

The Church on the Move: Enemies to Friends

Acts 9:1-19 || Pastor Paul Hahn || 21 August 2022

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: Do you have a good “surprise party” story, whether yours or someone else’s?

Worship: [Psalm 80](#) (*Remain a few moments in worship with this passage. What is God’s invitation?*)

Sermon Summary for [Acts 9:1-19](#) (*Read aloud before reading the sermon summary.*)

Every Christian has a conversion story, even if it happens when we are too young to remember life without Jesus. One way or another, though, it is true what Paul wrote: “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” ([Rom 5:10](#), also [2 Cor 5:17-19](#)). Our conversion is a movement from being an enemy of God to becoming His friend. Christ clearly states this ([John 15:15](#)), and we see it in Saul’s story. His story is certainly unique: his enmity against Jesus and His followers was rabid ([Acts 8:3](#)), his conversion was utterly dramatic, and his calling to be the apostle to the gentiles is exceptional. And yet, we can find commonality with Saul as well. Like him, we need to see our conversion this strikingly – from being enemies of Christ to His friends. We do this by viewing his story through each of its main characters:

Jesus: He takes the initiative as we move from enemies to friends of God // One of the unique aspects of the Gospel (versus other religious or secular life views) is in the primacy and direction of this movement of God *toward* us. Our conversion is neither initiated nor takes root because of our efforts or merit. As John Stott wrote of Saul, “*If we ask what caused Saul’s conversion, only one answer is possible. What stands out from the narrative is the sovereign grace of God through Jesus Christ.*” Saul was actively persecuting the Lord and His people, and Christ decided to intervene ([Gal 1:15-16](#)). And the same is true for every one of us. As in the parable of the prodigal son, we want to forget our Father – His wisdom, His love, His goodness – and replace Him with our own will and desires. Or worse: we wish He was dead. So, there is no starting point for us to reach a place of deservedness before God. *And yet*, He moves toward us. In Jesus, God has gone to staggering lengths to meet us in our sin and brokenness that we might find forgiveness and redemption. But also so much more: it is through Christ’s death and resurrection that we also become the adoptive sons and daughters of the Almighty.

Saul: Our lives are forever changed as we move from enemies to friends with God // NT Wright wrote, “*Everything that Saul said and did from that moment on... flowed from that sudden, shocking encounter with Jesus.*” Saul needed to be blinded so he could truly see. And then everything changed for Him. The man captivated by his own passion for righteousness is now keenly aware of his staggering sinfulness. Too often in the church today we miss this deep connection between our conversion and how our lives are fundamentally changed because of that faith. Saul is given a mission coming out of this; he will be Jesus’s instrument to the Gentiles. Likewise, our conversion will undoubtedly lead to a call to mission. God loves us too much to let us remain who we were (or even who we are), and He invites us to join Him in His mission to redeem the world.

Ananias: Help from others is essential as we move from enemies to friends with God // Ananias is an agent of Jesus’ encouragement, teaching and healing for Saul. He is essential to Saul moving forward in faith. We will need these kinds of people to become people living inside the Lord’s grace as well. God will provide them, but we must be open to them; for our Father rarely provides for us in ways we expect. Looking forward, each of us will be called to be an Ananias to others. And Jesus will be with us, using both our strengths and weaknesses in these callings. We can therefore move in the direction God calls us with confidence, knowing that all we have and all we

are is of God, and that He calls us personally and specifically to be in relationship with Him and to move with Him into the world to spread His message of redemptive love and hope.

Discussion Questions *(You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussions.)*

Jesus // He takes the initiative as we move from enemies to friends of God

- How would you describe the personality of Paul based on Acts 9 and his life before conversion?
 - Given his personality and history, what made him the ideal future apostle to minister and witness to the Gentiles (non-Israelites)?
- Can you see how God influenced you and the circumstances that led to your becoming a Christian?

Saul // Our lives are forever changed as we move from enemies to friends with God

- Read [Acts 9:19-25](#). What happens to Paul following his conversion?
 - What does it say about God that He chose someone persecuting His people to become a great missionary to them and others?
- The persecution of Paul as an early convert is a reminder for all followers of Christ that it is not the easy path. Why do you think Paul continued on in spite of this persecution? How do you identify with Paul?

Ananias // Help from others is essential us as we move from enemies to friends with God

- Review the text if needed: What did Ananias do for Paul when he first encountered him?
 - What words does Ananias use to claim Paul as saved and redeemed? (Meeting both physical and spiritual needs is also the Way of the Cross. Christ meets us where we are at.)
- Has there been someone in your life that particularly influenced your coming to Christ and/or your growth as a Christian? How did they meet you where you were at?
 - Have you ever had the opportunity to be this for another person? Describe that experience.
 - What qualities are needed/useful to be an Ananias to others?

Prayer

This week's Prayer Guide for personal or group use is [HERE](#).

Engage & Experience: Prayer

CG Discussion Guides will be provided through November 20th, the last day of our sermon series on **Acts: The Church on the Move**. As we continue our 2022 Focus on Prayer, we suggest you and your CG read a book on prayer together for the end of the year. Here are our recommendations:

- [Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God](#)
Timothy Keller
- [Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference?](#)
Philip Yancy
- [If God Already Knows, Why Pray?](#)
Douglas Kelly