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small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

UNLIMITED PATIENCE • Paul's Conversion

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 9:1-30

In Acts 9, we pick up the story of Saul, who was briefly introduced at the end of chapter 7, where Stephen was martyred. He was one of the great opponents of the gospel, who traveled around threatening the believers and seeking to have them imprisoned. This passage is the dramatic account of his conversion to faith. Later known as Paul, he became one of Christianity's first missionaries and its chief apologist, writing 13 New Testament books. God, in His amazing grace, loved him, opened his heart to believe, and forgave him.

In verse 3, Paul is on his way to Damascus to arrest any Christians he can find. On the way he meets Jesus, in all His blinding glory. Jesus asks him, "Why do you persecute Me?" Jesus took as an affront to Himself all the grief that was done to His followers. He suffered when they were hurt. Paul never answers the question, but immediately obeys Jesus' command to go into the city.

Meanwhile, a Christian named Ananias has a vision from God in which he is told to go meet Saul. He knows who Saul is and what his errand is, and so is afraid to go. But God assures him that He, too, knows all about Saul, and has a plan for his life that no one would ever expect. Believing God, Ananias ignores the risk, and goes to meet with Saul. He greets him as, "Brother Saul," identifying him as a believer, and restores his sight. Then Saul, signifying his new faith in Christ, is baptized.

As if that wasn't extraordinary enough, in verse 20, Saul begins to preach the gospel. The Jewish leaders are astonished, baffled, and angered. It's absolutely inconceivable to them that Saul could turn like this, and they try several times to kill him, but fail. Undeterred, Saul continues to preach, and debate, proving that Jesus is the Christ. The bulk of the remainder of Acts is the record of Saul taking the gospel throughout the known world.

Later in his life he wrote I Timothy, saying:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life. (I Timothy 1:12-16).

What's the Big Idea?

This passage is about an extraordinary and unexpected conversion. Saul, enemy of the gospel, came to faith and began preaching the gospel himself. No one is beyond the reach of the gospel. We should look for opportunities to lead people to Christ, even if we think they would never believe.

What's the Problem?

We tend to shrink back from sharing the gospel. Either because of our own fear or our lack of faith that the message will produce life change in those with whom we share it.





God still makes such examples. He may do it directly like he did with Saul, but He is more likely to use the people in your group as ambassadors to carry the message of the gospel.

Have you noticed that Luke seems bent on normalizing evangelism? To hear him tell it, it just seems to be what Christians do. Ananias is terrified of this antagonistic Christian hater, but Jesus tells him to go and he goes. Saul comes to faith and immediately begins to preach the gospel. Help your group grapple with the normalcy of redeemed people talking about their Redeemer. God can use you and the people in your group to lead the Sauls on your campus to faith. They, in turn, can lead yet others to the Savior.

What's Our Response?

Please help the members of your Bible study think through who they most identify with in this passage. Are they like Ananias, fearful and needing prompting to obey? Or are they like Saul, forgiven a great debt, and therefore compelled to share the gospel with all who will listen. In either case encourage them to take steps of faith to make the gospel known in the world around them.

Perhaps you could challenge them to identify someone on your campus, or in their life, who they are tempted to believe is beyond the reach of the gospel. As a group, pray for them, and ask God to show you how you could lead them to faith.

What Are the Questions?

Acts 9:1-30

LAUNCH

Who is the most outspoken critic of Christianity that you know? What would it take for you to believe that they might believe the gospel?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 9:1-2.

1. Christianity at this time was known as "the way." What do you think is the origin of this name?
2. Why do you think Saul hated Christianity so much?

Read Acts 7:54-60.

3. What significance might the author, Luke, be intending by introducing Saul to us at this point? How might Saul be an answer to Stephen's prayer?

Read Acts 9:3-19.

4. What is the first question Jesus asks Saul? Why did He phrase His question this way?
5. In verse 10, the focus shifts to Ananias. What does God want him to do? How does he feel about this?
6. How would you feel if God wanted you to meet with someone known for killing Christians? Would you do it?

7. What motivated Ananias to obey?

8. How did Ananias address Saul? What does that indicate?

9. In verse 15, God says that Saul is to be His chosen instrument for taking the gospel to the Gentiles. What would have made Saul a good candidate for this task?

10. In verse 16, God says, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Why do think God says this?

11. As demonstrated in the book of Acts, why does preaching the gospel go hand-in-hand with suffering?

Read Acts 9:20-31.

12. How did the Jewish leaders react to Saul's conversion?

13. List all the verbs attributed to Saul in vv. 20-29?

APPLY

14. With whom do you identify more in this study? Saul or Ananias? Why?

15. Saul's behavior in verse 20 is totally unexpected. He immediately begins to preach the very faith he once tried to destroy and people were astonished. Think of the most outspoken critic of Christianity on your campus. What would be the impact if they came to faith?

16. What would be the impact on your campus if you became an evangelist like Saul?

17. Why do you think Luke talks so much about evangelism?

18. How are his descriptions of the early church like or unlike things at this campus?

What Are the Answers?

1. The name, "the Way" comes from John 14:6 where Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
2. Allow the group to discuss. He had a misguided zeal for legalistic righteousness, and thought Christianity defiled God's holy laws.
3. One connection may be that Saul is a direct answer to Stephen's prayer for those who were persecuting him.
4. Why do you persecute me? He took the pain of His church personally.
5. He is supposed to go to Saul and restore his sight. He's scared.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. He believed God.
8. He calls him "brother," indicating he welcomes him as a believer.
9. There is no right answer. It might be his tenacity or even expertise in the Jewish Law.
10. Perhaps this is to say Saul will undergo as much, or more, persecution than he has caused. Due to his own involvement in persecuting Christians, Saul would have greater ability to patiently endure. Also, suffering goes hand-in-hand with preaching the gospel.
11. The true nature of this world, is a battle between God and Satan. Preaching the gospel advances God's kingdom, and brings this hidden battle to the surface.
12. They were astonished, angered, murderous. Paul continues to preach.
13. Preach, grew more and more powerful, baffled, proving that Jesus is the Christ, learned of their plan, tried to join the disciples, saw the Lord, preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus, stayed with them, moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord, talked and debated. The guy was a ministry machine.
- 14.-16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. It seems he wants to showcase evangelism as a normal, expected part of the Christian life.
18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8