

**Date** : 21<sup>st</sup> June 2026  
**Theme** : The work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and service.  
**Topic** : Saul: from Persecutor to Preacher.  
(God provides fellow soldiers in our Journey of faith)  
**Passage** : Acts 9  
**Key Verse** : ... *The Lord said to Ananias, Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim My Name to the Gentiles... For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name's sake... Acts 9:15,16*

### Introduction:

When Jesus commissioned us to make disciples of all nations, promising His power for the task, our first reaction is, where to begin sharing the gospel?

- Start with being **available to pray**.  
In Acts 2 the apostles and disciples, though hiding in fear, overcame it by being available to one another to wait in unity and prayer. Instead of doing their own thing (like fishing) when nothing was happening, they prayed.
- Continue with the **availability to sow the Word**. *Acts 8:1-8*  
While the catalyst for the scattering was intense persecution following Stephen's death, the disciples' immediate action upon displacement was not hiding but preaching the Word. *Acts 8:4*.
- Then be **available for God's unexpected assignment** by laying down personal plans. *Acts 8:15*  
Philip the Evangelist demonstrated immediate obedience as an essential prerequisite for the Holy Spirit's leading.  
He left a highly successful revival in Samaria to heed the Spirit's instruction to go to a desolate desert road. His availability for an unknown assignment led to the birth of the Ethiopian church.

Today, in Acts 9, we see the same **need for total availability** to receive God's power to transform lives.

### 1. Saul's transformation — from Persecutor to Preacher. *Acts 9:1-9*

*...I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers... Galatians 1:14*

*...Saul... was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples... Acts 9:1*

- Saul, before his encounter with the living Christ.
  - A Hebrew, his lineage tracing back to Abraham.
  - A Roman citizen with a Roman name Paul (meaning little), was a missive privilege.
  - Education was with Gamaliel, prominent rabbi of 1<sup>st</sup> century.
  - Zeal to serve God — a God he had no relationship with until meeting Jesus.  
*zeal = jealous.*

Saul, a Pharisee, was zealous for the Kingdom of Israel to be restored through the keeping of the law. His misplaced zeal, without knowledge, was dangerous.

While we could only see his outward rage against followers of the Way and an unlikely candidate for God's Kingdom, God saw his heart. In Saul, God had chosen His general. Once Saul encountered Christ, he surrendered all and suffered much for following Jesus all his life. *Acts 20:19 (niv)* summed up his sufferings... *I served the Lord with great humility and with tears... (many tears and trials nkjv)*

- Saul's first lesson was to humble himself. Responding to the intense burst of light emanating directly for the resurrected Lord Jesus, Saul fell to the ground. Blinded and helpless, he asked 2 questions:  
*Who are You, Lord? Acts 9:5*  
*What do You want me to do?*
- There and then, Saul settled 2 issues in his life, the identity of Christ as the Lord and secondly, the Lordship of Christ to whom He yielded total obedience. He immediately switched allegiance from the High Priest in the Temple to Jesus, the Great High Priest.

## 2. Ananias' immediate availability and Barnabas' generous advocacy. Acts 9:10-19

**Ananias** was a disciple at Damascus (not an apostle). Acts 9:9

(To him was given the opportunity to launch Saul into a ministry that would impact the Gentile world. His courage inspires us to minister to others.)

Little did he know of the tremendous privilege of setting the worlds' greatest missionary on his path.

a) Ananias was available to God to go even when it didn't make sense to him.

- Why does God choose an ordinary disciple to do such a great work?  
Psalm 111:2 says God's work is sought out by those who have *pleasure* (delight, joyful exploration) in His work (magnitude, variety, number).  
*sought out* = pondered upon, the more one gazes, the more one sees.

Why would God choose a nobody to do such a great work?

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 say that God is fond of choosing the small to confront the mighty. What is lacking in the weak believer, God will compensate with His mighty power.

- How does a little one chase a thousand? *Deuteronomy 32:30*  
Sharing the good news ignites a chain of disciples that is potentially explosive. This is discernible in the spark of evangelism, lit in mid-1800 and through to 2000's.
  - Edward Kimball, a Sunday school teacher taught an unschooled teenager, D.L. Moody whose later preaching ignited a spark that resulted in converting millions.
  - D.L. Moody's preaching (1860) reached F.B. Meyer.
  - F. B. Meyer, another great preacher impacted Billy Sunday (early 1900)
  - Billy Sunday preached and Billy Graham was converted.
  - Billy Graham's 6 decades of worldwide preaching reached an estimated 215 million in crusades, films, radio and TV in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

b). Ananias' **fears**. He was incredulous when God told him to go to Saul.

- He told God his apprehension of facing the persecutor who posed a direct **threat** to him.
- He told God the **harm** Saul had caused to believers in Jerusalem.
- The imminent threat as Saul had legal authority to **imprison** Christians in Damascus. What did the Lord tell Ananias?

*For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name's sake... Acts 9:16*

**Why is the fear of suffering the greatest deterrent to obeying God's commands?**

We are all naturally anxious and fearful of impending physical pain.

We all don't welcome suffering. Yet the Lord had said that pressing into the Kingdom would involve violence.

Our faith journey shows our courage or cowardice, a choice every disciple must make.

- **Cowardice is the opposite** of the courage of faith.
  - Cowardice makes us vulnerable to abandoning our faith journey in order to save our lives, avoid social rejection and thus escape suffering. Such people, alongside murderers, idolators etc, will not inherit eternal life. *Revelation 21: 8*
  - Those who fear suffering more than the fear of God cannot enlist in the Lord's army to fight a good fight of faith. God wants His soldiers to be more than conquerors.
- **Overcoming fear, with the courage of faith**, as a witness for Jesus, is part of our faith journey. Resist the enemy and he will flee from us
  - As fearful as Ananias was, he feared God more than Saul. Even when going to Saul did not make sense, He was available and trusted God's word that Saul was God's chosen instrument to speak to Gentiles, kings and His people.
  - In being available, he participated in one of the most incredible conversion stories ever recorded in Scriptures

c). Be available to befriend difficult people.

**Barnabas' generous advocacy** Acts 9:20-31

*...Barnabas took him (Saul) and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord... Acts 9:27*

- Barnabas took a risk to be available for Saul and represented Saul to the apostles. He vouched for him (Saul) who found himself isolated as the Christian community was too terrified to let him in. By acting as a bridge, Barnabas provided essential friendship and welcome to an isolated believer, He exercised grace to look past Saul's violent history and offered him a second chance, a generous act of mentorship and sponsorship. The Holy Spirit in Barnabas confirmed that Saul was his newfound brother in Christ.
- In our journey of faith, we need both the Ananias and Barnabas in our lives as well as to be available for others. To come alongside one another when we need it most and to recognise the work of God in each other's lives.

### 3. Prayer.

#### (a) Saul

In Acts 9:11 The Holy Spirit made an interesting first comment about Saul praying.

*Go to the house of Judas on straight street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying... Acts 9:11*

When Saul prayed, the Lord answered. Ananias was the answer. God gave Ananias a matching vision, detailing where and what Saul was doing.

- Before meeting Jesus, how did Saul, a Pharisee pray?  
His prayer life, as a Pharisee in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, would have consisted primarily of memorized, scripted prayers. Highly devoted to daily prayers, but his religious practice was rooted in established liturgy and fixed postures (standing with lifted hands) toward Jerusalem.
  - The Shema, recited twice daily.
  - A set of structured prayers recited daily.
  - Public piety – pray in visible street corners to display his righteousness.

*Matthew 6:5*

- After meeting Jesus, how did Saul's prayer change?  
For the 1<sup>st</sup> time, Saul was offering true, heartfelt prayer so much so that God noticed and told Ananias about it.  
Rather than reciting a scripted formula, Saul now, blind and humbled for 3 days, fasted and communicated with the Holy Spirit.

**(b) Ananias**

As a disciple, how seriously did Ananias take prayer?

- Luke tells us about the prayer culture of believers then  
...120 jointed together constantly in prayer... Acts 1:14,24  
...3,000 devoted themselves to apostles' teaching and prayer... Acts 2:42  
...Peter and John went up to the temple at the time of prayer... Acts 3:1  
...believers raise their voices together in prayer for Peter and John... Acts 4:24,31  
...the 12 gave attention to prayer and ministry of the Word... Acts 6:4  
...while they were stoning Stephen, he prayed... Acts 7:59  
...Peter and John prayed for Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit... Acts 8:15  
...Simon the sorcerer said ...Pray for me... Acts 8:22

In this spiritual climate, prayer was involved before making any important decision or during a difficult or dangerous situation.

- Ananias himself received the Word from the Lord in a vision. Visions are always delivered through times of prayer.  
Seems like the newly converted Saul and the faithful disciple Ananias took prayer seriously and spent considerable time praying.

**(c) BC needs this culture of prayer**

- Increase prayer time in church, cell, personal life.  
Church — (before service) Cease all conversation with men upon entering the hall.  
Commence conversation with God.

Enter His Courts — With praise and thanksgiving  
— Pray in small groups.  
— Do not read your prayers.  
The Lord Jesus criticised the Pharisees' long prayer.

Cell — Pray before, during and after cell meeting.

Personal A.C.T.S — Walking and praying alone.  
— Praying with your spouse, child.  
— Praying scripture.

**Application**

- I will make myself available to pray with my spouse
- children
- cell leader
- cell member