

Acts 9:1-12

“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”

If you were to think about it, you could probably think of someone who you know who has done something which you and/or the world sees as great. I was thinking the other day about this very thing. Who have I personally met that has done something outstanding? I have personally met Wade Shallis, at the time considered the greatest wrestler in the United States. I have met and was unmercifully beaten by the Romanian National Champion at 160 pounds. I have met baseball Hall of Famer Harmon Killebrew and actually sat and watched a minor league game with him. I not only know, but have attended a professional ice hockey game with a professional baseball player who played for both the St. Louis Cardinals and Colorado Rockies. I have met a handful of professional race drivers. I have met nationally known authors and speakers, Tony Campollo, Leonard Sweet, and Dr. Will Willimon. I'm sure if you thought about it, you too have met individuals you consider(ed) famous in their fields.

At Annual Conference many years ago I went to lunch with a good friend and seminary classmate of mine and a friend of his. We were in Orangeburg that year. We decided to eat at Ruby Tuesday's. Stacy, Barry, and I were seated at our table when Barry noticed across the restaurant there were some of the big wigs of the annual conference, and one of them was

author, speaker, and college professor Dr. Will Willimon. Stacy turned and looked at them as Barry pointed them out. I on the other hand did not respond because I knew Will and had actually sat and had dinner with him the night before. I had actually had dinner with Dr. Willimon each year at annual conference for the previous two years.

Stacy then made the statement “I wish I could be at that table and just listen to Dr. Willimon.” About that time Dr. Willimon and the others got up from their table and made their way to the salad bar. While standing in the line at the salad bar Dr. Willimon looked over and waved at me. He then proceeded to come over to our table. He shook my hand and I promptly introduced him to Barry Allen and Stacy Hanson. As Dr. Willimon shook Stacy’s hand he asks “and where are you.” Meaning what church are you serving. Stacy shaking Dr. Willimon’s hand was, too say the least in awe, he thought for a moment and replied “Ruby Tuesday’s.”

Stacy had just mentioned how he wanted to be at the same table with Dr. Willimon and here he was meeting him and shaking his hand and Stacy was so awe-struck not by the man but by what he represented.

Stacy, a very intelligent individual himself, who should be a college professor, was blinded by the might which surrounded Dr. Willimon. Stacy couldn't see the man because his reputation was in the way.

Saul was a highly respected Pharisee with one mission in mind, kill each and every Christian. He despised any and all Christians and had the authority and the passion to destroy them. Saul had recently instigated the stoning of Stephen, where he not only led what happened; he held the coats of the individuals who actually did the stoning. Saul despised everything Christians represented, mainly because they believed differently than him. Pharisees hated anyone who thought differently than them and they wanted nothing to do with people different from them.

As Saul was traveling towards Damascus with plans to kill Christians he was knocked to the ground by a blinding light from heaven. Once bowed to the ground Saul cried out "*Who are you, Lord?*" Notice that Saul knew it was God he said so in his question, but still he asked; much like many of us today. God does all kinds of things to get our attention and yet we are as blind to these attempts as Saul was that day on the road to Damascus. We consider these attempts conscience or happenstance, but rarely if ever do we see God as He tries to get our attention.

Having to slow down because your behind someone going the speed limit or slower. God may be speaking to you. Seeing someone often but never taking the time to stop and speak with and invited them to church. God may be speaking to you. What are some of the things that have happened in your life? How did you react to them? I believe our reactions to certain events depend on whether we are paying attention to the hows and whys. I want to ask you, are you paying attention to the events that are occurring in your life each day? If so what do you see taking place? Are these events a coincidence? Or are these things happening for a reason, and if so why?

Ever step on an elevator and noticed another person, and you think they may be distressed over something and you never ask “You seem troubled over something, may I pray with you?” It seems if it’s not on our schedule, or directly related to us we ignore everything and everybody. Like Saul we make everything about us!

This passage often has the focus on Saul and/or what God did; not forgetting what God did with Saul, I would like for us to look in a slightly different direction. I would like us to take a look at the men traveling with Saul.

Scripture tells us in **verses 7-8**, *“The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.”* These men saw the same light as Saul and they heard the same voice, but yet said and did nothing. They were there, they were part of the famous Damascus Road incident and they did nothing. That’s like sitting in a pew while ministries are going on all around and you do nothing, never participating. Complaining doesn’t count towards doing something. All some do, as ministries are in dire need of participation, is to lead others away with their indifference. The men with Saul did nothing, which is like us hearing how we are to *“Go and make disciples,”* yet never doing anything close to going and making disciples. Many of us just sit on the fringes and say, “that’s not my job,” or “I did that long enough.”

This brings us to the next character in today’s story, Ananias. He was a fine upstanding individual we would call a good Christian. This good Christian had a conversation with God. **Verse 10** *“Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.”* Ananias heard the voice of God, and he responded to the voice of God. He answered God *“Here I am, Lord,”* which means yes Lord what do you want me to do. In **verses 11-12** *“The Lord said*

to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision[a] a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.”

First noticed the place God sent Saul to wait; the house of Judas on Straight Street. I just thought that was neat, house of Judas on Straight Street. God was telling Ananias where to go and what to do.

Ananias, the good Christian Ananias, did what? He questioned God about he was being asked to do. He did not want to go. He did not like Saul, didn't matter he had never met Saul; He still didn't like Him and did not want to go to Him. Much like many of us today!

Does this sound familiar? Has God called you to spread His Word? The answer is yes if you're wondering. We have been called to spread God's Word and we only want to spread it to those within our comfort zone, our Sunday School classes, our friends, only those we feel comfortable with. Our doors are open for everyone and you are free to come in, just don't expect us to go out after you and make disciples. We have homes in the shadow of this building which no one has every considered stopping at and speaking with the residents.

Before you start grumbling “that’s the preacher’s job,” let me inform you that’s everyone’s job. The problem today is no one wants to go and do anything they want to sit back and point and say “that’s the preacher’s job.” If it is just my job then what’s your job?

Ananias did not want to go, but God told him something which changed his mind. God said in **verse 15-16** “*Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*” Saul was going to be God’s chosen instrument to carry His name to the Gentiles. Those individuals you refuse to go see may be God’s chosen for great things and you choose to delete them.

Rev. Henry Drummond once wrote, “How many prodigals are kept out of the Kingdom of God by the unlovely character of those who profess to be the loving ones on the inside.” There are times when we keep more people out of the church and out of kingdom of God by our lack of love, by our unlovingness, by our lack of concern and/or compassion, and/or by our perceived dispositions.

Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,*

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ...”

Jesus commands us to make disciples, followers. He wants us to lead people to Him not away from Him: lead them in the church, lead them outside the church, lead them on the street, lead them the mall, lead them at the post office, lead them in the grocery store.

Jesus not only wants us to make disciples, He also wants us to shape disciples. He wants us to help disciples grow in their relationship to Christ. Why? Because no one should stay the same spiritually as when they first believed. No one should stay a baby Christian. We need to help people grow in Christ! Not just our friends and those we like, but we need to help lead everyone and anyone in the name of Christ.

Some people fall through the cracks, so to speak. They are not welcomed properly; they are not made to feel at home. Some come into the church and are allowed to stay out on the fringes. They never grow or go anywhere in their faith. They remain or are allowed to remain on the fringes. They are never encouraged by anyone to become involved and take part. These people often stay away or worse stray away for various reasons. I've seen people leave the church and for the life of me, I could never figure out

why they left, except they were left alone out on the fringes ... did you hear that, alone!

Many do nothing because they are blinded by the light. They are blinded by either their might or the might of doing something. Many think its someone else's job to make disciples because they may already do something. Many believe it's the preacher's job to go make disciples. Scripture is clear, Jesus said, "*Go make disciples of all nations,*" this means all everyone is a potential disciple. Like God said about Saul, "*he is a chosen instrument of mine,*" those outside of the church, those we stay away from, could be, better yet, are instruments of God and we as believers have a responsibility to seek them out and witness Jesus Christ to them.

Don't be blinded by the light, the world's light, your supposed light, or what you perceive as your position and do nothing. You have, as believers, a responsibility to "*Go make disciples of all nations.*" You now have to decide, are you going to be like Ananias and go even when you don't want to, or are you going to be like the men with Saul who said and did nothing It's time to get up and go for God!