

Acts 9:1-22 (NIV)

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." 13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." 17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, 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." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

44-09-01-The Conversion of Saul

religious zeal, encountering Christ, conversion, transformation

Acts 9:1-22

Encountering God transforms our attitudes and our activities.

INTRODUCTION:

–Saul—with strong *religious ideas* and *investments*—was on a crusade against Christ, until he *encountered Christ*. He thought he was serving God, until he *met God*. **HOM.idea**. That's what Saul experienced.

–Religious zeal isn't a measure of *spiritual health*. Saul's *devotion* was in the wrong direction, until his encounter with Christ transformed it—**Acts 9:1-22 (NIV)**, *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

I. Why Doesn't Everyone Have These Kind of Encounters?

- A. Not everyone needs bright lights from heaven or *Christ's voice* audibly confronting them. (But Saul was *stubborn* in his religious convictions and *blindly committed* to his religious zeal: "Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.")
- B. God encounters people in whatever way He wants, but sometimes He gets out *the big guns*. [Sadhu Sundar Singh's encounter with Christ similar to Paul's; Gulshan Esther's healing encounter with Christ even more impressive; Muslim stories of Jesus coming into their dreams are common.]

TRANS: God meets us when, where and how we need to be met. (If we need a Damascus-road experience, we'll get it! But **whatever He gives**—a *mental epiphany* while reading Scripture, a *still small voice* in our hearts, or a *mighty rushing wind* blowing through our living room—each encounter with God is meant to transform us. Let's read **vs.7-16**, *The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord*

told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

II. Do Our Personal Encounters with Christ Affect Us Alone?

- A. **No, others can also be affected** by our encounters with Jesus. (The first affected by Saul’s vision were his traveling companions: they were “speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.”)
1. **Remember**, these men were also *persecutors of Christians*, bent on following Saul’s leadership in destroying the church....
 2. When Saul was *blinded by the light*, they became witnesses of a symbolic judgment on both him and on them, for it showed their own *religious ideas and commitments* were a form of *blindness!*
- B. **Saul’s encounter also affected Ananias**, who feared Saul as a dangerous persecutor. (Christ’s visionary command to seek out Saul was a test to Ananias of his own faith’s courage to obey.)

TRANS: Others are affected by our **encounters with God**. Saul was blinded physically to show him the spiritual blindness of his religious logic and loyalties. At the same time, it warned his companions of their religious blindness in persecuting the church. And it gave Ananias the chance to have his faith stretched and strengthened. Saul’s encounter forever changed his own life, his attitude and his actions, but His conversion affected the whole Mediterranean world! Let’s read the rest of the passage— vs.17-22, Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, 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.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

III. What Should Result from Our Conversion?

- A. God sent Ananias to Saul so that he could “*see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit*.” (God can do miracles without using other humans, but that’s not His usual pattern. He usually involves His servants.)
1. **God changes sinners into saints for building a spiritual family**. (Ananias, who feared Saul as an enemy, says, “*Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus... has sent me*.” **God transforms our relationships**.)
 2. **God heals spiritual blindness** with a *new vision*. (He often makes our transformations *unforgettable* – “something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes.” God must *open our eyes to change our attitudes*.)
 3. **God turns our zeal into Kingdom work**. (Being “filled with the Holy Spirit” equips us to be *witnesses for Christ*— “...he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.” He changes our **activities**.)
- B. **God transforms us**, not to be *humbly hidden* but *vitaly vulnerable*:
1. **We are to be open to our spiritual family** (“Saul spent several days with the disciples”— **Heb 10:24**. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. [**Sharing time** in church is *crucial!*])
 2. **We’re to be open about our changed thinking and transformed life— Mat 5:16 (KJV)**, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (They said of Saul, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc...?” The answer is *no!* This was a *new man*, a “new creation” in Christ Jesus!)

CONCLUSION:

–**Encountering God transforms our attitudes and our activities**.

That encounter must always happen a first time, but it’s **never just a one-time deal**. It’s meant to be ongoing. We should be encountering Jesus not just *daily* but *all day* long, as the Holy Spirit continues the process of our transformation.

–Read about Saul’s life as *the Apostle Paul*. You’ll see that he kept on growing. **Our conversion** isn’t a static event. It begins a *new life of dynamic change for the rest of our lives*. Jesus makes Himself available to us 24-7 for transforming encounters. That means that *today, right now*, isn’t just the beginning of the rest of our life. For believers, it’s the next phrase in the rest of our conversion.