



SESSION ONE: THE CALL OF GOD

A Call to Faith – A Call to Mission

The Story of Paul

(previously known as Saul)

RELATING TO THE WORLD'S STORY

Everyone has a story. Usually the topic of their story is what they are most passionate about. It could be an event, an achievement, or the direction their life has taken. But things change. Life's journey often takes us in directions we may not have expected—especially if we are on the wrong path. A new story.

What is the world around us most passionate about? Discuss the topics and activities that most engage the hearts and conversations of the people in your community.

Read Acts 16:1-10 (*Apostle Paul's story*)

*"Chief of Sinners
Though I Be"*

CW 385

Watch *"To the Ends of the Earth"* – segment 1 (start to 2:10)

- Express what most stood out for you about this part of Paul's life.
- What questions does it raise?

LEARNING FROM PAUL'S STORY

A. Paul's Call to Faith – an Unexpected Conversion

Act 16 brings us right into the middle of Paul's journeys. He risked even his own life to tell people about Jesus. It was what he was passionate about. But that wasn't always the case. In fact, it was exactly the opposite.

1. Read Paul's story when he was known as "Saul." Write down the points that stand out most for you. Then be ready to retell Paul's story in your own words.

📖 Acts 6:8-15

📖 Acts 7:1,51-60

📖 Acts 8:1-4

📖 Acts 9:1-9

Want to learn more?

Paul retells his story:

Acts 22:1-21

Acts 26:2-23

Galatians 1:13-24

Saul (Paul) once thought his life was so much better than others—more dedicated, more upright, more righteous. He was a fiery defender of the purity of his religion. It led him to become an extremist, a terrorist to the Christians. Saul thought he was doing God’s will—and didn’t realize that he was actually working against God, “persecuting Jesus” because he persecuted Jesus’ people. But God has a way of intervening even in the most unlikely lives and change them around to accomplish his purpose.

2. Look over Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:13-16. Point out how getting to know Jesus changed his mindset—his view of himself, of God, and of others.

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10). “Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

Want to learn more?

People God calls:

Genesis 12:1-4

Romans 1:1-7

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

How do you usually describe yourself to others? How might you change the description to reflect the outlook Paul gained? How will it reveal what you think about God, about yourself, about others?

Paul was living proof that God’s grace and power are beyond measure. God changed Paul’s pride into humility. No matter how far people have fallen or been deceived, no one is beyond rescue. And God not only rescues us from something... but also to something—to fulfill his purposes and plans. (See Philippians 2:13.)

B. Paul’s Call to Mission – a New Focus for Life

When Saul became a Christian, his name became Paul. At first the Christians weren’t sure if he was just trying to infiltrate them to turn them in. But God said, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul calls himself “an apostle of Christ Jesus by will of God” (Colossians 1:1), “sent not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Galatians 1:1). This was not just a call to faith, but a redefining of his life.

Want to learn more?

*You too were
chosen—for God’s
purposes*

John 15:5, 16-17

Ephesians 1:4-6

Romans 8:28-32

1. Describe Paul's mission as defined by God in Acts 13:47 & 26:16-18.
 "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." (Acts 26:16-18).
2. Where do you see the greatest need for this mission call today?

Paul was sent through the Antioch church. (See Acts 13:1-3.) Even though Paul most likely had a plan in mind where he would like to go, God ultimately directed or redirected him. God has orchestrated his plan all along from Adam until now. Even for us, following God's will is often a mixture of careful, logical planning and being prepared for those unexpected opportunities God is opening up.

3. Read Acts 16:6-12. Discuss what affected and guided the next steps in Paul's journey. What does that have to say about your life?

Want to learn more?

*Paul traces God's hand
in history:
Acts 13:14-39*

Many times, we may wish God would talk to us directly to tell us our next steps or the right decisions. Don't expect that our journey in life will be neatly spelled out for us but being a witness of Jesus and a light to the world is not just a task, it is our identity. Our call to action doesn't usually come as dramatic as it came to Paul but may become obvious if we look at the people around us. The work may not be as high profile as Paul's, but God involves us in very important roles. Each role is important. (See 1 Corinthians 3:5-8.) Don't overlook your home, your friends, your community.

4. Read through the passages below. Evaluate how these fit into the direction of your life.

 Matthew 28:18-20

 Acts 13:47 (Isaiah 49:6)

 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Many countries have been closed to Christianity. We may have to endure the frustrations of our plans and expectations before we discover the doors God is opening for a new and clearer direction. Yet all of us are also involved in the task of taking the gospel message to the ends of the earth. Don't sit around waiting for it. Keep moving and let God direct your steps.

Motivation from Isaiah

Isaiah 6:1-8
Isaiah 45:1-25
Isaiah 49:1-22

Ultimately it is about TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS who draws even unlikely people to follow him.

TELLING YOUR STORY

1. What amazing conversion stories have you witnessed or heard— “impossible people” coming to faith? Explain how it is by God’s grace alone that you can call Jesus your Savior.
2. Trace your journey to faith (may go back many generations for some). If you meet people like Saul, how could you make use of their story and yours to eventually lead to telling Jesus’ story?
3. When is it helpful and when is it harmful to criticize or condemn the ways or beliefs of others?
4. Discuss your life’s mission in view of being a light for the nations. Determine how that changes your priorities. How does that redefine how you carry out your different roles and relationships in life?

LIVING THE STORY – PROJECT

1. Learn this Bible Story to share: *Forgiveness for King David* (2 Samuel 12–13, Psalm 51).
2. List the persons you know who appears to be working against God. Pray that God would lead them to see Jesus as clearly as Paul did, and if possible, that God would use you to reach them.
3. Research the activities of our national and global Mission. Obtain a map of our missions to see where in the world we are reaching out. Choose a mission field to keep in prayer and see what you can do to support those efforts.
4. If someone reads your actions, expenses, and time commitments, what would they say is your mission? What do you want your life to communicate considering your relationship with God through Jesus? Write out a plan.

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