

TAKEAWAY:

No one is too far gone for Jesus to change their story.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- What did the moment (or process) look like when God changed your life?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 9:1-19

- 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?
- What does this passage teach about God's grace in salvation?
- What does this passage teach about Jesus?
- Ananias pushed back on God's instruction before he obeyed it. What does his honest objection followed by his obedience teach us about how we can wrestle with difficult assignments while still saying yes?
- Jesus told Ananias that Saul was a chosen instrument. How does knowing that God sees potential in people that we cannot see change the way you interact with difficult or unlikely people?
- Acts 9:17 records that Ananias called Saul "brother" when he arrived. That is a remarkable word given the history. What does it cost to extend that kind of welcome to someone who has been an enemy or an outsider?

APPLICATION:

- Saul was actively working against God when Jesus interrupted his journey. Is there someone in your life you have quietly written off as too far gone? What would it look like to bring that person before God in prayer instead?
- Write down the name of one person you consider unlikely to follow Jesus. Commit to praying for that person by name every day 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:

What is the bases of your identity? Prior to Acts 9, Saul's identity was largely built on his moral performance, theological pedigree, and the keeping of Israel's boundary markers (i.e., Israel's feasts, circumcision, and

dietary laws) that culturally and visibly identified God's chosen people as different from those around them. The foundation of that identity was radically changed by his understanding of what God did in Christ for fallen humanity.

- What “pedigrees” or “performances” do Christians most often use to justify their worth to themselves and others? What about churches?
- Have you ever experienced a season where God dismantled an errant and foundational part of your identity? How did that go for you? Others?
- In terms of being a follower of Jesus (Matt 11:28–30; 1 Cor 11:1), define the word apprentice and apprenticeship. What is the difference between viewing Christianity merely as a change in “legal standing before God” versus an ongoing apprenticeship to Jesus? How does the word *apprentice* change your view of how you live before others day-in-and-day-out?
- How does viewing our identity and worth foremost as a gift of grace (rather than achieving it) change the way we interact with and value people? Does this viewpoint change with respect to those those we disagree with and those who are unkind to us?
- Which paradigm shift feels most challenging: giving up your performance-based identity or submitting to the rigorous, daily apprenticeship of Jesus? Why?

Spiritual Blindness: Acts 9:8–9 records that after seeing the glorified Christ, Saul was struck blind and spent three days in darkness, fasting from food and water. This sensory deprivation dismantled his self-reliance and prepared him for a new revelation of grace.

- Why was it necessary for Saul, a man who believed he saw God's will more clearly than anyone else, to lose his physical sight before understanding the spiritual truth of the gospel?
- In what specific ways do modern believers construct perilous “blind spots” through religious zeal, legalism, or self-righteousness?
- How does the discipline of fasting—whether voluntary or thrust upon an individual circumstantially—strip away external distractions to heighten spiritual receptivity?
- How can a prolonged period of darkness, confusion, or isolation in the Christian journey ultimately serve as a vital incubator for deeper, more resilient faith?
- What are the best practices for a church community attempting to support an individual who is currently navigating their own “three days of darkness” while waiting for spiritual sight?
- In his *Homily 20 on the Acts of the Apostles*, John Chrysostom analyzed the psychological state of Saul during his three days of blindness in Damascus. Chrysostom argued that Christ intentionally wished to “deepen his dejection” to break the pride of the Pharisee. The blindness was not merely punitive; it was corrective. Chrysostom pointed out that the physical scales that fell from Saul's eyes were necessary so that Saul would not imagine his blindness to be merely a psychological fancy or a trick of the mind. The physical reality of the scales served as empirical proof of his prior spiritual blindness.

QUOTES:

- Henri Nouwen: “Our true identity is not what we do, not what we have, and not what people say about us. Our true identity is that we are the beloved children of God.”
- John Stott: “Self-righteousness is the largest idol of the human heart—the idol which man loves most and God hates most.”
- C.S. Lewis: “Christ says ‘Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.’”

- Eugene Peterson: "There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness."
- N.T. Wright: "The gospel is not just about going to heaven when you die; it's about heaven coming to earth, and you being part of that... Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven."

GROUP PRAYER: Share with the group the person's name you wrote down and pray for them as a Life Group.