



Adult Devotion

Loving Those Who Are Different Acts 9:1-31

- Have you ever walked through a new town or area and been afraid of the people around you? If so, what was the reason you were afraid?

Maybe the area you were in is known for a lot of crime, or maybe you walked past someone who said something unkind. It may be that a person simply looked different from you, or they talked or acted in a way you were unfamiliar with. Sometimes people are afraid of others for reasons they have no control over, and other times people do things that make others afraid.

- Has anyone ever been afraid of you? If so, how did you respond?

In the Bible, people were afraid of Saul. Saul did not believe in Jesus Christ and he hated Jesus and anyone who dared to say Jesus' name in public. It's no wonder they were afraid to be anywhere near Saul!

Read Acts 7:54-58 and Acts 1:8

Not only did Saul witness the murder of Stephen, the first Christian killed for his belief in Jesus Christ, he also wholeheartedly approved of Stephen's death. That day marked the beginning of great persecution of Christians. Many Christians fled Jerusalem for their lives. Acts 9 tells us that sometime later Saul was "still breathing threats and murder" against Christians. He hated Christians and got permission and authority to go outside of Jerusalem to Damascus to find fleeing Christians and arrest them.

Read Acts 9:3-9

Saul actually met Jesus in a vision on his way to Damascus! As a result of the encounter, Saul was a different man in many ways. He no longer hated Christians; he loved them. He realized he was wrong and opposed God through his mistreatment of Christians. Once he saw the light, Saul wanted to help others learn about Jesus and what God has done to show His great love for us. God sent His Son to die and rise from death; we are saved from our sins and will rise again also. This is the Gospel.

We learn that Saul had trouble being accepted by other Christians. Even though he had been changed by God, other people were afraid of him because of all the bad things he had said and done. We see this fear first in Ananias.



Read Acts 9:13-14

Ananias was afraid of Saul. He had heard of all the terrible things Saul had done to Christians in Jerusalem and how it was his intent to do the same in Damascus, Ananias' town. Also, Ananias wasn't sure Saul deserved to receive the recovery of his sight. Why would God heal someone who might continue to do bad things? God told Ananias through a vision that Saul was chosen by Him to tell many kinds of people about God's love through Jesus Christ.

- Has anyone been mean to you, either through words or actions?
- If so, was it difficult to forgive or accept them, even after they apologized?

Read Acts 9:16-20

Most importantly, once Saul regained his sight, he immediately told others that Jesus was the Son of God.

But when Saul went back to Jerusalem, other Christians—even Jesus' apostles—would not welcome him. They, too, were afraid of Saul and did not believe he really was a follower of Jesus Christ. Saul got help, though, from a man named Barnabas. Barnabas stood up for Saul and explained everything to the Jerusalem Christians. He shared with them Saul's vision of Jesus and how Saul boldly told others that Jesus was God's Son—even at the risk of losing his life. Saul was indeed a transformed man! The persecutor was now a preacher. His hatred had been turned into love. What a change! And because of Barnabas' help and encouragement, Saul was welcomed among the Jerusalem Christians and treated as a brother in the faith.

Saul did many evil things, yet was eventually accepted once he found the love of Jesus. Some people, however, are not accepted by others only because they seem different from them.

- Are there people you can help be included in your group or church?
- What are some ways you can help people conquer their fears of those who seem different and are left out?
- How can you help people move from being invisible to being indispensable?

Saul belongs in God's story of grace. Saul—who would later be known as the Apostle Paul—said the words in 1 Timothy 1:15-17. Let's read them together. *(Give enough time so entire group can find the passage in their Bibles.)*

Think about this: Who can you help be included in God's story of grace?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear Father in heaven, thank You for loving us. Help us believe in the salvation of Jesus, even when it's difficult. Use us to welcome others into Your story of grace. Help us not be afraid. Give us courage to step out of our comfort zone and purposefully include those who may be left out because of a difference or disability. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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