

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

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Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

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David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

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Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

When you indulge your passions, regardless of what they are, they grow in intensity. Saul's mind was consumed with one mission, imprisoning and killing those who were rejecting Judaism, Moses, the Law and the Temple and becoming followers of Jesus.

In Saul's mind, these heretics were choosing to align with a false and dead Messiah.

Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9-NIV)

As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

From time to time the pastor may have put a Damascus Road testimony into the pulpit.

I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

I have been telling people my testimony that is now in a book entitled, *"The God-father, found Father God."*

When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

A testimony that fails to be shared dies on the vine.

Testimonies that change lives, lead from the heart and not from the head. Stories need emotional propulsion. Movement. Action. Suspense.

No amount of fact or technological gadgetry will keep a person or audience engaged if it is not believable, authentic and possesses a few surprises.

Testimonies that emotionally move us whether **regular** or **radical**...

...whether a good boy Notch (after basketball in a church gym) or a demon possessed David (after church at an altar),

...makes us cry, gasp, sigh, yell, get angry, and bring us to a place where we are confronted with truth.

Your testimony must be told like an orchestra plays a symphony-and the conductor is the Holy Spirit.

Your testimony is too valuable to lose, too supernatural to keep silent and too transformational to sit on!

Your story is the testimony you share about (1)how God's grace has saved you, (2)how the Holy Spirit in you makes it possible for you to live for God, and how (3)God uses his purposes and plan in you to point your family and friends to Jesus.

Somebody must tell the story, divorce is not death, that through Jesus Christ, healing is possible.

Somebody must tell the story, that you do not have to live in anger, bitterness and resentment, forgiveness is possible.

Somebody must tell the story that abuse, rape and even murder does not have traumatize you forever, healing, forgiveness and a supernatural deliverance is possible for those in Christ.

Somebody has to tell parents how to be patient.

Somebody has to tell new believers how to read their Bible.

Somebody has to tell newly minted Christians about water baptism.

Somebody has to tell struggling Christians about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and discernment (the deliverance gift).

Whatever your story or testimony is, and if you don't have one, today you can.

Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

You came to the I Have Decided wall and one of our prayer team members, led you to faith in Jesus. **You can mark this day as your conversion day to Christ.**

Then a few weeks later you joined us in our summer splash and were water baptized. You joined the CR program and found for the first time freedom from gambling, pornography, alcohol or any other hurt, hangup or habit. You brought your friends and work buddies to church, and they found Christ.

Every testimony is a story of the life of God's grace through Jesus.

God has designed the puzzle pieces of your life, whether you have a **regular testimony** or a **radical testimony** to fit into the sovereign places of His jigsaw puzzle.

The question you should ask yourself is not why don't I have a radical testimony, but why has God created me with this testimony?

When you are satisfied with your testimony, it is easier to make a Big Deal out of God!

A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

Saul's name is changed to the Roman name, Paul, likely to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. (*Acts 13*)

In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9-NIV)

No person did more damage to the church in the first century than Saul. He was a one man wrecking crew. Saul was the very embodiment of the Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus), Haman in

Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

Other than Jesus himself, the one person who influenced the world more than anyone person was Saul who became Paul. You can't read the book of Acts, without being introduced to Paul's mission.

When we meet Saul, he is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. In Acts 7. A member of the ruling Sanhedrin, he heard Stephen's testimony, and instead of buying it and believing it, it made him madder. He became so angry along with the crowd, they had Stephen stoned.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:2a-NIV) (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 22:4, 26:9-12)

Acts 7:58-⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 8:1- *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

Acts 8:3-³ *But Saul began to **destroy** (ravage, decimate, ruin, used as a picture of being torn apart by a wild beast, and the verb means continual action) the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

Acts 22:4-⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,*

Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

Those who said that Jesus was not the Messiah were happy to persecute those who like Stephen said, yes, Jesus was the Messiah.

And persecution is still happening today. If you say yes, to Jesus, persecution will find you. And one day, it will be at levels that can only be described as living in the end times. And in many places in the world, persecution is killing Christians today. There are some magazines around that tell those stories, pick one up and read it.

Even as Americans you will experience some form of persecution, Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.*

Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. It should not surprise us! Do not be surprised about persecution as we are living in a culture that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Jesus and his disciples. Christian ideals. Christian values. Jesus predicted this would happen. Ok, got that?

Again, the dividing line is Jesus. People can be friendly to you until you mention Jesus. Many will want to fight you, but others will want to listen to you. Few people will be neutral.

Because Saul is not a Christian, he consents to Stephens's death and goes after those who have fled to Damascus. A large following of Jewish Christians had fled to Damascus, maybe hoping to escape persecution. Saul would not stand for it. I am going after them too, he declares.

As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Saul's transformation would not be complete until Ananias came and directed him out of his darkness. Blindness. His sightlessness.

While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

(3) Saul was water baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and offered fellowship in the church that he once persecuted.

Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

*Elvis sang it in Vegas.

*Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.

*Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

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So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

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As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

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I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

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When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

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What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

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For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

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Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

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A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

Saul's name is changed to the Roman name, Paul, likely to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. (*Acts 13*)

In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9-NIV)

No person did more damage to the church in the first century than Saul. He was a one man wrecking crew. Saul was the very embodiment of the Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus), Haman in

Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

Other than Jesus himself, the one person who influenced the world more than anyone person was Saul who became Paul. You can't read the book of Acts, without being introduced to Paul's mission.

When we meet Saul, he is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. In Acts 7. A member of the ruling Sanhedrin, he heard Stephen's testimony, and instead of buying it and believing it, it made him madder. He became so angry along with the crowd, they had Stephen stoned.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:2a-NIV) (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 22:4, 26:9-12)

Acts 7:58-⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 8:1- *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

Acts 8:3-³ *But Saul began to **destroy** (ravage, decimate, ruin, used as a picture of being torn apart by a wild beast, and the verb means continual action) the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

Acts 22:4-⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,*

Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

Those who said that Jesus was not the Messiah were happy to persecute those who like Stephen said, yes, Jesus was the Messiah.

And persecution is still happening today. If you say yes, to Jesus, persecution will find you. And one day, it will be at levels that can only be described as living in the end times. And in many places in the world, persecution is killing Christians today. There are some magazines around that tell those stories, pick one up and read it.

Even as Americans you will experience some form of persecution, Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.*

Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. It should not surprise us! Do not be surprised about persecution as we are living in a culture that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Jesus and his disciples. Christian ideals. Christian values. Jesus predicted this would happen. Ok, got that?

Again, the dividing line is Jesus. People can be friendly to you until you mention Jesus. Many will want to fight you, but others will want to listen to you. Few people will be neutral.

Because Saul is not a Christian, he consents to Stephens's death and goes after those who have fled to Damascus. A large following of Jewish Christians had fled to Damascus, maybe hoping to escape persecution. Saul would not stand for it. I am going after them too, he declares.

As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Saul's transformation would not be complete until Ananias came and directed him out of his darkness. Blindness. His sightlessness.

While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

(3) Saul was water baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and offered fellowship in the church that he once persecuted.

Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

*Elvis sang it in Vegas.

*Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.

*Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9-NIV)

Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

We loved our time in San Diego. Beaches. Trips to Mexico. We lived less than a half hour from the busiest border crossing in the world-Tijuana, Mexico. Our oldest son, Kenny, was born in Grossmont Hospital, in La Mesa, Ca.

Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

We chatted about life and then we talked about a Jesus kind of eternal life. I shared how Jesus Christ died an atoning death to forgive his sins and how Jesus would offer him eternal life. At the end of the conversation, "Notch," put his faith in Jesus Christ. He became a Christ follower, like many of you.

Unexpected. Unplanned. Undramatic.

At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

In the same college group was a young man named David. David showed up on a Sunday night for church when we had a guest speaker. Pastor Rick told the story about a demon possessed man in Mark 5, living in a cemetery and cutting himself.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5-NIV)

In Mark 5, we see this broken and suffering individual running, bleeding and screaming amongst the dead. Jesus arrives and does some deliverance, salvation and healing.

Read the story and you will discover that Jesus cast out the demons who went into a nearby farmers pigs, who then ran down the hill into the Sea of Galilee and drown themselves.

The preacher had a real sense humor, and the audience was laughing hysterically as he described what happened. At the end the service, just before he dismissed the people, the preacher said, **“and we know there are no demon possessed demoniacs here tonight.”**

At the end of the service, and with people filing out of the sanctuary, I was praying for some people at the altar, when suddenly a young man stood nearby waiting for prayer. When it was his turn, he walked up to me and before I could ask how I should pray him, David said, **“that preacher may not believe a demoniac is here, but you do.”**

He told me his story. You see, I had been involved in deliverance for many years. David told me how he lived a troubled life of drug and alcohol. David lived in a dark garage filled with evil and he would often go out onto the freeway and throw himself in front of cars, being hit and then walking away.

David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17-NLT)

Notch’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. And Undramatic.

David’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. A dramatic Damascus Road testimony.

Every testimony matters to Jesus, because it comes at the price and expense of Jesus atoning death.

Every testimony is a story of the grace of God.

Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

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And you go, boring.

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As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

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¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

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Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

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Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

*Elvis sang it in Vegas.

*Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.

*Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9-NIV)

Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

We loved our time in San Diego. Beaches. Trips to Mexico. We lived less than a half hour from the busiest border crossing in the world-Tijuana, Mexico. Our oldest son, Kenny, was born in Grossmont Hospital, in La Mesa, Ca.

Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

We chatted about life and then we talked about a Jesus kind of eternal life. I shared how Jesus Christ died an atoning death to forgive his sins and how Jesus would offer him eternal life. At the end of the conversation, "Notch," put his faith in Jesus Christ. He became a Christ follower, like many of you.

Unexpected. Unplanned. Undramatic.

At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

In the same college group was a young man named David. David showed up on a Sunday night for church when we had a guest speaker. Pastor Rick told the story about a demon possessed man in Mark 5, living in a cemetery and cutting himself.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5-NIV)

In Mark 5, we see this broken and suffering individual running, bleeding and screaming amongst the dead. Jesus arrives and does some deliverance, salvation and healing.

Read the story and you will discover that Jesus cast out the demons who went into a nearby farmers pigs, who then ran down the hill into the Sea of Galilee and drown themselves.

The preacher had a real sense humor, and the audience was laughing hysterically as he described what happened. At the end the service, just before he dismissed the people, the preacher said, **“and we know there are no demon possessed demoniacs here tonight.”**

At the end of the service, and with people filing out of the sanctuary, I was praying for some people at the altar, when suddenly a young man stood nearby waiting for prayer. When it was his turn, he walked up to me and before I could ask how I should pray him, David said, **“that preacher may not believe a demoniac is here, but you do.”**

He told me his story. You see, I had been involved in deliverance for many years. David told me how he lived a troubled life of drug and alcohol. David lived in a dark garage filled with evil and he would often go out onto the freeway and throw himself in front of cars, being hit and then walking away.

David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17-NLT)

Notch’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. And Undramatic.

David’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. A dramatic Damascus Road testimony.

Every testimony matters to Jesus, because it comes at the price and expense of Jesus atoning death.

Every testimony is a story of the grace of God.

Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

When you indulge your passions, regardless of what they are, they grow in intensity. Saul's mind was consumed with one mission, imprisoning and killing those who were rejecting Judaism, Moses, the Law and the Temple and becoming followers of Jesus.

In Saul's mind, these heretics were choosing to align with a false and dead Messiah.

Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9-NIV)

As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

From time to time the pastor may have put a Damascus Road testimony into the pulpit.

I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

I have been telling people my testimony that is now in a book entitled, *"The God-father, found Father God."*

When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

A testimony that fails to be shared dies on the vine.

Testimonies that change lives, lead from the heart and not from the head. Stories need emotional propulsion. Movement. Action. Suspense.

No amount of fact or technological gadgetry will keep a person or audience engaged if it is not believable, authentic and possesses a few surprises.

Testimonies that emotionally move us whether **regular** or **radical**...

...whether a good boy Notch (after basketball in a church gym) or a demon possessed David (after church at an altar),

...makes us cry, gasp, sigh, yell, get angry, and bring us to a place where we are confronted with truth.

Your testimony must be told like an orchestra plays a symphony-and the conductor is the Holy Spirit.

Your testimony is too valuable to lose, too supernatural to keep silent and too transformational to sit on!

Your story is the testimony you share about (1)how God's grace has saved you, (2)how the Holy Spirit in you makes it possible for you to live for God, and how (3)God uses his purposes and plan in you to point your family and friends to Jesus.

Somebody must tell the story, divorce is not death, that through Jesus Christ, healing is possible.

Somebody must tell the story, that you do not have to live in anger, bitterness and resentment, forgiveness is possible.

Somebody must tell the story that abuse, rape and even murder does not have traumatize you forever, healing, forgiveness and a supernatural deliverance is possible for those in Christ.

Somebody has to tell parents how to be patient.

Somebody has to tell new believers how to read their Bible.

Somebody has to tell newly minted Christians about water baptism.

Somebody has to tell struggling Christians about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and discernment (the deliverance gift).

Whatever your story or testimony is, and if you don't have one, today you can.

Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

You came to the I Have Decided wall and one of our prayer team members, led you to faith in Jesus. **You can mark this day as your conversion day to Christ.**

Then a few weeks later you joined us in our summer splash and were water baptized. You joined the CR program and found for the first time freedom from gambling, pornography, alcohol or any other hurt, hangup or habit. You brought your friends and work buddies to church, and they found Christ.

Every testimony is a story of the life of God's grace through Jesus.

God has designed the puzzle pieces of your life, whether you have a **regular testimony** or a **radical testimony** to fit into the sovereign places of His jigsaw puzzle.

The question you should ask yourself is not why don't I have a radical testimony, but why has God created me with this testimony?

When you are satisfied with your testimony, it is easier to make a Big Deal out of God!

A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

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Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

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vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

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So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

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Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

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Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

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Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

We chatted about life and then we talked about a Jesus kind of eternal life. I shared how Jesus Christ died an atoning death to forgive his sins and how Jesus would offer him eternal life. At the end of the conversation, "Notch," put his faith in Jesus Christ. He became a Christ follower, like many of you.

Unexpected. Unplanned. Undramatic.

At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

In the same college group was a young man named David. David showed up on a Sunday night for church when we had a guest speaker. Pastor Rick told the story about a demon possessed man in Mark 5, living in a cemetery and cutting himself.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5-NIV)

In Mark 5, we see this broken and suffering individual running, bleeding and screaming amongst the dead. Jesus arrives and does some deliverance, salvation and healing.

Read the story and you will discover that Jesus cast out the demons who went into a nearby farmers pigs, who then ran down the hill into the Sea of Galilee and drown themselves.

The preacher had a real sense humor, and the audience was laughing hysterically as he described what happened. At the end the service, just before he dismissed the people, the preacher said, **“and we know there are no demon possessed demoniacs here tonight.”**

At the end of the service, and with people filing out of the sanctuary, I was praying for some people at the altar, when suddenly a young man stood nearby waiting for prayer. When it was his turn, he walked up to me and before I could ask how I should pray him, David said, **“that preacher may not believe a demoniac is here, but you do.”**

He told me his story. You see, I had been involved in deliverance for many years. David told me how he lived a troubled life of drug and alcohol. David lived in a dark garage filled with evil and he would often go out onto the freeway and throw himself in front of cars, being hit and then walking away.

David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17-NLT)

Notch’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. And Undramatic.

David’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. A dramatic Damascus Road testimony.

Every testimony matters to Jesus, because it comes at the price and expense of Jesus atoning death.

Every testimony is a story of the grace of God.

Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

When you indulge your passions, regardless of what they are, they grow in intensity. Saul's mind was consumed with one mission, imprisoning and killing those who were rejecting Judaism, Moses, the Law and the Temple and becoming followers of Jesus.

In Saul's mind, these heretics were choosing to align with a false and dead Messiah.

Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9-NIV)

As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

From time to time the pastor may have put a Damascus Road testimony into the pulpit.

I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

I have been telling people my testimony that is now in a book entitled, *"The God-father, found Father God."*

When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

A testimony that fails to be shared dies on the vine.

Testimonies that change lives, lead from the heart and not from the head. Stories need emotional propulsion. Movement. Action. Suspense.

No amount of fact or technological gadgetry will keep a person or audience engaged if it is not believable, authentic and possesses a few surprises.

Testimonies that emotionally move us whether **regular** or **radical**...

...whether a good boy Notch (after basketball in a church gym) or a demon possessed David (after church at an altar),

...makes us cry, gasp, sigh, yell, get angry, and bring us to a place where we are confronted with truth.

Your testimony must be told like an orchestra plays a symphony-and the conductor is the Holy Spirit.

Your testimony is too valuable to lose, too supernatural to keep silent and too transformational to sit on!

Your story is the testimony you share about (1)how God's grace has saved you, (2)how the Holy Spirit in you makes it possible for you to live for God, and how (3)God uses his purposes and plan in you to point your family and friends to Jesus.

Somebody must tell the story, divorce is not death, that through Jesus Christ, healing is possible.

Somebody must tell the story, that you do not have to live in anger, bitterness and resentment, forgiveness is possible.

Somebody must tell the story that abuse, rape and even murder does not have traumatize you forever, healing, forgiveness and a supernatural deliverance is possible for those in Christ.

Somebody has to tell parents how to be patient.

Somebody has to tell new believers how to read their Bible.

Somebody has to tell newly minted Christians about water baptism.

Somebody has to tell struggling Christians about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and discernment (the deliverance gift).

Whatever your story or testimony is, and if you don't have one, today you can.

Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

You came to the I Have Decided wall and one of our prayer team members, led you to faith in Jesus. **You can mark this day as your conversion day to Christ.**

Then a few weeks later you joined us in our summer splash and were water baptized. You joined the CR program and found for the first time freedom from gambling, pornography, alcohol or any other hurt, hangup or habit. You brought your friends and work buddies to church, and they found Christ.

Every testimony is a story of the life of God's grace through Jesus.

God has designed the puzzle pieces of your life, whether you have a **regular testimony** or a **radical testimony** to fit into the sovereign places of His jigsaw puzzle.

The question you should ask yourself is not why don't I have a radical testimony, but why has God created me with this testimony?

When you are satisfied with your testimony, it is easier to make a Big Deal out of God!

A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

Saul's name is changed to the Roman name, Paul, likely to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. (*Acts 13*)

In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9-NIV)

No person did more damage to the church in the first century than Saul. He was a one man wrecking crew. Saul was the very embodiment of the Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus), Haman in

Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

Other than Jesus himself, the one person who influenced the world more than anyone person was Saul who became Paul. You can't read the book of Acts, without being introduced to Paul's mission.

When we meet Saul, he is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. In Acts 7. A member of the ruling Sanhedrin, he heard Stephen's testimony, and instead of buying it and believing it, it made him madder. He became so angry along with the crowd, they had Stephen stoned.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:2a-NIV) (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 22:4, 26:9-12)

Acts 7:58-⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 8:1- *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

Acts 8:3-³ *But Saul began to **destroy** (ravage, decimate, ruin, used as a picture of being torn apart by a wild beast, and the verb means continual action) the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

Acts 22:4-⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,*

Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

Those who said that Jesus was not the Messiah were happy to persecute those who like Stephen said, yes, Jesus was the Messiah.

And persecution is still happening today. If you say yes, to Jesus, persecution will find you. And one day, it will be at levels that can only be described as living in the end times. And in many places in the world, persecution is killing Christians today. There are some magazines around that tell those stories, pick one up and read it.

Even as Americans you will experience some form of persecution, Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.*

Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. It should not surprise us! Do not be surprised about persecution as we are living in a culture that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Jesus and his disciples. Christian ideals. Christian values. Jesus predicted this would happen. Ok, got that?

Again, the dividing line is Jesus. People can be friendly to you until you mention Jesus. Many will want to fight you, but others will want to listen to you. Few people will be neutral.

Because Saul is not a Christian, he consents to Stephens's death and goes after those who have fled to Damascus. A large following of Jewish Christians had fled to Damascus, maybe hoping to escape persecution. Saul would not stand for it. I am going after them too, he declares.

As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Saul's transformation would not be complete until Ananias came and directed him out of his darkness. Blindness. His sightlessness.

While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

(3) Saul was water baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and offered fellowship in the church that he once persecuted.

Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

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Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

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If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

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Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

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When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

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And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

A testimony that fails to be shared dies on the vine.

Testimonies that change lives, lead from the heart and not from the head. Stories need emotional propulsion. Movement. Action. Suspense.

No amount of fact or technological gadgetry will keep a person or audience engaged if it is not believable, authentic and possesses a few surprises.

Testimonies that emotionally move us whether **regular** or **radical**...

...whether a good boy Notch (after basketball in a church gym) or a demon possessed David (after church at an altar),

...makes us cry, gasp, sigh, yell, get angry, and bring us to a place where we are confronted with truth.

Your testimony must be told like an orchestra plays a symphony-and the conductor is the Holy Spirit.

Your testimony is too valuable to lose, too supernatural to keep silent and too transformational to sit on!

Your story is the testimony you share about (1)how God's grace has saved you, (2)how the Holy Spirit in you makes it possible for you to live for God, and how (3)God uses his purposes and plan in you to point your family and friends to Jesus.

Somebody must tell the story, divorce is not death, that through Jesus Christ, healing is possible.

Somebody must tell the story, that you do not have to live in anger, bitterness and resentment, forgiveness is possible.

Somebody must tell the story that abuse, rape and even murder does not have traumatize you forever, healing, forgiveness and a supernatural deliverance is possible for those in Christ.

Somebody has to tell parents how to be patient.

Somebody has to tell new believers how to read their Bible.

Somebody has to tell newly minted Christians about water baptism.

Somebody has to tell struggling Christians about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and discernment (the deliverance gift).

Whatever your story or testimony is, and if you don't have one, today you can.

Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

You came to the I Have Decided wall and one of our prayer team members, led you to faith in Jesus. **You can mark this day as your conversion day to Christ.**

Then a few weeks later you joined us in our summer splash and were water baptized. You joined the CR program and found for the first time freedom from gambling, pornography, alcohol or any other hurt, hangup or habit. You brought your friends and work buddies to church, and they found Christ.

Every testimony is a story of the life of God's grace through Jesus.

God has designed the puzzle pieces of your life, whether you have a **regular testimony** or a **radical testimony** to fit into the sovereign places of His jigsaw puzzle.

The question you should ask yourself is not why don't I have a radical testimony, but why has God created me with this testimony?

When you are satisfied with your testimony, it is easier to make a Big Deal out of God!

A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

Saul's name is changed to the Roman name, Paul, likely to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. (*Acts 13*)

In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9-NIV)

No person did more damage to the church in the first century than Saul. He was a one man wrecking crew. Saul was the very embodiment of the Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus), Haman in

Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

Other than Jesus himself, the one person who influenced the world more than anyone person was Saul who became Paul. You can't read the book of Acts, without being introduced to Paul's mission.

When we meet Saul, he is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. In Acts 7. A member of the ruling Sanhedrin, he heard Stephen's testimony, and instead of buying it and believing it, it made him madder. He became so angry along with the crowd, they had Stephen stoned.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:2a-NIV) (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 22:4, 26:9-12)

Acts 7:58-⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 8:1- *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

Acts 8:3-³ *But Saul began to **destroy** (ravage, decimate, ruin, used as a picture of being torn apart by a wild beast, and the verb means continual action) the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

Acts 22:4-⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,*

Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

Those who said that Jesus was not the Messiah were happy to persecute those who like Stephen said, yes, Jesus was the Messiah.

And persecution is still happening today. If you say yes, to Jesus, persecution will find you. And one day, it will be at levels that can only be described as living in the end times. And in many places in the world, persecution is killing Christians today. There are some magazines around that tell those stories, pick one up and read it.

Even as Americans you will experience some form of persecution, Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.*

Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. It should not surprise us! Do not be surprised about persecution as we are living in a culture that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Jesus and his disciples. Christian ideals. Christian values. Jesus predicted this would happen. Ok, got that?

Again, the dividing line is Jesus. People can be friendly to you until you mention Jesus. Many will want to fight you, but others will want to listen to you. Few people will be neutral.

Because Saul is not a Christian, he consents to Stephens's death and goes after those who have fled to Damascus. A large following of Jewish Christians had fled to Damascus, maybe hoping to escape persecution. Saul would not stand for it. I am going after them too, he declares.

As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Saul's transformation would not be complete until Ananias came and directed him out of his darkness. Blindness. His sightlessness.

While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

(3) Saul was water baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and offered fellowship in the church that he once persecuted.

Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

*Elvis sang it in Vegas.

*Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.

*Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9-NIV)

Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

We loved our time in San Diego. Beaches. Trips to Mexico. We lived less than a half hour from the busiest border crossing in the world-Tijuana, Mexico. Our oldest son, Kenny, was born in Grossmont Hospital, in La Mesa, Ca.

Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

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When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

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Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

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In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

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Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

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Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

Those who said that Jesus was not the Messiah were happy to persecute those who like Stephen said, yes, Jesus was the Messiah.

And persecution is still happening today. If you say yes, to Jesus, persecution will find you. And one day, it will be at levels that can only be described as living in the end times. And in many places in the world, persecution is killing Christians today. There are some magazines around that tell those stories, pick one up and read it.

Even as Americans you will experience some form of persecution, Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.*

Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. It should not surprise us! Do not be surprised about persecution as we are living in a culture that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Jesus and his disciples. Christian ideals. Christian values. Jesus predicted this would happen. Ok, got that?

Again, the dividing line is Jesus. People can be friendly to you until you mention Jesus. Many will want to fight you, but others will want to listen to you. Few people will be neutral.

Because Saul is not a Christian, he consents to Stephens's death and goes after those who have fled to Damascus. A large following of Jewish Christians had fled to Damascus, maybe hoping to escape persecution. Saul would not stand for it. I am going after them too, he declares.

As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Saul's transformation would not be complete until Ananias came and directed him out of his darkness. Blindness. His sightlessness.

While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

(3) Saul was water baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and offered fellowship in the church that he once persecuted.

Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

*Elvis sang it in Vegas.

*Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.

*Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9-NIV)

Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

We loved our time in San Diego. Beaches. Trips to Mexico. We lived less than a half hour from the busiest border crossing in the world-Tijuana, Mexico. Our oldest son, Kenny, was born in Grossmont Hospital, in La Mesa, Ca.

Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

We chatted about life and then we talked about a Jesus kind of eternal life. I shared how Jesus Christ died an atoning death to forgive his sins and how Jesus would offer him eternal life. At the end of the conversation, "Notch," put his faith in Jesus Christ. He became a Christ follower, like many of you.

Unexpected. Unplanned. Undramatic.

At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

In the same college group was a young man named David. David showed up on a Sunday night for church when we had a guest speaker. Pastor Rick told the story about a demon possessed man in Mark 5, living in a cemetery and cutting himself.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5-NIV)

In Mark 5, we see this broken and suffering individual running, bleeding and screaming amongst the dead. Jesus arrives and does some deliverance, salvation and healing.

Read the story and you will discover that Jesus cast out the demons who went into a nearby farmers pigs, who then ran down the hill into the Sea of Galilee and drown themselves.

The preacher had a real sense humor, and the audience was laughing hysterically as he described what happened. At the end the service, just before he dismissed the people, the preacher said, **“and we know there are no demon possessed demoniacs here tonight.”**

At the end of the service, and with people filing out of the sanctuary, I was praying for some people at the altar, when suddenly a young man stood nearby waiting for prayer. When it was his turn, he walked up to me and before I could ask how I should pray him, David said, **“that preacher may not believe a demoniac is here, but you do.”**

He told me his story. You see, I had been involved in deliverance for many years. David told me how he lived a troubled life of drug and alcohol. David lived in a dark garage filled with evil and he would often go out onto the freeway and throw himself in front of cars, being hit and then walking away.

David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17-NLT)

Notch’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. And Undramatic.

David’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. A dramatic Damascus Road testimony.

Every testimony matters to Jesus, because it comes at the price and expense of Jesus atoning death.

Every testimony is a story of the grace of God.

Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

When you indulge your passions, regardless of what they are, they grow in intensity. Saul's mind was consumed with one mission, imprisoning and killing those who were rejecting Judaism, Moses, the Law and the Temple and becoming followers of Jesus.

In Saul's mind, these heretics were choosing to align with a false and dead Messiah.

Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9-NIV)

As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

From time to time the pastor may have put a Damascus Road testimony into the pulpit.

I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

I have been telling people my testimony that is now in a book entitled, *"The God-father, found Father God."*

When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

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Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

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Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

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Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

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¹⁸to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

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While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

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...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

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Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

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This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9-NIV)

Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

We loved our time in San Diego. Beaches. Trips to Mexico. We lived less than a half hour from the busiest border crossing in the world-Tijuana, Mexico. Our oldest son, Kenny, was born in Grossmont Hospital, in La Mesa, Ca.

Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

We chatted about life and then we talked about a Jesus kind of eternal life. I shared how Jesus Christ died an atoning death to forgive his sins and how Jesus would offer him eternal life. At the end of the conversation, "Notch," put his faith in Jesus Christ. He became a Christ follower, like many of you.

Unexpected. Unplanned. Undramatic.

At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

In the same college group was a young man named David. David showed up on a Sunday night for church when we had a guest speaker. Pastor Rick told the story about a demon possessed man in Mark 5, living in a cemetery and cutting himself.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5-NIV)

In Mark 5, we see this broken and suffering individual running, bleeding and screaming amongst the dead. Jesus arrives and does some deliverance, salvation and healing.

Read the story and you will discover that Jesus cast out the demons who went into a nearby farmers pigs, who then ran down the hill into the Sea of Galilee and drown themselves.

The preacher had a real sense humor, and the audience was laughing hysterically as he described what happened. At the end the service, just before he dismissed the people, the preacher said, **“and we know there are no demon possessed demoniacs here tonight.”**

At the end of the service, and with people filing out of the sanctuary, I was praying for some people at the altar, when suddenly a young man stood nearby waiting for prayer. When it was his turn, he walked up to me and before I could ask how I should pray him, David said, **“that preacher may not believe a demoniac is here, but you do.”**

He told me his story. You see, I had been involved in deliverance for many years. David told me how he lived a troubled life of drug and alcohol. David lived in a dark garage filled with evil and he would often go out onto the freeway and throw himself in front of cars, being hit and then walking away.

David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17-NLT)

Notch’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. And Undramatic.

David’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. A dramatic Damascus Road testimony.

Every testimony matters to Jesus, because it comes at the price and expense of Jesus atoning death.

Every testimony is a story of the grace of God.

Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

When you indulge your passions, regardless of what they are, they grow in intensity. Saul's mind was consumed with one mission, imprisoning and killing those who were rejecting Judaism, Moses, the Law and the Temple and becoming followers of Jesus.

In Saul's mind, these heretics were choosing to align with a false and dead Messiah.

Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9-NIV)

As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

From time to time the pastor may have put a Damascus Road testimony into the pulpit.

I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

I have been telling people my testimony that is now in a book entitled, *"The God-father, found Father God."*

When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

A testimony that fails to be shared dies on the vine.

Testimonies that change lives, lead from the heart and not from the head. Stories need emotional propulsion. Movement. Action. Suspense.

No amount of fact or technological gadgetry will keep a person or audience engaged if it is not believable, authentic and possesses a few surprises.

Testimonies that emotionally move us whether **regular** or **radical**...

...whether a good boy Notch (after basketball in a church gym) or a demon possessed David (after church at an altar),

...makes us cry, gasp, sigh, yell, get angry, and bring us to a place where we are confronted with truth.

Your testimony must be told like an orchestra plays a symphony-and the conductor is the Holy Spirit.

Your testimony is too valuable to lose, too supernatural to keep silent and too transformational to sit on!

Your story is the testimony you share about (1)how God's grace has saved you, (2)how the Holy Spirit in you makes it possible for you to live for God, and how (3)God uses his purposes and plan in you to point your family and friends to Jesus.

Somebody must tell the story, divorce is not death, that through Jesus Christ, healing is possible.

Somebody must tell the story, that you do not have to live in anger, bitterness and resentment, forgiveness is possible.

Somebody must tell the story that abuse, rape and even murder does not have traumatize you forever, healing, forgiveness and a supernatural deliverance is possible for those in Christ.

Somebody has to tell parents how to be patient.

Somebody has to tell new believers how to read their Bible.

Somebody has to tell newly minted Christians about water baptism.

Somebody has to tell struggling Christians about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and discernment (the deliverance gift).

Whatever your story or testimony is, and if you don't have one, today you can.

Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

You came to the I Have Decided wall and one of our prayer team members, led you to faith in Jesus. **You can mark this day as your conversion day to Christ.**

Then a few weeks later you joined us in our summer splash and were water baptized. You joined the CR program and found for the first time freedom from gambling, pornography, alcohol or any other hurt, hangup or habit. You brought your friends and work buddies to church, and they found Christ.

Every testimony is a story of the life of God's grace through Jesus.

God has designed the puzzle pieces of your life, whether you have a **regular testimony** or a **radical testimony** to fit into the sovereign places of His jigsaw puzzle.

The question you should ask yourself is not why don't I have a radical testimony, but why has God created me with this testimony?

When you are satisfied with your testimony, it is easier to make a Big Deal out of God!

A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

Saul's name is changed to the Roman name, Paul, likely to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. (*Acts 13*)

In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9-NIV)

No person did more damage to the church in the first century than Saul. He was a one man wrecking crew. Saul was the very embodiment of the Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus), Haman in

Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

Other than Jesus himself, the one person who influenced the world more than anyone person was Saul who became Paul. You can't read the book of Acts, without being introduced to Paul's mission.

When we meet Saul, he is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. In Acts 7. A member of the ruling Sanhedrin, he heard Stephen's testimony, and instead of buying it and believing it, it made him madder. He became so angry along with the crowd, they had Stephen stoned.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:2a-NIV) (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 22:4, 26:9-12)

Acts 7:58-⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 8:1- *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

Acts 8:3-³ *But Saul began to **destroy** (ravage, decimate, ruin, used as a picture of being torn apart by a wild beast, and the verb means continual action) the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

Acts 22:4-⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,*

Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

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Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

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18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

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...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

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And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

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When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

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He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

So, what is the grace that blinded Saul and stormed John Newton-it was the realization that a holy God would offer mercy to a sinner, instead of death- Grace-There is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.

The Holy Spirit

Pastor Ken

August 4, 2025

Open your bibles or devices to Acts 9. If you are new to Bethel Life Center, we teach right out of the Bible every week. I use the NIV translation; you can use whatever translation helps you become **more like Jesus Christ**.

We are in a study in the book of Acts, about the Holy Spirit.

Welcome to God's house, let's stand and read right out of God's word. Let us know how we can pray for you, take a prayer card, fill it out, and put it in offering boxes or at the connect center. If you are on-line, put it in the comment box at the bottom of the screen.

Danice and I want to say how much we love each of you, and welcome to those who are watching online today. Let us know if you are out there in the world of the internet, by saying "hi."

If you are from Texas, you can say, "howdy." And back to you my friends watching this sermon on-line from Texas, "howdy, y'all." I said that to my aunt once, while I lived in Texas, going to seminary, I came home for a family visit and she hit me in the arm, because she thought I was calling her fat-y'all.

Ok, lets read God's word, I'll read first, then we will all read together.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9-NIV)

Nice reading of God's word Bethel Life Center. The Holy Spirit enjoyed your reading of the scriptures; He is the author of the word of God, you know. Let's pray.

Father, we need you to forgive our sins. We need the Holy Spirit's power for service. We need Jesus to speak to us.

So, Father, help me to get out of the way, so your people can be transformed once again, by the book of Acts 1:8, power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, Amen.

After Danice and I were married in November of 1988, about a year into our marriage we moved to San Diego, California. We were on staff of Faith Chapel, a large mega church, for a couple years. In church were the founders of Jack in The Box and Buck Knives. As the college pastors we were responsible for adults in their 20-30's. We met on Monday nights.

We loved our time in San Diego. Beaches. Trips to Mexico. We lived less than a half hour from the busiest border crossing in the world-Tijuana, Mexico. Our oldest son, Kenny, was born in Grossmont Hospital, in La Mesa, Ca.

Weekly the Faith Chapel pastors would gather in the gym and play pick up basketball. Sometimes those who were not employed at Faith Chapel would join us for lunchtime basketball.

One day, I noticed a young man playing whom I did not know, so after basketball I invited him to my office. Ignacio Baiz had been invited to play basketball at Faith Chapel, so he walked up the hill and joined us at lunch.

We chatted about life and then we talked about a Jesus kind of eternal life. I shared how Jesus Christ died an atoning death to forgive his sins and how Jesus would offer him eternal life. At the end of the conversation, "Notch," put his faith in Jesus Christ. He became a Christ follower, like many of you.

Unexpected. Unplanned. Undramatic.

At least that is what I thought. Then I told Ignacio we were having a baptism that Sunday night and he should follow Jesus into the waters of baptism, he said enthusiastically, "yes." He was water baptized on that Sunday night. His faith took off. He never missed a service on Sunday or Monday night. He joined our college group and built a lasting friendship with Tony Tapia.

In the same college group was a young man named David. David showed up on a Sunday night for church when we had a guest speaker. Pastor Rick told the story about a demon possessed man in Mark 5, living in a cemetery and cutting himself.

² When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³ This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴ For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (Mark 5-NIV)

In Mark 5, we see this broken and suffering individual running, bleeding and screaming amongst the dead. Jesus arrives and does some deliverance, salvation and healing.

Read the story and you will discover that Jesus cast out the demons who went into a nearby farmers pigs, who then ran down the hill into the Sea of Galilee and drown themselves.

The preacher had a real sense humor, and the audience was laughing hysterically as he described what happened. At the end the service, just before he dismissed the people, the preacher said, **“and we know there are no demon possessed demoniacs here tonight.”**

At the end of the service, and with people filing out of the sanctuary, I was praying for some people at the altar, when suddenly a young man stood nearby waiting for prayer. When it was his turn, he walked up to me and before I could ask how I should pray him, David said, **“that preacher may not believe a demoniac is here, but you do.”**

He told me his story. You see, I had been involved in deliverance for many years. David told me how he lived a troubled life of drug and alcohol. David lived in a dark garage filled with evil and he would often go out onto the freeway and throw himself in front of cars, being hit and then walking away.

David found Christ, and deliverance. A Damascus Road testimony. I told you these stories because whether your testimony is a regular journey to faith or a radical journey to faith, every conversion-story about Jesus matters to God. **Every testimony is supernatural.**

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17-NLT)

Notch’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. And Undramatic.

David’s story was-Unexpected. Unplanned. A dramatic Damascus Road testimony.

Every testimony matters to Jesus, because it comes at the price and expense of Jesus atoning death.

Every testimony is a story of the grace of God.

Well, today we meet the Apostle Paul (Saul) who is going to have a supernatural encounter with Jesus Christ in Acts 9. This encounter will happen while Saul is breathing out and breathing in, the fire of hatred and murder against Jesus disciples.

*^{1a} Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out** murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. (Acts 9:1a-NIV)*

While the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing lives in places like Samaria and amongst people like Simon a Sorcerer and an Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, persecution is increasing.

Back in Jerusalem Saul, the very air that Saul breathes is filled with murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. With the incarceration and death of Jesus-book of Acts disciples, Saul's rage grows.

When you indulge your passions, regardless of what they are, they grow in intensity. Saul's mind was consumed with one mission, imprisoning and killing those who were rejecting Judaism, Moses, the Law and the Temple and becoming followers of Jesus.

In Saul's mind, these heretics were choosing to align with a false and dead Messiah.

Saul's mind was consumed with evil. In a few minutes, we will see a miraculous change where Saul will be consumed with Christ. He will enter a period of his life, where with the same kind of passion, he will **testify** about Jesus instead of being a terrorist against Jesus disciples.

Jesus will appear to him. Jesus will speak to him. Jesus will rebuke him. Jesus will forgive him. And then Jesus will give him instructions as to how to use his one and only life.

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9-NIV)

As we will see Paul will go from killing Christians, to being a Christ follower himself. Paul will go from murder to missions. Paul will go from hating Christians to helping Jews and Gentiles become Christ followers.

Paul goes from being a terrorist to being a testimony for Christ.

When people have that kind of experience with Jesus, it is often referred to as a **Damascus Road experience**.

Some of you for years have wondered why your testimony is so soft and sweet. You've wondered, "why can't I have had a radical testimony?" You might have grown up in church and marveled at the testimony of others.

From time to time the pastor may have put a Damascus Road testimony into the pulpit.

I used to be a mafia boss. I had a few people knocked off. I ended up in prison - the mafia boss goes on, and I served my time.

I led every cell mate, and inmate to Jesus Christ. I even led the prison warden to Jesus Christ. I taught a prison bible study, and some who had life sentences came to Jesus. I formed a prison choir, and we traveled to nearby prisons, singing and testifying about Jesus.

After good behavior I got out of prison and then began to lead others to Jesus. I have been leading others to Jesus Christ around the world. Now, I lead police officers to Jesus. I lead prostitutes to Jesus. I lead professional athletes to Jesus.

I have been telling people my testimony that is now in a book entitled, *"The God-father, found Father God."*

When you hear that you go, really. Why can't I have a testimony like that? Why can't I have a mafia story like that? For some of you, your story goes like this.

If I were to ask some of you, how did you find Jesus Christ, "I found him at youth camp." I left a rebellious lifestyle of backtalking to my mom and pulling my sister's hair." My camp counselor led me in the sinner's prayer, and I have served Jesus since I was 7.

And you go, boring.

What God needs to teach all of us is, every person's testimony is unique.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a depression testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a debtor's prison testimony.

Whether a Damascus Road testimony or a decapitated leg in an auto accident testimony.

One person's testimony is no less radical than anyone else's. Why? Because we were all headed to hell. *The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)* And we were all on that path.

Every life changed by the radical grace of God, is a miracle. Whatever your story is, whether it is regular or radical testimony, each of us have a story that others can relate to.

For many of you who have served Jesus since your early years, you have something that others wish they had. **What is that?**

You have been saved from the painful destruction, damage and demonization that others have had to go through before they surrendered to Jesus.

So, why should you minimize the grace of God? Whatever your story, can I suggest you **get it out, dust it off, and start telling it.**

A testimony that fails to be shared dies on the vine.

Testimonies that change lives, lead from the heart and not from the head. Stories need emotional propulsion. Movement. Action. Suspense.

No amount of fact or technological gadgetry will keep a person or audience engaged if it is not believable, authentic and possesses a few surprises.

Testimonies that emotionally move us whether **regular** or **radical**...

...whether a good boy Notch (after basketball in a church gym) or a demon possessed David (after church at an altar),

...makes us cry, gasp, sigh, yell, get angry, and bring us to a place where we are confronted with truth.

Your testimony must be told like an orchestra plays a symphony-and the conductor is the Holy Spirit.

Your testimony is too valuable to lose, too supernatural to keep silent and too transformational to sit on!

Your story is the testimony you share about (1)how God's grace has saved you, (2)how the Holy Spirit in you makes it possible for you to live for God, and how (3)God uses his purposes and plan in you to point your family and friends to Jesus.

Somebody must tell the story, divorce is not death, that through Jesus Christ, healing is possible.

Somebody must tell the story, that you do not have to live in anger, bitterness and resentment, forgiveness is possible.

Somebody must tell the story that abuse, rape and even murder does not have traumatize you forever, healing, forgiveness and a supernatural deliverance is possible for those in Christ.

Somebody has to tell parents how to be patient.

Somebody has to tell new believers how to read their Bible.

Somebody has to tell newly minted Christians about water baptism.

Somebody has to tell struggling Christians about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and about the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, healing, miracles and discernment (the deliverance gift).

Whatever your story or testimony is, and if you don't have one, today you can.

Today can be your testimony, that on August 3, at Bethel Life Center, in Wichita, Kansas while listening to a sermon about a terrorist turned servant of Christ, you decided to also to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

You came to the I Have Decided wall and one of our prayer team members, led you to faith in Jesus. **You can mark this day as your conversion day to Christ.**

Then a few weeks later you joined us in our summer splash and were water baptized. You joined the CR program and found for the first time freedom from gambling, pornography, alcohol or any other hurt, hangup or habit. You brought your friends and work buddies to church, and they found Christ.

Every testimony is a story of the life of God's grace through Jesus.

God has designed the puzzle pieces of your life, whether you have a **regular testimony** or a **radical testimony** to fit into the sovereign places of His jigsaw puzzle.

The question you should ask yourself is not why don't I have a radical testimony, but why has God created me with this testimony?

When you are satisfied with your testimony, it is easier to make a Big Deal out of God!

A part of Saul's testimony is that God changed his name from Saul to Paul. This happens often in the Bible to identify a new purpose. A new future. A new calling.

Saul's name is changed to the Roman name, Paul, likely to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. (*Acts 13*)

In this case Paul's mission will be to take the message of Christ to the world. And the vehicle of that message will be heart ache and pain.

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9-NIV)

No person did more damage to the church in the first century than Saul. He was a one man wrecking crew. Saul was the very embodiment of the Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus), Haman in

Persia (Ester), Herod in Palestine (Matthew), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy), and every other person who has ever tried to stop the mission and message of Jesus.

Again, listen to the story of Saul because you can have a story too. This is such an important decision for your life, I suggest you make it a front burner priority. God can totally change you today. For those who don't have a testimony, Father knock them down or knock on their heart. Get'em God!

Other than Jesus himself, the one person who influenced the world more than anyone person was Saul who became Paul. You can't read the book of Acts, without being introduced to Paul's mission.

When we meet Saul, he is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. In Acts 7. A member of the ruling Sanhedrin, he heard Stephen's testimony, and instead of buying it and believing it, it made him madder. He became so angry along with the crowd, they had Stephen stoned.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9:2a-NIV) (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 22:4, 26:9-12)

Acts 7:58-⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

Acts 8:1- *And Saul approved of their killing him.*

Acts 8:3-³ *But Saul began to **destroy** (ravage, decimate, ruin, used as a picture of being torn apart by a wild beast, and the verb means continual action) the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

Acts 22:4-⁴ *I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,*

Acts 26:9-12-¹¹ *Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Why was Saul, a God-fearing Jew, terrorizing other God-fearing Jews?

Why did Saul call for the execution of another God-fearing Jew? On the surface it doesn't make any sense. The answer is:

The dividing line was over Jesus.

As to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had predicted. He was arrested and executed. And to Saul, this Jesus was a dead heretic of Judaism. He deserved death. Good riddance!

Those who said that Jesus was not the Messiah were happy to persecute those who like Stephen said, yes, Jesus was the Messiah.

And persecution is still happening today. If you say yes, to Jesus, persecution will find you. And one day, it will be at levels that can only be described as living in the end times. And in many places in the world, persecution is killing Christians today. There are some magazines around that tell those stories, pick one up and read it.

Even as Americans you will experience some form of persecution, Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.*

Because of me. Rejoice and be glad. It should not surprise us! Do not be surprised about persecution as we are living in a culture that is becoming increasingly more hostile to Jesus and his disciples. Christian ideals. Christian values. Jesus predicted this would happen. Ok, got that?

Again, the dividing line is Jesus. People can be friendly to you until you mention Jesus. Many will want to fight you, but others will want to listen to you. Few people will be neutral.

Because Saul is not a Christian, he consents to Stephens's death and goes after those who have fled to Damascus. A large following of Jewish Christians had fled to Damascus, maybe hoping to escape persecution. Saul would not stand for it. I am going after them too, he declares.

As Saul is about to arrive after a 150-mile, 6-day journey he meets Jesus Christ on the road. One thing that Saul did not realize, Jesus was not dead. He was very much alive. And he was now dictating to Saul what was going to happen.

Saul was knocked off his high horse by Jesus himself. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Saul's transformation would not be complete until Ananias came and directed him out of his darkness. Blindness. His sightlessness.

While Jesus' hand pushed Saul down, Ananias' hand lifted Saul up through healing, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism in water, and a meal.

Saul's spiritual transformation wasn't possible if he did not accept that Jesus is Lord, and then ask, what shall I do?

...accept that Jews and Gentiles are both offered salvation through Christ's death,

...accept that Saul is Jesus personal representative to take the Acts 1:8 message to the world,

...accept that this calling will come with personal suffering and hardship.

Saul says, "count me in."

Saul headed to Damascus as a terrorist and left Damascus as a fugitive.

Let me summarize Saul conversion to Christ. What do we see:

(1) Saul has a personal encounter with Jesus. Saul is offered salvation even though he does not deserve it.

(2) Saul was dependent on other Christ followers to lead him out of blindness and into forgiveness and restoration to those he persecuted and killed.

(3) Saul was water baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and offered fellowship in the church that he once persecuted.

Instead of pulling Jewish Christians out of synagogues, Saul was telling his story of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Some were hesitant, all were shocked and many went after Saul, and took up his mission of terror and declared, "Saul must be terminated."

Like Saul on the road to Damascus, John Newton on the Atlantic Ocean sailing for England, had a similar encounter with a holy God.

John Newton left Africa as a slave trader and arrived in England as Christ follower.

Let's end by singing the song that ties Saul of Tarsus, to John Newton of England, Amazing Grace. Saul the terrorist and John Newton the slave trader were both blind to God's Amazing Grace.

The song, Amazing Grace, is without question the most venerated and appreciated song in history. It has no equal. It is celebrating its **253 birthday** this year. It is sung 10's of millions of times, in every language and every continent.

*Joan Baez sang this song at Woodstock. 1969

*Elvis sang it in Vegas.

*Willie Nelson sang it at the Grand Olé Opry.

*Johnny Cash sang it in prisons all over the US.

This song crosses chasms of every kind. Yet, it contains only **5 notes**. Its harmonic structure is both sparse and complex. It is equally compelling when played by a full symphony orchestra, or by a single bagpipe or violin as we just saw. When the lyrics of this song are analyzed, most people comment on the uniqueness of the poetry and its common street talk.

Listen to the poetry here. "When we've been there **ten thousand years** Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

That is the most poetic way to describe how long eternity is, that has ever been written.

And then there is the street language –

vs. 1 "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me."
(That saved a what...wretch – pirate talk). For you young kids it means, very, very naughty.

"I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

This song was written by a ship's captain, who made his living by transporting slaves, from Africa to England. **His name was John Newton** as you see.

Not Isaac Newton, the **gravity guy**,

Not Cam Newton, the **football guy**,

And not Wayne Newton, **the Hollywood guy**. (As one family member told me recently as a funeral.)

...this was John Newton who was trying to make a living through selling slaves. He was the captain of a slave ship. He was doing what he saw his father do.

What his father taught him. Then one day, he ran smack dab into this one astonishing commodity, called grace. And the entire trajectory of his life changed.

And then later when he wrote this song and he thought about who he used to be, he could have used 100's of words to describe the old John Newton...but the one he chose was **wretch**.

So here is the story-A little background on Amazing Grace before we sing it. The hymn was written by ship captain John Newton. Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean.

When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman.

Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused.

Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which plied the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given up any religious convictions.

However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his **"great deliverance."**

He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, **"Lord, have mercy upon us."** Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

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