caused by his less-than-ideal physical condition or appearance, as well as by his illness, which had the potential to cause him to be insulted and humiliated. This is shown, for example, in the idea of 'The treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor 4:7) and 'a thorn was given me in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7). These two ideas are two of several examples that illustrate how Paul now interprets his physical condition, his illness and the bitter experiences that followed it differently. So, what enabled him to reinterpret his condition? What made him view his physical appearance and his illness differently than before?

The questions will be answered from the perspective of the positive effects of nostalgia. Nostalgia, as a variable in psychological research, and its effects will be explained in the next section. The change in the Apostle Paul's paradigm regarding his past can be reinforced by some empirical research on nostalgia, which has concluded that nostalgia could improve life satisfaction. Among people who experienced lower life satisfaction in the past, it can increase in the present and potentially in the future after their personal nostalgia is successfully stimulated (Ye, Ng & Lam 2018). Nostalgia affects people's evaluations of their past. These findings have also been supported by Zhang et al.'s (2024) empirical research. The same conclusion has also been proven by using the term 'well-being', which has a similar construction to life satisfaction (Hepper et al. 2021).

Thus, even though nothing changed in terms of his physical appearance and illness, which in fact worsened, his personal nostalgia for God significantly improved Paul's life satisfaction. Such personal nostalgia arose from his faithfulness in doing God's command – called *poiesis* (cf. Surbakti & Andangsari 2023, 2025). To prove the hypothesis, the first thing we did was to reconstruct the physical appearance and illness suffered by Paul. After that, we will show that such conditions affect his feelings and behaviour. In addition to presenting internal evidence in the canonical letters, we also draw on psychological theories, primarily those developed by Alfred Adler on individual psychology. Next, we review the theory of nostalgia and its positive effects, particularly the ability to reinterpret past experiences previously perceived as bad or bitter. After that, we show what God did and what Paul did until he finally had an abundance of personal nostalgia about God. The last part is a review of traces of changes in life satisfaction in Apostle Paul, as shown in several parts of his letters, caused by personal nostalgia about God that was successfully stimulated.

The physical appearance and illnesses

Almost all research on Paul's physical appearance cites *Acts of Paul and Thecla* – a text also quoted by Malherbe (1986:170). Malherbe acknowledges that interpreters tend to be more interested in the thoughts, vocabulary and literary style of Paul's writings than in his physical appearance (Malherbe 1986:170). Although Malherbe's efforts provide a balanced perspective on modern society's perception and the Hellenistic era's perception of a short man with bowed legs, this idea still needs to be explored, especially from the perspective of Saul, who later became Paul. In our opinion, such a physical appearance has influenced Paul's past experiences. This is especially true when accompanied by poor eyesight and epilepsy, which could recur at any time. Before moving on to a psychological perspective, it is necessary to explore in greater depth Paul's feelings and appearance as depicted in the canonical texts.

Several interpreters conclude that the reason behind Paul's statement, 'See with what large letters I am writing to you' (Gl 6:11), is that his eyesight was not good or even poor (Longenecker 1990:290). One argument is, '… if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me' (Gl 4:15). Indeed, there are also those who consider such a conclusion to be too speculative and baseless. According to them, 'writing the letters in large, handwritten script' was more an expression of Paul's desire to emphasise the importance of

what he was saying in the letter (Longenecker 1990:290). Although supported by the majority of interpreters, the second conclusion is still speculative (Moo 2013:392). This means that the assumption linking the large letters to his poor eyesight remains wide open. In this regard, we agree with Witherington III (1988:441), who states, 'I would suggest that it is wrong to dismiss the suggestion that Paul writes with the large letters at least in part because of his own eye difficulties … '.

Next, let us examine the phrase 'a thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7). Harris (2005:858–859), along with several other interpreters, has systematically presented a variety of interpretations of this phrase. However, Harris (2005:859) ultimately concludes that most interpreters agree that the phrase refers to a physical illness. Based on his survey of extensive literature on this subject, Martin (1986:414; cf. Belleville 1996:306) also acknowledges that the majority of interpreters view the 'thorn in the flesh' as a form of physical illness. So, what exactly was the physical illness that Paul suffered from?

Several interpreters of the Epistle to the Galatians associate the description of Paul in Galatians 4:13–14 with the 'thorn in the flesh' mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7 (Moo 2013:282; cf. Witherington III 1988:308). In our opinion, when linked to his words in Galatians 4:13–14, his illness was quite serious and affected Paul's feelings, even after he became an apostle. His illness had the potential to cause him not only to be rejected, but also to be insulted and humiliated (Fung 1988:197–198). He was very concerned and referred to his illness as a serious trial for the congregation (cf. Gl 4:14). It is because, in the social construct of society at that time, the illness was considered shameful or lowly, and disgusting (cf. Bruce 1982:209; Fung 1988:197–198; Hansen 1994:134; Morris 1996:138). Not only could his teachings be rejected, but his followers could also be ashamed to admit him. Some interpreters even state that the symptoms of Paul's illness could be identified, especially by the Jews, as a sign of God's displeasure or even punishment (Fung 1988:198; Louis 1997:421; Moo 2013:284), or that the illness could be seen as a sign that demons possessed the Apostle Paul (Longenecker 1990:191). The use of the present tense of the word κολαφίζῃ or *kolaphizē* [to strike] in 2 Corinthians 12:7 shows that the symptoms of the disease had attacked him repeatedly and could still hit him suddenly. Beyond the perspective of theological research, this conclusion is also proven in brain neuroscience and behaviour research, such as that conducted by De Souza et al. (2024). Based on evidence of seven symptoms of *Gastaut-Geschwind Syndrome* in Paul, which were extracted from several canonical texts, they ultimately strongly suspect that Paul most likely suffered from epilepsy (De Souza et al. 2024).

The influence of physical appearance and illness on feelings and behaviour

From the previous description, we can certainly conclude that the physical appearance of this great apostle was not what most adults would consider desirable, especially when accompanied by epilepsy. As an ordinary human being, this reality certainly also affected others and Paul's feelings. The way others viewed him and the way he viewed himself (feelings) in the past certainly left him with unpleasant, if not outright bad or traumatic, experiences. The way Paul analogises himself as a clay jar in 2 Corinthians 4:7 emphasises that, physically and mentally, he realised that he did indeed have many weaknesses (Barnett 1997:230; Collins 2013:98–99; Harris 2005:340; Martin 1986:85). A clay jar is an object of little value: it is cheap, unattractive, of low worth and easily broken (cf. Lm 4:2; Lv 6:28, 11:33). This analogy emphasises that Paul was aware of all his weaknesses (cf. 2 Cor 12:5).

He could not choose to have normal legs, a tall and sturdy body, a head with thick hair, an attractive nose, good eye condition, freedom from epilepsy, etc. All of that had already happened and could not be changed. Without disregarding his good experiences, his physical appearance and illness, as an ordinary human being, had also given rise to bad experiences in the past. His words to Timothy describing his past as a blasphemer and persecutor and insulted God (1 Tm 1:13) are most likely a compensation for his past experiences. The same idea appears in 1 Corinthians 15:9. The same is true of his tendency to take excessive pride in his Jewishness and his past obedience (Phlp 3:4–6). His harsh attitude towards Christians and his assertion that he was superior to all his Jewish peers in terms of obedience and diligence in observing all Jewish traditions also appear in Galatians 1:13–14. Implicitly, the Apostle Paul also acknowledged himself as a proud person or competitive person, because despite his physical condition, he had so many advantages that he was above average compared to most people. This is evident from his statement, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure …' (2 Cor 12:7). In our opinion, to a certain extent, those behaviours were very likely a form of compensation for his bad or traumatic experiences in the past related to his physical appearance, illness and feelings. In personality theory, a strong desire to dominate other people or parties by someone who is physically weak may be a compensation for feelings of inferiority within themselves.

The idea of compensation for negative experiences perceived as stemming from physical appearance and illness can be explained by Adler's theory. According to Adler (1992:33), all humans tend to feel inferior; this feeling exists even in people who appear strong and superior. Inferiority in humans can be interpreted as a feeling of weakness, powerlessness or even uselessness when compared to others. It is this feeling of inferiority that can motivate humans to become better and even superior individuals. In this regard, Adler's theory is closely related to teleological ideas, which concern the future or goals to be achieved (cf. Feist, Roberts & Feist 2021:81).

However, not all humans can behave in this way. Some humans sink further into despair, feeling completely meaningless and therefore always perceiving themselves as being looked down upon by others. They are unable to overcome their feelings of inferiority. If this happens, according to Adler (1992:33–34), the person enters a stage of

an inferiority complex. Negative perceptions of the past and the ability to respond to it are factors that influence the development of an inferiority complex. Adler concluded that an inferiority complex will be reflected in a person's behaviour. People who feel inferior do not necessarily behave calmly or even quietly. Adler (1992) states:

> It does not follow, therefore, that an individual with strong feelings of inferiority will appear to be a submissive, quiet, restrained, inoffensive sort of person … Inferiority feelings can express themselves in a thousand ways. (pp. 32–33)

One of the most prominent factors contributing to inferiority complexes is physical appearance and illness. Adler discusses this in his classical book, *Study of Organ Inferiority and Its Psychical Compensation* (1917). In the foreword to the translated version of the book, Lewis (in Adler 1917) states:

> He [*Adler*] studied thoroughly the feelings of inferiority resulting from organic deficiency and abnormality, as indicated above, and described the unconscious attempt of the ego to compensate for such defects. This whole concept later became popularly known as the 'inferiority complex' and was extended to include physical deficiencies, the personality reaction to which was often an overcorrection of the original disorder. (pp. vii–viii)

This is not surprising because, for Adler (1992:17–18), the mind and body are closely linked in overcoming inferiority. If the body has problems, especially disabilities, it will certainly affect the mind, and vice versa. It is in this context that we assess that at a certain point in time, at least when he was still Saul, the apostle experienced an inferiority complex. The response to an inferiority complex, as Adler refers to it, is compensation (1992:37–38), which requires synergy between the mind and the body. As mentioned above, this compensation can be seen in human thought patterns and behaviour.

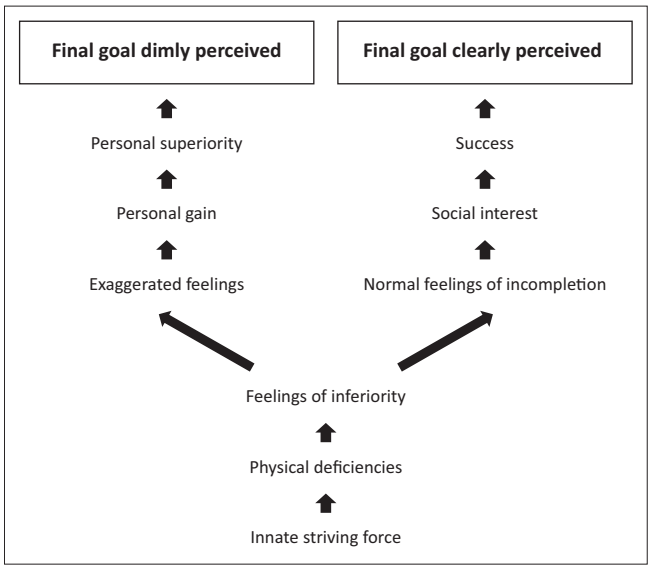
If all humans tend to feel inferior, then the compensation that arises is a tendency and/or motivation to become superior. This is not something abnormal. However, the displayed compensation can be positive or negative. Feist et al. (2021) summarise Adler's idea with the sentence (also see the idea presented in Figure 1):

> In his final theory, Adler identified two general avenues of striving. The first is the socially nonproductive attempt to gain personal superiority, and the second involves social interest and is aimed at success or perfection for everyone. (p. 79)

People who experience an inferiority complex and feel unable to overcome it tend to compensate aggressively. This is done to protect themselves (self-guarding) from various weaknesses and feelings of being belittled or powerless. The aggressive compensation consists of three types: depreciation, accusation and self-accusation (cf. Feist et al. 2021:91). The compensation displayed by such people is the drive to surpass or dominate others to cover up the feelings of insecurity within themselves. Sometimes they do things that blame, belittle, humiliate or even physically harm others so that they can enter a stage of superiority. As shown in Figure 1, such people are identified as those oriented towards personal superiority. We assess that traces of this can be found in Paul's confession about his past, as we mentioned above.

He admits that he was once a violent man, a blasphemer and a persecutor of Christians (1 Tm 1:13). Therefore, he dramatically admits that not only was he the least of the apostles (1 Cor 15:9), but he also was the most sinful of all sinners (1 Tm 1:15). Indeed, such things can be interpreted as humility (cf. Hodge 1980:317), but it cannot be denied that these words were based on his memories of his past behaviours. Furthermore, before becoming an apostle of Christ, he also boasted of his Jewishness and his excessive obedience to all the rules of Jewish tradition, especially when compared to others (Phlp 3:4–6; Gl 1:14). The latter is an indication of the potential for extreme pride in him (cf. 2 Cor 12:7). Traces of this extraordinary awareness of pride can be seen in his statement, 'Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me'; (2 Cor 12:8). After becoming an apostle, he was greatly disturbed by this 'thorn in the flesh' or 'messenger of Satan', so he besought the Lord three times. But because God did not grant his request, he finally realised that God allowed it so that he would not become arrogant. So, we can see that Paul's potential for pride was indeed very great, so much so that God allowed the 'thorn' in his flesh to remain. Thus, from what Paul confessed above, we can see it as a negative compensation for the inferiority complex he experienced in the past.

Meanwhile, positive compensation is displayed by people who have successfully overcome their inferiority complex. For such people, the desire to be superior remains, but it is not primarily to surpass others, let alone by humiliating or hurting them. Their compensation is more about the desire



Source: Feist, G.J., Roberts, T.-A. & Feist, J., 2021, *Theories of personality*, 10th edn., McGraw- Hill Education, New York, NY

FIGURE 1: Two basic methods of striving toward the final goal.

to become the best version of themselves. If this can make a positive contribution to a social community, then that is their goal in becoming superior. As shown in Figure 1, the goal of such people is 'success' – that is, success that comes from the goal of bringing goodness to everyone in a social community (social interest). We see this idea reflected in the Apostle Paul's exhortation after he came to know God more deeply: 'And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised' (2 Cor 5:15). We interpret the goal [*telos*] of believers who should 'no longer live for themselves' as a rejection of personal superiority. That is why such people no longer behave aggressively towards others but are more inclined to build community relationships to foster mutual psychological well-being.

Personal nostalgia and its effects

The word 'nostalgia' comes from classical Greek *nostos* [return home] and *algos* [suffering]. Thus, nostalgia is defined as a longing for home or one's homeland. The word nostalgia is associated with the Odyssey, a heroic epic by Homer (Hepper et al. 2012). The word nostalgia was first constructed as a medical term around 1688 by Johannes Hofer (Routledge et al. 2013:808; Sedikides & Wildschut 2018:48). Hofer's research subjects at that time were several Swiss soldiers who were fighting in France and ended up suffering from their longing to return home (Batcho 2013:2). They experienced what was experienced by the Jewish people as recorded in Psalm 137:5–6 (Batcho 2013:2–3).

Since then, nostalgia has been declared a disease, even a kind of 'cerebral disease' (Routledge et al. 2013:808). In the 19th century, nostalgia was no longer seen as a brain disease. However, nostalgia was still considered a disease related to the nerves, like depression. Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut finally pioneered the proof that nostalgia is not a neurological disease, let alone a disease of the brain, but rather an important source of mental health (Sedikides & Wildschut 2018:48). Nostalgia can be a kind of inner resource that is very much needed by humans when facing a crisis. Nostalgia becomes a kind of combat ammunition, ready to be used when needed. Like ammunition, if nostalgia is appropriately stimulated, it can become a tremendous force for confronting various life crises.

In the latest research on the Book of Joshua, Surbakti and Andangsari (2025) show that the construction of several objects was intended to stimulate nostalgia. Joshua 4 recounts God's command to Joshua to build a monument as a stimulus to nostalgia, using 12 men from each of the tribes of Israel (Jos 4:2). Each of them was asked to take a stone from the Jordan River (Jos 4:5, 8). The stones were then arranged in a specific pattern. The purpose was explicitly stated as a reminder for the children and grandchildren of Israel (cf. Jos 4:6–7, 21–24). If the story behind the arrangement of the stones continues to be shared from generation to generation, even to those who have never seen it, then the events behind the arrangement of the stones will become a source of nostalgia about the God of Israel. The story will be stored within the inner resources of the next generation. If the story is successfully stimulated, for example, just by seeing the arrangement of the stones directly, or even just seeing a picture or painting of it, then it will become a great strength in facing life's crises.

Likewise, at the end of this book (Jos 24), Joshua once again builds a stimulus of nostalgia for the Israelites through the construction of God's holy place in Shechem under a large tree (Jos 24:26). Before the elders of Israel were told to leave, Joshua uttered words that very clearly showed the idea of nostalgia he was referring to:

> And Joshua said to all the people, 'Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the LORD which he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God'. (Jos 24:27)

With objects that stimulate nostalgia, several miraculous stories experienced by Joshua and the Israelites he led will be immortalised. These objects will serve as reminders of God's power and love when they face crises in life – whether in the form of suffering or temptations to abandon God. Surbakti and Andangsari (2025:6) argue that it was this successfully stimulated nostalgia that made what is recorded in Joshua 24:31.

Indeed, the effects of nostalgia can be positive or negative, but in general, they are positive (Routledge et al. 2013:809). This has been proven by many experts through numerous empirical studies, even to this day. Summarising the results of several empirical studies, Surbakti and Andangsari (2022:2, 2025:3) present at least six publications on nostalgia. From these studies, it appears that the positive effects of nostalgia are indeed very dominant. These positive effects include: reducing anxiety about the threat of death, strengthening oneself when facing threats to one's existence, stimulating the improvement of social relationships, self-esteem and optimism; nostalgia can also reduce stress levels in people who have low meaning in life (Surbakti & Andangsari 2022:2). Therefore, the positive effects of nostalgia become very strong when a person feels threatened in their existence (Juhl et al. 2010:313).

Empirical studies on nostalgia conclude that nostalgia often arises when people experience crises in their lives, such as loneliness and other negative emotions (Routledge et al. 2013:809). Thus, it is not an exaggeration that nostalgia arises when someone experiences a crisis in their life, and its positive effects are greater when the crisis is more serious. Empirical research also shows that the most common objects of nostalgia are people, followed by important life events (Routledge et al. 2013:809).

Nostalgia itself consists of two types: personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia (Marchegiani & Phau 2013:24). Personal nostalgia is a person's memory of past experiences they have experienced themselves. Meanwhile, historical nostalgia is a

memory not experienced firsthand. Even though it has not been personally experienced, this memory can be remembered and passed down from generation to generation with a particular interpretation. Of the two types of nostalgia, the potential power of personal nostalgia is greater than that of historical nostalgia. This idea is clearly seen in the story of Joshua. To strengthen Joshua as the new leader replacing Moses, God transformed many historical nostalgia memories about Himself into personal nostalgia (Surbakti & Andangsari 2025). Many of Moses' experiences, which were also known to Joshua, are now experienced by Joshua himself. There are even experiences of God that Moses had not previously had. God did this to strengthen Joshua, who, from the beginning, had faced numerous crises in carrying out his duties as Moses' successor in leading Israel.

The Apostle Paul and the *poiesis*

As mentioned earlier, Paul's memories of his physical appearance and illness, which most likely left him with bad experiences, are clearly shown in his thoughts and behaviour, which we have concluded to be compensatory. Even when he became an apostle, the memory of his past condition clearly remained in his mind. What ultimately changed was the way he interpreted everything that was generally perceived as bad or at least not good. This change in perspective arose from his personal nostalgia about God, which was successfully stimulated. Meanwhile, this kind of nostalgia was born from a way of life that constantly strives to do what God commands in Jesus Christ, called *poiesis* (Surbakti & Andangsari 2023:5, 2025:6).

The term *poiesis* is one of three ways of life that can produce knowledge or experience, which became more popular in the Aristotelian era. The three are *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis* (Groome 1980:153, 156; Volanen 2012:53). *Praxis* and *poiesis* have similar meanings, but Aristotle distinguishes them in his statement:

> … action and making are different kinds of thing, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing, the end cannot be other than the act itself. (NE. 1140b 1–5)

From the quotation, Aristotle identifies *praxis* as action and *poiesis* as making. Thus, the ultimate goal of *praxis* is the activity itself, while that of *poiesis* is the product of that activity (Bernasconi 1986). That is why *poiesis* is often translated as 'making'. Like the analogy used by Jesus in Matthew 7:24–27, to distinguish *praxis* and *poiesis,* Aristotle also uses the analogy of building a house, '… the house and the builder have nothing in common, but the art of the builder is for the sake of the house' (*Pol*. 1328 a 27–35). The ultimate goal of the builder is not the activity of building [*praxis*], but a good and sturdy house [*poiesis*].

Based on this understanding, Surbakti and Andangsari (2023:5) see the significance of using the word *poiein*, rather than *praxis*, in Matthew 7:24–27, because the ultimate goal is the knowledge of God, which in turn produces a 'house', namely the disciples themselves, who have the strength to face various crises in life. This idea of 'knowing God' is in line with the main theme of Matthew's Gospel rhetoric, which is also supported by many interpreters, namely 'God is with us' (Davies & Allison 1997:688; France 1985:48; Kupp 1996:17–27; Menken 2004:129).

Thus, for Jesus in Matthew, the *poiesis* is the most effective means of producing an experience or knowing God, or what is called a personal nostalgia about God. It is this knowing of God that then gives birth to strength in facing life's crises. Surbakti and Andangsari see this idea in depth in Matthew 7:24–27. This text itself is concluded not only as a closing (Gundry 1994:133, 719), but also as the conclusion of Jesus' sermon on the mount (Davies & Allison 1988:178; Schweizer 1975:190; Witherup 2000:65). In this passage, Jesus uses *poiesis* to distinguish those who are ultimately strong in facing various crises in life. Those who hear and do [*poiein*] Jesus' words will be strong in the face of crisis, while those who hear but do not do [*me poiein*] will ultimately be destroyed when various crises in life hit them.

It is very interesting what Jesus Christ said when He first appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. On that occasion, the Apostle Paul, who was previously Saul, had a direct dialogue with Jesus Christ (cf. Ac 9:4–6). The dialogue shows that Saul did not yet know what he would do. That is why Jesus said, 'But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do' (Ac 9:6). The phrase 'what you are to do' is a translation of 'τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν' (*ti se dei poiein*). Note that the word Jesus Christ used in this event is not *praxis* but *poiein*. This means that the command to Saul, who later became Paul, was not simply to engage in activity, but to achieve an ultimate goal through that activity. Unfortunately, interpreters have overlooked the significance of *poiein* in this text.

In our opinion, the idea behind the use of *poiein* in this first encounter is related to the *poiesis*; the purpose of which is for Saul to get to know God better, or, in other words, to have a personal nostalgia about God in Christ Jesus. Why is this important in carrying out his role as an apostle of Christ? Similar to the story of Joshua above, the goal is for Paul to have the strength to face various crises in life while carrying out God's mission. One of these concerns is life satisfaction, one of the many positive effects of nostalgia. Like Joshua's, Paul's leadership, which had several weaknesses, needed strengthening, and that is why he needed a variety of personal nostalgia about God. That was what was expected to be the ammunition stored within him, and this idea was also found in the book of Joshua (cf. Surbakti & Andangsari 2025).

The Apostle Paul's personal nostalgia about God and its effects

The *poiesis* practised by Paul gave rise to personal nostalgia about God, which in turn led to an experience or knowledge of God. This was also Jesus' goal when He first appeared to Saul. Through the words 'what you are to do' or 'what do you need to do' [τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν – *ti se dei poiein*], Saul was

commanded to have a new way of life, namely *poiesis*. The ultimate goal is the knowledge of God.

Implicitly, the idea of 'knowing God' appears abundantly in the writings of Paul but explicitly appears in Philippians 3:8 and 10 through ἡ γνῶσις του Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (*hē gnōsis tu Christu Iēsu*). Verse 10 shows what Paul now desires, namely the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus; and earlier in verse 8, we see the effect of knowing God, which ultimately made him feel that what he once took great pride in or considered an advantage [ἡγέομαι – *hēgeomai*], namely all his achievements as a human being (Phlp 3:4–6), was now a loss [ζημία – *zēmia*]. In Philippians 1:21, he declares that for him, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Suffering in this world is no longer something that frightens him. It is all because of his knowledge of God.

By looking at the forms of suffering he experienced in the past (cf. 2 Cor 11:23–28), we would certainly say that it was all very terrible. At first, Paul also felt that it was very terrible (cf. 2 Cor 1:8–9a). However, because of his knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, he considered all of that to be light [ἐλαφρός – *elafros*] suffering (cf. 2 Cor 4:17). Once again, this happened because of his knowledge of God. He experienced firsthand that, during his ministry as an apostle of Christ, God never left him. His personal nostalgia about God was so abundant. That is what strengthened him in facing various crises in his life. He explicitly expressed that personal nostalgia, 'He delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again' (2 Cor 1:10). Paul was so confident that God would save him again because he had experienced God's love and salvation so many times. These kinds of things became personal nostalgia stored within him. Nostalgia can indeed give birth to hope (Andangsari, Surbakti & Sinambela 2023).

These experiences are shown in 2 Corinthians 4:8–9, 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed'. That is why he knew God so well in Jesus Christ, who had met him on the road to Damascus. God had done His part; Paul's part was to faithfully obey what God commanded – *poiesis*. That was also practised by Joshua (cf. Surbakti & Andangsari 2025:7). The Apostle Paul even proclaimed his obedience before King Agrippa when his existence was in great crisis in the courtroom, 'Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus' (Ac 26:19–20a). It was this obedience that gave birth to a personal nostalgia about God, which in turn became a tremendous strength within the Apostle Paul.

Portrait of the improvement of life satisfaction of the Apostle Paul

As mentioned earlier, the effects of personal nostalgia that have been successfully stimulated are generally very positive and varied. Now, we will specifically look at those related to Paul's improved life satisfaction. For example, related to the epilepsy that he analogised as a 'thorn in the flesh' (cf. 2 Cor 12:7). Of course, suffering from an illness that could and did attack him many times may have given rise to bad experiences in his life. Through his knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, he finally interpreted this as God's way of helping him to know Him better, who loved him dearly and never left him. That is what strengthened him. This can be seen in his reflective statement:

> But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'. I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9–10)

He also interpreted all physical and mental weaknesses as something permitted by God, so that if the gospel, which is heavenly treasure, is ultimately preserved and even spread to the ends of the earth through his servants, it is not because of his strength, but that of God who sent him. He said, 'But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us' (2 Cor 4:7). We consider what the Apostle Paul said to be a form of improved life satisfaction.

Several of Paul's statements clearly emphasise that the change in his perception of his past, along with all the memories that followed, was due to his knowledge of God. This is what we call personal nostalgia about God. The sentences that describe the change in how he assessed himself (2 Cor 12:9–10; Phlp 3:7–8) certainly appeared several years, or even several decades, after his first encounter with Jesus Christ. Then, apart from God's grace, the knowing comes from his obedience and faithfulness in carrying out all of God's commands in Jesus Christ for dozens of years, and that is called the *poiesis*. Experiences that were previously perceived as bad can be reversed and seen as good because Paul finally understood that God had a grand plan for him.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul was truly extraordinary. However, this should not blind us to his less-than-ideal physical appearance and his illness, which could have made him feel insulted and belittled. With his appearance and illness, he had likely experienced bad things in the past. It is shown from several statements he made in his letters. Those bad experiences cannot be completely erased from Paul's memory. As an ordinary human being, his bad experiences due to his physical appearance and illness had given him an inferiority complex, which in turn led to several quite aggressive compensations. In our opinion, this reality does not need to be covered up, let alone considered unnecessary to study. An in-depth study of this idea reinforces the conclusion that Paul was a truly extraordinary apostle! An in-depth study of this issue has revealed that past negative experiences that lead to low life satisfaction can be overcome by fostering personal nostalgia for God. The more diverse personal nostalgia about

God is, the more it will lead to knowledge of God, which, when appropriately stimulated, will give birth to enormous strength when humans face various crises in life. One of these strengths is increased life satisfaction. In the context of Paul, the factors that caused his inferiority complex remained and even worsened, but the compensation he displayed has now changed radically. The reason for this is his knowledge of God in Christ Jesus – that is, personal nostalgia about God coming from the *poiesis*.

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