



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 14
The week of January 24, 2016

God's Training Program
Acts 9:15-31

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

Spiritual Gifts - We believe that disciples of Jesus Christ must seek to know and use their spiritual gifts in order to accomplish God's purposes.

John Bunyan (1628-1688) is most well known for his book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As a young man, Bunyan worked as a poor tinker near Bedford in England. In 1660, Bunyan was imprisoned in the Bedford jail for twelve years on the charge of preaching without a license. While in prison, Bunyan wrote an autobiographical account of his conversion and call to ministry, which is entitled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. In the following excerpt from this book, Bunyan describes his discernment and exercise of his spiritual gift for preaching God's Word:

"Some of the saints who had good judgment and holiness of life seemed to feel that God had counted me worthy to understand the blessed Word and that he had given me some measure of ability to express helpfully to others what I saw in it. . . . At first this seemed to be an impossible thing for me to do, but they kept at it. I finally consented and spoke twice at small meetings of Christians only, but with much weakness and infirmity. So I tested my gift among them and it seemed as I spoke that they were being given a blessing. Afterward many told me, in sight of the great God, that they were helped and comforted. They gave thanks to the Father of mercies for this gift he had given to me."

"I could not rest unless I was exercising this gift of preaching, and I was pressed forward into it. I began to see that the Holy Spirit never intends that people who had gifts and abilities should bury them in the earth, but rather, he commanded and stirred up such people to the exercise of their gift and sent out to work those who were able and ready. And so, although I was the most unworthy of all saints, I set upon this work. Though trembling, I used my gift to preach the blessed gospel, in proportion to my faith, as God showed me in the holy Word of truth."

"At first I could hardly believe that God would speak through me to the heart of anyone, and I still counted myself unworthy. Yet those who were quickened through my preaching loved me and had respect for me. . . . And when I saw that they were beginning to live differently, and that their hearts were eagerly pressing after knowledge of Christ and rejoicing that God sent me to them, then I began to conclude that God had blessed his work through me."

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal' (I Cor. 13:1, KJV). Though a tinkling cymbal is a musical instrument that can make a heart-inflaming melody, the cymbal does not contain life; though it can make wonderful music, it can be crushed and thrown away. So are all those who have gifts but do not have saving grace."

"I perceived that although gifts are good to accomplish the task they are designed for – the edification of others – yet they are empty and without power to save the soul unless God is using them. And having gifts is no sign of a person's relationship to God. This also made me see that gifts are dangerous things, not in themselves, but because of those evils of pride and vainglory that attend them. . . . Gifts are desirable, but great grace and small gifts are better than great gifts and no grace. The Bible does not say that the Lord gives gifts and glory, but that he gives grace and glory. Blessed is everyone to whom the Lord gives true grace, for that is a certain forerunner of glory."

Not everyone has the gift of preaching as John Bunyan did, but everyone has been given some spiritual gift. It is the responsibility of every disciple of Jesus Christ to seek to discern the gifts given to them and to ask God for the grace and the opportunity to use their spiritual gifts for God's glory!

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This Week's Complementary Passage

I Timothy 4:9-16 (ESV)

⁹The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. ¹¹Command and teach these things. ¹²Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

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

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STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says
(Read it at least three times)
Acts 9:15-31 (ESV)

¹⁵But 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. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷So 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." ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

²³When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. ³⁰And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

STEP FOUR . . .

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

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

Commentary on Acts 9:15-31

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 Paul’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.

9:20 - “**Immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues.**” What an ironic statement regarding Saul! He came earlier with a letter from the High Priests in Jerusalem to the synagogues in Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus and now he came to the same synagogues preaching Jesus as the Messiah.

“**He is the Son of God.**” This is the only use of the title “Son of God” in the book of Acts (except for the quote of Ps. 2:7 in Acts 13:33).

9:21 - “**Made havoc.**” This is a rare and intense word meaning to ravage, lay waste to, or totally destroy. Saul had been notoriously known as a vicious persecutor of Christians!

9:22 - “**Confounded.**” The Jews could not explain Saul’s conversion or his powerful preaching of Jesus as the promised Old Testament Messiah.

“**Proving.**” This word means to conclude and by extension, to prove. Saul’s method was much like Stephen’s. They both used Old Testament passages and their fulfillment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth to prove that He was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

“**Jesus was the Christ.**” This is a way of referring to the Messiah. Saul was asserting with power and conviction that Jesus of Nazareth, killed in Jerusalem, was indeed God’s Son, the Messiah. If this was true, it changed everything for Jews (and Gentiles)! They had misunderstood and rejected Him. They had missed God’s gift and remained in spiritual darkness and need.

9:23 - “**When many days had passed.**” We read Paul’s personal account found in Galatians 1:15-24, which states that he spent a long period of time in Arabia. In this context Arabia refers to the Nabataean kingdom just southeast of Damascus.

9:26 - “**When he had come to Jerusalem.**” This verse demonstrates the level of skepticism in which the Jerusalem believers held their former persecutor.

9:27 - “**Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them.**” Barnabas was previously mentioned in Acts 4:36 and he later became Paul’s first missionary companion. Barnabas knew and shared Saul’s testimony, which opened the door for his acceptance among the disciples.

9:30 - “**Caesarea.**” This refers to the Roman seaport on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine. This was the official headquarters of the Roman government in Palestine.

“**Tarsus.**” Saul dropped out of sight for several years in his hometown. Tarsus was the capital of Cilicia and a free city. It was also the third largest center of learning in the ancient world, behind Alexandria and Athens. The universities in Tarsus emphasized philosophy, rhetoric, and law. Saul was obviously trained both in Greek rhetoric and philosophy as well as rabbinical Judaism.

9:31 - “**The church.**” Notice how the singular “church” refers to many individual congregations. The term “church” can denote a local church, all churches of an area, and all churches universally. Also notice that Luke observed that there was peace in all churches, the churches were growing and increasing, and they were experiencing comfort from the Spirit. What a dramatic change from the persecution mentioned in Acts 8:1! There were still problems, but God had met every need!

STEP FIVE . . .

SUMMARIZING the message

Saul of Tarsus became a Christian on the Damascus Road but he still had many lessons yet to learn. He did not suddenly begin to live the Christian life in all its fullness the moment he was converted. As we learned last week, after Jesus appeared to him, he entered Damascus where he remained without sight for three days. A disciple named Ananias came and prayed for him. Saul received his sight, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was baptized.

When we read Acts 9, verses 19-31, we might be left with the impression that Saul spent a few weeks in Damascus preaching Jesus, before heading off to Jerusalem. However, as Paul described this same period elsewhere he informs us that during this period, he actually went to Arabia (cf. Galatians 1:17). His sojourn in Arabia was **a time of profound preparation for him**. The Lord met him in Arabia and taught him personally. Over the course of nearly three years, he began to see the Old Testament in a whole new way—always pointing to Jesus.

When he returned from Arabia, Saul became part of **a new community** of people who, like him, had been transformed by Jesus. In addition, Luke refers to “his disciples” (v. 25). After three years, **Saul was already actively making disciples**. While God was blessing his ministry, things were really heating up. There was a plot against his life. He barely escaped by being lowered through an opening in the wall in a large basket. From there he went to Jerusalem where he was “speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.” However, when he tried to associate with the disciples many were still suspicious about him. Luke adds that they were afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple (9:26). They were certain that Saul had gone underground and was acting as a double agent for the enemy.

Sometimes the very people we look to for acceptance and support turn their back on us. This is why **we all need a Barnabas** in our lives. We first met Joseph, called Barnabas, in Acts chapter 4 when he sold a piece of land and gave the proceeds to the Apostles for distribution to those in need. That’s how he was given the nickname “Barnabas,” or “Son of Encouragement.” Barnabas had heard about Saul’s ministry in Damascus and he believed him. In Galatians Paul tells us that Barnabas introduced him to Peter and James. **Barnabas stood up for Saul and spoke on his behalf, risking his own reputation.** Sometimes you have to risk your own reputation when identifying with someone.

The believers in Jerusalem finally accepted Saul, but it wasn’t long before the Hellenistic Jews devised a way to kill him. Some of the believers learned of the assassination plot against Saul and brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to his hometown of Tarsus. There is a cost for following Jesus. Most Bible students think that Saul spent around ten years in Tarsus, completely out of the limelight.

After Saul left for Tarsus Luke noted, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied” (9:31). **For ten years Saul lived in virtual obscurity. He must have felt that God had forgotten him.** Imagine how this must have affected him. He wanted to make a difference for Christ but everywhere he went trouble seemed to follow him.

This is a vital passage for us to recall whenever we think that after coming to Christ, everything will be candy and flowers. We would do well to ponder the rough beginning Paul had and to realize that God’s training program is likely the beginning of our problems and not the end of them. All of us who follow Christ will have ample opportunity to feel solidarity with the One who was crucified and whom we now serve.

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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 25 thru Saturday, January 30
Genesis 49-Exodus 1; 2-4; 5-7; 8-9; 10-12; 13-15

Loudonville Community Church
374 Loudon Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

www.lcchurch.org