

Acts chapter 9 is about radical transformation—first in one man (Saul) and then in two towns (Lydda and Joppa). It shows how God prepares an instrument over a lifetime, confronts him in a moment, and then uses him in ways no one expected. It also shows that God’s power did not end with the apostles; He still heals, restores, and raises up His people for His purposes.

1. How God Prepared and Apprehended Saul (Acts 9:1–9)

Long before the road to Damascus, God was already shaping Saul.

He was born in Tarsus, a major center of Greek culture. Greek (Hellenistic) influence emphasized art, philosophy, and rhetoric. At the same time, Saul’s parents were strict Hebrews, Pharisees devoted to the Law. As a boy, Saul grew up around Greek culture, but at about fourteen he was taken to Jerusalem and trained under Gamaliel, one of the most respected Pharisee teachers of that day (Acts 22:3).

So Saul became:

- Deeply grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures
- Fluent in Greek culture and language
- A strict Pharisee “concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church” (Philippians 3:5–6)

In other words, God had been preparing him—though Saul did not realize it—for a unique role: to carry the good news of Jesus to both Jews and Greeks.

Saul’s rage and the way of Christ

After Stephen’s death, Saul was relentless:

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1–2)

The first believers were simply called “the Way,” because following Jesus was not just agreeing with doctrine; it was walking a new way of life.

As Saul neared Damascus, heaven intervened:

“Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’

And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’

Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’” (Acts 9:3–5)

Goads were sharp sticks used to prod oxen. The more an animal kicked, the more it hurt. Jesus was telling Saul, “You have been resisting what you know in your conscience. You are fighting the truth, and it is wounding you.”

Watching Stephen die, seeing his face shine, hearing him forgive his killers—these were spiritual goads pressing into Saul’s heart. The risen Lord had been dealing with him long before this moment.

Notice also how completely Jesus identifies with His people. Saul was arresting Christians, but Jesus asked, “Why are you persecuting Me?” To harm His disciples is to strike at Him. That is how closely Christ is joined to His church.

Saul’s response is simple and life-changing:

“Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6)

In one sentence he surrenders. Instead of telling God what he will do, he places himself under the Lord’s direction.

Jesus does not give him a full life plan. He gives him one clear step:

“Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (Acts 9:6)

The men with him hear a sound but do not understand the words. Saul opens his eyes but cannot see. He is led by the hand into Damascus and spends three days blind, not eating or drinking (Acts 9:8–9). God has shut out every distraction so Saul can think, pray, and face the truth.

Practical application

- God often prepares us long before He calls us. Your background, training, and experiences—even the painful and confusing ones—may be part of how God is shaping you for His purposes.
- When God puts “goads” in your life—conviction, uneasiness about sin, the memory of someone’s faithful witness—do not fight them. To resist His loving conviction only hurts you.
- The right response to the Lord is still: “What do You want me to do?” Not “Here is my plan, please bless it,” but “Here is my life; direct me.”

2. Ananias, a Chosen Vessel, and the Cost of Calling (Acts 9:10–19)

In Damascus there was a disciple (not an apostle, just an ordinary follower of Jesus) named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision:

“Ananias.”

“Here I am, Lord.” (Acts 9:10)

The Lord tells him:

“Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.” (Acts 9:11)

Ananias is understandably hesitant. He has heard of Saul’s reputation:

“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” (Acts 9:13–14)

But the Lord answers:

“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15–16)

Paul would later recognize that God’s hand had been on him even from his mother’s womb (Galatians 1:15). All his training was part of God’s preparation. Yet this calling would also involve suffering, not just honor.

Ananias obeys. He goes to the house, lays his hands on Saul, and says:

“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17)

“Brother Saul.” Ananias accepts him immediately as family in Christ. That is grace.

Something like scales falls from Saul’s eyes, he regains sight, rises, is baptized in water, and eats to regain strength (Acts 9:18–19).

Practical application

- God often uses “ordinary” disciples in extraordinary ways. Ananias is never mentioned again in Scripture, yet he was used to restore Paul’s sight and pray for his filling with the Holy Spirit. Do not underestimate how God might use you.
- God’s call includes both privilege and pain. To follow Christ is to share in His life, His joy, and also His sufferings. The Lord does not hide that; He prepares us for it.
- When someone comes to faith who has a dark or hostile past, will we treat them with suspicion or with grace? Ananias calls him “Brother Saul.” We should be eager to receive repentant sinners as family.

3. Preparation, Preaching, and Pressure (Acts 9:20–31)

As soon as Saul regains strength, he begins to preach:

“Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20)

He takes the Scriptures he already knew so well and, now that he has met the risen Jesus, the pieces fall into place:

- The promised Child who would be called “Mighty God, Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6)
- The virgin-born Emmanuel, “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14)
- The suffering Servant of Isaiah 53

Jesus is that Son. Jesus is the Christ.

People are stunned:

“Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose...?” (Acts 9:21)

Luke then summarizes:

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” (Acts 9:22)

Between verses 21 and 22, there is a period we only learn about from Paul’s letter to the Galatians. After his conversion, he went away into Arabia for a time, then returned to Damascus (Galatians 1:15–18). For about three years he pulled back from public ministry to be taught by the Lord and to let the truth sink deep.

Only after that did he come to Jerusalem to meet Peter and James (Galatians 1:18–19; Acts 9:26–27).

Back in Damascus, his preaching stirs such hatred that the Jews plot to kill him. The gates are watched day and night, so the disciples lower him in a basket through an opening in the wall (Acts 9:23–25). Not a very glorious exit—but God is preserving His servant.

When he arrives in Jerusalem, the believers are afraid and do not believe he is a disciple (Acts 9:26). Then Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” takes Saul, brings him to the apostles, and tells them how Saul saw the Lord, heard His voice, and preached boldly in Damascus (Acts 9:27).

Saul then speaks boldly in Jerusalem, especially disputing with the Hellenistic Jews. Once again, they try to kill him (Acts 9:29), and the believers send him away to Caesarea and then to Tarsus—his hometown (Acts 9:30). He will stay in relative obscurity there for several years until Barnabas later brings him to Antioch (Acts 11:25–26).

Luke sums up this season:

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31)

Practical application

- **Preparation matters.** Even though Saul was brilliant and well-educated, he still needed time in “Arabia” to be grounded in the gospel. When God calls us, we should not rush past the season of preparation: learning Scripture, deepening in prayer, and letting God shape our character.
- **We must be careful about putting new believers in the spotlight too quickly.** Especially if someone is famous or gifted, there is a temptation to push them forward. But without roots in the Word and a humble walk with God, that can lead to spiritual collapse.
- **We need Barnabas-like believers.** Barnabas bridges the gap between a suspicious church and a genuinely changed man. God still calls people to come alongside others, vouch for them wisely, and help them find their place in the body of Christ.

4. Peter in Lydda and Joppa: The Lord Still Heals and Restores (Acts 9:32–43)

The narrative now turns back to Peter. As he travels to visit believers in various towns, he comes to Lydda (modern Lod, near today's main Israeli airport):

“There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.” (Acts 9:33)

Peter speaks a simple, clear word:

“Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.”
“Then he arose immediately.” (Acts 9:34)

The focus is not on Peter's power but on Jesus' present work. The result?

“So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” (Acts 9:35)

The miracle opened the door for many to believe.

Nearby in Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha (Dorcas), “full of good works and charitable deeds” (Acts 9:36). She became sick and died. The believers washed her body and laid her in an upper room. Hearing that Peter was in Lydda, they sent for him urgently (Acts 9:37–38).

When Peter arrives, the widows stand around weeping, showing the tunics and garments Tabitha had made. It is a moving scene of love and loss (Acts 9:39).

Then Peter sends them all out, kneels down, and prays. Turning to the body, he says:

“Tabitha, arise.” (Acts 9:40)

She opens her eyes, sees Peter, sits up, and he helps her to her feet. He calls the saints and widows and presents her alive (Acts 9:40–41).

News of this spreads through all Joppa, and many believe in the Lord (Acts 9:42). Peter stays in Joppa with Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:43), right on the edge of Jewish ceremonial comfort, and there he will soon receive a vision that opens the door of the gospel to the Gentiles in chapter 10.

A balanced view of miraculous power

Acts 9 reminds us:

- Jesus still has power to heal, raise, and transform.
- He sometimes leads His servants to speak bold words of faith (“Jesus the Christ heals you,” “Tabitha, arise”), after prayer and in step with His will.
- The purpose of miracles is to glorify God and lead people to faith, not to exalt human personalities.

We should avoid two extremes:

- Unbelief and cynicism: acting as if God does not do powerful works anymore.

- Spiritual showmanship: treating power as a tool to control life, demand riches, or build our own name.

The greatest miracle is still a transformed life—someone turned from sin to Jesus, forgiven by His blood shed on the cross and given new life because He rose from the dead.

A Challenge for Believers

Acts 9 calls followers of Jesus to examine our hearts and response:

1. **Are you surrendered like Saul?**
Have you truly said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Or are you still negotiating, holding back certain areas of life from His rule?
2. **Are you available like Ananias and Barnabas?**
Are you willing to visit the “dangerous” person God tells you to love? Are you ready to be an encourager who brings others into fellowship and helps them find their place?
3. **Are you willing to prepare, not just perform?**
Are you digging deep foundations in God’s Word and prayer, or are you in a hurry to be seen and used? God is not in a rush; He wants depth, not just speed.
4. **Do you still believe God can work powerfully?**
Not in a sensational way that glorifies people, but in a real way that glorifies Christ—healing hearts, restoring bodies, and raising the spiritually dead to new life.

An Invitation to Those Who Do Not Yet Know Christ

You might feel more like Saul before Damascus than Peter or Ananias:

- Fighting against God in your heart
- Resisting your conscience
- Carrying guilt over your past
- Or simply empty, religious but not truly reconciled to God

Jesus, who spoke to Saul, is alive today. He shed His blood on the cross for your sins. He bore your guilt and shame. On the third day God raised Him from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Scripture says:

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13)

You do not need to fix yourself first. You need to turn to Him, trust Him, and let Him begin His work in you.

If your heart is stirred and you want to turn to Christ, you can call on Him right now. Your own words are best, but you might pray something like this from your heart:

“Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner and that I have been going my own way. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins, shedding Your blood for me, and that You rose again from the dead. I believe that You are the Son of God, my only Savior and Lord. I turn from my sin and ask You to forgive me. Please come into my life, make me new, and teach me to follow You. I give myself to You.”

If you truly turn to Him, He will not cast you out. Just as He met Saul on the Damascus road, He will meet you where you are, forgive you, and begin to transform your life—step by step, one act of obedience at a time.