

Bible Background

Jesus was not accepted by everyone as warmly as he was by the disciples who followed him or the magi who discovered him in Bethlehem. Some people, who believed that their power was challenged by Jesus' message, had Jesus arrested and killed. But on the third day after his death, Jesus was raised from the dead! Jesus' resurrection, as well as the Holy Spirit, galvanized his disciples and other followers to continue sharing his message throughout the world. This movement became the church and spread quickly in the surrounding area.

Some people opposed the church, however, believing the message shared by the church jeopardized their power the same way Jesus' ministry did. A man named Saul was one such person. Saul saw the church as a threat to the power structure that existed and sought to bring an end to this movement of Jesus followers—and often violently. However, on the way from Jerusalem to the city of Damascus, Saul encountered Jesus in a vision. In his encounter with Jesus, Saul lost his eyesight and was led by God to understand that his persecution of Jesus' followers was wrong.

All of this, including the familiar story of Saul's encounter with Jesus, serves as a backdrop for our Session 5 story, which focuses on the followers of Jesus in Damascus. As far as these disciples knew, Saul wanted them dead. One disciple, named Ananias, also receives a vision from Jesus. Jesus tells Ananias to find Saul and restore his sight. But Ananias knows about Saul, and he is wary about helping an enemy of the church. "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man. People say he has done horrible things to your holy people in Jerusalem. He's here with authority from the chief priests to arrest everyone who calls on your name" (Acts 9:13-14).

Jesus explains to Ananias that Saul will share his message with "Gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (verse 15). Ananias knows he must trust God's grace to transform even someone as fearsome as Saul, so he obeys. Saul's sight is restored, and he stays in Damascus with the other disciples, preaching about Jesus in the synagogues. But the tables soon turn on Saul. After preaching about Jesus to the people in Damascus, some of them began to plot to kill Saul—much like he had done before his encounter with Jesus! Jesus' disciples in Damascus had a choice: they could abandon Saul—a man who had once conspired to kill them—to fend for himself against the threat of death, or they could extend grace and help him escape the city. The disciples understood the grace shown to all of us by Jesus and extended that same grace to Saul. They snuck him out in a basket through an opening in the city wall, and Saul returned to Jerusalem to continue preaching Jesus' message.

These disciples in Damascus were called to show grace to Saul, even though they knew of him only as their enemy. Jesus calls us to show grace to everyone, too—even our enemies! It might be difficult or even scary to love our enemies. Jesus' disciples in Damascus were afraid, too. But Heroes know God is with us when we show love to everyone! Saul was transformed by his interaction with disciples who showed him grace. When we work together like the disciples in Damascus, who knows what we can accomplish?



Bible Story

Unexpected Heroes Give Paul a Basket Ride
Acts 9:1-25

Hotline Verse

So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.
(Romans 14:19)

Hotline Tip

Heroes are called to...
Show Grace!

Teacher Tip

This Bible Background feature is a supplemental aid provided for you, the Storyteller, to give context for each session's story before you teach on it. You may share this information with your Heroes, if desired, but it is not a recommended portion of the intended lesson.