

**No one is so far from God that He cannot reach down for them,  
and no height is so high that God's grace cannot lift a sinner to it.**

Saul of Tarsus, and God's dealing with him is a perfect example of this.

He would be surprised to learn how far from God he actually was

He will be surprised to see the ways that God will use him for the rest of his life.

( *Story about thinking you are helping a situation - but actually you are hurting it.* )

1-2 Saul in [Jerusalem](#)

3-25 Saul in [Damascus](#)

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### **Saul in Jerusalem v1-2**

Saul the Persecutor of the church.

Ch8 had a theme persecution and violence inside of Jerusalem, but outside Jerusalem, there are tales of the gospel spreading and of joy

v8 "much joy in that city"

v39 the Ethiopian believer "went on his way rejoicing"

Meanwhile - in Jerusalem, the church's enemy was not satisfied with the damage that he has done so far, and is thinking up new ways to try to stamp out the newly formed (and international) Jesus movement.

he was "uttering threats with every breath" NLT

Saul, like the big bad wolf that our kids are scared of, is huffing and puffing, and threatening and scheming. He wants to finish what he started.

8:3 He was "ravaging" the church

A wild boar in the vineyard. uprooting and tearing apart the beloved vines and branches of God's carefully tended vineyard.

9:13 - he has done "much evil" to the saints in Jerusalem

9:21 - he "made havoc in Jerusalem" among those who call on the name of Jesus.

We (and the Christians in Jerusalem and Damascus) think of him as a persecutor, but, remember - he views himself as a righteous guardian of orthodoxy, defending the true faith against dangerous heretics.

It is quite possible that there was not a thought in his head that he could be wrong.

Not even having to justify his actions to himself; why would he? he's right.

(Jack Bauer and other characters like him "I've done some terrible things, and I live with that guilt but it was for a good cause, right?" inner conflict of troubled protagonists) as far as we know, Saul of Tarsus sleeps pretty well at night!

In his mind, he is authorised by God and by man to do this.

v2 the high priest gave him letters / extradition papers, to go retrieve refugee Christians from Damascus and bring them back to their jurisdiction for trial and "punishment" (Acts 22:5)

Damascus, in modern day Syria, had a sizeable Jewish population there, and Saul wagered (correctly) that some of the Christians who fled Jerusalem ended up there. So he prepares himself for the 6 day journey to go arrange a meeting with them. 210 kilometers northeast of Jerusalem (his first international mission trip)

The Way:

interesting title for Christians

Saul leaves Jerusalem, and unbeknownst to him, he will never be the same again

## Saul in Damascus 3-25

First we need to look at what took place **on the Road to Damascus** 2-9

Very important event, life-changing for Saul, and life-changing for the church of God. This is recorded 3x in the book of Acts, ( here and ch 22 and ch 26 ) and referenced in many of Paul's letters, in his auto-biographical sections when he speaks of his conversion (1 Timothy 1, which was read out earlier)

*"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.**" (1 Corinthians 15:3–8, ESV)*

It starts with a flash of light - then conversation with the risen Jesus then a humbling blindness, which leads to a genuine conversion

### Saul sees the Light: v3

it was the middle of the day, but this light from heaven is brighter than the midday desert sun. He falls "off his high horse"

*"humbled by Your majesty"*

### Conversation with the Risen Jesus v4-6

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Jesus does this sometimes, say a name twice, like when Jesus says "Martha, Martha," in **Luke 10:41** when Martha was serving and Mary was resting... or "Jerusalem, Jerusalem..." **Matthew 23:37** when Jesus was lamenting over the sin of Jerusalem.

reasons why He does it:

- 1) What comes next is important
- 2) I know you.

Why are you persecuting ME?

- to harm the church is to harm Jesus. Body of Christ imagery isn't some sweet illustration that Paul thought of when he was writing Corinthians , this is how Jesus introduces Himself to him (He actually says it twice in 2 verses v4 & v5) (repetition)

Paul is shown this by Jesus at their first introduction - and meditates on it for the rest of his life. He learns that to harm the body of Christ is to harm Jesus, and he goes on to learn that to serve and build up the body of Christ is to bless Jesus - so he devotes the rest of his life to serving Jesus by serving the church.

He also instructs other christians of this truth.

Ephesians :Christ is the head of the church, and we are His body.

Corinthians: We are the body of Christ and each of us has a different role to play, just as our body parts do different things, together.

Jesus identifies with His people. Union. At the cross He identifies with us in our sin and in the resurrection we identify with Him in His victory. All that He is, all that He has is ours, where He is, we shall be forevermore.

An additional comment from Jesus : "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**'" (Acts 26:14, ESV)

A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick used to get an ox going the way you wanted when plowing. One jabbed the hind legs of the ox with the goad until the ox cooperated. A disobedient ox would kick back, and would cause damage to himself.

Jesus said that He has been at work, in Saul's life, and that Saul has resisted it up until this point.

Perhaps Jesus was at work through the words of Stephen, or the way that Stephen died in front of Saul, asking God to forgive his murderers.

Perhaps Jesus was at work in Saul through the testimonies of the anonymous Christians that Saul had interacted with, as he drug them to court, and contend to their deaths.

Perhaps Jesus was at work in saul through any number of ways - its conjecture to be sure, but we know that somehow, there was a suppression of unrighteousness and the testimony of Jesus in the heart of Saul.

**God had been working on him for quite some time and he had been fighting it.**

Saul was a Jewish fanatic, Carl Jung (swiss psychiatrist) said "*fanaticism is only found in individuals who are compensating secret doubt.*"

v5 Saul's response : who are you Lord? (probably has a good idea at this point, but just wants to be sure!)

a second question: "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'" (Acts 22:10, ESV)

who are you and what do you want?

If you could ask God anything, what would you ask? A Gallup Survey from the 1990s asked people to choose three questions they would most like to ask God. The top five responses were:

- "Will there ever be lasting world peace?"
- "How can I be a better person?"
- "What does the future hold for my family and me?"
- "Will there ever be a cure for all diseases?"
- "Why is there suffering in the world?"

It is strange that people would want to ask God these questions when they are already answered in the Bible. But they really aren't the most important questions for us to ask. Saul asked the *right* questions.

Who are you Lord? / What do you want me to do?

two important questions!

who are you : what do you want me to do

(Paul's epistles follow this pattern -

first he tells us who God is, then he tells us what God wants us to do)

what do you want ME to do? personal. Not for the sake of others, but for the sake of personal obedience.

## **Saul and Ananias 10-19**

3 days of darkness and fasting

meanwhile God appears to ananias:

Hard for him to believe that Saul could be saved - but god shows him that

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he prays - The very same mouth which was breathing out murderous threats was now breathing out praises and prayers to God.

One might say that Saul had never *really* prayed before; he merely repeated formal prayers. Before this: His prayers were more mechanical than spiritual. He had never prayed with Jesus as mediator. He had never prayed in Jesus' name. He had not prayed with a humble heart, near to God - he had said many prayers but he had never *prayed*

Saul realises that he raised his hand against the Lord's Anointed, Jesus Christ. He killed His messenger - Stephen. He persecuted the citizens of His kingdom - the church. He deserves death. Is he awaiting his execution? And then Ananias greets him and says "Brother Saul" - GRACE!!!

Blind Saul could not see the love on Ananias' face, so he communicated it through his touch and his voice.

**Be filled:** God did an effective job of breaking Saul, but it wasn't His intention to leave him broken. God wanted to break Saul so He could fill him and leave him filled. "It is often said that Saul was converted on the road to Damascus. Strictly speaking, this is not the fact. His conversion began in his encounter with the law but it was not accomplished until the gospel entered his heart by faith, and that did not occur on the road, but in Damascus." (Lenski)

The family of God. Saul's gradual acceptance into the broader body of Christ that he had heard so much about.

Saul is Baptized into Jesus, and the community of Jesus' followers - We should understand baptism in the book of Acts not only as a theological understanding of identity in Jesus' death and resurrection but also in terms of Allegiance. Baptism is a picture that you have joined a new tribe and pledged allegiance to the Chief.

**Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name:** People were genuinely amazed at Saul's conversion; it was hard to believe just how powerfully Jesus could change a life. Years later, Paul himself would write: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)) Paul lived that verse long before he wrote it.

## Saul in Jerusalem 26-31

Initial reluctance to accept him

Vouched for and welcomed in by Barnabas

True to his disposition and his name, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles

Thank God for Ananias and Barnabas, who introduced him to the Christians in Damascus and Jerusalem. What would church history look like without welcoming friendly people?

Christians must join churches, and churches must welcome Christians, no matter their background.

We need modern Ananiases and Barnabasses who overcome their scruples and hesitations and take the initiative to befriend newcomers.

The Apostles themselves needed to be reminded by Barnabas

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God's grace is seen "not only in turning such a cruel wolf into a lamb, but also in transforming him into a shepherd" - John Calvin