



Chapter 5

What's God's Mission for Your Life?

Acts 9:1-19

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 64 - 69

DISCUSSION

Pages 70 - 74

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 9:1-19

The Big Picture

God has a plan for our life. How are we called to serve?

What is God's plan for your life? In this chapter, we will look at the conversion of St. Paul to examine how God gave him a mission for his life. Then, your group will begin to outline their own personal mission statements to explore God's plan for their lives.

Saul the Pharisee, Saul the Persecutor

As we saw earlier, Saul (known later as St. Paul) consented to the death of the first martyr, St. Stephen (Acts 8:1). He also scattered the Christians to Judea and Samaria through his persecutions. Now he takes center stage as he goes to Damascus to persecute the Christians there.

We know a little bit about St. Paul's background from his own account in the New Testament. He tells us that he was a Jew from the tribe of

Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). He was a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, and studied under the greatest Pharisee of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was zealous for the law, meaning that he was willing to use violence even against his fellow Jews to protect the correct teaching of the law (see 1 Maccabees 3:23-26).

'Saul, Saul, Why Are You Persecuting Me?' (Acts 9:1-9)

Saul's zealousness for the law helps explain why he violently persecuted the Christians and why he is intent on traveling to Damascus. Damascus is about 130 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the commercial center of the Roman Empire and the intersection of many important trade routes. Saul wants to try to make sure Christianity doesn't spread to the many Jews who live in the Jewish diaspora along these trade routes, after seeing how quickly the Christian faith spread in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47; Acts 4:4).

On his way to Damascus, Saul sees a blinding light and hears a voice call out "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). In asking who is speaking, God responds, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Notice how Jesus equates Saul's persecution of the early Christians with Himself! The Church makes up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). Saul continues to be blind and is led into the city of Damascus. Saul traveled to Damascus to bind Christians and take them away; now he is taken captive by Christ and led away to Damascus.

Application to Jesus

Jesus' mission should remain at the heart of our mission no matter what we are called to do.

Ananias: Courageous Evangelization (Acts 9:10-19)

As Saul remains blind, God calls Ananias in a vision. Ananias quickly responds to the Lord's call in a manner similar to many Old Testament figures (1 Samuel 3:4, Genesis 22:1-2). Once Ananias hears that God wants him to heal a murderer of Christians, he shows a little more hesitation (Acts 9:13-14). Notice God doesn't tell Ananias that Saul has seen Jesus in a vision or has had a conversion; Ananias just has to trust that Saul won't arrest him. When Ananias prays over Saul, Saul regains his sight and is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is then baptized and has his first bite of food in three days, after which he immediately begins preaching about Jesus in Damascus. From Acts 13:9 and on, Saul will be known as Paul.

St. Paul, the Suffering Servant

In Acts 9:15-16, God tells Ananias His plan for St. Paul: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Earlier, we saw St. Philip explain to the eunuch that Jesus was the Suffering Servant from Isaiah. Here in Acts 9, St. Paul will take on the role and mission of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant.

Compare the following verses to the mission given to St. Paul in Acts 9:15-16. Isaiah 42:1-3 states, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights, I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations." Isaiah 49:6, 7 states, "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.... Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

St. Paul is given the mission of the Suffering Servant and then lives this mission out throughout the Acts of the Apostles. He is filled with God's Spirit (Acts 9:17). He preaches to the sons of Israel (Acts 9:19-22). He preaches before kings (Acts 13:7-12). He preaches to the nations (Acts 13:13-14; Acts 16:1; Acts 18:5-6). In the end, God's message that St. Paul will suffer for His name comes to pass as he faces trials throughout his life and ultimately martyrdom.

During all of this, St. Paul understands that he is taking on this mission of the Suffering Servant (see Acts 13:46-47; Galatians 1:11-17; Romans 15:20-21).

God's Plan for Our Lives

Hopefully, this passage from Acts will help us to reflect: What is God's plan for our lives?

If possible, have your group bring their laptops or tablets to the Bible study in order to make their own mission statement. As a group, go to www.franklincovey.com/msb. Build a personal mission statement. You will have to create a log-in in order to go through the exercise. Find time during the study or the next study to share your mission statements as a group.

Application to Our Lives

How will we figure our God's mission for our lives? Use patience, prayer, and the guidance of a spiritual director to discover what God is calling you to do.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 9:1-19

STEP 1: OPENER

Do you think God has a specific mission for your life? What is the best way to discover what that mission is?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

As we saw earlier, Saul (known later as St. Paul) consented to the death of the first martyr, St. Stephen (Acts 8:1). He also scattered the Christians to Judea and Samaria through his persecutions. Now he takes center stage as he goes to Damascus to persecute the Christians there.

Damascus is about 130 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the commercial center of the Roman Empire and the intersection of many important trade routes. Saul wants to try to make sure Christianity doesn't spread to the many Jews who live in the Jewish diaspora along these trade routes, after seeing how quickly the Christian faith spread in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47; Acts 4:4).

Let's look at the mission God gives Saul in Acts 9 during his conversion.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 9:1-19. Start by reading Acts 9:1-9.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. From the Acts of the Apostles and other places in the New Testament, what do we know about who Saul is before his conversion?

Answer: See the second paragraph in "Saul the Pharisee, Saul the Persecutor."

2. What is significant about Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Answer: Jesus equates Saul's persecution of the early Christians with Himself. The Church makes up the body of Christ.

3. Knowing that Saul was seeking to arrest Christians and lead them away, what is ironic about what happens to Saul?

Answer: Saul traveled to Damascus to bind Christians and take them away. Now, he is taken captive by Christ and led away to Damascus.

Read Acts 9:10-19

4. What is Ananias' reaction to God's initial call?

Answer: He is quick to respond—"Here I am, Lord" Acts 9:10.

5. What is Ananias' reaction to God's specific request?

Answer: He hesitates because he knows who St. Paul is.

6. If you were in this situation, how would you react?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. Who do you identify with more in this chapter, St. Paul or Ananias? Why?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. Think of the most outspoken critic of Christianity on your campus. What would be the impact if they had a conversion?

Allow the group to discuss.

9. In Acts 8:15-16, what is God's plan for St. Paul?

Answer: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

10. In the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, St., Philip showed how Jesus fulfilled God's plan for the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. Read Isaiah 42:1-7 and Isaiah 49:1-7. How is the mission God gives to St. Paul similar to the Suffering Servant?

Answer: St. Paul is chosen (Acts 9:15; Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 49:7). He receives God's Spirit (Acts 9:17; Isaiah 42:1). He is to go to the nations (Acts 9:15; Isaiah 42:1). He is to preach to Israel (Acts 8:15; Isaiah 49:5). He preaches to kings (Acts 8:14; Isaiah 49:7).

11. Do you think that God has given you a specific mission in your life?

Allow the group to discuss.

12. One of the best ways to discover your mission is by creating a personal mission statement.

(If possible, have your group bring their laptops or tablets to the Bible study in order to make their own mission statement. If not, you can make it a "homework" assignment to share next study). As a group, go to www.franklincovey.com/msb. Build a personal mission statement. You will have to create a log-in in order to go through the exercise. Find time during the study or the next study to share your mission statements as a group.

