



john 15:4  
A B I D E in ME



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 13  
The week of January 17, 2016

**Good News for Rebels & Terrorists**

Acts 9:1-19

**THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT**

**Salvation by Grace** - We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German pastor and theologian who opposed Adolf Hitler when most of his colleagues would not. He was executed for taking part in a plot to assassinate Hitler. The following is an excerpt on the topic of Grace from Bonhoeffer's classic work, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. . . .

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. . . . In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. 'All for sin could not atone.' Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. . . .

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus. It comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

## This Week's Complementary Passage

### Romans 6:1-14

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

#### Marking Guide for Acts (not all words occur in the passage)

appointed

baptized

Caesar

enemy/demons/Satan

eternal life

fathers & children [in one color  
different from Moses]

Gentiles

gospel

grace

Holy Spirit

in the name of Jesus Christ

Jesus

Jews

Law (of Moses)

men of the council

Moses [in different color from  
fathers & children]

prayer

repent (repentance)

resurrection (raised up)

salvation

suffering

the Way

the promise of the Father

witnesses

word of God

#### STEP ONE . . .

**READING** what the passage says  
(*Read it at least three times*)  
Acts 9:1-19 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." <sup>17</sup> So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; <sup>19</sup> and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

## STEP TWO . . .

### OBSERVING how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **mark key words, phrases and movements:**

- Circle all of the words in this passage that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).
- Underline the significant verbs/action words in this passage.
- In Acts 9:1, highlight the phrase “Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”
- In Acts 9:2, underline the phrase “the Way.”
- In Acts 9:3, highlight the phrase “suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.”
- In Acts 9:4, highlight the phrase “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”
- In Acts 9:5, highlight the phrase “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”
- In Acts 9:10, highlight the phrase “Here I am, Lord.”
- Highlight Acts 9:15-16.
- In Acts 9:17, highlight the phrase “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
- In Acts 9:18, underline the word “immediately.”
- In Acts 9:18-19, highlight the phrase “something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.”

## STEP THREE . . .

**Ask the five “W” questions and the one “H” question:**

1. **WHO** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? And, to **whom** is it speaking?
2. **WHAT** is the subject of the passage? What does the passage say about the subject?
3. **WHEN** do or will the events occur? When did something happen to a particular person, people, or nation?
4. **WHERE** did or will this happen?
5. **WHY** is something said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen? Why at this time? Why this person?
6. **HOW** will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

## STEP FOUR . . .

### UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

*This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.*

#### Commentary on Acts 9:1-19

**9:1 - “Saul, still breathing threats and murder.”** This is literally “snorting.” In Acts 26:11, Paul says of himself, that he was furiously enraged at them. It’s possible that Saul may have killed some Christians himself.

**“The disciples of the Lord.”** The word ‘disciples’ means learners. It only appears in the Gospels and Acts. In the remainder of the New Testament, Christians are referred to as “saints.”

**9:2 - “Letters to the synagogues at Damascus.”** The Roman government had given limited authority to the Sanhedrin to conduct and control events in the synagogues or related to Jewish life in the Empire. Judaism was a recognized, legal religion of the Greco-Roman world. Apparently these were letters of extradition for the Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem in the face of the Jewish persecution.

**“The Way.”** This was the early designation for believers. It has an OT background, speaking of lifestyle faith (see Psalm 1:1; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 4:10-19). There is a possible allusion to this title in John 14:6.

**9:3 - “Damascus.”** This was an ancient city and capital of the Roman Province of Syria just north/northeast of Galilee. It was 150 miles from Jerusalem.

**“A light from heaven shone around him.”** This kind of light is associated with lightning in other New Testament passages. It is also possible that this light is theologically/physically related to the Shekinah glory of the Lord’s presence with Israel during the wilderness wandering period. The Hebrew concept of “glory” takes on an aspect of bright light from this historical event. This light would have showed Saul, a rabbi and Pharisee that this was the personal presence of God.

**9:4 - “He heard a voice.”** This heavenly voice was something Judaism was familiar with. It is known as a *bath kol*. This provided a means for the Jews to receive information and/or confirmation from God during the time after Malachi had written his prophecy. This form of revelation was necessary because there were no inspired prophets during this period.

**“Saul, Saul.”** The repeating of someone’s name was a way to show intensity in the Hebrew language.

**“Why are you persecuting me?”** This is extremely significant theologically because it shows the continuity and intimacy between Jesus and His church. Saul was persecuting the Church, but Jesus took it personally. From Acts 26:14, we know that Jesus spoke to Saul in Aramaic.

**9:5 - “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”** Saul is claiming to have seen the Glorified Christ. Saul will later understand this experience as an integral part of his call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

**9:7 - “The men who were traveling with him.”** This phrase possibly refers to the Temple police accompanying Saul; other Jewish zealots, probably from Hellenistic synagogues; or other theological students from Jerusalem.

**9:8 - “Although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing.”** Saul apparently had eye problems from this point on. There is irony here; Saul experiences a reorientation. He thought he could see (both physically and spiritually), but he found out that he was blind. After this encounter with Christ he was physically blinded for a period, but his spiritual eyes were wide open!

**9:9 - “And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”** Saul was fasting and praying. What a radical transformation must have been occurring in Saul’s mind (theology) and heart (desire)! He moved from a persecutor of Christians to proclaimer of the gospel!

**9:10 - “Ananias.”** This name means “The Lord is gracious.” Apparently Ananias was a believing Jew of good reputation, not a refugee.

**“Here I am, Lord.”** This is a Jewish idiom of availability (See Isaiah 6:8).

**9:13 - “I have heard from many about this man.”** Obviously Ananias had heard the bad reports about Saul’s vicious persecution of believers from the Jewish refugees from Jerusalem.

**“Your saints.”** The term is related to the Greek word “holy.” The OT background relates to something, some person, or some place set apart by God for a special task. The term “saints” is always plural. To be a Christian is to be a part of a family, a community. There are no loners in the faith.

**9:14 - “The chief priests.”** According to the Old Testament, the high priesthood was for life and was passed on to a man’s son. However, during the Roman period this position was purchased from the Roman officials.

**9:15 - “Go.”** This verb is a command and Jesus authoritatively sent the reluctant Ananias to Saul.

**“For he is a chosen instrument of mine.”** God graciously chose Saul. It is very interesting that Saul’s conversion does not fit neatly into our modern model of voluntary, volitional conversion. Saul was dramatically drafted into Christ’s service!

**9:16 - “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”** Suffering is not the exception, but the norm for Christians in a fallen world. There is a theological relationship between the sufferings of Christ and the sufferings of His followers in this fallen realm. Namely, if the world rejected Jesus Christ, the world will also reject His followers.

9:17 - "Brother Saul." By addressing Saul in this manner, Ananias models the obedience and love that should mark all followers of Jesus Christ.

9:18 - "Something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight." This is a technical medical term for the flaking of skin from a wound which Luke uses to describe what happened to Saul's eyes in this moment of healing.

"He rose and was baptized." In the New Testament, baptism was an act of obedience to Jesus' example and command. It marked a change of ownership and allegiance. Presumably Ananias baptized Saul.

## STEP FIVE . . .

### SUMMARIZING the message

In Acts 9 we come to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the relentless terrorist and persecutor of Christians. There is no more powerful and revealing story of the love and grace of God than His merciful apprehension of this young zealot. It is so typical of God that He pursues people until He captures their rebellious will and changes the direction of their lives.

Saul was a man on mission. He was breathing out threats like a terrorizing beast. He was possessed by a bloody zeal to eliminate the sect of the Nazarene. He was engulfed in an atmosphere of hate and violence. Saul was a complicated man, maybe prompted by a disturbed conscience. It seems he could not forget the death of Stephen. The death of Stephen, and the way he died, enraged Saul and propelled his terrible pursuit of those belonging to the way. Early Christians lived a different way of life because they believed in the One who is the Way.

It is interesting that God apprehends Saul, the man who would take the gospel to the Gentiles, outside of Israel. As Saul approached Damascus, a light from heaven flashed about him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" He replied, "Who are you, Lord?" And the voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." The story of Saul's conversion has been broadly scrutinized over the years. One of the earliest attempts to explain it away was that he suffered an epileptic attack. When Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great English preacher, first heard that explanation he responded, "O blessed epilepsy! Would that every man in London could have epilepsy like that!" Others have suggested that Saul was hit by a stroke of lightning or experienced a nervous breakdown.

The Apostle Paul was completely consistent throughout his life about what happened. He saw Jesus. This was not a lightning stroke or an epileptic seizure. This was an appearance of Jesus Christ to this zealous Pharisee. The first words that Jesus spoke to Saul of Tarsus are significant, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Why? What was it that was driving Saul? The answer to that question not only changed his life but history.

**The first thing Saul experienced when he met Jesus was the implications of His Lordship.** Jesus tells him what to do. He was told to go into the city. Now he would no longer be giving the orders. This was his great reversal. He is beginning to understand what it means to be a Christian. A gospel conversion is a reversal of thinking that you can run your own life. He would no longer be directing people and sending them where he wanted them to go. He would now be told what to do. Saul was led by hand into the city of Damascus where for three days and nights he neither ate nor drank, while the image imbedded unforgettably in his heart did not fade.

A gospel conversion is a reversal of thinking that you can run your own life.

From this point on, we watch as God prepares Saul for his new calling. The Lord described him as a chosen instrument. Saul is told four things about his future. *First of all, he was being sent to the Gentiles. Secondly, he would appear before kings.* He would speak about Jesus before those in positions of authority and influence. In Acts Paul appears before governors, procurators, kings, and finally the emperor himself. *Thirdly, he was to be a minister to the people of Israel.* He always wanted to minister primarily to his kinsmen. Over the years, he had a great impact on his own nation but he was primarily the Apostle to the Gentiles. *Fourthly, the Lord revealed how he was to make his impact.* He was called to suffer. He would later write to the Philippians and tell them that they were called not only to believe in Jesus but also to suffer for Him. He was called to enter into the sufferings of Jesus. When we are called to follow Jesus, we are called to suffer. That is a part of the Christian life.

Ananias entered the house where Saul was staying and laying his hands on him **he was filled with the Holy Spirit.** There was a quiet infilling of the Holy Spirit who came to dwell within him and fill his life and show him how to suffer and love for Jesus. His vision was restored as scales fell from his eyes. He now saw everything differently.

When we are called to follow Jesus, we are called to suffer. That is a part of the Christian life.

**He was also baptized.** He identified himself with those who called themselves followers of the Way. The point of this great story is that it is such great news for rebels. Saul is Exhibit A that we can be changed when we meet the One who can forgive us for the mistakes of our past and fill us with a new purpose for the future.

**STEP SIX . . .**

**EXPLORING** the passage through discussion

1. Why was Saul's conversion one of the most important historical events in the past 2000 years?
2. What were Saul's reasons for arresting the followers of Jesus?
3. How do you think Saul was affected by the stoning of Stephen?
4. What did Jesus compare persecuting Christians to? How does this apply to you?
5. What does Saul's conversion tell you about God's grace and mercy? How do we communicate God's mercy to people who have never experienced it?
6. What life-changing principle did Saul first recognize on the Damascus Road?
7. How does Saul's zeal in persecuting Christians compare with his zeal for Jesus following his conversion?
8. Paul was the perfect person to take the gospel to the Gentiles and to the west? How is God using you the way he made you?
9. How does Saul's conversion give you the confidence in God's control over the advance of the gospel, as well as courage to be sent witnesses for Him?





## THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

### 10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

#### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

#### **The Godhead** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### **The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ** *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

#### **The Sufficient Atonement of Christ** *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

#### **The Resurrection and Return of Christ** *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

#### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

#### **The Ministry of the Holy Spirit** *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

#### **Unity in Christ** *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Eternity** *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

#### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

### 10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

#### **Undiluted Worship** *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

#### **Constant Abiding** *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

#### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

#### **Desperate Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

#### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

#### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

#### **Total Forgiveness** *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

#### **Tangible Compassion** *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

#### **Generous Giving** *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

#### **God Space** *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

### **Love - a sincere affection for others** *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

### **Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances** *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

### **Peace - an abiding sense of harmony** *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

### **Patience - a willingness to stick with things** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

### **Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart** *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

### **Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly** *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty** *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

### **Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness** *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

### **Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely**

*Titus 2:11-13*

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

### **Hope - a certainty of what is to come** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.



**# OT in 52**  
(52 weeks through the Old Testament)

**OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE READING IN A YEAR**

Monday, January 18 thru Saturday, January 23  
Genesis 36-37, 38-40, 41, 42-43, 44-45, 46-48

Loudonville Community Church  
374 Loudon Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

[www.lcchurch.org](http://www.lcchurch.org)