

From Terrorist to Evangelist | Acts 9:1-30 Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To participate in God's surprising mission to draw people we never would expect to himself.

Icebreaker: Have you ever had a surprising friendship with someone you didn't think you would click?

Discussion

Transition: God often works in surprising ways. Sometimes, he transforms people we would never think would become followers of Jesus. Saul is perhaps the most surprising of all these transformations.

Go around and have different people reach each of these passages:

Acts 8:1-4

¹ And Saul approved of their killing him (Stephen).

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 9:1-2

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Acts 22:3-5

³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from

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them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

[Acts 26:9-12](#)

⁹ "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities. ¹² On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests."

1. What do we learn about Saul? How was he intensifying the persecution that started with the stoning of Stephen?

Read:

[Acts 9:3-9](#)

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

[Acts 26:14](#)

¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

2. Why does Jesus tell Saul that Jesus is the one whom Saul is persecuting?
3. Why does Jesus use the image of kicking against the goads?

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4. Is there some way that you feel like you have been kicking against the goads? A way your conscience is bothering you? A way you feel the emptiness of what you've been chasing?

Read:

[Acts 9:10-19](#)

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

5. What would it have felt like for Ananias to be given this command at first?
6. How can we play a role like Ananias today?

Optional Dig Deeper: What would Saul have experienced through these events? And what would have been surprising to Saul about his new mission?

Sharing and Prayer:

Have each person silently name a person or a group who is their enemy and pray for them silently for a minute.

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After a minute, close the group with this prayer:

Shine your light of truth into the darkness of my enemies' hearts. Remove them from the shadows of evil. Give them liberty from past wounds. Give them unhindered steps, God, that they might walk without stumbling. Keep them back from that which will harm them more.

Restrain the forces of evil that work against them and cause them to act in destructive ways. Give me power in prayer to resist these powers and principalities with you, Jesus.

Give me strength to endure as long as it takes to endure.

Give me patience to wait for your will to come forth.

Give me contentment in the process of discipline.

Give me fortitude for the race.

Give me acceptance of your will at any cost.

Bring me into a broad place where I may pray for my enemies freely, honestly, effectively. I want you to hear my prayer, Lord, even as I want your will to be done. Teach me how to pray for my enemies, for I am your child. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

From "Canyon Road" by Kari Kristina Reeves