

# impossible discipleship

acts 9.1-19

We serve an impossible God who has offered us a life that is absolutely supernatural. That is clear from the Scriptures. But it doesn't happen on its own. We're looking at different aspects of our activity as Christians who want to see the power of God working in our lives.

We've looked at devotion and faith and today we turn to the New Testament to see the next stop in this process: discipling others.

We're all familiar with Matthew 28.19:

**Matthew 28.19 - [Jesus said] "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."**

It's interesting that we're not commanded to go and make *converts*. We're to go and make disciples. We're to not only share the Gospel, but then we're to get those who believe on the disciple road, show them how to identify with Christ, so that they can have their lives transformed. In that process we are called to be disciplined as well.

Now, the word 'discipleship' means a lot of different things to different people. In the American Evangelical culture it's become largely programmatic. With accountability groups or small group studies or some other sort of system. But, since we are commanded to disciple people, it's important that we understand what that actually means.

There's a powerful and very practical example of how we carry out this command, even when it seems impossible, in Acts chapter 9. What we're going to see there is the conversion of Saul, but, more importantly, we'll see a Christian named Ananias carrying out this calling to disciple others.

**Acts 9.1-19 - Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.**

**As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"**

**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."**

**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."**

**And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 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. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**

**Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."**

**So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."**

**Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."**

**But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.**

**So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.**

Biblical discipleship isn't very programatic. In our culture, we love programs. We love books and methods and systems. Most of what we do as discipleship is programatic. That's not necessarily wrong, it's just not *necessarily* Biblical.

Here's the thing - when God asks us to participate in discipleship, He's not asking for a program, He's asking for a 'Here I am.' That's the starting point. Because the Lord can and does accomplish His will for people's lives in all sorts of small and large ways. And our activity in discipleship doesn't begin with a system, it begins with volunteering. By coming to the Lord, who is calling us, and saying, "Here I am."

Ananias was going to accomplish some wonderful discipleship here in this text and he serves us as an example. But, really, what he did was very simple. It was plain. What we see highlighted was the way he approached this calling. And, hopefully, there are a few ideas we can bring home to our own lives as we take a look at what happened.

So Saul is knocked off his horse and blinded there on the road to Damascus. God tells him to get up and go into the city and his companions lead him by the hand into a house. Then, in verse 6, Saul is told that he's going to have to wait for someone to come and tell him what he must do. Interesting that Jesus didn't just explain it to him right then since He had already gone to the trouble of revealing Himself.

But elsewhere, God appears to a man named Ananias in a vision and gives him this specific task of going and ministering to Saul. And, when God shows up to direct Ananias, he says, "Here I am."

If you go into E-Sword or other Bible programs that let you do a phrase search and you type in 'here I am', you'll find some very interesting passages. Really, that could be a whole series by itself. But, so many times, what we see in those passages is God revealing Himself or revealing some plan that He has, then waiting for someone to take up the call. When God called to Moses from the burning bush, Moses answered, "Here I am!" When God was revealing Himself to Samuel, the first prophet of Israel, Samuel answered, "Here I am!" When God said, "Who will go?" Isaiah answered, "Here I am Lord, send me!"

The calling to make disciples starts with a person who is ready to be sent. Ready to be used. And, once we've made ourselves available, then God puts us to task. For Moses, it was to lead 2 million people out of bondage. For Samuel, it was to transition between different leaderships in Israel. For Isaiah, it was to preach.

For Ananias, it was to go to a house, meet a guy and put his hands on him.

It was a relatively simple task, but from our perspective, we know that it was the beginning of an incredible life of ministry of the last and perhaps greatest apostle of Jesus Christ. It was the moment, really, when Saul became Paul.

Now, the task was pretty simple, but the target wasn't. In fact, the person that God called Ananias to disciple was pretty dangerous. The target seemed impossible. Verse 13:

**Acts 9.13-14 - Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."**

As usual, we're quick to criticize Ananias about this. However, I don't really think this was back-talking to God. At very least, I think there's enough room in the text that we can give him the benefit of the doubt. Because when God responds to this statement, He doesn't rebuke Ananias.

Remember when Peter was called to go and preach to the house of Cornelius, he had the vision of the sheet and all the animals and Peter said, "Hey, I'm not going to eat this stuff." God answered and rebuked him. He said, "I don't want you to say that. You're going to eat it."

I don't see a rebuke here, so I think it's better to give Ananias the benefit of the doubt. What I think he may have been asking the Lord was how this was exactly going to work. Even if Saul was willing, what if his entourage was still planning violence against believers? Was there a certain way he was supposed to approach this man? How's this going to work?

When we're discipling people, individually or if we're involved in some discipleship group, it's important to remember that God hasn't given a set program by which everyone is brought along. God works uniquely and individually, because He has unique and individual plans for each of His people.

**Acts 9.15 - But the Lord said to [Ananias], "Go, for the is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."**

God has a specific and special plan for your life and a specific and special plan for the lives of the people that He wants you to disciple. Which means that we have to rely on His direction and explanation when we're trying to minister to others. Paul was a very unique guy and the Lord was going to use very specific methods and situations to build up his faith and his ministry. Our discipling of others should be specifically led by God, not cookie cutter and simply programatic.

So Ananias obeyed and we see a few more practical things that he did.

First, he met Saul where he was at. Literally. He went to the house and inquired of Saul.

Oftentimes I think a mistake we can make is always waiting for ministry to just be served up to us on a platter. We need to wait for direction, we need to wait for the moments where God brings opportunity to our lives, but once those people are there, once that leading or that burden has been given, we need to get up and go. We need to meet people where they are, not always recede away and expect everyone to come to us.

Next, he put his hands on Saul and called him brother.

This is discipleship. He didn't show up as Saul's mentor. He didn't show up as Saul's superior. He showed up as a loving brother. Discipleship isn't about ranking one believer over another. It's about helping those who are younger in the Lord know what they must do. Because they don't know yet! It's not that as we make disciples we become swamis or gurus. We're brothers. And we should disciple others like a brother loves a brother. Getting our hands into their lives with compassion and attention. Again, being personal, not programatic.

And then we see Ananias talk a little bit to Saul before he's healed. He says,

**Acts 9.17 - "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."**

What's interesting is that Ananias knew more than he said. The Lord had talked to him about what Paul was going to become. How he would preach to kings and Jews and Gentiles. How he was going to suffer and the life he was going to live.

But Ananias stuck to the basics. He focused on Jesus and Paul's need for the daily, dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Then, he baptized Paul, explaining to him how he can find his whole identity in Jesus, what it means to become a new creation. Giving Paul an action to take to find life in Christ. And then he got him plugged in with the other disciples.

Simple.

This is what we're called to do. This is discipleship. Being led to people and then leading them to the Lord. Explaining to them how to live life as someone who follows Jesus. Being personally invested in their lives and then getting them plugged into the Body of Christ. Later on in this chapter we see Barnabas doing the same thing with Paul. When the others didn't want to have

anything to do with him, it says that Barnabas brought Paul to the other believers. Simple action, but important action.

So, here's the deal: We're called upon and commanded to make disciples. And that's different than just being called to make converts. To make a disciples we have to get involved in people's lives. Not programmatically, but personally.

And we all need to *be* disciplined as well by people who can teach us. People who are further along in their faith. People who are truly being used by God, not just the person who has a program or who has set themselves up as a mentor over you.

When we see these relationships in the Bible it puts discipleship into perspective. Ananias and Paul. Barnabas and John Mark. Paul and Timothy.

If we're never discipling others like those guys did and if we're never being developed like those guys were, then we're not accomplishing the discipleship that we're asked to. If we're not being used to develop younger believers, then we need to pause our lives and answer God's call to get up and go. I think it's interesting that God said the same thing to both Saul and Ananias: *ARISE AND GO!* Get up and go! Get up and go be disciplined by the person God reveals to you and get up and go disciple those who the Lord has put in your path.

That's the call. The only answer is, "Here we are Lord. Send us."