

ACTS 9:1-31

The Conversion of Paul

Memory Verse

"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.'"

Acts 9:15

Real-life Problems

Fear—All of us experience fear. Whether our fear is of small things like worms or big things like losing someone we love, we all experience fear. We wonder if God will still be there for us, even when things get really hard. We ask, "Will God see me through this? Or am I going to have to figure this out myself?"

The Good News

We all experience fear. If we aren't experiencing fear right now, we will someday. When we're in seasons that push us toward fear, we must keep in mind that God provides for His people, especially in difficult times, in exactly the way that we need (even if that provision looks different than we might want it to).

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Do you like horror movies? Why or why not?

Idea #2: What would you say is your most unique fear?

Idea #3: What activity makes you feel most relaxed?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Acts?

Luke wrote Acts as a history of the earliest days of the church.

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The original audience of Luke, narrowly speaking, is Theophilus. More broadly, though, Luke has written Acts with elements that appeal to both Jew and Greek, so the ultimate audience appears to be any Christian from any ethnicity.

3) Why was the book of Acts written?

The book of Acts was written to record the works of God in the early church.

What's going on?

REMIND

Last week we learned that God is the only source of reliable, unending joy.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) About Saul's conversion.
- 2) About Ananias' faithfulness in the midst of fear.
- 3) About God's faithfulness to His people.

Read

Read **Acts 9:1-31** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What is Saul doing at the start of Acts 9?

He is "breathing threats and murder" against Christians. He even gets permission to round them up and arrest them.

2) What happens to him on his way to Damascus (vv. 3-4)?

He meets Jesus on the road to Damascus. A bright light shines around him, and he falls to the ground.

3) What does Jesus ask Saul (v. 4)? How does Saul answer Him (v. 5)?

Jesus asks Paul why Saul is persecuting Him. Saul responds by asking who is talking to him.

4) According to verse 9, how is Saul affected by this experience?

Saul loses his sight and doesn't eat or drink.

5) Whom does God call to go meet with Saul, the new convert (vv. 10-12)? How does Ananias react (vv. 13-14)?

God tells Ananias to find him. Ananias responds that Saul is the one who's been arresting Christians, but he goes to Saul anyway.

6) What does Saul begin to do in the synagogues (v. 20)? What is the reaction of those around him (vv. 21-23)?

Saul begins to preach that Jesus is the Son of God in the synagogues. The Jews around him are shocked to the point that some try to kill him.

7) Who vouches for Saul in Jerusalem? Why did Saul need to be backed up (vv. 26-27)?

Barnabas vouches for Saul by telling his fellow disciples essentially that Saul is a changed man. Saul needed to be backed up because his history was one of persecution, so naturally the Christians were skeptical of him.

B. SO WHAT?

1) What do you think Saul felt when he was confronted by Jesus, and why?

Certainly Saul felt some fear. He is on a journey when all of a sudden he sees a bright light, hears a voice, and is struck blind. Then, he finds out the one who has come to him is Jesus, the one whom Saul has been persecuting.

2) In verses 13-14, Ananias is clearly nervous about approaching Saul, but he goes anyway. Why do you think he fights through his fear and goes to Saul?

The short answer is that Ananias goes because God told him to go. The deeper answer, it seems, is that Ananias takes God at His word because he trusts God more than he fears Saul. If he didn't, he wouldn't care what God has to say. Despite the danger, nerves, and fear, Ananias is faithful to God's command.

Hurricanes, Oh My!

Adapt this to your experience

When I was a young boy, a hurricane was making landfall near our house. I remember that, as the wind got really strong and the rain got really loud, I got more and more terrified. As I was sitting in the corner worrying about what was going to happen, my dad picked me up and brought me to where he was sitting. He sat me in his lap, and we watched TV together (shockingly, we still had power). Nothing changed about my circumstances—there was still a storm raging outside, and the wind and rain were still threatening. My dad couldn't do anything to make that stop. Yet, just being in the presence of my dad made me feel safe. How much safer should we feel in times of fear knowing that our heavenly Father knows everything, is all powerful, and will give us exactly what we need (even if what we need looks different than what we want)?

3) In verse 17, Ananias calls Saul, the persecutor, "brother." How does this show Christ's love, grace, and mercy?

We read in Romans 5:10 that God loved us even while we were His enemies. Indeed, Jesus died for us while we were actively sinning against Him. Here, before Ananias has seen any indication from Saul that he is a changed man, he calls him "brother." He leaves all of Saul's past behind and greets him as a fellow member of God's family.

4) Read verses 20-25 again. Especially in verses 24-25, how have Saul's roles reversed even from earlier in the chapter?

Saul has now become the one people are persecuting, when just 25 verses earlier, he was doing the persecuting. This is one of the impacts of the gospel upon us: It changes everything. It pushes us to deny ourselves and take up our crosses for God's glory and the good of our neighbors. It's a religion in which the King of the universe dies to save His people. Saul's story fits right into God's upside-down plan of salvation for His people.

5) Luke says that the church was "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Spirit" in verse 31. What is notable about this?

Answers might vary, but make sure to point out that, even while they're being persecuted day and night, God's people are concerned more with their fear of God than their fear of man. What's more, they're characterized by walking in comfort, not fear or anxiety.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Consider all the characters in these 31 verses who feel some kind of fear—Ananias, Paul, the believers in Jerusalem—and talk about how they each react to their fear. What is typically your response to fear? Is it to charge forward, or to withdraw, or something different entirely?

Answers may vary.

2) Look specifically at Ananias. In the midst of his fear, he trusts the Lord and does what God asks him to do. Are there times, or have there been times in the past, in which it's been difficult for you to trust the Lord? Why or why not?

Answers may vary.

3) Acts 9 is a chapter in which God's people experience a lot of fear and uncertainty. That fact makes verse 31 so much more impactful. What do you learn about God by knowing that, in times of uncertainty, God still causes His people to walk in "the comfort of the Holy Spirit"?

Answers may vary, but make sure to hit on the fact that, even in times of fear and uncertainty, God is certain. That is, He is still comforting His people as He walks alongside them.

Main takeaway

Fear is a constant of the human experience after Genesis 3, but even in the midst of our fear, we know God is with us and working all things for our good and His glory.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

We all experience fear. If we aren't experiencing fear right now, we will someday. When we're in seasons that push us toward fear, we must keep in mind that God provides for His people, especially in difficult times, in exactly the way that we need (even if that provision looks different than we might want it to).

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, we come to You today thankful that You've brought us into Your family. You are a good Father who works for our good and Your glory. Help us to remember that every day, and especially when we're fearful. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) When was the first time you remember feeling scared? How about the *last* time you remember feeling scared?
- 2) What usually makes you feel better when you're scared?
- 3) Do you feel like you can trust God when you're scared? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Can you tell your student about a time God provided for you when you were scared?
- 2) How do you usually cope with fear when you experience it?
- 3) Do you feel like it's easier to seek the Lord in times of fear and difficulty or in times of peace? Why?