

STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS
SPIRIT-FILLED LIVING

Week 7: Week of November 3

"When God Interrupts"

Text: Acts 9:1-30

(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)

Luke interrupts the account of church's expansion with the greater interruption of Saul, who will become the primary spotlight for the rest of the book. Luke regards Saul's conversion as the most significant event in the beginnings of Christianity by recounting it 3x. (9:1-19; 22:3-21; 26:4-23).

Each vary in detail, but Luke saw no inconsistency in retelling the same story in diverse terms. All three accounts center on the encounter between Saul and Jesus and climax in Saul's commissioning to take the gospel to the Gentiles. The fact that Paul himself gives equal emphasis to just these two points (I Cor. (:1-2; 15:8-10; Gal. 1:13-16) shows that Luke and Paul were at one in their assessment of his conversion and its importance. Luke's source is probably Paul himself.

It's technically not a conversion (which is from one religion to another) because neither Luke nor Paul saw the new movement as a new religion. It was not simply a continuation of Judaism either (see Gal 1:13-14). But it was a continuation of the faithful religion of Israel.

Luke makes it priority to emphasize the belief in the one sovereign God, and its heritage of faith and devotion was fundamental. What happened to Paul on the Damascus road was not a renunciation of that identity and heritage. Rather, it was an "awakening to the responsibility which had always been Israel's – to be a blessing to the families of the earth (3:25), to be a light to the nations." Hence, the emphasis in the accounts is more on a prophetic calling or commissioning, as in Isa 42:7 or 49:1,6.

At the same time, it was a "conversion" in that it was a complete turnaround to go in the opposite direction. It implies an inner trauma and transformation.

Paul was converted within two or three years or less of Jesus' crucifixion. For Paul's claim to be accepted it must have followed quite closely upon those which had preceded.

Notice the personal identification between Jesus and his persecuted followers. This becomes a key basis for Paul's later theology of the church as the body of Christ. It was personal hostility towards Jesus himself.

Ananias addresses Saul as "brother" – which is more than "fellow Jew" but also "fellow believer". Naturally, Luke assumed that a primary objective of Ananias would be for Saul to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is so much the mark of the disciple for Luke, it could hardly be otherwise. The Spirit's filling is at the initiative of the Spirit not under the control of the apostles.

Luke also links Saul to Jerusalem to show how the gospel was taken to the Gentiles. The suspicion of Saul would have been understandable. The role of Barnabas is consistent with his character. Luke makes a point of showing that Saul, the apostle to the Gentiles began by preaching to his fellow Jews, and at the heart of Jewish religion and tradition. Its boldness identifies him firmly with the group who prayed the prayer of 4:29-30. The opposition from the Hellenists also identifies him with Stephen, with those whom he had persecuted. (Gal 1:23).

Discussion Questions

Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to choose).

1. As you look back on your spiritual life, is there any particular moment that stands out as more significant?
2. Have you ever felt like you were “interrupted” by God? What happened?
3. How were you first introduced to the Christian faith? When did the Lord first get your attention?

Read Acts 9:1-30

1. Saul traveled 150 miles to Damascus order to bring back from Damascus refugees from Jerusalem. What does this action tell you about who Saul was?
2. Describe what happened in verses 3-9 from the point of view from one of Saul's companions. What did they see and hear as opposed to what Saul saw and heard?
3. How do you think Saul felt when confronted by Jesus? Look at 2 Cor. 4:4,6; I Cor. 9:1-2; 15:8-10, and Gal. 1:13-16.
4. Who is Ananias and what does he do that is so significant? What kind of person must he be?
5. What is the climax of the story between Ananias and Saul? What is significant about the way Ananias addresses Saul?
6. What questions still remain for you about Saul and this encounter with Christ?
7. When have you, like Ananias obeyed the Lord even when you had doubts about it? What happened?
8. Who has played the role of Ananias in your life? What was that like?
9. What happened to Saul after he was restored to health?
10. What would have others expected for Saul to say when he came to the synagogue? What did Saul preach?

11. How did the crowds respond to Saul? Why?
12. In vs 26, we learn Saul returned to Jerusalem. What difficult situation did he find himself?
13. Who is Barnabas and what does he do for Saul? Why?
14. What changes has knowing Jesus Christ and being a part of His Body brought into your life?