

Restore Small Group Questions - Acts (Week 15) — “Plot Twist Part-II” - ‘Real Change’ — 5/11/2025

SCRIPTURE - NIV:

ACTS 9:19-31 - “...and after taking some food, he regained his strength. 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?” 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. 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 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. 29 He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,^[a] but they tried to kill him. 30 When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 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.

Galatians 1:11-18 - **11** - I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.

1 Peter 5:8 - 8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Revelation 12:10 - Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

2 Peter 1:5-9 - For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing

measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

2 Corinthians 11:22-29 - Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

KEY POINTS - Mother's Day 2025 - The prayers of a mother have often moved the heart of God to intervene in her child's life - an intervention that includes pain....but it's worth it! Mom's prayers are a catalyst but it is the Holy Spirit that brings about transformation and eternal change.

- **Marks of a changed life** (by the Holy Spirit) that Saul experienced and you may have experienced as well.
 - **SUDDEN TURNAROUND** - Saul, at once, began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God. His subject matter changed overnight - to Jesus
 - **ALL IN** - Saul was passionate, bold, fearless - all in for Jesus [Acts 9:20; 28]
 - **SHOCKINGLY NOTICEABLE** - There was a noticeable change in Saul's behavior...nothing quiet or hidden. [Acts 9:21-22]. Observers were 'baffled but there was no mention of thousands coming to Jesus because God wasn't so much working THROUGH Saul as He was working IN Saul. We too need to have work done IN us before we see results of what God will do THROUGH us.
 - **A HUNGER TO LEARN** - The time between verses 9:25 and 9:26 was three years where Saul was being discipled through revelation by Jesus. [Galatians 1:11-18] After the 3 years, Saul went to Jerusalem to meet Chephas (Peter). Note....Cephas is Aramaic for 'Rock'. This was a time of learning and unlearning...a Holy Spirit task. There is a time to sit and learn from someone ahead of you in your journey...it is called discipleship (Restore's long term vision) to integrate discipleship within any leadership or serving opportunity. The theme is to serve, learn, and grow simultaneously. Saul had his life transformed by Jesus. Jesse's sabbatical goals are rest, reconnection and confirmation/clarification on the best way to carry out the Restore Church vision.
- **A marked target of Satan.** -
 - **IF** your life has been radically and completely changed and your citizenship has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, **THEN**, your life is marked by Satan for either elimination or marginalization.

- Saul was marked for assassination twice [Acts 9: 23;29].
- Saul's ministry was marginalized in an attempt to blunt his effectiveness [1 Peter 5:8]. The parable of the 4 soils in Matthew 13:1-23...1 soil is good, but 3 soils pinpoint Satan's attack on God's Word in us. **The Path:** [Word sown and Word stolen through doubt, unbelief, or lack of importance]; **Rocky:** [Accepts Word but no root system or depth through trouble and persecution]. **Thorny:** [Accepts Word but it gets choked out through worry, wealth, and worldly pursuits].
- We get sidelined due to failure (I tried, I failed, why try again), business (busyness), distraction, pride/arrogance, comparison (I could never measure up or at least I'm no as bad as....); Satan's lies and accusations [Revelation 12:10].
- **Things that keep you effective [2 Peter 1:5-9]** - Increase your faith by adding goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love — do not be nearsighted and blind for we have been forgiven and cleansed. Paul/Saul recounts the many times his life was targeted for elimination or marginalization by Satan. Bad attitudes can sideline our effectiveness if allowed.

CONCLUSION - The mark of coming to Jesus is a changed life, a sudden turnaround, going all in, becoming noticeable, and having a hunger to learn. The challenges to our effectiveness include being paralyzed by doubt, stopped by distractions, and/or disillusioned by disasters. We need to learn and to disciple others. For the graduates, life has a tendency to challenge your effectiveness, what you believe in and why you believe it. Charting a new course for yourself offers opportunities to indulge in sinful behavior and offers new feelings of being overwhelmed with pressures. Learning doesn't stop after graduation...it just begins. Stay close to the Lord; remember to pray and ask for staying power and God's protection....seek His strength and joy — —guard your hearts from the enemy and be the light of change in the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. Discuss the following aspects/marks of a changed or transformed life in Jesus.....a sudden turnaround, going all in, becoming noticeable, and having a hunger to learn. Are there other marks that can distinguish a changed life for Christians today?
2. Saul learned from Jesus for 3 years before going public. Do you know the purpose that God has prepared for you? Who do you learn from and who are you learning with? Is discipleship an integral part of your learning and teaching?
3. How does the Holy Spirit operate in our learning process? Are we ever done learning? What is your comfort zone regarding boldness and going all in?
4. IF we are totally and radically transformed by the Holy Spirit, THEN we are marked by Satan. Discuss the challenges we face today with Satan's attempts to block or blunt our effectiveness. If we are not facing challenges, what does that say about our transformation?
5. Peter says we are to be alert and sober of mind in regard to the challenges of Satan. What does that mean in our every day lives. How did Saul handle the multitude of challenges from Satan to eliminate him and marginalize his life in Jesus?
6. Peter also said that we must make every effort to add to our FAITH, in increasing measures, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love to keep us from being ineffective. Discuss the ways we can do this.

How do these attributes blend perfectly and powerfully together to change our life and the lives of others?

7. If you had an opportunity to share your experiences in your journey with Jesus to the high school graduates of today, what would you tell them that would help them stay the course and guard their hearts against Satan and his attacks? Would you seek the graduates out and boldly do that?

8. A mother's prayer for her child(ren) is special. What is it that makes her prayers special and unique with God? If her prayers are the catalyst, who is the provider?

9. Bonus Question — — Barnabas advocated the case of Saul to the other apostles in Jerusalem. They believed what he had to say about Saul. Why do you think they believed him, especially considering they were skeptical about Saul's conversion? What does this say about Barnabas' testimony?