
Signs of Life: Changed Lives

Acts 9:1-22

August 22, 2026

CUSTOM

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Women's Fall Bible Study - last day of early bird pricing is today

Baby Dedication - 2nd service - Landrie Elizabeth Cassity, June 20, 2026. Parents: Garrett & Baylee Cassity

"Baby dedication is less about parents making promises about what their child will become and more about parents making a commitment concerning the kind of home in which that child will be raised."

Opening: Psalm 127:3

"Children are a heritage from the LORD..."

Psalm 139:13-16 — God's intimate knowledge of the child

■ *"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."*

Charge to the parents: Deuteronomy 6:4-7

"You shall teach them diligently to your children..."

Communion Today

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:1-22 (NKJV) [1] Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest [2] and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. [3] As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. [4] Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" [5] And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." [6] So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." [7] And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. [8] Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. [9] And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. [10] Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." [11] So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. [12] And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." [13] Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. [14] And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." [15] But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. [16] For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." [17] And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." [18] Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. [19] So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. [20] Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. [21] Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" [22] But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

ILLUSTRATION

Seeing the bully from high school at church.

We have been walking through the book of Acts and watching Jesus build His church through ordinary people empowered by the Holy Spirit. What began with a relatively small group of disciples in

Jerusalem is spreading. Persecution has scattered believers into Judea and Samaria, but instead of silencing the gospel, persecution has actually carried it farther.

Those who were scattered spoke out.

Stephen boldly proclaimed Christ even when it cost him his life. Philip carried the gospel into Samaria and then followed the Spirit into the wilderness, where one conversation with an Ethiopian official potentially carried the message of Jesus into another part of the world.

But standing in the background of these stories has been another man: **Saul**.

- The first time we really noticed him, coats were being laid at his feet while Stephen was being murdered. Saul wasn't simply skeptical of Christianity. He hated it. He believed Christians were dangerous heretics, Jesus was a false Messiah, and the church needed to be destroyed.
- And now Acts 9 opens with Saul heading toward Damascus to finish the job.
- What Saul doesn't know is that before he ever reaches Damascus, **Jesus is going to reach him**.
- He leaves Jerusalem breathing threats and murder. He will soon enter Damascus proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God.

That is the power of the gospel.

Christianity isn't merely about becoming more religious, respectable, informed, or moral. One of the great signs that Jesus is alive is that **Jesus changes lives**.

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:21-22 (NKJV) [21] And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled [22] in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

And few lives illustrate that better than Saul of Tarsus. Let's examine this guy and see that perhaps Saul is not that far off from the rest of us...

MAIN POINT

Saul had a past

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:1-2 (NKJV) - Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Every Christian has something in common: **there was a time when we were not Christians.**

We all have a past.

For some, that past is dramatic and obvious. For others, it looks respectable and religious. Saul's past included both extraordinary religious achievement and extraordinary rebellion against God.

Saul wasn't a nominal Jew. He was zealous, educated, disciplined, and deeply committed to Judaism. In Philippians 3 he describes himself as circumcised the eighth day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee concerning the law, and so zealous for his religion that he persecuted the church.

He had also been trained under Gamaliel, one of the most respected teachers of the Jewish law in his generation.

By almost every religious measurement available to him, Saul was impressive.

But that is part of the tragedy.

Saul was sincerely religious and sincerely wrong.

He believed he was defending God's honor when, in reality, he was attacking God's Son.

Years later, after experiencing the grace of Christ, Paul would look back and describe himself as formerly ***“a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man (1 Tim. 1:13).”***

Before Christ, Saul thought Christians were the blasphemers. After meeting Christ, he realized **he had been the blasphemer.**

That is what happens when grace opens our eyes. We finally begin to see ourselves accurately.

Acts says Saul was **“breathing threats and murder.”**

The picture is vivid. Hatred toward Christ and His people had become the atmosphere Saul breathed. He obtained authority from the high priest to travel to Damascus, arrest Christians, and drag them back to Jerusalem.

Later he would admit:

SCRIPTURE

Acts 26:11 (NKJV) [11] And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Saul was consumed with rage. And there is an important warning here. Religious zeal is not necessarily evidence that someone is walking with God. Human beings can become so convinced of their own righteousness that they justify things God hates while believing they are serving Him.

Pascal famously observed:

QUOTE

— Pascal

“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”

That describes Saul. It also describes many today. Zeal + Ignorance + deception = a life lived passionately against the truth.

But it also makes what happens next remarkable.

This is one reason Saul's conversion is such powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Something happened that turned one of Christianity's fiercest enemies into one of its boldest witnesses.

- The man traveling to Damascus to destroy the church would eventually spend his life planting churches.
- The man attempting to silence the name of Jesus would eventually carry that name throughout the Roman world.
- The persecutor would become the preacher.

Only Jesus can explain Saul.

APPLICATION

And that means your past doesn't have the final word either. Satan loves to tell people, “You have done too much. You have gone too far. You have been this way too long.”

Acts 9 answers: **Have you met Saul?**

Grace specializes in people with a past.

MAIN POINT

Saul had a divine appointment with Jesus

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:3-5 (NKJV) - As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

We aren't told the tone of Jesus' voice. But we know the character of Jesus. This is certainly confrontation, but it is also mercy. Jesus could have destroyed Saul. Instead, He stopped him.

That itself is grace.

And notice the question Jesus asks:

“Why?”

Saul had undoubtedly constructed an entire theological justification for his actions. He could defend himself. He could quote Scripture. He could explain his logic. And Jesus reduces everything to one question:

Why are you doing this? And God still confronts people with that question.

- Why are you living the way you are living? Committing adultery, living a lie, walking in stubborn pride?
- Why are you chasing something that never satisfies you?
- Why are you allowing bitterness to rule your heart?
- Why are you destroying yourself with something you know cannot give you life?
- Why are you running from the God who made you?

QUOTE

Eventually, the why leads us to the Who.

Saul asks:

■ *“Who are You, Lord?”*

And Jesus answers:

■ *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*

Imagine that moment. Everything Saul believed suddenly collapsed.

- Jesus is alive.
- Stephen was right.
- The Christians were right.
- And Saul had been fighting against the very God he believed he was serving.

APPLICATION

And don't miss this! Jesus says "persecuting me..." This means that when someone messes with Christ's bride, they are messing with Christ. Jesus takes the mistreatment of his church personally.

Acts 26 tells us that Jesus also described Saul as "kicking against the goads." A goad was a cattle prod of sorts, used to direct an animal. When the animal kicked against it, the resistance only caused greater pain.

Saul had been kicking. God had already been placing truth in front of him.

He knew the Scriptures. He had heard the claims about Jesus. He had watched Stephen die. He had heard Stephen proclaim Christ from the Old Testament. He had watched Stephen pray for the forgiveness of the very people killing him.

I wonder how many times Stephen's face and words returned to Saul's mind. He could suppress the truth, argue against it, fight it, and persecute those who believed it. But he could not make it untrue.

but here's the thing: Saul was trying to stamp out externally what he couldn't escape internally. You never know who might come to Christ. Sometimes the most ardent critics of Christianity are simply overcompensating for the deep conviction they can't escape.

APPLICATION

Maybe someone here is doing the same thing. You've heard the gospel. You've felt conviction. God has put people in your life who have spoken truth to you. Maybe circumstances have stripped away some of your excuses.

- Yet you keep resisting.
- You keep kicking against the goads.
- There comes a point when you realize that resisting Jesus isn't freedom. It is exhausting. You don't need to outrun His grace. You need to surrender to it.

APPLICATION

And Christian, don't become discouraged when someone you love doesn't respond immediately to the gospel. You may have shared Christ with them for years. You may have prayed a thousand prayers that seem unanswered.

Your responsibility is faithfulness. Salvation belongs to God.

You never know what truth God is using, what seed is taking root, or what conversation will come back to someone years later.

Stephen probably never knew what his sermon did to Saul. But heaven had a plan the entire time.

MAIN POINT

Saul had to be shaken up

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:6-9 (NKJV) - So he, trembling and astonished (you think!), said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

The two most important questions for everyone to answer regarding Jesus are:

"Who are You?" and "What do You want me to do?"

APPLICATION

One of the truest signs of conversion is not simply a mental belief that Jesus is real but the response of, "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

- Notice Saul didn't respond, "Lord, here's what I want You to do!"
- Because when you discover Christ's power, reality, and truth, the first response shouldn't be one of entitlement, but of submission.

Arise and go - one step at a time... that's how God leads us!

Talk about a reality check. One moment you are on your spiritual high horse, in the prime of your life and career, with all the right friends in all the right places; the next moment, you are blind, humbled, and shaken to the core... so shaken that you cannot even eat or drink for three straight days.

Where is big, bad Paul the persecutor now? Where is the man who had a religious answer for everything? Where is the arguer, the zealot? Brought to nothing by one moment in the presence of the King of kings!

ILLUSTRATION

The great and powerful Oz of Tarsus, exposed as nothing more than a fearful, lost soul **hiding behind a religious curtain**. Now he learned the words he would echo for the rest of his life: "What do You want me to do?" From this point on, he would never see himself as anything more than a bondservant of Jesus Christ.

- Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish. Saul sat for three days in physical blindness, when, in reality, he could see spiritually more clearly than ever before.
- Maybe the blindness remained so that the vision of Jesus would be etched into his mind's eye for the rest of his life. Like a camera shutter closing after the image is impressed on the film, God shut down Saul's connection to the world.
- He was forced to think about his encounter with Christ. It took God completely breaking Saul; breaking him from his pride, breaking him from his self-righteousness, breaking him from his self-reliance, breaking him from his bitter hatred and rage. Vance Havner put it well.

QUOTE

— Vance Havner

God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume.

God sometimes breaks what we have built so He can rebuild something better.

- He breaks our pride.
- He breaks our self-reliance.
- He breaks the illusion that we are in control.

He breaks the false identities behind which we have been hiding.

And then He teaches us to say what Saul said: **"Lord, what do You want me to do?"**

APPLICATION

From this point forward, Saul will spend the rest of his life learning what it means to be a bondservant of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we fear being exposed by Jesus.

But Jesus does not expose us because He delights in humiliating us. He brings us into the light because things hidden in darkness cannot be healed. Right now, His invitation is grace.

There will come a day when Christ returns as Judge. But today He offers mercy, forgiveness, cleansing, and new life.

So if Jesus is shaking something in your life, don't assume He has abandoned you. Maybe He is getting your attention.

MAIN POINT

Saul needed other Christians

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:10-11 (NKJV) - Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying."

Often, the way God works in the life of one Christian is through another Christian. That is why daily obedience to God is so important. You never know when God may call on you to disciple, pray for, or encourage someone on behalf of Jesus. That is exactly what we see as we meet Ananias.

Ananias was a "certain disciple." We don't hear anything about this man before or after this story. But if you are going to be mentioned in the Bible once, this is the way you want to be seen. He was available to the Lord, and he knew the Lord's voice. When Jesus calls, will you know His voice? Are you ready for Him to call on you this afternoon?

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:12 (NKJV) - And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.

The encouragement of fulfilled prophecy:

I love the detail Jesus gives. This is not some vague prophecy that requires little faith. Jesus did not say, "Go around town and knock on doors. In one house there is a man who is praying; go lay hands on him."

No, Jesus tells him the name of the street, the name of the man who owns the house, Saul's name and condition, and exactly what Saul is doing. This was to confirm in Ananias' mind (who was afraid of Saul and hesitant to go) and in Saul's mind that Jesus was truly and miraculously at work.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:13-14 (NKJV) - Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

The difficulty: Ananias argues with the Lord. We can imagine the weight of being called to minister to someone who had caused so much damage and pain to his brothers and sisters in Christ. This was no easy command for Ananias to receive. After all, we might understand why God would want to save my kind neighbor—but the evil, violent, malicious man? Why would God want to save him? And why would God want to send me into danger?

APPLICATION

Sometimes the truest test of our obedience to Christ is when Jesus asks us to believe that His power is capable of saving all... even those who we might consider our greatest adversaries... and remembering that our safety is not the highest priority when it comes to obedience.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:15-16 (NKJV) - But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Notice that God doesn't promise Saul riches, health, and prosperity. Nope, the only thing that gets promised to Saul is suffering. Saul would have a mighty ministry, taking the gospel to kings, nations, and peoples, watching the power of the Holy Spirit at work. But the mighty power and mighty ministry came with mighty suffering.

Sometimes it is the suffering that God calls us to, for His glory, where Jesus becomes our greatest source of joy, happiness, and peace.

Suffering seems terrifying, but after Saul met Jesus and became Paul, **he viewed suffering for Christ as a great privilege and joy**. There is no doubt in my mind that if God calls you to suffer for Him, He will provide the supernatural strength, peace, and joy in the midst of it to overcome.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:17-18 (NKJV) - And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Isn't this beautiful? After all the supernatural things Jesus did, He chose to bring Saul's final healing and strength through the touch of another person.

APPLICATION

Christian, you never know how greatly God might use your obedience simply to reach out and touch someone's life. When He places it on your heart to pray for someone, share a Scripture, or even offer a simple hug, don't underestimate the power He can release through that act. You can become a tangible point of contact where people see and encounter Jesus.

MAIN POINT

Saul was transformed

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:19 (NKJV) - So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

According to Paul in Galatians, after Christ revealed Himself to him on the road to Damascus, he spent time between Damascus and Arabia before going up to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:15–18). This was a season of divine reorientation. The persecutor had been apprehended by grace, set apart by God's sovereign purpose, and entrusted with the gospel he once tried to destroy.

A few changes took place in Saul's life:

A. His priorities changed

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:20 (NKJV) - Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

He was on the road to Damascus to destroy Christians, and now he is in Damascus trying to make some! **Immediately...** there was no reason to wait. He knew he had been changed, and he sensed the urgency to start spreading the message. This is a zeal he would never lose. May we never lose it either.

When Christ changes your heart, he reorients your priorities. All of a sudden, seeking the kingdom and His righteousness above all other things makes sense.

B. His reputation changed

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:21 (NKJV) - Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

Saul's transformation confounded those who knew of him. Even the apostles, when he came to them, were afraid of him. And yet the Holy Spirit's work of changing this man's heart became clearly evident to all who were watching.

- How many of you were "known"? You know what I mean.
- "That's the crazy guy."
- "That's the player."
- "That's the immoral girl."
- "That's the party animal."
- The religious hypocrite
- That's the "fill in the blank."
- How awesome is it that Christ can give you a new identity—that you can become a new creation! Now they will know you by your love, compassion, generosity, character, and all the things that look like Jesus.

C. His mind changed

SCRIPTURE

Acts 9:22 (NKJV) - But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

The Scriptures Saul had studied his entire life suddenly looked different. The pieces came together.

- Isaiah.
- The Psalms.
- The promises.
- The sacrifices.
- The Messiah.
- Jesus was everywhere.

Saul still had the same mind. He still had his training, intelligence, education, and ability to reason. But now those things were surrendered to Christ. His knowledge was no longer being used to exalt himself. It was being used to exalt Jesus.

APPLICATION

You who may not know Jesus, how would you like to be radically changed today? How would you like to stop living for the small things this world offers and start living for eternity? How would you like your identity to change from “Oh, that guy” to “Something is different!”? How would you like your mind to be renewed and transformed, so you can see Christ for who He truly is and show Him to others?

If God could do it for Saul, there is hope for us all!

CLOSING

It's important to note that Saul's conversion is the exception, not the rule. Obviously, Jesus is not in the habit of regularly meeting people with the physical brightness of His glory, blinding them, and audibly speaking to them—though I have met several people with similar supernatural stories. But we must remember that the simple gospel message is just as glorious and powerful. It is how God speaks and calls people today to repentance. As Augustine wrote of his own conversion,

“You called, and cried out, and broke through my deafness; You flashed, shone, and scattered my blindness.”

The truth contained in His Word and in prophecy is how He undeniably speaks. He still orchestrates events and people by the Holy Spirit to confirm that He is at work. And if He is calling you today, right now you know it. Undeniably, you hear His voice in the depths of your heart calling you to know Him and be saved. The story of Saul's spiritual transformation ought to remind us never to write anyone off as being beyond the love of Christ.