

## Acts 9:1-31

### *Belief And Big Changes*

? Share an example of a person (either someone you know or a celebrity) who did a highly-visible 180° turn in their lifestyle or beliefs. Do you believe it was authentic? Why?

#### **Acts 9:1-19a (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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."

<sup>7</sup> 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."

<sup>13</sup> "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> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

#### **Power Play**

Saul (Paul) specifically asks the religious leaders in Jerusalem for the authority to arrest Christians in Damascus. This would legitimize his actions and put pressure on the synagogues to participate instead of staying neutral, as well as pressuring Jews to ostracize their newly-Christian neighbors and friends. This is a religious power play, independent of the higher legal governmental authority.

? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, “breathing out murderous threats?” (vs. 1)

? In verse 4, Jesus asks Saul, “Why are you persecuting me?” Why would Jesus say “me” instead of “my people?”

? God gives Ananias a command in verses 11 and 12. In verses 13 and 14, Ananias voices his concerns about what God has asked of him. Why do you think Ananias is hesitant to obey? How might you respond in a similar circumstance? How does God respond to Ananias’s hesitation?

? Ananias addresses Saul as “Brother Saul,” indicating his acceptance of him as a believer. Why is this important?

? What does Ananias model for us as believers? How is this a godly model rather than a human model?

? Do you bring your honest concerns to God, or do you hesitate to voice your questions? Why?

#### **Acts 9:19b-31 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

**Historical FYI**

Hellenistic or Grecian Jews were Jews who had adopted Greek language and culture.

<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.

? The Jews were astonished when Saul started preaching about Jesus in the synagogues. Why was this so drastic for them?

? How did Saul's past uniquely equip him to serve as someone who could effectively spread the Gospel?

? The believers were afraid of Saul when he tried to join them. How do you think you would have reacted? Do you identify more with Saul or with the believers? Why?

? Verse 31 talks about an important period in the timeline of the church. What was the start of the sequence of events that led to this? How might things have been different if Saul had not chosen to follow God?

### **For Discussion and Accountability**

**?** You don't have to be afraid to bring your concerns to God, but what counts is your decision to follow Him or not. Is there any area of your life where God is calling you to act where you are hesitating to obey?

**?** Are there any significant changes God is asking you to make in your life that you are not making? How can our small group come alongside you in pursuing change?