

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

“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. Goads 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 goads have been for Saul? How did Jesus use them? What applications can we draw?
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?

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.¹ 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.

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.²*

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.

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

² Bruxy Cavey, *The Meeting House*, January 17, 2010.