

Calling  
August 4, 2024  
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Acts 9:1–22

If someone said to you, “*Tell me about the Apostle Paul*” how would you answer? Who was he? What was his personality like? What was his role in Christianity?

The Apostle Paul's accomplishments for God tend to obscure our perception of the reality of who Paul was BEFORE Jesus dramatically and eternally changed Him. To appreciate that dramatic change we need understand Saul of Tarsus.

We first meet Saul when Jewish leaders murdered Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Scripture tells us the murderers, “*laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.<sup>i</sup> And Saul approved of his execution.*”<sup>ii</sup> “*And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered<sup>iii</sup>... But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*”<sup>iv</sup> Paul himself said, “*being zealous for God as all of you are this day. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women...<sup>v</sup> still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, [Saul] went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*”<sup>vi</sup>

We are told that “*A religious extremist terrorist can be defined as an individual or group that uses terrorism as a strategy to achieve religious goals, motivated by an absolute belief that their violent actions are sanctioned or commanded by a higher power.*”<sup>vii</sup>

Terrorizing Christians in the name of defending his religion and with authority from the clerical establishment; by any definition, Saul of Tarsus was an extremist, religious terrorist. Why do you think God would choose to select a religious terrorist as his "chosen instrument" to take the gospel to the Gentiles and to author half of the books in the New Testament?

The point: Every follower of Christ has a unique calling from God. (Eph.2:10)<sup>viii</sup> In today's text we see God calling and using two very different men. Saul was a religious extremist trying to stamp out Christianity before it could get started. Ananias was a humble follower serving in obscurity. God can change and use both the meek and the murderous. That's why it's called “Amazing Grace!” If he can use them, he can use us!

We find Saul the theocratic terrorist on his way to do more “evil to the saints.”

**(ESV) —3** Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. **4** And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” **5** And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and

you will be told what you are to do.” **7** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. **8** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. **9** And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **10** Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” **11** And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, **12** and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” **13** But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. **14** And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” **15** But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. **16** For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” **17** So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” **18** And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; **19** and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. **20** And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” **21** And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” **22** But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

- This passage is a pivot point in the book of Acts. Wiersbe writes, “*The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the leading persecutor of the Christians, was perhaps the greatest event in church history after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.*”<sup>ix</sup>
- Why do you think God would have chosen to reach Paul in such a dramatic way?
- Based on verses 8&9, why do you think God made him temporarily blind?
- When we think about his life before and after Christ how was his blindness symbolic (note verse 18)?
- What do we know about Saul’s background and education? How did that help him as an Apostle? (see this article <https://www.gotquestions.org/life-Paul.html> )
- What personality traits of the terrorist zealot would also come in handy for a zealous Apostle of Christ? Why is that encouraging to us?
- I thought about titling this lesson, “Better Call Saul!”
- When God needed someone smart, passionate, determined, persistent, and bold to reach the Gentiles with the gospel, He predestined He had better call Saul.
- What personality traits of the terrorist zealot do you think God changed so Paul could fulfill his calling as an apostle? Several verses document the changes in Paul’s “sanctified” personality. [1 Corinthians 15:9–10; Philippians 4:11–13; 2 Corinthians 11:26; Romans 9:3; Philippians 3:7–8; Romans 7:18]
- According to 2 Cor. 12:7 how did God forcefully overcome the “old Saul”?
- God didn’t blot out the helpful parts of Saul’s personality; He transformed them.

- God DID change Saul’s heart. He softened his rough edges making him humble, loving, self-sacrificing, aware of his sin and shortcomings, and totally dependent on God for his needs and the strength to carry out his mission.
- God also changed Saul’s name to Paul when He filled Him with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:9)
- That was Saul, but this text shows us a contrasting personality God used.
- How would you describe the personality of Ananias? Why was he exactly the right kind of person for God to send to Saul at this time of conversion?
- Clearly Ananias was content to be a humble disciple, yet it doesn’t appear he was shocked when the Lord came to him with a job to do. He was a little scared, but he said, “*Here I am, Lord*” and he obediently got going as God directed.
- God chooses and uses the bold, the humble, and everyone in between. Every Christ-follower has a calling we just need to say, “*Here I am, Lord...send me.*”

### So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Verse 15 is a key verse in this passage. God told Ananias Saul would be His “...*chosen instrument...to carry [His] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*” Saul was chosen specifically by God for this specific role.
- So, how can we apply this account of Saul’s conversion to our lives today?
- First, as we said at the beginning, God chooses, changes, and uses different kinds of people because His calling is unique to that person.
- We also see that God chose and changed a religious terrorist into the most productive Apostle of Christ in history. No one is too bad to be changed and called by God.
- Chuck Swindoll in his biography of Paul shares these applications:
  - No matter how we appear to others today, we’re all sinful by birth, by nature, and by choice. We all have a past. We’re all “wretches.”
  - Regardless of what you’ve done, no one is beyond hope. No sin in our past can “trump the grace of God.” (He used a terrorist like Paul!)
  - Though our past is “soiled,” anyone can find a new beginning with God.<sup>x</sup>
- That’s why God’s grace is “amazing!” As John Newton said in that most beloved hymn, if God’s amazing grace could save a wretch like Saul, He can (and will) save and use a wretch like you and me.
- Praise be to God for His glorious grace and His plan for sinful people!

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<sup>i</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 7:58). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>ii</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 8:1). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>iii</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 8:1). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>iv</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 8:3). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>v</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 22:3–4). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>vi</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 9:1–2). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.perplexity.ai/search?q=pending&newFrontendContextUUID=cf73c372-df49-4b96-bb32-65b879708661>

<sup>viii</sup> 1 Cor. 12:7, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 2:10, Ephesians 4:11-12

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<sup>ix</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [\*The Bible exposition commentary\*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 438). Victor Books.

<sup>x</sup> Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit (Great Lives from God's Word, Volume 6) Hardcover – April 15, 2002  
by Charles R. Swindoll (Author)