

**Acts of the Holy Spirit - 12**  
**The Evidence of Conversion – Saul to Paul**  
**Acts 9 - Week of Oct 1, 2017**  
**Bay Park Life Groups – Leader**

*“No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.”* Jesus, John 6:44  
*“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit”.* Jesus, John 15:16

The Bible clearly teaches that *“there is no one who seeks God”* (Rom.3:11). That is, no one seeks God alone. Sin has so damaged us on every level that without the breath of the Holy Spirit on our calloused hearts, we would never come to Christ. If we love God it is only because he first loved us and opened our hearts to his love (cf Acts 16:14, 1 John 4:10, 19). So God’s work of grace doesn’t end at the cross but continues in his calling. How God’s “seeking grace” works has been the source of much debate throughout Christian history. Some adopt a predestination view believing that God’s seeking grace is irresistible. The Armenian camp however believes God’s seeking grace can be resisted and even rejected. What all agree on is that we don’t turn to God unless he first comes to us.

Saul’s conversion is a powerful illustration of God’s seeking grace. Given Saul’s hostility towards Christians and his bent on silencing them, it’s safe to conclude that he wasn’t a “seeker” or open-minded. Saul’s conversion reminds us that we didn’t choose or deserve God’s grace. Nor should we ever underestimate the power of God’s seeking grace in others by labeling them *hopeless* or *too far-gone*. Think about it, who would have predicted Saul’s conversion?

1. Pick one sentence to finish:
  - Light bulb! This past week I learned that . . .
  - The biggest shock of this past week for me was . . .
  - If I could relive or redo one moment this past week it would be . . .

Read Acts 9:1-9 & 26:12-15

2. Goats were sharpened sticks used to get farm animals to obey. They were positioned strategically such that if an animal kicked he would hurt himself on them, thus encouraging a calm, compliant walk. What could these goats have been for Saul? How did Jesus use them? What applications can we draw?

Possibilities:

- The goad of doubt. Think about it, Saul’s fanatical opposition to Christianity might well be evidence of a breakdown in convictions and/or conscience. We know from Romans 7:7ff that prior to his conversion he was under tremendous conviction that he couldn’t fulfill the law of God. The 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, not to covet, seems to have particularly pierced Saul’s pride! He had dedicated his life

to obeying and fulfilling the law and instead the law revealed how covetous and far from God his heart really was.

- The goad of a guilty conscience. Saul heard Stephen's gospel proclamation of how Jesus came to fulfill the law for us – Jesus in my place. Saul saw the joy and love on Stephen's face as he was being stoned to death (Acts 6:15; 7:58-60). He had even approved Stephen's death! He had Stephen's blood on his hands. Saul's zeal to silence Christians was likely more about his zealous attempt to silence his guilt ridden conscience.

From this we learn:

- Saul's conversion was likely not as "instantiations" as it appears in Acts.
  - That there is divine preparation to every conversion.
3. In what ways is Jesus' statement "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" a great encouragement? A great admonition? How and when do you most need to be reminded of and shaped by this truth?

Jesus is present on earth through believers, filled with his Spirit – the church.

Positive: Jesus takes personally how his church is treated. If people reject us, it's Christ they reject. If someone takes on believers, it's Christ they have picked a fight with. Every insult hurled at us, every injury suffered is felt by Christ, the God, Saviour and Judge of the universe.

Admonition: Jesus equally died for and called every one who is part of his forever family. The way we treat each other either honours or dishonours Jesus himself. This doesn't just apply to local churches, but across denominations and geography. By divine design, how we treat one another also impacts our worship & witness. Here's some other verses you might want to have your group read: Luke 16:10, 1 Cor 1:10, 1 Jn 17:20-26, 1 Jn 4:12, Ro 12:16

Read Acts 9:10-19

4. *"I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* If you know the rest of Paul's story, you know how much he suffered. And he wasn't alone. Whether intentionally or not, the gospel message these days often gets reduced to a get out of trouble now with a free pass to heaven later proposition. What a contrast to Christ's crucifixion, Paul's experience, and to the lives of his followers throughout history who joyfully suffered in his name.

*Why is suffering a part of Christian life? Because suffering is the activity of love.<sup>1</sup> In a broken world, suffering is the shape love takes. A suffering, Christ-like love clashes with the highest of our cultural values of a long life, of good health, in utmost comfort and pleasure. Love like Jesus doesn't choose what feels good but that which is good in spite of how it feels. Suffering is an opportunity to display the love of Christ in a world of pain.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Stedman, *God's Unfinished Book: Journeying through the Book of Acts*, Discovery House 2008

How are you pursuing a love willing to suffer and sacrifice for the good of others? Where are you growing and where do you need help the most?

Read Acts 9:20-31

5. *At once he began to preach – but his training was far from complete. Spiritual zeal without gentleness wins battles but loses wars. The Apostle Paul became increasingly effective in his ministry as he learned to focus on winning hearts rather than debates. Arguing is not a fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness is.*<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to sharing Jesus, where on the scale of 1 – too aggressive to 10 – too meek, do you land? Don't be shy to share personal experiences be they a success or failure. Brainstorm together ways you can help each other grow.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruxy Cavey, *The Meeting House*, January 17, 2010.