



Acts Chapter 9

Many people can testify by their own personal experience to God working in their lives. Spend some time-sharing times where God has been at work in your life; or, perhaps you haven't experienced such a connection with God—discuss that too.

Read

Read through Acts 9:1-31. Carefully take note of the characters, what they say and do. Take note of what those who follow Jesus are called. Take note of the supernatural in the story. Take note of what Saul does after he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

“Suddenly Saul’s world turned upside down and inside out. Terror, ruin, shame, awe, horror, glory and terror again swept over him. Years later he would write of seeing ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah’ (2 Corinthians 4:6), and though, to show that this was something he shared with all Christians, he described it as God shining ‘in our hearts’, elsewhere he makes it clear that his own ‘seeing’ was unique, a seeing, like Stephen in his death, which involved the coming together of heaven and earth, earthly eyes seeing heavenly reality. ‘Am I not an apostle?’ he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:1). ‘Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’

But this ‘seeing’ went far, far beyond a mere qualification for office, ticking one of the boxes under the category ‘apostle’. It confirmed everything Saul had been taught; it overturned everything he had been taught. The law and the prophets had come true; the law and the prophets had been torn to pieces and put back together in a totally new way. It was a new world; it was the old world made explicit. It showed him that the God he had loved from childhood, the God for whose glory he had been so righteously indignant, the God in whose name and for whose honour he was busy rounding up those who were declaring that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s Messiah, that he was risen from the dead, that he was the Lord of the world (this Jesus who had led Israel astray with his magic tricks and false prophecy about the Temple, this Jesus who the Romans had, thankfully, crucified, to make it clear that whoever was God’s Messiah it certainly couldn’t be him!)—it showed him that the God he had been right to serve, right to study, right to seek in prayer, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had done what he always said he would, but done it in a shocking, scandalous, horrifying way. The God who had always promised to come and rescue his people had done so in person. In the person of Jesus.” Tom Wright, Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12

Many people are open to spiritual experience today and many believe in God or a “higher power” or spirituality. But what is the source—or more importantly—who is the source of spiritual power and experience? There is ignorance here for many. Saul discovers that the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth was the God of Israel, and indeed the Creator God, come in human form. How can we cultivate a richer Jesus-centred spirituality and how can we help others around us to understand that God is like Jesus and Jesus is God?

Read

Consider the way the church prayed back in ch. 4:

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Now look at how Saul is described:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples .Ac 9:1.

The early church followed Jesus' teaching, and example, and committed themselves to love their enemies and pray for them regularly. Imagine that they were specifically praying fervently for Saul, and imagine how God might have answered those prayers in sovereignly intervening in Paul's life. Could that be part of what is happening here? What if our prayers really do release God's power and kingdom purposes into our world?

Read

In the New Testament those who follow Jesus are described as disciples around 270 times, and as Christians 3 times. The Greek word for disciple means student or apprentice; one who learns from a Master.

Read the following from Mick Breen and Steve Cockram and discuss:

"... Most of us have become quite good at the church thing. And yet, disciples are the only thing that Jesus care about, and it's the only number that Jesus is counting. Not our attendance or budget or buildings. He wants to know if we are "making disciples." Many of us serve in, or lead churches where we have hundreds or even thousands of people showing up on Sunday But we have to honestly answer this question: Do their lives look like the lives of the people we see in Scripture? Are we just good at getting people together once a week and maybe into a small group, or are we actually good at producing the types of people we read about in the New Testament? Have we shifted our criteria for a good disciple as someone who shows up to our stuff, gives money and occasionally feeds poor people?

Effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way round. We need to understand the church as the effect of discipleship and not the cause. If you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide.

Now one of the buzzwords around today is the word "missional." People want to create missional churches or missional programmes or missional small groups.

The problem is that we don't have a "missional" problem or a leadership problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission. Always. You see, somewhere along the way we started separating being "missional" from being a disciple, as if somehow the two could be separated. Pastors started saying they didn't want to be inwardly focussed so they stopped investing in the people in their churches. So they could focus on the people outside their churches.

Granted, we should focus on people who don't know Jesus yet, but Jesus himself gave us the model for doing that: Disciple people. If you know how to actually make disciples, you'll reach people who actually don't know Jesus. Because that's simply what disciples do. That was Jesus' whole plan. If you disciple people, as these people do mission in their everyday comings and goings, with the work and shaping of the Spirit, the future of the church will emerge..." (Building a Discipling Culture, Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, 2011, P. 16-17)

Discuss and write down what we learn about being a disciple of Jesus from this story. What next steps are there for you, and all of us, to become maturing and fruitful disciples of Jesus? Are we a church of disciples? How can we become this?

A Prayer

Father God, we ask you to give us your Holy Spirit now.
Holy Spirit come, fill us with the love of God;
Holy Spirit come, affirm that we are God's children;
Holy Spirit come, lead us in the way of Jesus;
Holy Spirit come, give us power to testify about Jesus;
Holy Spirit come, let your joy fill our hearts;
Holy Spirit come, lead us in the truth of Jesus, Amen.

A prayer for all day everyday: Holy Spirit, help me be like Jesus and live for Jesus.