

**Need leaders?**  
*They could be right in front of you...*



SERMON SERIES:

# THE CALL: A GOD-GIVEN MISSION

ACTS 17:26; 13:36

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA



## THE CALL: A GOD-GIVEN MISSION

ACTS 17:26; 13:36

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH,  
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Today we begin another series. For the next five weeks we will talk about “The Call.” I begin this series with a few specific people in mind...

While we sit here, a gentleman sits in a Starbucks somewhere contemplating life. On Friday he walked out of his office carrying a cardboard box full of family pictures and other items previously found in the drawers of his mahogany desk—another casualty of downsizing. Over his overpriced, but very good, Grande Breakfast Blend he ponders his future...and wonders if God can help.

Last night, after she finally got the kids to bed, a lady down the street from you sat, alone, rubbing her temples. She is wrestling with a recent invitation to return to the law firm she enjoyed so much before her children were born. She wishes she knew what God wants her to do. (Truthfully, she wishes God would just tell her what to do and spare her the agony of deciding.)

Last Friday a college student left a summer school class with a headache. The professor had said that human beings are merely coincidental fallout from an accidental cosmic explosion a few billion years ago and there isn't a lot of real meaning to our existence. It threw her for a loop. The pat answers and clichés she heard growing up in church just don't cut it now. She longs to know, if there is a God, does she have a place in His plan?

I have good news for the guy at Starbucks and the lady rubbing her temples and the college student...and for anyone here who wonders why in the world we are here and/or why we are here in the world. **We can know, and live out, the purposes for which we were created. Each of us has a God-given mission—a call—and we can fulfill it.**

Acts 17:26 declares, **“From one man God made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”** And Acts 13:36 tells us, **“When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.”** We learn from those two texts a couple of truths that are of great importance here. **One, you aren't living where you are and when you are by accident. Two, it is possible for humans like you and me to fulfill God's purposes for us during the fleeting time allotted to us on this earth.**

Some of us have found our purpose, our mission in life. We are living what our Creator created us do to and we know it. The waters are not always smooth, but we feel the wind of the Spirit in our sails. Others of us are still searching. Some of us—too many of us—are, to quote the late Senator from Alabama Howell Heflin “wanderin' aimlessle without a goooal!” So how does one find his or her God-given “gooool”? A Christ-follower might ask it this way: “How do I find God's will for my life?”

I remember being disappointed when, as a fairly new pastor, I decided to preach my first sermon on finding God's will. I looked in my concordance under “will of God” and expected to find an abundance of passages that would enable my flock to decipher God's blueprint for each of their lives.

Blueprint passages, however, were conspicuously missing.

However, what I *did* find is a lot about God's will for—His mission to—the world. I saw His desires for the world, such as...

*His desire that everyone be reconciled to Him through faith in His Son, Jesus.*

*His desire that people who are suffering be comforted, and those who are hungry be fed.*

*His desire that those who have much would share with those who have little.*

*His desire that all people be treated justly, regardless of their station in life.*

*His desire that people understand the value of moral boundaries.*

*His desire that people embrace His grace—His unconditional, undeserved, unlimited love.*

I also found in Scripture stories of lots of people—rather ordinary folks, most of them—who found their place in God's mission. I didn't find much about "God's will for their lives." And I'm not sure they would even have considered that concept, as we generally think of it. I did see God direct their paths and prepare them for specific tasks within His plan.

In other words, the Bible doesn't talk a lot about "God's will for our lives." It *does* talk a lot about people finding their place within God's mission.

Here is another way to look at it. It's still baseball season. (It's been a good week, by the way. The Braves are on the upswing and the Yankees are still trailing the Red Sox.) Well, back to God's plan for us: a new baseball player is not likely to ask the coach, "Coach, what is your personalized plan for me?" The baseball player is more likely to ask, "May I play a position on your team?"

You have a part to play on this team. You don't have to watch from the bleachers. You don't have to sit on the bench. You have a place on God's team, and your place in His game plan is your **call**.

**Call is the ongoing promptings of God's Spirit, confirmed through Scripture, intellect, and experience, that communicate: *These are your roles in my mission.***

That definition needs an explanation. First, call is ongoing. Call is not a one-time experience at a youth retreat. God's call unfolds throughout our lives.

Second, call is a "prompting." Prompting is an intentionally vague word, for I believe a call is a mystical, spiritual impression that God is communicating with us.

Third, there are ways to confirm those mysterious "promptings," and we'll talk more about those things over the next few weeks.

Finally, God's purposes for us always fit within His "big picture." Remember: God is the star of this drama, not us.

**There are actually four levels, or "kinds," of call.**

### **1. The call into a relationship with God through Jesus.**

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life (Revelation 22:17).*

The first call you hear (or have heard) is God's call into relationship with Him through faith in Jesus. If you have not yet responded to that call, I pray you will be open to that, for that is the first step in finding your place in God's plan.

### **2. Corporate call—God's call to a body of people.**

### **3. The call to a way of life, including lifestyle and vocation.**

Because our vocations are so important to us, let's concentrate on that for a moment.

Life is too short for you and me to work merely for a paycheck. If you are considering new employment, I highly recommend the book by Richard N. Bolles, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* A Christian, Bolles embraces the concept of a divine call when it comes to one's vocation, and the epilogue, "How to Find Your Mission in Life," is worth the price of the book. Bolles writes, concerning your vocation, that your mission is...

- a) to exercise that Talent which you particularly came to Earth to use—your greatest gift, which you most delight to use,
- b) in the place(s) or setting(s) which God has caused to appeal to you the most,
- c) and for those purposes which God most needs to have done in the world.

And that's true whether you are a plumber, professor, pastor, or pig farmer—there ought to be a sense of God-given mission about your vocation.

**Here is a quick side-bar: Would you consider vocational ministry?** Over the last few years Bon Air Baptist Church has called several senior staff members from mid-career, from within our congregation, and from secular jobs. Obviously, they aren't as saintly as those of us who took the more conventional route, but they are outstanding ministers.

There are countless Christians following God's mission through their secular jobs. Just don't rule out the possibility that God is calling you to a ministry vocation.

Whether it is in a secular or ministry vocation, I hope you will find your calling. Yesterday at Starbucks my receipt read, "Love what you do. Talk to a manager about working at Starbucks." Well, I'd re-word that a bit. I'd say, "Love what you do. Talk to the manager of the universe, and find your place in His mission."

#### 4. Call to specific acts.

God speaks in Isaiah 48:14-15: "I, God, love this man Cyrus, and I'm using him to do what I want with Babylon. I, yes I, have spoken. I've called him. I've brought him here. He'll be successful" (From *The Message*). God brought Cyrus to the throne of Persia in order to defeat the Babylonians. That was God's "call" for Cyrus. That is an example of God's call to a specific act. Here are a couple of contemporary examples...

Jennifer sits down in the company cafeteria with a plate of steamed vegetables, her Weight Watchers candy bar, and a diet soda. As she sits down a young lady from two cubicles down sits down across from her. Jennifer's slim coworker has a cheeseburger, fries, a milkshake to wash it down, and two donuts for dessert. Jennifer quickly calculates her coworker's calories and moans at the injustices of life.

Soon the young lady is pouring out her heart to Jennifer: she just found out she is pregnant. She is scared, and contemplating an abortion. There is an instant connection between the two. Jennifer finds herself offering insights that appear genuinely helpful to her frightened, young coworker. Jennifer is able to comfort her, and they agree to meet for lunch the next day.

On her way back upstairs, Jennifer senses a spiritual stirring within her. She remembers the words of the lady who spoke at church on the previous Sunday about the crisis pregnancy center. While she listened to the director of that center make her plea for volunteers, Jennifer had felt the same stirring she felt in the cafeteria listening to the young lady pour out her heart.

And by the time she closes her eyes that night she has spoken with the crisis pregnancy center's director and Jennifer knows it: she has been called by God to volunteer at the crisis pregnancy center. It was no accident that the lady from the center and her pregnant co-worker entered her life in the same week; Jennifer has found one of her primary roles in God's mission.

Of course God's call is not always so dramatic. God might call you, for example, to speak a particular word to your neighbor. Maybe you both have taken the trash can to the road at the same time and you meet there in the street. After exchanging comments about the weather, your heart races a bit. You sense somehow that God wants you to say something. You know your neighbor's not a church-goer, and you don't want to offend him, but believing God's Spirit is behind this, you blurt out: "Hey, I go up on Monday mornings and pray with some folks at the church. Is there anything I can pray about for you?" Your neighbor gets an inquisitive look on his face. "Funny you should ask," he says. "I could use some prayers for my family." You have responded to God's call, and fulfilled your role, in that particular moment, in God's mission.

Let me return to the lessons we learned from our two texts: One, you aren't living where you are and when you are by accident. Two, it is possible for humans like you and me to fulfill God's purposes for us during the fleeting time

allotted to us on this earth. We are going to spend the next few weeks talking about how we discern and follow God's calling in our lives. And today we begin by grasping one principle...

### **It begins with surrender.**

Two of my experiences as a missionary in Nigeria were with “Babalawos”—“medicine men” as we might call them. One is about a young man who brought a duffle bag full of his “juju” (black magic) to the seminary students and me out in a village after an evangelistic service. The other experience involved an older man.

A Nigerian pastor and I, together with a couple of young adults from the church, sat one Sunday afternoon on the dirt floor of a mud house and spoke with an elderly Babalawo. We spoke of Jesus as the Lord and King and as greater than all other powers. This was not the first time the medicine man had heard this; the Christians in the village had been praying for him and speaking to him of Jesus. He had been attending worship services at the church, and God's Spirit obviously had been working in his heart.

That Sunday afternoon, after we had talked for a while, the man expressed his desire to follow Jesus completely. Thrilled that we had been honored to reap the harvest for which so many had worked, we prayed with him.

Following the prayer the Babalawo instructed the young people to gather all his juju—his powders, potions, and paraphernalia—into a big bag. “You can do whatever you want with those things,” he said. He was through with them.

When they finished, the old man—completely unprompted—began to sing a song that he had heard at church:

*Mo fi gbogbo re. Mo fi gbogbo re.*

*Fun o Olugbala mi ni; Mo fi won sile.*

It was one of the most surreal experiences I can remember. He was singing in Yoruba the hymn he'd often heard the Christians sing at church: *I surrender all. All to Thee my Blessed Savior. I surrender all.* It was quite an unusual and moving experience. In many ways he had just placed his life in a bag; he had trusted the true God enough that he offered his life to Him as His gift.

That is what it means for you and me to follow that call—to trust God enough to surrender our lives to Him as best we understand how to do that.

Warren Wiersbe said: “*God still gives His best to those who let Him write the contract.*” Would you be willing to let God write the contract? Today I have to speak to your will—your willingness to let God call you. You won't find your mission, your purpose, your call, until you trust your Creator enough to let Him write the contract.

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SERMON SERIES:

**COURAGE FOR GOOD LIVING & GOOD DYING**  
JOSHUA 1:9

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA



## COURAGE FOR GOOD LIVING & GOOD DYING

JOSHUA 1:9

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH,  
RICHMOND, VA

Moses had died and God had called Joshua to a difficult job. Following Moses and leading the Israelites would be a tough combination. But God said to him, “Be strong and courageous, for you are a super guy with a winning smile. And besides, this leadership thing is easy; it’s a piece of manna.”

No, of course that’s not what God said. Rather, God said, “Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). God commissioned Joshua: “Be strong and courageous for in every decision you make and every change you initiate and every conflict that erupts...I will be before you, behind you, and beside you.”

The courage of the call is not self-confidence. And it is not audacity, bravado, or machismo. Real courage is a decision—a decision made sometimes by people who are shaking in their boots—that God who calls us won’t leave us.

This is the fourth Sunday in our series on “The Call.” Remember the definition of “call” with which I’m working: **Call is the ongoing promptings of God’s Spirit, confirmed through Scripture, the faith community, intellect, and experience, that communicate: “These are your roles in my mission.”**

Also, our theme for this series is: **We can know, and live out, the purposes for which we were created. Each of us has a God-given mission—a call—and we can fulfill it.** Last week we talked about a tool for the discerning of God’s call—a LIFE COMPASS:

C – Constancy (Is this something that is a constant, recurring thing for you?)

O – Observation by Others (I believe it is easiest to discern the promptings of God’s Spirit as we seek the input of others.)

M – Motives (Are our motives pure enough not to distort the voice of God’s Spirit?)

P – Peculiar Passions. (What are those things that turn you on that others find completely uninteresting?)

A – Aptitudes (What are your spiritual gifts? Your natural abilities?)

S – Seasoning (How long have you been a faithful follower of Jesus? How much experience have you had?)

S – Sensible Decision Making

Today we move from the idea of understanding, or discerning, God’s call to the idea of living out that call. Truth is, call-following is not without its challenges. Nothing of any significance ever is. In 2007 Virginia is going to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Jamestown colony. Four centuries ago mariners with knots in their stomachs, courage in their hearts, a new world in their vision, and compasses in their hands, set out across stormy seas toward uncharted land. It was quite the adventure. But it was not an adventure for the squeamish.

Following God’s call is an adventure, too. But not an adventure for the squeamish. Strong characters, hearty constitutions, and a lot of courage are required.

Oswald Sanders wrote:

*More failure comes from an excess of caution than from bold experiments with new ideas... “The frontiers of the kingdom of God were never advanced by men and women of caution.”*<sup>1</sup>

Doing something that you really feel like God has led you to do is often a little bit scary. Following a divine call can be daunting. If there is one thing required for call-following, it is **courage**.

### **Some specific reasons why courage is required...**

#### **1. You will have to live by faith.**

Poet and priest James Kavanaugh went to work for three months with Mother Theresa in Calcutta. Kavanaugh was trying to figure out how to spend the rest of his life. In his first conversation with Mother Theresa, she asked him, "What can I do for you?" "I want you to pray for me," he answered.

"What do you want me to pray for," she asked. And he voiced his deep desire—that which had brought him all the way from the U.S.: "Pray that I have clarity."

Mother Theresa was firm: "No, I will not do that." He asked why not, and she answered, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of." "But you always seem to have clarity," he told her. She laughed. "I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I pray that you will trust God."

This compass that I keep talking about is a tool to help us discern the will of God, but no tool takes all the mystery out of a finite human trying to understand the ways and mind of infinite God. You never will have complete clarity. Oh, we can know enough to follow God's call; at the forks in life's road we can know which direction to follow. But we never will have complete clarity, and for many of us that is an awfully unsettling thing. Call-following will require you and me to live, largely, by faith. The best we can do is the best we know how to follow the promptings of God's Spirit.

Courage is required to follow a call, because you will have to walk by faith. And there is another reason...

#### **2. You will get in over your head.**

Once two men were sitting on the front porch of the General Store. One was a large, strapping, muscular fellow.

The other was a thin little guy.

They were talking about bear hunting. The little guy said to the big guy, "If I was as big as you, I'd go out there and get me a big ol' bear."

The big fellow answered simply, "There's plenty o' little bears in the woods."

If you are new at this call-following, and worried that you will get in over your head, you might want to start with the little bears. There are bears that you can wrestle in these woods. You don't have to start with the grizzlies. You can take on a cub or two until you get the hang of it. That's what Paul was talking about when he wrote, in 1 Timothy 3, that new believers should not take on certain responsibilities until they have some experience under their belts

Yet there are, quite frankly, a lot of big bears that need wrestling. The bottom line is that eventually you will find yourself in a tussle with one of them. It's not a matter of "what if" you get in over your head. You *will* get in over your head. You will find yourself in various situations for which you feel underqualified. I'm in a group of about thirty pastors from across the country who meet once a year. Last year the pastor of a large church in Texas confessed, "I've got a job I don't know how to do!" We all laughed, because we could identify.

That's not a bad thing, however. There is a lot to learn about relying on God when we feel like we aren't up to the task to which we've been called. God reminded Paul that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Fighting a bear that's bigger than we are, however, requires courage.

Courage is required, for you will have to walk by faith, and because you will get in over your head. Furthermore...

#### **3. You will face criticism.**

Robert E. Lee once declared, "We've made a terrible mistake! We've placed all our worst generals in the fields, and we've got all our best generals in the newspaper offices!" That's not a slam on newspaper people; but it is a good reminder that anyone who does anything significant is likely to be criticized by someone sitting on the sideline.

If you are "in the fields," even the fields of ministry, criticism will come. If you attempt anything significant, you will be criticized. Jesus himself warned that something is wrong when all people speak well of you. Criticism, therefore, should be accepted as a cost of call-following.

Our effectiveness in following our call will depend largely on how we respond to that criticism. On the one hand, we can't dismiss criticism. On the other hand, we can't allow ourselves to be devastated by criticism either. Effective call-followers take their medicine when they need to, yet they don't swallow every bitter pill that someone tries to stuff down their throats.

The effective call-follower develops a tender heart, a tough hide, a clear mind, and a discerning ear. If you are without any one of the four you are like a car running with one flat tire. I know of no way to develop that crucial combination of characteristics besides a close relationship with God.

Courage is required of call-followers, for we have to walk by faith, we will get in over our heads, and we will be criticized.

**But it's worth it...for call-following makes for good living and good dying.**

### **1. Life's greatest joy comes in actively living out our calls.**

Someone wrote:

*There was a very **cautious** man  
Who never laughed or played.  
He **never risked**, he never tried  
He never sang or prayed.  
And when he one day passed away,  
His insurance was denied.  
For since he never really lived,  
They claimed he never died!<sup>9</sup>*

If you are *too* cautious, you can't really live! I don't want to suggest irrational, irresponsible, impulsive, imprudent decisions. And I recognize that there is a fine line between courage and craziness. Nevertheless, I would challenge you to courageously pursue your good dreams.

Remember: One of the elements of God's call to a specific task is a passion for that task. (*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*, Philippians 2:13). Your dream might just be your call! Check out your dream by your COMPASS, and if your COMPASS confirms that yours is a God-given dream, then follow it courageously. It would be downright sinful to bury a dream that God has entrusted to you.

C. S. Lewis, in *Surprised By Joy*, suggested that joy is not found when it is sought, so much as it is a "byproduct whose very existence presupposes that you desire not it but something other and outer." Joy is the almost unexpected consequence of meaningful pursuits. Joy is found in giving ourselves for purposes that are greater than ourselves and that have everlasting consequences. Joy is found in the fulfilling of our God-given mission, our call.

Call-following makes for good living. Call-following also makes for good dying.

### **2. The end of a courageous journey is sweet.**

There are two ways to finish life's journey: with regret or joy. How sad it would be to come to the end of our journey and hear God whisper, *While you were doing all these things, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer* (Jeremiah 7:13).

Yet if we are following our God-given calls, then there will be a great sense of fulfillment at the end of our journeys. Would it not be deeply satisfying to come to the end of the line on earth and look back with a sense that we had done all we were called to do, when and where we were called to do it? Paul, for example, set out for Jerusalem, knowing that it probably would mean his demise. His friends warned him not to go, but he said, *None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 20:24, Amplified Bible).

Paul wanted to follow his call (he referred to it as his "ministry") so that he could finish his course with joy.

And then there was Jesus. It was late on a Thursday night. A matter of probably a couple of hours later Jesus would be betrayed in the garden by Judas, arrested, and led away to be mocked and then crucified. Jesus knew that the end was near, and a few fateful hours before his crucifixion, Jesus began to pray. John recorded his prayer:

*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*

Then, Hebrews 12:2 says, that Jesus...*for the joy set before him endured the cross.*” Amid the sorrow of carrying our sin and the agony of the cross, Jesus experienced joy. Jesus came to the end of the journey with joy. How? His prayer explains it: He took out his “call” and looked at it, and said, “You know, I’ve done what I came to do.”

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and their team of thirty-three men had walked for nineteen months—over a year-and-a-half, crossing 4,000 miles. President Thomas Jefferson had sent them on a journey of exploration to the west coast. Their journey had afforded spectacular views of God’s creation, but it had been tough. Mountains, river rapids, hostile encounters with Indians, hot days and cold nights, more varmints than vittles.

Can you imagine what it was like when Lewis & Clark reached the Pacific? On November 7, 1805, at camp near Pillar Rock, Captain Clark wrote in his journal:

*Great joy in camp we are in View of the Ocian, this great Pacific Oceatan which we been So long anxious to See. and the roreing or noise made by the waves breakeing on the rocky Shores (as I Suppose) may be heard distictly. **Ocian in View! O! the joy.***

They had reached the end of a long, glorious, and difficult journey. O, the joy! They had done what they’d been sent by the President to do!

Several old hymns speak of the end of life’s journey using the metaphor of crossing the Jordan River. One says, “On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand and cast a wishful eye.” When you stand on the banks of Jordan, on the verge of eternity, how will that be for you? If God grants you the knowledge that your journey’s end is approaching, will there be regrets? Or will there be joy at having completed the work you were created to do? Will you be able to say, as Paul did, “I’ve completed my course with joy?”

Our decision today will help determine what it will be like when we stand on the banks of Jordan. For call-following not only makes for good living. It makes for good dying too.

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), pp. 127-128.

<sup>2</sup> In John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p.191.

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SERMON SERIES:

# HOW DO I HEAR A CALL?

JOHN 10:3-4

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA

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## HOW DO I HEAR A CALL?

JOHN 10:3-4

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This is the second Sunday in our series on “The Call.” Remember the definition of “call” with which I’m working: **Call is the ongoing promptings of God’s Spirit, confirmed through Scripture, intellect, and experience, that communicate: “These are your roles in my mission.”**

Also, if there is a theme for this series it would be this phrase: **We can know, and live out, the purposes for which we were created. Each of us has a God-given mission—a call—and we can fulfill it.** Today we begin to talk about how we can discern or discover that God-given mission, our call. Today we begin to talk about how we can hear God’s voice.

Brownie Hamilton, a member of our church, read something in our monthly newsletter that really interested her. The Richmond Baptist Association (of which our church is a member) was putting together a mission trip to China. The contact information for the coordinator of the trip, a lady named Ruth, was listed. (Ruth is a member of another church.)

Brownie called Ruth that afternoon, introduced herself, and asked, “How can I get my name on the list for that mission trip to China?” Ruth responded with a question: “May I ask how you got my name?”

Brownie answered, “The Spirit.”

Ruth thought to herself, “Oh, my, I’ve got someone on the phone who thinks the Holy Spirit gave her my name!”

Brownie did, indeed, get Ruth’s name from the Spirit. As it turned out, however, the matter was not quite as mystical as Ruth imagined—the *Spirit* is the name of our church’s newsletter.

Don’t you wish the *Holy* Spirit would communicate as clearly as the church newsletter? Although it is not as clear as black and white print, He does speak.

*The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them...his sheep follow him because they know his voice* (John 10:3-4).

It isn’t easy, at least for me, to discern the voice of God’s Spirit. We have to strain to hear. But His sheep listen for, and recognize, His voice. And He leads them.

I believe there are tools we can use that facilitate our hearing God’s voice—hearing aids, if you will. Next week I’m going to offer a tool for the discerning of God’s call. That tool is a COMPASS. I’ll talk about it in detail next week, but here, briefly, is what that compass is:

C – Constancy. (Is this something that is a constant, recurring thing for you?)

O – Observation by Others. (I believe it is easiest to discern the promptings of God’s Spirit as we seek the input of others.)

M – Motives. (If we aren’t careful, we can justify or rationalize anything in our minds. Are our motives pure enough not to distort the voice of God’s Spirit?)

P – Peculiar Passions. (What are those things that turn you on that others find completely uninteresting?)

A – Aptitudes. What are your spiritual gifts? Your natural abilities? Your God-given strengths?

S – Seasoning. (How long have you been a faithful follower of Jesus? How much experience have you had?

Those answers help you know how you should be serving.)

S – Sensible Decision Making. (When we enter the quest to hear God’s call, we can’t leave our brains at the door.)

All that being said, we have some things we need to cover before we get to next week. **And here are some important keys for discerning God’s call.**

### **A PERSONAL, GROWING, REAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

Henry Blackaby stated: “The key to knowing God’s voice is not a formula. It is not a method we can follow. Rather, knowing God’s voice comes from an intimate love relationship with God.” If you want to know God’s plan for you, then cultivate your relationship with Him. And there is no way to do that other than the spiritual disciplines which we mention around here so often—a lifestyle of solitude, prayer, Bible study, worship, on a regular, disciplined basis.

### **A DEEP SENSE OF RIGHTNESS**

God’s voice comes as a profound impression that we are being prompted toward a decision. Deep in our spirits there comes an “oughtness”—a deep sense of rightness—if God is directing our steps.

For me, God’s voice sounds like a quiet, confident, unwavering “yes” in my gut. “Gut feelings,” however, need confirmation. Dan McBride sang, “This must be the will of the Lord because it seems so right to me.” Is that how we determine the will of the Lord? A feeling? Well, we need more than that, and I will take all my time next Sunday talking about some confirmations that we can look for. Yet there is nothing that can take the place of a mystical, deep sense of rightness.

### **LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE**

Our daughter, Brennan, was sad when we first told her that a move to Richmond was likely. (She was a fourteen-year-old with a boyfriend.) Then, two mornings later, she announced, “Last night I was reading in my quiet time the story of Job—how God told him to leave his people and his country and go to a new place...”

“Might that have been Abraham?” I asked.

“Whoever,” Brennan said.

Then she told Keri and me, “I thought maybe that story was a sign that we should go to Virginia.”

Now *that’s* cool. God does speak through the examples and principles of Scripture.

### **CIRCUMSTANCES? YES, BUT BE CAREFUL...**

From time to time I hear people say, “It must be the will of God, for everything has just fallen into place.” I get a little nervous when I hear that. Obstacles are not necessarily indications that God is in opposition to what is happening. Likewise, the absence of obstacles is not necessarily a sign of God’s blessing or approval.

Warren Wiersbe noted that if Jonah had followed only the circumstances, the “open doors,” he might well have concluded that God was calling him *away from* Ninevah. After all, everything seemed to fall into place! When he got to the docks at Joppa the ship was right there waiting for him! He just happened to have enough money for a ticket! And he had such a peace about things that he was able to sleep during a storm! Wiersbe concluded, “It’s possible to be out of the will of God and still have circumstances appear to be working on your behalf.”

Let me offer a fresh example of how circumstances can be misleading. Over the past three years we have done a lot of talking and planning and praying about a multi-site ministry. There arose a consensus among church leaders that we should launch another site, and the church voted to do that. But six months before our target launch date, circumstances were not encouraging. We couldn’t find a site! We couldn’t find anywhere to meet! We couldn’t find a building to lease that had the right square footage except in places where the price was way out of our range. Our

request to use James River High School was turned down. Circumstances seemed to say that we weren't supposed to be doing this.

But there was a deep sense of rightness among our leaders—the belief that we were doing the right thing—so we pressed on. And then things began to happen. We found a marvelous site pastor in John Sawyer. We have a great part-time staff in Brent Jones and Becky Kaiser. A lot of great folks, strong leaders, have emerged who say they have been called to be part of a launch team. And James River High School reversed their decision and said we could come! Besides that, the new person in charge of the facility is a Christian and a member of Crestwood Presbyterian Church, a church in two locations, so he totally “gets” the multi-site idea and wants to help us succeed!

If we were sitting here, a few weeks away from launch, and we had no place, no staff, and no volunteers, we probably would be right in saying we need to rethink our decision. So circumstances are not to be ignored. But “open doors” and “closed doors” should be weighed alongside other indications.

God does not always orchestrate everything according to our calendar or strategy. Things don't always go according to plan. Circumstances, when considered alongside other indications, can be helpful in discerning God's voice; but everything doesn't fall perfectly into place—even when God is calling.

**Here now are three common myths regarding God's call.**

**Myth One: God only calls people who are (1) young; and (2) have unblemished pasts; and (3) have impressive resumes.**

**TRUTH: The call comes to unlikely people.**

Moses is an example of an unlikely callee. He was not young, he did not have an unblemished past, and he did not have an impressive resume. He was a middle-aged fugitive sheep farmer working for his father-in-law.

**First, if we are not careful, we will assume that if God is going to call someone to a unique role He will do so while the individual is a teenager, or maybe in college.** When God called Moses from the burning bush, however, he was middle aged—eighty years old (granted, people lived longer then).

Now it is true that teenagers and young adults should be particularly careful to listen to God, for you are making decisions that you will live with for the rest of your life. Yet, we cannot assume that if we are past the age of twenty-two God won't call us to anything that would require a life change for us.

Increasingly, followers of Jesus seem open to a refreshing call from God in their thirties and fifties and seventies. Some call this the “second journey.” People are resigning, retiring, retooling, retraining, refocusing, regrouping, and receiving a fresh word from the Almighty. They are catching their second wind—and it is the wind of God's Spirit. Are you open to a fresh word from God about your life—a “second journey”?

**Second, we sometimes assume that God calls people with perfect pasts and unblemished records.** Moses, though, was a killer who had left Egypt to escape punishment. That ought to give some encouragement to those of you who think God couldn't call you because of your past.

I *know* God calls unworthy people, for I *am* one. God is grace-ful; don't be disheartened by the regret of past decisions.

**Third, God uses people who might not make the cut if someone else were doing the hiring.** Moses himself knew that he was not the guy that most would have picked to lead the Exodus. When it comes to a call, God seems to *prefer* unworthy people. Look at these words from Scripture.

*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).*

So don't think that God only calls people who are young, who have unblemished pasts, and have impressive resumes.

**Myth Two: In each situation, there is only one decision I can make and still be in God's will.**

**TRUTH: There might be more than one decision that you can make and still fulfill your purpose in God's plan.**

I don't think the will of God for one's life is limited to that *one* job or that *one* place I could be or that *one* role in God's Kingdom that I could fulfill. My understanding of "God's will" is that He wants me to long for the fulfillment of His purposes for humankind, and to find where I fit into that picture. And there might be more than one "slot" where I could "fit."

Let's consider a possible scenario. A deeply devoted, twenty-two-year-old follower of Jesus is graduating with a B.S. in nursing. She has four job offers. Is there only *one* that is in God's will for her? Maybe. Maybe not.

Certainly she is going to pray and ask for God's direction. She is going to consult those whose counsel she trusts. And she is going to ask the following questions about those potential places of employment:

*Is there one place that seems to fit my skills best?*

*Is there one place where the needs are greatest?*

*Is there one place where I will be able to reach my God-given potential?*

*Are my motives appropriate for a follower of Jesus? In other words, is this decision about how best I can serve God and humankind, or is this purely about what's in it for me?*

I believe God gives us the freedom to make choices. I believe that as long as her motives are Christ-like and her intentions are pure—as long as she does the best she can do, and what she chooses is consistent with God's mission and His character—God will be delighted with whichever decision she makes.

**Myth Three: If I blow it once, I've blown it forever.**

**TRUTH: The God who calls is full of grace.**

Sharron sensed a clear call to be a missionary to Africa during a spiritual retreat in college. Soon after that, however, she met a handsome, charming, baseball player who stole her heart and, in a sense, stole her call. The two were married and now, two decades and two kids later, Sharron squirms while the guest speaker in her church—a missionary from Africa—pleads with people to join him and his colleagues in international mission service. "Don't just pray and pay," he says, "Be willing to go!" Sharron's mind goes back to that college retreat during which she told her campus minister that she was called to be a missionary to Africa.

So has Sharron blown it completely? Has God turned His back on her? Certainly not.

God meets us where we are and invites us to walk with Him from that point—even those who have blown a call to missions. God caught up with Jonah in the belly of a big fish, and with John Mark back in Jerusalem after he'd left Paul and Barnabas high and dry in Pamphylia. God has accomplished some wonderful things through people who missed, or even abandoned, their original calls.

Sharron can serve as a short-term volunteer overseas, in a Christian homeless ministry, or in helping her church start a new congregation. She won't see those as chances to make up for a mistake; she will see them as opportunities to join God on mission *now*, regardless of the past.

When (not *if*) we make an honest mistake in judgment, God does not write us off. God's grace is amazing, even when our judgment is amazingly bad. That takes the pressure off...when hearing the voice of the Shepherd is not as easy as reading *The Spirit*.

**Need leaders?**  
*They could be right in front of you...*



SERMON SERIES:

# THE COMPASS

ISAIAH 30:21

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA



## THE COMPASS

ISAIAH 30:21

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH,  
RICHMOND, VA

This is the third Sunday in our series on “The Call.” Remember the definition of “call” with which I’m working: **Call is the ongoing promptings of God’s Spirit, confirmed through Scripture, the faith community, intellect, and experience, that communicate: “These are your roles in my mission.”**

Also, our theme for this series is this: **We can know, and live out, the purposes for which we were created. Each of us has a God-given mission—a call—and we can fulfill it.**

Today, as part of this quest to understand our call, I want to suggest for you a COMPASS, a *LIFE COMPASS*.

God spoke to His people, when they were living as exiles in Babylon, through the prophet Isaiah. He promised them, “Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21).

God’s voice is not necessarily like the newfangled Global Positioning System in some of your cars; it does not tell you every turn to take. I was riding with a friend to a ball game last year; he has on his car a GPS. Some distance before we would reach a turn, a woman’s silky voice would say, “Your turn is approaching.” Well, I offer no voice that will tell you exactly when and where to turn before you get there. I do believe, however, that we can have a compass—a clear sense of direction—a means of understanding God’s course for our lives when we stand at the many forks in life’s road.

### COMPASS

#### **C – Constancy**

Do you have a vision that won’t go away? A constant concern for a certain need and a consistent desire to meet that need? Then you might be the recipient of a divine call.

Gwen Siler had a vision that wouldn’t go away—a vision for a Christian ministry to young ladies with an eating disorder. Despite a steady stream of setbacks, Gwen kept following the dream she couldn’t shake.

There was a 49-acre piece of property, for example, that Gwen believed God wanted her to have. More than one “sign” had confirmed for Gwen that it was on this piece of God’s earth that the vision should be implemented. The property, however, was just too expensive at first. Then she had the opportunity to buy it, but it slipped through her hands. Twice. The first time she couldn’t close due to a lack of financing, and the second time because someone else bought the property. At several junctures it looked to many of us like her vision was just going to disappear into the fog. She even began to appear a bit like Don Quixote to some—impractically idealistic. But Gwen kept plodding, praying, and expecting.

All the while, Rebecca Jones had an undying passion for single young ladies with unplanned pregnancies. For years Rebecca had been drawing up plans for some type of ministry that would love and mentor these young ladies and coach them on the life growing inside them. Both Gwen and Rebecca are in our church, and when they found out about their similar passions, the confluence of their visions seemed blessed by God.

Gwen, Rebecca, and their ministry partners are about to open *Northfield*, a Christ-centered, residential ministry for young ladies with eating disorders or unplanned pregnancies. Would you like to guess where it is going to be located?

Yep, in the plantation-style home on that very piece of property in Cumberland County, Virginia, that once appeared to some to be a pipe dream. It is absolutely one of the most inspiring stories of faith and perseverance that I've known.

One day I commented on how unrelenting Gwen had been. "I can't help it," she said. "I can't lay the burden down. This dream keeps haunting and driving and prodding me."

If you catch a vision for some ministry, but your interests soon shift to something else, then your good idea was probably no more than that—a good idea. One of the signs of a God-given call is constancy—a tug that won't go away toward a need that you can meet.

Do you remember God's call to Samuel? Samuel was lying in the darkness when God's voice disturbed Samuel's rest. It was on the fourth time, and after Eli's counsel, that Samuel finally figured out it was God calling. After that fourth call, Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Does something that sounds an awful lot like the voice of God keep calling? Maybe...just maybe...it *is* His voice.

### **O – Observations by Others**

A college professor introduced himself to me on campus one day. For two years he took me to lunch, invited me to his home, mentored and challenged me, pulled no punches with me, and gently nudged me toward ministry. Dr. Cowley's observation of me—of something I didn't see in myself—set me on my God-planned course.

Paul and Timothy had a similar relationship. In Paul's mentoring of Timothy I see what you and I need from those whose observations will help us discern God's call: genuine concern for Timothy's well-being, words of encouragement, a readiness to address the chinks in Timothy's armor when such was warranted, and the wisdom to give sound counsel. On the one hand, he encouraged and affirmed Timothy. But when it was time to be candid, he could do so. Paul wrote, for example, "Now, Timothy, I know you'd like to leave Ephesus, for that's a tough assignment. But you need to stay in Ephesus." God's call to Timothy was made clear by the observations by Paul.

You need to look for your personal "Pauls" and "Dr. Cowleys." God has them for you—people who love you and who are kind enough, honest enough, candid enough, and wise enough to give you good counsel.

### **M – Motive**

If we aren't careful, we can easily misuse this concept of the will of God. We sometimes appeal to "God's will" to defend our own decisions or to avoid responsibility for our actions. Often this is not a premeditated decision on our part. So you and I have to be cognizant of our own motives, and self-aware enough to realize that if we aren't careful we can convince ourselves that something is God's will when He might prefer not to be associated with our decision.

There are only two ways that I know of to check our motives. The first is sincere, God-aided, introspection. David prayed, "Search my heart, and see if there be any wicked way in me" (Psalm 51). Earnest prayer that God will help us see our true motives is critical. A second means of determining our true motives is to find spiritually mature people who care enough about us to shoot straight with us—people whom we trust to help us see what we cannot see on our own.

When I was in the process of being considered by, and considering, Bon Air Baptist, my good friend John Lockett often took me to lunch and pumped me. He'd ask why I'd want to leave a place I loved—FBC, Mt. Washington.

Was it the prestige of Bon Air? Was it because Bon Air is a bigger church? He loved me enough to help me examine my motives.

If our motivation is not as pure as humanly possible, then our judgment is impaired. Mixed motives muddle our thinking. We can mistake our selfish desires for a word from the Lord. By doing so we might say “no” to what we might ought to say “yes” to, or say “yes” to what we ought to say “no” to, or leave where we ought to stay, or stay where we ought to leave.

Furthermore, selfish intentions jeopardize the ultimate reward for our service. The Bible tells us that when the Lord comes, “He will...expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). Let’s live so that God will be able to say, “Well, done, good and faithful servant,” and that He will be able to add, “And you did it for the right reasons.”

## **P – Peculiar Passions**

*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose* (Philippians 2:13).

When you take a look at those things about which you are passionate—peculiarly passionate—you will begin to see God’s call unfold.

Near the end of the workday Ralph can hardly contain his enthusiasm. “I can’t wait till tonight,” he exclaims to his coworker.

“What’s the big deal about tonight?” his coworker inquires.

Ralph exclaims, “Tonight is the night of the children’s English as a Second Language class that I teach at the church. Tonight is *bring a dish from your country* night!”

“Let me get this straight,” says his coworker. “You get all excited about sitting around with kids who speak very little English and whose customs are different from ours. And tonight you’re going to eat weird food. You actually like that?”

“I *love* it,” answers Ralph. “Wouldn’t *everybody* love that?”

Well, no, as wonderful as it sounds to some people, *everybody* would not love it. Some people would wonder how Ralph has the energy to do that at the end of a long day. The fact that Ralph loves children who speak another language and enjoys unusual food is one of his peculiar passions. And that distinctive characteristic of his make-up lets us know that he is probably living out his calling in that ESL class.

So what are your peculiar passions? What are the issues and who are the people about which you care most deeply? Your peculiar passions are God-given, and God didn’t give them to you to waste.

## **A – Aptitudes**

*Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people* (1 Corinthians 12:7, *The Message*).

Why would God create us with unique aptitudes and expect us to do something that didn’t fit?

Each person born into God’s family through faith in Jesus has at least one spiritual gift. The gifts are listed in various places in the New Testament, including Romans and 1 Corinthians. Ideas about how to compile and formulate a list of spiritual gifts vary, but Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels have suggested the following “master list” of the gifts for us:

Administration, Apostleship, Craftsmanship, Creative Communication, Discernment, Encouragement, Evangelism, Faith, Giving, Healing, Helps, Hospitality, Intercession, Interpretation, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Miracles, Prophecy, Shepherding, Teaching, Tongues, Wisdom.

Besides spiritual gifts, you have natural abilities. Romans 12:6 in the New Living Translation reads, “God has given

each of us the ability to do certain things well.” God’s gifts to us of those “certain things” help us understand His plan for us. Don’t assume that any talent you have is useless.

What are your “certain things”? The ability to maintain a building? To build a web site? To comfort older adults? To read a financial statement or a musical score? To speak publicly? What are your natural abilities?

Your aptitudes—your spiritual gifts and natural abilities—are part of your call.

## **S – Seasoning**

Are you a new believer? A believer who, to this point, has not yet grown in your faith? Or are you a longtime believer who has continued to mature? Your answer will help determine what you should do. The Bible cautions, for example, in 1 Timothy 3, against a new believer taking on certain roles before having the time to season a bit as a Christ-follower. Have you had sufficient experience to be prepared for the opportunity you are considering? There is no shame in not being ready for a certain role. The shame is in taking on something for which we needed more preparation.

On the other hand, if you are a seasoned follower of Jesus, perhaps you ought to be assuming *greater* responsibility within God’s Kingdom. After several weeks of *Bodypump*, Suzy, the leader of the class, asked me, “Are you adding weights every couple of weeks?” I sheepishly admitted that I was working at the same level of difficulty as when I began, several weeks earlier. I’d begun to coast.

Don’t coast. If you have been a follower of Jesus for a while, then it is time to pray about bigger responsibilities. Paul wrote that it is a shame when people who should be enjoying steak dinners are still drinking only milk. I’m not suggesting you ought to be overloaded. Yet to “coast”—to let our accumulating wisdom and experience go unused—is a waste.

## **S – Sensible decision-making**

*Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that (Galatians 6:4, The Message).*

This search for the will of God deserves our “careful exploration.” Common sense is not enough by itself. In fact, our human reason can mislead us. But common sense is important to the process.

One way to look at things sensibly is to do an “autobiography.” Look back on your life. What experiences have you had that would enable you to contribute to the body of Christ? When did you feel like you were in your “sweet spot?” That will be a good indication of God’s intention for your life.

Another means of exercising good sense in considering a call is to “try it on.” One night in Venezuela, when I was twenty-two years old, I was lying in a hammock in a room with two career missionaries. Joe Powell was one of the missionaries in the room that night. Hoping he hadn’t gone to sleep, I asked, “Joe, how did you know God was calling you to preach?” Joe didn’t respond with an explanation; he responded with an invitation. “I tell you what,” he said. “Why don’t you come to Faith Baptist Church some Sunday and preach in the English service?” I took him up on it, and a few weeks later I was standing in the pulpit of Faith Baptist Church, where Joe was pastor. It’s hard to explain, but as soon as the service was over I knew...I just knew...that God had cut me out to preach. I certainly had not produced a sermonic masterpiece; but it was like trying on a suit that fit.

A lot of people have found their place in the body of Christ by simply “trying on” ministries that seemed compelling. Many have tried on a ministry and sensed immediately that it was a good fit. Others, however, have wondered, “What was I thinking?” From teaching two-year-olds in Sunday School to helping out at a homeless shelter, “trying it on” can help you find your function(s) in the body of Christ.

Of course I don’t advise anyone with a family to sell your house, quit your job, get another degree, and take a completely new career path just to “try it on.” If you can test the waters without undue risk, however, that should help you discern God’s will for you.

Yesterday afternoon I went to see the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean II*. (Went by myself. It was kinda sad—a middle-aged man sitting by himself in a dark theatre.)

I went because I'd heard that at the heart of this adventure is a compass. And it's true. At the heart of the story is a compass—no ordinary compass—an enchanted compass. The compass points not to the north, but toward that which the holder of the compass wants most in life.

I wonder what you really want. Do you truly long for a life that makes sense, that has meaning, that has direction and purpose? Do you really want to follow your call—your God-given mission?

I want to close with a challenge. Would you be willing to take this sheet of paper—this outline—and sit alone somewhere for a couple of hours? Is the living of your life worth some time alone with your Creator?

I pray for you the ability to follow your God-given COMPASS.

**Need leaders?**

*They could be right in front of you...*



PRESCHOOL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

# ANANIAS LISTENS TO GOD

BACKGROUND: ACTS 9:1-18 • KEY PASSAGE: ACTS 9:10-11,17

CO-WRITTEN BY:

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PRESCHOOL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

# ANANIAS LISTENS TO GOD

BACKGROUND: ACTS 9:1-18 ● KEY PASSAGE: ACTS 9:10-11,17

BIBLE STORY: Ananias Helps Saul

SESSION BIBLE THOUGHTS:

- Help one another. Gal. 5:13
- We are helpers. 2 Cor. 1:24
- Ananias helps Saul. Acts 9:17b-18
- Ananias listens to God. Acts 9:17a

## PREPARATION

1. Read the story of Ananias and Saul from Acts 9:1-18.
2. Read the suggestions for activities and the story from the lesson.
3. Choose which learning centers to lead. Gather resources for the learning centers.
4. Find a picture of Ananias placing his hands on Saul; consult the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades teachers.
5. Select books about being helpers.
6. Print Bible verses on a variety of colored construction paper strips and use to mark scripture passages in your Bible for using during group time.
7. Pray for yourself and your teachers, the preschoolers and their families, and your time of preparation for guiding preschoolers in their faith walk.

## TEACHER BIBLE STUDY

Read Acts 9:1-31, paying attention to the context of the passage. Note that while this is the story of the conversion of Saul, the use of the name “Paul” does not appear in this chapter. This chapter in Acts is one of three accounts of Paul’s conversion (see also chapters 22 and 26). The repetition of the event indicates its importance to the author of Acts. The conversion of Saul is a transformation from one who persecutes Christ and his followers to one who suffers for Christ and the church. His conversion is not only as a follower of Christ, but as an advocate and servant of God to share the gospel with the Gentile community.

Two visions occur in this chapter—first, Saul’s vision following the event on the Damascus road; and second, Ananias’ vision of God’s call to help Saul. As a disciple of Jesus the Christ, Ananias was at first reluctant (he had heard of the persecution of believers by Saul), but more importantly Ananias demonstrated faithfulness to the Lord’s call. He went and found Saul, and laying hands upon him, Saul’s sight returned just as Saul had seen in his vision. The focus of this lesson is on the discipleship of Ananias and the important and faithful role he played in Saul’s conversion. Through the faithfulness of Ananias and the Lord, Saul became a believer and the instrument through which the name of Christ was shared throughout the world.

Does this account of Saul and Ananias repeat itself in our lives today? Have we heard the call of God, been reluctant, but followed through nonetheless? Have we experienced God’s nudging, but missed the opportunity through our reluctance? How might we help one another in our journey with Christ?

## LEARNING CENTERS (35 – 45 MINUTES)

The learning centers are designed to encourage preschoolers to help one another just as Ananias helped Saul. As you see children helping one another, affirm them in the ways they help that they may grow in their understanding that God asks us to support, encourage, and help one another. Preschoolers enjoy a variety of activities that allow for creativity, and older preschoolers can work collaboratively, particularly when teachers encourage them to offer one another help. The learning centers are designed to support cooperative play among the children, with teachers interjecting ways they observe cooperation and helpfulness among the children.

Be sure to tell the Bible story briefly as the preschoolers learn through the centers.

### I. BLOCKS

Resources needed: wooden building blocks, variety of small transportation toys (SUV, car, truck, ambulance), traffic signs (available from Discount School Supply, item #815BEASFE), “road builder set” (available from Discount School Supply, item #815Build), “city block play mat” (available from Discount School Supply, item #815CityMat).

Ask the children to work together to build a road they may travel on to visit a friend. Talk about what friends do together. How may friends help each other? Have pictures of friends or family helping one another. Ask the children if they have traveled to help a friend or family member. Help the children write a sentence about their traveling and helping. Share later in group time.

### 2. HOMELIVING/DRAMATIC PLAY

Resources needed: Plastic smocks to protect preschoolers’ clothing, 2 dishpans, kitchen drying cloths, small sponge, and dish detergent.

Invite the preschoolers to help by washing the dishes, drying, and stacking the dishes in the homeliving/dramatic play area. Add approximately 2” to 3” inches of water to the pans; squirt 2 or 3 drops of detergent in one pan; use the second pan to rinse the dishes. One child may wash, another may rinse & place on towel to absorb some water, and another may dry and stack.

Talk with the preschoolers about ways they help at home. Use the Bible thoughts as the preschoolers learn. You may say, “Ananias helped Saul when Saul couldn’t see. The Lord told Ananias to help Saul; Ananias did as the Lord said.”

Ask the children to be helpers while you sing the following song:

Song: (to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”)

I, I, I can help, I can help at home, I can wash the dishes, I can help at home.

I, I, I can help, I can help at home, I can clean my room, I can help at home.

I, I, I can help, I can help at home, I can make my bed the best, I can help at home.

I, I, I can help, I can help at home, I can help my mom cook, I can help at home.

Have the preschoolers, especially kindergartners, make up other verses of ways they can help at home.

### 3. MUSIC

Resources needed: pictures of people needing help, large sheet of paper and washable markers, musical instruments such as tambourine, guitar, etc.

Have the children create verses about helping friends (I, I, I can help, I can help my friends – tune: “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”). Show pictures of things people need help doing – when they are sick, helping to cook, building a sand castle, building a house. Create a song, write the words on large sheets of newsprint paper and use the song in group time. Assist the children to enjoy “helping each other” write a song.

#### 4. PUZZLES

Resources needed: wooden puzzles of helpers (available from Discount School Supply, item #815compuz12 and item #815mltfampz). Place 3 to 4 puzzles on the floor for 3's; place 4 to 5 puzzles on the floor for 4's and kindergartners. Encourage preschoolers to take out the puzzle "piece by piece" rather than "dumping" all the pieces on floor at one time.

HINT: Label each puzzle on 2 sides; then write the name (i.e., firefighter) on each puzzle piece. Labeling will save you much time matching puzzle pieces to the proper puzzle.

Place puzzles of friends, church, and helpers in the center. Talk about helping at church, at home, and helping friends. Talk about helping professions such as firefighters, nurses, doctors, police officers, dentists, veterinarians, and teachers.

Say a short prayer for people who help us: "Thank you, God, for the firefighters. Keep them safe as they help people."

#### 5. ART

OPTION 1: Finger painting in a tray.

Resources needed: One tray for each child using the center, finger paint, paper, plastic smocks to protect preschoolers' clothing.

Using a tray or cookie sheet, place finger paint in the middle of the tray. Invite the children to sit or stand (depending on the height of the table) in front of the tray and paint using their fingers. Have plenty of wet paper towels or wipes for children to use for cleaning hands during the process. Once the child has finished his or her painting, have them wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water, and then return to the table. Using a piece of paper slightly larger than the tray, help the child place the paper gently on the painting to copy the image of their painting. Again, help or instruct the child to gently smooth the paper. Gently lift the paper from one side or corner, and hang to dry. As you and the child work together, talk about how important it is to help one another.

OPTION 2: Kindergartners will enjoy looking through magazines to locate pictures of people helping.

Resources needed: Magazines or leaflets, child's scissors, glue, paper.

Be alert to the kinds of magazines you provide; consider using old preschooler Bible study take-home leaflets. Allow the preschoolers to cut (or tear) the pictures and glue to 12"x18" sheet of paper.

Kindergartners may want to dictate to you a sentence about their art work. If so, remember to manuscript in lower case letters.

Briefly share the Bible story as preschoolers learn through the art center.

#### 6. BOOKS

Resources needed: picture books (with realistic pictures) about helping, magnetic letters and board, lapboards, construction paper, dry erase pens.

Place the books in various areas of the room, such as the block area. As preschoolers learn in the centers, they may pick up the book to look at it; you will have the opportunity to read the book. Limit the number of books to 4 or 5.

Ask the children to tell you and other preschoolers how the people in the books are helping. Ask the children if they have ever helped a friend or if someone has helped them.

For the kindergartners, add magnetic letters and a magnetic board to the book area along with the Bible verses printed on 12"x18" construction paper. Allow the kindergartners to "copy" the Bible thoughts from the construction paper to the magnetic board.

If you can't access the magnetic letters and board, consider using picture story lapboards (Discount School Supply item #815STORYWB) or two-sided lapboards (item #815MYWB).

Kindergartners will enjoy using either of these approaches to learning.

### CLEAN-UP TIME (5 MINUTES)

Preschoolers respond well to advance notice that "it's almost time to clean up." Help the children to finish their center work. Sing a familiar clean-up song or make up a song using a familiar tune – maybe the children created a new clean-up song in the music center or homeliving center earlier that you can use as you and the children straighten the room.

### GROUP TIME (10-15 MINUTES)

PREPARATION: Prepare name cards for Saul, Ananias, and God or Jesus. Place in the Bible for use during the story (you may want pictures of Saul, Ananias, and Jesus to help with the visualization).

#### BIBLE STORY: ANANIAS HELPS SAUL

As the children begin to gather in the group area, involve them in this movement/gathering activity.

Arms up high, reach the sky,

Arms down low, touch your toes,

Now cross your legs (one leg over the other)

and sit like so! (sit down into a seated position with legs crossed)

OPEN THE BIBLE TO ACTS 9. Show the children from where you have read the story and will now tell them.

Tell the children that the story is about helping, but it's not about helping someone you know like a friend.

Children understand helping friends. It's about helping someone because God asks you to help.

It is about helping and it is about listening to what God wants us to do.

#### ANANIAS HELPS SAUL

Ananias was sitting in his house in Damascus. As Ananias sat there, he had a vision. He saw something special. He heard Jesus call him by name.

Ananias said, "I am here, Lord."

Jesus said, "Get up and go the street named 'Straight.' There at Judas' house you will find a man named Saul. He is praying there. He knows that someone is coming to help him. He knows that someone will help him to see again."

Ananias said, "Lord, I've heard many people talk about Saul. Saul is not very kind. Saul has hurt people who want to live as you have taught them. He can do the same thing here in Damascus. He can hurt people who love you and want to be like you."

Ananias didn't want to go to help Saul; Ananias was afraid.

And Jesus said to Ananias, "Go! I have a special job for this man Saul. Saul will help many people to know that I love them. He will tell many people about me."

Ananias left his home and went to Judas' house. There he found Saul. He went to Saul. He spoke to Saul and said, "Jesus has sent me to help you."

Ananias placed his hands on Saul; when he did, Saul was able to see again.

(Pause for 5 seconds for the preschoolers to realize that the Bible story is completed and also for the preschoolers mentally and emotionally to respond to the story.)

## STORY REVIEW

Ask the preschoolers, “What are the names of the two men in our Bible story?” “How did Ananias help Saul?”

For kindergartners, you may continue the review by asking, “How do you think Ananias felt when Jesus told him to go to Saul? How would you feel if you had to help someone who you thought might hurt you?”

Say, “Stand up if you know a way that you might help someone.” Preschoolers may sit after telling you a way that they might help someone. Listen to and accept the preschoolers’ responses, thanking them for their responses.

Be alert to the need of preschoolers to stand and to move and that preschoolers’ attention spans are very short!

Show a Bible picture if you have one. Discuss who the people in the picture might be.

For kindergartners, add “reading” of the Bible thoughts. Invite preschoolers, one at a time, to come to you and to select a Bible marker on which you have written the Bible thought.

Whisper the Bible thought to the preschooler; allow them to tell the Bible thought to the other preschoolers. Then have all the preschoolers say the Bible verse with you and the “reader.” Continue until all the preschoolers have had a turn; of course, you will use the Bible thoughts several times. Each use of the Bible thought reinforces the possibility of retention.

**PRAYER:** Thank you, God, that Ananias helped Saul. We want to help others as well. Amen.

## CLOSING GAME/ACTIVITY

Red Light, Green Light (adapted)

Materials needed: red and green construction paper.

Have the children choose a partner; ensure that all children have partners. Explain that when you hold up the Red construction paper, it means “Stop.” When you hold up the Green construction paper, it means “Go.” Have one child in the “pair” close his/her eyes. The other partner will be the guide, just as Saul’s friends guided Saul to Damascus.

When you hold up the Green “Go” sign, the “sighted” partner will lead the other partner around the room. When you hold up the Red “Stop” sign, the sighted partner will help the friend to stop. Begin. After a few times of “going and stopping” have the partners switch roles. Have fun. At the end of the session, thank the children for listening and for helping.

**Need leaders?**

*They could be right in front of you...*



CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

## ANANIAS, GOD'S OBEDIENT SERVANT

BACKGROUND: ACTS: 9:1-18 ● KEY PASSAGE: ACTS 9:10-11,17

CO-WRITTEN BY:

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Need leaders?  
*They could be right in front of you...*



## CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

# ANANIAS, GOD'S OBEDIENT SERVANT

BACKGROUND: ACTS: 9:1-18 ● KEY PASSAGE: EACTS 9:10-11,17

**PURPOSE:** To help children understand that following God's instruction brings about God's good purpose in the world for all people.

**BIBLE STORY:** Ananias, God's Obedient Servant

**MEMORY VERSE:** Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight. Matthew 12:18 (NIV)

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Read Acts 9:1-31, paying attention to the context of the passage. Note that while this is the record of Saul's conversion, the use of the name "Paul" does not appear in this chapter. This chapter in Acts is one of three accounts of Paul's conversion (see also chapters 22 and 26). The repetition of the event indicates its importance to Luke, the author of Acts. The conversion of Saul is a transformation from one who persecutes Christ and his followers to one who suffers for Christ and the church. His conversion is not only as a follower of Christ, but as an advocate and servant of God to share the gospel with the Gentile community.

Two visions occur in this chapter—first, Saul's vision following the event on the Damascus road; and second, Ananias' vision of God's call to help Saul. As a disciple of Jesus the Christ, Ananias was at first reluctant to go to Saul (he had heard of the persecution of believers by Saul), but more importantly Ananias demonstrated faithfulness to the Lord's call. He went and found Saul, and laying hands upon him, Saul's sight returned just as Saul had seen in his vision.

The focus of this lesson is on the discipleship of Ananias and the important and faithful role he played in Saul's conversion. Through the faithfulness of Ananias and the Lord, Saul became a believer and the instrument through which the name of Christ was shared throughout the Gentile world and ultimately throughout the entire world.

Reflect upon the response of Ananias. Consider how often we hear the word of God and choose not to respond out of our own fear or apathy. The role Ananias played in Saul's conversion is tantamount to the role we play in others hearing and receiving the gospel.

Also, reflect on Saul's response to his experience on the Damascus road. He did not dismiss the event as some strange occurrence, but upon arriving in Damascus, he began to pray to God. He heard the Lord; he prayed; he received a vision; he accepted the task given to him by God as the instrument through which the entire world would hear the Good News of Jesus the Christ, and he began the work of God as directed.

Does this account of Saul and Ananias repeat itself in our lives today? Have we heard the call of God, been reluctant, but followed through nonetheless? Have we experienced God's nudging and missed the opportunity through our reluctance? How might we help one another in journeying with Christ? How do we or could we share the gospel more powerfully with the Holy Spirit directing the way?

The focal point of this lesson is obedience to God in the way we serve God through helping others in this world. Affirm the children as they demonstrate obedience and helpfulness during the session today. Offer them ways of experiencing obedience, both when the task is easy and when it is difficult. Help the children recognize that sometimes, even often, it is difficult to do that which is "right" or difficult to "choose the better option."

Children make decisions every day, and as significant adults in their lives, we have a responsibility to help them contemplate and evaluate the better decisions. What makes one decision better than another – even when both actions might be o.k.? What processes do we use when making decisions? Although children are often in the stage of “right and wrong,” our role is to help them begin the process of evaluating decisions so that as they grow and mature, they will have the tools to evaluate major life decisions.

Saul’s conversion changed his life forever, just as our trust, belief, and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior change our lives forever. Ananias’ decision gave him strength and courage to believe that God is present even in the most difficult and frightening tasks. Ananias learned that he was (and we are) a part of God’s plan for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

1. Locate Bible pictures of various aspects of the Bible story – Saul journeying to Damascus, Saul on his knees on the Damascus road, Ananias before Saul, Ananias touching Saul, etc. Place on the focal wall, along with the title of the session, “Ananias, God’s Obedient Servant.”
2. Print the memory verse on 12”x18” construction paper and add to the focal wall.
3. Select worship music to have playing softly as children enter the room.
4. Secure from the church or public library 3 or 4 books about helping. These books might be Bible related or quality children’s books about helping. Place on a rug in an area of the room; a child or two might need a quiet place on arrival at the session.

## PREPARATION FOR INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

1. For Simon Says: Choose the location for the activity – on the carpet, in a circle, in rows – and decide what will be the best for having children participant in this large group and physical activity. Focus on following instructions/obedience.
2. For Scavenger Hunt: Determine the number of small groups you will have. Have 1 adult for 5 to 6 children. Locate one camera (Polaroid or digital) for each group. If Polaroid, be sure to have film. If digital, you may want to show on a laptop or simply use the “review” on the digital camera. Copy the “Scavenger Hunt Activity Questions Sheet.” Provide a large piece of newsprint for each group to record answers to the questions used in the Scavenger Hunt activity. Have a copy of the questions for each group as well. Place paper, questions, and a marker at a table or space for each group to use on return to the classroom.

## PREPARATION FOR BIBLE STUDY TIME (LARGE GROUP)

1. Create a large copy of the Question/Answer Match to use as a group.
2. Write each word of the memory verse on a separate index card. Shuffle the cards so they are not in order.

## PREPARATION FOR APPLICATION ACTIVITIES

1. Provide a variety of colors of construction paper, glue for each child, and a piece of large beige, white, or black construction paper for each child to use to create a collage.
2. Make copies of the “Ananias and Saul Word Search” activity.

## GUIDE TO THE LEARNING SESSION

### I. SIMON SAYS (10 MINUTES) (LARGE GROUP ACTIVITY)

Children may join in as they arrive; have all children participate in this activity, letting it build from simple to more difficult instructions. This activity is a prelude to the second activity that will be small groups participating in a “scavenger hunt.”

“Simon Says” (or you may use your name in the game title). Give the children instructions according to their age and ability. If you have a small group, you may line them up in a row and give instructions that will move them all in the same direction. If you have a larger group, you may want to have multiple rows and direct them to perform actions that they can do in place.

Example from simple to more difficult:

Simon Says: Raise both hands

Simon Says: Raise both hands over your head

Simon Says: Raise both hands and place them behind your back

Simon Says: Lower both hands and place them behind your back.

Children enjoy being the leader in this activity as well. Change leaders as often as you want, if time allows for the activity.

EMPHASIS: following directions, being obedient.

As you finish playing the game, thank the children for listening and following directions.

## 2. SCAVENGER HUNT (10-15 MINUTES) (SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY WITH ALL CHILDREN PARTICIPATING)

- a. Divide the children in groups of 5 to 6: assign an adult to each group.
- b. Each group will need a Polaroid camera with film or a digital camera.
- c. Instruct the children to find objects or places in the church that give instructions.  
Example – on the Communion Table we often see the words, “Do this in remembrance of me.”
- d. When the children return (having used all the film and shared in the taking of pictures) have them write, as a group, answers to the following questions:
  1. Why did you choose to take this picture?
  2. What instructions or directions does the picture represent?
  3. Who are the instructions given to? individuals? the entire church?

## 3. TRANSITION TO LARGE GROUP (3 MINUTES)

Gather the children in the large group. Have each small group share their pictures and their responses to the questions from the scavenger hunt. Did the groups find the same instructions or different instructions? Compare their findings and make a complete list of their findings on instructions and ways of being obedient to God.

## 4. BIBLE STUDY TIME (20 MINUTES)

As the group is already gathered, the “scavenger hunt sharing” will serve as the transition into the Bible Study time. Share with the children that God’s instructions come to us in many ways. For Saul, they came as a voice from heaven. Sometimes we hear God’s instructions through teachers, preachers, parents, and also our friends. At other times, we read God’s instructions in the Bible and in our Bible study lessons. Are there other ways we hear, see, or experience God’s instructions? Give the children a few minutes to think about it. Have one or two share and then move on to the story.

Say, “During our Bible study, listen for the ways God gave instructions to Ananias and Saul. I will ask you questions at the end of the Bible story.”

TELL THE STORY: Open your Bible to Acts 9 and tell the following story (older children may volunteer to take turns reading the story aloud from their own Bibles for the group to hear).

## ANANIAS, GOD’S OBEDIENT SERVANT (BASED ON ACTS 9:1-18)

Ananias was a servant of God, a disciple of Jesus. He lived in the city of Damascus, not too far from Jerusalem, and shared his faith and his knowledge about Jesus and the miracles that Jesus had performed. He was a good and faithful and obedient disciple. God was getting ready to use him in a very important way.

At the same time, there was a man named Saul. Saul was a Jewish man, like Jesus, but he did not believe that Jesus really was the Son of God or that Jesus was the one to teach us about God's love and care for us. In fact, Saul believed that Jesus was bad. He believed Jesus was corrupting the beliefs of the Jewish people and that anyone who believed in Jesus should be punished.

One day Saul, a zealous and passionate young man, set out with his friends to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus. Along the way, as they were talking and joking about the punishments they would impose on the followers of Jesus, a bright and blinding light appeared from the sky, and a voice was heard saying, "Saul, why do you persecute me?" And Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Saul was blinded by the bright light. His fellow travelers helped him to make his way to Damascus. Being a faithful Jew, Saul began to pray, asking God to tell him what he needed to do. Saul was not prepared to hear the word of God, but he listened. God told him a man named Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, would come to help him.

Now Ananias, the faithful servant of God and disciple of Jesus, had a vision about the same time. God told Ananias to go to Saul and lay his hands upon him so that Saul's eyesight could be restored. Ananias was afraid of Saul because Saul was known to punish, persecute, and even cause the death of the followers of Jesus. Ananias reluctantly did as God instructed him. Ananias was not met with persecution but acceptance when he entered Saul's room.

Saul had changed in those few short days. He understood that Jesus was not only important, but the Son of God. That Jesus was the Messiah. When Ananias came to Saul and laid hands on him, scales fell from his eyes and Saul could see again. Ananias told Saul that he was to be baptized, and that he had been chosen by Jesus to share the Good News of Jesus the Christ with the Gentile community and the entire world.

Pause (for at least 8 seconds), allowing the children to realize that the Bible story is complete and to allow the children to respond emotionally and mentally to the story. Scan the group of children, looking into their eyes, as you pause.

5. REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY by asking the following questions. Give these directions before reviewing: "You may select a buddy to help you answer the questions. I will ask the question; then turn to your buddy and quietly discuss (whisper to each other) the answer. When you think you know the correct answer, stand up with your buddy. Don't offer the answer until called upon! Everyone understand our process?"

1. Who are the people in the story?

*A: Saul, Ananias, the voice of God/Jesus, men traveling with Saul*

2. What was the "strange occurrence" on the road to Damascus?

*A: Bright light and a voice from heaven*

3. Who heard the voice?

*A: Saul and the men who were traveling with him*

4. What happened to Saul?

*A: temporarily blinded*

5. How did Saul respond?

*A: continued on to Damascus with help and prayed*

6. Who is Ananias?

*A: a follower of Jesus*

7. What did God tell Ananias to do?

*A: to help Saul by going to him and placing his hands on him for healing*

8. How did Ananias feel about God's instruction?

*A: he was reluctant, scared*

9. How did he respond?

*A: he obeyed God*

## 6. APPLICATION

What do you think might have happened if Ananias had refused to help Saul? What do you think might have happened if Saul had refused to listen to God's instruction? What might have happened if the men traveling with Saul had been so frightened that they had run away and left Saul in the middle of the road? What do you think happened to Saul's friends?

When was a time you were obedient to your parents, teachers, grandparents? What happened? When were you disobedient? What happened? How do you know when to be obedient? When should you not be obedient or follow instructions?

## 7. LEARN A VERSE

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 12:18. Help the children who are having difficulty finding the verse. Encourage them to help one another. Encourage them to use the table of contents. Read the verse together. To whom does the verse refer? Why is God delighted? What do you think that you do or don't do that delights God? How can our church delight God? Can you name some times when you knew that you had delighted God? Using the pre-printed index cards, give one to each child. Have the children put the words in order and read together.

## 8. PRAY

## 9. APPLICATION ACTIVITIES (15 MINUTES) (CHILDREN CHOOSE ONE)

### 1. Helping Hands Collage:

Remind the children that being obedient to God means that we help others. Allow the children to trace around their hands and cut out the shapes. Encourage the children to identify ways they help or are obedient and write (or draw) these ways on their handprints. Encourage them to complete 4 or 5 handprints. They may glue their handprints to the construction paper to create a collage. Encourage them to hang the collage on their refrigerators or in their bedrooms as reminders to be like Ananias and to follow God's instruction, even when afraid.

Ask the children what it means to help someone they do not like (you may want to use the word enemy). Help the children write those answers as well. Talk about the importance of helping others no matter who they are. We are to show kindness to our neighbor, treating our neighbor as our self. Is this an easy task? By no means, but if we model kindness, we help others to show kindness as well. We are obedient to God's mandate to love God and love others as ourselves when we help one another.

### 2. Ananias and Saul Word Search

Help the children locate the words embedded in the word search. Words may be read from left to right, from bottom to top, and on the diagonal.

**Need leaders?**  
*They could be right in front of you...*



YOUTH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

# GOD'S CALL & HARD CHOICES

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-18

WRITTEN BY: SUZANNE STOVALL VINSON AND RICHARD VINSON

Need leaders?  
They could be right in front of you...



YOUTH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

## GOD'S CALL & HARD CHOICES

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-18

### BIBLE BACKGROUND

This is the story of Saul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and of his subsequent meeting with a Christian named Ananias. It is one of the most powerful stories of the mysterious and life-changing power of God in all of Scripture. Because of the dramatic and memorable nature of Saul's experience, the story occupies a large place in the church's understanding of conversion and of vocation. However, even though Saul is the main character in Acts, Ananias plays an equally important role in this story. Both men had to make some tough choices and had to step out on faith in order to obey God.

Be sure that youth understand that Saul is the same person as the apostle Paul who wrote a number of letters in the New Testament. His name didn't change; he probably went by a Hebrew name (Saul) among his Jewish contemporaries, and by a Greek name (Paul) among his Greek-speaking Gentile associates. Also, remind students that the book of Acts has the same author as the Gospel of Luke and that it picks up the story of Jesus' disciples after Easter.

It may be useful to have a map available to show students the locations of Jerusalem – where the apostles had gathered and where Saul was present for the stoning of Stephen – Damascus, and Tarsus. Point out that the ministry of Jesus took place in a very small geographic area: Galilee and the towns surrounding Jerusalem. It was Paul and the apostles who carried the story of Jesus across the ancient world.

The notion of a vision may arouse skepticism in some youth, whose ability to accept stories of the miraculous uncritically may be diminishing. Rather than arguing about what actually happened, point out that what is equally, if not more, miraculous about this story is the extent to which Saul – and Ananias to some degree – changed as a result of his experience. Saul was a different person with a new understanding of God after his vision, and that was his testimony throughout his life (e.g., Acts 22:6-16; Gal. 1:13-17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:8-9; Phil. 3:4-7).

**9:2 – “letters to the synagogues at Damascus”:** Some mistakenly characterize the stoning of Stephen and subsequent events as Jewish persecution of Christians. If this were true, then why would Saul have expected to find Christians in the synagogues? In fact, at the time depicted in this story Christianity was still considered a sect or branch of Judaism. After all, both Saul and Ananias (Hebrew – Hananiah) were Jewish names. Jewish believers in Jesus continued to practice their faith and to follow the Law, but they also proclaimed Jesus, the crucified preacher from Nazareth, as the Messiah and Son of God. It was this insistence on the identity of Jesus, as well as the inclusion of Gentiles into the church, that deepened the rift between Jews and Christians. That did not happen until a generation or two later. This is one reason why we find a variety of references to Christ's disciples in Acts – “the church” (8:1), “[those] who belonged to the Way” (9:2), “saints” (9:13), “all who invoke [Jesus'] name” (9:14), and finally “Christians” (11:26).

**9:10 – “Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias”:** The narrator reports that the persecution in Jerusalem scattered the believers throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), but there is no recorded mission to the

neighboring province of Syria, of which Damascus was the chief city. In keeping with the theological perspective of Acts, though, this suggests that there were other, unnamed Christians already carrying the gospel “to the ends of the earth” (1:8). For any reader, it is a reminder that God is working even when we are not aware.

**9:13 – “But Ananias answered”:** The initial response of a prophet or a servant of God to a call from God is not always positive. The banner example is Moses, who objected not once but four times (Ex. 3:13; 4:1,10,13). The judges Barak and Gideon (Judges 4:8; 6:15), the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. 6:5; Jer. 1:6), and Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:34) all asked questions or raised doubts about what God was asking them to do. In the end, though, they all lived up to their vocations.

**9:15 – “He is an instrument whom I have chosen”:** The same word translated “chosen” describes the choosing of the twelve apostles, the seven “deacons,” and those chosen in Jerusalem to bear the letter to Antioch (Luke 6:13; Acts 6:5, 15:22) [Robert, Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. II (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 118]. Its use here reinforces the characterization of Saul as someone with an important task to fulfill.

### INTRODUCTION – IS THIS SEAT TAKEN? (10 MINUTES)

Finding a seat on a crowded school bus can be one of the most unnerving experiences in a young person’s life. Play this funny game to reward those who pay attention to the needs of others and who show hospitality. Before class starts, place pairs of chairs in a column facing one direction or, if there are enough students and enough space, in two columns with a center aisle. These are the seats on the bus. Choose three students to board the bus (or one if numbers are fewer) and have the other students take seats on the bus, such that no one is sitting beside anyone else.

Prepare slips of paper with wacky characteristics (Resource Sheet A), and hand one to each of the three new boarders. Instruct them to board the bus, one by one, and to ask to sit with a rider while demonstrating their special trait. The boarders can talk and can demonstrate their special trait, but they cannot say what it is. The seated riders will try to guess what is different about each boarder. If a rider can guess, he or she will say something like, “Sure, girl who walks like a chicken, you can sit with me.” If the rider guesses correctly, the boarder sits down, and the rider gets off the bus and chooses a new trait to model. Play until everyone has had a chance to get on the bus.

Conclude by asking:

- What was it like to need someone to make a place for you?
- What was it like to have to pay attention to what someone else needed?
- Which did you find easier? Why?

### READ THE TEXT – ACTS 9:1-18 (5-10 MINUTES)

Give a brief introduction to the text. Prompt students to remember where Acts is in the Bible, who wrote it, what it’s about, and who Saul was. Read it aloud, or have one or more students read it.

### ENGAGE THE TEXT (15 MINUTES)

Allow time for class members to ask questions or to make observations about the text if they so desire. Refocus them with the following questions (Resource Sheet B). You may omit the first three if youth are already familiar with the story.

1. Why was Saul on his way to Damascus? (*A: to round up Christians and to bring them back to Jerusalem*)
2. Of what did Jesus accuse Saul? What is peculiar about the phrasing of the accusation?  
(*A: Jesus said Saul was persecuting him, not just his followers.*)
3. Why did Ananias object to helping Saul?  
(*A: Saul was a known persecutor of the church and was in Damascus to round up Christians.*)
4. What kinds of life choices did Saul face after his encounter with Christ? Which of these choices might have put him at odds with his Jewish friends and associates? (*e.g.: Christian baptism, fellowship with other Christians, belief in Jesus as God’s Son, future career as evangelist and missionary*)

5. What choices did Ananias face after his vision? Which of these choices might have put him at odds with his fellow Christians? (e.g.: *helping an enemy of the church, introducing him to other Christians and putting them at risk*)
6. What are some circumstances that make it easier to do the right thing? When is it hard to do the right thing? Can you think of other biblical stories in which someone had to do something difficult or risky to obey God? Who helped them in those situations?

### REFLECT AND APPLY THE TEXT (25-30 MINUTES)

Choose one of the following three options for reflection and application.

#### A. BUILD A CHURCH

Materials: large sheet of butcher paper, markers

Instructions: Draw a large, church-shaped outline on a piece of butcher paper. Give students markers and instruct them to write down all of the people that it takes to make a church (or their church) function (e.g., pastor/preacher, musicians, singers, teachers, students, people to open doors, people to hand out bulletins, etc.). Once they have a sufficiently large list, allow them to take a few moments and then underline the jobs that they have done. Then have them circle the jobs that they think they might be able to do. If time allows, have them choose one job each that they think one of their classmates might be able to do. Discuss their results, and point out that God calls many people to many different roles.

#### B. FALLING SCALES

Materials: cardstock or construction paper; scissors; crayons, markers, and/or oil pastels; pens and pencils; small basket or box

Instructions: There are many aspects of life that can keep a person from seeing his or her path. It can be peer pressure, the need to fit in, the attempt to rebel, a tendency to lie or to conceal the truth, fear and anxiety, or simply avoiding reality. Ask youth to design pairs of “scales” to represent those things that blind them. The scales need to be at least as large as an egg for the purposes of this project. Have youth draw on one side of the scales, adding as much detail as they wish. Then have youth list on the other side of the scales some things in life that bind, blind, or keep them from “seeing” clearly.

To begin a time of prayerful confession, have the youth hold their scales over their eyes. Ask them to pray individually for God’s guidance in their lives and for the ability to let go of those things that hinder them from following God’s call. After a few moments of silent prayer, read Acts 9:17-18a. When Paul’s scales fall from his eyes, conclude the prayer by saying, “Amen.” Have youth remove their scales and place them in a box or basket as a sign of their commitment to follow God’s direction in their lives.

#### C. WHAT’S NEWSWORTHY?

Materials: poster board, paper, pens/pencils, colored pencils, scissors, glue sticks or glue

Instructions: This is a collaborative activity in which youth imaginatively explore the story of Saul and Ananias. The finished project will be a front page layout on poster board of the [Your Church Name] Herald.

First, assign roles to the group members. Two will take the roles of Saul and Ananias, and the rest will serve as reporters, sketch artists, and editors. Resource Sheets C, D, E, and F give instructions to the newspaper staff.

Next, instruct youth to reexamine the text from Acts to find out what’s newsworthy. What in this story is worth telling and worth telling to a VERY large audience? What do people need to hear? What strikes them as the pivotal moment in the story? What makes these people tick?

Finally, have the reporters interview Saul and Ananias and write up brief reports (about a paragraph each). Sketch artists will draw an important scene or scenes from the story. Editors will write headlines and lay out the front page. Because of the time involved in this project, consider allowing the staff to finish the following week if necessary.

## SPECIAL FOLLOW-UP OPPORTUNITY

As a way to stimulate conversation about calling and vocation within your church, consider the following special session, either as an alternative to Sunday School or as a special program on a Wednesday or Sunday evening. Arrange for an adult and a youth Sunday School class to meet together, preferably in a neutral gathering space. Have each group prepare beforehand.

Youth should prepare questions for the adults about the adults' sense of God's call in their lives. Questions might include: How does your work fit into your understanding of God's call for you? Are there tasks or roles that you feel called to that are not part of your professional life? Have you ever felt called to a specific task or mission? If so, how old were you, and what were the circumstances? How did you respond? At what times in your life has it been easier or harder for you to hear and to respond to God's call?

Adults should prepare individual, handwritten notes to the youth that they know. These notes should focus on gifts that the adults recognize in the youth (e.g., charity, leadership, creativity, interest in children, compassion for older adults, public speaking, etc.) and on ways that the adults could envision the youth using their gifts.

The youth should ask their questions to the adults first in a panel format so that all adults have a chance to respond if they wish. Allow youth to ask follow-up questions if they do not understand a response. Once the questions are through, have the adults give their personal notes to the youth, which the youth will take with them.

# RESOURCE SHEET A - WACKY TRAITS

Walk like a chicken

Hair is on fire

Think you're Elvis

Dying of thirst

Can only turn left

One-man band

Shoes are filled with helium

Riding on a lawnmower

Can only speak in rhymes

Think you're a ninja

Afraid your teeth are going to fall out

# RESOURCE SHEET B - ENGAGE THE TEXT

Answer the following questions about Acts 9:1-18.

## REMEMBER

1. Why was Saul on his way to Damascus?
2. Of what did Jesus accuse Saul? What is peculiar about the phrasing of the accusation?
3. Why did Ananias object to helping Saul?

## CONSIDER

4. What kinds of life choices did Saul face after his encounter with Christ? Which of these choices might have put him at odds with his Jewish friends and associates?
5. What choices did Ananias face after his vision? Which of these choices might have put him at odds with his fellow Christians?

## RESPOND

6. What are some circumstances that make it easier for you to do the right thing? When is it hard to do the right thing?
7. Can you think of other biblical stories in which someone had to do something difficult or risky to obey God? Who helped them in those situations? Resource Sheet C – What's Newsworthy?

# RESOURCE SHEET C - WHAT'S NEWSWORTHY?

Reporter/Reporting

Team 1:

Your assignment is to interview Saul. You'll need to consult the recording of the story in Acts to develop your questions. Ask three (or more) probing questions in the short time you have. Be thorough and make sure you have time to write the story with your fellow reporters before the copy deadline. We've got to get this paper to press!

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

# RESOURCE SHEET D - WHAT'S NEWSWORTHY?

Reporter/Reporting

Team 2:

Your assignment is to interview Ananias. You'll need to consult the recording of the story in Acts to develop your questions. Ask three (or more) probing questions in the short time you have. Be thorough and make sure you have time to write the story with your fellow reporters before the copy deadline. We've got to get this paper to press!

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

# RESOURCE SHEET E - WHAT'S NEWSWORTHY?

## Sketch Artist

The challenge before you is to create the most visually appealing scene from the account in Acts. You can consult the recording of the story in Acts to begin the process as well as accompany one or both of the reporters (or reporting team) in order to better visualize the story. Remember, this is FRONT PAGE coverage the editing team needs. Thorough, accurate, timely—that's what we need. We've got to get this paper to press!

# RESOURCE SHEET F - WHAT'S NEWSWORTHY?

## Editor/Editing Team

Use the art from the sketch artists and the articles from the reporters to create the best cover in this paper's history! Write headlines, and lay out the material on poster board in an attractive and compelling way. Remember, time is of the essence. Once you have the final edit, you must present the final copy to members of the paper for review. Bonuses are in this if we sell in the millions, so get busy!

**Need leaders?**  
*They could be right in front of you...*



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

# GOD'S CALL & DIFFICULT DECISIONS

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-18

WRITTEN BY: SUZANNE STOVALL VINSON AND RICHARD VINSON

Need leaders?  
They could be right in front of you...



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON:

## GOD'S CALL & DIFFICULT DECISIONS

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-18

### BIBLE BACKGROUND

THIS IS THE STORY OF SAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS AND OF HIS SUBSEQUENT MEETING WITH A CHRISTIAN NAMED ANANIAS. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL STORIES OF THE MYSTERIOUS AND LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF GOD IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE, MADE MORE SO BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT SAUL PLAYED IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND BECAUSE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS LETTERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. THE STORY OF HIS VISION OF JESUS WAS AN IMPORTANT MOTIF IN PAUL'S — AS SAUL THE JEW WAS KNOWN TO HIS GREEK-SPEAKING AUDIENCE — OWN PREACHING (E.G., ACTS 22:6-16; GAL 1:13-17; CF. 1 COR 15:8-9; PHIL 3:4-7). IT OCCUPIES A LARGE PLACE AS WELL IN THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF CONVERSION AND OF VOCATION.

THE SAME STORY, HOWEVER, ILLUSTRATES BEAUTIFULLY HOW GOD'S CALL OPERATES IN AND THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS. AT THE SAME TIME THAT A NEWLY REPENTANT SAUL WAS PRAYING, GOD WAS PREPARING ANANIAS TO GIVE EXPLANATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO SAUL. JUST AS SAUL NEEDED THE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT OF HIS NEW BROTHERS AND SISTERS, ANANIAS, AND PROBABLY THE OTHER BELIEVERS IN DAMASCUS, NEEDED GOD'S HELP TO RECEIVE THEIR FORMER ADVERSARY INTO THEIR FELLOWSHIP. THE CALL OF GOD, WHICH EXTENDS TO ALL, LEADS THE FAITHFUL INTO PATHS OF GREATER KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICE — AND ALSO VULNERABILITY.

**9:1 – “Meanwhile”:** Both the NRSV and NIV begin the passage the same way. In fact, the temporal relationship between this story and those that precede and follow it is not certain. Perhaps they took place one after the other, or perhaps they happened at roughly the same time. Tannehill suggests that the stories of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), Saul and Ananias, and Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) are a group of three “unlikely convert” stories [Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. II, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990, p. 113, with note to Beverly Roberts Gaventa's “Overthrown Enemy.”]. The preaching of the gospel to these three — an African eunuch, a Hellenistic Jewish antagonist, and a Roman centurion — signals a new widening of the church's ministry.

**9:2 – “letters to the synagogues at Damascus”:** Some mistakenly characterize the stoning of Stephen and subsequent events as Jewish persecution of Christians. If this were true, then why would Saul have expected to find Christians in the synagogues? In fact, Christianity was still considered a sect or branch of Judaism. Jewish believers in Jesus continued to practice their faith and to follow the Law, but they also proclaimed Jesus, the crucified preacher from Nazareth, as the Messiah and Son of God. This is also why we find a variety of references to Christ's disciples in Acts: “the church” (8:1), “[those] who belonged to the Way” (9:2), “saints” (9:13), “all who invoke [Jesus'] name” (9:14), and finally “Christians” (11:26).

**9:5 – “Who are you, Lord?”:** The Hebrew word for “lord,” *’adonai*, and its Greek equivalent, *kurios*, are both forms of address for God — whose proper name no devout Jew would pronounce — and terms of respect, sort of like the English “sir.” Saul obviously knows this is no ordinary encounter, but his response shows uncertainty about the identity of the person in his vision. Later in the story, the narrator reports that “the Lord” spoke to Ananias (9:10).

When Ananias finally meets Saul, he leaves no doubt about the originator of both visions: “the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me” (9:17).

**9:9 – “For three days and nights”:** Fasting was both a symbol of mourning and of repentance, and Luke reports that Jesus fasted in the wilderness prior to his public ministry (Luke 4:2). In addition, Robert Wall notes that the time period may reflect the three days of Jesus’ entombment [Robert Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), p. 151]. Saul is, in effect, dead until Ananias comes and revives him with the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

**9:10 – “Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias”:** The narrator reports that the persecution in Jerusalem scattered the believers throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), but there is no recorded mission to the neighboring province of Syria, of which Damascus was the chief city. In keeping with the theological perspective of Acts, though, this suggests that there were other, unnamed Christians already carrying the gospel “to the ends of the earth” (1:8). For any reader, it is a reminder that God is working even when we are not aware.

**9:10 – “The Lord said to him in a vision”:** Double or complementary visions also play a role in the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. They emphasize not only the divine origin of the mission but also the scope and complexity of God’s plan. They also demonstrate the ways that Jesus, now ascended but present through the Holy Spirit, continues to play an active role in the church.

**9:13 – “But Ananias answered”:** The initial response of a prophet or a servant of God to a call from God is not always positive. The banner example is Moses, who objected not once but four times (Ex. 3:13; 4:1,10,13). The judges Barak and Gideon (Judges 4:8; 6:15), the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. 6:5; Jer. 1:6), and Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:34) all asked questions or raised doubts about what God was asking them to do. In the end, though, they all lived up to their vocations.

**9:15 – “He is an instrument whom I have chosen”:** The same word translated “chosen” describes the choosing of the twelve apostles, the seven “deacons,” and those chosen in Jerusalem to bear the letter to Antioch (Luke 6:13; Acts 6:5, 15:22) [Tannehill, p. 118]. Its use here reinforces the characterization of Saul as someone with an important task to fulfill.

**9:19 – “after taking some food”:** Food was highly symbolic in the ancient world, and how and with whom people ate were indications of ethnic, religious, and social distinctions. Food was the subject of the first argument in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1), and Paul attacked the Corinthians for their inequitable eating habits (1 Cor. 11:17-22). If this passage suggests that Saul and Ananias ate together, then it indicates not only that Saul had fully recovered but also that he was fully included by the believers in Damascus.

#### INTRODUCTION – “CONVERGING LINES OF FAITHFULNESS” (10 MINUTES)

Dr. James Fowler, author and theologian, used the term “converging lines of faithfulness” in a lecture to describe the way in which God can use the lives and choices of individuals, sometimes without their realizing it, to bring about the greater purposes of God. Take a few minutes and trace out your own lines of faithfulness. Instruct class members to cluster into groups of four or five and to discuss their faith connections (Resource Sheet A). Ask, “Which important people brought you to faith in Jesus? How did you come to this church? To this Sunday School class? What books have you read that have shaped the way you think and act? What hymns express your faith most powerfully?” Find out how many connections there are within the class.

#### READ THE TEXT – ACTS 9:1-19A (5 MINUTES)

Give a brief introduction to the passage, emphasizing its position in Acts between the persecution of the church in Jerusalem and the conversion of Cornelius. In other words, it comes at the beginning of the main missionary stage of the church. Read the passage aloud or have a class member read it.

## ENGAGE THE TEXT (25 MINUTES)

Allow time for class members to ask questions and to make observations if they so desire. If they are hesitant to engage the passage, ask some of the following questions:

1. What evidence did Saul have that this experience was really from God?
2. How do you think Saul reacted to Jesus' characterization of him as a persecutor?
3. What might have been going through Saul's mind during his three days of blindness?
4. This Ananias is only mentioned in this story in Acts. What else might we like to have known about him?
5. How does this story compare with other miracle stories in the Gospels? With other "conversion" stories in Scripture (e.g., Jonah, Zacchaeus)?

After class members are sufficiently familiar with the contours of the text, refocus the class with these questions (Resource Sheet B):

1. What choices did Saul face after his encounter with Jesus?
2. How might these choices have affected the way he was perceived by other Jews?
3. How might Ananias' decision to help Saul have been perceived by the other disciples in Damascus?
4. What are some difficult choices that Christians in our culture face?

## REFLECT AND APPLY THE TEXT (20 MINUTES)

Choose one of the following options for reflection and application.

### A. Whom do we include?

Instructions: Ananias faced a tough choice in reaching out to a known opponent of the early church. Certain groups in our culture have been the subjects of heated debate, high emotions, and even controversial legislation. As a whole class or in small groups of three or four, consider what you think would be a Christ-like response in the following situations:

- a. You are sitting in the church office one day when a mother with two small children comes to your church asking for assistance. She wears the hijab, the headscarf common to many Muslim cultures. She speaks only a little English, but it is clear that she is asking for money for food.
- b. You are serving on the building and grounds committee, and your church hires a contractor to do repairs on its parking lot. When the crew shows up for work on Monday, you notice that most of the workers are Hispanic and speak to one another exclusively in Spanish. The next day you receive a call from a fellow committee member who is concerned that the workers may be undocumented and may have entered the country illegally.
- c. A small apartment complex, whose patrons are mostly working-class singles and single parents, sits about a block from your church. As you are walking past your church's nursery area one Sunday, you overhear two congregants speaking about one of the residents. One claims to have learned that a new resident is a convicted sex offender. She is concerned about the safety of the church's children.

### B. Suffer for the sake of my name.

Instructions: Write the phrase "Suffer for the Sake of My Name" on a chalkboard or sheet of paper visible to the whole class. Break the class into two groups, and assign each one of the following discussion topics.

- a. How do we as Christians suffer for Jesus' name's sake? Why do we suffer for Jesus' name?
- b. How do Christians cause Jesus' name to suffer? In what ways do we misuse or misappropriate the name of Jesus?

Bring the groups back together at the end to discuss their findings.

### C. Visions of change.

Materials: old magazines and newspapers, scissors, poster board, glue or glue sticks

Instructions: As many commentators and historians have noted, we live in an increasingly image-driven society. This presents challenges as well as opportunities for the church as it seeks to communicate the gospel and to shape the lives of believers. Break the class into two groups, and provide each with old magazines and newspapers, scissors, a piece of poster board, and glue or glue sticks. Give each group one of the following two assignments:

- a. Look for images that you think represent and shape our contemporary culture. You can consider areas such as politics, entertainment, business and industry, consumerism, or family life. Cut these out, and mount them on the poster board.
- b. Look for images that you think could represent the message of the gospel in our contemporary culture. The images may or may not be explicitly religious. Cut these out and mount them on poster board.

Once the groups have completed their work, have them present their images to the whole group. Compare and contrast the two sets of images. Of those images that represent our culture, could any be used to present the message of the gospel? Of those images that depict themes of the gospel, how are they still shaped by our culture?

### SPECIAL FOLLOW-UP OPPORTUNITY

As a way to stimulate conversation about calling and vocation within your church, consider the following special session, either as an alternative to Sunday School or as a special program on a Wednesday or Sunday evening. Arrange for an adult and a youth Sunday School class to meet together, preferably in a neutral gathering space. Have each group prepare beforehand.

Youth should prepare questions for the adults about the adults' sense of God's call in their lives. Questions might include: How does your work fit into your understanding of God's call for you? Are there tasks or roles that you feel called to that are not part of your professional life? Have you ever felt called to a specific task or mission? If so, how old were you, and what were the circumstances? How did you respond? At what times in your life has it been easier or harder for you to hear and to respond to God's call?

Adults should prepare individual, handwritten notes to the youth that they know. These notes should focus on gifts that the adults recognize in the youth (e.g., charity, leadership, creativity, interest in children, compassion for older adults, public speaking, etc.) and on ways that the adults could envision the youth using their gifts.

The youth should ask their questions to the adults first in a panel format so that all adults have a chance to respond if they wish. Allow youth to ask follow-up questions if they do not understand a response. Once the questions are through, have the adults give their personal notes to the youth, which the youth will take with them.

# RESOURCE SHEET A - “CONVERGING LINES OF FAITHFULNESS”

Consider the following questions with your class members. Find out what connections you share.

- Which important people brought you to faith in Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How did you come to this church? To this Sunday School class?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What books have you read that have shaped the way you think and act?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What hymns express your faith most powerfully?

# RESOURCE SHEET B - “ENGAGE THE TEXT”

Answer the following questions about Acts 9:1-19a.

1. What choices did Saul face after his encounter with Jesus?
2. How might these choices have affected the way he was perceived by other Jews?
3. How might Ananias' decision to help Saul have been perceived by the other disciples in Damascus?
4. What are some difficult choices that Christians in our culture face?