

ACTS: POWERED FOR PURPOSE

Week 5 • Deeper Study Guide

Acts 9:1–31 | "The God Who Interrupts"

THE ACTS PROGRESSION — WHERE WE ARE

Acts 9 is the turning point of the entire book. Luke has been showing us the Spirit-empowered Church expanding outward — now he shows us the King reaching inward to transform His greatest enemy into His greatest missionary.

- **Week 2** Acts 2 — Power: the Spirit fills ordinary people
- **Week 3** Acts 3–4 — Presence & Boldness: the Church carries God into the world
- **Week 4** Acts 5–7 — Faithfulness: the Spirit empowers believers to finish well
- **Week 5** Acts 9 — Sovereignty: the risen King is still directing history, pursuing enemies, and recreating people

Big Idea: The risen King is still conquering the world — but He conquers through grace, new creation, and surrendered people.

THE DEEPER THEOLOGICAL QUESTION

Acts 9 opens with Saul breathing out murderous threats — and the language is deliberate. Genesis says God breathed life. Saul breathes death. Everything about him has inverted the design of God. And yet Jesus rides out to meet him on the Damascus Road — not with judgment but with grace.

The conversion of Saul is not simply a dramatic personal story. It is a theological statement about the nature of the risen King. Jesus is not reacting to history — He is directing it. Saul thinks he is going to Damascus to arrest Christians. Jesus knows Saul is going to Damascus to become one.

But the deeper question Acts 9 presses is this: What kind of God pursues His enemies? And what does it mean that salvation is not self-improvement but new creation — that Jesus doesn't repair the old Saul but buries him and raises Paul?

THREE THEOLOGICAL THREADS IN ACTS 9

Thread 1 — The Pursuing King: Jesus identifies Himself as the one being persecuted: "Why are you persecuting Me?" — not "My followers" or "My Church." Christ is so completely united with His people that to wound the Body is to wound the Head. This is not metaphor. This is identity.

Thread 2 — New Creation, Not Reformation: Saul spends three days blind, fasting, in darkness. Luke is echoing the three-day pattern woven throughout Scripture (Jonah, Jesus). This is not a waiting period — it is a burial. The Damascus Road is where Saul dies and Paul is born. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17) is not abstract theology — it is Paul's autobiography.

Thread 3 — The Kingdom Through the Yielded: Jesus could have healed Saul Himself. Instead He sends Ananias — an ordinary, frightened disciple. Why? Because He is not only saving Saul. He is showing Saul how the Kingdom works. It moves through surrendered people, not spectacular people. And the first word Ananias speaks to the Church's greatest persecutor is "Brother." Grace gives you family before you've earned a reputation.

SCRIPTURE THREAD

Read these in sequence — watch the new creation theme build:

- Genesis 1:1–3 — "Let there be light" — the first creation
- Genesis 2:7 — God breathes life; compare Saul breathing death
- Proverbs 16:9 — "A man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps"
- Jonah 1:17–2:10 — Three days: death, burial, new beginning
- Acts 9:1–19 — The Damascus Road encounter in full
- 2 Corinthians 4:6 — Paul remembers Damascus: God spoke light into darkness
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 — "If anyone is in Christ, new creation"
- Romans 5:8 — "While we were still sinners" — Paul lived this before he wrote it

Don't miss:

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul writes: "God, who said 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts." He isn't using a sermon illustration. He is remembering the Damascus Road. The God of Genesis 1 is the same God who interrupted Saul. Creation and new creation have the same Author.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Saul was sincerely devoted and sincerely wrong. Have you ever been certain you were serving God — only to discover later that God was actually pursuing you in that season? What does that reveal about how sovereignty works?
- Jesus asks "Why are you persecuting Me?" — not "My Church." What does the intimacy of that question tell you about how Jesus feels about what happens to His people? How does that change the way you think about your own suffering?
- The world offers self-improvement. The gospel offers new creation. Where in your life are you still asking God to improve the old version of you — rather than surrendering to what He wants to build from scratch?
- Ananias was afraid — and obeyed anyway. He called Saul "Brother" before Saul had done anything to deserve it. Is there someone in your life God is asking you to extend that kind of grace to? What is the cost?
- Saul's two questions on the road were: "Who are You, Lord?" and "What do You want me to do?" Which of those questions is harder for you to ask right now — and why?

GOING DEEPER: NEW CREATION THEOLOGY

One of the most important theological moves in Acts 9 is what Luke doesn't say. He never says Jesus repaired Saul or redirected him. The language throughout is burial and resurrection. Three days of darkness. Scales falling from eyes. A new name eventually emerging. This is not renovation — it is re-genesis.

- Forgiveness removes guilt — new creation restores purpose
- Forgiveness wipes away the past — new creation gives you a future
- Forgiveness changes your standing before God — new creation changes your very nature

The key question: What if God isn't punishing you by dismantling your plans — what if He's preparing you? God cannot resurrect what we refuse to bury. Sometimes He has to let the old identity die before He can reveal the new one.

For further study: Read 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 and 5:14–21 back to back. These are Paul looking back on Damascus. Notice how thoroughly the new creation framework shapes his entire understanding of ministry.

RESOURCES FOR DEEPER STUDY

BOOKS

- Paul: A Biography — N.T. Wright | The most readable scholarly treatment of Paul's life, beginning with Damascus. Brings Acts 9 to life with historical depth.
- The Prodigal God — Timothy Keller | Explores the pursuing nature of God that Acts 9 embodies — the Father who runs toward the rebel, not away.
- New Creation Eschatology and the Land — various AG scholars | Theologically grounds the new creation theme that runs from Genesis through Paul's letters.
- Acts: An Exegetical Commentary (Vol. 2) — Craig Keener | Thorough treatment of Acts 9 including the historical background of Saul's Damascus commission and Ananias's role.
- Surprised by Grace — Tullian Tchividjian | Uses the story of Jonah (another three-day burial and resurrection) to unpack the relentless pursuit of God — a perfect companion to Acts 9.

PODCASTS & SERMONS

- "Acts 9" — The Bible Project podcast | Traces the theological significance of Saul's conversion as the turning point of the whole book, and its connection to new creation language.
- "The Damascus Road" — Sermon by Jentezen Franklin (YouTube) | Passionate treatment of God's pursuit of Saul and what it means for people who feel too far gone.
- "New Creation" — The Bible Project YouTube series | Essential background for understanding why Paul's "new creation" language in 2 Corinthians is autobiographical, not abstract.
- "God Who Pursues" — Christine Caine / Propel Women (YouTube) | Addresses the pursuing nature of God that drives Acts 9 — excellent for personal encouragement and evangelism motivation.
- "When God Interrupts" — Steven Furtick / Elevation Church (YouTube) | Directly addresses the experience of divine interruption and what surrender looks like in the middle of it.

ARTICLES & ONLINE RESOURCES

- "The Conversion of Paul" — Assemblies of God Enrichment Journal (ag.org) | AG-aligned treatment of Acts 9 and its implications for evangelism and the Spirit-empowered life.
- "What Is New Creation in the Bible?" — The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org) | Clear theological overview of the new creation theme from Genesis through Paul.
- "Who Was Ananias in the Bible?" — Christianity.com | Short, accessible overview of the often-overlooked man whose obedience changed the history of the Church.
- "The Three Days of Saul" — Bible Study Tools (biblestudytools.com) | Explores the three-day pattern in Scripture and its significance in Acts 9.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Acts 9 ends with two questions. This week, sit with both of them:

- Read Acts 9:1–31 in full, then read 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 and 5:14–21. Let Paul interpret his own story. Notice what the Damascus Road produced in him decades later.
- Memorize Acts 9:6: "What do You want me to do, Lord?" Pray it every morning this week — not as a formula but as a genuine posture of surrender. Journal what you sense.
- Identify one person in your life who seems like a "Saul" — someone you've written off or someone who seems far from God. Begin praying for a Damascus Road moment for them this week.
- Ask yourself honestly: Is there anything in your life that God is trying to bury — an identity, a plan, a version of yourself — that you keep trying to resurrect? Name it. Surrender it.

"God cannot resurrect what we refuse to bury."