

TAKEAWAY:

God transforms former enemies into powerful partners in His mission.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

Has there been a time where you waited to “feel ready” before stepping out in obedience to something God was calling you to do?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 9:20-31

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- Saul's new life brought immediate resistance. How do you personally tend to interpret opposition; as a sign you are doing something wrong, or as confirmation that you are doing something right?
- Barnabas risked his own credibility by vouching for Saul when no one else would. Who in your life has played that role for you? Who might need you to play that role for them right now?
- The church's initial fear of Saul was completely reasonable given his history. How do we balance appropriate discernment with genuine openness to someone who claims to have changed?

APPLICATION:

- Barnabas's advocacy created the conditions for Saul to find his place in the community. What does our group do—or what could it do—to help people who feel like outsiders find genuine belonging?
- Think of someone in your church or community who is trying to move forward but is still being defined by their past. Find one specific way to advocate for or encourage them this week.

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Going Deeper" discussion prompts that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

“Living in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31): Fear has become such a strong, negative force in our culture that it's hard to understand this phrase in a positive light. Thus, some theologians translate it as an awe of God, a respect for God, or a reverence for God. The fear of the LORD does include these thoughts but it includes more than that: a loving relationship of a son or daughter with God, an awareness of God's grace and compassion and forgiveness that draws us to the LORD, helps us entrust our lives to God, and creates in

us a desire to follow God's ways in all we do. For the Christian in right relationship with God, it doesn't have to do with punishment from God or being afraid God will hurt or abandon us. Rather, it is a way of speaking about the intensity of our love for God, our dependence and trust in God, our joy and delight in God and God's ways, and our awareness that God is all and all.

- Read and discuss Ps 103:13-18; 112:1-3; 145:18-20; Pro 1:7; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; Jer 32:40. Consider reading *Rejoice & Tremble or What Does It Mean to Fear the Lord?* - both by Michael Reeves, the latter a shorter version of the former.
- If fearing God means recognizing our total dependence on Him, how does this humble posture naturally lead to making wiser life choices?
- In Jeremiah, God promises to actively put the fear of God into our hearts so we will not turn away from the LORD. Extrapolate this thought (as it relates to you life and that of others) that this intense love, trust, and desire to follow God is actually something God provides for us by His grace. How does viewing yourself as a deeply loved son or daughter (Ps 103:13-18) change the way you "fear" or entrust your life to God?
- Acts 9:31 describes the early church as simultaneously walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort/encouragement of the Holy Spirit. How does having a correct, awe-filled view of God's unmatched majesty (the fear of the Lord) actually magnify the value of the intimate comfort He offers? how do these two truths work together to free a congregation from the paralyzing fear of cultural opposition or the need for human approval? What specific habits/practices can you, your family, and our church adopt to ensure the cultivation of both a holy reverence for God and the tangible comfort of God's Spirit?

The Theology of the Basket: The man who traveled to Damascus with supreme authority from the high priest escapes through a hole in a wall in a basket. This profound image of humiliation shatters self-reliance and forces the newly converted Pharisee to depend entirely on the very people he once sought to imprison.

- "What excuse will they make for David... fleeing from his house on account of Saul... and Paul, when he was sought after by the governor at Damascus was let down from the wall in a basket, and so escaped him". Athanasius connects Paul to the great lineage of Old Testament saints who fled violence not out of cowardice, but out of a providential understanding of God's timing. This provides deep historical backing to the sermon point regarding resistance; facing opposition requires not only boldness but also the strategic wisdom to preserve one's life for future ministry.
- How does God use humiliating or humbling circumstances to strip away self-reliance in the life of a new believer?
- The text notes that unnamed disciples let him down by night; what does this reveal about the necessity of the broader, unsung Christian community in supporting leaders?
- Fleeing in a basket might have looked like cowardice, yet Saul later boasts of this in 2 Corinthians 11; how does the gospel redefine our understanding of what constitutes a spiritual victory?
- How do believers discern the difference between standing firm in the face of resistance and knowing when God is providing a quiet, unglamorous escape?
- How can a local church cultivate an environment where highly accomplished individuals feel safe enough to embrace these vulnerable "basket moments"?

QUOTES:

- **Michael Reeves:** "The fear of God' is not a negative, draining, or depressing thing. It is not an anxious, shivering dread.... For the nature of the living God means that the fear which pleases him is not a groveling, shrinking fear. He is no tyrant. It is an ecstasy of love and joy that senses how overwhelmingly kind and magnificent, good and true God is, and that therefore leans on him in staggered praise and faith."
- **J. I. Packer:** "Saul wasn't seeking God. God sought Saul. That is the heart of grace."

- **A. W. Tozer:** "The greatness of God rouses fear within us, but His goodness encourages us not to be afraid of Him. To fear and not be afraid—that is the paradox of faith."
- **John Murray:** "The fear of God is not the trembling of a slave but the devotion of a son... It is the reflex in our consciousness of the transcendent majesty and holiness of God. And it is this that God promises to write upon the hearts of His people."

GROUP ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Think of ways you can bring those who feel like outsiders closer to you and your group. Maybe this requires you to be in an uncomfortable season of opening up and starting new with new friends and a new group.

GROUP PRAYER: Pray for God to lead you to people who feel they have no belonging or feel like outcasts. Pray for new life groups to form in our church so that people can find a place they belong.