

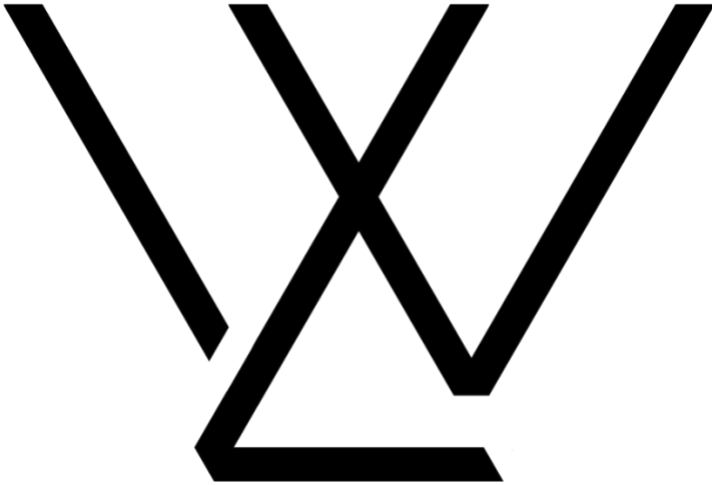


WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 5 - 8



ACTS 9:1-31



Word to Life's are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

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Week 5: Acts 9:1-9

Day 1: The Way

READ: Acts 9:1-9

EXPLORE:

The section of Acts we are studying this week introduces us to one of the earliest names that was given to the Church in the first century. This early community of Christ followers, who had fled Jerusalem because of widespread persecution, were called “The Way.” In today’s study we are going to discuss the significance of this name and its implications.

Before we can discover the significance behind this name, we should remember that “The Way” was far from the only name that was used to identify those who followed Christ. Early Christ followers would have been called disciples, followers, and Nazarenes for example. The first mention of Christ followers being labeled “Christians” did not occur until Paul was in Antioch in Acts 11:26.¹ Each of the previously listed names gives us an angle to understand what the Church was like, what they valued, and how they lived.

Even though Acts 9:2 introduces us to the idea of “The Way,” this is not the only time in which this name was used. In the book of Acts, Luke uses the term six times to describe the community of faith in action.² It is likely that the early Church self-identified as followers of “The Way”.

From within the larger body of first century Jews, the early Church saw themselves as those who followed the promised and fulfilled way. The fact that Luke continually chose to describe the Church

¹ There is historical evidence that the term “Christian” was used earlier than Antioch.

² See Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, and 24:12.

as “The Way” is profoundly important. It is a deeply rooted concept throughout Scripture.

In Isaiah 40:3 we can read the famous phrase that is repeated in the Greek Scriptures, “*prepare the way of the Lord.*” In John 14:6 Jesus spoke, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” In these verses and others like them, there is a profound truth that we should not miss! Simply, because there was and is a way of salvation in Christ, there is a way of life for His followers. Their belief in the resurrected Christ could not be neatly separated from their everyday lifestyle.

Although they were far from sinless, the early Church refused to separate right belief from right behavior. Because they encountered and believed in The Way, they became people of The Way.

BIG IDEA: The early Church was known and identified by how the way of salvation shaped their way of life.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Each of the names used for the early Church gives us a specific window through which we can see their community. What aspects of the Christian faith are implied in the following names?
 - Disciples:
 - Followers:
 - The Way:

- **Question:** Sometimes we can miss the true meaning and significance behind a name. What do you think it truly and fully means to be labeled, “Christian?” How would you define the term Christian?
 - Definition of Christian:

Week 5: Acts 9:1-9

Day 2: Why are you persecuting me?

READ: Acts 9:1-9; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

EXPLORE:

“The Church is under attack!” The news of danger had spread in Jerusalem and throughout the surrounding regions. Saul, a pious Pharisee, was leading the charge to eradicate Christianity from the face of the earth. He believed their practices were divergent from the Law and their teachings were blasphemous against God Himself. Therefore, Saul saw it as his righteous duty to eradicate this heresy by any means necessary. God had different plans.

In the midst of his campaign, Saul found himself on a road headed to Damascus, where Jesus confronted him directly! The first words Jesus speaks to Saul were, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” This question is deeply profound and is where we will spend our time today.

The first observation to consider is that Saul’s theological conviction behind why he was persecuting the church is completely undone with this question. The root of the Christian belief, and their heresy (in Saul’s mind), was that Jesus was resurrected and in glory. Fundamentally, Christians believed Jesus was and still is resurrected. Now, Saul encountered the one who he was convinced was dead and he was laid face down in His presence because of His glory. As the body of Christ, we know, just as Saul found out, that when the righteous endure persecution, it is first and foremost an attack on Jesus himself.

Second, notice who Jesus accuses Saul of persecuting. He doesn’t say, “Why are you persecuting my Church?” He says, “Why are you persecuting me?” Saul’s attack on the followers of Jesus is an attack on Jesus himself! This should cause us to marvel at the

miraculously spiritual union between the Church and their Savior. Many years later, Saul (who was also called Paul) wrote regularly about this deep connection. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:27, *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”*

Finally, take note of how God chose to vindicate himself. Instead of killing Saul, God chose to convert Saul. Whereas, the Lord could have justly destroyed Saul under His righteous wrath, He instead changed Saul’s heart and covered him with grace. Ironically, this grace was and is made possible through the forgiveness purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, the very one who Saul was persecuting. Remember, Saul was the greatest adversary against the Church, but God turned him into the greatest ally to build the Church. This is the dramatic plot twist which God has initiated time and time again throughout history.

BIG IDEA: We should be faithful, obedient, and patient as we know God will vindicate Himself in marvelous ways.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How does the fact that Jesus personally experienced our suffering and hardship influence our response to persecution here and now?

- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus chose to say, “Why are you persecuting me?” Instead of saying, “Why are you persecuting my church?” What does this choice of words teach us about persecution?

Week 5: Acts 9:1-9

Day 3: Saul according to Paul

READ: Acts 9:1-9, 22:3-11, and 26:12-18

EXPLORE:

Our ability to remember is an interesting thing. Sometimes we are able to recall events that are decades old. On other occasions, however, we might struggle to remember what we did only an hour before. Some moments slip our minds and other memories seem to be stuck forever. Thankfully, Saul, who would later be identified as Paul, would not soon forget his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. On more than one occasion, the Scriptures record Saul's experience in his own words. Our aim in today's study is to read, study, and explore the experience of Saul – according to Paul.

Spend time reading through the passages below. Make observations about what you read in each passage individually and together.

Acts 22:3-11

Context: Paul was arrested for his teaching in the temple. Only moments before being taken into the barracks, he was able to convince the crowd to listen one more time. After sharing his story, the crowd wanted to kill him.

Observations:

Acts 26:12-18

Context: Paul was giving a formal speech and testimony before King Agrippa. He would have been positioned in a large room filled with high-ranking officials of the city. The crowd wanted Paul killed, but there was disagreement about his guilt. This was his response.

Observations:

APPLY:

Optional Questions:

- **Question:** Given his setting and choice of words, why do you think Paul said what he said?

- **Question:** How are the different passages similar to and different from one another?

- **Question:** What does Paul's example teach us about sharing our faith stories with others?

Week 5: Acts 9:1-9

Day 4: The Mighty Have Fallen

READ: Acts 9:1-9, Proverbs 3:34, and Proverbs 22:4

EXPLORE:

Imagine what it would have been like to encounter Saul as he left Jerusalem compared to what he was like as he finally entered Damascus. The once prideful man-on-a-mission was now being led by the hand as one who was unable to eat, drink, or even walk on his own. He was nothing short of a changed man. Because of an encounter with Christ, the mighty had fallen.

We have the luxury of reading Saul's story quickly and experiencing his conversion from a safe distance. The early Church would not have been so lucky. It would have been a jarring experience for everyone involved to witness the change in Saul as he was reduced from a threatening aggressor to a shell of his former self. Sometimes we miss how dramatic and complex moments in Scripture would have been because we read the biblical text too quickly.

To get an idea of how disorienting this moment might have been in that day, read only Acts 9:1-2 and Acts 9:8-9. If you read only those verses, you will get a glimpse of how mystifying it would have been to see Saul before and after his jolting road trip. Threats were reduced to vulnerability and pride was replaced with a desperate need for help. This transformation would not only have been confusing for the persecuted Church, but it would also have been quite puzzling for Saul.

When Saul encountered the Lord on the road, his first response was, *"Who are you, Lord?"* After being told that it was Jesus, Saul was told to rise and go to Damascus. We need to notice he was not given the full plan. He was simply given the next step. His first

few steps in obedience to Christ would be difficult and they would be dependent upon the help of others. His pride had come face-to-face with the power of Christ, and it did not stand a chance.

When we consider this moment and others like it, we sometimes run the risk of skipping over the story too quickly. For three days Saul was left without food, water, or sight. In this waiting and in the days that followed, his every action would have reminded him that his very life had been humbled by the presence of God. As we will uncover in the story of Saul, the words of the Proverb ring true, *“The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.”*³

BIG IDEA: Even though it was a surprise to many people (Saul included), the presence of God transformed pride into humility.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Saul was not given the whole plan. Instead, he was given only the next step for obedience. Why do you think God works that way? In what way or ways have you experienced this in your own life?

- **Question:** How have you experienced your pride being turned into humility because of an encounter with God and His truth? How might God be challenging you to confess areas of pride and rightly humble yourself before Him?

³ See Proverbs 22:4 for reference.

Week 5: Acts 9:1-9

Day 5: To Be Revealed and To Reveal

READ: Psalm 16:7-11

EXPLORE:

If you ever have the unfortunate experience of being stranded at sea, you will quickly become well-acquainted with the value of lighthouses. Known for their ability to help direct and warn seafaring ships' captains, lighthouses were created to ensure safe travel for boats and all those aboard them. Originally designed as large, rustic towers with an open flame lit in the top, lighthouses were not only created to be seen themselves, but also to illuminate that which was around them. The goal of a good lighthouse was not simply to be seen, but to make other things visible as well.

In many ways, the Christian faith speaks to a very similar reality. We see the power and authority of Christ and by it we see everything else. The author and theologian CS Lewis once wrote, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Christ is the one to whom we look, and He is the one through whom we see everything else. By revealing Himself to Saul on the road, Jesus desired to radically transform his outlook on life altogether.

When Saul encountered Jesus in Acts 9:3, the presence of God appeared suddenly like a light from heaven which shone all around. The Greek verb used to describe how the light shone around is only used twice in the entire Bible.⁴ The verb which was chosen by Luke is designed to communicate that the light

⁴ *Periastraptō* is the Greek verb meaning to shine around. See Acts 9:3 and 22:6 for reference.

illuminated both Saul and the area around him. This glorious encounter with Christ left him exposed, but it also left him changed forever. Saul lost his physical sight when he met Christ, but he was only truly beginning to shed his spiritual blindness. Despite this blindness, he was beginning to perceive the power of the gospel. He had experienced Christ and he would never be the same. Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road transformed his life and catapulted his eventual ministry to the Church.

Because Saul encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, he was given the status and authority of an apostle. As a result of this authority, his ministry was given weight and influence that stemmed first and foremost from his interaction with the victorious Christ. Like Saul, may our lives and ministry reflect power and effectiveness that is rooted in a genuine encounter with the resurrected Christ!

BIG IDEA: The truth of Christ is not only designed to be seen, but also to illuminate everything else.

APPLY:

Activity: Read, meditate on, and pray through Psalm 16:7-11. If possible, spend time talking about this Psalm within your LifeGroup.

⁷I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;

in the night also my heart instructs me.

⁸I have set the Lord always before me;

because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;

my flesh also dwells secure.

¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,

or let your holy one see corruption.

¹¹You make known to me the path of life;

in your presence there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Week 6: Acts 9:10-19

Day 1: The Role of Visions in Divine Revelation

READ: Acts 9:10-19

EXPLORE:

The story of how Ananias and Saul's relationship became intertwined is yet another extraordinary reminder of the powerful ways in which God is always at work. In one masterfully orchestrated move, the Lord gave simultaneous visions to both Saul and Ananias. To Saul, the Lord gave a vision of a man named Ananias who would come help him regain sight. To an understandably reluctant Ananias, the Lord gave a command to go and help Saul.

When we stop to consider stories like these, it is hard not to marvel at the spectacular ways in which God can and will move His mission forward through humanity. In today's study, we are going to unpack the role of visions as they reveal God's character and His mission in the Church.

First, Scripture consistently incorporates visions in the unfolding mission of the Church. Zechariah received a vision while praying in the temple.⁵ Cornelius saw a vision from the angel of God.⁶ Peter saw a vision from God that led him to drastically expand his ministry.⁷ Paul was encouraged in a vision to continue in bold ministry while in Corinth.⁸ The fact is that God has tactfully used visions to reveal Himself and His mission in both the Old and New Testaments.

⁵ See Luke 1 for reference.

⁶ See Acts 10:3 for reference.

⁷ See Acts 11:5 for reference.

⁸ See Acts 18:9 for reference.

Second, visions are an instrumental part of divine revelation today. In a recent study that was collected, more than 25% of 600 Muslims in unreached countries reported that a vision was instrumental in their conversion to the Christian faith.⁹ It is important to note that the vision itself did not save. Instead, it pointed to the one who could save. Whether it was a dream of Christ communicating His word or visibly appearing before them in glory, visions continue to be profoundly significant within the unreached areas of the world today.

Finally, God is constantly in the business of making Himself known to us in a variety of ways. Whether through His creation, human nature, scientific discovery, life events, visions, or the Bible, we need to remember that God desires to make Himself known. God can and will use a variety of tools to reveal Himself. We ought to be thoughtful and discerning as believers, but we should also be led to a place in which we marvel at the graciousness of God to consistently reveal Himself to us.

BIG IDEA: As with Saul and Ananias, may the God who reveals Himself captivate our hearts and transform our lives for His Glory.

APPLY:

- **Question:** The Christian who may be understandably skeptical about visions might point out that many cults began with supposedly divine dreams. What are some steps we can take as followers of Christ to discern the credibility of a vision? How can we know if a vision is true or not?
- **Question:** Imagine that you were Ananias in Acts 9:10-19. How do you think you would have responded to the vision from God?

⁹ See “*When Muslims Dream of Jesus*” written by Darren Carlson for reference.

Week 6: Acts 9:10-19

Day 2: "Here I Am"

READ: Acts 9:10-19, Genesis 22:1-2, Hebrews 10:5-7

EXPLORE:

"Here I am!" These may be the most appropriate and godly words to utter in response to the God of heaven and earth. They are words that have a long history when it comes to the servants of God. They are words that are normally followed by a grand adventure by those who use them. Abraham said, *"Here I am"*, and then went up on a mountain to sacrifice his only son - the son of promise. Moses vocalized them at the burning bush and God told him that Moses would deliver His people, Israel from slavery in Egypt by many mighty wonders. And here, in our story in the book of Acts, we have more of the same.

Ananias speaks them and then God tells him to go the most notorious persecutor of the Church to restore his sight so that Saul can become one of the most devoted missionaries in Church history. This really is a true, epic tale. At first, we see that he is reluctant, and we can all understand why. Ananias has not yet received word that Paul has seen the risen Lord. As a result, he is worried that Paul will put him in prison as he had put many of his other brethren in prison. After receiving more intel from the Lord, he obeys the command to go to Saul. Ananias' words to Saul are no doubt the first words from a believer that Paul had heard and how sweet those words were, *"Brother Saul"*. He has been welcomed into the believing community, the very community as of three days ago he was persecuting.

This encounter already proved how much of a changed man Saul was. He went from breathing threats to letting this disciple of Jesus lay his hands on him and pray for him. Saul went from raging anger at the disciples to gentle brotherhood. This is the

grace of our God at work! Then it was most likely Ananias who was able to baptize Saul, feed him, and introduce him to the Church family. Wouldn't it be nice to have your resume read "the disciple who baptized the apostle Paul?" What adventure awaits when our heart's posture before the Lord is also, *Here I am!*

We cannot finish this discussion without mentioning the most important time these words were uttered. They, of course, came from our Lord. When the Father asked Jesus to go to the cross, His heart's posture before the Father was *here I am*. This is what the passage above in Hebrews tells us. Jesus came to earth saying to the Father, "*Behold I have come to do all your will.*" May it be so in our lives as well. May we be a people that earnestly desire to be used by God and have our lives proclaim together, "*Here I am.*"

BIG IDEA: We are called to be a people who are ready and available to do the will of God in everyday life.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** As disciples, let's be fully present in our service to the Lord. Think of two practical things you can do this week in your home or on the job where you can serve as one who is available to do as God wills. Write them down and commit to doing them.

Week 6: Acts 9:10-19

Day 3: The Inexcusability of Excuses

READ: Acts 9:10-14 and

EXPLORE:

Humans are incredibly talented and creative excuse-makers. Not only are we inconsistent, but we are well-versed at explaining our inconsistency away. From the guy who missed work because he accidentally ate cat food to the employee who was late because he was stuck in the blood pressure machine, we may even have reasons for the stupidity that seems to follow us around. Regardless of whatever we label them, the fact is that our excuses are indefensible before an almighty God.

In Acts 9:10-14, God visited Ananias in a vision and told him to enter into a really difficult situation. Ananias was tasked with going to Saul who, only days before, would have happily arrested him for following Jesus. Ananias responded to the Lord's command saying, *"Lord, I have heard from many about [Saul], how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."*

We need to notice that even though Ananias addresses the giver of the vision as Lord, he does not treat Him as such. To call someone Lord was to necessarily place yourself as their willing servant. Ananias rightly called Him Lord but refused to obey Him as one who had authority. He made excuses for why he was not originally willing to obey the calling of God.

I (Stephen) don't know about you, but as I read this story of Ananias, I am left wondering about all of the excuses I have given God throughout my life. Whether I labeled them reasons or excuses, there have been many moments in which I claimed Jesus

was my Lord but did not act like it. It is an interesting dynamic when we try to make excuses before God. Our excuse-making is tragic and all-too-common. When I read this story and consider my own excuses, I am left wondering, “What am I trying to accomplish when I resist the will of God through a cheap excuse?”

When we make excuses for our disobedience, we are often trying to free our hearts and minds from a right and godly sense of ownership that we ought to have. Interestingly, the term “excuse” is a combination from two Latin root words: “*Ex*” meaning out and “*causa*” meaning cause or accusation. When we make excuses before God, we are attempting to explain our own wrongdoing before an all-powerful God.

Like Ananias, you and I will be called beyond our excuses and outside of our comfort zones into the glorious purposes of God. Hopefully, our lives will give us many opportunities to refuse excuses as we trust in God’s power and His plan.

BIG IDEA: We need to refuse the habit of making excuses by trusting in God as our true Lord.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In what circumstances do you feel most tempted to make excuses for apathy or disobedience? Take time to list out these areas and pray that God would make you willing to follow His will.

- **Question:** How have you learned to distinguish the difference between valid reasons and invalid excuses?

Week 6: Acts 9:10-19

Day 4: "A Chosen Vessel"

READ: Acts 9:15-16 and Ephesians 2:4-10

EXPLORE:

As we explore today's passage, I want you to consider the significance of these 3 words, "A chosen vessel." These three words are packed with truth and they combine to communicate deep realities about how God works.

"A"- Saul is, at this point in his life, being singled out by God. Throughout history, God has displayed His own power and sovereignty by working in and through people both individually and corporately. In the same way that a builder envisions a beautiful house and then carefully selects each brick, shapes it, and fits it perfectly into place, God intentionally sets his plan in motion. He works with individuals to shape them and place them perfectly into his sovereign plan of redemption. No one would ever marvel at a single brick in a beautiful home. Rather, we stand back in awe and marvel at the completed structure. Saul was chosen not so that he would be marveled at, but so that God's greatness would be magnified.

"Chosen"- Make no mistake, God is the initiator in this transformation. Left to his own, Saul would have continued on his path of persecuting Jesus in opposition to the Church. In Romans 3:11, Paul makes it clear that *"no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside..."* As we observed today in Ephesians 2:4-10, it is only by the grace of God that Saul, or any of us, would be saved by God. Saul was saved *from* his sins. Saul was saved *for* good works.

"Vessel"- This term "vessel" or "instrument" usually refers to containers. The primary meaning of this word is the place where

something valuable is kept (Matt 2:11; Mark 6:45) but it may also refer to what is kept, the treasure (Matt 6:21; 13:44; Luke 12:34; Heb 11:26). It is used in contexts that contrast heavenly and earthly treasures.¹⁰ Saul is not chosen because of anything he offers to God. He is simply chosen by God, to be filled with the Spirit of God, to be used for the glory of God. Saul was a chosen vessel because God wanted him to bring the good news of Jesus to the world. This would not be an easy task. It would cause Paul much hardship, suffering, and would ultimately take his life.

BIG IDEA: In Christ, we are all chosen vessels called by God to be filled with the Spirit of God to live for the glory of God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How has your relationship with Jesus been similar to Paul's? In what way or ways has it been different?

- **Question:** When you think of your life as one which can be used as an instrument or vessel for God, what comes to mind?

¹⁰ Park, I. (2014). *Property*. D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Week 6: Acts 9:10-19

Day 5: Invited to Reconcile

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

EXPLORE:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”¹¹

When Jesus delivered His famous sermon on the mount, one of the most astounding commands that was made exhorted those listening to love their enemies and pray for those who would persecute them. Christ not only commanded that His followers possess love for their enemies, but he also embodied that truth in His death on the cross. Jesus was and is the great reconciler who has invited us into the work of reconciliation.

If you have not had the chance to read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, take a quick moment to read through the passage. In this section of Scripture, Paul (*who is called Saul in Acts 9*) is explaining how the reconciling power of God in Christ invites us to take part in the ministry of reconciliation. This invitation can be clearly seen in Acts 9:1-19. Although he originally made excuses, Ananias models what it looks like to be an ambassador for Christ’s reconciling work.

When Ananias made his way to Saul, he called the blinded man, *“Brother Saul.”* In just two simple words, Ananias refused to rebuild a wall of hostility that had already been brought down by Christ. We need to notice what Ananias chose not to say and do. Ananias could have been filled with fear and reluctantly agreed to help Saul. He could have delivered a rebuke and been filled with bitterness toward his former rival. He could have simply introduced himself and kept the focus on his own obedience.

¹¹ See Matthew 5:44 for reference.

Instead, Ananias greeted Saul as his brother. In two simple words, Ananias addressed a foe as though he was family.

The truth that is put on display in these two straightforward words and those that follow is simple but incredibly challenging. An experience with and embrace of the reconciling work of God in your life is certainly an invitation to funnel that reconciliatory power to others as well. It is not human ingenuity, but a divine encounter that changes hearts and reconciles individuals. It is the grace of God that makes it possible for us to be reconciled with Him and with one another.

Because of this profound truth, Ananias was willing to help Saul regain sight and receive the Holy Spirit. Ananias did not greet his new brother in the faith with resentment, anger, bitterness or reluctance. Instead, the first words on Ananias's lips were a statement of family, belonging, healing, and the great reconciling work of Jesus. We need to be reminded that God is bigger and holds more power than that which threatens to separate, alienate, or isolate. The Church has been rescued by and called to the ministry of reconciliation.

BIG IDEA: In Christ, we have been rescued by and called into God's work of reconciliation.

APPLY:

- **Question:** Ananias labeled Saul as his *brother* before he had actually seen his life be changed. What do you think enabled Ananias to include Saul in the family before he actually saw his faith? In what ways should this challenge us to think and behave differently?
- **Activity:** Spend some time thinking and praying through what it would look like for your life to embody the ministry of reconciliation.

Week 7: Acts 9:19-25

Day 1: Call Upon the Name

READ: Acts 9:19-25 and Romans 10:12-13

EXPLORE:

Immediately after the Saul gained his sight and was strengthened physically, he went out in Damascus preaching the gospel boldly. He came to Damascus to arrest Christians and now we see that he is partnering with them and preaching Christ. It is hard to comprehend how shocking this would be. This would be more startling than a pastor at LifePoint announcing himself as a Muslim and no longer a Christian. The people were understandably amazed.

Saul now shares an identity with those whom he had previously persecuted. That identity is a people who “call upon the name of Jesus”. This is a wonderful identity of a Christian. It is an admission of those who know they are not self-saviors. Christians do not point to their own righteousness to prove their salvation. It is an admission that we need a Savior, thus the call. It is a declaration that Jesus is a worthy and capable rescuer, able to save us from our sins. It is a proclamation that Jesus is alive and active.

I (Sabino) think of a child who often calls upon the name of their parent when they need help, and we know that little children always need help. A call for help is an admission of weakness and that the stronger can help the weaker. As we call upon Jesus, we admit our weakness and proclaim that He is strong. Those who call upon the name of the Lord are adopted into His family and become children of God. Therefore, Jesus says in Matthew 18:3, *“Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

The good news is that anyone can become like a little child. Romans 10:12 tells us that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. We are fundamentally left without excuse. All we need to do is humble ourselves and call upon the name of Jesus in faith. With this in mind, there are crucial questions we must ask. Have you called upon the name of Jesus? Have you proclaimed His name to others?

Begin today by calling upon the name of Jesus. It is not only important for our faith, but also our ability to share the gospel. Sometimes we can overcomplicate evangelism. In the same way that we all know how to call upon someone when we are in need, we are designed to worship and call upon God.

My encouragement to you is to direct someone this week to call upon the name of Jesus! Pray that God would provide you with opportunities to incline your own heart toward Christ and encourage others to do likewise.

BIG IDEA: Christians are known as those who “call upon the name.”

APPLY:

- **Activity:** I encourage to listen to these songs and meditate upon the lyrics. After you have spent time listening, pause and pray.
 - *There’s Something About That Name* by Bill and Gloria Gaither
 - *Something About the Name Jesus* by Kirk Franklin

Week 7: Acts 9:19-25

Day 2: Urgency Without Anxiety

READ: Acts 9:19-25 and Ephesians 5:15-17

EXPLORE:

On two separate occasions in Acts 9 we read about something which occurred immediately. First, we are told that as Ananias was laying his hand upon Saul something like scales immediately fell from his previously blinded eyes. Second, we are informed that after some time with the disciples, Saul immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues. With the same immediacy that Saul was healed, he began to preach Christ. In today's Word to Life, we are going to take a closer look at the idea of immediacy in life and in ministry.

Whether you have recognized it or not, immediacy can be dangerous and it can also be powerful. When we allow immediacy to become our master, we will become impatient and anxious. When our desire for immediacy is handled well, it can lead us to a deep and profound sense of urgency and passion. The calling for Christ followers is to possess urgency without anxiety, passion without impatience, and thoughtfulness without reluctance. In Christ, a perfect example of this dynamic was put on full display.

In Mark's fast-paced retelling of the life of Christ, the term "immediately" appears on nearly every page. Occurring forty times in a relatively short book, it is safe to assume that "immediately" was one of Mark's favorite words. Throughout Mark, we are able to see that although Jesus embodied perfect urgency, he did not live a frantic life of frenzied busyness. His urgent ministry was discerning and focused. In a hurting and broken world, Jesus lived and ministered with a careful and conscientious urgency.

This idea of gospel urgency is certainly present in the life of Saul. After only being a believer for a short while, he immediately began to proclaim the good news about Christ. He obeyed the Great Commission, and he did so immediately. The truth is that while urgency can be an incredibly powerful tool, it can also be incredibly dangerous. The same urgency that can cause us to rightly leap into action can also erode into a frantic anxiety that refuses to trust and rely upon God.

In the examples of both Jesus and Saul we are able to see that not all urgency is bad. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we can live with a gospel urgency that is passionate, hard-working, focused, and thoughtful. In order to grow healthy urgency, start by thinking and praying through a few simple questions. First, who has God positioned in my life that I should pray for? Second, who has God positioned in my life that I need to build and foster a deeper relationship with? Third, how can I introduce my experience with Jesus and the Gospel into everyday life and conversation? Finally, in what ways do I need to pursue rest and trust God?

For some, you may need to release some unnecessary burdens to God. For others, you may need to embrace an increased sense of gospel urgency. Regardless of your situation, questions like these are designed to help grow and develop a healthy sense of urgency in your life.

BIG IDEA: If it is submitted to God, a sense of urgency can be a powerful tool for those who have encountered the power of Christ through the gospel!

APPLY:

- **Question:** If you had to characterize yourself as either “excessively urgent” or “not urgent enough,” which would you choose and why?

- **Question:** How have you personally wrestled with cultivating a healthy sense of godly urgency in your life? What advice would you give to others about how to possess urgency without it possessing you?

Week 7: Acts 9:19-25

Day 3: Prove It!

READ: Acts 9:19-22

EXPLORE:

Prove it! Two words that were often used growing up to get to the bottom of any bold claim from a friend. Anyone can talk a big game, but can they prove it? We often experience the same with our faith. In our text it says that Paul was “proving that Jesus was the Christ.” Today, we will explore the role that proof should or should not have in the evangelistic process. Beginning with our text, we should establish the difference between Paul “proving that Jesus was the Christ” and our common understanding of proving Jesus is that Christ.

PAUL IN DAMASCUS:

We should recognize that Paul was talking to the Jews in Damascus (vs 22). This means that his audience would have already had a monotheistic foundation for their belief system. They all agreed that God would one day send a Messiah to liberate them and establish a kingdom (Isaiah 9:1-7). Paul’s task for proving that Jesus was the “Christ” (the Greek translation for “Messiah”) would have been evidenced through reasoning from the Old Testament scriptures. I am sure his own personal conversion story would have been a part of this effort, but there is no doubt that the discussion was focused on the Old Testament scriptures.

CHRISTIANS TODAY:

For most Christians in our culture, the burden of proof exists in a vastly different arena. The Enlightenment, post-modernism, science, and humanism are all among the leading influences that shape how most people see the world in the West. These result in a skeptical outlook on spiritual realities all together. As Christians,

we find that we have to first convince people that there is a God and then that our God is the right one. We should thank God for the many great Christian apologists such as William Lane Craig, Paul Copan, Gary Habermas, and more, who have provided compelling responses to the questions and criticism we face. We should be diligent in study and be prepared to engage the culture with good answers to the questions they have.

However, we should also recognize that no one can be reasoned into the faith. Our faith is not merely an intellectual pursuit but one that involves the heart, soul, and mind. We must live in such a way to shine the light of Christ to those around us (Matthew 5:16) and we must preach the gospel because *“faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). Only by that Spirit of God working through the Word of God can one be softened to the gospel of Jesus Christ and find eternal life. Therefore, the real work of winning people to Jesus comes through a life of prayer, love, and the truth of the gospel.

BIG IDEA: Apologetics is helpful to tear down barriers of the mind, but the primary work of evangelism comes by the Holy Spirit through prayer, love, and sharing the gospel of Jesus with others.

APPLY:

- **Activity and Question:** Name three of the most common questions you have faced about the Christian faith. How would you describe your experience responding to these questions?
- **Activity:** If possible, list resources that you have found which provide good answers to tough questions. This activity may be the most beneficial within your LifeGroup.

Week 7: Acts 9:19-25

Day 4: Saul's Escape and a Word of Encouragement

READ: Acts 9:23-25 and 2 Corinthians 11:32-33

EXPLORE:

It did not take long before Saul joined a long, distinguished group of faithful people throughout biblical history. The list includes figures like Moses, David, Stephen, and Jesus himself. In fact, Saul was officially included in this illustrious group almost as soon as his ministry began. You might think Saul joined their ranks through some form of heroism or good deed. This is not the case. As of Acts 9:23, Saul joined a long list of faithful men and women who were threatened and persecuted because of their faith.

Moses was chased out of Egypt; Stephen was stoned for his faith; David was almost pinned to a wall with a spear; and Jesus was crucified. Following in the footsteps of this faith legacy, Saul very quickly became a threat to the Jewish leadership in his time. In the same way that plots arose to end the life of Christ, Acts is abundantly clear that the Jewish leaders violently opposed the early ministry of Saul.

After spending days confounding the Jews in Damascus, Saul was officially added to the hit-list. Oppositional Jews were guarding the gates and conspiring to kill the young convert to Christianity who was supposedly trapped in the city. As a result of this manhunt, Saul would eventually be forced to flee Damascus by being lowered in a basket through a hole in the city wall. If we aren't careful, we might assume that this was some incredibly epic and heroic escape. This was not the case. When Paul later recounted this sequence of events to the Church in Corinth, it was clear that this escape was particularly humiliating.¹² He narrowly

¹² See 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 for reference.

avoided a very swift end to his life. The persecutor was now being persecuted.

This moment in the life of Saul reminds us that the life of a Christ follower is not always easy. In fact, it often becomes more complicated. Contrary to what many have preached and written in recent history, the calling of Christ on the life of the believer is so much bigger than earthly fulfillment, material blessing, and blissful serenity. It is a calling to unreservedly follow Christ despite the discomfort.

When I (Stephen) read Acts 9:23-25, I cannot help but wish the Damascus chapter of Saul's story had ended differently. I wish that hardened hearts had been transformed and that Saul wouldn't have needed a desperate escape. In the same moment, I praise God that the Scriptures do not just record the spiritual highlights, but the moments of struggle as well. I am encouraged that Acts chose to intentionally include this moment that we might be strengthened in persecution and encouraged despite apparent failure.

BIG IDEA: We can be reassured and encouraged by the story of Saul even when it includes him narrowly escaping death.

APPLY:

- **Question:** How can we be encouraged by the story of Saul's narrow escape from violence in Damascus?

- **Question:** Have you ever looked back on your life and been encouraged by previously discouraging moments? If yes, write about what enabled that specific experience to transition from discouragement to encouragement.

Week 7: Acts 9:19-25

Day 5: Your Motivation and Method Matter

READ: Proverbs 4:20-27

EXPLORE:

My guess is that at some point in life you have experienced the infamous statement, “It is not what you said, it is about how you said it.” Maybe you have heard this all-too-common quote in the aftermath of a heated exchange or in the midst of a complicated discussion. Regardless of the context in which you first experienced this idea, there remains a great deal of truth hidden within a few simple words. It is not always about the “what.” Sometimes, it is about the “how.”

Sometimes, the appropriateness of a certain action hinges not solely on what is done, but on the way in which it is executed. For example, Acts 8-9 present two different occasions in which Christ followers flee danger. Depending on the circumstances and context, fleeing from danger can either be smart or cowardly. Simply, it is not just about what took place, but the way in which it occurred. In order to explore and apply this concept at greater length, we need to take a closer look.

In the aftermath of Stephen’s death in Acts 8, everyone except for the apostles scattered to various regions. Before we can label this action as cowardly, we need to consider two primary factors. First, before the Christians scattered, they boldly buried and lamented the loss of their brother in the faith.¹³ Second, as the Christians scattered, they continued to preach Christ.¹⁴ In these two factors, it is clear that the early Church was not simply interested in self-preservation, but in the spread of the Gospel.

¹³ The proper burial of a convicted blasphemer was illegal according to Jewish law. The Christians boldly broke that law to honor the legacy of Stephen.

¹⁴ See Acts 8:4 for reference.

In the same way, Saul escaped Damascus not as a coward, but as one who was persevering for another day. Saul, alongside the early Church, fled for the glory of God. In the biblical text and through their lives, we can see their heart motivations in and through their actions. In these examples, we need to be reminded that it is not just about what is done, but the way in which the action is done. It is possible to flee for the wrong reasons and it is also possible to fight for the wrong reasons.

As Christ followers, we are called not only to guard what we do, but the ways in which we do them. May God sanctify our hearts and purify our actions as we seek to point others to life in Christ no matter the circumstance.

BIG IDEA: As followers of Christ, both our method and our motivation matter to God.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** Read Proverbs 4:20-27.
 - What themes do you see in Proverbs 4:20-27?

 - What commands do you read in Proverbs 4:20-27?

 - Pray that God would have His way in what you do and how you do it.

Week 8: Acts 9:26-31

Day 1: It's About Time!

READ: Acts 9:26-31 and Galatians 1:18-23

EXPLORE:

Every once and a while the Scriptures present us with a seemingly straightforward detail that becomes far more complicated when we take a closer look. This is certainly the case in the events that followed Saul's harrowing escape from Damascus. If the book of Acts were read in without considering the rest of the Bible, it would appear as though Saul immediately made his way from Damascus to Jerusalem. However, when Paul wrote the book of Galatians, he references a three-year period after his conversion before he entered Jerusalem. Some who have tried to solve this supposed contradiction have argued that Saul's visit to Jerusalem is recorded in Galatians 2:1-10 and not Galatians 1:18-23. However, features of Galatians make this reading rather unlikely. The seeming contradiction in historical accounts can be summarized simply.

In Acts, it appears as though only a few days elapsed while Galatians talks about a three-year period. The timing in Acts and Galatians appear to contradict. Seemingly, we are left with two different accounts of what took place. How can we make sense of such a curious case? The key to understanding this question lies in the unique purpose of each individual book. First, we need to take a quick look at Galatians.

In Galatians, Paul¹⁵ was defending his credibility and authority as an apostle before a religious group known as the Judaizers. The Judaizers argument against Paul was that he was a second-class

¹⁵ Paul is the same historical character as the Saul that we have been studying in Acts 7-9.

leader who should not be granted apostolic leadership and authority over other Church leaders. Paul points to his track record, to his encounter with Christ, and to his three years of growth and learning to highlight his independence from the Jerusalem apostles. In Galatians, Paul accurately retells his story to emphasize the authority which was anchored in Christ and developed over a long period of time.

Whereas Galatians aims to validate the young apostle's authority, Acts has a different and primary goal. Fundamentally, the retelling of Saul's Jerusalem trip in Acts is designed to show how the Church eventually embraced their former persecutor in light of their larger mission. Acts emphasizes the speed of Saul's escape to Jerusalem to show how the Church continued to embrace the unfolding of God's mission toward the Gentile people.

It is important to know that ancient historical accounts could maintain a liberty not to deceive or mislead, but to purposefully retell a story to emphasize fundamentally different points. These liberties extended even to the precise timing of events.

In short, Paul and Luke refer to the same story to make different points. Neither of these accounts are inaccurate. In fact, both are incredibly brilliant and purposeful. They communicate the same events for different reasons. In either story, we need to notice that a man who was violently opposed to the gospel was forever changed by Jesus.

BIG IDEA: Luke and Paul do not contradict each other. They intentionally articulate the timing to communicate different points.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In Galatians, Paul argues for a three-year time period of independence from the Jerusalem apostles. If Saul was trying to argue for his credibility as an apostle, why would it make sense for him to emphasize how he developed separately from them?

- **Question:** When we read Acts and Galatians together, we learn that it took three years for Saul to enter Jerusalem. Why do you think the people in Jerusalem were still afraid of him after all that time?

Week 8: Acts 9:26-31

Day 2: Judging Faith Rightly

READ: Acts 9:26-31

EXPLORE:

Saul's conversation comes at the perfect and most peculiar time. After leading a rampage against the Church and making clear his goal to eradicate the people of the Church, he now has conveniently become a disciple of Jesus himself and wants to rendezvous with Christian leadership. It certainly seems suspicious. It is almost as if the disciples responded, "Yeah, sure. We aren't falling for that one! Nice try." In the minds of early Christ followers, the vicious and zealous persecutor named Saul could have been pretending to be a disciple in an effort to defeat "The Way." Their caution would have been certainly understandable.

Have you ever found yourself in a position where you were skeptical of someone's faith? Maybe you have even found yourself in a place where you felt it was wise to humbly and cautiously judge the validity of someone's faith. Though we are not the ultimate judge, Jesus tells us that there is a righteous judgement that we should have towards one another.¹⁶ This is vital for building friendships, choosing a spouse, and even determining Church membership. Today, let's look at three indicators of the true faith based on our text and how it might help us as we discern the faith of others.

PROFESSION

We begin by seeing that Saul "*preached boldly in the name of Jesus*" showing that his faith came with a right belief and profession. One cannot rightly believe the gospel if they do not

¹⁶ See John 7:51 for reference.

properly prioritize Christ. When assessing the work of God in someone's life, we should consider what they are professing about Jesus. If their profession does not include a recognition of their own sin, God's righteous judgment, and the freedom that comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, then it is safe to be cautious and speak truth to them in love.

PASSION

Next, we see Saul's changed behavior and a new zeal that accompanies his profession of faith. He is now trying to unite with those that he once despised by boldly declaring his newly found faith to the crowds. He did not attempt to keep it a secret. He did not try to keep his faith between himself and God. We ought to be reminded that although our faith is personal, it was never intended to be private. To be truly "*in Christ*" means we have been reborn and have become a new creation.¹⁷ As we consider the faith of those around us, we should expect to see new passions and pursuits in the life as a result of God's transformative grace.

PERSECUTION

In the aftermath of Saul's conversion, he preached with boldness and encountered an incredible amount of persecution. A life that is willing to be used for the gospel will undoubtedly face opposition. In John 15:20, Jesus told his disciples that *just as the world persecuted Him, they will persecute His followers*. A mark of a true believer is that trials, hardship, and persecution will not have the power to deter obedience.

BIG IDEA: True faith is accompanied by a right *profession* of the gospel, a new *passion* in life, and a perseverance through trials and *persecution*.

¹⁷ See the conversation in John 3 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 for reference.

APPLY:

- **Question:** What are some reasons you might need to discern the validity of someone's faith? In what ways should we be cautious against judging too harshly or with pride in our hearts?

- **Question:** What are some other indicators of true faith not mentioned here?

Week 8: Acts 9:26-31

Day 3: Radical Encouragement

READ: Acts 9:26-31 and Acts 4:36

EXPLORE:

Saul's entry into Jerusalem is met with an understandable amount of tension and apprehension. If you had a former enemy who claimed to possess an incredible reversal of allegiance, you would probably be uneasy as well. Thankfully for Saul and all of those who have experienced the transformative grace of Christ, the convert was not left on his own.

At an absolutely crucial moment in Saul's story, it is none other than a faithful man named Barnabas who stepped in. For those familiar with the earlier portions of Acts, we were previously introduced to this Levite man who was affectionately referred to as the son of encouragement.¹⁸ In Acts 9:27 we get to see the radical encouragement of Barnabas put on full display through his response to Saul.

In order to see the unique response of Barnabas, we need to notice how the other Jerusalem believers reacted to Saul. The two primary responses to Saul in Jerusalem were that of fear or distrust. On the one hand, they were terrified of his former violence and threats against their faith. On the other hand, their fear of Saul gave way to a general suspicion and even skepticism. We would do well to remember that the Jerusalem community was far from the last Christian community that responded from a place of fear and of disbelief. At its core, their hesitancy existed because of an unwillingness to embrace Saul as one of their own.

¹⁸ Acts 4:36 references a man named Joseph who was referred to as Barnabas. He was a Levite from Cyprus.

Into this environment of fear and confusion, the influence and presence of Barnabas arose. When everyone else pulled back in fear, Barnabas literally stepped toward Saul and brought him in. When everyone met Saul with skepticism, Barnabas provided space for a testimony to be shared. Barnabas noticed in Saul what others failed to perceive. His lifestyle as an encourager made it possible for him to bridge the gap when others wanted to build a wall.

Could it be possible that godly encouragement is far more radical and transformative than we might originally think? Through godly encouragement, we are able to see a person according to God's perception and not merely our own. True encouragement is not flattery. For the follower of Christ, encouragement it is not optional.

Radical, godly encouragement enables us to go against the popular perception in order to rightly honor what is good. The radical encouragement of Barnabas fought against the fear and skepticism that was paralyzing the Church's response to Saul. Radical encouragement is not just saying nice things. It is a willingness to be used by God to equip the weary, challenge the fearful, and confront the skeptic.

BIG IDEA: Radical encouragement is a willingness to speak life and truth according to God's perception.

APPLY:

- **Question:** The Christ followers in Jerusalem met Saul with skepticism and fear. Do you think that their response was appropriate? Why or why not?
- **Question:** The Jerusalem believers initially failed to receive someone who was one of their own. How do you think the Church today might fail to receive or welcome someone who is our own?

Week 8: Acts 9:26-31

Day 4: The Fruit of the Spirit Keeps Growing

READ: Galatians 5:22-23, Acts 8:8 and Acts 9:26-31

EXPLORE:

Can we all agree that landscaping can get a little complicated? Things that we try to grow often die and things that we try to remove often live to fight another day. I (Stephen) find myself often surprised by the things that grow and flourish despite the odds. After much confusion, I have found that it is sometimes easier to grow grass in a driveway than in a yard. Similar to the tenacious plants that grow in the most inconvenient of places, the book of Acts is a constant reminder of how the fruit of the Spirit can flourish even when it seems unlikely.

Paul writes in Galatians 5:22-23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”* Interestingly, Luke gives us explicitly clear examples of the fruit of the Spirit put on display in the unfolding of Church history.

JOY | Acts 8:8 *“So, there was much joy in that city.”*

As we studied previously, the opening of Acts 8 discusses the spread of Christianity into the regions of Judea and Samaria. Luke focuses on the ministry of the scattered Christ followers as they preached and ministered. Specifically, the story focuses in on the ministry of Philip who not only performed exorcisms, but also healed many people. In summary, a hostile region that was riddled with sickness, spiritual darkness, and separation from God was enveloped by the joy of the Lord. As a result of God’s work through His people in Samaria, the result was great joy!

PEACE | Acts 9:31 *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”*

Acts 9:31 is a powerful reminder that after Saul was eventually welcomed into the community of faith, peace spread throughout the region. Although they were hesitant to welcome the wayward soul, the region experienced great peace following Saul’s inclusion in the Church.

When we consider both examples together, we can see that God was growing the fruit of the Spirit in the development of His Church. Whether it was visible following an exorcism or the radical inclusion of a wayward soul, the fruit of the Spirit was miraculously growing in the early community of faith. Only God could bring about peace where there was demonic possession and joy where there was murderous strife. In the most unlikely of places, the Lord delights to put the fruit of His Spirit on display.

BIG IDEA: Joy and peace are fruit of the Spirit which are meant to be seen in the Church.

APPLY:

- **Activity:** When I read Acts 8-9, I cannot help but think about Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Spend some time reading John 4:19-26 and notice how the words of Christ was being fulfilled in and through the early Church.
 - **Question:** As you read John 4:19-26 alongside Acts, what connections do you notice and why are they significant?

Week 8: Acts 9:26-31

Day 5: Fear and Comfort

READ: Acts 9:31

EXPLORE:

Acts 9:31 is an incredibly astonishing summary of the Church in the wake of Saul's conversion. The Church was being built up in peace, they were walking in a right fear of the Lord, they were being comforted by the Holy Spirit, and multiplication was happening. This is astounding when we consider all that the Church had endured in a short time.

Think about all that the Lord had done in the Church that was recorded in only two succinct chapters. Namely, the most zealous persecutor of the early Church at this point in history became the most zealous advocate for the gospel of Jesus Christ. A section of Acts that began with a great lamentation over Stephen's death, includes summary statements of great joy and profound peace amongst the believers. This is incredible.

We need to notice that this peace that is mentioned resounds throughout the Church until Acts 12 and the persecution experienced under Herod. Acts 9:31 is a reminder of the ways in which God has continually taken His people through crises and refined them through the process.¹⁹

Specifically, we are told that the Church *walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit*. According to Luke in Acts, the Church possessed both fear and comfort that were honoring to the Lord and edifying to His people. At first glance, these two actions seem diametrically opposed. If we desire to be

¹⁹ Acts 2:43-47 and Acts 5:42 are two examples of summary statements that illustrate this same truth.

a Church that exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit with great effectiveness in our world, we cannot afford to quickly skip over this tension. How can we fear the Lord and be comforted by the Holy Spirit at the same time?

The fear of the Lord is a frequently misunderstood concept in Scripture. Because we do not rightly understand it, we often neglect it. Despite these misunderstandings, fear of the Lord is far too significant in Scripture to be overlooked. To fear God is to have a right view of His holiness and authority in such a way that you revere and worship Him as supremely powerful. A fear of God includes, but is not limited to, an appropriate view of His surpassing greatness and sovereignty. We need to notice how the fear of the Lord fits into the larger context of Acts 8-9.

The Church moved from a place of anxiety regarding Saul and his authority to a place of fearing God and his matchless power. In a very real sense, the Church in Acts 9:31 feared something far greater than worldly persecution. Oswald Chambers once wrote, "The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else." The Church knew that they were on the side of the only one who was truly worth fearing. As a result, they could be comforted! This is the profound truth of appropriate fear and deep comfort. If the one worth fearing is on your side, you can be deeply comforted.

BIG IDEA: If you are on the side of the only one worth fearing, you can experience a deep and lasting comfort that comes from God.

APPLY:

- **Question:** In your own words, how would you explain the relationship between fearing the Lord and experience comfort through the Holy Spirit?

- **Question:** Throughout Acts, Luke gives several summary statements about what the Church was like at a particular season. Why do you think those summary statements are significant and valuable for us today?



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