

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ
Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 8

Day One: Missionary to the Gentiles

The entrance of Saul in Luke’s account leads the reader back to the end of chapter 7 and the tragic act of Stephen’s death. Those who witnessed the stoning had lain down their clothes at a young man’s feet whose name was Saul. Following his consent to that horrific act, in chapter 8 we saw him making havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women to prison. Here in chapter 9, he expands the hunt more than a hundred miles northeast of Jerusalem to Damascus which was about a six-day walk. His persistent determination was a testimony of his commitment to the cause.

Luke here refers to Christianity as *the Way*—the earliest name for the Christian movement. It indicates that faith in Christ transcends belief in a set of opinions or doctrines. It is rather a way of living and behaving as well as believing. It is a fitting title—one Luke uses five times in the book of Acts.

Read Acts 9:1–9.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impression of Saul’s encounter with the Lord.

Memory verse: Proverbs 21:2 Write out the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.

Acts 9 does not contain the entire record of what took place on that Damascus Road. Paul himself recounts the story repeatedly in his own words. Look up each passage and record your summary highlights. Contrast and compare any similarities and differences you notice. (Please note: although there are differences, there are no disagreements or discrepancies. The different records simply reflect the manner in which the facts of the event are presented to different groups of people on multiple occasions.)

1. Acts 9:3–9 (The shortest of the historical accounts.)

2. Acts 22:4–16 (Delivered by Paul in the Hebrew tongue to the Jews. It is the longest recorded statement.)

3. Acts 26:12–18 (Given by Paul in the presence of the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish King Agrippa; addressed to both Jews and Gentiles.)

4. Paul also mentions his conversion briefly in the following places. Note what you find in each case.

- a. 1 Corinthians 15:8–9 _____

- b. Galatians 1:15–16 _____

- c. 1 Timothy 1:12–13 _____

- d. According to 1 Timothy 1:12–13, *why* did God show Paul mercy? *How* did God demonstrate grace to Paul?

God extends mercy by not giving us what we *do* deserve—which is death; and He offers grace by giving us what we *don't* deserve—which is a call to serve Him!

Day Two:

Called and Sanctified

Read Acts 9:10–30.

It has been noted that when God saves a man, He first takes the man—breaks the man—and then makes the man. The divinely predetermined outcome of God’s call is becoming fit for the Master’s use. Saul’s unique call is one of the most dramatic on record, revealing to the world what God does when He fully invades a person’s life.

In a strikingly undramatic follow up to a startling conversion, what we see in verses 10–30 is the *setting apart* of God’s chosen instrument for His own purposes. It is *sanctification* in its infancy, the beginning of a process that lasts a lifetime. Saul, this once powerful and zealous persecutor of the church is led humbly by the hand into the city of Damascus. “And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank” (Vv. 8–9).

1. What are some of the things Saul might have experienced during those three days of fasting and blindness?
2. What was Ananias sent by the Lord to do? What was his initial reaction? Why?
3. God will now unfold a new direction for the church to His humble servant Ananias before revealing it to the rest of the world. What did God tell Ananias about the vessel he was sent to pray for? Vv. 15–16
4. How did Ananias acknowledge Saul’s conversion? Briefly cite the points of his message to Saul in verses 17–19.

Saul immediately began to grow in his understanding of Christianity while preaching that Christ is the Son of God. His call answered and his initial training begun, Saul headed into the desert of Arabia for some prolonged time alone with the Lord. The reference to “many days” (v. 23), speaks of this period of three years he remained in Arabia. There he received greater deeper revelations from the Lord that would prepare him for his life’s mission.

5. How does God sanctify His people today? See John 17:17 and Ephesians 5:26.
 - a. By whom are you being sanctified? 1 Corinthians 6:11 How does this understanding affect your perspective?

*For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one,
for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.*

Hebrews 2:11

Day Three: Saved and Satisfied to Serve!

Read Acts 9:31–43.

The churches were enjoying a season of great prosperity according to verse 31: *Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.* Notice the key words: *peace—edified—walking in fear of the Lord—and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.* The gospel was going forth; people were being blessed, healed, and served by the body of Christ.

Out of the vast multitude of believers, Luke singles out a female disciple for honorable mention. Her name is *Tabitha* (Aramaic) or *Dorcas* (Greek)—both names mean “gazelle.” One wonders why Luke mentions a woman at all, and when he does it is within the context of her using her gift to serve others. We aren’t told whether she was single, married or widowed; simply that her life was one of value.

1. What facts can you determine about her from your reading of the text?

2. To whom do you think she ministered?

Certainly devout in her faith and service, Dorcas was loved by all. And in a scene reminiscent of Jesus raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead (Mark 5:21–24; 35–43), here again is an upper room full of people mourning the loss of their loved one. Peter voices the equivalent of Jesus’ words: “Tabitha kumi [arise]” (v. 40), and she opened her eyes and sat up.

3. What familiar result took place after Peter raised Dorcas back to life? (v. 42)

4. From your perspective, why would Luke think it significant to focus his readers’ attention on a relatively unknown female disciple of Christ? Could it be because it is the everyday ordinary behind-the-scenes believers who exemplify gospel love in action—without any expectation of recognition or applause? Please share your thoughts.

5. Personal: Are *you* satisfied to be saved to serve others? It is in God’s plan for you. Are you looking for recognition or reward? Or is performing “secret service” fulfillment enough?

Day Four:

The Goads of God

For Saul, that day on the Damascus Road was much like any other, hunting down Christians—who were of “the Way” and bringing them bound to Jerusalem. But then *suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. He fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads’* (Acts 9:3–5). Oh, that we could hear the tone of the Lord’s words, for they were certainly meant as a tender loving appeal to Saul. Jesus used an expression from a common Greek proverb with which Saul would be well acquainted. They were words aimed at the heart of the religious leader who represented persecution to the church of Christ!

Jesus Himself appeared to Saul, revealing that he was taking a hard path in struggling *against* God’s divine promptings. Had the Lord not intervened that day, Saul would have been lost. How kind it was of the Lord to condescend to such a sinner to “goad” him in the right direction (and Paul would later write about this marvelous grace in his letters). The word *goad* means to *spur, drive, or incite to action*. Oxen and other beasts of burden were most often *goaded* to move in their master’s desired direction. But in the Christian life these *goads* are Holy Spirit promptings—convictions—which can cause a person to immediately pause and assess which is the best way to take. If a person is resistant, ignoring these goads, the way can become very hard. But if, on the other hand, we yield obediently to these promptings, the understanding of God’s will and His way can become quite clear. God has indeed planned our way, but He also gives us a free will to *choose* whether or not we will obey.

Deeper Discoveries ~

Saul was resisting, kicking against God’s highest and best for him without realizing it. There will be times when we too will face difficult choices, causing us to feel the same divine sharp pricks goading us in the right direction. Look below at the references taken from the book of Proverbs. Consider the lesson in each verse and how it may apply to *your* life right now. Make note of your discoveries in the space provided.

- a. Proverbs 15:24 _____

- b. Proverbs 16:9 _____

- c. Proverbs 16:17 _____

- d. Proverbs 16:25 _____

- e. Proverbs 19:21 _____

- f. Personal: What *goad* is God using to get your attention and spur you to action or a different direction right now? Is it a crisis situation or a sudden illness? The loss of a loved one or financial hardship? Write it down, committing yourself to Him in prayer.

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Using Psalm 139:23–24, prayerfully ask God to lead you in His way.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.

Notes

A series of horizontal lines for writing notes.

