Acts 9:1-19

When Grace Changes Everything

Summary

Acts 9 tells the story of Saul's dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saul was actively persecuting Christians and believed he was doing the right thing. But everything changed when he encountered the risen Christ.

Jesus didn't just confront Saul's past. He gave him a new purpose, a new direction and a new identity. Saul went from persecuting the church to becoming one of its greatest missionaries. But Saul's transformation didn't happen in isolation. God also called an ordinary disciple named Ananias to step into Saul's story. Ananias had every reason to be afraid, but he obeyed Jesus, welcomed Saul as a brother and played a significant role in Saul's transformation.

This story reminds us that nobody is too far gone for God's grace and that when Jesus changes our lives, He also calls us to obedience, community and a life of purpose.

Intro Prayer

God, thank You that Your grace reaches people we might think are too far gone. Thank You that You don't define us by our past but invite us into a new life and a new purpose through Jesus.

Help us be honest as we talk tonight. Show us where we need to surrender, where we need to trust You and where You may be asking us to take a step of obedience. Give us the courage to listen to Your Spirit and the compassion to welcome the people You are bringing into our lives. Amen.

Ice Breaker

Have you ever had an experience that completely changed the way you saw something or someone?

Key Verses

Acts 9:4-5
“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”
“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.
“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.

Acts 9:15
“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.’”

Acts 9:17
“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.”

Discussion Questions

1. Saul was actively working against Jesus and persecuting Christians when Jesus encountered him. What does Saul's story teach you about how far God's grace can reach?
2. Kevin said, “You can't out-sin the cross. You can't outrun the grace of God.” Why do you think we sometimes struggle to believe that God's grace can reach us or someone we love?
3. Before Saul was looking for Jesus, Jesus came looking for Saul. How does that change the way you think about your own relationship with Jesus?
4. Jesus called Saul by name instead of calling him by his past or his failures. What does that tell us about the way Jesus sees people?
5. Saul had to spend three days in darkness, fasting, praying and waiting. Why do you think God sometimes uses seasons of waiting to change us?
6. Ananias knew Saul's past, but God knew Saul's future. Where might you be tempted to define someone by their past instead of seeing what God might be doing in their future?
7. Ananias was afraid, but he obeyed anyway. What does his story teach us about the difference between courage and the absence of fear?
8. The first word Saul hears from Ananias is “Brother.” Why is that significant? What does it look like for us to welcome people into Christian community before they have everything figured out?
9. The message identified several marks of a transformed follower of Jesus: seeing Jesus clearly, being filled with the Holy Spirit, baptism, obedience, community and becoming a witness. Which of these stands out most to you right now? Why?
10. Is there anything on that list that you have quietly treated as optional? What might God be inviting you to take seriously?

Life Application

This week, choose one of these two responses:

If you're more like Saul: Take time to get alone with God. Put your phone down, pray and ask God to show you where you need to surrender. Ask Him to help you see clearly, trust His Spirit and take your next step of obedience.

If you're more like Ananias: Ask God to show you someone you may be keeping at a distance because of their past, reputation or mistakes. Pray about whether God is asking you to move toward that person with courage and compassion.

Remember, Ananias didn't know Saul's future. He only knew what Jesus was asking him to do next.

Key Takeaways

- **Nobody is too far gone for God's grace.**
- **Jesus pursues people before they ever pursue Him.**
- **A collision with grace changes our direction and gives us purpose.**
- **God knows our future even when others only know our past.**
- **Obedience doesn't mean we aren't afraid. It means we keep walking anyway.**
- **Transformation happens in community.**
- **When Jesus changes our lives, there should be evidence.**

Ending Prayer

Jesus, thank You that Your grace is greater than our past. Thank You that You pursue us even when we're running in the opposite direction.

Help us surrender the areas of our lives where we're still calling the shots. Fill us with Your Spirit and give us courage to obey You.

Give us the heart of Ananias. Help us see people the way You see them, not simply by their past but by what You can do in their future. Show us who You are asking us to move toward, welcome and encourage.

Use our lives as instruments for Your purposes. Help us become people who see Jesus clearly, obey Him quickly, live in community and tell others what He has done.

Amen.