



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM • KINGDOM CALLING • GALATIANS 1:11-24; ACTS 9:1-9 •

MAIN POINT

God has the power to radically change us and the course of our lives.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How do you typically react to change? Do you thrive on change, or does it make you nervous? What does this say about your personality?

What is the biggest life change you've experienced recently? What do you remember most about that experience? How did you handle the change?

Change is inevitable. In our jobs, families, relationships, church, and country, change swirls all around us. For many people change is far from welcome. The way that we respond to changes shapes our lives going forward. Today we will see that Paul experienced dramatic life changes as his story went from being one of the most feared enemies of Christianity, to one of its most prolific voices. In Galatians 1 and Acts 9 we can see the catalyst and result of the change in Paul's life.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:11-17.

Why did Paul make a distinction between the gospel he preached and man's gospel? Describe these two gospels and their differences.

What happened to Paul when he received Christ? How did his life change?

Paul made the distinction between the two gospels because there were teachers in Galatia accusing him of trying to please men. Paul was making it clear he only preached the gospel that he received directly from Jesus Christ. Paul transformed from a persecutor of the church to a missionary to the Gentiles. We see Jesus as the source of Paul's transformation in Acts 9.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 9:1-9.

What was Saul's overall attitude toward Christianity before his conversion? Read Acts 8:1-3 for additional insight.

Saul, a Pharisee, persecuted Christians because he thought they were a threat to Judaism. How have you seen sin distort and twist people's identities, including your own?

How do you think Saul felt when confronted by Jesus? Given his previous activities, what might he have been thinking about during those three days of blindness and fasting (v. 9)?

Saul's desire to go to Damascus reveals the extent of his hatred of Christians. His earlier activity against believers had been directed primarily against those in and around Jerusalem. As Saul approached Damascus, the risen Christ encountered and commanded him to enter Damascus and await instructions. Saul was blinded, so his companions led him into Damascus, where he fasted for three days (vv. 3-9). For Saul, this encounter with Jesus resulted in a dramatic transformation in the life of this proud, Christian-hating Pharisee.

Why do you think Jesus chose one of Christianity's worst enemies of the time to be a follower? Why is this good news for us? What does it tell us about God?

| HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 1:18-24.

What did Paul consider his new purpose to be? Could he have discovered this purpose through any other means? Why or why not?

What influence did Paul's life before Christ have on the way he lived as a changed man?

Paul changed from a persecutor of the gospel to a preacher of the gospel, however people still remembered his treacherous past. Paul did not let this stop him, instead he used it to show the power of the gospel and the change that Christ brings.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What in your past makes it hard for you to feel worthy of serving God? How does the gospel impact those feelings?

How has your past prepared you to minister to people today?

How can you use your story to serve in the church? How can your past successes and failures help you glorify and serve God?

Who in our community can you connect with because of your story? What are some ways you can be intentional with people this week?

PRAYER

Close in prayer asking that God would use your history and experience to bring Him glory and to expand His kingdom. Pray that He would reveal ways for your group to serve the church and the community. Pray that God would use your stories of life change to impact people in similar situations.

COMMENTARY

| GALATIANS 1:11-24

1:11-12. Paul did not say when his direct revelation from Jesus Christ came, but “reveal His Son in me” in verse 16 may imply that it was related to his conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-18).

1:13-14. Paul communicated three things to his readers: (1) he had advanced much farther in Judaism than those who had distorted the gospel; (2) he was far more zealous for the Jewish traditions than these false teachers; and (3) ironically, Paul’s zeal and advancement in Judaism led him to persecute the church before his conversion.

1:15. The phrase “God, who... set me apart and called me” sounds like Isaiah 49:1, which refers to the messianic Servant, and Jeremiah 1:5, which refers to the prophet Jeremiah. Paul knew that his callings to salvation and apostleship were both undeserved (Rom. 1:5).

1:16-17. On Paul’s calling to preach Christ among the Gentiles, see Acts 9:15; 26:17-18; Rom. 1:5; 16:26. After his conversion (Acts 9:3-9), Paul did not feel any compulsion to travel immediately from Damascus to Jerusalem to consult with the authorities on the gospel. He went to Arabia (see Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor. 11:32-33), then back to Damascus.

1:18. Because of how time was computed in Paul’s time, it cannot be known whether the three years in this verse speaks of three full calendar years or one full year plus portions of two additional years. It is also not known whether the three years is figured after: (1) Paul’s conversion (vv. 15-16), (2) his departure for Arabia (v. 17), or (3) his return from Arabia to Damascus (v. 17). His trip to Jerusalem was to get to know the apostle Peter (the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic Cephas, meaning “stone”; Matt. 16:18). If there were differences between Paul and Peter over the gospel message, they would have come out during this visit.

1:19. James, the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; James 1:1), is nowhere else listed as one of the 12 apostles (i.e., the 11, without Judas Iscariot, who was replaced by Matthias; Acts 1:23-26). But since he was in the upper room before Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14) and was the senior pastoral figure in the church at Jerusalem (see Acts 15:13; 21:18), James was considered to be virtually an “apostle.”

1:20. If anyone in Galatia doubted that Paul had previously had a harmonious discussion about his gospel message with Peter, and possibly with James, he solemnly affirmed in this verse that it was true.

1:22. That Paul was personally unknown to the Judean churches agrees with the silence about him in Acts from when he went to Tarsus (Acts 9:30) until Barnabas went there to bring him to be involved in the church in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

1:23-24. Since the Judean churches glorified God because Paul was preaching the faith he once tried to destroy, it is clear that they did not disagree with the gospel as he preached it.

| ACTS 9:1-9

9:1-9. As the word of God spread and the number of disciples increased, the church met strong opposition. Saul, who had held the clothing of those who had stoned Stephen, was intent on destroying the church (vv. 1-2). This persecution was the most severe threat believers had faced to this point in the church's brief history. Saul's hostile mission was to place believers under arrest, whether men or women, and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. There they would stand trial before the Sanhedrin. Saul clearly showed himself to be an enemy of Christ and His people.

As Saul and those traveling with him neared the completion of their journey to Damascus, an unusual thing happened. Saul encountered the resurrected and exalted Christ. A blinding light flashed around him, and he heard a voice. The question Saul heard was succinct and accusatory. Saul was on a mission of hate to persecute Jesus' followers. The resurrected Christ, however, so identified with His people that He said the persecution was against Him personally. When Saul inquired about the identity of the One speaking to him, he used the title Lord. After securing Saul's full attention and revealing His identity as the risen Christ, Jesus commanded Saul to go into Damascus and await further instructions (vv. 6-7). Saul's encounter with Jesus also impacted him physically. He was unable to see when he got up from the ground. His traveling companions had to lead him by the hand into Damascus. For three days Saul was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Certainly his meeting with Jesus had been a traumatic experience. His life would be changed radically by this encounter with the resurrected Christ (vv. 8-9).