



EPC Discussion Guide for Acts 9:1-19

EPC Discussion Guides provide context and teaching to discuss a passage of Scripture. Many of these guides are usually companions to sermons. But the discussion guide will provide enough material for those who did not hear the sermon to discuss the passage. Group leaders are encouraged to order questions and emphases according to the needs of their particular group.

Read Acts 9:1-19

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² 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.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.

1. This passage narrates the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the Christian faith. Formerly, he had been a zealous persecutor of the church. After he became a Christian, Saul’s name was changed to Paul—the Apostle Paul. In 1st Timothy 1:16 Paul says that one of the reasons that God saved him was to be an example of God’s mercy: “But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.” Rather than judging Paul eternally for his sins (including the great sin of persecuting the church), Christ saves him from his sins. Paul doesn’t get what he deserves, and that is the definition of mercy. More than that, Christ has great plans for Paul in spite of his past. He will make Paul an extraordinary witness for Him. There has never been a greater missionary than the Apostle Paul. *Do you ever feel that your past could disqualify you from serving God? Why do you think we have a hard time with the concept of the mercy of God?*
2. Paul goes from being a strong man persecuting the church, to a very weak man. *How is his weakness manifested and how does God meet him in his weakness? Has God ever met you*

powerfully in a time of physical weakness or suffering? If so, how has he used that experience in your life and in your ministry to others?

3. The Lord chooses to use Ananias to restore Saul's sight. At first Ananias resists the Lord's instruction, telling Christ that he knows "how much evil he has done to [the Lord's] saints in Jerusalem" (9:13). *What two things does Christ share with Ananias to shift his perspective with regard to Saul? Have you ever known someone who you never thought would come to Christ but did?*
4. This narrative is full of drama. One of the most dramatic points comes when Ananias actually lays hands on Saul and calls him "Brother Saul." With this act of physical touch and that word of familial acceptance Saul receives his sight back and receives a sense of belonging to a new family—he experiences physical restoration and a type of social or community restoration. *Has God ever used someone in your life to bring you closer to Christ and make it clear that you were welcome in the body of Christ?*
5. Christ had greater plans for Saul than Saul probably ever conceived of. Consider this quote by the 17th century Puritan Richard Sibbs: "There are those who go on in all their ill courses of life on this pretence: that it would be useless to go to Christ because their lives have been so bad; and yet, as soon as we look to heaven, all encouragements are ready to meet us, and draw us forward. Among others, one allurements is that Christ is ready to welcome us and lead us further. None are damned in the church except those who are determined to be damned, including those who persist in having thoughts of Christ as being hard. They want some reason to find their contentment from other things, as did that unprofitable servant in Matt. 25:30 who thought his master was a hard man. For that reason, he sought to excuse his unfruitful ways, in not increasing the talent he had been given."¹ *Sibbs suggests that one of the reasons that we are not led further is because of our low view of the mercy and love of Christ for us. In your time of prayer as a group praise the Lord Jesus Christ for his great love and mercy, repent of having too low a view of his love for you, and ask the large to enlarge you heart and mind to perceive his mercy so that you will be all the more quick to draw upon his grace in those areas where he stands ready to lead you further. Pray also, by name, for those in your life that you perceive as especially resistant to the gospel of grace.*

¹ *The Bruised Reed*, section 10. <http://www.monergism.com/bruisedreed.html> (September 15, 2014)