

UNIT 33 | SESSION 1

PAUL BECAME A CHRISTIAN

ACTS 9

KEY PASSAGE:

John 3:17

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

Who can be saved? Anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven of their sins and be right with God.

CHRIST CONNECTION:

Jesus appeared to Saul and changed him inside and out. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15) Jesus called Saul, who was once an enemy to Christians, to spend the rest of his life telling people the gospel and leading them to trust in Jesus.



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION



LEADER Bible Study

The Acts 9 story of how Saul of Tarsus came to be a follower of Jesus is a widely known passage that reveals an essential truth for us as believers: God has the power to transform the hearts and lives of anyone who places their faith in Him. The power of the Holy Spirit changes us from the inside out, and the same Lord who transformed Saul causes us to walk in new life when we turn to Christ.

What do we learn about the role of God's saving grace in this story? How can our testimonies reflect the same Spirit-empowered life change as Saul's?

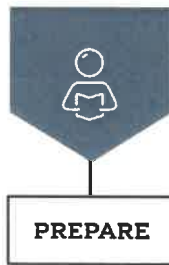
God sought out Saul for the work of His kingdom, despite the hostility and malice this former Pharisee had toward the Christian church. Nothing in Saul's story—not even the wrongful executions and imprisonment of Christ's disciples—was too big for God to forgive by grace through faith in His Son, Jesus. Through his experience on the road to Damascus, Saul realized the weight of his own sin, the power of this mighty God, and the only chance he had in being made right before Him: surrendering his life to Jesus. Nothing Saul did could separate him from God's love for him in Jesus. The same is true for us!

Later, in a letter to his protégé Timothy, Saul—also known by his Greek name, Paul—wrote, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them” (1 Tim. 1:15). He knew he needed God's grace to be made right before the Father and that trusting in Jesus was his only means of being saved.

Teach the kids in your group that all of us, no matter how young or old we are, needed Jesus to come into the world to save us. The gospel transforms our hearts and propels us to share the life we've found in Jesus with all who will listen. How can you equip your class with the excitement and knowledge of Jesus Christ that will lead them to share of His love, just as Paul did?

TERMS TO KNOW

Christian: From the Greek noun *Christos* (“Christ” or “Messiah”) comes the word *Christianos*, meaning “belonging to Christ.” The disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch. (Acts 11:26)



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



Activity Page

- ☐ “Changed” activity page

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ painter’s tape
- ☐ blindfolds, 2



Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ “Paul Became a Christian” video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster

Questions from Kids

- ☐ “Unit 33, Session 1” questions from kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ “The Life of Betsey Stockton” missions video
- ☐ map of the United States

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ “Through Him (John 3:17)” song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



Activity Choice (Option 2)

- ☐ dry erase board and marker

Reflection and Prayer

- ☐ Bible Story Coloring Page (optional)



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be? Would you change something like your behavior or your physical abilities? Why?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Changed” on the activity page.

SAY “Our world is full of things that change like tadpoles into frogs. But only God can change the human heart. Today, we’ll learn how Paul met Jesus and he was changed forever.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: RUN FROM SAUL



Invite one kid to be Saul. Lead Saul to stand in the center of the room. Tell the kids that Saul will count to 10 and while he does, they need to move to one of the four corners of the room. Explain that Saul will keep his eyes closed and point to one of the four corners. Tell kids that kids in that corner are out. Play as time allows, choosing new kids to be Saul.

SAY “Today, we will learn about a man named Saul. You might know him by his Roman name Paul. Before Saul became a Christian, he wanted to put an end to the church. He went into believer’s homes, dragged them out, and put them in jail. Many believers had to flee Jerusalem. Let’s get ready to learn how Saul met Jesus and became a Christian.”

☐ OPTION 2: WALK THE ROAD

Before the session, create two paths or “roads” using painter’s tape. Make the paths about 2 feet wide. Form kids into two teams. Tell kids that they will take turns helping their teammates walk the road blindfolded. Explain that as kids are blindfolded, their team needs to help guide the blindfolded kids down the “road” without them stepping outside the lines. Tell kids that if they step outside the lines, they are out.

Invite a kid from each team to go first and place a blindfold over their eyes. Direct kids to start walking down the “road,” listening for their teammates’ guidance. Kids can tell their teammate to “stop” “move more right” “move left” etc. The team with the most teammates left at the end of the activity wins.

SAY “You all needed help to stay on the right path. Today, we will learn about a man named Saul and how he could not see after he met Jesus. The men he was traveling with had to help lead him down the road. Let’s get ready to hear what happened to Saul.”

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

* Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Welcome, kids! I am so glad you’re here! My name is [your name]. Today, we are going to hear a story about a man who was changed from the inside out. He still looked the same, but his heart was changed, and he began to live differently. The Bible is full of stories about people who are saved by God and changed forever. Let’s take out our Bibles as we get ready to hear our story. [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

worship → * House of the Lord * offering
* It is Finished

* SAY “ Today, we have a new big picture question. Our question is, Who can be saved? The answer to our question is such good news: Anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven of their sins and be right with God. ”

* What does it mean to sin? [Allow responses.] To sin is to think, say, or behave in any way that goes against God and His commands. But we can receive forgiveness and be made right with God through faith in Jesus. Let’s say our big picture question and answer together two times. Who can be saved? Anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven of their sins and be right with God. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “ Over the last several weeks, we have learned how the church grew and spread into Judea and Samaria. We also learned that this growth began with persecution or treating the church cruelly. As we’ll see in our Bible story today, one of those persecutors was a man named Saul. Yet, God had a plan for His church. Just as God used Peter and the other apostles to share the gospel, God also chose Saul to share the good news throughout the world. Let’s learn how God saved Saul and changed him forever. ”



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LEARN the Bible Story



1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Acts 9. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Paul Became a Christian.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

PAUL BECAME A CHRISTIAN

“After Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, **people in Jerusalem who believed in Jesus were persecuted**, or treated cruelly because of their faith. One of Jesus’ followers, **Stephen, was even killed. A man named Saul had watched in approval when Stephen was killed. Saul wanted to put an end to the church.** He went into the believers’ homes, dragged them out, and put them in jail. Many believers fled the city.

Saul headed to Damascus to arrest believers there, but on the way, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Saul fell to the ground. He heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

“Who are You, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus,” He replied. “Get up and go into the city. Then you will be told what you must do.”

The men who were traveling with Saul were speechless. They heard the sound but saw no one. **Saul got up and opened his eyes, but he couldn’t see! So the men who were traveling with Saul led him by the hand into Damascus.**

Ananias (an uh NIGH uhs), a disciple of Jesus, lived in Damascus. The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision. He told Ananias to go to the house where Saul was staying. Ananias knew that Saul had hurt many believers and that he arrested anyone who believed in Jesus. But **the Lord said, “Go! I have chosen this man to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.”**

Ananias obeyed. He found Saul and told Saul that Jesus had sent him to help. Ananias put his hands on Saul, and Saul could see again. Saul got up and was baptized. For the next few days, Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus. **He began to go to the synagogues to preach about Jesus. Saul told the people, “Jesus is the Son of God!”**

The people were amazed. They recognized Saul and knew he had wanted to put an end to the church. Now he was one of them! **The Jews did not like Saul’s message. They planned to kill him, so one night Saul left the city. The disciples helped Saul escape by lowering him down the city wall in a basket.**

Later in the Bible, Saul is referred to by his Roman name, Paul.

Christ Connection: Jesus appeared to Saul and changed him inside and out. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15) Jesus called Saul, who

STORYTELLING TIPS

Act it out: Act out the part of Saul as you tell the story.

Thumbs up or down: Challenge kids to hear the hard parts and good parts of the story and respond with a thumbs up when good things happen or a thumbs down when bad things happen.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

was once an enemy to Christians, to spend the rest of his life telling people the gospel and leading them to trust in Jesus. ”

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ Saul was a Pharisee who hated Christians. He thought it was OK that Stephen was stoned. In our story today, Saul was on his way to Damascus to continue arresting Christians. But before he arrived in Damascus something amazing happened. Who appeared to Saul? [Allow responses.] A bright light flashed around Saul, and he heard Jesus’ voice! Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him. We’ve learned that the church is the body of Christ. So for Paul to hurt the church was the same as hurting Jesus.

Even though Saul was hurting Jesus and His church, Jesus sought Saul out—like a Shepherd who searches for a lost sheep. Jesus had a plan for Saul’s life. What happened to Saul’s eyesight after Jesus appeared to him? [Allow responses.] Saul couldn’t see. The men he was traveling with had to help him as he traveled to Damascus.

The Lord had told Ananias, a Christian man in Damascus, to help Saul. When Saul met Ananias, he regained his sight, was baptized, and even spent time with other disciples. Saul began to live differently and show that he had changed. What did Saul begin to do that showed he had changed? [Allow responses.] Saul began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God and told others that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus said that Saul was His chosen instrument to preach the gospel throughout the world. Saul’s story reminds us that **anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven of their sins and be right with God.** ”

3 CHRIST CONNECTION

SAY “ Jesus appeared to Saul and changed him inside and out. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15) Jesus called Saul, who was once an enemy to Christians, to spend the rest of his life telling people the gospel and leading them to trust in Jesus. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)



Show the “Unit 33, Session 1” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. Why isn’t everyone saved from their sin? Are some people too bad?
2. Have you been saved by Jesus? How has Jesus changed your heart?



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Display a map of the United States and point to the State of Hawaii.

SAY 🗣️ In 1798, Betsey Stockton was born in Princeton, New Jersey. She was a slave who became a Christian while attending college classes. Later, Betsey was granted freedom from slavery and God used her to tell people in Hawaii about Jesus. 🗣️

Play the missions video. Tell kids that Betsey believed that all Christians are called to God's mission to share Jesus with the world. Share how Betsey felt called to take the gospel to those who had not heard. Pray that God will raise up more missionaries to share the gospel with people who have not yet heard the good news.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead kids in reading aloud John 3:17 together.

SAY 🗣️ To condemn means to declare someone guilty after weighing the evidence. We are already condemned because of our sin. We are guilty before God. Jesus came into the world to save us from our sin. He came to take the punishment we deserve. 🗣️

Invite kids to create motions to help them remember the key passage. For example, kids could point up for "God," shake their head no for "condemn," cross their arms for "save the world," etc. Challenge kids to say the key passage a few times while performing the motions.

Lead kids to sing "Through Him (John 3:17)." You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

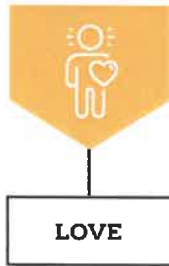
7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY 🗣️ Thank You, God, for sending Your Son to earth so that we can be forgiven of our sins. Change us inside and out just like You did for Paul. Help us tell others about how Jesus saves us from our sins. Amen. 🗣️

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the New Testament Israel Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Acts 9. Explain the book of Acts was written by Luke, a physician and friend of Saul. Tell kids that later in the book of Acts, Saul goes by his Roman name Paul as he takes the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles.

Consider pointing out the location of Damascus (A8) on the New Testament Israel Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Acts 9:20-21 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY 🗨️ Why do you think the people who heard Saul preaching Jesus were amazed? **[Allow responses.]** Everyone knew Saul as a man who hated Christians and wanted to arrest Christians. Now, Saul was sharing that Jesus is the Son of God.

When Saul met Jesus, his life was never the same. Saul had changed from the inside out. Jesus does the same for us. When we trust in Him as our Savior, He changes our hearts so that we no longer want to live for ourselves but for Him. We want to tell everyone how Jesus saves us from sin and gives us new life. 🗨️

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY 🗨️ What caused Saul to change? 🗨️

Remind kids that Saul did nothing in his own power to change. Discuss how Jesus changed Saul and even though he became physically blind, he truly was able to see and believe who Jesus is. Lead kids to remember that we are never too sinful for Jesus to save us. **Anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven of their sins and be right with God.**

SAY 🗨️ It took courage for Ananias to obey God and go to Saul. How can we have courage to obey God even when it might be hard or scary? 🗨️

Discuss how God never calls us to do something that isn't ultimately for our good. Discuss how we can have courage as we trust God's character and believe that He always wants what is best for us. Tell kids that Ananias had an opportunity to see the power of God and how He can truly save anyone.

SAY 🗨️ How has God changed you? What are ways you can ask God to change you? 🗨️

Answers will vary. Encourage kids to remember that we are all sinful and that when we trust in Jesus, He does begin to change us. Challenge kids to think about how they need God's grace to help them be more like Jesus. Invite kids to learn more about how they can be changed through saving faith in Christ.

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





LIVE

THE MISSION OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: SHIP TO SHORE



Tell kids that Betsey Stockton traveled by sea to Hawaii on a ship called *Thames*. Share that the long journey from Connecticut to Hawaii took over five months. Invite kids to play a game where they try to get from the ship to the shore and vice versa. Designate one side of the room as “ship” and the other side as “shore.” Tell kids that when you call “ship” or “shore” they need to run to the appropriate side. Explain that the last kid to reach either side is out. Consider adding in other actions such as shouting “hit the deck” and directing kids to lay on their bellies or “crow’s nest” and leading kids to form a group of three. Share that any kid who fails to complete these orders is out. Play until time is up.

SAY “When Betsey was saved, God changed her desires. Even with such a long and dangerous journey by ship, Betsey desired to share the gospel with the people of Hawaii. We can ask God to help us be faithful to share the good news of Jesus as well.”

☐ OPTION 2: SAUL CHANGED



Play a game similar to hangman but instead of adding parts to build a man, you will draw a stick figure and add parts as kids answer correctly. For example, on a dry erase board draw a stick figure with only head, arms, legs, and body. As kids answer the questions correctly add parts such as eyes, nose, mouth, ears, beard, hat, and so on. Create true or false questions for kids to answer such as “Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus” (true); “Saul could see after he met Jesus” (false); “Ananias helped Saul see again” (true); etc. Consider asking for volunteers to answer the questions by raising their hands.

SAY “As you responded with either true or false, the stick figure began to change. He was given eyes, a nose, a mouth. This reminds me of how Saul changed from the inside out because Jesus saved Him from his sins. **Anyone who trusts in Jesus can be forgiven of their sins and be right with God.** Jesus changes us, like He did Paul, when we trust in Him.”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.