

Small Group Guide – Week 46

The Acts of God through the Apostles

The Church at Brook Hills

November 15-21, 2010

Acts 9

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

The Acts of God through the Apostles (9:1-31)

As we saw in Acts 1-8, the gospel is now progressing with ever-increasing strength and diversity. Until chapter 7, the church had been mostly contained in Jerusalem. But after Stephen's martyrdom the church was forced to scatter. It is at the scene of Stephen's martyrdom that we are introduced to a new character, Saul. Saul was a law-abiding, prominent Jewish man who was present and approving at Stephen's stoning. Chapter 8 begins with the fact that *"Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."* We see here that Saul had quickly become the Church's greatest enemy.

Study the Text . . . (Read Acts 9:1-9)

Chapter 9 begins with Saul seeking to extend his persecution of the Church by going into other towns and cities to find believers. The first thing we should notice is this: there are Christians in Damascus. The Apostles have been preaching the gospel in various towns, but there is no record of them going to Damascus. It is incredible to see that the gospel was spreading simply by those who had scattered from the persecution and those who had heard Peter preach in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Saul's attempt to stamp out the Church had actually done the opposite. As Tertullian, an early Church Father said: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Now, while Saul was on his way to Damascus to begin his persecution, Jesus appears to him. Notice the words of Jesus: *"Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"* What is Jesus saying here? Was Saul actually persecuting Jesus? It is important to note that by saying this Jesus is identifying Himself with the Church. As Saul persecutes the Church, he persecutes Jesus Himself, because the Church is the body of Christ.

Group Discussion . . .

- Take time to discuss the impact of martyrdom on the Church. Stephen's death was one thing that God used to send and grow His Church, and He has done it many times since. In a country where death is not much of a threat for sharing the gospel, it is easy for us to grow cold to the realities of martyrdom around the world. Is your treasure found so much in Christ that you would be willing to die to make Him known?

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- As you discuss the above truth, be reminded that Jesus identifies with us in persecution. He has said that we are His Body and that if anyone persecutes us, they persecute Him. How might that truth be comforting to us as we seek to share the gospel with others?
- How can we as a small group thank and praise God for the peace He has given His church here in the United States?
- How can we as a small group pray for our brothers and sisters that are being persecuted all over the world? If Christ identifies with them, do you think we should as well?

Study the Text... (Read Acts 9:10-19)

God's response to Ananias is essential for understanding the rest of the book of Acts. "Go [to Saul], for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name." God is fulfilling His promise in Acts 1:8 to take the gospel from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to Judea, and then the ends of the earth. The gospel had already been preached in Jerusalem and was currently being preached in Judea and Samaria. Now God begins raising up Saul to complete the initial stages of the gospel going forth by the Apostles, for he was appointed to take the gospel to the Gentiles in the ends of the earth. From this point on in the book of Acts, Saul will be the main character and the gospel going throughout the nations will be the theme.

Group Discussion...

- Consider the fact that within one year of Jesus resurrection, the gospel had progressed significantly. There are thousands of believers and the gospel has moved out of Jerusalem into the surrounding region. We can clearly see that the primary objective of the early church was to make the gospel known for the glory of God. Compare your small group to the mindset of the early church. Is your primary objective to make the gospel known for the glory of God among the people around you? How are you currently putting your strength and time into that purpose as a small group?

Study the Text . . . (Read Acts 9:20-31)

Four times in this short passage Saul is described as boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is incredible that from the very moment he believed, he began preaching the gospel, clearly demonstrating that his life embodies the primary objective of the Church. This was not done without risk either. Remember that it was Saul who approved of the first martyrdom. The result of his bold preaching in both places was the same: they wanted to kill him. Yet Paul continued on, making known the good news of Jesus Christ that had saved his life from the sure judgment of God. Notice the result of Saul's conversion and preaching on the church: *"the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had*

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peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” The church was multiplying because of the power of the gospel.

Group Discussion...

- Take time to pray for the lost in your lives. Each person share one person they are currently sharing the gospel with and then pray for that person to believe the gospel.
- Take time to pray for the power of the gospel to permeate your small group and that God would make Christ known to others through you and your small group.
- Take time to pray for the multiplication of the redeemed in both your small group and our faith family at Brook Hills.
- How can you as a small group walk in the “*fear of the Lord*” (9:31)?