



## WEEKLY STUDY

### ***The Book of Acts - Week Five***

We have reached another milestone in our study of the book of Acts. In chapter 9 we are more fully introduced to the character of Saul. As a persecutor of early followers of Jesus, he was an unlikely candidate to lead the charge of the Gospel among the Gentiles. His conversion from persecutor to chief promoter is evidence of God's ability to use anyone for God's purposes. As you read and study this week, you might find inspiration in Saul's story. Are you placing a limit on God's ability to use you and all of your faults? God is able!

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,  
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit [prov.church/smallgroups](http://prov.church/smallgroups).

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for the witness of the Church as our nation and the world continue to reel from division and violence. May the Way of Christ be lifted up as the true way of peace.

## DAILY STUDY

### MONDAY: ACTS 9.1-2 (NIV)

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> 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.*

- We first met Saul a couple of chapters ago during the stoning of Stephen. ([Acts 7.57-58. 8.1](#)) He seems to have presided over this murder. Certainly he approved of and had even inspired this act with his persecution of the fledgling Christian community. So it was important for Luke to point back to that moment as he began to record the story of Saul's conversion. He was breathing out threats of murder against the disciples. It's more than a shout or an occasional cry against the disciples, it was in every breath Saul breathed. He was obsessed with his mission against the church. What about the early church do you think he found to be so threatening? Does the church of Jesus Christ seem imposing or threatening to the powers of this world today? Why or why not?
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- **Prayer Prompt: Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.(Luke 23.34)**
- *God, the threats that are breathed out against the church today come from outside and within the church. Help me to have a heart of forgiveness and steady my faith in your victory. Amen.*

### TUESDAY: ACTS 9.3-6 (NIV)

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

<sup>5</sup> *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

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

- "Who are you Lord?" is a question that can be prompted by awe, fear, and curiosity—maybe all at the same time. Saul clearly knew that this thing he was experiencing was not normal. As much as he thought he knew about God, he was now encountering God in person and it forced him to the ground. In what ways has your knowledge about God translated into an encounter with God?
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- **Prayer Prompt: You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. (Jeremiah 29.13-14)**
  - *Jesus Christ, Son of God, I want to know you more and more. Step into my path, set me on the ground if you need to, so that I might dare to ask who you are! Amen.*

### **WEDNESDAY: ACTS 9.7-12 (NIV)**

*The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

*<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he answered.*

*<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”*

- Notice how we see a vision within a vision in this passage. Two men (who have never met) have received visions that cause their paths to cross. It’s like a divine introduction. “Ananias, meet Saul. Saul, meet Ananias.” He even gives the address! Sometimes God seems to be elusive, but sometimes God lays it down in no uncertain terms. When have you felt such clear direction from God?
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- **Prayer Prompt: Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup> in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3.5-6)**
- *Oh God, make my paths straight today. I trust in you with all my heart. Amen.*

## THURSDAY: ACTS 9.13-18 (NIV)

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

*<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*

*<sup>17</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup>*

- Ananias was suspicious of the instructions he was given from the Lord. “Are you sure this is the man whose sight you want to restore?” We would probably do the same. Saul was well known as a persecutor of the church, and it seemed risky to restore his sight. God reassures him that Saul’s journey will not be easy, but that he is God’s chosen instrument. Once he could see again, Saul was baptized. That is familiar language for one who is giving their life to the cause of Christ. I once was blind but now I see! Has there been a moment when you felt as if you were given fresh vision for the Kingdom of God? What did it lead you to do?
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- **Prayer Prompt: Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch; like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see. (Amazing Grace, John Newton)**
- *God, if I am only seeing partially— if my vision of your Kingdom is impaired, send an Ananias to set me free from my blindness and allow me to live for you. Amen.*

## FRIDAY: ACTS 9.19-25 (NIV)

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

*<sup>23</sup> After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, <sup>24</sup> but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. <sup>25</sup> But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

- Praise for persecution turns to persecution for praise! It's amazing how quickly we see that Saul indeed suffered for the name of Jesus. The very crowds who rallied to his cause when he was arresting believers are now plotting against him. Saul's previous power and fame were fleeting and he was not as strong as he thought he was. The old position and platform gave him an opportunity to share the good news behind his conversion, but the crowds weren't ready to follow him through this sudden change. Have you ever noticed how crowd-mentality tends to shift more slowly? Have you ever been suspicious of a sudden change in the heart of an evil person? Describe that experience below.

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- **Prayer Prompt:** "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19.9-10)
- *God, I thank you for seeking out a man like Saul and offering your salvation to him. I too struggle to fully live out my faith at times. Help me to be bold and courageous to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## **SATURDAY: ACTS 9.26-31 (NIV)**

*When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

*<sup>31</sup> Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.*

- Barnabas played a large role in persuading the apostles to accept the transformation of Saul. Is there someone who has spoken up for you in your faith? The passage ends where several episodes in Acts have taken us...a church that is growing. It is amazing how growth occurs through times of persecution. Saul was once arresting Christians, and then was hunted down for his own belief in Christ...and yet the church increased in numbers. What evidence do you see that the church is living in the fear of the Lord and is encouraged by the Holy Spirit? What evidence do you see that it is still growing?

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- **Prayer Prompt** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together (Hebrews 10.23-24)
- *Lord God, thank you for the gift of the church. I am encouraged at signs of your continual work through the Spirit to bring about growth in the Body of Christ. Amen.*

## GROUP DISCUSSION

Conversion can be a tricky topic because we all experience it differently. It's not always linear or sudden, but there is evidence of conversion we can look for.

Commentator John Stott wrote:

*"Every new convert becomes a changed person, and has new titles to prove it, namely a 'disciple' or 'holy person' newly related to God; a 'brother or sister, newly related to the church; and a 'witness', newly related to the world."* -John Stott

- How do you see these three areas of relationships impacted by your faith in Jesus? How do you see these relationships present in other members of your group?

Relationship to God

Relationship to others

Relationship to the church

Regardless of whatever disqualifications you think you have, God has not written you off, you are not too far from his grace!