



DevotionalTools

OVER THE FENCE: LIVING THE LOVE OF GOD | OPEN UP
FEBRUARY 4 – 5, 2012 | ACTS 9:1-18

SAUL'S STORY

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6 | ACTS 8:1-3

"Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, [committing] them to prison" (Acts 8:3). No one fought harder against the "the Way" than Saul, a devout Hellenistic Jew and Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin. He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and trained in theology and philosophy under Gamaliel, a renowned Jewish scholar. But the two disagree about how to handle followers of the Way (Christians). Saul finds them heretical and blasphemous for many reasons, not the least of which was the idea of a crucified Messiah. Impossible! Are there viewpoints within Christianity that you find "heretical" or "blasphemous"? Why? Does the story of Saul make you want to re-examine them? Is God hindered when people have conflicting opinions? When Stephen proclaims that the temple was no longer necessary, it's too serious for Saul to ignore. He seeks their arrest, trial, conviction, punishment, even death. Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

SAUL'S CONVERSION

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7 | ACTS 9:1-18

"Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord ..." The first word, "meanwhile," indicates that even in the midst of the tenacity of the Christ-followers, Saul's tenacious attack on Christians is as strong as ever. Saul's conversion story happens three times in the book of Acts: here, again in 22:3-21, and in 26:12-18. All three accounts point to the powerful work of God against all odds, the presence of Jesus in Paul's life, and the work of the Holy Spirit. All three times, he tells his story simply and directly, and God used that story – and still does – to impact the lives of others. What a turnaround! The power of God, transforming lives, is an amazing thing. How has God transformed your life? It doesn't matter if your transformation isn't as dramatic as Saul's. Can God change you in small or subtle ways, as well as obvious ways? If someone like Saul can be transformed by God's love, is anyone out of God's reach? Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

YOUR STORY: STEP 1

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8 | ACTS 9:19-22

As the story of Saul becoming Paul continues, even the crowds are asking, "Is this the same man?" This weekend we discovered that we all have a story to tell about what God has done in and through us, but not all of us believe that our stories carry God's power. Our lives are the canvas upon which God's story is painted for others to see. **Step 1: Get comfortable with your story.** Take time to make a map or timeline of the recent years in your life. Note both good times and bad, significant events, memorable times, important relationships, and changes. Reflect on how you perceive God's presence in the events of your timeline. In your eyes, did anyone in your life reflect the love of God to you? How do you see God at work today? Giving shape to our own story of faith takes time and patience. Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

YOUR STORY: STEP 2

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9 | ACTS 9:23-31

It's hard to imagine Paul's boldness in the face of a plot to kill him. As we

form our faith stories, we can learn from Paul's personal transformation. **Step 2: Reflect on your relationships.** Who are the people you regularly interact with? What are your conversations usually about? Do you know any of their concerns? Have you had occasion to talk about their values or beliefs? What's on your friend's mind? How do your friend's concerns/issues/stories intersect with yours? Where are you on the same page with them? What do you have in common? Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

YOUR STORY: STEP 3

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10 | ACTS 9:32-43

Imagine the excitement of being one of these first followers of Jesus. Here we read of another miracle as God works in and through Peter. **Step 3: Think about what you know about God's story,** and how you describe the presence of God. What is your favorite Bible story? What do you know about the life of Jesus? What do you recall from the stories of key people in the Bible? In the last five days, we've spent a lot of time in the book of Acts. In this section, Acts 8:2 – 12:23, the Jewish Christ-followers are scattering, experiencing a dramatic and terrifying persecution. This is just one example of a part of the God story that can bring you strength and encouragement. These early disciples must have good reason to believe that Jesus Christ is exactly who he says he is, or they wouldn't go through all of this. Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

YOUR STORY: STEP 4

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11 | ACTS 10:1-8

As we continue spending time in Acts, we meet another person with a God story: Cornelius. Here, once again, God clearly speaks to humans through an angel. **Step 4: Clarify what you know about God.** How do you describe God? Creator, lover, father, spirit, redeemer, mother? What do you know about Jesus Christ, and what does Jesus do for you? How would you describe Jesus? Forgiver, healer, teacher, savior, Lord? What do you know about God the Holy Spirit? How would you describe the Holy Spirit? Comforter, advocate, living power of God, breath of God? Our faith story is shaped primarily by our view of God and our experience of God. Because God has behaved in certain ways in the past, we can expect that pattern to continue into the future. Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

YOUR STORY: STEP 5

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12 | ACTS 10:9-23

Here Peter tries to understand the meaning of what is happening to him. There's a trance and a vision. Three men travel to Peter, at the request of Cornelius, because of an angel's message. Peter welcomes these strangers into his home because they speak highly of the one who sends them. Time after time, we read of these early Christians and their encounters with God, and the presence of God. **Step 5: Recall any times in your life that a person shared a story about the presence of God.** As Jesus-followers, we know that God continues to be active and present in our world today. How will we see this? How will we know when God is present? One way is to pay attention to personal testimonies from those who believe that God is present with them, and active in particular ways. How will we learn this? We tell each other our stories. Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the power of God in your story of faith.

