



Summary

This powerful exploration of Acts 9 takes us through the remarkable transformation of Saul of Tarsus and reveals profound truths about suffering, waiting, and the cost of discipleship. We encounter a man who went from being Christianity's greatest persecutor to its most influential evangelist, and in his journey we discover that God's grace reaches the most unlikely candidates. The passage reminds us that following Christ is never presented with false promises of ease. Jesus himself warned that disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and be willing to forsake all. For Jewish believers like Saul, this wasn't conversion but completion—receiving the full revelation they had been missing. We see the critical role of encouragers like Barnabas, who recognized Jesus in Saul when others only saw a threat. Perhaps most striking is the timeline: Saul experienced dramatic encounters with Jesus, received prophetic words about his ministry, yet spent approximately ten years in relative obscurity before his calling fully materialized. This teaches us that God's promises are certain, but His timing is sovereign. We cannot rush into ministry or significance; we must be seasoned, tested, and prepared. The contrast between speaking things into existence through our own will versus speaking as God commands becomes crystal clear. True faith doesn't manipulate God but cooperates with Him, speaking His words at His direction. This distinction protects us from the damaging theology that blames sick believers for lacking faith. As we witness Peter raising Tabitha from physical death, we're confronted with an even greater miracle: the spiritually dead hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming to life. That resurrection is available to anyone willing to respond.





Points

Title: From Persecutor to Preacher: The Transformation and Ministry of Saul of Tarsus

Sermon Summary: This sermon examines the dramatic conversion and early ministry of Saul of Tarsus (later known as the Apostle Paul) as recorded in Acts 9. The message emphasizes that Saul's transformation from a violent persecutor of Christians to a bold preacher of the Gospel demonstrates God's grace and willingness to save anyone. The sermon explores the three-year period Saul spent in Arabia after his conversion, his initial rejection by the Jerusalem church, and how Barnabas courageously vouched for him. A central theme is that Christian discipleship requires counting the cost, denying self, and being willing to suffer for Christ's name. The message also highlights the importance of waiting on God's timing for ministry, as Saul spent approximately ten years in relative obscurity before entering full-time apostolic work. The sermon concludes by examining Peter's ministry of healing and resurrection, demonstrating the power of speaking words of faith as directed by the Holy Spirit, and distinguishing this from the false "word of faith" movement that attempts to command God. Ultimately, the message emphasizes that the greatest resurrection is not from physical death to physical life, but from spiritual death to spiritual life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Key Points:

- **Saul's conversion represents God's grace in saving the undeserving, as he was actively persecuting Christians when Christ appeared to him**
- **Jesus prophesied that Saul would suffer greatly for His name's sake, and the Christian life should not be expected to be one of ease**
- **Following Christ requires denying oneself, taking up one's cross daily, and counting the cost of discipleship**
- **Saul spent three years in Arabia receiving direct revelation from Jesus Christ about the Gospel**
- **The body of Christ, initially fearful of Saul, eventually saved his life twice, demonstrating genuine transformation**
- **Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," played a critical role in vouching for Saul before the apostles**
- **Saul spent approximately ten years in Tarsus waiting for God's timing before entering full-time ministry**
- **Aspiring leaders should not be novices but should be seasoned through faithful service and develop good reputations**
- **Peter's healings and raising of Tabitha from the dead demonstrated speaking words of faith as directed by God, not commanding God**
- **The greater resurrection is from spiritual death to spiritual life, which believers can proclaim with certainty to the lost**



Scripture Reference:

- Acts 9:20-43 (primary focus)
- Luke 9:23-26 (taking up one's cross daily)
- Luke 14:25-33 (counting the cost of discipleship)
- Galatians 1:11-24 (Paul's account of his conversion and early ministry)
- 2 Timothy 3:12 (all who live godly will suffer persecution)
- 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 (Paul's catalog of suffering)
- 1 Timothy 3:6-7 (qualifications for elders, not being a novice)
- Acts 3:1-10 (Peter healing the lame man at the temple gate)
- Mark 5:35-43 (Jesus raising Jairus's daughter)
- John 5:24-29 (the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God)
- Matthew 16:19 (keys of the kingdom)

Stories:

- Saul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus and his three days of blindness
- Ananias's obedience in going to pray for Saul despite his fearsome reputation
- Saul's immediate preaching in Damascus synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God
- The disciples lowering Saul in a basket through the wall of Damascus to save his life
- Barnabas bringing Saul to the apostles and vouching for his genuine conversion
- The pastor's personal story of believing God told him he would live in Florida, but having to wait seven to eight years for that promise to be fulfilled
- The account of the Jewish man who founded the first Messianic Fellowship in Jerusalem explaining the difference between "conversion" (for Gentiles) and "completion" (for Jews who accept Jesus as Messiah)
- Peter healing Aeneas, the paralytic in Lydda, with the words "Jesus the Christ heals you"
- Peter raising Tabitha (Dorcas) from the dead in Joppa after putting the mourners out of the room and praying
- The story of a man in Austin who was shunned by his word-of-faith church because his sickness supposedly indicated insufficient faith
- Jesus raising the daughter of Jairus, which served as the model for Peter's raising of Tabitha





Scripture

Scripture References from the Sermon

Acts

- Acts 9:15-16
- Acts 9:20
- Acts 9:21-22
- Acts 9:23-25
- Acts 9:26
- Acts 9:27-28
- Acts 9:29
- Acts 9:32-35
- Acts 9:36-42
- Acts 4:36-37
- Acts 11:25-26
- Acts 22:17-21
- Acts 3:1-10
- Acts 2 (Pentecost/baptism with Holy Spirit)
- Acts 4 (Peter filled with Holy Spirit)

Luke

- Luke 9:23-26
- Luke 14:25-33

Galatians

- Galatians 1:13-17
- Galatians 1:18-20
- Galatians 1:21-24
- Galatians 1:11-12



2 Timothy

- 2 Timothy 3:12

2 Corinthians

- 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

1 Timothy

- 1 Timothy 3:6-7

1 Corinthians

- 1 Corinthians 12:9

Mark

- Mark 5:35-43
- Mark 5:41

John

- John 5:24-30

Matthew

- Matthew 16:19



Romans (alluded to)

- Romans 10:9 (confess with your mouth, believe in your heart)

Ephesians (alluded to)

- Ephesians 2:8-9 (by grace saved through faith, not by works)

Main Themes with Relevant Supporting Verses:

Theme: Suffering for Christ's sake

- Philippians 1:29
- 1 Peter 4:12-16

Theme: God's grace in salvation

- Titus 3:4-7
- Romans 3:23-24

Theme: Waiting on God's timing

- Psalm 27:14
- Isaiah 40:31

Theme: Spiritual death to spiritual life

- Ephesians 2:1-5
- Colossians 2:13

Theme: The power of God's Word

- Hebrews 4:12
- Romans 1:16



Quotes

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Jesus never sugarcoats what life in Christ will be about and a better way of saying it is Jesus never sugarcoats what life in Christ will no longer ever be about and that is the temporal life.

The man who caused so much suffering among the body of Christ so fully came to know the effect of it.

Not having the official title of elder did not prevent Saul from serving as one.

Just because the word of faith has been so badly and deliberately misused and misapplied by the word of faith movement in the modern church, does not mean we should shy away from the proper employment of a spoken word of faith as the Holy Spirit may prompt.

Which is the greater resurrection from physical death to physical life or from spiritual death to spiritual life?

I personally cannot provide forgiveness of sin, nor can I save anyone. But I can by faith declare to you that God can forgive your sins and that God will provide both forgiveness of sin and eternal life to any spiritually dead person who asks him.





Discussion Questions

How does the distinction between conversion for Gentiles and completion for Jews deepen your understanding of God's covenant relationship with Israel and the fulfillment found in Christ?

What does Saul's immediate willingness to preach Christ in the synagogues despite knowing he would face persecution teach us about obedience to God's calling regardless of personal cost?

In what ways does Barnabas exemplify the gift of encouragement, and how can we cultivate that same spirit of seeing Christ in others when everyone else sees only their past?

Why do you think God required Saul to wait approximately ten years between his conversion and his full-time ministry, and what does this reveal about God's preparation process for those He calls?

How does Paul's catalog of sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11 challenge modern expectations of the Christian life being one of comfort and prosperity?

What is the significance of Peter speaking a word of faith to the paralyzed and the dead, and how does this differ from the misuse of faith teachings that command God rather than obey Him?

How does Jesus' teaching in Luke 9 and 14 about counting the cost and denying oneself challenge cultural Christianity that minimizes the demands of discipleship?

What does it mean that your personal salvation is worth more than gaining the whole world, and how should this truth reshape your daily priorities and decisions?

How does the body of Christ's willingness to save Saul's life twice demonstrate the transformative power of grace, and what does this reveal about how we should treat former enemies who come to faith?

In what ways does the pattern of spiritual resurrection being greater than physical resurrection inform how we should prioritize evangelism and the proclamation of the gospel?





Small Group Guide: Acts 9:20-43 "The Transformation of Saul: Grace, Suffering, and Patient Faith"

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by asking God to open hearts and minds to His Word and to help group members apply the truths discussed.

Ice Breaker

Share a time when someone unexpectedly gave you a second chance or showed you grace when you didn't deserve it. How did that impact you?

Sermon Summary

This sermon explores Saul's transformation after his conversion/completion in Christ, highlighting his immediate boldness in preaching, the suffering Jesus promised him, and the critical role of Barnabas as an encourager. We also see Peter's ministry of faith through miraculous healings and resurrection, demonstrating that God can use anyone—even former persecutors—for His glory.

Key Takeaways

1. Grace must be received gracefully AND given gracefully - Saul, the former persecutor, received extraordinary grace and became an example of God's willingness to save anyone.
 2. Christian life involves suffering - Jesus never sugarcoated the cost of discipleship; following Him means denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily.
 3. God's timing requires patient waiting - Between Saul's conversion and full-time ministry was approximately 10 years of preparation and waiting.
 4. Encouragers are essential - Barnabas ("son of encouragement") played a pivotal role in vouching for Saul when others feared him.
 5. Words of faith come from God, not our own power - Peter spoke miraculous healings as God directed, not by commanding God to act.
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. Read Acts 9:15-16. What did Jesus tell Ananias about Saul's future? How do you think Saul processed knowing he would suffer greatly for Christ's name?
2. Read Luke 9:23-26 and Luke 14:25-33. How does Jesus describe the cost of following Him? Why do you think He was so direct about this rather than making it sound easier?
3. What was the significance of the approximately 10-year gap between Saul's conversion and his full ministry launch? What might God have been doing during that time?

Personal Reflection

4. The "Barnabas Question": Who has been a "Barnabas" (son/daughter of encouragement) in your spiritual life? How did they help you when others might have doubted you?
5. The "Saul Question": Is there someone in your life you've written off as "too far gone" or unlikely to come to Christ? How does Saul's transformation challenge your perspective?
6. The sermon distinguished between Jewish "completion" and Gentile "conversion." Regardless of your background, what "missing information" about Jesus has God revealed to you over time?

Going Deeper

7. Read 2 Timothy 3:12 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. Paul cataloged his sufferings for Christ. How does this challenge modern "prosperity gospel" teaching? What should we realistically expect as followers of Jesus?
8. The sermon emphasized that Peter didn't command God to heal but spoke as God commanded him to speak. What's the difference? How does this protect us from the errors of the "word of faith" movement?
9. Read 1 Timothy 3:6. Why does Paul warn against putting new believers in leadership ("not a novice")? How does this apply to our church today?

Application

10. Are you currently in a "waiting season" like Saul's years in Tarsus? How can you faithfully serve where you are while waiting for what God has promised?
 11. The sermon stated: "Grace must be given gracefully." Who in your life needs you to extend grace to them, even though they may not deserve it (just as you didn't deserve God's grace)?
 12. Read Matthew 16:19. How can you exercise "the keys of the kingdom" by declaring with faith what God can do in someone's life, even if you can't do it yourself?
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Practical Applications

Choose 1-2 of these to focus on this week:

- Be a Barnabas: Identify someone who needs encouragement or advocacy. Take a specific step to come alongside them this week.
 - Count the cost: Reflect honestly on what following Jesus has cost you or might cost you. Journal about areas where you're holding back from full surrender.
 - Wait faithfully: If you're in a waiting season, commit to serving faithfully where God has you now rather than becoming passive or bitter.
 - Extend grace: Think of someone who has hurt you or the church. Pray for them daily this week and ask God to help you see them as He does.
 - Speak faith: Ask God for opportunities to declare His truth to someone who is spiritually dead, trusting that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God."
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Memory Verse

Acts 9:15-16 *"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'"*

Closing Prayer Points

- Pray for those in your group or church who are in "waiting seasons" to remain faithful and patient.
 - Pray for courage to speak words of faith as the Holy Spirit leads.
 - Pray for grace to extend forgiveness to those who have hurt you.
 - Pray for those who don't yet know Christ, especially those you might consider "unlikely" converts.
 - Thank God for the "Barnabases" in your lives who have encouraged you.
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For Next Week

Read Acts 10 in preparation for the next study, which will focus on Peter's vision and the gospel going to the Gentiles.



Daily Devotional

5-Day Devotional: Grace, Transformation, and Faithful Waiting

Day 1: The Grace That Saves the Undeserving

Reading: Acts 9:1-19; Galatians 1:13-16

Devotional: Saul of Tarsus was a terrorist against the church, yet Jesus reached down and transformed him completely. This reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. You may feel unworthy of God's love, and that assessment is accurate—we all are unworthy. But grace is not about our worthiness; it's about God's willingness. Paul later wrote that it is by grace we are saved, not by works. Today, consider the areas where you feel disqualified from God's love. Remember that the same grace that saved the chief persecutor of the church is available to you. Grace must be received gracefully, but it must also be given gracefully to others who seem undeserving.

Reflection Question: Who in your life seems "too far gone" for God's grace? How might God be calling you to be a Barnabas to them?

Day 2: Immediate Obedience Despite the Cost

Reading: Acts 9:10-19; Luke 9:23-26

Devotional: Ananias faced a terrifying assignment: go to the very man who had come to Damascus to arrest and persecute believers. Yet he obeyed immediately when Jesus clarified the mission. Ananias exemplifies what Jesus taught about taking up our cross daily. Following Christ is not about comfort or safety; it's about obedience regardless of cost. Jesus never sugarcoated discipleship. He told His followers to count the cost, to be willing to lose everything, even their own lives. Ananias counted that cost in a moment and chose obedience. His faithfulness became instrumental in launching the greatest missionary the church has ever known. Your immediate obedience today, even in small things, may have eternal consequences you cannot yet see.

Reflection Question: What act of obedience has God been calling you to that you've delayed because of fear or inconvenience?



Day 3: The Word of Faith Spoken in God's Power

Reading: Acts 3:1-10; Acts 9:32-35; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Devotional: Peter spoke healing to a paralyzed man with stunning confidence: "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." This was not Peter commanding God or "speaking things into existence" by his own power. Peter spoke as he was commanded by God to speak—a crucial distinction. The word of faith movement has distorted this biblical truth, but we must not abandon the proper expression of faith-filled proclamation. Peter had learned from Jesus to listen for the Father's voice and speak only what the Father gave him to speak. The result? Immediate healing and an entire region turning to the Lord. When the Holy Spirit prompts you to speak a word of faith, hope, or encouragement to someone, trust that God will honor His own word spoken through you.

Reflection Question: Have you been reluctant to speak words of faith because of misuse by others? How can you discern the Spirit's genuine prompting?

Day 4: Faithful Waiting in the Seasons of Preparation

Reading: Galatians 1:11-24; 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Devotional: After his dramatic encounter with Jesus, Saul spent approximately three years in Arabia, then returned to Damascus, fled to Jerusalem, and finally spent eight to ten years in his hometown of Tarsus. That's over a decade of waiting between the promise and its fulfillment. Jesus had told Saul he would bear His name before Gentiles and kings, but the timing remained undefined. During those quiet years, Saul was being seasoned, unlearning wrong theology and relearning Scripture through the lens of Christ. He worked as a tentmaker and served faithfully without the title or platform he would later receive. God's delays are not denials; they are preparations. Your seasons of waiting are not wasted. God is preparing you for assignments you cannot yet imagine.

Reflection Question: What promises has God spoken over your life that have not yet been fulfilled? How are you stewarding this season of preparation?

Day 5: From Spiritual Death to Spiritual Life

Reading: John 5:24-29; Acts 9:36-42; Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotional: Peter raised Tabitha from physical death, but Jesus declared something even more profound: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live." The greatest resurrection is not from physical death to physical life—Tabitha would die again. The greatest resurrection is from spiritual death to eternal spiritual life. Every person walking this earth apart from Christ is spiritually dead, yet Jesus declares that the dead can hear His voice and live. You cannot save anyone, but you can declare with certainty that God will save anyone who asks. This is the meaning of binding and loosing—proclaiming with



faith-filled confidence what God has already declared to be true. Today, speak life to the spiritually dead around you.

Reflection Question: Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear the life-giving message of the gospel? Will you speak it with confidence this week?

Closing Prayer: Father, thank You for Your transforming grace that reached down to save Saul of Tarsus and reaches down to save us. Help us to walk in immediate obedience, speak words of faith as You direct, wait patiently in seasons of preparation, and boldly proclaim the resurrection power available to all who are spiritually dead. May we be instruments of Your grace, given gracefully and received gracefully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

