

Calvary Chapel  Philadelphia



# CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TEACHER'S PACKET

1st Grade

## Sunday Morning

Study 39

*Saul's Conversion*

# Saul's Conversion

The Objective is the key concept for this weeks lesson. It should be the main focus of the study

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verse support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

**Objective** This lesson will teach the students what grace is using the story of Saul's conversion.

## Key Verses

Acts 9:1-19—Main Teaching Passage

Acts 8:1-3

Ephesians 2:8-9

**Memory Verse** - 1 Corinthians 15:10a

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain;"

## Hook

Review last week's memory verse, 2 Timothy 4:2.

Tell the students to imagine someone who is short and slow. Would you expect that person to be a basketball player? Now imagine someone who is forgetful. Would you want them to be your doctor? Do a couple more of these.

Lastly, have them imagine a person who steals, murders, uses bad words, and lies. Would you think that this person would become a Christian? In today's story, someone who you would never expect will become a believer.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

## BOOK

Before we get into today's story, we need to remember a character we saw earlier. Back when Stephen was martyred for his faith, we found out in Acts 8:1-3 that a man named Saul was there to approve of his death, and then he led the persecution that drove many of the Christians out of Jerusalem. In Acts 9, we find that Saul gained permission from the high priest to persecute the Christians in the city of Damascus. While on his journey, suddenly Jesus appeared to Him in a bright light and asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul asked who this figure was, and Jesus answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul asked what he should do, and Jesus commanded him to go into the city. However, Saul was blinded by the light for three days and had to be led to the city.

Now in Damascus there lived a Christian named Ananias. The Lord told Ananias to go to the house of Judas (not the one who betrayed Jesus), where Saul was staying, and pray for Saul to receive his sight back. When Ananias heard this, he was afraid because he had heard of how Saul had persecuted many Christians, but the Lord assured him that He had chosen Saul for a special purpose. Ananias obeyed and went to Saul. When he got there, he laid his hand on Saul and prayed for him to receive back his sight. When that happened, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he got up and was baptized. After that, the Christians in Damascus gave Saul food and he stayed with them for a few days.

## LOOK

Of all the people in all the world, Saul of Tarsus was probably the last person you would expect to become a Christian. Not only did he reject the message of Christianity, but he was actually leading the persecution of the believers. When Ananias heard that God wanted him to go to Saul and restore his sight, he was surprised. He was afraid that his life might be in danger. Perhaps he thought, "Surely Saul can't become a Christian." But that is exactly what happened. God took the worst man you could imagine and turned him into an apostle. God showed Saul grace.

When we talk about God's grace, we refer to His undeserved favor. Saul did not deserve God's forgiveness. He had done everything he could to fight against God. Nothing Saul had done had earned him the right to be forgiven. The only thing he deserved was death and eternal separation from God. Yet God showed Him extraordinary grace and not only forgave him, but made him into an apostle and the author of most of the New Testament. In fact, Saul (later called Paul) is known as the Apostle of grace, and he wrote more about it than any other biblical author.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

# LOOK (Continued)

Saul wasn't the only one who needed grace. We all do. He would later write in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by grace, not by any works that we can do. We might not have persecuted Christians like Saul, but we all have broken God's laws, and as we have discussed before, the wages of sin is death. When God saves us, it is not because of what we have done. It is because of His grace. That means that even if we have done some really bad stuff, we can still be saved. But it also means that if we think we are a "good person," we still need God's grace to save us. The most wicked criminal and the holiest pastor both need God's grace and forgiveness to cover their sins, and that grace is just as available to the criminal as it is to the pastor.

Maybe you are like Saul and have done all kinds of bad things. Perhaps you don't think God can forgive you. In today's story, we see that's not true. If Saul could receive God's grace, anyone can. Maybe you are like Ananias and there is someone you know who seems like they could never believe in Jesus. It could be the school bully, the mean kid in the neighborhood, or even your brother or sister. Don't give up on them! They can be saved too. Keep praying for the "Sauls" in your life. Pray that God would show them grace just like He showed Saul grace in Acts 9.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

# TOOK

Present the Gospel and offer students who have never received God's grace to ask Him to be their Lord and Savior.

As a class, memorize 1 Corinthians 15:10a.

**Pray:** Thank the Lord for His grace in saving us. Pray for friends and family who are not believers to receive that grace.

**Parent Question:** What is grace and who can receive it?

# FURTHER STUDY

## Commentary on Acts 9:1-19 by David Guzik

### ***The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus***

A. Saul on the road to Damascus.

1. ([Act 9:1-2](#)) Saul's purpose in traveling to Damascus.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

a. **Then Saul:** We last saw Saul in [Acts 8:3](#), where it says that *he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*. Here he continues and expands this work to the city of **Damascus**.

i. **Damascus** was 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem. This was at least a six-day journey, and Saul's willingness shows how committed he was to his cause. When God got a hold of Saul, Saul wasn't looking for Jesus!

b. **Went to the high priest:** The high priest mentioned here is Caiaphas. Recently, an urn was found in Jerusalem inscribed with the name of this high priest and positively dated to this period. These are the first physical remains (such as bones or ashes) of a specific person mentioned in the New Testament.

c. **Still breathing threats and murder:** Saul was committed to persecuting Christians, and even after he became a Christian, he remembered his days as a persecutor. In [Philippians 3](#), he makes mention of this background, saying he was *circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*.

i. In [Galatians 1:13](#), Paul adds more regarding his background: *For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers*.

d. What did Saul look like? A very old apocryphal book, dating to the end of the first century, describes Paul like this: "A man of moderate stature, with crisp hair, crooked legs, blue eyes, large knit brows, and long nose, at times looking like a man, at times like an angel." (Cited in Gaebelain)

e. **If he found any who were of the Way:** Here, Christianity is referred to as **the Way**. This seems to be the earliest "name" for the Christian movement, and a fitting one - used five times in Acts.

i. The name **the Way** means that Christianity is more than a belief or a set of opinions or doctrines. Following Jesus is a way of living as well as believing.

2. ([Act 9:3-6](#)) God meets Paul on the road to Damascus.

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

a. **Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven ... and heard a voice:** This spectacular event also must be regarded as unusual. God does not *normally* confront sinners with a heavenly light and an audible voice from heaven.

i. In [Acts 26:13](#) Paul reveals that this happened at mid-day, when the sun shines at its brightest; but this heavenly light was brighter than the sun could ever be.

b. **Then he fell to the ground:** Saul's reaction was simply to fall **to the ground**. This wasn't because of honor or reverence for God, it was simply a reaction of survival - he was terrified at the heavenly light.

c. **And heard a voice saying to him:** The rabbis of Saul's day believed that God no longer spoke to man directly, as He did in the days of the prophets. However, they believed that one could hear the "echo" of God's voice, what they called "the daughter of the voice of God." Here, Saul learns that one can hear God directly!

d. **Saul, Saul:** When God repeats a name twice, it is to display deep emotion, but not necessarily anger (as in the *Martha, Martha* of [Luke 10:41](#) and the *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* of [Matthew 23:37](#)).

e. **Why are you persecuting Me?** As the heavenly light overwhelms him, Saul is confronted by the true nature of his crime: He is persecuting God, not man.

i. Saul thought that he was serving God in viciously attacking Christians, but now he discovers that he has been fighting against God.

ii. This has been sadly true through history. Men who were convinced they were doing God a favor have done much of the worst persecution and torture ever practiced.

iii. We shouldn't only emphasize the "**Me**" in **why are you persecuting Me**; we should also notice the "**why**" and see that Jesus is asking "**why are you persecuting Me?**" That is, "Saul, why are you doing such a futile thing?"

f. **I am Jesus:** This was all Jesus had to say for Saul to know exactly who He was, even though "Jesus" was a fairly common name. Saul knew who **Jesus** was; he had undoubtedly heard Him teach in Jerusalem and as a probable member of the Sanhedrin, Saul sat in judgment of Jesus in the trial before His crucifixion.

g. Saul responds with two of the most important questions anyone can (and must) ask. The first question is "**Who are You, Lord?**" The second question is "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**"

i. Most everyone has questions they would like to ask God. A recent Gallup Survey asked people to choose three questions they would most like to ask God. The top five responses: "Will there ever be lasting world peace?" "How can I be a better person?" "What does the future hold for my family and me?" "Will there ever be a cure for all diseases?" "Why is there suffering in the world?" It is strange that people would want to ask God these questions when they are already answered in the Bible! But they really aren't the most important questions for us to ask. Saul asks the right questions!

ii. **Who are You, Lord?** We must ask that question with a humble heart, and ask it to God. Jesus shows us exactly who God is, and He can answer this question. Paul spent the rest of his life wanting to know more com-

pletely the answer to this question ([Philippians 3:10](#)).

iii. **What do You want me to do?** Few dare to really ask God this question, but when we ask it, we must ask it with submission and determined obedience.

iv. Saul's question was *personal*. He asked the question with a "me": "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" We often are quite interested in what God wants others to do. But the surrendered heart asks, "Lord, what do You want *me* to do?"

h. In saying "**It is hard for you to kick against the goads,**" Jesus is giving Saul a "mini-parable."

i. The insertion of **it is hard for you to kick against the goads** and **Lord, what do You want me to do?** in [Acts 9:5-6](#) is accurate, but not in Luke's original text. They were added by scribes, based on [Acts 22:10](#) and [26:14](#), who thought they were doing God a favor by putting it in here.

ii. A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick that was used to get an ox going the way you wanted him to when you were plowing. You would jab the hind legs of the ox with the goad until the ox cooperated.

iii. Essentially, Saul is the ox; Jesus is the farmer; Saul is dumb and stubborn - yet valuable, and potentially extremely useful to the Master's service. Jesus is goading Saul into the right direction, and the goading causes Saul pain, but instead of submitting to Jesus, Saul is kicking against the goad - and only increasing his pain.

iv. Is it too much to say that if we will not ask these two great questions and listen to God's answers to these questions, then we are acting like dumb oxen?

v. We may complain that God compares us to oxen, and indeed it is an unfair comparison. After all, what ox has ever rebelled against God like we have? God almost owes an apology to oxen!

i. **It is hard for you** shows the great love of Jesus. He is the one being persecuted, yet his concern is for the effect it is having on Saul. What a tender heart Jesus has!

j. The fact that Saul was **trembling and astonished** by all of this reminds us that it is not always pleasant to encounter heaven dramatically. Saul was terrified by this experience, not oozing with warm, gushy feelings.

i. In [Acts 9](#), we are only given the briefest account of what happened here. We know more from what Paul says about this experience in [Acts 26:12-18](#), [1 Corinthians 9:1](#) and [15:8](#). We also know more from what Barnabas says about Saul's experience in [Acts 9:27](#) and from what Ananias says about Saul's experience in [Acts 9:17](#). From these accounts, we learn that Jesus appeared to Saul personally in this blinding vision.

ii. In response to this light, Saul undoubtedly shut his eyes as tight as he could; yet, Jesus still appeared before him. After the same pattern, Jesus has often had to appear to us even though we shut our eyes.

iii. In this encounter with Jesus, Saul learned the gospel that he would preach his whole life. He insists in [Galatians 1:11-12](#), *that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

k. When Saul asks "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" Jesus answers him only by telling what to do right at the moment.

i. This is often the character of God's direction in our lives. He directs us one step at a time instead of laying out the details of the grand plan at once.

3. ([Act 9:7-9](#)) Saul immediately after the Damascus road.

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

a. **The men who journeyed with him stood speechless:** The experience was incomprehensible to Saul's companions, but as Saul opened his eyes (presumably shut tight in a terrified reaction to the heavenly light), he still could not see (**when his eyes were opened he saw no one**).

i. We can almost hear God saying to Saul, "You shut your eyes against My light and My Saviour. Fine! Spend a few days as blind physically as you have been blind spiritually!"

b. **And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank:** It seems that he was so shaken by the experience that he was unable to eat or drink for three days. All Saul could do was simply sit in a blind silence. This was a humbling experience, and a time when Saul must have challenged all his previous ideas about who God was and what pleased God.

i. In the **three days** of blindness and deprivation, Saul was dying to himself. It would only be after the **three days** of dying that he would be raised to new life.

B. God ministers to Saul through Ananias.

1. ([Act 9:10-12](#)) God's message to Ananias.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. "And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

a. **To him the Lord said in a vision:** There is an entirely different character in the way God spoke to Ananias than in the way He spoke to Saul. Saul had a bold, almost violent confrontation from God, but Ananias hears the voice of God sweetly in a vision, where God calls and Ananias obediently responds. What better response could there be than "**Here I am, Lord**"?

i. We shouldn't be surprised if unbelievers receive the word with initial resistance and questioning like Saul, and we should expect Christians to receive the word like Ananias.

b. **Arise and go:** God's instructions to Ananias are clear, but curiously, God tells Ananias about Saul's vision in Ananias' own vision!

c. **Behold, he is praying:** Paul had never really prayed before; he merely repeated formal prayers. Before, his prayers were not spiritual, he had never prayed with Jesus as mediator, he had never prayed in Jesus' name, and his own heart was proud and far from God. He had said many prayers, but had never prayed.

d. Why **Ananias**? Was he a prominent Christian? We have no reason to believe so. Did God need to use a human agent at all in this work? Not really. God used Ananias because God loves to use people, and Ananias was a willing servant. Ananias asked Saul's question, "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" by the way he lived his life.

e. Ananias was an ordinary man - not an apostle, a prophet, a pastor, an evangelist, an elder, or a deacon. Yet God used him especially because he was an ordinary man. If an apostle or a prominent person had ministered



to Paul, people might say Paul received his gospel from a man instead of Jesus. In the same way, God *needs* to use the ordinary man - there is a special work for them to do.

2. ([Act 9:13-16](#)) God overcomes Ananias' objections.

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

a. **Lord, I have heard from many about this man:** Certainly, Ananias had heard that this angry and violent persecutor named Saul of Tarsus was on his way from Jerusalem. The Christians of Damascus must have been anxiously preparing for the persecution to come.

b. **I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done:** Ananias' objections are perfectly logical and well-founded. However, they presume that God needs instruction, or at best, counsel. It is almost as if Ananias is asking, "God, did you know what kind of guy this Saul is?"

c. **He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name:** God had a call for the life of Saul. At this time, God had not even revealed that calling to Saul, though He tells Ananias first.

i. God considered Saul His **chosen vessel** long before there appeared anything worthy in Saul to choose. God knew what He could make of Saul, even when Saul or Ananias didn't know.

d. **For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake:** This is almost chilling. Saul was going to leave a life of privilege to embrace a higher call, but a call with much suffering.

3. ([Act 9:17-19](#)) Ananias prays and Saul is healed and receives the Holy Spirit.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

a. **Brother Saul:** When Ananias laid his hands on Saul, it was not only a gesture with the spiritual meaning of bestowing the blessing of the Holy Spirit on Saul; it was also a simple gesture of love meeting the needs of a blind man who could not see the love on Ananias' face, so he communicated it through his touch.

b. **Be filled with the Holy Spirit:** It seems that this is when Saul was actually born again. Here is where he receives the Holy Spirit and is healed from his blindness, which was spiritual blindness as much as physical blindness.

i. **Be filled:** God did an effective job of "breaking" Saul, but it wasn't God's intention to leave him broken. God wanted to break Saul so He could fill him and leave him filled.

ii. "It is often said that Saul was converted on the road to Damascus. Strictly speaking, this is not the fact. His conversion began in his encounter with the law but it was not accomplished until the gospel entered his heart by faith, and that did not occur on the road, but in Damascus." (Lenski)

c. **When he had received food, he was strengthened:** Saul immediately began to be strengthened both physically and spiritually. God is concerned about both areas of need.

#### 4. Observations on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

a. Paul regarded his conversion experience as a pattern for all believers: *Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief ... However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Timothy 1:13,16).*

b. If Paul's conversion is a pattern, then we can share his experiences. First, Jesus must confront us with Himself, with our sin and rebellion against Him, even the sins which were done in ignorance. Then we must humbly wait for the work within us that only He can do.

c. Saul's conversion reminds us that at its core, salvation is something God does in us. What we do is only a response to His work in us.

d. Saul's conversion reminds us that God finds us, even when we are not looking for Him.

e. Saul's conversion reminds us that God looks for people to cooperate in the conversion of others, even when they are not really necessary, except as a demonstration of the importance of the *family* of God.

f. Saul's conversion reminds us that it isn't enough that we be broken before God, though that is necessary. God's desire is to only use brokenness as a prelude to filling.