


**A Five-Day Devotional Journey**
**May 4 - 10, 2008**

Acts 9:1-19

## Kicking against the goads

### 1 A one-man terror

**Read.** Acts 9:1-2 NLT

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

**Read.** Acts 26:9-11 Message

For a time I thought it was my duty to oppose this Jesus of Nazareth with all my might. Backed with the full authority of the high priests, I threw these believers—I had no idea they were God's people!—into the Jerusalem jail right and left, and whenever it came to a vote, I voted for their execution. I stormed through their meeting places, bullying them into cursing Jesus, a one-man terror obsessed with obliterating these people. And then I started on the towns outside Jerusalem.

**Think.**

- What do you think was driving Saul's obsession to obliterate Christianity?
- In Acts 22:3 we discover that Saul had been mentored by rabbi Gamaliel. Rewind back to Acts 5 — what advice had Gamaliel given regarding this new "Jesus movement" in Jerusalem? How is Saul responding to this counsel — and what does this say about him?
- Jesus had told his disciples that "the time is coming when he who kills you will think that he is serving God" (see John 16:2-3). From Saul to the Crusades to radical Muslim terrorists, what is it that brings religion to this dark place of oppression and terror? When have you caught glimpses of this darker side in yourself? How do we stay away from it?

**Pray.**

Lord Jesus, direct all the passion of my heart into your life-giving ways. Keep me far from the darker shades of deadly religion that wounds and cuts and kills. Make me a radical practitioner of true religion that helps orphans and widows in their plight and stays pure in a loveless, lust-filled world.

**Live.**

Take time to pray for religious terrorists around the world and those who are suffering at their hands. Pray for God's kingdom to come!

"What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a "law man" so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him.

Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but

it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that."

Galatians 2:19-21

### Kicking against the goads.

There's a picture to dwell on.

**Imagine a headstrong ox that persistently heads off in the wrong direction. The owner's sharp stick keeps finding it's way into the ox's hindquarters, only to be met with repeated kick-backs from the ox. Oxen stubbornness finally meets with the equivalent of a mallet to the forehead, stunning and stopping it in its tracks.**

**That's what happened to the ox-man Saul of Tarsus on that road to Damascus. The Master whacked him between the eyes with a mallet of glorious light, leaving him stunned for three days.**

**Saul had been a religious terrorist of sorts, lobbing religious mortar shells into gatherings of early disciples. There was no safe green zone for these Jesus followers — Saul made sure of that. Then he took steps to export his own personal holy jihad against Jesus.**

**But the terrorist himself is terrorized en route by a roadside bomb that shows him what he had been longing to see all his life: the glory of God. Moses had asked to see His face, but only got a view of Him in passing. Now Saul sees the Face — and to his horror he sees that it is the face of Jesus.**

**That revelation became the first decisive hammer blow of Saul's own crucifixion in which he went from "law man" to "God's man." Saul's conversion wasn't a quiet turning. It was volcanic, thunderous, shattering. Pieces of Saul scattered all over the desert floor — each lovingly gathered up and reassembled over the next decade into the wee man we know as Paul.**

## 2) Why are you persecuting me?

**Read.** Acts 9:3-6 NLT

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

**Read.** Acts 26:16-18 Message

But now, up on your feet—I have a job for you. I've handpicked you to be a servant and witness to what's happened today, and to what I am going to show you. I'm sending you off to open the eyes of the outsiders so they can see the difference between dark and light, and choose light, see the difference between Satan and God, and choose God. I'm sending you off to present my offer of sins forgiven, and a place in the family, inviting them into the company of those who begin real living by believing in me.'

**Think.**

- Take a moment to take in this whole scene. Watch it unfold. What does Saul see? What does he do? What does he hear? What does he say? What do you think was going through his mind at this moment of sudden revelation?
- How did the Lord first get your attention? Was it something dramatic or much more subtle? What call have you heard upon your life?

**Pray.**

Lord, intercept me when I find my self running headstrong along old ruts. Shine in my darkness, light up my night.

**Live.** Identify a "Saul" in your life and pray for him today.

## 4) Public Sinner Number One

**Read.** Acts 9:10-14 NLT

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name."

**Think.**

- What mission does Jesus give to Ananias? How does he communicate it? What vision had he already given to blinded Saul?
- How does Ananias respond to Jesus' orders? How would you have responded?
- Who has been an Ananias in your life — someone who risked helping you in your spiritual journey?
- Is there anyone around you know to whom you are afraid to reach out? What can help you overcome that fear?

**Pray.**

Lord, thank you for bearing with me when I am dragging my feet, or even when I want to run away from where you are calling me. Let your perfect love drive out my fear and free me to risk reaching out to someone who needs your touch.

**Live.**

Risk reaching out to someone "out of bounds" today.

## 3) He opened his eyes and was blind

**Read.** Acts 9:7-9 NLT

The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

**Read.** 1 Timothy 1:12-14 Message

I'm so grateful to Christ Jesus for making me adequate to do this work. He went out on a limb, you know, in trusting me with this ministry. The only credentials I brought to it were invective and witch hunts and arrogance. But I was treated mercifully because I didn't know what I was doing—didn't know Who I was doing it against! Grace mixed with faith and love poured over me and into me. And all because of Jesus.

**Think.**

- Describe the roadside scene from the viewpoint of Saul's companions? What do they see? What do they hear? What do they do?
- Which of the following do you think best describes Saul's state during his three days of blindness: a. humbled; b. terrified; c. confused; d. remorseful; e. angry; f. repentant or \_\_\_\_\_
- Later in life, how did Paul account for God's intervention in and calling upon his life?

**Pray.**

Lord Jesus, thank you for going out on a limb and trusting me with new life and kingdom ministry, when the only credentials I had were brokenness and failure. Help me to turn around and extend the same grace to someone else.

**Live.**

Meditate on 1 Timothy 1:15-16 today.

## 5) Scales fell from his eyes

**Read.** Acts 9:15-19 NLT

But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

**Think.**

- What is the most significant thing that happened when Ananias came to see Saul?
- If you could compare your conversion experience to Saul's, where would you say you are right now:
  - a. still on the road to Damascus without a clue
  - b. blinded and confused
  - c. waiting for someone to help me take the next step
  - d. baptized, seeing, eating and ready to go
  - e. or \_\_\_\_\_
- Where in your outlook on life do you sense some "scales" still need to fall from your eyes?

**Pray.**

Lord, give me the empowering, healing touch of Ananias, the renewed sight of Saul, and fresh hunger for you and your kingdom.

**Live.**

Ask the Lord for a fresh revelation of his call on your life.