

Spiritual Growth Resources: From Discipleship to Apostleship

Acts of the Church

Early Church Faith for Today



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Brief overview of chapter 9

Saul/Paul is probably the most known person in the New Testament, if not the Bible. Paul makes his appearance on the scene by “consenting” to Stephan’s stoning. The believers leave Jerusalem because persecution broke out. The Gospel was already in Samaria. Apparently, it had spread out as far as Damascus. Saul thinks that he can get ahead of the spread and contain the spreading of the Gospel. Saul went to Damascus with a purpose (to kill and imprison), but his purpose changed when he came face-to-face with Jesus. His life was never the same. Saul went to Damascus pursuing Christians, not knowing that God was pursuing him.

After his conversion, Paul goes through a “desert” experience before beginning a traveling ministry of preaching. He joins the many prophets and chosen ones who go through a training ground of sorts to be ready for a very demanding ministry.

Knowing the Word of God, **Growing** in our Faith, **Going** to share the good news.

K N O W | G R O W | G O

Unlikely Missionary

K N O W

Read Acts 9:1-31

1. How would you characterize Saul's zeal for his cause? Acts 9:1-2
 - A. Very intentional.
 - B. Overzealous.
 - C. Misdirected.
 - D. Fully invested in stopping the Gospel from being preached.
 - E. Other.
2. How can you believe something so strongly and be so wrong? Acts 9:3-4; Acts 26:9-11.
 - A. You only see what you want to see.
 - B. You follow the faith of your fathers, and it becomes tradition and part of the culture.
 - C. You become part of the institution, and you want to keep it going.
 - D. You haven't left your "bubble."
 - E. Other.
3. How have you found yourself "persecuting" Jesus? Acts 9:5
 - A. I haven't persecuted "the Lord," just some his people.
 - B. I have tried to do a lot for God, but that hasn't brought me closer to God.
 - C. My words have "scattered" people away from God and church.
 - D. When I get away from an honest and authentic relationship in prayer and reading the Word of God.
 - E. Subscribing to a religion that goes out of its way to imprison and not to set free.
 - F. Other.
4. Why is being "knocked to the ground" part of our discipleship and spiritual growth? Acts 9:6-9
 - A. Jesus wants to bring awareness to our blindspots.
 - B. We know the Lord, but we still ask at times, "Who are you, Lord?"

- C. Our self-sufficiency needs to humbly allow others to help us get back on our feet and guide us.
 - D. Our eyes need to be reset, to see things in a new way.
 - E. It gives us time to meditate about our ways, the direction of our lives.
 - F. Other.
5. What was Ananias' role in bringing Saul back to health? Acts 9:10-19
- A. To lay hands on Saul so he can regain his sight.
 - B. Saul had a dream that Ananias would come and lay hands on him, and he would see again.
 - C. To lay hands on a persecutor, hands to heal, not to imprison.
 - D. To show grace to Saul when Paul thought he deserved punishment.
 - E. Getting Saul baptized.
 - F. Other.
6. What other things did Saul do to get on the right track? Acts 9:20-22
- A. He was mingling with God's people.
 - B. He spoke of Jesus with others and in the synagogue.
 - C. Saul's strength was regaining more and more. He was taking care of his health.
 - D. Started teaching.
 - E. Other.
7. How do you think Saul felt now being the persecuted one? Acts 9:23-25
- A. How quickly roles switch. Enemies are now allies.
 - B. Those who you persecuted, imprisoned, and killed were now your brothers and sisters.
 - C. He got to experience the fear of having to be on the run like those he persecuted.
 - D. He knew he wasn't alone. He had friends looking out for him.
 - E. Other.
8. How was Paul accepted in Jerusalem? Acts 9:26-27
- 1. The disciples greeted him with skepticism.
 - 2. People were still afraid of him.
 - 3. They thought of him as the "persecutor," not the converted Saul.
 - 4. People wanted to test him out before they accepted him.
 - 5. Other.

9. How crucial was Barnabas' role in bringing Saul into the circle of disciples? Acts 9:27
- A. Barnabas introduced Saul to the group.
 - B. Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36).
 - C. Barnabas was a respected member of the community. (Acts 4:36-37)
 - D. Barnabas gave testimony of how Saul was preaching Jesus Christ with boldness.
 - E. Other.
10. What did the church do in this short time of peace? Acts 9:31
- A. The church had a more significant influence on the community.
 - B. They didn't let their guard down and continued preaching the Gospel.
 - C. The believers had a greater sense of God's presence in their midst.
 - D. The church multiplied.
 - E. Other.

G R O W

A couple of people in this passage go through some growth in several areas. Foremost of those is Saul. We will see Ananias' hesitancy to minister to Saul. The disciples back in Jerusalem had a "healthy" dose of skepticism when Saul shows up, claiming to now be one of them. Barnabas partners up with Saul.

Saul's introduction at the scene shows him consenting to Stephan's death. Those who were to stone Stephan took off their outer garment and placed them at Saul's feet (Acts 7:58). Saul is a religious fanatic with a passionate zeal for the wrong cause. In Acts 9:1, Paul is not content with getting rid of the Christians in Jerusalem. He volunteers to go outside of the Jerusalem jurisdiction to find Christians. The very ones who were fleeing persecution. He's willing to travel to bring "dissenters" back for punishment, so he procures a permit to go into Damascus. Saul believes that imprisonment and the threat of death are good ways to get people to comply with the religious authorities.

You find in Saul the quickest turnaround in religious beliefs. He truly believes he is doing God's work. He is willing to terrorize Christians, drag them back to Jerusalem, incarcerate them, and in some instances consent to their death.

His encounter with Jesus changes all of that in a short period. Jesus' words to him, "Saul, Saul..." remind us of how Jesus called his friends, "Martha, Martha..." It is an endearing way of addressing someone. His question for Saul was life-changing, "why are you persecuting me?" Imagine being knocked to the ground with a blinding light, and then you hear someone asking you why you are persecuting them. Saul refers to Jesus as "Lord" in his response. He no longer resists. He allows his companions to lead him "by the hand" into Damascus. Saul was humbled. His whole world has come to a stop. He had to reevaluate his beliefs and his position on different issues. He had to take stock of his own life and come to terms with his sinfulness, the hatred he had towards Christians. He had time to think about why he had invested so much time and energy trying to defeat what he thought was evil and blind to the evil within himself.

Saul was praying. That is what Jesus tells Ananias as to why he needs to see Saul. What was so special about Saul praying. Saul's prayer life had changed too.

Saul saw Ananias in a vision. Not only did Saul have an encounter with the risen Lord. Saul gets a vision showing him how he was to regain his sight. Saul is blinded but can see his

future better than ever. Ananias tells him his future fate. God reveals to him how much he must suffer for the sake of Jesus' name.

Saul allowed Ananias to lay hands on him and speak words of blessing on him. Saul regains his sight. Ananias was probably one of those who he came to arrest and drag back to Jerusalem. Now Saul is in the physical and spiritual care of Ananias, who most likely was on his "Hitlist."

Ananias probably is the one who gives him his first Bible study about Jesus being the Messiah. Ananias tells Saul what Jesus told him. "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Acts 9:15-16.

Ananias also grew in his faith as a result of this. Ananias was skeptical. Jesus' response to Ananias' concern was he ought to go because Saul was praying, and God showed Saul Ananias' face as the one who would come to pray for him and give him sight. Why did God choose Ananias? Ananias was God's instrument to be the physical representation of God. Ananias' laid hands on Saul and spoke God's words to him. Saul ends up getting baptized. Saul is now submitting to Ananias' spiritual leadership. All of this must be humbling to Ananias too. Ananias' opened his eyes to see how God's love could reach such a hardened soul like Saul.

APPLY

1. How does Saul's faith journey give you hope for yourself and for many others you may consider too difficult to reach with the Gospel?
2. Think of that time in your life when you were "knocked to the ground." How grateful are you for this encounter?
3. Who is someone transformed by the Gospel but you thought was too far gone to be reached?

G O

Saul was a missionary *going* in the wrong direction. He believed in this mission to purge Jerusalem of this sect that was corrupting Judaism. Saul was zealous for Jerusalem. Was he sincerely zealous for God? He thought so.

Misguided evangelism happens a lot. In the name of saving souls, we can be driving them away. We excuse terrorism in the name of evangelism. History is full of examples of misguided Christians persecuting faithful believers for not following the accepted way of things. Somehow, religions and people have not understood that forced conversions don't transform the heart. You may get compliance or conformity. Force may convince but not convert.

I can hear some of you say, "I don't like talking about my faith because I don't want to force my beliefs on anyone." You shouldn't. We already know that you actually can't force beliefs on anyone. The Holy Spirit is the one who convinces, convicts, and converts. We are like the Ananias to Saul.

God told Ananias to go to where Saul was and pray with him and share God's message. We are the instruments God uses to bring sight to the blind. God heals; we are the ones to provide the physical touch. God convicts and converts; we are the ones to open our mouths and speak God's words.

Barnabas plays a vital role in the *going* that is many times overlooked - **encouragement**. Ministry can be challenging at times. You may feel left out, uninvited, overlooked. These can all be painful experiences that can turn a person away from the mission. The disciples back in Jerusalem didn't seem too eager to bring Saul into their circle. They were skeptical, and they allowed their skepticism to get the best of them. They forgot God's grace and power to save. Many souls are saved by the simple act of encouragement.

Barnabas becomes the instrument to get Saul introduced to the church in Jerusalem. Barnabas spoke on his behalf. When you have a past like Saul, it helps when someone else believes in you and believes you. People like Barnabas are crucial to the survival of the church. Be an encourager, not a discourager.

Also, for church growth to happen, we must be willing to open up our circle of friends to let new people join. We cannot have closed, exclusive groups. Practice being a Barnabas this week. Do it in your workplace, your school, and next Sabbath at church when you see someone new wandering around wanting to be included, wanting to be part of church life.

APPLY

1. Who represents your style of evangelism, Saul, Ananias, or Barnabas?
2. Take a risk to invite someone into your circle of friends, invite them to church, invite them to your small group, invite them on a hike with your friends.
3. Not having to force someone to believe takes the pressure off of us. Practice sharing your faith, make the invitation, and let God take care of the results.
4. Would you like to be part of a class to learn how to share your faith? (Contact Pastor Pedro at ptrinidad@carmsda.org)

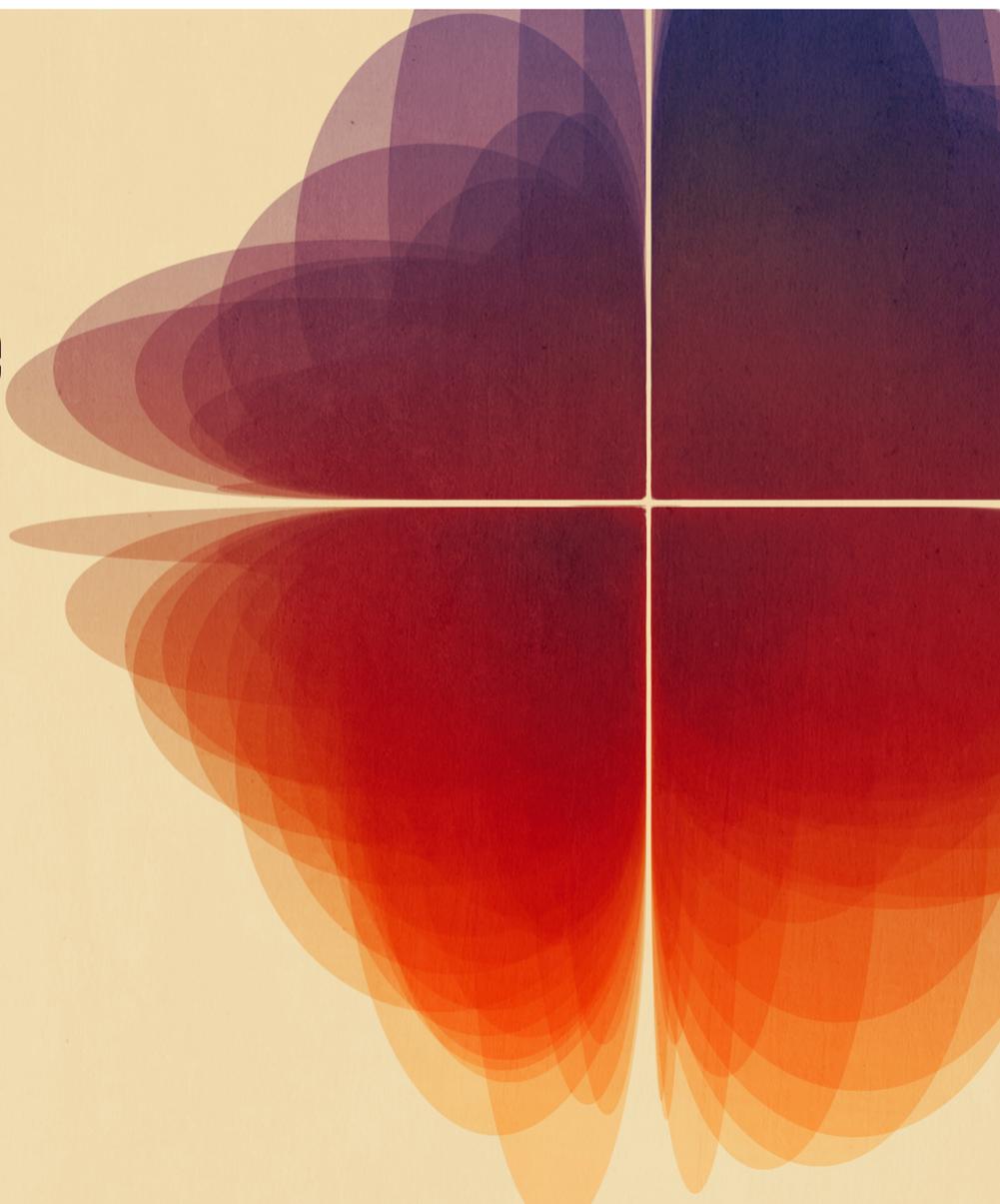
Scripture Memorization for this Week

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. - Acts 9:31

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Acts 9:31



Praise & Worship in Song

The Conversion of Saul



The Commission by Cain



T H E C O M M I S S I O N
C A I N

