

Good morning Fellowship. My name is Christopher Young; I'm the Young Adults Director here. If you've been following us the past few weeks, we've been in a series on the book of Acts where we've been learning about the Acts of God through His Apostles as God continues the work Jesus began through the power and person of the Holy Spirit. The work we see in Acts 1:8 which says, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. Eyewitnesses to the life of a man unjustly executed, buried and raised from the dead, witnesses that Jesus is the Son of God.

[Animation 1] And we've seen the progress of this witness about Jesus beginning in Jerusalem where it says in 2:45-47 "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." [Animation 2] Then we see a second report where the witness is still in Jerusalem in 6:7 where it says "7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Today, [Animation 3] we'll see again another report of tremendous progress in 9:31, where we'll learn how 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

That's the progress we're going to see today, But before we get there, something powerful happens.

Something that reminds me of my youngest brother, DJ. He's a man who wakes up looking he stepped right out of GQ magazine. He loves fashion. He likes to look good. (like many of here today) I'm a little different. When I wake up I grab whatever's close and comfortable. My wife often fusses at me over my clothing selections, but not DJ. I remember he came by the house one December, it was his birthday. I went to open the door and BAM! There he was wearing some foreign-exotic made shoes, with a freshly pressed birthday fit. (short for outfit). He was so crisp, he could step out of his clothes and they'd still be standing. In fact DJ would walk like this just to keep the creases.

And he wasn't the only one that stayed fresh. He kept his boys looking good, too. [Photo] Here is a photo of them. Funny thing is we were just chatting about this last week. He actually called me and our other brother, Terrence who is here today. He called us... He called us from a jail cell in **Limestone County Detention Center**. He hasn't seen his two precious sons, other members of his family who are also here today, in over three months.

You see, DJ had plans, he was running full speed building a powerful public image, building wealth, all without the Lord. And He was knocked off of his horse. And now he awaits an unknown sentence in an unplanned place.

But are we any different than DJ? Don't we all sometimes fall into this trap, where we *plan* on building powerful reputations and wealth and comfort, doing our own thing, without the Lord.

I want you to know today, we're going to look at a passage that reminds us that **As God continues to work His master plan, be warned, He can change yours**. As the name of Jesus continues to spread throughout the world, don't be surprised if God calls you in a different direction, or in the same direction with a different purpose. I want you to know that...

And we will see this in the story of Saul. I want to read part of the story first, and then I we'll talk about it. Remember this is the same guy back in chapters 7 and 8, who looked on with approval of the murdering of Stephen. And we'll see today, he hasn't slowed one bit. Chapter 9:1.

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul [intensity increased], why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. [Jesus identifies with the suffering of His church] 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. [Saul is powerless and helpless before the Lord] So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. [indicating He's been humbled seeking God's help] 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I [myself] will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then [as a result of God's words] Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

The first lesson we learn from this story is that...

God can break into your life, even if you don't invite Him

God does not need your permission to break into your life.

Here we see Saul, born in Tarsus a busy metropolis of diverse culture, great education and international commerce, only a dozen miles from the glistening beaches of the Mediterranean, born to Pharisees who afforded him a classical education to accompany his brilliant powerful mind, He sat at the instruction of Gamaliel, the grandson of a supreme teacher of the day, where he learned to consider the opinion of generations of rabbis. This successful lawyer lived for the day he'd become a member of the Jewish Supreme Court, aka the Sanhedrin. That's how sharp this brother was!

Here we see him, a take-charge zealot riding his high horse, with authority from the high priest to strip believers of their freedoms and take them as prisoners. And in a moment's flash, he's knocked to the ground, blinded and now dependent on others. He's led by the

hand into Damascus (vv 8-9). Jesus mercifully intervenes into Saul's life and gifts him eternal life.

Sometimes, God has to knock us off of our high horse, in order that we may depend upon His guiding hand for direction. Sometimes, we have to be blinded to our plans in order to see God's perfect plan and purpose for our life.

But that's not the only life God broke into in this chapter he also breaks into Ananias's life. *He could have been grocery shopping. We don't know.* But God tells him to go to Saul.

And I really can appreciate Ananias' sincere response. To paraphrase he says Lord [uh] excuse me? You sure about this?

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard *many* reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.

God says, Go! And Ananias obeys the Lord and goes. God can break into your life, without permission!

We heard part of DJ's story earlier. I want to read you something he said to me on the phone last week,

"Chris, Me personally, I never felt like I needed him. I felt like I had him, but I never felt like I needed him, I only accepted him to a certain point. There were certain things I had my mind on that I still wanted to do. But, I wish I didn't wait until everything was out of my control, when God got my attention.

Some things you're so sure about, you think you really don't need anyone's help. But there will be a time when you realize that there are things that are beyond your control. I don't care how much you have. There wasn't a name brand I didn't own: Christian dior, gutchie, V-lone, Moncler, (Maison Margella, Kenzo, Burberry, MCM, Alexandra McQueen). I owned some of the best vvs diamonds money can buy. But I don't have any of that today. I've learned that the best brand I ever put on was God, that's the only brand I still have today. [then he paused] I'm super grateful that he's not a God that won't forgive. He will forgive us our sins.

The words of a man, whose life God broke and gave new life.

God can break into your life, even if you don't invite Him. Not only that, we also learn that...

There are no "little people" in God's master plan

After Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and regains his strength...

19b Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" [They're asking like the answer is yes] 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful [he's being empowered by the Spirit] and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

As a result, there's a conspiracy of the Jews planning to kill him

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But [don't we all need a 'but' in our lives] Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he

had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

When most people think of the New Testament, many would quickly mention the name Paul (Saul's Greek name). After all he did write the second most words in the New Testament behind Luke. But what about Ananias, Barnabas?

What if Ananias', a new Jewish Christian, only major contribution in life was trusting the Lord, placing his hands on Saul and delivering God's message to him. What if that's all he did in life.

What if Barnabas, the advocating mentor whose name means son of encouragement, never steps in to mediate for Saul who is on the move from persecution, and he's never accepted by the apostles/church? That could have been the end of Saul's ministry, and we'd be 13 to 14 letters short in the New testament. As Saul's on the run and possibly down and discouraged, here Barnabas steps in and speaks up for him.

How many of you could use an Ananias and a Barnabas in your life, someone with the courage to speak God's truth to you when you need it most, and someone who comes alongside you in a critical moment to mentor and disciple you? These aren't little people. There are no little people in God's plan.

If fact if took a moment right now to think about it, who is that person in your life no one will ever know? That person that's been with you, praying for you, spoke God's truth to you. If you watching online, **type their name in the comments section**. Who stepped into your life when you needed it most? Who has been a steady godly presence for you?

But you may be watching me thinking, well Chris, but I'm not the preacher, I'm not a pastor, I'm past my prime, don't have the education, don't know enough of the bible, I didn't go to seminary. Don't think of yourself that way. You have a significant role to play. God still has work for you to do.

It may be showing God's love to non-believers on the sports team you coach, or reading bible stories to children in our children's ministry, or praying with and for your children and grandchildren and godchildren, maybe it's asking your next waiter, waitress or lady at the checkout counter how you can pray for them, or inviting your neighbor to church. God still has work for you to do.

Please never forget that there are no little people in God's plan. Your part is important, so lastly know that..

As you share God's part in your story, you invite others into His.

We end where we began.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

After God steps into Saul's life, the church is strengthened, encouraged and increasing. God's chosen instrument continues to invite others into Jesus' story. That's God's part in Saul's story.

Which leads me to remember God's part of my story - My mother's sitting at my side. I'm dressed in a three-piece suit. (in my upbringing you had to have a three-piece, and *don't just mean chicken*). We finally got seated in this crowded overflow room of about 600 people. There's a man sweating profusely on screen, as he preaches Jesus Christ is Lord. Five years prior I had lost my father to street violence on the south side of Chicago. There was a large void no one could fill, there was a person & presence missing from my life.

And I remember, in a moment's flash, I felt the powerful presence of the Lord holding me, telling me everything was going to be okay. I heard him say, "Chris you are my son, and I'm going to take care of you. I love you." And without thinking twice, I stepped out into the isle, walked to the front and placed my trust and allegiance in Christ alone. I was baptized that day. The most powerful moment in my life. Life since that day, has never been the same. Life still has its challenges, but the Lord is with me and with me to stay.

That is God's part in my story. So, today you've heard Saul's story, you've heard mine, and you've heard DJ's story, what about your story? What has God done in your life?

How did God break into your life? Given your life purpose? Who is God leading you to tell this to? If you don't hear me say anything else, hear this, **"You are God's chosen instrument to tell Jesus' story."**

Saying that, I realize there are some of you that are listening to this message and you don't have a story. Well, today is your day; You've had a hard year, few years. Today is the beginning of your story with Jesus. He loves you, no matter your past. **If you're online, tell someone in the chat** that you are placing your trust in Jesus; they are waiting for you. **If you're here live there will be people outside this auditorium at the connecting center waiting for you.**

As God continues to work his master plan, he can change yours. And when he does you should tell someone.

Let's pray.