

Monday
Acts 9:1–28

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early Christian Church began to grow rapidly. But there were also people who opposed the Christians. Saul, an enemy of the followers of Jesus, was authorized to find and arrest Christians in Damascus.

As he traveled to that city, suddenly a bright light from heaven shined on him. Falling to the ground, Saul heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul asked, "Who are you?"

And the voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus told Saul to go to the city, where he would be told what to do. When Saul got up, he was unable to see. Those who were with him had to lead him into the city. Meanwhile, Jesus spoke to a disciple named Ananias, who lived in Damascus. He told Ananias to go to Saul and help him. Ananias didn't want to go. He had heard that Saul hated Christians. Jesus said, "Go. Saul will tell many people about me." So Ananias went with a message from Jesus. Saul's sight was restored, and he was baptized.

Then Saul began to preach the good news of Jesus in Damascus. Now his former friends were his enemies. They were angry that he had changed. They wanted to capture him. So his new Christian friends let Saul down over the wall of the city in a basket to escape. Saul, also known as Paul, went to Jerusalem and spoke boldly of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus changed Paul. Paul was once a man who hated those who believed in Jesus. Now, he was a missionary. As a missionary, Paul would tell people all over the world the good news about Jesus. The good news about Jesus is called the gospel. Paul wrote several letters to believers in other cities and talked about the gospel. The gospel tells us that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to earn forgiveness of sins and a home in heaven for all people.

• **Why is the gospel important for us as sinners?**

Loving Father, thank you so much for the gospel! Please give us patience and endurance to spread the gospel, that we might reflect and share your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday
Acts 13–14

The Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas on a journey to spread the good news about Jesus. They began in Antioch and traveled to many towns all around the Mediterranean Sea. Whenever they reached a new place, they would go first to the Jewish meeting house. There Paul and Barnabas told the Jews that God had sent Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Then Paul and Barnabas moved on to tell other people who were not Jews about the gospel. Paul and Barnabas were called missionaries because they brought good news to many people in faraway places.

In each city they went to, there were people who did not believe their message. Sometimes these people became very angry and treated Paul and Barnabas badly. But in each city, the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of other people who then believed. With help from Paul and Barnabas, these new believers formed new little churches. When they finished their work in each city, the Holy Spirit would send Paul and Barnabas on to new places.

Once in a town called Lystra, Paul and Barnabas met a crippled man who had never walked before. Paul saw that this man had faith. In a loud voice Paul said to the man, "Stand upright on your feet."

Immediately, the man jumped up and began to walk! When the crowds saw the miracle, they thought Paul and Barnabas must be pagan gods of some sort. They said, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" The pagan priest, who looked after the city's idols, brought garlands of flowers and a bull to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. The people even began to call Paul and Barnabas by the names of false gods.

Paul and Barnabas were horrified! Only the Lord should be worshipped. They tried to stop the people from worshipping them. Paul said, "Why are you doing these things? We too are only human, like you."

Then Paul explained how he and Barnabas had come for this very reason: to turn people away from these false gods, so that they could know the one true living God, who made heaven and earth. Some people in Lystra believed Paul's message, but others tried to stop him.

Paul and Barnabas journeyed a long time. Then, on their way home, they stopped at all the places they had visited before. They encouraged those who believed in Jesus. All along the way, God continued to protect Paul and Barnabas, leading them and blessing their work.

When they arrived back in Antioch, they reported to the believers all that God had done and how both Jews and Gentiles had believed in Jesus. The Holy Spirit had worked in people's hearts so they would repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus.

Today the Holy Spirit still sends missionaries to spread the good news about Jesus, and he still changes people's hearts so they believe in him.

- **What happened to Paul and Barnabas in the town of Lystra after the crippled man was healed?**
- **Who did the people think Paul and Barnabas were?**
- **Many of the people who believed were Jews, but what were the other people called?**
- **How do people in faraway places find out the good news about Jesus today?**

Wednesday
Acts 16:11–15

Paul and his friend Silas traveled to many distant countries, telling people the good news about Jesus. Eventually, their travels took them to Philippi in the present-day country of Greece on the continent of Europe.

On the day when people got together to worship God, Paul and Silas went outside the city to the river. There, they expected to find a place of prayer. They sat down and began to speak about Jesus to the women who had gathered there. One of those women was Lydia. She made a living dealing in purple cloth.

As Paul and Silas talked about Jesus, Lydia listened to what they were saying. The Holy Spirit used God's Word as it was spoken by Paul to change Lydia's heart. Lydia became a believer in Jesus! Lydia and the members of her family were baptized. And Lydia invited Paul and Silas to come and stay at her house.

Holy Spirit, you forgive my sins and make me new every single day. Guide me today in faith that I know true joy and do those things that show your power in my life. I pray in Jesus' name, with thanks for all he has done for me. Amen.

Thursday

Acts 16:22–34

Saul, also called Paul, became a great missionary. He traveled to many places to preach the gospel. Many people, however, did not want to hear the message about Jesus.

In Philippi, Paul and his helper Silas were arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison. Inside the prison, Paul and Silas sat with their feet locked in wooden stocks. Still, they were not discouraged. At midnight, while they were praying and singing hymns, an earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. The doors opened, and the chains that held Paul and Silas fell off.

The jailer awoke from sleep and, seeing the open prison doors, took out a sword to kill himself. Paul called out, "Do not harm yourself. We are all here." The jailer called for light, rushed to Paul and Silas, and fell trembling before them. He said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." The jailer took Paul and Silas to his home and washed their wounds. He and his whole family were baptized. The jailer was filled with joy. And so the jailer and his whole family believed the gospel and became Christians.

Dear Father, thank you for making me your child and a new person through Jesus. Thank you for your love and grace, and for my baptism. Help me to share your love with others. Amen.

Friday

Romans 8:28

Sometime after Paul's third missionary trip, he was arrested and taken to Rome to stand trial as a Roman citizen. While sailing to Italy, his ship faced a terrible storm. The wind raged, and the waves splashed.

Neither the sun nor the stars could be seen for many days. The people began to give up hope of being saved. Paul encouraged them by telling of a message God had given him through an angel. God's message said that though their ship would be destroyed, not one of them would die.

When they were shipwrecked, Paul and his fellow travelers swam or floated to the nearby island of Malta. The friendly island people of Malta built a fire to warm the cold and wet newcomers. When Paul threw sticks onto the fire, a poisonous snake bit him.

Paul shook the snake into the fire. Paul suffered no harm because God had said he would live to reach Rome. From Malta, Paul and his shipmates traveled on safely to Rome. Paul was greeted in Rome by the Christians there, who were glad to see him. For two years, Paul remained in Rome under house arrest, preaching the good news of Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Each of these things that happened in Paul's life was part of God's plan for him. God planned for Paul, once a persecutor of God's people, to become a great missionary who would take the good news into the world. And so Paul did. It was God's will, part of his plan. And God's will for each of us is that we come to faith in Jesus and live our lives for him.

- **What goals have you set for yourself?**
- **What goals do you think God has set for you?**

Dear Father thank you for always listening to me. Help me always to first seek you and your will, and then trust it and follow it. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.