**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

**Acts 9:1-31**

**\* Read Acts 9:1-31. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will emphasize the power of God to save those far from God and the power of God to use those whom he redeems as His instruments for the furtherance of the gospel. In this passage, we can see the theme of knowing Jesus (Acts 9:1-19a) and following Jesus (Acts 9:19b-31). Pastor Aaron will use the following textual markers to structure his sermon: (1) Who are you, Lord? And (2) Here I am. Pastor Aaron will challenge us to think about the following questions: Do you know Jesus? Are you willing to say, “Here I am”?

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 9:1-31?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*In fulfillment of Acts 1:8, God continues to work to redeem and restore men and women to himself so that the gospel may continue to move from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In Acts 9, Luke tells us the conversion story of Saul, who would be the main messenger in carrying the gospel to the Gentiles (the ends of the earth). The story begins with Saul on a mission to persecute followers of the Way in Damascus; however, on his way, Saul encounters the Way. Through his encounter with the risen Jesus, Saul is brought to faith in Christ, pictured by the laying on of hands by Ananias, the scales falling from the eyes of Saul, and the baptism of Saul. After his conversion, Saul went about proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in Damascus and Jerusalem, yet as prophesied in Acts 9:16, Saul would get an early foretaste of suffering for the name, as he would be ushered out of Damascus and from Jerusalem in order to escape death. With the chief persecutor of the church becoming the chief proclaimer of the gospel, the church experienced peace, growth, and joy in the Lord.*

*As you read through this passage, what themes are evident? What does this passage teach us about Jesus? What does this passage teach us about the power of the Gospel and the cost of following the Way?*

**2. What is going on in Acts 9:1-9?**

*In contrast to Philip who went throughout Judea proclaiming the Way, Saul was headed to Damascus to persecute the followers of the Way. He was not content simply to approve of Stephen’s execution and to imprison followers of the Way in Jerusalem (see Acts 8:1-3), but seething with murderous rage, Saul secured letters from the high priest so that followers of the Way in Damascus might be brought bound to Jerusalem. However, on the road to Damascus, the risen Lord encountered Saul. Blinded by a bright light and hearing a voice from heaven, Saul fell to the ground. The voice of the risen Lord said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” And the voice of the risen Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” Those traveling with Saul were left speechless, having heard the voice but seeing no one. After this encounter with the risen Lord, blind Saul rose from the ground and went to Damascus, where for three days he neither ate nor drank. Saul waited for the Lord to tell him what to do.*

*As you read these passages, think about Saul’s hatred for others, and how in a moment, Jesus humbled Saul. What does this passage teach us about the power of Jesus to reach those far from him, the power of Jesus to change his enemies into friends? Who do you know that is an enemy of Christ, one who you can’t imagine ever coming to faith in Christ? Pray for God to bring them to salvation. Also, take time to share your testimony of how Jesus redeemed and restored you. Read over the passages below that cover Saul’s conversion story and reflect on how his encounter with the risen Lord saved him and stayed with him. Finally, how does Saul’s conversion remind you of Old Testament prophets’ call from God (for example, see Exodus 3-4; Isaiah 6)?*

*Note that Damascus is 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem, which is a 6 day journey by foot. For a visual of where Damascus is located, see the map on question four.*

*For more biographical information on Saul’s conversion, see Acts 22:3-21; 26:2-23; Romans 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:8-10; Galatians 1:11-24; Philippians 3:1-11; 1 Timothy 1:12-17. For passages related to the “way,” see Matthew 7:14; John 14:6; Acts 16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.*

*Tony Merida writes, “God can change the most hardened sinners, the vilest men and women, and turn them into great ambassadors of the kingdom.”*

**3. What is going on in Acts 9:10-19a?**

*The Lord appeared to Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, in a vision. First, the Lord called Ananias by name to which Ananias responded, “Here I am, Lord.” Second, the Lord gave instructions to Ananias that included the following elements: (1) the location—the house of Judas off the street called Straight; (2) the person—Saul, a man from Tarsus, who is praying; (3) the action—lay your hands on him so that he might regain his sight, which is what Saul has seen in a vision. In response to the Lord’s instruction to him, Ananias discerns/acknowledges the risk of the Lord’s instruction. Yet, Jesus encourages Ananias to be obedient to His command by telling him that the Lord is at work to redeem and restore Saul so that he might lead many others to know and follow Jesus. Ananias obeys the Lord’s instruction, and upon entering the house, he begins, “Brother Saul….” Luke points us to events following Ananias’s words to Saul: scales fell from Saul’s eyes so that Saul regained his sight, Saul was baptized, Saul was strengthened after eating food.*

*As you read through the passage, what would your response be if God instructed you to share the gospel with someone as evil as Saul? How does Ananias’s obedient response encourage us to be obedient to Jesus’s commands to go and make disciples? Do you realize the significance of the words, “Brother Saul,” which communicates Saul becoming a member of a new family? How does scales falling from Saul’s eyes and his regaining of sight illustrate for us the spiritual sight/life Saul received? In light of God’s call/purpose in Acts 9:15-16, what is God’s call and purpose on our lives and how can he use us as an instrument to carry his name to others in our families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities?*

*Note that the “here I am” response of Ananias is similar to Abraham (Gen 22:11); Jacob (Gen 31:11; 46:2); Moses (Ex 3:11); Samuel (1 Sam 3:4-8); Isaiah (Isa 6:8).*

*Tony Merida writes “Saul was elected not just to salvation, but also for mission.”*

**4. What is going on in Acts 9:19b-31?**

*Acts 9:19b-31 give us a foretaste of the suffering that Saul would endure for the sake of the name of Jesus. After his conversion in Damascus, Saul immediately proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues. Those who heard Saul proclaim Jesu as the Son of God were amazed because they knew Saul was a persecutor of the followers of the Way. Saul persecuted the followers of the Way in Jerusalem and had come to Damascus in order to persecute followers of the Way. Yet, Jesus had so transformed his life that he confounded those who heard him as he proved that Jesus was the Christ. Eventually, Saul’s preaching irritated the Jews to the point where they were ready to kill him, but the disciples in Damascus aided Saul’s escape from Damascus before the Jews killed him.*

*After this, Saul came to Jerusalem in order to join the disciples. Yet, the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him because they did not believe Saul was a follower of the Way. However, Barnabas came to Saul’s defense, advocating and declaring to the apostles that Saul had come to know and follow Jesus on the Damascus road and had proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God boldly in Damascus. Upon hearing this, Saul was received by the apostles/disciples in Jerusalem and he went in and out among them proclaiming the name of Jesus boldly in Jerusalem. Like in Damascus, Saul upset the Jews, specifically the Hellenistic Jews, so that they plotted to kill him. Once again, Saul was aided in his escape from Jerusalem by the disciples. In the years to come, Saul would suffer much for the name of Jesus as he was used as God’s instrument to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.*

*In short, Acts 9:19b-30 fulfill the words of Jesus in Acts 9:16. Saul would indeed suffer much for the name of Jesus. The plots in Damascus and Jerusalem to kill Saul offer just a foretaste of the suffering to come (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-33).*

*In Acts 9:31, Luke gives us another summary statement of the growth of the church. The whole church experienced peace--due to the chief persecutor being defeated and to the reconciliation they experienced in Christ—and was built up. As the church walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Once again, Luke informs us that the church is growing wherever the gospel is proclaimed.*

*As you read this passage, here are some questions to ponder: Do the actions of our lives give evidence that we know Jesus? When was the last time that we proclaimed the name of Jesus to an unbeliever? Are we experiencing any persecution/pushback for our proclamation of the gospel, and if so, how can we stand firm and continue proclaiming the name of Jesu boldly? What is the role of Barnabas in Acts 9:27? What does it look like to walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit?*

*For other passages on suffering for the name of Jesu, see Luke 12:8-12; 21:10-19; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33.*

*John Polhill writes, “The Greek word (proving/symbibazo; see verse 22) means to join or put together and seems to picture his assembling Old Testament texts to demonstrate how Christ fulfilled them. No wonder the Damascene Jews were astounded and totally unable to respond to the skillful interpretations of the former student of Gamaliel.”*

*ESV Study Bible:* ***“Fear of the Lord*** *does not mean fear of final judgment but is a common theme in Acts referring either to fear as godly awe, reverence, and devotion (as in*[*Acts 2:43; 10:2; 13:26*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B2%3A43%3B%2BActs%2B10%3A2%3B%2BActs%2B13%3A26/)*) or fear of God’s displeasure and fatherly discipline (as in*[*5:5, 11; 16:29; 19:17*](https://www.esv.org/Acts%2B5%3A5%3B%2BActs%2B5%3A11%3B%2BActs%2B16%3A29%3B%2BActs%2B19%3A17/)*; see also*[*Heb. 12:7–10*](https://www.esv.org/Hebrews%2B12%3A7-10/)*).”*

***Major Events in the Life of Apostle Paul (from ESV Study Bible)***

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| ***Date*** | ***Description*** |
| A.D. 5-10? | Born in Tarsus as an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin and a Roman citizen; raised in either Jerusalem or Tarsus |
| 15-20 | Trained as a Pharisee by Gamaliel |
| 33 | Death, resurrection of Christ |
| 34 | Present at Stephen’s stoning; persecuted Christians |
| 34 | Converted, called, and commissioned on the way to Damascus |
| 34-37 | Stays in Damascus a short time; leaves for “Arabia” (Nabataean Kingdom); returns to Damascus; Jews and the governor under King Aretas try to arrest and kill him; Saul escapes through the city wall. |
| 37 | Meets with Peter (and sees James) in Jerusalem |
| 37-45 | Ministers in Syria/Cilicia, which is where his hometown of Tarsus is located |
| 42-44 | Receives his “thorn in the flesh” |
| 44 | Herod Agrippa I dies (Acts 12) |
| 44-47 | Spends a year ministering with Barnabas in Antioch; second visit to Jerusalem; time of famine (Acts 11; Galatians 2:1-10) |
| 46-47 | First missionary journey, which lasted about a year and a half (Acts 13-14) |
| 48 | Paul and Barnabas spend “no little time” in Antioch; Paul writes letter to the Galatians (Acts 14:28; Galatians 2:11-14) |
| 48-49 | Returns to Jerusalem for the apostolic council; Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch, but a dispute over John Mark causes them to part ways (Acts 15) |
| 48/49-51 | Second missionary journey, which lasted about two and a half years (see Acts 15:36-18:22) |
| 49 | Edict of Claudius (Acts 18:2); Paul and Silas travel to southern Galatia through Asia Minor, on to Macedonia; Thessalonica; Berea; and then Achaia and Corinth |
| 49-51 | Spends one and a half years in Corinth; appears before Gallio; writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians |
| 51 | Returns to Jerusalem? (Acts 18:22) |
| 52-57 | Third Missionary Journey, which lasted about 5 years? (Acts 18:23-21:17) |
| 52 | Travels to Antioch, where he spends “some time,” then travels through Galatia and Phyrgia (acts 18:23) |
| 52-55 | Arrives in Ephesus; ministers there for three years and writes 1 Corinthians in the spring near the end of his ministry there; makes brief, “painful visit” to Corinth, then returns to Ephesus and writes “tearful, severe letter” (now lost) to Corinth |
| 55-56 | Travels north to Macedonia, where he meets Titus; writes 2 Corinthians |
| 57 | Winters in Corinth, writes letter to the Romans from Corinth; travels to Jerusalem and is arrested (Acts 20-21) |
| 57-59 | Imprisonment transferred to Caesarea, where he stays for two years |
| 60 | Voyage to Rome; shipwrecked for three months on the island of Malta; finally arrives in Rome (Acts 28) |
| 62 | Under house-arrest in Rome, writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon (Acts 28) |
| 62-67 | Released from house-arrest in Rome, extends his mission (Spain?), writes 1 Timothy (from Macedonia?) and Titus (from Nicropolis); is rearrested, writes 2 Timothy from Rome shortly before his execution |
| 64-67 | Martyred in Rome |



*Note that this map comes from the ESV Study Bible, which states, “As Paul approached Damascus to arrest followers of the Way, Jesus appeared to him (1).*[*Galatians 1:17*](https://www.esv.org/Galatians%2B1%3A17/)*makes it clear that soon after this Paul spent time in Arabia (2, 3) before going to meet church leaders in Jerusalem (4). When some believers learned of a plot to kill Paul in Jerusalem, they took him to Caesarea, and he returned to his hometown of Tarsus (5).”*

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. Who do you know in your life that is far from God? Do you know anyone in your life that you couldn’t imagine ever coming to faith in Christ? Why do you think that about them? Pray for these individuals to be saved. Pray that God would open up doors for you to share the gospel with them.

2. In Acts 9, we hear the conversion story of Saul. In your community group, take time to share your testimony with one another. Rejoice in the grace of God that saves. Who was it that that Lord used to bring you to saving faith? What were the circumstances of your life when you encountered Jesus?

3. In Acts 9:10-19a, we are told about an individual who God had assigned to go to Saul, yet he was reluctant to do so. What are obstacles/objections that we have/give for not sharing the gospel with others? Do we look at all our relationships as opportunities to lead someone to the Lord or to encourage someone in the Lord?

4. In Acts 9:15-16, we see the specific call of God on Saul’s life. In your own life, what has/is God calling you to do? How can you be a Spirit-empowered witness in your stage and situation of life?

5. Do you have stories of those who were once hostile to the name of Christ but now are proclaiming the name of Christ? Share one of these stories with your community group. How can telling the stories of God’s grace at work in and through people’s lives be an encouragement for us to press on in the faith?

6. Saul suffered for proclaiming the name of Christ. Yet, God preserved His life so that he might continue His ministry. Two questions: Are we prepared to suffer for the name of Christ? Will we risk opposition/persecution/mocking/etc. in order to proclaim the name of Christ?

7. Once again, Barnabas shows up. This time Barnabas is the one who reconciles Saul with the apostles in Jerusalem and encourages them to embrace the ministry of Saul. How does this situation remind us of differing roles within the body of Christ? Do you know anyone like Barnabas who is an encourager/connector?

8. Read Acts 9:31. What do you notice about the church in this verse? How are the disciples living? How ought this verse to instruct us to walk/live? Use this verse to close your group in prayer.

9. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. David Jones):

 A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

 B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

 C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

 D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

 E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

 F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

10. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

 A. Understanding the Bible

 1. What do we learn about God?

 a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

 b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

 c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

 2. What do we learn about people?

 a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

 b. Look for the fallen condition.

 c. Look for how God’s people should live.

 3. What do we learn about relating to God?

 a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

 b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

 c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

 4. What do we learn about relating to others?

 a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

 b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

 c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

 B. Applying the Bible

 1. What does God want me to think/understand?

 2. What does God want me to believe?

 3. What does God want me to desire?

 4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will challenge us with two questions: (1) Do you know Jesus? (2) Are you surrendered to the Lord Jesus, saying, “Here I am”?

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—1 Thessalonians 1; 1 Kings 18

2. Tuesday—1 Thessalonians 2; 1 Kings 19

3. Wednesday—1 Thessalonians 3; 1 Kings 20

4. Thursday—1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Kings 21

5. Friday—1 Thessalonians 5; 1 Kings 22

6. Saturday—2 Thessalonians 1; 2 Kings 1

7. Sunday—2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Kings 2

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 1)**

1. November 12th –Acts 9:32-11:18

2. November 19th—Acts 11:19-30

3. November 26th—Acts 12

**\* Advent 2017**

1. December 3rd—Isaiah 9:6-7

2. December 10th—Luke 2:1-20

3. December 17th—Luke 2:21-40

4. December 24th—Matthew 2:1-12

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 2)**

1. December 31st--??

2. January 7th—Acts 13-14

3. January 14th—Acts 15:1-35

4. January 21st—Acts 15:36-16:5

5. January 28th—Acts 16:6-40

6. February 4th—Acts 17:1-15

7. February 11th—Acts 17:16-34

8. February 18th—Acts 18:1-23

9. February 25th—Acts 18:24-28

10. March 4th—Acts 19:1-41

11. March 11th—Acts 20:1-16

12. March 18th—Acts 20:17-30

13. March 25th—Acts 21:1-26

--. April 1st (Easter Sunday)

14. April 8th—Acts 21:27-22:29

15. April 15th—Acts 22:30-23:35

16. April 22nd—Acts 24:1-27

17. April 29th—Acts 25:1-12

18.May 6th—Acts 25:13-26:32

19. May 13th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 27:1-44

20. May 20th—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)