

God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me. . . . ⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

9. Discussion: (a) The first 12 apostles appointed by Jesus spent three years under his direct teaching, before he ascended into heaven. What was different about the way Paul received his training. (b) What are your thoughts about Paul's "thorn in the flesh?" Why do you think God humbled him in that way? (c) After God told Paul "no" three times in answer to his prayer for deliverance, God gave Paul a message of encouragement. How could that same message also encourage you when God seems to be leading you through difficulties, rather than answering your prayers in the way you had hoped?

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: Blue = New Testament Red = Words of Jesus

Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 13

1. Background Information: In lesson 12 Saul's life was suddenly turned in a new direction when there was a flash of bright light, he was knocked to the ground, and a voice called "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

2. Saul joins the fellowship of believers.

Acts 9:10-19 Now there was a believer in [Syrian] Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

¹¹ The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. ¹² I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

¹³ "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! ¹⁴ And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

¹⁷ So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹ Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

3. Discussion: (a) Why did Ananias fear Saul? (b) What were some of the rewards of Ananias's obedience? (rewards to Saul -- rewards for the Roman world -- rewards even for us today?)

4. Saul in Damascus.

Acts 9:19-25 Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. ²⁰ And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

²¹ All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?"

²² Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. ²³ After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. ²⁴ They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. ²⁵ So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

5. Discussion: (a) Explain why you think Saul's witness was so persuasive? (b) Was Saul's escape from Damascus a wise example for all believers, when persecuted? Explain.

6. Saul in Jerusalem.

Acts 9:26-30 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! ²⁷ Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

²⁸ So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. ³⁰ When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

7. Discussion: (a) Based on what happened, how would you describe Barnabas? What were his spiritual gifts? (b) How did the believers respond to the persecution against Saul? Why do you think they felt it was wiser for him to escape rather than continue his bold witness in Jerusalem?

8. Special revelations to Saul (also known as Paul).

In his letters to the Churches in Galatia and Corinth, Paul filled in some additional details about what he did immediately after his conversion: (Galatians 1:11-12) Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the Gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. ¹² I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

(Galatians 1:16-19) It pleased [God] to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. ¹⁷ Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus.

¹⁸ Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹ The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord's brother.

2 Cor. 12:7-9) I have received . . . wonderful revelations from