



The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

ACTS 9:19–25

"THE ESCAPE"

NOVEMBER 5, 2023

AT A GLANCE

Jesus is in your heart... but what is in your bones?

CONTEXT

The Book of Acts is the theological history of the Church. In previous weeks, we explored how God's people (the Church) have become where heaven and earth meet. The Church is multiplying rapidly, and with it, opposition from the outside and obstacles from within. Despite the opposition, these followers of Christ are sown, not scattered, into areas and people groups in need of hearing the Gospel.

But the expansion of the church is at a dramatic turning point. Saul, the former zealous church persecutor, has radically come to faith in Jesus through the ordinary faithfulness of a follower named Ananias. And despite everyone's bewilderment, Saul has now joined the team of teachers/missionaries who are taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

SERMON SUMMARY

Pastor Joey's sermon this week was about how Jesus transforms our hearts in a moment, but it takes some time to work itself out into our behaviors and habits. He showed us this in the life of Saul—who you may know better by his Greek name, Paul. His conversion to his death is a case study of what spiritual growth and sanctification look like over time. Pastor Joey highlighted that although we can experience a radical transformation of the heart, sometimes our behaviors take some time to catch up.

We see this in Acts 9:19–25, when Saul uses all the same boldness and zeal he formally channeled at destroying the church to challenge his former peers aggressively. God redeems this boldness for the proclamation of the Gospel, but as we see in Paul's later reflection, there was a lot of room left for Jesus to get into his "bones."

Pastor Joey challenged us to evaluate where our behaviors/mindsets are rooted in our past experiences, family traits, or sinful habits. Once we are aware of those things, we can then join with the Holy Spirit to do the work, over time, of aligning us more with God and his Gospel.



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This document can be used for either personal or group reflection.

Group facilitator: you do not need to ask every question but can select the best ones for your group dynamic.

DISCUSSION

Expand Your Awareness

Pastor Joey quoted Pete Scazzaro saying, "Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones. And the task of discipleship is to get Jesus more and more into your bones."

In essence, he is saying that we can experience a change of heart but not see evidence in our behavior for some time. Instead, our behavior can often be more aligned with past influences, experiences, sinful habits, or family traits. Therefore, without intentional effort to root out those behaviors, our growth can remain stagnate.

- Do you agree with Pete Scazzaro's quote? Why or why not?

Extract the Truth:

Pastor Joey highlighted that Saul's spiritual growth is well documented through the development of the New Testament. What we see in this text today is the first days of Saul's new life in Jesus. With his conversion, he makes an "about-face" from aggressive preaching against Jesus to aggressive preaching for Jesus as the Son of God.

Read Acts 9:19-25

- What mindsets and behaviors might still be in Paul's "bones" that he learned as a law-keeping, well-educated, and zealous Pharisee?
- What type of posture or tone would you expect from someone preaching the Gospel as a former pharisee to current Pharisees?

Pastor Joey highlighted Paul's reflection on this period in his life in 2nd Corinthians 11. Read: 2nd Cor. 11:30-33 (though the whole passage, from 11:16 through the end of chapter 12 is helpful for context).

- What can we learn from this text about how Paul views these early days in ministry?
- Based on your knowledge of the scriptures/person of Jesus, how might you expect Paul to mature as he becomes more like Christ over time?



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Explore Your Experience

The Holy Spirit does the work of refining us as we walk with Jesus. But we must take ownership of our growth by joining him in this process. One way of doing that is through broadening our self-awareness so we can root out the old "bones" of our past so Jesus can replace them with new ones.

Pastor Joey listed a few examples of how our old bones can influence how we see/experience Jesus. Here are a few he mentioned:

Self-Hatred/Shame = Jesus is a judge who is waiting to punish you.

Anger/Wrath = Jesus is a tool for me to execute my anger on those who don't measure up.

Greed = Jesus is a tool to acquire blessing.

Insecurity = Jesus is a tool to get people to notice and affirm me.

Fear = Jesus is a tool to ensure I win and others lose.

- Which one of these (or those not listed) most resonates with you?
- Where do you think that behavior/mindset comes from? (Experiences, sinful desires, family development, etc.)
- What do you think you are trying to gain from that behavior or mindset?

Experience Transformation

Armed with greater self-awareness, let's take it a step deeper by aligning our behaviors and minutes around the good news of Jesus.

- Recalling your answer to the questions "What are you trying to gain from this behavior/mindset?" How does the good news of Jesus meet that deeper need?
- How does being aware of that truth help you to get more of Jesus into more of your "bones?"
- What would you like to change about that behavior or mindset that would allow you to follow Jesus more freely?
- What is one practical way you can pursue that change this week?



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Engage the World

Pastor Joey said despite Saul's need for spiritual growth over time, it did not prohibit him from declaring the Gospel nor God from using him to call his chosen to faith. We, too, should not allow our need for spiritual growth to distract us from moving toward our neighbors with a humble zeal that shares what Christ has done in our lives.

- Recall from previous weeks who is someone you feel prompted to move towards with the Gospel. What is the next step you can take this week?

Pray For:

- A desire for Jesus to move from the heart to our behaviors/mindsets
- Awareness of the source of our mindsets and behaviors that prevent God in Jesus.
Surrendering of those behaviors/mindsets to Jesus
- A willingness to proclaim Jesus despite being "in process."



**PREPARE FOR
NEXT WEEK:**

Read Acts 9:26-31