

**WARM-UP**

- Think of someone you had reservations about approaching. How did you overcome those challenges?
- How do you come to believe in something? What are the steps you take to do this?
- Recall someone who changed your life. What was different before compared to how you live your life today?

**WORD** *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

**ACTS 1:8**

(Read also **ACTS 9:1–22, 31.**)

When the disciples heard Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit would empower them to preach the gospel, they probably did not expect to encounter many different kinds of people. Some were of good reputation, while others came from unexpected backgrounds. They had no idea that God would use one of the most dangerous men of their time to become instrumental in proclaiming the good news to the nations outside of Israel. Today, let’s look at how God used this man named Saul to fulfill Jesus’ promise of His disciples being witnesses to the end of the earth.

## 1 | Saul persecuted the church.

*<sup>1</sup>But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

**ACTS 9:1-2**

When he was younger, Saul witnessed and approved the execution of believers. He was present when Stephen was stoned for speaking about Jesus (Acts 7:58) and went from house to house arresting those who followed Jesus (Acts 8:1-3). Surely, this man was far from becoming a disciple. However, little did he know that God would eventually turn his life around in an unexpected way. How do you think you would feel if someone like Saul threatened your community of faith?

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## 2 | Saul encountered Jesus miraculously.

*<sup>3</sup>Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup>And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup>And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." **ACTS 9:3-5***

One day, as he was approaching the city of Damascus, Saul encountered Jesus for the first time. Jesus called Saul by name and made His name known. When Saul was given instructions from Jesus, he became blind and lost his strength for a few days. God used Ananias to help Saul regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. As Ananias prayed for Saul, he was miraculously healed, both physically and spiritually.

What do you think would have happened if Ananias remained hesitant about visiting and praying for Saul to be healed?

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### 3 | Saul was sent as an apostle to the Gentiles.

*<sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup>For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."* **ACTS 9:15-16**

After Saul regained his sight, he was baptized, strengthened, and began proclaiming Jesus to others. From a persecutor to a preacher, Saul became known as Paul, a disciple, a preacher of Christ's gospel, and an apostle to the Gentiles. While some believers doubted his transformation at first, his testimony of his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus is a powerful reminder that God could change the hardest of hearts. If you were Paul, how would you feel preaching the very message you initially opposed?

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Paul was a fulfillment of God's promise in Acts 1:8 and became instrumental in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles in key places, such as Greece and Rome. There was peace and continued growth in the church because God stepped in and worked a miracle in Paul's life (Acts 9:31). Today, Paul continues to speak to us about God's love through his epistles and letters of encouragement in the Bible.

## APPLICATION

- Why do you think God chose a persecutor instead of a righteous believer to bring the gospel to both Jews and Greeks? Why do you think God chose you to hear and respond to His gospel?
- Was there a time when you persecuted someone for their faith? How did God correct you from this? How are we to respond to persecution today?
- Is God leading you to be a blessing to someone you have reservations with? Ask God to remove any doubts and prejudice as you demonstrate His love to them this week.

## PRAYER

- Thank God that nothing is impossible for Him and that He is able to transform and use challenging people to make His name known.
- Pray that God would use you to be of good encouragement instead of bitterness and pride. Ask God for the grace to demonstrate His love to the people around you, even when they are difficult to approach.
- Pray for someone who you have a difficult time engaging with but needs to hear the gospel. Pray that God would use you as His channel of blessing to that person in the following days.



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