

Date February 6, 2022

Scripture/Bible Story/Theme

Acts of the Apostles 9 - Saul's Journey to Damascus

Children's Illustrated Bible – p. 290-291

God can change and transform lives

Workshop Name

Following in the footsteps of Jesus and St. Paul

For the teachers:

The meaning of the story in a nutshell:

When Saul, later known as Paul, met Jesus on the Road to Damascus, his life was dramatically changed.

Encountering Jesus can transform our lives as well, if we are willing to have our eyes opened and become one of his disciples.

The following notes from the Workshop Rotation site are lengthy, but they do give a deeper understanding of Paul and that in turn may be helpful to the teachers as they teach the lessons in this unit.

Bible Background Notes for Teachers

It is easy to understand why Jesus chose to appear to Saul.

Saul was a man immersed in three cultures - Greek, Roman, and Jewish. He was trained in the scriptures as Pharisee (Acts 22). And he could support himself as a tentmaker wherever he went (Acts 18). This made Saul uniquely equipped for taking Christ's message beyond the Jewish world, and into the Greek and Roman world.

What this says to us is that our gifts, however mis-used or undeveloped, can be re-directed by Christ for his purposes, and that none of us is so damaged or "wrong" as to be beyond Christ's transformative reach.

What do we know about Saul?

Saul was born around the year 3 AD in Tarsus in southern Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Tarsus was a bustling commercial center brimming with Greek culture, education, and philosophy. It is believed that Saul came from a relatively wealthy family because he had Roman citizenship (which could be purchased), and because his letters reveal him to be well-educated.

In Acts 22, Luke tells us that Saul was a student of Gamaliel, a famed Jewish scholar in Jerusalem. In Philippians 3, Paul describes himself as a Pharisee. Pharisees were not priests, they were students of scripture who tried to enforce their strict interpretations and practices on others, believing that their salvation came through their own right-ness ("righteousness") of belief and practice.

It is questionable how closely Saul followed Gamaliel's teachings. In Acts 5:38-39, Luke describes Gamaliel as convincing the Sanhedrin not to kill the followers of Jesus, but instead, warning them that "*If their plans and actions only come from people, they will fail. But if their plans come from God, you won't be able to stop them.*" Yet, according to Acts 7, the men who stoned Stephen "laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul."

Using a term from today's headlines, we could say that **at some point Saul became "radicalized."** By Acts 9, he is on his way with authority to persecute Jesus' followers in Damascus.

What this says to us is that no one, however, wrong or evil, is out of Jesus' reach.

Paul's Point of View on his Past and Transformation

In Philippians 3, Paul makes his case that his former point of view as a "faultless" Pharisee is now to be counted as "garbage" (waste, useless). **This theme of his world and perspective on his Jewish faith being turned upside down**, would be revisited by Paul many times. But rather than rejecting the past, he simply described it as something that was to be put in the past, The Old Testament and old ways simply prepared us for the transformation of God.

"this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

This theme should not be lost in our teaching. Saul was very religious, but that was not enough. Paul does not convert from one religion to another. He does not exchange one set of rules for another. **Paul's encounter with Christ transformed his entire understanding of "religion."** Instead of thinking we are saved by religious rules and practices, Paul repeatedly speaks about grace and love, forgiveness and tolerance. Paul's Good News finds its fullest expression in 1 Corinthians 13 where he describes "a more excellent way" —the way of Love.

Saul to Paul: What's in a name?

"Saul" literally means "**the one you prayed for**" or "the one you asked for" —which is reference to the people's demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8. But Saul always refers to himself by the Greek (Gentile) name of "Paul," which can be translated as "**small**" or "**humble.**" And in numerous letters, he refers to his "weakness" and "humility." So while some commentators simply ascribe the name change to a common custom among Jewish families living in the Gentile world to have both a Hebrew and a Gentile name, we can be sure that to Paul, his Gentile name was a perspective as well.

Perhaps not so coincidentally, our students are "small" in age and stature, and their talents are only beginning to be revealed. In a world that encourages them to "be big," "be the answer to prayer" or be #1 (literally: "be Saul"), "be gifted." Paul's name change and experience points us in a different direction. **It is the upward call that humble-Paul now values, and calls us to strive for** (Philippians 3).

Opening Prayer

Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank you for your presence and strength as we live our daily lives. We ask that you are always in our hearts so that we may have compassion toward others and spread your word. In Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Objectives

1. Locate the story of Paul in the Book of Acts.
2. Outline the basics of Paul's story, who's in it, what happened.
3. Describe how Saul/Paul was transformed by meeting and believing in Jesus.
4. Children will locate the following places on the map: Tarsus, Damascus, Jerusalem
5. Know that Jesus' "amazing grace" reaches out even to those who resist him or hate him.
6. Discuss ways Jesus encounters us and changes us, and steps we can take to help others "see" Jesus and become his disciple.

Supplies

Construction paper in various colors.

Color pencils, markers, sharpies – hoping you will have these at home

Activity

The following vocabulary will be helpful to go over before beginning the activity.

Pharisee – Jewish leaders who were very careful to follow all of God's laws and rules that they made up.

Gentile – someone who is not Jewish

Temple – the center of worship and religious life in Jerusalem

Synagogue – Jewish places of worship and study in cities and towns

Jerusalem – center of Jewish religious life

Damascus – one of the oldest cities in Paul’s time, where he was going when he was blinded and heard Jesus speak

Tarsus – capital city of Cilicia, in modern day Turkey, where Saul was born

Persecution – causing other people to suffer because of what they believe

After reading the story ask the youth to take off their shoes. Using the colored pencils, markers or sharpies ask the youth to trace around the outline of the left foot on one sheet of construction paper and then the right foot on another piece of construction paper. Repeat the process several times so that you have several foot prints. Place the pieces of construction paper on the floor in a continuing pattern to make for a trail of footprints. Emphasis should be on the trail of footprints like St. Paul’s following Jesus.

Reflection/Evaluation

What happens when you stumble and lose faith? – Sin – but Jesus saves and saves us again and again.

Is it always easy to walk with Jesus? - No – believing can be hard sometimes, doing the right thing can be hard.

When did you first learn to “follow” Jesus? How do you continue to learn about Jesus?

Lord’s Prayer

