

ACTS

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Young Adults United Studies – the book of Acts

Intro – Acts is the powerful bridge between the ministry of Jesus and the mission of the church throughout history. In Acts, we see Jesus faithfully building His church just as He promised, and we watch that work ripple out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The same Spirit who empowered the first believers empowers us today.

- **4/15: Acts 2** – The Spirit Comes and the Church Begins
- **4/22: Acts 4** – Bold Witness in the Face of Opposition
- **4/29: Acts 9** – Saul’s Conversion
- **5/6: Acts 10** – The Gospel Breaks Barriers
- **5/13: Acts 15** – Church Conflict
- **5/20: Acts 28** – The Mission Continues Unhindered

Review – Last week we discussed these things from Acts 4...

- **Opposition to the Gospel:** Religious leaders were angry because the apostles taught resurrection, challenging their control and beliefs. Anger toward Jesus often reveals inner spiritual resistance.
- **Rapid Growth of the Church:** About 5,000 believed shortly after Jesus’ resurrection—evidence of the gospel’s power .
- **Spirit-Filled Boldness:** Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke with courage and clarity, showing the Spirit’s empowering presence.
- **Mark of Being with Jesus:** People could tell Peter and John had been with Jesus—transformation is visible in those who truly follow Him.
- **Holy Spirit’s Community Impact:** The early church was unified and generous, reflecting the Spirit’s prompting and love in action.

Transition – Today we move to Acts 9 where Saul, a zealous Pharisee, actively persecuting followers of Jesus is determined to stamp out the early church. His journey to Damascus marks a turning point—not only for him personally but for the spread of the gospel to the whole world.

Acts 9 - 9 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 holy people 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 proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to 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.

Teaching Points –

1. Why would Saul/Paul be so intent on killing Christians?
2. Saul wasn't seeking God. Rather, he was an enemy of God. Doesn't God respond to those who seek Him and punish those who don't?
3. What might Saul have been thinking once he heard the words, "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting*"?
4. When Saul was blind for three days did he know he would regain his sight?
5. Ananias seemingly doesn't want to go to Saul. Why is this?
6. Ananias does go and places his hands on Saul and calls him "Brother Saul". He does this in the name of and at the request of Jesus. What does this tell us about the heart of Jesus?
7. Saul regains sight, is baptized, and eats food. How is this a picture of spiritual new life and salvation?

Summary Points –

- No One Is Beyond God's Reach (vv. 1–4)
- A Personal Encounter with Jesus Changes Everything (vv. 5–6)
- God Often Uses Unexpected People and Means (vv. 10–17)
- Spiritual Blindness Must Be Healed (vv. 8–18)
- Conversion Leads to Transformation and Mission (v. 19)

Small Groups

Ice-Breaker – If you could snap your fingers and your name was changed, all documents were changed, and everyone knew you by your new name, would you do it? If you said no, how much money would it take for you to change your name? Bonus points - what would you want your name to be?

Darker side – Read Acts 9:1 from our handout. Let's get into the minds of those who hate Christians. What might be going on inside? Do your answers give you a greater level of empathy towards non-Christians?

Past life – Read I Corinthians 6:11. What were some Christians before they met Jesus? Glance at the previous two verses that preceded I Corinthians 6:11. Is it helpful for a Christian to remember their past life? Did Paul remember? How does this fit with Philipians 3:13–14?

Expected fate – Joseph, Esther, and Daniel were all expecting to die, or were prepared to die and then discovered that God's plans for them were to elevate them. Saul, once he was blinded, likely thought he would die. God's plans were for him to start the church! If someone came to you believing God was against them, their life was over, what would you ask or say or do?

Our love – Go back and read verses 13 and 14 again from Acts 9. What is Ananias saying? That's he's afraid for his own life? That he thinks God has made a mistake? That he doesn't want to tell Saul about Jesus? Which of these would you relate to? What are we supposed to learn here?

Chief of sinners – In I Timothy 1:15 Paul will call himself the worst of sinners, or in the old KJV, the chief of sinners. Jesus rescued and redeemed prostitutes and murderers down through the Bible. Can you name some? What are we to conclude from this and how are we to apply it?

Brothers and sisters – How sweet must have that been for Saul to feel Ananias's hands on his shoulders and to hear that word, "brother"? What does that mean for us? What are the implications of truly treating each other as brothers and sisters? Read these verses to help...

- Romans 12:10
- Galatians 6:10
- Hebrews 13:1
- 1 Peter 1:22
- 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10
- John 13:34–35

New life – Go back at look at teaching point 7. Then read Acts 9:17-19. How should we live this new life in Christ?

LIVING HOPE

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night
Then through the darkness, Your loving kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The King of kings calls me His own
Beautiful Savior, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me