

OASIS:
PAUL'S CONVERSION
DONE IN SYNC WITH
THE "LIVING GOD'S STORY" JOURNEY
The Passage – Acts 9:1-19



***Preface:** Welcome to our LC Bible study in our sermon series “Living God’s Story.” As you know, this year we are working our way through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. So fasten your seat belt—it is quite a ride! These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading.*

Study’s BIG idea: Christian conversion is an unmistakable, personal encounter with God that leaves the individual ready and willing to change their life and follow Christ.

Possible starter questions (3 min.): Think back to your high school graduation. What are some of the thoughts and assumptions you had about life that you had to unlearn and change?

What’s the one thing you are doing in life of which you literally thought, “This is the *last thing* I thought I’d end up doing”? (Feel free to use a couple of examples, as we tend to think this a few times.)

Transitional comment:

It seems safe to say that when Paul set out on the road to Damascus, the last thing on his mind was that he was going to end up proclaiming the gospel of Jesus as opposed to stopping it. As we will see in the conversion of Paul, sometimes God uses the most unlikely people for the most important responsibilities. When we encounter Jesus, everything changes.

Acts 9:1-19 (New International Version © 2011)

1 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.

Context: Acts 8 tells us because of the persecution, the Church in Jerusalem scatters, finding some safety in Judea, Samaria and beyond. Please note that this study will be using the name Saul/Paul interchangeably. It is Paul’s conversion but generally, the name Saul is used in referring to his pre-Christian/pre-baptized life.

O – It is odd to find Saul hunting down and killing followers of Jesus. Not only is he not a Roman soldier but he is a trained rabbi (a Jewish scholar!). What does this tell us about first century Judaism in the Roman world?

(Society was prone to violence. However, perhaps this rabbi thought he could validate his actions against Christians from Old Testament precedents like Moses’ slaying of the immoral Israelites at Baal-Peor in Num. 25:1-5, or Phinehas’s slaying of the Israelite man and Midianite woman in Moab in Num 25:6-15 [and even the action of Mattathias and the Hasidim in their idolatry in 1 Macc. 2:23-28, 42-48]. Though as Protestants, we do not recognize 1 Macc. as inspired text, if Paul included this scene with the aforementioned precedents, it would seem relevant.)

O – Describe Paul’s conversion experience.

I – For centuries critics have attempted to undermine the Damascan road experience, suggesting that Paul radically changed his mind because of great guilt. Instead of a supernatural experience, he not only came to his senses, but decided to serve the cause he once attacked. How do you respond to this? Why is this unlikely?

(If he was motivated by guilt, he simply would have removed himself from persecuting. At most, he would have advocated for the Christians to worship freely while still being a Jewish leader. Something dramatic needed to happen for him to abandon his entire life and begin a radically different one.)

A – One of the most beautiful features of the Church is that everyone has a unique experience in finding Jesus. Has anyone tried to discredit your conversion experience and if so, how did you respond?

O – The scene was traumatizing for Saul. Here he was, a proud Pharisee leader thinking he was guarding and defending the honor of God. However, not only was he persecuting Christians but the Lord tells him he was persecuting God Himself! What do you think went through Saul’s mind those three days (keeping in mind he was temporary blind)?

A – What examples do you see of people doing terrible things in the name of God? If the examples mentioned fall outside of the Church, ask “What examples of terrible things do you see Christians doing in the name of God?”

(Remember, among the lessons here, Paul’s conversion teaches us that everyone can be redeemed and used for God’s glory.)

O – Imagine you are Ananias and God has asked you to go and pray with Saul, a violent individual known for his persecutions of the early Church. What would you be thinking as you made your way to Straight Street?

I – God speaks to two people in Chapter 9, Saul and Ananias. Ananias does not appear outside the book of Acts (his other mention is in Acts 22, regarding Paul’s conversion), so why the need for him? What do you think of his initial reaction and what about his exchange with God?

(Ananias is used by God to receive the baptized Paul into the Christian community in Damascus. Note the use of baptism in verse 18 and the name change in chapter 10. They are the first to receive him.)

A – Have you ever been in the position of Ananias where you to receive someone with suspicion amidst a tense audience of onlookers (whether it be in church, work, your home)? Have you ever been in Saul’s position where you felt the suspicion of the community? What did you learn from the vulnerability?

A – From the Old Testament to the New, God is certainly unpredictable when selecting His chosen instruments to bring His message. What does this teach us about the nature of God? What effect does a true encounter with Jesus have on how we live as individuals and as a Christian community?

Key: O – Observation. I - Interpretation. A – Application.

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.