

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 4: The Gospel At Work Lesson 44: Saul's Conversion and Mission



Session Snapshot

Narrative Passage: Acts 9:1-19

Gospel Focus: Ephesians 2:4-10

Student Takeaways:

- Students will understand that Paul was saved by Christ, moving from being an enemy of the Church to one of its most powerful advocates.
- Students will realize that God saved each of them in order that they may serve Him and His Kingdom.
- Students will identify some real, practical opportunities to do the Lord's work in their particular contexts.



Overview

As you progress through your look at the big-picture story of Scripture, this week you're covering one of the "biggies." This is one of those moments in the Bible that rocked the world, even though in this week's case, it might not have seemed like it at first. As you study Saul's conversion, your students will be reminded of how amazing grace truly is. God can save anyone! Just as Paul was saved for a purpose, so are we. This lesson will help your students unpack this truth and apply it to their lives.



Teacher Prep Video

Each *Thread* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your *Thread* lesson 44 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 44, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.



Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you'll be studying.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson we encourage teachers to help students know who wrote a particular book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **Why teach context?** Grasping the big-picture view of God's story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they're studying.

Acts

Author: Acts has long been held to be a letter from Luke, a Gentile physician, to a man named Theophilus, possibly a benefactor of some sort.

Time frame: There is some debate over when Acts was written. The suggested dates are between 70 AD and 80 AD.

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Purpose: The Book of Acts is a second letter to Theophilus that tells the story of the early Church following Jesus' resurrection. The book begins with Jesus' ascension and His command of His followers to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The rest of the book traces this journey as the early church leaders proclaim the Gospel and plant churches.

Ephesians

Author: The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians and Titus. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

Time frame: Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.

Purpose: Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.



Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- An introductory activity called Getting Started designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- A section entitled The Story featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- A special emphasis entitled The Thread where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- An application-focused segment called Wrapping Up helping teenagers ask the question, "How am I impacted by what I learned today"?

Getting Started

- **Goal:** To get the students to start thinking about the concept of switching sides and receiving a new mission.
- **Set-Up:** If you have the capability to show pictures on a screen it would be helpful.

BEGIN by putting these pictures on a screen:

1. Picture representing Judas (You can find one here: http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-4Myq_6QYXgk/VPpmG-cp65KI/AAAAAAAAAJ0/oie1XAmMM0k/s1600/judas.jpg)
2. A picture of Peter Pettigrew (Like this one: http://www.cinemablend.com/images/news/21819/10_Big_

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- Differences_Between_The_Harry_Potter_And_The_Deathly_Hallows_Book_And_Movie_1290181424.jpg)
3. A picture of LeBron James: (Similar to this one: <https://nbcprobasketballtalk.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/cd0ymzcznguwzdbhnduynddiytjhm2yyzthlmtjjotqwyynptu3md-e3yzgwydim2q2ngy1ogq5ytbkytg3zjq1otcz.jpeg>)

THEN, ask something like:

- **What do Judas Iscariot, Peter Pettigrew from Harry Potter, and LeBron James have in common?**
 - o Answer: At some point in their lives, people considered them to be traitors.
- **What did they do to get that label? What do you think of when you hear the word “traitor”?**
 - o Answer: They switched sides. Judas turned his back on Jesus, Peter Pettigrew turned his back on Harry, and LeBron left Cleveland for Miami (though now that he is back it's easy to forget how “hated” he was because of it).
- **Can you remember any other famous traitors? Can you remember what they did that got them that label?**
 - o Answers here will vary.
- **So, what is at the heart of being a traitor? Why do we hate the idea of someone being a traitor so much?**
 - o Answer: Betrayal is at the heart of being a traitor. It's when a person turns their back on a friend, their team, or their country in order to help or be a part of something else. We innately value loyalty, so when someone turns his or her back on someone or something, we naturally don't like it.

Transition to The Story by saying something like:

- **Today we're going to look at a scenario where someone completely turns their back on a group he had been a loyal part of for a long time. He was a man on a mission. And all of a sudden he jumped ship, switched sides, and his mission completely changed. Some saw him as a traitor. However, as we'll see, it was one of the greatest switches of all time.**

Transition to The Story.

The Story

- **Goal:** For students to understand that Paul was saved by Christ, moving from being an enemy of the Church to one of its most powerful advocates.
- **Setup:** None.

FIRST explain to the students that none of the traitors you've talked about so far compares to the “switch” we're going to talk about today. It's truly one of the most amazing shifts in all of history. If you'd like, use the “Connecting The Dots” section below to do a little review and/or fill in the gaps from your last lesson and this one.

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Connecting The Dots

As you teach The Thread, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it as a way to review and/or to connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- In Acts 6 Stephen was performing wonders and signs and was eventually seized and taken before the council and accused of blasphemy.
- In chapter 7 Stephen gave a speech in front of the council that outlined God's work through the people of Israel from Abraham to Moses.
- At the end of chapter 7 Stephen was stoned and the beginning of Acts 8:1 says, "And Saul approved his execution."

Begin by having the students open their Bibles to Acts 9. While they're finding it, you can use the Bible Background to explain some of the context surrounding the book of Acts to the students. Then read or have a student read Acts 9:1-2. Ask:

- **So, what do you think of Saul? What kind of guy does he seem like?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **If you were a Christian during this time, how would you feel about Saul? What would you think if you knew he was heading toward your town?**
 - o Answers will vary, but likely the students will say that they would be afraid of him and wouldn't want to be anywhere close to him.
- **You've likely never met anyone as intense and violent as Saul was toward Christians. But think of people you have known that are full of hatred. Do you give them much of a chance to change? Why or why not?**
 - o Answers here will vary.

NEXT, read or have a student read Acts 9:3-9. Ask:

- **OK, so this is pretty intense. Have you ever seen a bully get put in his place? They usually don't have much to say. What do you think is going through Saul's mind right now?**
 - o Answers here will vary. But Saul's head had to be spinning a bit. The one that he'd been persecuting for so long just confronted him. He probably was wondering if he was about to get some divine punishment for all he had done.
- **What stood out to you in these verses?**
 - o Answers here will vary, but one cool point is that Saul uses the word "Lord." Although he had been persecuting Christians for their faith in Jesus, he was quickly made aware of whom he was in the presence of. Another amazing point is that Jesus didn't harp on all that Saul had done wrong. He didn't chew him out or punish him; He simply revealed himself to Saul and gave him instructions about what to do next.

THEN, read or have a student read Acts 9:10-16. Ask:

- **Put yourself in Ananias' shoes. What in the world would be going through your mind at the moment?**
 - o Answers will vary, but most people are going to be thinking, "Hold up, you want me to do what with who?"

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- **Ananias' response seems pretty reasonable, right? Why do you think God is doing this? What do you think His plan is?**
 - o Answers here will vary.
- **Jesus tells Ananias that Saul is His "chosen instrument." Does Saul seem like a weird choice to you? Why or why not?**
 - o Answers here could vary. If we're being honest with ourselves, it probably does seem like a strange choice to most of us. We don't usually think people can change. We often think the only people God can use are the ones that have the nice, neat, clean-cut life. But the Bible tells us a different story. God repeatedly uses outcasts, screw-ups, and people that make big mistakes to accomplish His purposes (think Moses, Rahab, David, etc.).
- **Why do you think God chooses to use people like Saul?**
 - o Answer: God often works through unlikely vessels. He's letting us know that His ways aren't our ways. It also demonstrates His incredible power and grace. He's powerful enough to mighty things in people's lives and use unlikely sources to accomplish His purposes. He's also incredibly gracious and doesn't write people off because of their past mistakes. His grace can overcome anything any of us have ever done.
- **What about Saul's personality and this incredible event make Saul a good choice to take the Gospel to the Gentiles?**
 - o Answer: Saul doesn't lack for energy and zealotry. He also experienced one of the most incredible conversion experiences ever recorded. So, it's safe to assume that Saul is going to be passionate about spreading the good news of the Gospel.

Finish this passage by reading or having a student read Acts 9:17-19. Ask:

- **What's the significance of Saul regaining his sight when something like scales fell from his eyes?**
 - o Answer: This symbolized Saul once being spiritually blind, but now having his eyes and heart opened to who Jesus really is.

Transition to The Thread by explaining to the students that your going to look at another passage and see how our spiritual experience relates to what Saul experienced.

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Read or have a student read Ephesians 2:4-7. Ask something like:

- **What does this passage say about our spiritual state before Christ? Is this comparable to Saul's spiritual state before he met Jesus on the Road to Damascus?**
 - o Answer: Yes, Saul was dead in his sin. So were we. Regardless of whose sins were "worse" in the world's eyes, we were all equally desperate without a relationship with Jesus.
- **What does this passage say about God's response to our sin and separation from Him? Is this comparable to what Saul experienced?**
 - o Answer: It says that He loved us so much that He rescued us from death and saved us through

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grace. He rescued Saul in the same way He rescues everyone that puts their faith in Him, through salvation by grace.

- **So, is our conversion equally as miraculous and amazing as Saul's? Do you ever think that your salvation experience was boring?**
 - o Answer: Sometimes we may think our salvation experience was "boring" or not as amazing as someone else's. But the reality is that every person that comes to trust in Jesus is an amazing example of God's love and grace. Each conversion is an example of someone moving from death to life and that is something incredible and worthy of excitement!

FINALLY, read or have a student read Ephesians 2:8-10. Ask:

- **Why did God save us through grace rather than coming up with a way for us to earn it?**
 - o Answer: Part of the reason, according to verse 9, is so that we could never take any pride in our salvation. We can't boast about the fact that we're saved because we didn't have anything to do with our salvation. There's nothing for us to brag about; we have to brag about Jesus!
- **He didn't save us so we can just sit back and do whatever we feel like. Why did God have to save us in order for us to do "good works"?**
 - o Answer: We've already established that we were all dead in our sin apart from Jesus. Dead men can't do good works. So, God, in His infinite grace, saved us so that we could be a part of His work throughout the world.

If your students don't have any more questions, transition into the "Wrapping Up" section.

Wrapping Up

- **Goal:** For students to identify some real, practical opportunities to do the Lord's work in their particular contexts.
- **Set-Up:** Blank paper and pens for the students.

BEGIN, by having the students draw three circles on their page. Tell them to draw them big enough that they can write inside them a little bit. Ask them to take a moment and think of the three places they spend the most time. Examples would be school, home, practice, church, etc. Have them place each answer inside one of the circles. So, one circle may have "Home" written inside it, another may have "School" inside it, etc.

EXPLAIN to them that if these are the three places they spend the majority of their time, God has placed them there for a purpose. These three places are three of their spheres of influence.

NEXT, have them think about the people they come in contact with at each place. Have them write their answers in the circle. So, the "Home" circle may have "Parents" and "Brothers and Sisters." The "Practice" circle may have "Teammates" in it, or they can use individual's names if they want to.

THEN, explain to the students that these people are the people God has regularly placed in their lives for a reason. Next, under each circle have them list 2-3 things they can do in each of these contexts to be on mission to live out the Gospel.

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When they're done, you might want to see if any of them would be willing to share about one of the "spheres" on their list. Encourage them to keep their papers and look at them each day and pray over living those steps out in each context.

FINALLY, close the lesson by reminding them that if they've put their faith in Jesus, they've been moved from death to life and have been saved for a purpose. Their routine, and sometimes mundane life is a gift from God. It's where they have incredible opportunities to be like Saul, on mission to carry the Gospel to those around them.

Close your Bible study in prayer, perhaps including thanksgiving for what God has promised followers of Jesus about eternity.

- **If you've purchased the *Tracing The Thread* devotional journal, remind students that they'll be working through Week 44 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions, and to give memo-rizing this week's verse their best shot.**
- **If you'll be utilizing the digital devotions included in the *Thread* curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.**

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.