

# Open Bible Stories — Saul Becomes a Follower of Jesus

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## Introduction

### Key Idea

The story of Saul becoming a follower of Jesus teaches us that God can save the worst of sinners and use them for his purposes in the world.

### Core Belief Verse

*"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 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." 1 Timothy 1:15-16*

## God's Big Story

The eternal God created all things in six days.

He made a good and perfect world.

He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation.

But humans rebelled against God and ruined God's creation.

God set to restore his world through his promise.

God made a covenant with Abraham.

He promised to bless all nations through Abraham.

God kept his promises across the generations.

God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac.

God gave Isaac a wife, and she bore twins Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation.

God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and used him to rescue his family.

God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves.

But God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from slavery.

God judged the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people, who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb.

Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people.

God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan.

God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies.

God formed Israel into a kingdom.

He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever.

Many of Israel's kings were evil, and the kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms.

God sent prophets to warn his people of God's judgment and call them to repent.

When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile.

After many years, he brought them back to the land.

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send his Messiah to deliver his people from their sin.

After many years, the prophet John was born.

He would prepare people for the coming Messiah.

At the perfect time, God sent his Son, Jesus, to be born of a virgin Mary.

When John and Jesus grew up, John baptized Jesus as a sign that Jesus was God's beloved Son.

Jesus endured all manner of temptation without ever sinning.

When he was thirty years old, he launched a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing.

He taught his disciples about the life of compassion, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

Jesus performed many miracles: he fed a crowd of five thousand, he walked on water, he healed the sick, and he cast out demons.

He proclaimed to people the nature of real faith, God's kingdom, and how fallen humans can be restored in relationship with God.

Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus revealed his power and glory to his disciples.

He raised a dead man to life.

Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples and put on trial before a Roman governor.

Jesus was sentenced to death and crucified on a cross.

Three days later, Jesus rose again from the dead.

After meeting with many of his disciples, Jesus went back to heaven.

The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus' followers and formed them into his church.

Jesus' disciples, like Peter and John, performed miracles and preached the good news about Jesus.

New leaders like Stephen and Philip served the church and preached about Jesus. Even Saul, a persecutor of Jesus' followers, became a Christian.

## The Story: Saul Becomes a Follower of Jesus

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46-01



There was a man named Saul who did not believe in Jesus. As a young man, he guarded the robes of the men who killed Stephen. Later he persecuted the believers. He went from house to house in Jerusalem to arrest both men and women and to put them in prison. Then the high priest gave Saul permission to go to the city of Damascus. He told Saul to arrest followers of Jesus there and to bring them back to Jerusalem.

46-02

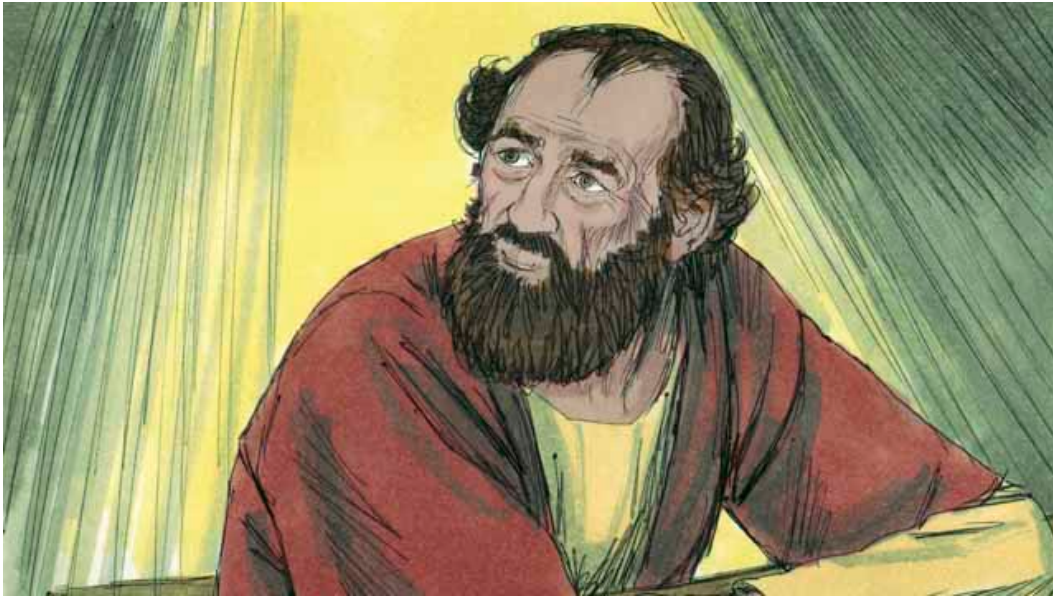


So Saul began to travel to Damascus. Just before he reached the city, a bright light in the sky shone all around him, and he fell to the ground. Saul heard someone say, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Master?" Jesus replied to him, "I am Jesus. You are persecuting me!"

46-03

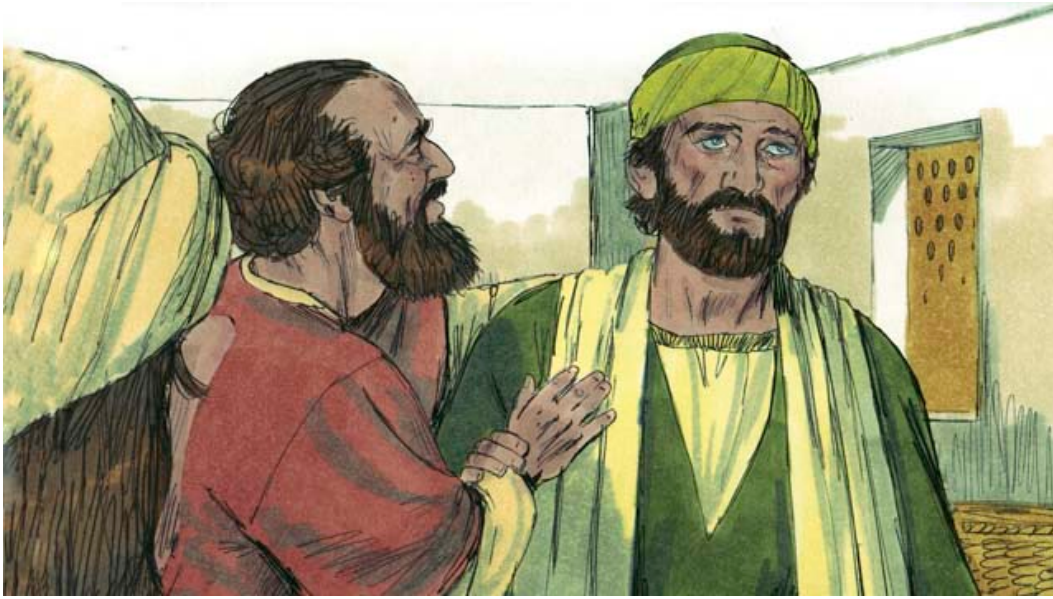


When Saul got up, he could not see. His friends had to lead him into Damascus. Saul did not eat or drink anything for three days.



There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. God said to him, "Go to the house where Saul is staying. Place your hands on him so that he can see again." But Ananias said, "Master, I have heard how this man has persecuted the believers." God answered him, "Go! I have chosen him to declare my name to the Jews and to people from other people groups. He will suffer many things for my name."

46-05



So Ananias went to Saul, placed his hands on him, and said, "Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, sent me to you so that you can see again, and so the Holy Spirit will fill you." Immediately Saul was able to see again, and Ananias baptized him. Then Saul ate some food and became strong again.

46-06



Right away, Saul began preaching to the Jews in Damascus. He said, "Jesus is the Son of God!" The Jews were amazed because Saul had tried to kill believers, and now he believed in Jesus! Saul argued with the Jews. He showed that Jesus was the Messiah.

46-07



After many days, the Jews made a plan to kill Saul. They sent people to watch for him at the city gates in order to kill him. But Saul heard about the plan, and his friends helped him escape. One night they lowered him over the city wall in a basket. After Saul escaped from Damascus, he continued to preach about Jesus.

46-08



Saul went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles, but they were afraid of him. Then a believer named Barnabas took Saul to the apostles. He told them how Saul had preached boldly in Damascus. After that, the apostles accepted Saul.



Some believers who fled from the persecution in Jerusalem went far away to the city of Antioch and preached about Jesus. Most of the people in Antioch were not Jews, but for the first time, people who were not Jews became believers. Barnabas and Saul went there to teach these new believers more about Jesus and to strengthen the church. It was at Antioch that believers in Jesus were first called 'Christians.'



One day, the followers of Jesus at Antioch were fasting and praying. The Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do the work I have called them to do." So the church in Antioch prayed for Barnabas and Saul and placed their hands on them. Then they sent them out to preach the good news about Jesus in many other places. Barnabas and Saul taught people in different people groups, and many people believed in Jesus.

*A Bible story from: Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-31; 11:19-26; 13-14*

### **Community Study: Mission Community— Embracing God's Purpose**

- **Key Idea:** viewing Christian community as a community of purpose
- **Key Passage:** 1 Peter 2:9-12
- **Main Session:** ## OBS 46 (Saul Becomes a Follower of Jesus)

#### **Recite the Core Belief Verse** (3–5 minutes)

The verse below summarizes the teaching of the current passage. Read the verse out loud as a community. Read it again several times as a group until the whole community can recite it from memory.

*15 This message is reliable and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I am the*

worst of these. 16 But for this reason I was given mercy, so that in me, the foremost, Christ Jesus might demonstrate all patience. He did this as an example for those who would trust in him for eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:15-16

OR

9 For I am the least of the apostles. I am unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me was not in vain. 1

Corinthians 15:9-10

**Pray a Confession** (5-10 minutes)

It is important to always remember the impact of God's grace in our lives. A community is strong and united as it remembers God's transforming grace. In groups of 2-3 people, pray this prayer to God.

God, I am the least of all the disciples. My life before Jesus was like this...

Merciful God, you have changed my life to be like this... By the grace of God I am what I am.

**Read the Passage** (3-5 minutes)

God's grace and mercy dramatically changes people. God can transform the lives of those who are opposed to him and make them his servants. Read the passage below to learn about how God transforms the church community to be a part of his mission in the world.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession, so that you would announce the wonderful actions of the one who called you out from darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. You did not receive mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I call on you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from fleshly desires, which make war against your soul. 12 You should

*have good behavior among the Gentiles, so that, if they speak about you as having done evil things, they may observe your good works and praise God on the day of his coming. 1 Peter 2:9-12*

**Discuss the Passage** (10-15 minutes)

The church community is transformed by God's grace. This same grace launches the church on God's mission. As a community, use the following questions to discuss the teaching of the biblical passage.

1. How does this passage describe the church?
2. How do these descriptions of the church inform the church's identity and mission?
3. How does the church sharing a common mission help believers live in a godly way toward each other and outsiders?

1. What would it look like for your community to be a community on mission? What things are you already doing to help in this? What things would you have to change about how you relate to each other?

**Summarize the Mission** (5 minutes)

Take time in groups of 2-3 to share a simple sentence about the mission of the church and the mission of your community. When completed, share some examples with the large group.

The mission of the church is...

The mission of our community is...

**Pray to God** (5 minutes)

Pray that God will help your community become a community on mission. Ask 2 or 3 people to pray out loud before the whole community.

**Sing a Song** (3-5 minutes)

Choose a song about God's mission. Sing this song as a community.

## **Movement 1: Understand the Story**

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*Read each question aloud. Give the group time to answer before sharing the answer.*

### **Observation Questions**

*46-01*

#### **What was Saul like before he became a disciple of Jesus?**

Saul did not believe in Jesus. He guarded the robes of the men who killed Stephen, and he persecuted believers by going house to house to arrest and imprison followers of Jesus.

#### **Why was Saul going to Damascus?**

The high priest gave Saul permission to go to Damascus, arrest followers of Jesus, and bring them back to Jerusalem.

*46-02*

#### **What happened to Saul before he reached the city?**

Just before Saul reached the city of Damascus, a bright light shone all around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking to him.

#### **What did the person say to Saul?**

He asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting me?"

#### **What did Saul learn about who this person was?**

Saul asked who the person was, and he said he was Jesus and that Saul was persecuting him.

*46-03*

#### **What happened to Saul when he got up after seeing the bright light?**

Saul could not see. His friends led him into Damascus, and he did not eat or drink for three days.

*46-04*

#### **Who did God send to Saul?**

God told Ananias, a disciple who lived in Damascus, to go to the place Saul was staying.

#### **What did God tell Ananias to do when he came to Saul?**

God told Ananias to place his hands on Saul so he could see again.

**Why was Ananias afraid to speak to Saul?**

He had heard that Saul was persecuting the believers.

**What did God say was the purpose for which he had chosen Saul?**

God had chosen Saul to declare God's name to the Jews and people from other people groups.

**What hardship would Saul face in doing God's work?**

God told Ananias that Saul would suffer many things for God's name.

*46-05*

**What did Ananias do to Saul when he came to him?**

He placed his hands on him.

**What did Ananias say to Saul?**

Ananias told Saul that Jesus sent him to Saul so he could see again and that the Holy Spirit would fill him.

**How long did it take for Saul to regain his sight?**

Saul was able to see immediately.

**What did Ananias do to Saul after he regained his sight?**

Ananias baptized him.

**What did Saul do after Ananias baptized him?**

Saul ate some food and became strong again.

*46-06*

**How did Saul right away start to do God's work in Damascus?**

Immediately, Saul began preaching to the Jews in Damascus.

**What message did Saul immediately begin preaching to the Jews?**

He preached, "Jesus is the Son of God!"

**How did some Jews respond to Saul's preaching?**

Jews were amazed that Saul believed in Jesus since he had tried to kill believers a little while earlier.

**How did Saul interact with the Jews?**

Saul argued with the Jews and showed them that Jesus is the Messiah.

*46-07*

**How did the Jews respond to Saul's preaching?**

They made a plan to kill Saul.

**How did the Jews plan to kill Saul?**

They sent people to watch for Saul at the city gates in order to kill him.

**How did Saul escape from Damascus?**

Saul heard about the plan, and his friends lowered him over the city wall in a basket so he could escape.

**Did this cause Saul to stop preaching?**

Saul continued to preach about Jesus.

*46-08*

**How did people respond when Saul arrived in Jerusalem?**

Saul met with the apostles in Jerusalem, but they were afraid of Saul.

**Who helped Saul to be accepted by the disciples in Jerusalem?**

A believer named Barnabas took Saul to the apostles and told them how Saul had preached boldly in Damascus.

**How did people treat Saul after Barnabas told them how Paul preached boldly?**

After Barnabas said these things, the apostles accepted Saul.

*46-09*

**Why did some believers go to Antioch?**

Some believers fled to the faraway city of Antioch because of the persecution.

**What did some of these believers do in Antioch?**

They preached about Jesus.

**What was different about the people who became believers in Antioch?**

They were not Jews.

**What was unique about the believers in Antioch?**

This was the first time people who were not Jews became believers.

**Who showed up to teach these new believers?**

Barnabas and Saul came to Antioch to teach the new believers and strengthen the church.

**What name first began to be used for the believers in Antioch?**

They called them "Christians."

*46-10*

**What was the church in Antioch doing when the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul?**

They were praying and fasting.

**How did the church in Antioch send out Barnabas and Saul?**

The believers prayed for Barnabas and Saul, placed their hands on them, and sent them out.

**What was the purpose for which the church in Antioch sent out Saul and Barnabas?**

They sent them out to preach the good news about Jesus in many other places.

**Who did Barnabas and Saul preach to?**

Barnabas and Saul preached to people in many different people groups.

**How successful was their preaching?**

Many believed in Jesus.

**Movement 2: Theological Questions**

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*Answer the following theology questions as a community. Discuss what truths this story teaches.*

1. How does God bring a transformation/change in those who become genuine disciples of Jesus? How did Saul becoming a believer teach us what kind of change is involved in becoming a follower of Jesus?
2. What is the mission of followers of Jesus? What kind of work/mission has God called believers to do? What does the activity of the early believers teach us about what it means to do God's work/mission on earth?

## **Movement 3: Live It Out**

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### **Personal Implications & Applications From The Story**

*Guide the group to discuss practical obedience from this story and name concrete next steps.*

1. What kind of change/transformation has God brought about in your life as a result of becoming a Christian?
2. In what ways is God continuing to change you as you follow Jesus?
3. How has God used your own personal hardship and persecution as a means to share the gospel with others?
4. Think about this week. Where does "Saul Becomes a Follower of Jesus" challenge you to obey God in a practical way?
5. How does this key idea shape one decision you need to make right now: The story of Saul becoming a follower of Jesus teaches us that God can save the worst of sinners and use them for his purposes in the world.

## **Movement 4: Retell the Story**

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*Invite the group to retell the story several times until they can tell it clearly and faithfully.*

1. Can someone retell "Saul Becomes a Follower of Jesus" from beginning to end in their own words?
2. Retell this story again, but focus on what God did at each key moment.
3. Retell the story in three parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What changed in each part?
4. If you were teaching this story to your family tonight, how would you tell it simply and clearly?

### **Church Ministry**

Reflect on how this story can edify and mature the Christian community. Design a way to minister this story to your church community.

**Ministry Preparation:** Take time to consider how you could minister this story to others. Record some ministry ideas below.

**Ministry Implementation:** Minister this story to a group of believers as you had planned. Use the information in this study to help develop

a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with other believers. Record your ministry plan below.

**Ministry Reflection:** Think about what you learned from ministering this story to other believers. Reflect on your experience below.

## **Movement 5: Share It**

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*Help each person plan how they will share this story with others before the next gathering.*

1. Who is one specific person you will share "Saul Becomes a Follower of Jesus" with this week?
2. When and where will you share this story with them?
3. What is the one main truth from this story you want them to remember?

Report-back next meeting: Who did you share with, and what happened?

### **Mission Engagement**

Consider how you will witness this story to unbelievers. Design a way to share this story and engage them in what it teaches about Christianity and the gospel.

**Witness Preparation:** Take time to consider how you will witness this narrative to unbelievers. Record some ideas below.

**Witness Implementation:** Share this story with an unbeliever. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with other believers. Record your ministry plan below.

**Witness Reflection:** Think about what you learned from ministering this story to unbelievers. Reflect on your experience below.