



SESSION I

- **Main Passage:** Acts 8:1-3, Acts 9:1-9, 1 Corinthians 15:9-10
- **Purpose:** To show men that the same passion that Saul had to destroy the church, God used in Paul to advance the church.
- **Session Snapshot:** Paul did not take grace lightly. When we see who he was before the road to Damascus, we get a good idea of what made Paul tick. Because of the extremes of Paul's rebellion toward God (all in the name of God, or more accurately, religion), Paul's response to God's grace toward him is just as extreme. Paul was not a grace abuser. In contrast, it was grace that fueled Paul's life of selfless, devoted service as an apostle of Christ.

GETTING STARTED

Kick off your time together by introducing a new theme or reviewing what you did in the last session.

FIRST, explain to your group that they will be beginning a video series on Paul that is part of a larger study on looking at the real men of the Bible. Remind men that the men you are studying are real people who lived real lives. God wants us to learn what it means to be in a relationship with Him from the example of these men.

THEN, if this study on Paul is your first study in the Real Men line of curriculum, consider introducing yourself, if necessary, and having the men in your group introduce themselves. Then, ask for volunteers to share what they want to get out of their time in this study. If you want to pass around a contact sheet or do any other first-session "housekeeping tasks," this is the time to do it.

If this is not your first study in the Real Men line, consider asking men to recap what they remember from the last man you studied together. Ask them what has been the biggest takeaway so far, or to share how the studies you've completed have impacted them.

FINALLY, if there are no questions or other input, transition into the *Digging In* section of your leader's guide.

DIGGING IN

Jump into the session by watching this week's video.

FIRST, if this is your first study, explain to the group the basic structure of your time together. Explain that you will watch a video that is usually about 15 minutes long, followed by a short discussion of the video. Then, you'll spend a few minutes in Bible study, followed by a closing activity. Consider encouraging men to take notes as they watch the video.

THEN, play the video. You can access the video by logging into your Iron Hill Press account.

When the video is over, lead men in a short discussion based on what Rick covered. Feel free to come up with your own questions, or consider asking some similar to those below:

- Rick mentioned in the video that sometimes men worry about what will happen, and more specifically, who they will be, after becoming a follower of Christ. Can anyone relate to that?
- Paul was not just wrong; he was passionately wrong. Can you think of something in your life that you were “passionately wrong” about?
- When you think back to how you were before your salvation, does it serve as a reminder of the power of God and how gracious He has been in dealing with you? Do you ever feel any emotions that differ from this? (Think along the lines of missing the “good old days.”)
- Paul’s response to the tremendous grace God showed him was an unwavering devotion that played out in Paul’s life through an exemplary work ethic (“I worked harder than any of them”). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. What can be some other, maybe less desirable, responses to God’s grace toward us?
- Rick stated that God wants us to use our gifts. This is different than our spiritual gifts (which we are given upon becoming believers and followers of Christ). What aspects of your personality do you see God using for His glory? Is there anything you may be holding back?
- You cannot question the commitment that Saul had. The problem, of course, was that he was committed to the wrong thing. Once his focus was corrected after being born again, Paul was good to go, as he didn’t have to learn to commit to something; to be passionate in his pursuits. Do you have misplaced commitments? Or do you have the issue of a lack of commitment, regardless of where it’s directed? There is danger in both, but they are different and require different strategies to combat.

FINALLY, transition into the *Opening the Word* portion of your time together by saying something like the following:

- In these three passages, we get a glimpse of Paul before his conversion when he went by the name Saul. When we see the lengths he went to in order to destroy the church of Christ, we get a better understanding of the lengths he would go to advance the church of Christ, post-conversion. In addition to that, we see Paul’s understanding of God’s grace and how that shaped Paul’s life and ministry. The grace of God transformed Paul’s life and shaped all that he did for the rest of his ministry.

OPENING THE WORD

Spend time going deeper into a specific concept Rick introduced in the video.

FIRST, explain that you’re going to take a more in-depth look at Acts 8:1-3, Acts 9:1-9, and 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. As Rick stated in the video, Paul was a man of great passion and commitment but was pointed against God. God didn’t take away Paul’s passion and commitment. Rather, He directed it towards His Kingdom. Paul’s personality remained intact. As we see in our text, what was once detrimental to the Kingdom was now beneficial. And Paul knew that it was God’s grace, and God’s grace only, that made that possible.

We must make sure your people have a good understanding of the context of the passage you’ll be studying. Provide the context for the passage using the following bullet points:

- **Author:** Acts has long been held to be a letter from Luke, a Gentile physician, to a man named Theophilus, possibly a benefactor of some sort.
- **Time frame:** There is some debate over when Acts was written. The suggested dates are between 70 AD and 80 AD.
- **Purpose:** The Book of Acts is a second letter to Theophilus that tells the story of the early Church following Jesus' resurrection. The book begins with Jesus' ascension and His command of His followers to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The rest of the book traces this journey as the early church leaders proclaim the Gospel and plant churches.

THEN, read or have volunteers read Acts 8:1-3. When you've finished, lead your group in a discussion. Ask:

- **How does Acts 8:1 hit you?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Let's make sure we're on the same page here. Why was Paul persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem?**
 - Answer: Paul believed that he was serving God. He did not believe He was the Son of God and felt that those who followed Jesus were blaspheming God.
- **What were the results of Paul being so shockingly wrong in how he expressed his devotion to God?**
 - Answers will vary. Among other things, real people were hurt. Real lives were impacted. Innocent people went to jail for their faith, which would turn out to be rightly placed. Let's also acknowledge that God used this dispersion to spread the Gospel outside of Jerusalem. But that doesn't in any way justify Paul's actions.

NEXT, read Acts 9:1-9. When you've finished, ask:

- **It wasn't enough that Paul persecuted Christians in Jerusalem. He asked for special permission to travel to an entirely different city to persecute them there. What does this tell you about Paul's personality and conviction?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **In this passage, we read of Paul's encounter with Christ. Look back at how you described Paul's personality. What about him that made him a zealous persecutor of the church made him a powerful resource for God?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Do you know anyone in your life who doesn't know God but who has the makeup to be a powerful force for the Kingdom? What can you do to share the Gospel with them?**
 - Answers will vary.

Explain to men that with everything we know about Paul, we have to also admit that he was a normal human being just like any other man. Say something like:

- **He had an encounter with God that changed him. But he had a choice to make: he could let his past mistakes and failures define him and slink off to live a life of anonymity. Or, he could lean into the calling God put before him. Here's what Paul had to say about his response to Jesus.**

FINALLY, read or have a volunteer read 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. Lead the group in a brief discussion. Ask something like:

- **Paul expresses a few things here. What do you see?**
 - Answers will vary. Paul expresses humility, a little remorse, and a lot of resiliency.
- **Paul makes a powerful statement. He says that the grace God showed him was not in vain. Wow. What does it take to make that statement?**
 - Answers will vary.

- Here we see that Paul had some guilt regarding his past persecution of the church. Paul's response to his guilt is correct, healthy, and, ultimately, God-honoring. Have you ever struggled with anything from your past? Did you respond as Paul did? What are other ways we may find ourselves responding to shame?
 - Answers will vary: Paul used the guilt of his past to continually hone in on the grace of God, creating a spirit of thanksgiving and worship, shifting his focus from how bad he (Paul) was to how great He (God) is. In this way, regret over our past missed opportunities can be useful. Unfortunately, regret and guilt can also manifest themselves in the wrong ways. Shame is one of the most-used tools in the devil's tool belt. Expect answers that involve guilt preventing someone from being effective for God to feeling "not good enough" to serve.

Ask if there are any questions. If there are none, transition into *Accepting the Challenge*.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Focus your group's attention on one key takeaway from your time together.

FIRST, explain that you want to challenge the group to focus on the takeaways from this session. Consider starting this portion of your session by asking your group what they think are the main application points from your session. Allow discussion to go until there are no more suggestions.

Then, if necessary, supplement your discussion with the following application points. Say something like:

- **Are you squandering the grace God has given you?**
 - How does this question sit with you? We can never do anything to justify or earn God's grace, but shouldn't our motivation be that God's grace to us wasn't in vain? What does it take to live a life like this?
- **Do you acknowledge where you were and who you would be without Christ?**
 - How does this guide your life?
- **What is the return God is getting on His grace investment in your life? How is that manifesting itself?**

Allow the group to consider where they find themselves on this spectrum of evaluation. If it feels appropriate, allow some discussion about the kind of evaluation they find themselves considering.

FINALLY, encourage men to process these questions in the week to come. Challenge them to listen to what God is trying to tell them and to respond accordingly. If there are no more questions or input, close your time together in prayer.