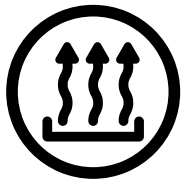




ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES



WARM-UP

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?

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 9:1-19A (NIV)

1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened.



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

Possible Answers: Saul hated the believers for following Jesus because he believed it to be heresy. Jesus identifying Saul's persecution against himself does a few things: it clearly identifies the man before Saul as the resurrected Jesus (showing the gospel is true!), it connects that through the gospel Jesus is now living in his followers through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is the culmination of the whole faith and Saul was trying to eradicate the idea of Jesus as Messiah.



Ananias was understandably hesitant and probably fearful to approach Saul, who has been an enemy to the faith, but he follows God anyway. When was a time that you followed where God called even in the face of fear? What helps you to do this?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary. Examples: moving, taking a new job, or having a hard conversation. Ananias let the gospel disarm him and approached his enemy with grace knowing he was no better than Saul. What helped Ananias was probably the concept of grace. What helps will also be individual but encourage your members with the future Hope that this is not our true home. It's not hell, but it's not exactly our home either.



How does Paul represent the gospel in these verses? How does Ananias represent Jesus in these verses?

Possible Answers: Paul: Paul didn't invite Jesus into his life, Jesus interrupted his murderous plots just like the gospel interrupted our sin. Paul personally experiences the gospel, spending three nights in darkness before he is saved from his darkness. Once saved, Paul could see physically but also spiritually. Paul represents the 180 flip that the gospel brings to our lives. Paul also immediately knows he needs to share what God has done. Ananias: Ananias pushed through fear to follow God like Jesus pushed through fear to follow God to the cross. He went to his enemy like Jesus came to us as his enemies. He sought out and came to Saul just as Jesus came to earth to seek us out. He put his hands on Saul and called him brother just as Jesus reaches for us and calls us his siblings. Ananias came to Saul with grace and humility just as Jesus came to earth to serve instead of being served.

Read out loud as a group

ACTS 9:19B-31 (NIV)

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. 23 When many days had passed, the Jews[a] plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall,[b] lowering him in a basket. 26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists.[c] But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.



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

Possible Answers: Saul was already well-known, and actually notorious for his actions taken against believers. His high visibility would make him a figure of interest, and make people curious about what could affect such drastic change in his life. His experience doing public speaking and acting in high-visibility situations would also equip him to share the Gospel more effectively and with a great deal of persuasiveness and courage. He also studied and taught the old testament so he'd be very well versed in the bible along with the current thinking of the jewish community.



Saul was brought into the disciples by Barnabas. What are ways that we can be welcoming like Barnabas?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary. Examples: Barnabas ultimately displayed Christ by welcoming someone into a new family. We can do that through putting our uncomfot aside to meet someone who's new to Hope, moving towards planting a small group with the vision of multiplying the number of people who find a home at Hope, push past our biases, inviting a friend to small group or a sunday service. etc

Read out loud as a group: At the end of his 2nd letter to the corinthians. Paul talks about boasting in his sufferings and in his weaknesses and ends with this:

2ND CORINTHIANS 11:30-33 (NIV)

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.



Paul is linking his weakness with his need to escape from his persecutors by having others lower him down from a window in a basket. How does this image, along with Paul's own reversal, echo that of Jesus and echo the gospel?

Possible answers: It echoes Jesus because Paul went from this esteemed jewish leader to running for his life. Paul went from zealously persecuting christians to zealously preaching the gospel and being persecuted himself. Jesus himself was "made for a little while lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:9), Jesus humbled himself to come down to earth and take on a human life, lowered himself to need to be taken care of as a baby, he lowered himself by coming to serve vs reign, he lowered himself to the point of death for our sake. It echoes the gospel because Paul needed another's hands to escape death, we need Jesus' hands to save us from death.

DISCUSSION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY



- Is there any area of your life where God is calling you to act where you are hesitating to obey?
- Are there portions of your past that uniquely equip you to share the Gospel? How have you seen God use those experiences?