

Within Reach!

Welcome/Easter/ series review

Read: Acts 9:1–31

Saul or Paul, either. Saul is his Jewish name, Paul is Latin.

1. Saul starts off, headed in the wrong direction.

Explain: That's my testimony. How many of you started off in the wrong direction. Saul is way off course. He is in the business of arresting, abusing, and even executing Christians.

How could Saul get so off track?

- **Upbringing and Background.** It is what he has always known, what was modeled.
- **Blind Ambition.** Climbing the ladder, trying to prove myself.
- **Religion, pride, hypocrisy.** When my love for God is measured by my hate for others, we have a problem.
- **Inexperience.** Paul is young, full of zeal but lacking in wisdom.
- **Pain, isolation.** Just wanting a place to belong.

There are lots of reasons we can get started in the wrong direction.

Argue: Galatians 1:13-14

Illustration: Have you ever been driving down the road, following your GPS, when you realize make an extra stop. The GPS lady, make a u-turn, make a u-turn, make a u-turn.

Apply: Are you headed in the wrong direction? Maybe you think you are too far gone. How many of you have hunted people down in order to physically assault and murder them? If there is hope for Paul, there is hope for us. **What is that hope?**

2. God's zealous pursuit!

Explain: Jesus comes to rescue Saul. "Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him." I just love how God pursues Saul. We are all here today because at some point in our past, Jesus came after us.

- Salvation, as a kid, high school, college, seminary, and as an adult. The last year has been a real challenge but in the midst of the struggle I see God, in pursuit, coming for my heart, refusing to let me go. **Romans 8:28, Phi 1:6, Hebrews 12:2**
- Fishermen, tax collectors, women, children, blind, lepers, religious

Argue: Luke 19:10, Luke 15- Leave the 99 to find the one. **(Easter)**

Explain: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Galatians 1:15-16, Genesis 3

Apply: God is not hiding from you; God is looking for you. However, many say, I tried it. Often what that means is, I made some bad decisions, got in trouble, went to church so God would clean up the mess I made, and when He did not do that, Christianity does not work, God is not real. God cannot be a means to an end. God often allows us to live with the consequences. If He is your fist pursuit, He will exceed your expectations.

3. Paul's conversion!

Explain: The radical conversion and transformation of Saul to Paul is one of the strongest pieces of evidence to the historical validity of the resurrection.

We say all the time; Jesus did not come to get us to heaven; it is better than that. The Christian life is a life-long, transformational journey with Christ. The first step in that journey is repentance, U-turn. Paul is headed in one direction, repentance is turning around, heading in a new direction.

- **Step One: Attention**- blinding light. Something Paul could not ignore.
- **Step Two: Humility**- knocked off his high horse. I do not know what I thought I knew.
- **Step Three: Revelation**- I am Jesus! Can you imagine how terrifying that moment was?
- **Step Four: Invitation**- Trust and follow me. Usually, requires a sacrifice. Pride
- **Step Five: Help**- Ananias.

I have been through going through these steps again recently:

- **Attention:** Crisis
- **Humility:** I cannot fix it, I cannot control it, it is beyond my power. God, I need your help.
- **Revelation:** God, begins to teach me. When my focus sharpens, God usually begins by teaching me, addressing the unfinished areas of my heart.
- **Invitation:** Will you trust me? Will you obey me? Almost always a sacrifice is required. What is standing in the way of what God wants to do next.
- **Help:** We get to see God at work

Conversion always begins when we stop defending ourselves, blaming other people and start listening to Jesus.

Apply: Praying, Spirit-filled, Bold, United, Generous, Participating church. This flows out of the work God is doing in our hearts. We can choose to give God our attention, to humble ourselves, to open the word and quiet our hearts, so we hear the invitation to follow.

4. God turns our weakness into strength. Verse 15-16

Explain: This is what we mean when we say redemption. Our vision is to help people follow Jesus and experience the hope of redemption. How does God do that?

- God sends Ananias.** None of us can take this journey alone, not even Paul, but not of us have to. We want to take the journey with you! I am so grateful for all the people through the years who were further along in their journey, who invested in me, and accelerated my journey. In the same way, we want to support and encourage you along the way.
- Ananias has the courage to go.** Ananias knows about Saul's reputation and is understandably afraid. He probably assumes Saul is a lost cause. However, God is not finished with Saul. **"He is My chosen instrument."** **Failure isn't fatal.** God takes this young, arrogant, ambitious young man, transforms his life and uses him to impact his world. God is calling us to go to our family, neighbors, co-works, and classmates. Often, those who we have given up on, seem to be transformed by God's grace. As Jesus said, those who have been forgiven much, love much.

Read: Verse 9:28-31

Argue: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Apply: God's Grace may knock you down—but only to raise you up. **1 Peter 5:6**

Invitation