

Are You Sure God?

Unsung Heroes series

by Chris Famisaran

So grateful that we have a team here, who was willing to step out of their comfort zone. So many things that trying to do. So let's give them a hand. And thank you, Pilar for organizing that. You will see more drama in the future. Let's pray. God has we now jump into sermon aspect today we pray that you will lead in guidance and Jesus' Amen.

Have you ever told God, are you sure God? Like are you really, really sure about this? Maybe we're scared. Maybe we're wondering, is that really the path I want to take? Do I want to do the uncomfortable thing? Now in Ananias' defense, God was asking him to go essentially to his sworn enemy. Not sworn but he definitely was nervous about what God was asking. And so we see, Ananias had to confront his fear.

When we talk, when we think of fear, what comes to mind? Let's not go down that path. Let's avoid it. Recently, Chapman University did a survey of American fears. I believe they took the survey in 2021. And then they published it last year. Do you know what the top 10 fears of 2022 was? Starting at number 10 51.5%, said biological warfare 52.5% said pollutions of oceans, rivers and lakes, the eighth was economic financial collapse. Number seven, not having enough money for the future. Number six pollution of drinking water. Number five, the US becoming involved in another world war. Number four people that they loved who were dying. Number three, Russia using nuclear bombs. Number two people that you love becoming seriously ill. And then number one, at 62.1%, corrupt government officials. How is your trust in this world, people that we're supposed to be able to honor and respect and listen to? are they behaving in the way that we expect them to? Are they listening to us? Do they care? Can you trust the information that's been told to you? Can you trust the news? Don't answer don't answer. We're going live. We're in an age where let's be honest, we can't even have a civil conversation at times.

Here we find in the book of Acts, we're going to focus specifically on chapter nine. But leaning to chapter nine, chapter seven, there's a man by the name of Steven, faithful follower. And one day he's brought before to have a hearing, because he's saying some things that was going against the protocol of what should have been said. And he tells the officials, he reminds them of the story of the Jewish faith from the very beginning all the way to where they were. And he had some choice words that they did not approve. And so what did they do? They followed scripture, according to them. They took them outside, they took their coats off because they were about to throw some rocks at them. So they had to make sure they had a good throw, a good swing. And they laid their coats at whose feet a man by the name of Saul, later on Saul would grow up because he was a young man in chapter seven, and he would drag men and women off to prison. Those who were believers of the way saw in a sense he was a militant behavior of a believer and cause that he was fighting. He was trained in the best schools learning under Gamaliel. Get a Gentile parent and a Jewish parents. Have you ever met a saw like person who was a Christian militant in their faith, but yeah, going about it in absolutely all have the wrong ways.

Let's go to the Bible and see what it says in chapter nine. We're going to rehash a little bit of what you have just seen. Acts chapter 9, verse one, and it has some very, very descriptive language. I'm now at the age where I have to take my glasses off to read. And it says, meanwhile, Saul was breathing out what kind of threats, murderous, meaning he wanted vengeance, he wanted death. And he went to the high priest. And he asked them for what? Letters. Why did he want letters, because he wanted to make sure that what he was about to carry out would cover his tracks. He went to the letters, he found the letters, he got the letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found anyone there who belonged to the way other men and women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Okay. So he gets official documentation to cover his tracks. Imagine now that he's asking the religious leadership at this time, permission to imprison people who thought differently than him. Can you imagine the church having a tribunal or counsel? If somebody wanted to go to they could get papers to say, they're not acting correctly, they're not keeping the Sabbath correctly. They're saying false things. They're misrepresenting God. So give us purpose permission, and we'll arrest them, and we'll bring them here and then we'll throw him in

prison. What does that sound like? You're crazy. Right? We have rights. Back then it was a different time. And as we continue, he says, As he neared Damascus, suddenly a light from Heaven flashed around him and he fell to the ground. And you heard a voice saying, So Saul, why do you persecute me? And Saul's response? Who are you Lord? Notice your Bible. What color are the read the letters? They're red, and whose signifies red letters? Jesus, Jesus is asking Paul, I'm sorry, Saul, why are you persecuting me? He says, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city. And you will be told what you must do. So Paul, who was part of the ruling majority, his life is about to change. And it's here that we see that Jesus is confronting Saul.

Now, there are some other guys who are with them. They can see what's happening, but they're kind of scratching their heads. Why is Saul acting like this? And imagine being Saul now he had to get help to get to Damascus because he couldn't see. So much so that when Jesus reaches out to him, he falls down. I always kind of think, you know, it doesn't say but he probably was on a horse. You ever been thrown off a horse? I may or may not have been thrown off a couple of times. Horses just don't like me. But imagine being thrown off your horse or regardless, falling down. You can't see because as you'll read later, there was some type of scale like thing on his eyes. He was forcefully blinded. Have you ever lost your sight for a time? Have you ever lost function of a body part? Maybe your ankle, you twist your ankle or you break your ankle, and all of a sudden you can't just get up and walk around? You've lost your mobility. Now for Saul, he lost his eyesight. He can't see he has to use his hands. He has to depend on the men who are with him to get to Damascus. And it's here that, you know, as I thought about this, really, I've never really thought about it in depth. But here, Saul is now confronted with the fact of the actions that had led him to this point. I imagine him questioning in his personal beliefs. Is it possible that everything that he was taught that a lid for that he tried to serve and do in the service of the Lord was key wrong? And also when he gets to Damascus, okay? Did he have anything to eat or drink? Nothing. Verse nine says for three days, he was blind and he didn't eat or drink anything. Not gonna lie, I'd probably be hangry after three days, but especially no water. They didn't have AC back in the day. Imagine means all at this point, sitting in a room, unable to see not eating, not drinking. Darkness has settled in. It's a lot of time to think and reflect the men. I imagine him thinking

why God, why am I here? Why am I in this position? You finally had to come to grips with who he was. And really he was in a state of vulnerability. Previously, we read that he was breathing out murderous threats, he wanted people to die. It's almost like he became ISIS for a little bit. Did you really say that pastor? But he believed everything that he thought. And he went out, he went after it.

And we find now a man by the name of Ananias. An unsung hero. And as we've journeyed through this series of unsung heroes, many of them are placed in life and death scenarios. Ananias was no exception. We find in verse 10. It says, in Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias and the Lord called him in a vision Ananias! Yes, Lord, he answered. Lord said to him, go to the house of Judas on Straight street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul for he is praying. Saul is being faithful he's doing what he knows to do is to pray. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and placed his hands on him to restore his sight. Now, if you're Ananias how are you feeling? I imagine his stomach was in knots. And his heart started to beat a little faster. Amen. Lord, do you know what you're asking of me? It says, Lord, I've heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he's come here with authority from the chief priests, to arrest all who call on your name.

And you know what I love about this passage, what's Ananias doing? He's questioning God. Are we allowed to do that? Now the Lord responds, go, this man is my what? My chosen instrument, to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings into all the people of Israel, I will show him how he must suffer from my name, meaning God has a plan or soul. The most unlikely of choices, is going to serve the Lord and ultimately be martyred for it. Have you ever tried to predict people who you think are going to be faithful believers and then all of a sudden you kind of scratch your head what went wrong? Ananias in his head, he's thinking, this guy cannot possibly be the guy that God wants to go on and serve. And yet we find if you read the New Testament, how many letters does Paul send out? We were just studying earlier the book of Ephesians in Sabbath School. Had a really great lesson. How we should treat our children. How children should treat their parents. How we should deal with people who were enslaved. Or sometimes when you're working you feel like a slave Amen. And it took courage, even though Ananias' heart and mind is saying Are you sure God?

Ananias gets up. And he goes. So Ananias in verse 17, went to the house and he entered it. He placed his hands on Saul And he said, Brother saw the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul's life is about to change. And immediately something like scales, fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again, he got up and he was baptized. And after taking some food, he regained his strength.

I think there's definitely a couple of lessons that we can take from this passage is number one. Ananias just showed tremendous grace and acceptance towards Saul by calling him what? brother. Your sworn enemy, would you dare to want to call him brother, him or her? brother or sister? Oh, I'd be rather driving the other way to get as far away as as far as possible, if I were Ananias. But he doesn't have that option. Because God came to him in a vision and said, I want you to go. And as our skit highlighted earlier, Ananias is calling Saul brother.

When you hear the term brother what comes to mind? Someone close, family. Love, supposed to love your brother, right? Do you fight with your brothers and sisters? Those of you who say no, I don't believe you. Even to this day, I still fight with my siblings. That's a loving fight though. And I love this. I love this story. Because Ananias questions God. And does Gods smight Ananias? No. I think sometimes God expects questions because we're about to do something in the name of the Lord. And it could potentially cost our life or cost us an unpleasant time. We kind of know why we're going right. Faith sometimes has questions, and it's okay to ask questions. But he goes in he calls him brother, we think of family love closeness, not an enemy. And Ananias the skit pointed out. He could have done something to Paul, now's my moment to take this guy out in the name of the Lord. But he doesn't. He responsive because the Lord specifically told agonize, I have chosen Saul to be a witness.

Not only that, he doesn't just call them brother, he puts his hands on Saul. Do you want to put your hands on your enemy? in a literal sense, or a figurative sense? Sometimes you do? Let's be honest. They make you so angry want to shake you? But no. He tenderly places his hands he placed his hand in the scales from Saul's eyes fall off. The one who is breathing out murderous threats, who is now placed in a place of vulnerability and desperation is treated with love and grace and

compassion. Is there anybody in your life that you consider your enemy and God is calling you to have reconciliation between you two could be your neighbor. The one who snitches on you for the HOA. Could be your sibling, could be your parent, could be your friend, could be a fellow church member, could be that co worker that always talks around at the watercooler, or maybe when knows, could be anybody.

The second thing though, or the other takeaway here is that God desires that we have love for those who persecute us. Earlier we were talking about dealing with bad bosses or bad co workers. Right? How should we respond to them with love? Now am I saying that you can be a doormat you can be a punching bag. No Was Jesus a doormat? No. Did Jesus ever get upset? So is it okay to get upset? To a degree, because we are emotional people, Amen. Now, if you always live in a state of anger 365 days a year, maybe you need to check yourself before you wreck yourself. Right? Because if you're not dealing with your emotions and you're not dealing with your anger, there's something wrong. That could have dangerous consequences. Okay. So love, but don't be a doormat. Jesus was firm. He says to turn the other cheek but he also doesn't just blindly be a doormat.

But also God will be with you as you courageously face your fears just as Ananias confronted his fears of going down to the city to the street called Straight.

When it comes to courage, Maya Angelou wrote this, on developing courage. In an interview for Harvard Business Review, the poet Maya Angelou was asked about the most important lessons that she learned from her very own mother and Mrs. Miss Angelou said, I would say she encouraged me to develop courage. And she taught me by being courageous herself. And after years of leaving her and I think being coming courageous, I realized that one is born with courage. One develops it, one develops courage. And you develop it by doing small, courageous things in the same way that one wouldn't set out to pick up 100 pound bag of rice. If that one's aim, if that is one's aim, the person should be advised to pick up a five pound bag, then a 10 pound bag, and then a 20 pound and so forth until one is able with enough muscle to actually pick up 100 pounds. And that is the same way with courage. You develop courage by doing courageous things, small things, but things that cost you some exertion mental and I suppose spiritual exertion.

Many years ago, I became a lifeguard and also a water safety instructor (WSI). I taught kids how to swim. And especially young kids there, they love to just want to jump in the water. And then sometimes though, even adults, they want to learn how to swim, but they're petrified of water. And sometimes I've heard stories where other instructors would say, we had to start by just putting their toes in the water because they were so scared. Have you ever felt so scared about something, that situation that you're facing that the first step is just to put your toes in the water. And eventually as you walk into the water, maybe you'll get them to get to their waist, but they're still holding on to the wall just in case. Now as kids to, Oh this vexed me so, so much, kids who do not know how to swim, I think the first sermon that I preached here, I was talking about how kids would hug the wall, they want to go to the deep end, but they didn't know how to swim, so they'd hug that wall. And every time we'd have to tell them go back. And then as you as you're teaching these kids, okay, let's get down to the water level at your chin, and just put your face in the water up and breathing. This person is developing courage with the simplest the baby steps. Next, put your hands on the wall, put your face in the water and start to kick. And eventually you tell him do a stroke. And next thing you know, they're doing freestyle laps across the pool. Person who would not get into the water had to start with just dipping their toes. Sometimes courage means dipping your toes into the pool of whatever you are facing a new job. An unexpected life change where your spouse decides I no longer want to be with you. Dipping your toes in the courage to get up when you get a diagnosis that you're not expecting. deletion of a job, difficult neighbor, you name it. We all can learn from Ananias. Sometimes, we may say are you sure God but God will be faithful. So may you pray and develop that courage, even if it means starting by just dipping your toes into the pool. Eventually, you will be swimming laps Not just 100 yards, but maybe a couple of miles. The Lord can do wonderful things if you trust God and when God calls you to do something amazing, such as the unsung hero and a nice be ready because God will call me you go with courage and strength.

So this week, our reflect where in your life have you been maybe scared and hesitant and still follow God's leading in overcoming your fears? Where's the moment where God helped you to overcome your fear?

And this week, I want you to what is the most pressing fear that you have and ask God for courage and wisdom and tackle that fear? Whatever that may be. May the Lord bless you, leading guide you may you be an unsung hero like Anand is, even when you're saying, Are you sure God?

Father in heaven, Thank you, Lord, for Your grace and mercy. I pray for each one of us here that we go forth. Lord, lead and guide and mold us into the disciples that you've called us to be. And when we're unsure, Lord, make us short. Forgive us of our shortcomings. Help us to be faithful to you and all things and may we trust in you in Jesus name. everybody said, Amen.

Grace and peace everyone have a great week. Don't take off