

24b ACTS

Acts chapter 9, on that happy note, and we left Saul blind, no food, no water for three days because he is doing a lot of thinking. Sometimes to get important thinking done you have to clear out distractions, you have to get some solitude, you have to not be looking at other things. Not always, this isn't the universal answer for every problem, but sometimes there are some critical junctures of life where you really have to just get some thinking time.

And sometimes we're not smart enough to arrange that time for ourselves, God will bring it. He'll knock us down with an illness or get us unemployed or do some other thing to put us in the place. The apostle, the soon to be the apostle Paul here, Saul, has been struck down.

He doesn't have a whole lot of choice. When you're blind, duly blind, it's not like they've got a crash course in Braille or they've got little canes or anything that they can do for him. He can't see a thing.

So he has enforced inaction and he recognizes that this is God giving him time to think. So he says, I'm going to leave off eating and drinking, I'm going to fast, I'm going to pray. Fasting and praying were two sides of the same coin.

We had a great question during the break about the nature of fasting and is that something we should still do today? Well, think about the other things that were a part of life in Israel, especially worship life, such as sacrifice. What happened to sacrifice when we went from the Old Testament to the New? We don't grab some unsuspecting goat and make a sacrifice out of it, do we? But when you go to Romans chapter 12, it says, present yourselves a living sacrifice, a living sacrifice. What is the picture? Rather than living to please myself, I will subordinate that.

What is the first and greatest commandment? Even the Pharisees knew this when they were talking to Jesus. Remember the guy who came up and he said, I've been trying to keep these commandments. He says, well, what is the greatest commandment? He says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength.

And the second one is likened to it, love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, all the law and the prophets are summed up in those two commands. Love God, love your neighbor.

The greatest measure of love is self-sacrifice, laying down your life. Love, genuine love, is sacrificial. If someone tells you they love you, but they are completely unwilling to go out of their way or inconvenience themselves on your behalf, they only love you when the sun is shining and when you look your best and your best foot is forward and you've got on the right clothes and your hair is the right way, that's not love.

Love is genuine love, quality love, especially the love that comes from God, is based not on who and what the object of love is. It's based on the quality of the lover, the person doing the loving. I would much prefer to be loved by someone who is a quality person of character and integrity and consistency than be loved because somebody thinks I'm good at something or look like something, because those things might change.

That's the great thing about being loved by God. When the Bible says God loved us, it isn't because He looked down and said, well look at those cute little people, I believe I'll save them. Some of those little people I created are actually kind of talented.

They're sort of cute. That's not why God loved us. God loved us because He has character.

He has integrity. He has inherent quality. And His love for us, see this is the great thing, that's why I can have confidence that God will never leave me or forsake me because His love and His commitment to me is based on who and what He is, not who and what I am.

Well guess what? God says in the same way that He loves us, we should love one another. That means that our love ought to be based on who and what we are and not be looking around. You know how people with lonely hearts are looking around? There's an awful lot of wasted time and energy in singles clubs and on the Internet and one thing or another because people say, well I've got a vision of a dream person.

If they're a girl they say, well I've got a hunk in my mind. I've got a guy, I know exactly who I want. And guys are saying, oh there's a girl, I know exactly what she looks like.

I know exactly what I want in a girl. And they themselves are a waste of human life. And they want this beatific vision of the perfect person that they want to love and cherish and get a hold of, get both hands on in some way.

And they don't stop to think, if there was such a person that you envision, if there was this beautiful or handsome vision of humanity that you've got all your hopes and dreams on, if you are a steaming pile of organic fertilizer, what makes you think this person is going to have any interest in you? Love ought to be based on who and what we are. And we want to become someone who is capable of loving in that way, of being faithful. You marry someone and maybe they have a disaster befall them.

Maybe they develop cancer. Maybe they are in an accident. Maybe they have a hard life in some way.

Maybe their family situation or their financial situation or their, some other thing happens. But you love them and you are a person of quality and you love them no matter what. It's like the vows that people say when they get married.

I will love you. Everybody likes the good parts. Why don't we just say the good parts? I'll

love you for better, in health, for richer, as long as we don't die.

You know, as long as everything is good, why, I'll just love you to pieces. But if you get sick or if you get poor or if some other bad thing happens, don't be counting on me sticking around. I'm going to develop some irreconcilable differences and I'll be gone.

Love, just think about love. The love that God has for us. Aren't you glad the love of God is based on who and what He is? That's what our love ought to be like.

Well, guess what? You can't love if you have no quality in your soul. And none of us do. We don't start out with any quality in our soul.

We are corrupt. We are selfish. We are deceitful.

We are self-centered. We live in a pre-Copernican universe. You remember before Copernicus, everybody thought all the stars and planets revolved around the earth and the earth was at the center of the universe.

And we think that we are the center of the universe and everything should happen to make us happy. Well, God says, you know what? I need to give you a little course in the solar system. There is something about which everything revolves and it's not you.

They tried to kill the scientists who first came up with this. You remember Galileo and Copernicus and some of these guys saying, hey, you know, I really think maybe the sun is at the center of the solar system and it's in a galaxy. And the church and the scientific world at large practically killed those guys because they didn't want to hear it.

No, we are at the center of the universe. Everything revolves around us. Well, we're the same way as people.

God is in the business of improving us. He is at work in us. He is giving us a new soul.

This is what's happening with the Apostle Paul. He's got a lot of biblical information. He's a great student of the Old Testament, but he's got it all tangled up and he didn't see who Christ was when he came and he still hasn't got it figured out.

But Jesus said, you know, with a little bit of encouragement, this man can get it straightened out. If I go and talk to him, he'll listen. Now, Jesus went and talked to hundreds and thousands of people while he was here on this earth and they did not listen.

But when he talked to Saul here, he did listen. That's called teachability. Another word for teachability is humility.

Humility and teachability doesn't mean that you're weak. It doesn't mean that you're an idiot. In fact, it takes a stronger person to be teachable than it does to be unteachable.

Any numbskull, any low life, low rent, ignorant, impulsive, emotionally driven, pleasure seeking, rat in the maze, punching the button for the happy pill, anybody can do that. God is looking all over the earth to find somebody who will respond when he speaks, who will try to live in the light of his word. Jesus said, there is a wide road and a broad gate that leads to destruction and there's thousands of people on it.

Narrow is the way, straight is the gate that leads to life. Well, I don't know about you, but I think it would be a nice idea to try to be one of the people that is somewhere on that straight road, aiming generally in the direction of that narrow gate that leads to life. So, the Apostle Paul, who he is about to become, he's still Saul here, has three days to think this over.

Now, I'll give you another little clue about the number three. This story is going to be told. This Damascus Road incident is going to be recounted in Acts three times.

We have it here in chapter 9. We also have it in chapter 22 and again in chapter 26. Now, if I'm Luke and I'm writing a book, and I've told in great detail, here's Saul on the road to Damascus, bright light, thunder, fall on the ground, blind, why are you kicking, go to the city, you'll be told. Okay, I've told that story.

I've only got a limited amount of space, only so much leather for the scroll, as it were. So, when I get to chapter 22, why does this entire story get repeated? Paul is talking to Felix and he's talking to different ones, and Luke includes the entire text of the story when Paul retells it. By the way, we find out in the other tellings that this happened at noon.

This happened at midday. Now, just bear that in mind. I was tempted to talk all about noon and midday this time, but I'll never finish.

But just remember that tonight we talked about noon. And in a week or two, I'm going to come back and say, now, you remember that night when I was telling you that Saul was starting out on the road at noon? Because something else is going to happen at a different time of day, and we're going to do all about the time of day, but not now. But it's noon.

So, he tells it again in Acts chapter 22, and he tells it again in Acts chapter 26. Why is that? In the mouths of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. There is a threefold emphasis.

This is an important thing. Why do we have three synoptic Gospels? John is sort of a thing unto itself, but we've actually got four Gospels, but we've got three that essentially tell a lot of the same stories. Matthew, Mark, and Luke overlap to a great extent.

Why? Because that information is important. The life of Jesus Christ on this earth is important. And so God tells it three separate times.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And then you've got John as icing on the cake. Same thing here.

This experience on the road is important. It's important enough that God not only repeats it, but he puts it in three times in the same book. So, we say, alright, I'm convinced it's important.

What's important? Why should I care about this story? I am not getting struck down. Yes, you are. And so am I. We are confronted with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I will tell you, and I will defend this, if you like, offline. This is not salvation for Saul. He is not getting saved, quote, unquote.

He is already saved. He is a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He is a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

He is steeped in the Old Testament law. And if he had died of a myocardial infarction or something the day before the Damascus Road, he would have been an Old Testament saint. Just like his teacher Gamaliel.

Just like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus or any one of the other Old Testament saints. He's an Old Testament guy. And you say, well, now, wait a minute.

He was persecuting Jesus. He was all getting after people. He didn't believe in Christ.

How could he be saved? Keep in mind, Acts is a book that talks about the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. There's going to be an overlapping time here where people qualify under the Old Testament standard for salvation, which is what? We have a scripture for it. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6. Hebrews 11 is the chapter that talks about great people who were believers in God in the Old Testament.

And Hebrews 11, verse 6 says, you've got to have faith to please God. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. He that comes to God must believe that He is and that He rewards those who seek Him.

Do you think Saul believed that? Sure. He was messed up on Jesus, as were a lot of people in that generation. And a lot of those people who didn't recognize Jesus when He came, it was a blindness.

It was a hardness of heart. It was scar tissue on their soul from years of self-righteousness and years of practicing their own brand of religion. But they believed in God.

And they are Old Testament saints. So now, when did that change? Because there's people who think today, well, you know, you can be saved and not really believe in Jesus. You're kind of like an Old Testament person.

You believe in God. Muslims believe in God. A lot of these other people believe in God.

The Indians, you know, the Great Spirit. You can believe in the Great Spirit, not believe in Jesus. So now, think about this for a minute.

Does this make sense? I just got through saying, Saul, if he had died the day before the Damascus Road and didn't accept Jesus as his Savior, would have had the Old Testament brand of salvation. Why can't somebody do that today? If what I say is true. And it is.

First class condition. It's true. So why can't that happen today? I will tell you, there is a huge theological movement that says it can and does happen today.

And they're just as wrong as they can be. But they have gotten this far in their thinking, which is good. But then they just fell off the rail.

This is why. Because the Holy Spirit has a unique ministry in this age. Jesus said, I'm going to go away and I'm going to send you the Holy Spirit.

He's going to convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Now, these people in this transitional generation, the Holy Spirit is coming a little at a time. We're talking about this on the break.

Day of Pentecost. How many people did the Holy Spirit come on at the Day of Pentecost? The people in Jerusalem in that room. He didn't rain down on everybody simultaneously and poke a sword in their soul and say, Hey, Jesus is the Lord.

Believe in him or else. Which is what he does ever since then. But in that generation, he started out with a small group.

And their testimony spread to others. And the Holy Spirit convicted them when they heard the word. And this is the change over time.

And in this change over time, you are not accountable for the New Testament standard of salvation until you are confronted by the Holy Spirit about Christ. The apostles, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, all of these guys, they didn't get confronted by the Holy Spirit. They got confronted by Christ himself, right? You remember, they walked around with him for three years.

And he told them who he was. They didn't have to wait for the Holy Spirit. How did Peter get the gospel and say, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God? Jesus spoke with him.

That's one of the marks of an apostle. So guess how Saul on the Damascus Road gets the New Testament salvation package delivered. Not by the Holy Spirit, by the Lord Jesus in person.

Because that's one of the marks of an apostle. Jesus evangelized, if you will, all 13 apostles. Lost one who messed up in a huge way and killed himself.

Replaced him with another. By the way, how many tribes were there in Israel? Thirteen. How many apostles are there chosen by the Lord Jesus to be apostles? Thirteen.

Why? Because in each case, you lose one. You lose Judas out of the ranks of the disciples slash apostles. And you lose Dan out of the Old Testament tribes.

Go to Revelation. Look at the roster of the 144,000. And you will find every tribe except Dan.

Ephraim and Manasseh, the double tribe of Joseph. Each of them now becomes a full tribe and Dan disappears. So, Dan and Judas be sitting up there looking at each other saying, Boy, did we mess up.

Now, here we are on the road. He gets up and he obeys. It's a very small thing.

You figure he's going to get up anyway. That's just as easy as it can be in terms of obedience. But he says, go on to Damascus.

Now, Saul may have a really good doctor back in Jerusalem. He gets up. He opens his eyes.

He can't see. And he says, I can't go to Damascus. I can't see a bleeding thing.

I've got to go back to Jerusalem and get my eyes fixed. I know a great optometrist back there on the street that is called Straight. I'm going to go down there and get my eyes fixed.

Then I'll consider doing this Damascus thing. It is a small step, but it is a step of obedience. God calls you and me to small steps at first.

You don't have to become an overnight sensation in terms of going and being a missionary to the impoverished in some far-off country or something. There are just small things that God asks us to do. Look at the Word of God.

Listen to what it has to say. Turn a guy on on the radio or attend church. Just let God speak.

Listen to His voice when He speaks and consider what He has to say. It's not that hard. You don't have to wreak a giant lifestyle change.

God didn't say, you know, you've got to go back to the council, Saul, and tell them that you're all washed up as a Christian hunter and you need to go crawl through 1,000 yards of ground glass and wear a hair shirt and you need to go make restitution to all the

people that you locked up. God says, look, just get up and go into town. And that's all He has to do.

Then He has three days to think. Does this make sense? Now, we pick up in verse 10. There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias.

And to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias? And Ananias said, Behold, I am here, Lord. The Lord said to him, Get up and go into the street which is called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he prayeth. See, the street that's called Straight is in Damascus.

It's not even in Jerusalem. He would have been looking all over. He was blind.

He would have never found it. The street that is called Straight, inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he's praying and has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Saul already knows you're coming.

Get up and go see him. Ananias says, Hey, Lord. I don't know if you know this or not, but I've heard by many that this man has done evil to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he's got authority from the chief priest to bind everyone that calls on your name.

Now, this is a pretty scary thing. This is as though Himmler or someone has come to your little town in Poland and is staying at the hotel and you get a vision from God. Well, go down and see Himmler, and you're a Jew.

You say, Lord, I don't know if you remember, but Himmler is the guy sending us to the camps. That's about what God is asking Ananias to do. Now, this is a pretty big... You compare what God asks Saul to do, get up and go into town, to what God asks Ananias to do, what the Lord Jesus asks Ananias to do.

Go into the lion's den and stand before the lion, because I told him you're coming. Well, Ananias has been around a lot longer. He knows the Lord as soon as he speaks, unlike Saul.

As we grow, our tests will get more challenging, more interesting. Our faith will be stretched a little further. So, when you look at your life and you see larger challenges, more numerous challenges, five lions instead of one, look up.

Your redemption draws nigh and you're making progress. God says, you know, I don't have to give you these little charge of the flea things anymore. I'm going to give you the charge of the wild boar.

And if you pass that, I'll give you the charge of the elephant. If you pass that, I'll send the whole herd at you. And we begin to learn, you know, the same principles that got me

through the charge of the flea, and the charge of the boar, and the charge of the one elephant, work just fine with a whole herd of elephants.

God is consistent. He doesn't change. His promises are true.

Claim them in the small circumstance. What did the Lord say? He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much. So, Ananias is getting a big test here.

Saul, his first test is just a little tiny one. So, the Lord says, in verse 15, Go your way. He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

I find this a fascinating statement when it comes time to figure out who wrote Hebrews. Because, his primary mission, I think these are in order. Gentiles are the main target.

Kings, secondary target. You've got your Felixes and your Festuses and your Agrippas. And the children of Israel, tertiary target.

I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. You think, wait a minute. If you show him everything he's going to suffer, he's going to say, not interested.

I don't want to suffer. Why would I want to suffer? Everybody that wants to suffer, raise your hand. I've got a lot of suffering to be passed out.

All I have to do is say the word. The suffering will be dispensed. Who wants it? Nobody is raising their hand.

Why is that? We don't like pain. He's already been kicking against the cactus thorns, hasn't he? But this is going to be a different kind of suffering. This is productive suffering.

When I have an abscess in my tooth, and I go in and get drilled, there is an element of discomfort there. Now, with my current dentist, there's no real pain. But it's not my first choice of things to do.

If I had a choice between getting my tooth drilled into or almost anything else, I would choose almost anything else. But we know this is true. You have to have surgery to get something fixed.

There's pain involved. But it is productive pain. It's not the same as some guy deciding he's going to trick ride his bicycle down a stair rail, and he misses the rail and falls a story and a half and breaks three or four bones for totally no good reason.

That's suffering for no purpose. You have to watch maximum exposure. You can see all kinds of people suffering for no good reason.

The suffering in God's plan is productive. Have you ever lifted weights? Have you ever run sprints? There's discomfort. But it's productive discomfort.

It is suffering for a purpose. You reap a benefit at the end, and you say, you know, that was tough. It wasn't pleasant, but it was worth it.

That's what God has for us. God doesn't say, you know, if you come to Christ and become a Christian, I'm just going to strew your path with rose petals, and there's going to be a glow, and angels will light your way and wait on you hand and foot. But Jesus said, in this world, you're going to have trouble.

That's the literal translation. In this world, you shall have tribulation. Jesus said, in the world, you're going to have trouble.

But cheer up. I have licked the world. I've overcome the world.

I'm using the world for my own purposes now, and I'm using it as training. We take germs that are capable of twisting you up and destroying you with polio and with yellow fever and other kinds of drastic, horrible diseases, and we cook those germs. They're not killed, but they are weakened so that they can't infect anymore, and then we stick them in our body.

Why? We use that weakened germ to make ourselves stronger, to make ourselves immune. It's called an immunization. And immunizations are taking a weakened, defeated form of the germ and sticking it in our body and saying, Body, fight that thing.

Learn how to cope with it. Learn how to identify it. Learn how to not be beaten by it.

And that's what our body does. That is what suffering does for us. We should not fear suffering, because we are in the hands of a loving God who never asks us to do above what we're able, and all of our suffering is for benefit.

It's like the burn you get after a good workout, if you view it in that light, if you operate in faith. Now, there are some people, if you put them on a weight bench and handed them 50 pounds and made them pump it three times, would be screaming in terror and pain and agony, because to them, weightlifting is just a horrifying, painful, and scary experience. And they don't see the benefit.

They don't want the benefit. They just want out. I don't like the kind of people that hang around gyms.

Let me out of here. Well, how do you deal with somebody like that? You have to want it. You have to see the benefit.

God has benefits for us. The apostle here, the soon-to-be apostle, sees this. Saul, even as a Pharisee, realizes.

That's what he was thinking about for three days. So, Ananias went his way in verse 17, entered into the house, he put his hands on him and said, Brother Saul, notice this, first words out of his mouth, Brother Saul. Now, we don't go for this, you know, we don't call each other brother and sister and that.

But what's the idea? In those days, they did. It was a different kind of a dynamic. He says, Brother Saul.

Why does he say that? Because the Lord has told him that this man is on the team. That he's going to be used for great things. Ananias believes it.

Never laid eyes on the guy. Hasn't spoken a word to him. The first thing out of his mouth is, Adelphos, brother.

If God says you're a brother, brother, you're a brother. If God says it, it is so. And this is the faith of Ananias.

You can tell why God picked him for this mission. There probably weren't very many men in Damascus who would have had the intestinal fortitude to fulfill this mission and the faith to fulfill it. But Ananias does.

Do we have this kind of faith? Can we walk into a potentially hazardous looking situation and say, if God put this in front of me, it's here for a reason, let's just take it as it comes. That's why this is here. That's why we've got this example.

Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared to you in the way as you were coming, He sent me so that you could receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Two things. What's the two purposes? It's an open book test, folks.

What are the two purposes? Why did Ananias go to Saul? So that he could receive his sight and be filled with the Spirit. I'm here to tell you those are one and the same thing. One is symbolic.

One is actual. His physical sight is a symbol of his spiritual sight. He needed the spiritual scales to fall off his eyes so he could see the truth about the Lord Jesus.

These are scales of his own making. And Jesus had to confront him. We get confronted.

We have scales of our own making on our eyes. And if we will listen, God will send someone. Now this is the second time Philip got sent to the eunuch.

Ananias gets sent to Saul. In both cases, why didn't Jesus just fill in all the details on the Damascus Road? Why didn't Jesus show up and talk to Saul in the street that is called Straight instead of going to Ananias? Why did Jesus use Ananias to deliver this message? He's already talked to Saul once. Saul probably recognized him this time.

Why does he send Ananias? Why does the angel send Philip? Well, we're going to see a third case of this and we're going to analyze it in detail, but I will give you a preview now. The reason is God uses us to encourage each other. We are a body.

We are part of the same family. When you have a family in a house and you've got the mother and father and you've got the kids, you don't lock one kid in one room and one kid in another room and one kid in the third room and then just visit each room and you just raise them all in separate rooms and they never see each other, do you? You put the older child in charge of the younger child. You say, keep watch him.

Don't let him run amok. There is great training value in the interaction of the children in a family. That's where they first learn to hold their own against others.

That's where they first learn social skills. That's where they first learn, hopefully, how to be sacrificial towards self and beneficial towards others. Yes, I know my sister messed up the room, but I'll clean it up.

Yes, I know that's her chore, but she's not feeling good. I'll do it. That's where you learn interaction, give and take.

I'll do the chores this time if you'll do them next time. And there's all kinds of fighting and bickering because there's a lot of stress and strife and sharpening that goes on. What happens when you've got a lawnmower blade that needs sharpening? Turn the lawnmower over or maybe take the blade off, clamp it in the vice and then you get a file and you start rasping on it, right? To get the blade sharp, you use a metal file, metal on metal.

And it says in the Old Testament, as iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. God uses us to sharpen each other. One time, they've got that song, sometimes you're the windshield, sometimes you're the bug.

Well, sometimes you are the metal that is being sharpened. Other times, you're the file and you're what God is using, either because you're doing what you're supposed to or because you're not, to be a tool, an instrument in His hands to sharpen and strengthen others. That is a beneficial and necessary part of our fellowship.

God says do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is. What is the practical application of this? If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're not going to get anywhere. You're not going to make any progress trying to be like Paul Simon and singing, I am a rock, I am an island.

And I don't need anybody, I don't need to fellowship with other believers, I don't need to spend any time with other Christians. We do. It's necessary.

It's like trying to grow up as a child and never go to public school, never go into any

groups, never take any lessons, never be around any other children, just be locked in your room and grow up to adulthood, never having had contact with your peer group in any way, shape or form, except your parents. Your parents just raise you in a germ-free bubble and you never see any other... They had a movie about that, about what, they went underground because of the nukes and the guy grew up in the basement or something and then he comes out and he's just completely loopy because he doesn't know how to deal with people. Well, God doesn't do that.

God says you have to circulate amongst the other... And that's why He does this. That's why Philip goes to the Ethiopian eunuch. This is why Ananias comes.

And there's benefit both ways. Ananias learned something about the grace of God. Do you think Ananias isn't going to be telling this story the rest of his life? How many people knew about Saul, the terror of all the Christians? And Ananias says, you will not believe the change that the Lord Jesus Christ has made in this guy that we thought was incorrigible.

I saw it with my own two eyes. I watched the Lord Jesus heal him of his blindness and the man went out and started preaching Christ. He came to the town to lock up Christians and he wound up going out and making more.

I saw it. I was there. God sent me.

Jesus appeared to me and told me to go see Him. I would have never gone in a million years except Jesus sent me. God uses that.

Philip, I told you before, we get to ask and we see his daughters and all that. Philip told this story to Luke years later about the Ethiopian eunuch. If the angel had gone to the eunuch, who would know? Philip knew because God sent him there and saw that a Gentile man reading the Scriptures could come to faith more rapidly than all these Jews in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria.

God uses us to help each other, to teach each other, to be a test for each other, to be an encouragement for each other. Sometimes you are the Louisville slugger and sometimes you are the ball. It just depends.

But you have to be in contact with others. God says do not forsake assembling yourself with other believers because there is blessing in it. You can be blessed and you can be a blessing to others.

We are not an island. So that's what's going on here. Ananias goes in immediately in verse 18 when he lays his hands on and he says, Jesus sent me to you so that you can receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now we are going to have to talk more about this next time, but I find this very

interesting. Normally you have Peter or John and even the Apostle Paul later on is going to find a group of people, lay hands on them, and they are going to receive the Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ, for the first 11 apostles, breathed on them and said receive the Spirit.

They have Pentecost. The Spirit comes down and descends on them in a unique way when they are all gathered together in the upper room. Saul receives the Spirit when Ananias, an otherwise unknown non-apostolic believer, lays his hands on him.

He didn't get the Holy Spirit on the road to Damascus. He didn't get the Holy Spirit during the three days of his fasting and praying. He got it when he was touched by Ananias.

Well, I'll leave you to ponder on that and we'll look at it more next time because we're going to see throughout the book of Acts that it seems to require contact for the gift of the Holy Spirit to appear. And it doesn't seem to be at the time of believing in Christ. It seems to be at the time that hands are laid on.

Well, what is the laying on of hands? You go over to Hebrews 6, the first few verses, and he says we want to go on and not lay again the foundation of change of mind, away from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, and the laying on of hands. Is this something we should be doing? A lot of churches say, well, we lay hands on one another and wash each other's feet and do all kinds of strange things. Well, if not, why not? The first answer, of course, is Acts is the book of transition.

There are temporary things. There are measures that are symbolic that are designed to teach. Once their lesson has been recorded in books like Acts, they disappear.

But what does it mean? We're going to have to save that for next time. But if there's one thing you remember from this lesson, this half of our study tonight, you think about the difference between the Lord Jesus going to Saul on the road and the Lord Jesus going to Ananias. You've got one man at the beginning of his spiritual journey.

You've got another man well down the road. Each of them is given an instruction to obey. And each of them obeys it, even though it requires great faith.

It requires going in blind, literally, for Saul, and figuratively for Ananias. But you see that in each case, when the requirement is put in front of them, they say yes. It doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

Jesus says, you need to tell the guy he's going to be suffering great things for my name's sake. Saul says, bring it on. I'm ready.

It is productive suffering. It is suffering for blessing. It is suffering to bear fruit.

As Jesus said in John 14 and 15, He says, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you are fruitful, my Father will come and prune you so that you can bear more fruit. Well, pruning is a painful process.

Something gets chopped away, but it's necessary. Things are removed so that other things can grow. You and I may have things that we need to turn loose of, that we need to put in our past.

Let God prune those away so that we can be more fruitful. There may be a little bit of discomfort involved. There may be a little bit of pain.

It may not be easy, but it is suffering for blessing. It is suffering for production, and it's worth it. It has eternal consequences.

Why give up some temporary thing? Why try to hang on to some temporary thing instead of giving it up when it's temporary anyway, when instead we can have permanent things that can never be taken away? I think it makes good sense to give away temporary things that you can't hang on to to gain what you can never lose. And the benefits and the opportunities that we'll have in the eternal future are worth it. But we've got to have the eyes to see.

We've got to let the scales fall from our eyes the way they do for Saul. And see that God is really on our side. He's trying to help us.

He's trying to give us a productive, meaningful life if we will just have the reaction of Saul on the road, if we'll have the reaction of Ananias. Whatever stage of our spiritual life we're in, when God speaks, we want to be the ones that respond and say, if that's what I'm called to, I'm ready. Let's do it.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for giving us these clear pictures in your word. We thank you for the gift of your spirit who enables us to understand, to remember, and to apply the truth that we see from your word.

We pray that he will find our hearts ready, that he'll impress these things on us in such a way that we will have them before us and have them in our conscious minds as we go through and navigate the circumstances of our lives. We pray that as a result, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be glorified. We pray it in his name.

Amen.