

THE REST OF THE STORY

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 9:1-9

Topic

Saul quits kicking against the goads
and is saved on the road to Damascus

Title

Goad Hazard

Acts 9:1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

Acts 9:2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Acts 9:4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**"

Acts 9:5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**"

Acts 9:6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "**Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.**"

Acts 9:7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

Acts 9:8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Introduction

To this day I would swear that there was a ladder in the road!

We were returning from a worship conference and were just north of Costa Mesa along I-5. I was driving a rented Ford Explorer filled with conferees from our fellowship. Mostly they were napping and so I don't blame them for their contrary opinion about what happened next. Suddenly and without warning there was an extension ladder in my lane. I swerved (in a very controlled manner I thought) to avoid the hazard.

No one else saw the ladder, **but it was there**. We arrived home safe and sound and without further incident. Except that none of those passengers will drive even locally with me anymore!

Saul encountered a very spectacular road hazard. No one traveling with him saw it quite like he did. It was the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Lord made a very pointed statement (bad pun intended): **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**"

A **goad** is a long wooden pole used to prod stubborn oxen. One end of the pole is either sharpened to a point or it has a sharp piece of metal attached to it. When an ox doesn't want to obey their master it kicks against him and he goads them back on their way.

Jesus had been goading Saul. Saul had been stubbornly resisting. On the road to Damascus Saul would finally relent and the Lord's *goad*ing would change to His *guid*ing.

Before you were saved, and sometimes even after you are, Jesus has to goad you. You've chosen a way that seems right to you but in the end it leads to destruction and death. He wants to guide you along His way that yields peace and leads to life.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Goads You Along Your Way, and #2 Jesus Guides You Along His Way.

#1 Jesus Goads You
Along Your Way
(v1-5)

This is the first of three accounts of Saul's conversion in the Book of Acts (22:1-16 & 26:9-18). In chapter thirteen we'll read that Saul was also called Paul. His conversion settled his calling as an apostle and, from this point forward, he is the main character in the early history of the Church.

We first encountered Saul at the stoning of Stephen in chapters seven and eight. He led the persecution against the first Christians. **He made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison (8:3).**

Acts 9:1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

The word for **breathing** is literally *breathing in*. It was as if he was a predatory animal who had caught a scent. I watched a show about great white sharks the other day. (By the way... You don't want to be out in the waters of the Red Triangle, from Monterrey to just north of San Francisco). A great white can detect a single drop of blood in twenty-five gallons of water.

Saul caught a scent of **disciples of the Lord** two hundred miles away. He wanted to **murder** them.

Acts 9:2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

The disciples of the Lord in **Damascus** may have fled there from Jerusalem when persecution broke out. More likely they had been in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, gotten saved, and returned home to Damascus. Back home they continued to attend their local **synagogues**.

Letters from the **high priest** would instruct the synagogue leaders to identify those who had returned from Jerusalem converted to Jesus

Christ. Saul would then seize them and bring them back as prisoners.

Christians were called **the disciples of the Lord** and the Church was called **the Way**. It's a very basic description but a profound one. A **disciple** is a follower of his or her teacher. The teachings and lifestyle of the teacher are the **way** the disciple is to live.

You might occasionally remind yourself that you are a disciple of the Way. You once were going another way on a broad path that leads to destruction and eternal separation from God. It might have been a secular way; it might have been a so-called spiritual way. Either way it was the wrong way! Then you met Jesus and He set you on the narrow way that leads to eternal life.

Acts 9:3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Saul was almost to the city. The other accounts of this event tell us it was high noon. Without warning Saul was surrounded by a light brighter than the noon sun. It was as if he was under a spotlight.

Acts 9:4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**"

In one of the other accounts you learn that they all fell to the ground (Acts 26:14). This gives rise to the common Bible myth that Saul was knocked off his horse. No where are we ever told he was riding a horse! Many paintings of this show him on a white steed. One scholar noted, "Painters are, in almost every case, wretched commentators" (Adam Clarke).

Imagine the impact of the question, **why are you persecuting Me?** Saul thought he was persecuting men and women who were following the heretical teachings of a dead man. Now it quite literally dawned on him that Jesus was alive!

Before continuing with Saul we might want to consider the impact of Jesus' question upon ourselves. Jesus takes very seriously words spoken against or actions taken against His saints. Whatever you say and do to believers you are saying and doing to Jesus!

Acts 9:5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

There is a lot of scholarly debate as to whether this initial word for **Lord** was just a polite title or a recognition of deity. It seems to me that Saul knew he was in the presence of God.

Jesus was risen from the dead and **is** God! This Q&A with Jesus would have such a profound affect on Saul that later he would develop the unity and oneness of Christians with their Lord in the letters he wrote to the various Churches. He would be the one who talked about the Church as the body of Jesus on the earth.

Jesus said something revealing to Saul. He said, **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.** It meant that Jesus had been goading Saul for some time but Saul had been resisting.

One goad that we can for sure identify was the shining face of Stephen as he was being pelted with stones and martyred. Another goad would have been the words Stephen spoke while dying:

Acts 7:59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Acts 7:60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

I'd bet that every one of the men and women that Saul persecuted and imprisoned and murdered was like Stephen. Every one of them was a goad. The harder Saul kicked against them the more it pricked him. These people were powerful. They were radical. They had something supernatural. It was driving Saul crazy in a manner of speaking.

Our episode thus far suggests two applications for us:

1. The first and most obvious is that Jesus is already at work in the lives of nonbelievers to goad them towards faith. The Lord has many means at His disposal to prick the hearts and minds of people on their way to Hell.
2. The second and (perhaps) less obvious application is that the Lord's goading often involves you as a believer in relationship

with nonbelievers. Especially when they somehow mistreat or persecute you. It is then that **you** can be like Stephen and not want the Lord to charge them with their sin. It is then they can see the radical transformation within **you**.

It's not going too far to say that you are a goad in the hands of Jesus! But only when you are filled with His Spirit and let His light shine forth.

In the account of Stephen we read that his face was like that of an angel (6:15). Certainly there was a peace about his expression. But it might indicate his face shone with light from within him. Saul had seen this. Now a light shone around Saul – the same light, the light from Heaven.

Your life and testimony can be the spotlight that shines upon or around nonbelievers that encourages them to ask, *Who is your Lord?*

#2 Jesus Guides You Along His Way (v6-9)

If there is any debate about his first use of the word Lord, there is none in his second utterance:

Acts 9:6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "**Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.**"

Saul was saved in this encounter. Later Saul would write **if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved** (Romans 10:9). He confessed Jesus as Lord; he obviously knew God had raised Jesus from the dead!

Charles Ryrie adds, "[Saul] was one of those rare persons who settled the matter of life service at the same time as he settled the question of the salvation of his soul." Saul was fully at the disposal of Jesus and he would be from that point forward.

The Lord only gave Saul the very next step. Literally. Just get up and walk in to the city.

Do you read instruction manuals? *You should!* Often each step is essential to complete before you can move to the next step. When I am putting something together I know what it's going to be at the end. But it takes each step to get to the end.

God is putting you together a little at a time as you walk along a path set for you as His disciple. You can't profitably skip any steps and arrive at the place of completion where you are conformed into the image of Jesus and are like Him.

Getting up and walking into Damascus wasn't going to be so easy:

[Acts 9:7](#) And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

[Acts 9:8](#) Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus.

The [men who journeyed with](#) Saul didn't see the Lord. The other accounts advise you that they heard something but not intelligibly. It reminds me of any service in which the Gospel is presented to a group of nonbelievers. Some may respond. They see the Lord; they hear His voice. *Others do not!* It remains a mystery to us.

- being changed to bring change -

Saul was physically blind but he could see. His traveling companions could see but were spiritually blind.

As a blind man he would need to be [led... by the hand](#) into town. The little corp of armed soldiers with him would not make a grand and fear-inspiring entrance. Instead they became care-givers, nurses really. From one point of view it was comical.

What became of the letters Saul was carrying? They would have gone for a high price on e-bay!

It's interesting to note that, as a devout Jew and Pharisee following the Law to the letter, Saul carried letters of authority from the high priest in Jerusalem. As a Christian indwelt by God the Holy Spirit he

became a living-letter and would be inspired by God to write letters filled with the grace of God.

[Acts 9:9](#) And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Whether this was a fast or Saul just had no appetite it all amounts to the same thing. He was [three days](#) trying to sort out what all of this might mean. Everything he had lived for had been taken from him. **But everything he had longed for had been given to him!**

The last thing Saul had seen was the face of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. All of his thinking and praying for three days would be illuminated by the glow of that glory.

It's a good exhortation for us! We must 'see' Jesus in His risen glory by the eye of faith. Then everything we study in His Word should be illuminated by His glory.

Jesus had been goading Saul. Now He was guiding him, one step at a time. Saul had himself become a disciple of the Way. He would learn to walk with Jesus day-by-day.

God loves to walk with you. It's how things started out way back seven thousand or so years ago in the Garden of Eden. He would come into the garden in the cool of the day to walk around with Adam and Eve.

Because of their sin walking around has become a lot more dangerous and difficult! We're no longer in the beautiful garden paradise but are in a fallen and rapidly decaying world. Awful and unspeakable things happen to people. Even God's children.

God still walks with you. It's just that sometimes it is through peril or affliction or suffering. He will guide you through it; He will get you through it; He will grace you through it.

You are a disciple and the way is His, chosen for you for your good and His glory. Let Him shine through you along your way so others will have His light shine upon and around them.