

What are some 'I will never' statements you have made in your life that you later found yourself doing, and how did those experiences humble or change you?

Paul describes himself as 'the worst of sinners' even after his transformation. Why do you think he maintained this perspective, and what does it teach us about grace and humility?

How does Paul's dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus challenge our modern expectations of how faith should develop or grow?

In what ways might we be sincerely passionate about our beliefs yet still be wrong about Jesus, similar to how Paul was before his conversion?

The sermon states that grace doesn't erase memory but redeems it. How have you seen God redeem painful parts of your past into testimony rather than letting them define your identity?

What would it look like for you to have a genuine encounter with the risen Jesus rather than just learning about him from a distance?

Paul's traveling companions heard the sound but didn't see Jesus. Why do you think God reveals himself differently to different people, and what does this mean for our own spiritual journeys?

How does the resurrection of Jesus specifically address the guilt and shame you carry, and what would change in your life if you truly believed death doesn't get the final word?

If someone as opposed to Christianity as Paul could be transformed, who in your life seems too far from God to be reached, and how does his story challenge that assumption?

The sermon asks whether the empty tomb is a hoax or your hope. What evidence or experience most convinces you that the resurrection is real, and how does that conviction shape your daily life?

# Small Group Guide: "Hoax or Hope?"

**Series:** This Is My Story

**Text:** 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Acts 7-9

**Theme:** The Resurrection Changes Everything

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## Opening Prayer

Begin your time together asking God to open hearts and minds to the truth of the resurrection and its power to transform lives.

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## Icebreaker (10 minutes)

**Question:** Share a time when you said "I will never..." and then ended up doing exactly that. What changed your mind?

*This question connects to the sermon's opening and helps people relate to Paul's dramatic transformation.*

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## Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **You can be sincere and still be wrong** - Paul was passionate, disciplined, and deeply religious, but completely wrong about Jesus.
  2. **An encounter with Jesus will change everything** - Paul didn't drift into faith; he had a dramatic, undeniable encounter with the risen Christ.
  3. **No one is beyond the reach of grace** - If Jesus can save Paul (the "worst of sinners"), He can save anyone.
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## Discussion Questions

### Understanding Paul's Story (15 minutes)

1. **Before reading the sermon text, what did you know about Paul's conversion story?** How does understanding his background as a persecutor of Christians make his transformation more powerful?

2. **Read Acts 9:1-9 together.** What details stand out to you in this account? Why do you think Jesus appeared to Paul in such a dramatic way?
3. **Paul calls himself "the worst of sinners" in 1 Timothy 1:15.** Why would he describe himself this way? What does this reveal about how he viewed God's grace?

### Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

4. **The sermon asks: "Is the resurrection a hoax or your hope?"** What evidence for the resurrection do you find most compelling? What questions or doubts do you still have?
5. **Paul was "sincere and still wrong" before meeting Jesus.** Have you ever been absolutely certain about something, only to discover you were wrong? How did that experience change you?
6. **Share about your own "before and after" moment with Jesus.** If you haven't had a dramatic conversion like Paul's, how has your relationship with Jesus grown over time?
7. **The sermon mentions three things resurrection hope does:**
  - Replaces guilt and shame
  - Gives your past a new name (testimony instead of identity)
  - Means death doesn't get the final word

**Which of these three aspects of resurrection hope do you need most right now? Why?**

### Application and Action (15 minutes)

8. **Paul's violent past became his most compelling testimony.** What part of your story (even the difficult parts) could God use as a testimony to His grace and power?
9. **Paul immediately began telling others about Jesus after his conversion (Acts 9:20).** Who in your life needs to hear about the hope of the resurrection? What's holding you back from sharing with them?
10. **The sermon says, "Don't let imperfect people keep you from a perfect Savior."** Do you know someone who has been hurt by the church or Christians? How can you help them see past our imperfections to Jesus Himself?

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## Practical Applications

Choose one or two of these to commit to this week:

### Individual Actions

- **Journal your story:** Write out your "before and after" Jesus story, focusing on what He's changed in your life.
- **Identify one regret or shame** you're carrying and bring it to God in prayer, asking Him to replace it with resurrection hope.

- **Memorize 1 Timothy 1:15:** "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."
- **Research the resurrection:** Read one article or watch one video about the historical evidence for Jesus' resurrection to strengthen your faith.

## Group Actions

- **Share testimonies:** Plan a time for each group member to share their full story of encountering Jesus (perhaps over several weeks).
  - **Pray for the lost:** Create a list of people in your lives who don't know Jesus and commit to praying for them regularly.
  - **Serve together:** Find a way to demonstrate resurrection hope through practical service in your community.
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## Closing Exercise (10 minutes)

### Resurrection Hope Prayer

Go around the circle and have each person complete this sentence in prayer:

*"Jesus, because You rose from the dead, I have hope that..."*

Examples:

- "...my past doesn't define my future"
- "...my loved one who died in Christ will live again"
- "...I can be forgiven for what I've done"
- "...my life can have meaning and purpose"

After everyone has shared, close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the resurrection.

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## For Next Week

- **Read:** Acts 16:16-34 (if continuing in the "This Is My Story" series)
  - **Reflect:** How has this week's discussion changed your understanding of the resurrection?
  - **Prepare:** Be ready to share one way you saw God work in your life this week
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## Leader Notes

- **Be sensitive** to those who may be questioning their faith or dealing with doubt. Create a safe space for honest questions.
  - **Share your own story** first when asking about "before and after" moments to model vulnerability.
  - **Don't rush** the personal reflection questions—these may bring up deep emotions or memories.
  - **Have tissues available** as stories of transformation can be emotional.
  - **Follow up** with anyone who seems to be wrestling with their faith or ready to take a next step.
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## Additional Resources

- **Book:** *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel (evidence for the resurrection)
- **Book:** *Surprised by Joy* by C.S. Lewis (story of an intellectual's conversion)
- **Video:** "The Case for the Resurrection" (available on RightNow Media or YouTube)
- **Article:** "The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection" (available through your church or online apologetics sites)

# 5-Day Devotional: From Hoax to Hope

## Day 1: The Power of "I Will Never"

**Reading:** Acts 9:1-9

**Devotional:** We all have our "I will never" moments—declarations made with absolute certainty that life later proves wrong. Saul was convinced he would never believe in Jesus. He was so certain that he violently opposed those who did. Yet on the Damascus road, everything changed in an instant. What "I will never" statements have you made about God, faith, or your own capacity for change? Perhaps you've said, "I will never forgive that person" or "I will never believe God could use someone like me." Saul's story reminds us that our certainties don't limit God's possibilities. The Jesus who stopped Saul on that road can interrupt your journey today. Are you willing to let Him challenge what you're absolutely certain about?

## Day 2: Sincere but Wrong

**Reading:** Philippians 3:4-11

**Devotional:** Paul's testimony is sobering: he was passionate, disciplined, and deeply religious—yet completely wrong about Jesus. Sincerity doesn't equal truth. You can be confident and still be incorrect. Before his encounter with Christ, Paul had impressive credentials and unshakable convictions, but they were built on a faulty foundation. Today, many people are sincere in their beliefs but haven't truly encountered the risen Jesus. Perhaps you've been building your life on good intentions, religious activity, or moral effort. Paul discovered that knowing about God is vastly different from knowing God personally. His education, his zeal, his pedigree—he counted it all as loss compared to knowing Christ. What are you building your life upon? Is it your own righteousness or the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus?

## Day 3: When Jesus Interrupts Your Plans

**Reading:** Acts 9:10-22

**Devotional:** Saul had a mission, authority, and momentum. He knew exactly where he was going and what he planned to accomplish. Then Jesus showed up. The blinding light wasn't just physical—it exposed the spiritual blindness Saul had been living in. For three days, he sat in darkness, forced to reckon with everything he thought he knew. Sometimes God interrupts our carefully laid plans not to punish us, but to redirect us toward something far greater. What plans are you holding so tightly that you can't see what God might be trying to show you? Saul's blindness became the pathway to true sight. His weakness became the place where God's strength was revealed. When Jesus interrupts your journey, it's not the end of your story—it's the beginning of the story He's been writing all along.

## Day 4: No One Beyond Grace

**Reading:** 1 Timothy 1:12-17

**Devotional:** Paul never minimized his past. He called himself a blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent man—the worst of sinners. Yet he didn't wallow in shame; he marveled at grace. The same hands that dragged Christians to prison were now lifted in worship. The same voice that breathed murderous threats now proclaimed mercy. If God could save Paul, He can save anyone. Perhaps you're carrying guilt that whispers you've gone too far, done too much, or waited too long. Paul's story declares otherwise. God didn't wait for Paul to clean up his act before extending grace. He poured out mercy on Paul while he was still an enemy. That same grace is available to you today. You are not too broken, too guilty, or too far gone. The resurrection means that new life is possible for anyone who turns to Jesus.

## Day 5: Resurrection Hope Changes Everything

**Reading:** Romans 6:1-11

**Devotional:** The empty tomb isn't just a historical fact—it's the foundation of our hope. Because Jesus rose, death doesn't have the final word over our past, our present, or our future. Resurrection hope replaces guilt with grace, transforms our worst chapters into powerful testimonies, and promises that the grave won't win. Paul staked his entire life on this truth. He faced beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, and eventual martyrdom—all because he encountered the risen Christ and could never be the same. What would change in your life if you truly believed in resurrection power? Not just that Jesus rose, but that His resurrection means new life for you today? You don't have to stay stuck in old patterns, defined by past failures, or hopeless about the future. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you. Will you receive this hope today?