

Restore Small Group Questions - Acts (Week 14) — “Plot Twist Part 1” - 5/4/2025**SCRIPTURE:**

Acts 7: 59- 8:1 - 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. **60** And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. **8:1** - And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 9:1-19a - 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, why do you persecute me?" **5** "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. **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. 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. **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 will show him how much he must suffer for my name." **17** Then 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.

2 Corinthians 12: 7b-10 - Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. **8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. **9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

KEY POINTS -

Introduction: Good chess players are always thinking ahead....sometimes many moves ahead of their opponent. God is always ahead of us and it always ends in a

checkmate if you are playing against God. In today's scripture, we see that Saul is forced to surrender to the Real Jesus of the way...which left him with no excuses...He was face to face with Jesus! While at the height of Saul's rage and folly against Christians, God chose Saul to be converted and to live for Jesus.

I. God Chose Saul - Let's look at some of Saul's character traits:

- He was clearly **self-righteous** - He thought He was in the RIGHT and that he truly worshipped God and all others were imposters and in the wrong.
- He was clearly **self-motivated** - He initiated asking for the arrest warrants from the High Priest.
- He was clearly **self-reliant** - He thought he could eradicate the Christians on his own.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools - AI compared Acts 9:1-2 with a radical extremist in a terror organization....Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the former leader of ISIS. AI indicated some parallels with Saul, especially in the persecution of religious groups.
 - Saul aggressively **persecuted** the Christians. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi led a brutal campaign against anyone opposed to his extremist ideology - Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims among others.
 - Saul had the Jewish leaders **authority** to pursue the Christians. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi operated as the self-proclaimed Caliph over muslims worldwide.
 - Both Saul and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi were driven by ideology and fervently believed they were right!
- God chose Saul not Abu Bakr al Baghdadi - Saul was redeemed, Baghdadi was not! God Chose Saul to lead the majority of the people in the world to believe in Jesus. The lesson is that no one is too far out of God's reach!

II. God Addresses Saul - In the encounter between Saul and Jesus, we see God revealing himself as strong but with grace and patience. God starts with a question, then identifies himself as 'Jesus', and gives Saul next-step instructions [not the whole plan].

- God used pain to get Saul's attention....sometimes He uses pain to get our attention too! Not always does pain come from the Lord....we should not ask Him 'Why' but "What am I supposed to learn". We also see that God's level of intrusion on Saul's life FIT the level of calling God had for his life..... a world-wide and multi-generational calling. We are also called....does God have our attention?

III. God addresses Ananias - God uses people to implement His plan and to help other people (Divine Appointments)! Again, God allows us to question and He will answer. He gave Ananias enough information for him to understand his role and mission. Saul needed to learn that he had to rely on someone else, that he was chosen for a high calling and that he was chosen to suffer. [In 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10, Saul did not get his full "Why" answered when he was tormented by a demon.]

- Ananias learned that it was OK to question God and to have doubts. It is OK for us too but, it becomes a problem if we don't accept the answer or if we get angry because we don't get an answer.
 - Church is a place where we can air our questions and doubts and get answers or Godly guidance. God is always 2-3 steps ahead of us.
 - God called Ananias into a deeper trust relationship with Him by asking him to love an enemy and to see the true character of God.
 - God will ask hard things of His followers.

IV. CONCLUSION - Both Saul and Ananias concluded God's mission (divine appointments) through '**Actionable Faith**'.

- Ananias released any fear in his heart and embraced trust in God
- Ananias followed through by visiting Saul, delivering the message and laying hands on Saul.
- Saul **willingly received God's help!** - This is difficult for someone who is self-righteous, self-motivated, and self-reliant. He also was baptized!
- Lessons for us:
 - God can choose, use and change YOU
 - No person is beyond God's reach to save
 - To receive Jesus, lay down 3 things in your life:
 - Self-righteousness
 - Self-motivation
 - Self-reliance
 - To Trust God more....Ask Questions and Accept answers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. Why do you think Saul's conversion was so dramatic? In what way(s) is every new believer's conversion the same as Saul's?
2. God chose Saul for a very specific calling. Is every believer called to serve God, or just some with a special calling?
3. Saul's conversion was God's initiative and it was dramatic. Discuss how God might be trying to get your attention right now (dramatic or not).
4. The very men whom Saul had purposed to destroy were to be his instructors in the religion he had despised and persecuted. Discuss the thoughts and emotions that Saul might have had in his conversion journey and also the thoughts and emotions of the apostles as they assimilated Saul into their midst.
5. Although not specifically mentioned in Luke's account of Saul's conversion, what role do you think the Holy Spirit played in God's plan? Discuss the miracle of Saul's reinstatement of his sight, the laying on of Ananias' hand and Saul's baptism.
6. Pain seemed to be a major element of Saul's conversion and possibly even our own. What was Saul supposed to learn from pain? How can we discern the difference between pain coming from God versus pain coming from ourselves or Satan?
7. Describe what 'actionable faith' looked like for both Ananias and for Saul in their God directed 'divine appointment. The defeat of 'self' played a role in each person. Discuss how 'humility' enabled faith to become 'actionable'.
8. The encounters of Saul and Ananias with God showed that asking questions of God is OK and natural. When does asking questions become a problem? Do you have questions and/or doubts that have hindered your full submission to God? Do you trust God to answer your questions?
9. To help you embrace God's life/calling for you what 3 things do we need to lay down to be able to trust God completely?