



The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

ACTS 9:1-9

"THE PERSECUTOR"

OCTOBER 22, 2023

AT A GLANCE

Even after an initial decision for Christ, God continues to change us so that we reflect the values of the kingdom.

CONTEXT

The Book of Acts is the theological history of the Church. In the 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. Followers of Christ are spreading to areas and people who need to hear the Gospel – including some who are actively hostile.

SERMON SUMMARY

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus – from a hostile opponent of Christ and persecutor of his followers, to Paul, the most prominent messenger of the gospel, apostle, and theologian of the church – is one of the most stunning transformations in history. But if we know Jesus, we all have stories of personal change.

God converts and changes us when we meet the risen Jesus. But that's not just true for coming to know Jesus; it's the reality of our lives as his followers.

So what elements are present when real change happens in our lives? And how does that process of change continue as we walk with Jesus?

Pastor Jeff said that we see in Acts 9 and Saul's transformation the elements of confrontation, reorientation, and reidentification. And those same elements are present in our lives as God continues to change us. Pastor Jeff exhorted us to look for the ways God is using those elements in our own lives to grow us to look more like Jesus and reflect the values of his Kingdom.



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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

- What are some examples of dramatic transformation in people lives – either in coming to know Jesus or in some other way?
- Pastor Jeff said that we can't take one example, like Saul, and make it the pattern for everyone's conversion. What is the story of your coming to know Jesus? Do you think it matters whether it's dramatic like Saul's conversion?
- Are there people whom it's hard to imagine ever coming to Christ? What makes it hard to believe they could be converted?
- What changes have you seen in your life as a result of following Jesus? If you came to faith very early or can't remember a time not knowing him, what do you think you'd be like without Jesus?

Extract the Truth:

Read Acts 9:1-9

Look at 9:1-3 and back at Acts 7:57 – 8:3.

- What do you believe led Saul to so strongly oppose Stephen's message about Jesus and persecute Jesus' followers?
- What jumps out to you in Jesus's calling out to Saul – in what he says (and doesn't say)?
- How does Jesus confront Saul with what he has gotten wrong? – in other words, up to this point, who does Saul think Jesus is? Who does Saul discover him to be?
- Based on what we know of Saul, what does he have to reconsider or reorient in his thinking about God? About himself?
- How does Jesus identify with his suffering people? What does that say about our identity in Christ?



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Explore Your Experience

Jesus calls out to Saul in kindness and patience.

- How has Jesus shown you patience, kindness, and forgiveness in your sin?

Jesus doesn't bring judgment or condemn Saul.

- How does that encourage you? How does that challenge you when you think about the people whom you'd maybe like God to judge and punish?

Pastor Jeff said that God changes us as we're confronted with the ways we shape God in our image.

- What ways might you be assuming that God looks like you – likes the things you like, votes the way you vote, dislikes the same people and things you dislike? How have you invited God to challenge your thinking, attitudes, assumptions?

It's been said that the longer we walk with God, the more we see his holiness and our sinfulness. In that growing awareness, we either keep going back to the cross to find our identity in Christ and his grace, or we adjust our vision of ourselves and God.

- How is God continuing to grow you/reorient your understanding of him? Of yourself?

Jesus so closely identifies with his people that Saul's persecution of them is persecution of Jesus. When have you felt/do you feel especially close to Jesus? Does that happen more or less in times of suffering and difficulty? Why is that?

Experience Transformation & Engage the World

- What do you feel convicted to repent of, from this text?
- In what do you feel encouraged by this text – especially in Jesus' forgiveness and identification with his people?
- Where do you want/need God to confront, reorient, or reidentify you to change you?
- How can you find more of your self-awareness/identity simply in being a sister or brother of Jesus?
- Whom do you need to love, pray for, forgive, bless who's hurt you?
- Who is suffering – maybe especially because of their faith – whom you can pray for, support, help, encourage?

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Pray For:

- A desire to be changed and grow in following Jesus
- Willingness to let God show us potentially ugly things about ourselves to change us
- Encouragement in Jesus' identification with his brothers and sisters
- Willingness and help by the Spirit to forgive and bless others who've hurt you like Jesus does with Saul
- God to use you to support and encourage those who are suffering for their faith in Jesus



**PREPARE FOR
NEXT WEEK:**

Read Acts 9:10-19a