

THE THREAD

DISCOVERING THE THREAD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH THE BIG-PICTURE STORY OF THE BIBLE

PART 4: THE GOSPEL AT WORK

LESSON 5 || SAUL'S CONVERSION AND MISSION

SESSION SNAPSHOT

NARRATIVE PASSAGE: Acts 9:1-19

GOSPEL FOCUS: Ephesians 2:4-10

STUDENT TAKEAWAYS:

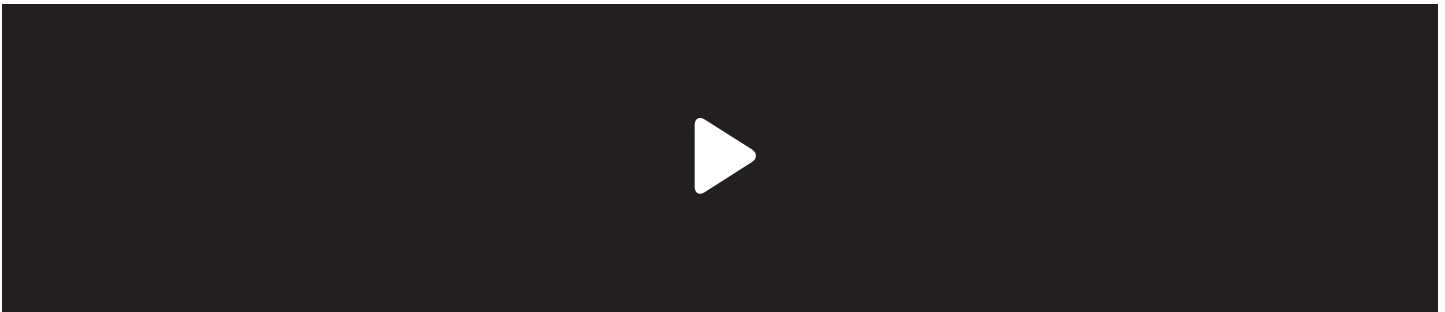
- Understand that Paul was saved by Christ, moving from being an enemy of the Church to one of its most powerful advocates.
- Realize that God saved each of them so that they may serve Him and His Kingdom.
- Identify real, practical opportunities to do the Lord's work in their contexts.

OVERVIEW:

As you progress through your look at the big-picture story of Scripture, this week, you're covering one of the coolest stories in Scripture. This is one of those moments in the Bible that rocked the world, even though, in this week's case, it might not have seemed like it at first. As you study Saul's conversion, your students will be reminded of how amazing grace truly is. God can save anyone! Just as Saul was saved for a purpose, so are we. This lesson will help your students unpack this truth and apply it to their lives.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *Thread* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you'll be studying.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible study lesson, we encourage teachers to help students know *who* wrote a particular book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHY TEACH CONTEXT?** Grasping the big-picture view of God's story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they're studying.

ACTS

- *Author:* Acts has long been held to be a letter from Luke, a Gentile physician, to a man named Theophilus, possibly a

benefactor of some sort.

- *Time frame:* There is some debate over when Acts was written. The suggested dates are between 70 AD and 80 AD.
- *Purpose:* The book of Acts is a second letter to Theophilus that tells the story of the early Church following Jesus' resurrection. The book begins with Jesus' ascension and His command to His followers to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The rest of the book traces this journey as the early Church leaders proclaim the Gospel and plant churches.

EPHESIANS

- *Author:* The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians. Of course, we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
- *Time frame:* Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.
- *Purpose:* Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. The letter covers general teaching on work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- **GETTING STARTED**– An introductory activity designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- **THE STORY**– A section featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- **THE THREAD**– A special emphasis where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- **WRAPPING UP**– An application-focused segment helping teenagers ask the question, “How am I impacted by what I learned today”?

GETTING STARTED

- *Goal:* To get the students to start thinking about the concept of switching sides and receiving a new mission.
- *Set-Up:* If you have the capability to show pictures on a screen, it would be helpful.

BEGIN by putting these pictures on a screen:

1. A picture representing Judas – https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3a/Brooklyn_Museum_-_Judas_Iscaiot_%28Judas_Iscariote%29_-_James_Tissot_%28cropped%29.jpg/220px-Brooklyn_Museum_-_Judas_Iscaiot_%28Judas_Iscariote%29_-_James_Tissot_%28cropped%29.jpg
2. A picture of Benedict Arnold – <https://assets.editorial.aetnd.com/uploads/2018/07/why-did-benedict-arnold-betray-americas-featured-photo.jpg>
3. A picture of Kevin Durant – <https://cdn.nba.com/manage/2023/02/durant-iso021623.jpg>

THEN, ask something like:

- **What do Judas Iscaiot, Benedict Arnold, and Kevin Durant have in common?**
 - o *Answer:* At some point in their lives, people considered them to be traitors.
- **What did they do to get that label? What do you think of when you hear the word “traitor?”**
 - o *Answer:* They switched sides. Judas turned his back on Jesus, Benedict Arnold turned his back on the United States, and Kevin Durant went from the OKC Thunder to the Golden State Warriors.
- **Can you remember any other famous traitors? Can you remember what they did that got them that label?**
 - o *Answers will vary.*
- **So, what is at the heart of being a traitor? Why do we hate the idea of someone being a traitor so much?**
 - o *Answer:* Betrayal is at the heart of being a traitor. It’s when a person turns their back on a friend, team, or country to help or be a part of something else. We innately value loyalty, so when someone turns their back on someone or something, we naturally don’t like it.

Transition to The Story by saying something like:

- Today, we’re going to look at a scenario where someone completely turns their back on a group he had been a loyal part of for a long time. He was a man on a mission. And suddenly, he jumped ship, switched sides, and his mission completely changed. Some saw him as a traitor. However, as we’ll see, it was one of the greatest switches of all time.

TRANSITION TO THE STORY.

THE STORY

- *Goal:* For students to understand that Paul was saved by Christ, moving from being an enemy of the Church to one of its most powerful advocates.

- *Set-Up*: None.

FIRST, explain to the students that none of the traitors you've talked about so far compares to the "switch" we're going to talk about today. It's truly one of the most amazing shifts in all of history. If you'd like, use the Connecting The Dots section below to review or fill in the gaps between your last lesson and this one.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

As you teach *The Thread*, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it to review or connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- In Acts 6, Stephen performed wonders and signs and was eventually seized and taken before the council and accused of blasphemy.
- In chapter 7, Stephen gave a speech in front of the council that outlined God's work through the people of Israel, from Abraham to Moses.
- At the end of chapter 7, Stephen was stoned. Acts 8:1 says, "And Saul approved of his execution."

Begin by having the students open their Bibles to Acts 9. While they're finding it, you can use the Bible Background to explain some of the context surrounding the book of Acts to the students. Then read or have a student read Acts 9:1-2.

Ask:

- **So, what do you think of Saul? What kind of guy does he seem like?**
 - *Answers will vary.*
- **If you were a Christian during this time, how would you feel about Saul? What would you think if you knew he was heading toward your town?**
 - *Answers will vary*, but the students will likely say they would be afraid of him and wouldn't want to be anywhere close to him.
- **You've likely never met anyone as intense and violent as Saul was toward Christians. But think of people you have known that are full of hatred. Do you give them much of a chance to change? Why or why not?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

NEXT, read or have a student read Acts 9:3-9. **Ask:**

- **OK, so this is pretty intense. Have you ever seen a bully get put in his place? They usually don't have much to say. What do you think is going through Saul's mind right now?**
 - *Answers will vary.* But Saul's head had to be spinning. The One that he'd been persecuting for so long just confronted him. He was probably wondering if he was about to get some divine punishment for all he had done.
- **What stood out to you in these verses?**
 - *Answers will vary.* But one cool point is that Saul uses the word "Lord." Although he had been persecuting Christians for their faith in Jesus, he was quickly made aware of Whom he was in the presence of. Another fantastic point is that Jesus didn't harp on all Saul had done wrong. He didn't punish him; He simply revealed Himself to Saul and instructed him on what to do next.

THEN, read or have a student read Acts 9:10-16. **Ask:**

- **Put yourself in Ananias' shoes. What would be going through your mind at this moment?**
 - *Answers will vary*, but most people will be thinking, "Hold up, you want me to do what with who? You sure about that?"

- Ananias' response seems pretty reasonable, right? Why do you think God is doing this? What do you think His is?
 - *Answers will vary.*
- Jesus tells Ananias that Saul is His "chosen instrument." Does Saul seem like a weird choice to you? Why or why not?
 - *Answers will vary.* If we're being honest with ourselves, it probably does seem like a strange choice to most of us. We don't usually think people can change this drastically. We often think the only people God can use are the ones that have a nice, neat, clean-cut life. But the Bible tells us a different story. God repeatedly uses outcasts, screw-ups, and people that make big mistakes to accomplish His purposes (think Moses, Rahab, David, etc.).
- Why do you think God chooses to use people like Saul?
 - *Answer:* God often works through unlikely vessels. He's letting us know that His ways aren't our ways. It also demonstrates His incredible power and grace. He's powerful enough to do mighty things in people's lives and use unlikely sources to accomplish His purposes. He's also incredibly gracious and doesn't write people off because of their past mistakes. His grace can overcome anything any of us have ever done.
- What about Saul's personality and this incredible event make Saul an excellent choice to take the Gospel to the Gentiles?
 - *Answer:* Saul isn't lacking energy or zeal. He also experienced one of the most incredible conversion experiences ever recorded. So, it's safe to assume that Saul is going to be extremely passionate about spreading the good news of the Gospel.

Finish this passage by reading or having a student read Acts 9:17-19. **Ask:**

- What's the significance of Saul regaining his sight when something like scales fell from his eyes?
 - *Answer:* This symbolized Saul once being spiritually blind but now having his eyes and heart opened to who Jesus really is.

TRANSITION TO THE THREAD BY EXPLAINING TO THE STUDENTS THAT YOU'RE GOING TO LOOK AT ANOTHER PASSAGE AND SEE HOW OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE RELATES TO WHAT SAUL EXPERIENCED.

THE THREAD

Read or have a student read Ephesians 2:4-7. **Ask something like:**

- What does this passage say about our spiritual state before Christ? Is this comparable to Saul's spiritual state before he met Jesus on the Road to Damascus?
 - *Answer:* Yes, Saul was dead in his sin. So were we. Regardless of whose sins were "worse" in the world's eyes, we were all equally desperate and dead without a relationship with Jesus.
- What does this passage say about God's response to our sin and separation from Him? Is this comparable to what Saul experienced?
 - *Answer:* It says that He loved us so much that He rescued us from death and saved us through grace. He rescued Saul in the same way He rescues everyone that puts their faith in Him – through salvation by grace.
- So, is our conversion equally as miraculous and amazing as Saul's? Do you ever think that your salvation was boring?
 - *Answer:* Sometimes, we may think our salvation was "boring" or not as amazing as someone else's. But the reality is that every person who trusts in Jesus is an amazing example of God's love and grace. Each conversion is an example of someone moving from death to life, which is incredible and worthy of excitement and celebration!

FINALLY, read or have a student read Ephesians 2:8-10. **Ask:**

- **Why did God save us through grace rather than devise a way to earn it?**
 - *Answer:* Part of the reason, according to verse 9, is so that we could never take any pride in our salvation. We can't boast that we're saved because we didn't have anything to do with our salvation. There's nothing for us to brag about; we have to brag about Jesus!
- **He didn't save us so we could just sit back and do whatever we wanted. Why did God have to save us in order for us to do "good works?"**
 - *Answer:* We've already established that we were all dead in our sin apart from Jesus. Dead people can't do good works. So, God, in His infinite grace, saved us so that we could be a part of His work throughout the world.

IF YOUR STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS, TRANSITION INTO THE WRAPPING UP SECTION.

WRAPPING UP

- *Goal:* For students to identify some real, practical opportunities to do the Lord's work in their particular contexts.
- *Set-Up:* Blank paper and pens for the students.

BEGIN by having the students draw three circles on their page. Tell them to draw them big enough to write inside them. Ask them to take a moment and think of the three places they spend the most time. Examples would be school, home, practice, church, etc. Have them place each answer inside one of the circles. So, one circle may have "Home" written inside it, another may have "School" inside it, etc.

EXPLAIN to them that if these are the three places they spend the majority of their time, God has placed them there for a purpose. These three places are their spheres of influence.

NEXT, have them think about the people they come in contact with at each place. Have them write their answers in the circle. So, the "Home" circle may have "Parents" and "Brothers and Sisters." The "Practice" circle may have "Teammates" in it, or they can use individual names if they want to.

THEN, explain to the students that these people are the people God has regularly placed in their lives for a reason. Next, under each circle, have them list 2-3 things they can do in each context to be on mission to live out the Gospel.

When they're done, you might want to see if any of them would be willing to share about one of the "spheres" on their list. Encourage them to keep their papers, look at them daily, and pray over living those steps out in each context.

FINALLY, close the lesson by reminding them that if they've put their faith in Jesus, they've been moved from death to life and have been saved for a purpose. Their routine, and sometimes mundane life, is a gift from God. It's where they have incredible opportunities to be like Saul, on mission to carry the Gospel to those around them.

If there are no further questions, close your Bible study in prayer.

- If you've purchased the corresponding devotional journal, remind students they'll be working through Week 44 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.
- If you're utilizing the digital devotions included in the Thread curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well that you want to share?
- Something that didn't work that you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns at feedback@youthministry360.com.