

God space  
Noticing where God is at work

Acts 9:1-22

You may wondering why I am speaking from Acts when we have just completed a whole series through Acts. Well a number of reasons, only half of you would have been here anyway, and the other half won't remember, we skipped over some bits and the story but mainly fits with the topic that I believe God wants to encourage us with.

The passage is Saul's/Paul's conversion, and I am reading from the Message translation.

**9** <sup>1-2</sup> All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest and got arrest warrants to take to the meeting places in Damascus so that if he found anyone there belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.

<sup>3-4</sup> He set off. When he got to the outskirts of Damascus, he was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you out to get me?"

<sup>5-6</sup> He said, "Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, the One you're hunting down. I want you to get up and enter the city. In the city you'll be told what to do next."

<sup>7-9</sup> His companions stood there dumbstruck—they could hear the sound, but couldn't see anyone—while Saul, picking himself up off the ground, found himself stone-blind. They had to take him by the hand and lead him into Damascus. He continued blind for three days. He ate nothing, drank nothing.

<sup>10</sup> There was a disciple in Damascus by the name of Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision: "Ananias."

"Yes, Lord?" he answered.

<sup>11-12</sup> "Get up and go over to Straight Street. Ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus. His name is Saul. He's there praying. He has just had a dream in which he saw a man named Ananias enter the house and lay hands on him so he could see again."

<sup>13-14</sup> Ananias protested, “Lord, you can’t be serious. Everybody’s talking about this man and the terrible things he’s been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he’s shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us.”

<sup>15-16</sup> But the Lord said, “Don’t argue. Go! I have picked him as my personal representative to non-Jews and kings and Jews. And now I’m about to show him what he’s in for—the hard suffering that goes with this job.”

<sup>17-19</sup> So Ananias went and found the house, placed his hands on blind Saul, and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord sent me, the same Jesus you saw on your way here. He sent me so you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” No sooner were the words out of his mouth than something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes—he could see again! He got to his feet, was baptized, and sat down with them to a hearty meal.

<sup>19-21</sup> Saul spent a few days getting acquainted with the Damascus disciples, but then went right to work, wasting no time, preaching in the meeting places that this Jesus was the Son of God. They were caught off guard by this and, not at all sure they could trust him, they kept saying, “Isn’t this the man who wreaked havoc in Jerusalem among the believers? And didn’t he come here to do the same thing—arrest us and drag us off to jail in Jerusalem for sentencing by the high priests?”

<sup>22</sup> But their suspicions didn’t slow Saul down for even a minute. His momentum was up now and he ploughed straight into the opposition, disarming the Damascus Jews and trying to show them that this Jesus was the Messiah.

Today we continue our series on Godspace – where spiritual conversations happen naturally.

- It’s a term that is used to describe that space or area in which God works within us and within the lives of people around us.
- Godspace is a short way of describing being sensitive to the Kingdom of God or the way God is working and moving in our midst.
- The more Godspace we have in our lives the more we will be able to engage in spiritual conversations with people that we meet in everyday situations.



NEVER

SOMETIMES

ALWAYS

5. Be honest: Do you *like* people who are far from God?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

6. Do people who are far from God like *you*? For example: Are you invited to “party parties”?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

7. Does your body language communicate an open-hearted acceptance of the not-yet-Christians in your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

8. Are you able to communicate acceptance to not-yet-Christians without endorsing their lifestyles?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

9. In your relationship with not-yet-Christians, do you typically offer kindness rather than “rightness”?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

10. Is your heart consistently broken and filled with compassion for the not-yet-Christians in your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
NEVER SOMETIMES ALWAYS

It’s a simple evaluation, not meant to be threatening, it is meant to give us some food for thought about how we connect with the unchurched around us.

I think that it can be quite difficult to rate yourself, so maybe have a chat with your spouse or friend, or maybe even a non-Christian friend, and see what they think.

Any way you can total your score, and then the writer of the Godspace book has given some classifications for your scores.

TOTAL SCORE (add circled numbers in questions 1-10): \_\_\_\_\_

**85-100**—Congratulations! The not-yet-Christians in your life are undoubtedly drawn toward the heart of Jesus formed in you. Keep walking in this light.

**65-85**—You must decrease, and Jesus must increase—one heart at a time. Embrace the people and the situations in your life as God attempts to prune those heart attitudes that are not bearing fruit for his kingdom.

**Under 65**—Jesus needs to do something *in* you before he can do something *through* you. Consider spending less time doing religious activities, and more time asking God to do the soul surgery needed to form the heart of Jesus in you.

Like any evaluation the goal is not to have all tens, the goal is not really to compare with other people, because their evaluation of what ‘sometimes’ means will be different from yours. The goal is to work out where you are and just to move forward, just one step at a time, to have a little more sensitivity to God’s work in the people around us. However if you do have all tens then come and see me after the service and you can preach the remainder of this series.

### **Ananias and Saul’s encounter**

This story we read here from Acts 9, the story of the conversion of Saul speaks to some of these areas, where Ananias and Saul have a fascinating, divinely appointed encounter. It’s a story of an encounter with God first and foremost, where Saul’s life was changed dramatically in a very mysterious mystical event, where a light shines from heaven and a voice, the voice of Jesus comes to Saul and it changes the course of his life in an instant.

And yet the story of Saul’s transformation isn't complete until he has this encounter with Ananias, a man, about whom we know very little.

Ananias is a Christian, he is a disciple, a follower of Jesus, but this is the only story in all of the New Testament where this man shows up. Can you imagine being Ananias as he encounters Saul?

Saul is mean, he is not friendly, he is not nice, he is not the kind of guy that you invite over to have dinner with the family, he is angry, ruthless and dangerous.

In the early days of the Christian movement it was not safe for Christian's to be Christians, and especially in this story. Saul has papers from the authorities that allowed him to arrest Christian's, and take them back to Jerusalem and imprison them, try them, and hopefully, from Saul's perspective, execute them, either by stoning or crucify them. It wasn't safe to be a Christian at all.

In this first encounter between Ananias and Saul I wonder what Ananias' attitude was to Saul. Cast your mind back to the questionnaire we had at the beginning when we were considering the way we might initially connect with the unchurched. I wonder what Ananias' verbal and non-verbal responses were like. Can you sense the feeling in Ananias words when God lead him to go and see Saul;

“Lord, you can't be serious. Everybody's talking about this man and the terrible things he's been doing, his reign of terror against your people in Jerusalem! And now he's shown up here with papers from the Chief Priest that give him license to do the same to us.”

And then when Ananias spoke to Saul, I wonder what his body language was, probably just as well Saul was blind!

“Brother Saul, the Lord sent me, the same Jesus you saw on your way here. He sent me so you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

There is no record of this but I am pretty sure that Ananias needed to seek to understand Saul before trying to make Saul understand him.

It might have been tempting for Ananias to take advantage of that opportunity to criticise Saul for what he was doing, to rip into him, make him squirm, to yell at him and remind him of all the terrible things he was doing.

It might have been tempting to find a way to kill Saul. After all if we could kill the guy was going to kill a lot of Christians, wouldn't that be good for Christianity. That tends to be the way we deal with enemies today, we just get rid of them, we build a wall...that would be better for us.

But Ananias was sensitive to what God was doing in Saul's life. Ananias was sensitive to the Godspace around him. He was willing to listen to God's voice, even if it was instructing him to do something that was not only outside of his comfort zone, but outside of his ideas of how God should work!!!

Saul for that matter had to be spiritually sensitive too. He saw light from heaven, he heard Jesus' voice, but he had to choose whether or not to listen to that voice, whether to obey it or not, he had to choose to be spiritually sensitive to God's desire. Even though he would have been seething with rage and violence within himself, he showed an openness to God's work in his life.

Saul's conversion shows us that God can speak to anyone, God can transform anyone's life regardless of our expectations.

### **Judas from Straight Street**

There is one more character in our story that shows a spiritual sensitivity, and we know even less about him than we know about Ananias. And that's a bloke named Judas who lives on Straight Street. (v 11-12) Judas from Straight Street has no lines in this scene, he doesn't do anything else in scripture, he is just there.

Somehow this Judas, whoever he is, whatever his thoughts about God or Jesus are, he found himself taking care of a blind Jewish Pharisee, who had encountered God in some strange way. He provided for his needs and he opened his home to a potentially dangerous situation.

Whoever this Judas was, whatever he understood about God or Christian faith, he made space in his home for a meeting that changed the world. Because, you see, this Saul character is no ordinary person. In a little while he will change his name from the Aramaic version Saul to the Greek version Paul. And he will go on a handful of missionary trips, preaching Jesus, planting churches and seeing all sort of people come to faith in Christ. He will end up writing the majority of the books of the New Testament, and letters to lots of churches that becomes our bible.

So **thank you Judas** from Straight Street for your hospitality and being sensitive to the situation and for creating space in your home.

And **thank you Ananias** whoever you were, for being sensitive to God voice, for setting your fears aside and for noticing what work God was doing in Saul's life.

Noticing where God is at work is a crucial first step in the lifestyle of learning to share Jesus and his love with other people. If we don't pause to notice what is going on around us, then we run the risk of rolling through life like a steam roller, not listening or noticing anyone, and we will miss an encounter or conversation that God is asking us to join.

So your homework for this week is to pay attention to the other people in your everyday life. If it's the waitress at the café or the checkout operator or your neighbour or that kid at school, just pay attention to someone in your life this week. You don't have to introduce them to Jesus, you don't have to enter into some kind of uncomfortable spiritual conversation, just notice what's going on in someone else's life. Notice what God is doing.

Next Sunday when we gather together I'm going to ask a couple of you to volunteer to share how you have seen God working in someone else's life over the last week or two, so be prepared.