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***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is  
Nobody Beyond His Reach***  
**Acts 9:1-31**  
**Jeff Germo, October 14, 2018**

**[2-Live Poll]**

We are going to do another live poll this morning. Open up your browsers on your smart phones or tablets and go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and when it asks key in the code: 77431.

And then answer the following question: **Have you prayed long and hard for unsaved loved ones to meet Jesus?** You can choose up to three of the following responses, since you may be praying for more than one person:

1. No!
2. Yes, but with no visible answer.
3. Yes, and there is some movement towards Jesus.
4. Yes, and my prayers were answered.

We will have a show of hands as well for those of you who don't have the technology to do this live poll.

**How many of you have you prayed long and hard for unsaved loved ones to meet Jesus?**

**How many of you have had no visible answer to your prayers and you are still praying?**

**How many of you have seen some movement, or softening in the hearts of those you are praying for?**

**How many have seen your prayers answered and your loved one receive Christ?**

This morning we are going to look at the conversion of Saul. It is one of the most dramatic conversion stories in the Bible. As we will see later, however, that kind of conversion is not unique to the first century.

Let me remind you of where we are at in our study thus far. We have been working our way through the entire Bible landing on some major scenes along the way, from Genesis, the first book in the Bible, to Revelation, the last book.

**[3]**

We have seen that there are three threads that have been weaving their way through Scripture, through all history, and even through our own lives.

**[4]**

1. **God is up to something.** History is not just randomly moving from event to event. God is up to something. History is moving purposefully as God is writing the greatest story ever told. He is on a rescue mission to save humankind. He is working to restore the *shalom* that was lost in the garden of Eden when the first man and first woman, Adam and Eve, chose to believe the lie of Satan that they didn't need God.

**[5]**

2. **Satan is actively working against what God is doing.** He is doing everything he can to destroy your peace, and your relationships.

**[6]**

3. **Left to our own devices we most naturally move away from God.**

A few days ago in my quiet time I read from Luke 22. It was the account of Peter denying Jesus, the same narrative that I preached from about three weeks ago, and alluded to last week. I'm not sure how I missed this in my last sermon. Normally I read all the parallel accounts in the Gospels before I preach a given passage.

This scene is at the last supper Jesus would have with his disciples before he would be crucified. He let them know at their final meal together that one of them would betray him. The disciples then commenced arguing about which one of them would betray Jesus. And, if you can believe it, they also argued about who was the greatest. Jesus used that as a learning opportunity and told them that the greatest in his kingdom would actually be the least and the least would be the greatest.

And then he said something that I missed when I preached on Peter's denial. It very clearly shows the three threads: God is up to something; Satan is up to something; and we most naturally move away from God. Jesus spoke very clearly to Peter and told him what was going to happen behind the scenes.

[7]

**Luke 22:31–34 (NLT)**

***31 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. 32 But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you.” 34 But Jesus said, “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.”***

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When Peter denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of Caiaphas, those three threads were at work. **1. God was up to something.** He was preparing his Son to die to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. And Jesus, at the same time, was interceding for Peter. **2. Satan was up to something.** He was working against what God was doing. He was working in Peter to destroy his peace and to get him to work against what God was doing. **3.** And, as we can clearly see in this passage, **Peter** did what came naturally to him. When he wasn't looking to Jesus, **he moved away from God.** He followed the path of least resistance.

Do you see what's happening here? Satan, the enemy of your soul, your accuser, is working behind the scenes trying to destroy the work of God in your life. He wants to take away your peace. Jesus is concurrently interceding on your behalf; and he has complete authority over everything in heaven and on earth, including Satan.

We need to know that Satan is at work. This is not just a theological idea. It's a reality. We need to always be aware of all of these three dynamics that are at work in our lives. God is working. Satan is working, and we most naturally move away from God. We see these three threads working their way through all history.

We have made it through the Old Testament so far in our journey through the Bible. We have hit on some major themes in the four Gospels in the New Testament. For the last couple weeks we have been in the book of Acts which is about the spread of the first century church after the resurrection of Jesus.

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit came to in-dwell and empower the followers of Jesus just like he promised, and the disciples began to be his witnesses, which he also promised would happen.

Thousands of people believed in Jesus. The church grew quickly and the apostles felt the need to put some structure to what was happening so they chose some deacons, or servants, to take care of the widows. Stephen was one of those deacons. He had been preaching the Good News of Jesus powerfully. Many people were coming to faith in Jesus because of his preaching. The religious leaders didn't like what was happening so they arrested him on some trumped up charges and had him stoned him to death.

At his feet, approving of the stoning, was Saul, someone who was vehemently opposed to Jesus and his followers. He worked tirelessly to try to stop the move of God. So, God was at work, Satan was at work, and Saul was moving away from God.

Let's follow the story of Saul and see what happens.

[9]

#### **Acts 9:1–31 (NLT)**

***<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. <sup>2</sup> He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.***

[10]

***<sup>3</sup> As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" <sup>5</sup> "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!***

[11]

***<sup>6</sup> Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." <sup>7</sup> The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! <sup>8</sup> Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. <sup>9</sup> He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.***

You gotta wonder what this must have been like for Saul. Saul was a Pharisee, which was a very strict Jewish religious sect who meticulously kept and protected Jewish law. Saul later called himself a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee. He was trained from a young age by a very famous Rabbi named Gamaliel. Saul's entire life, from the time he was a young boy, had been dedicated to following God as defined by the Pharisees. He knew the Old Testament law inside and out.

He was so zealous in his faith that he saw Jesus and his followers as a threat to the religious system he was raised in. He thought he was doing the right thing by persecuting the church. And then he met the risen Jesus in a blinding light on the road to Damascus. He must have been utterly gobsmacked. Almost everything he had been living for had been a lie. He had been spiritually blind and now he was physically blind. His head must have been spinning while he was alone in his thoughts.

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***<sup>10</sup> Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. <sup>11</sup> The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now.***

[13]

***<sup>12</sup> I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again." <sup>13</sup> "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! <sup>14</sup> And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name."***

Saul was a feared man in the community of Jesus followers. He was infamous for having Christians arrested and even executed for their faith in Christ. No wonder Ananias was afraid and questioned the Lord.

[14]

***<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."***

[15]

***17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight.***

He not only gained his physical sight. He also gained his spiritual sight. He had his eyes opened to the reality that the Jesus he had been persecuting really was the Messiah he and all his fellow Jews had been waiting for. His physical eyes were opened. And his spiritual eyes were opened.

***Then he got up and was baptized.***

As soon as he believed he was baptized. There was no waiting for the right moment. Baptism follows belief in Jesus. Today, at the end of the service, we are going to offer those of you who have placed your faith in Jesus’ death to pay the penalty for your sins but haven’t been baptized as a believer yet, to come forward and take the plunge. If you have trusted Jesus but haven’t been baptized, you need to obey Jesus and come forward.

***[16]***

***19 Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. 20 And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!”***

***[17]***

***21 All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?” they asked. “And didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?”***

It took some time for these Jesus followers before they would trust Saul. He may have arrested some of their family members or friends, and maybe even had some of them executed. It would take some of them quite a while before they were willing to believe that Saul’s change of heart was real.

***22 Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn’t refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.***

***[18]***

***23 After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. 24 They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. 25 So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.***

***[19]***

***26 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! 27 Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.***

***[20]***

***28 So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. 30 When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.***

***[21]***

***31 The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.***

This is a very spectacular story, isn’t it? Some of it seems so unreal. A light and a voice from heaven blinding Saul and telling him to stop persecuting Jesus. God speaking to people in visions and dreams so

that this fierce enemy of Christ becomes not only friendly to followers of Jesus, but the greatest evangelist of all time. Saul, whose name would be changed to Paul, would end up writing thirteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament.

**[22]**

It makes for good reading, but is it all just embellished to perpetuate the myth of Jesus? Why don't we see these kinds of things happening today? The truth is that today God is using dreams and visions to bring many in the Muslim world to get to know Jesus. Tonight Sandy Ewan is going to share about her ministry in South Sudan, where she has seen several Muslims come to faith in Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and they do so at great risk to their lives.

I emailed Dr. Mark Naylor to ask him about this phenomenon of Muslims coming to faith in Christ through dreams and visions. Mark, besides being Dale Stevens' cousin, is a missiologist who works with Fellowship International and teaches missiology at our seminary in Langley. He was a missionary to Pakistan and is still working on a Bible translation project there. He wrote back: "Yes, I have a whole folder on the topic. Yes, many Muslims take dreams seriously. Yes, many of the believers in Pakistan will testify to dreams that have been a part of their spiritual journey and I have heard their stories."

**[23]**

There are some websites from very credible organizations that have videos of testimonies from former Muslims who are now following Jesus. A very good one is called [www.morethandreams.org](http://www.morethandreams.org). There are several videos that you can stream or download from their website. God is at work all around the world bringing people to Jesus. He is on a rescue mission to bring people back into relationship with him. In the Muslim world, for some reason, God uses dreams and visions to bring people to Jesus. There is a move of God happening around the world.

People are coming to Jesus in Campbell River as well. I want to tell you a story about Ryan. I have asked his permission to tell his story. Ryan, Randi, and their kids and Randi's mother, Loretta, are very good friends of ours. We actually call them family. Randi came to Christ a couple years ago and was baptized. She is relatively young in her faith, but has been telling Ryan about Jesus since they have been together. She would read Scripture to him and they would talk about it.

Randi and Ryan got Tyrell, their oldest boy, into the Christian school and on the way to school on the first day, Ryan told me that he was starting to believe. "Randi's been making a believer out of me," he said. Ryan had never been to church before. He came to a couple of potlucks here with Randi and the kids, but had not had not been to a service.

Randi would come to church with Ruthie whenever she could with her nine year old daughter, Ciara. Ciara had been to church a couple times when we had baptisms. She had asked us several times if she could get baptized, so we finally set up a time when we could go over to their place and talk about what baptism was with the whole family.

This happened two Mondays ago. Ruthie and I went for a visit and the plan was to sit down after dinner and read some Scripture together about the purpose of baptism. We arrived at 6:00 and Tyrell told us that his 'big brother' from the John Howard Society was coming over to take him swimming. Well, we thought, 'That's okay we'll talk to the rest of the family.' Then when Peter arrived and asked Ciara if she wanted to go swimming as well. That left Ryan and Randi, five year old Dominik and baby Aurora. We took this as from the Lord and carried on. Dominik fell asleep on Ruthie's lap and little Aurora was quiet and happy all night.

We looked at some Scripture on baptism and Ryan was listening intently and asking very appropriate and brilliant questions. At one point, he said, "Who do I answer to? Jesus, or God?" What a great question. So, we went to John 1 and showed him how Jesus has existed with God for eternity, and is in fact God. We read it and then he reiterated it eloquently in his own words. Then we went to John 14 where Jesus told his

disciple Philip and the others that he and the Father are one and that he is preparing a place for them in heaven. And then Ryan again mirrored it back beautifully in his own words. It was amazing.

At one point he said, "This all has to be true. Jesus wouldn't have died for a lie." Both Ryan and Randi were glowing with joy. Then we all took turns praying simple but beautiful prayers. When we were done Randi said, "Wow! That was powerful!"

Then I said, "You know the next step, Ryan, is to get baptized. Would you like to do that?" He smiled and said, "Yes, I'd like that." So, today Ryan is going to get baptized, not to save him, but as a symbol of the fact that Jesus has saved him. Randi, and her mom, Loretta, who is a very good friend of ours as well, and Ruthie and I have been praying for Ryan for a long time. We are so excited.

God is at work. He is at work all around us. He is working in the hearts of your family members, your friends, your neighbours, your classmates, and your colleagues, and in your hearts. He is at work. Many of you have been praying for a long time for unsaved friends and loved ones. Don't stop. Keep on praying and keep on loving. Don't pressure or cajole. Just keep loving and accepting them where they are at and let the Holy Spirit do his work. It is not our job to convince or convert.

#### **[24]**

There is nobody who is beyond the reach of Jesus. If God could save Saul, a fierce enemy of Jesus, he can save anyone. Keep on praying and loving them. Watch what God is doing and then join him. Don't try to force things.

A few months ago Pastor Adrian asked you to write down the names of loved ones you have been praying for who don't know Jesus. I want you to do that again. There is piece of paper in the bulletin where you can write their names. Keep that piece of paper with you and put it somewhere where you will be reminded to pray for them every day. Never give up. God wants them to come to Jesus more than you do.

For those of you who know Jesus and have not yet been baptized, we are going to give you an opportunity to do that this morning. If you have trusted Jesus to pay the penalty for your sins, but have never been baptized before, you can come today. If you came unprepared but want to do it, we have towels, shorts and t-shirts. Come forward. Courageously step out of your seats and follow Jesus in baptism today.

If you have not yet asked God to forgive you based on Jesus' death, you can do that this morning. You simply need to say yes to him in your heart. Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins so you can have a relationship with a holy God. He is offering you life and forgiveness, not based on anything you have done or can do, but based solely on the fact that Jesus died for your sins and was raised to life on the third day. You can trust him today and come forward and get baptized as well.



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is  
Nobody Beyond His Reach***  
**Acts 9:1-31**  
**Week of October 14, 2018**

**Objective of this study:** To see how the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of those around us and join him by praying for those who do not yet know Jesus.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us.]

**Welcome (5 minutes)**

Describe the best, worst, or biggest surprise you can remember.

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 40:1-5** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

**Word (30-45 minutes)**

1. What stood out from the sermon?
  1. Read Acts 9:1-31.
    1. Describe Saul. Read Philippians 3:4-6 for background.
    2. What would it have been like for Saul to make the paradigm shift in his mind and heart from enemy of Christ to disciple, to evangelist? (Put yourself in his place.)
    3. What would it have been like for the other followers of Jesus to welcome Saul into their fellowship? eg. Ananias; Barnabas; the other followers of Jesus?
    4. What are all the ways you see the Holy Spirit at work in this passage?
    5. Look at the different people in this passage who had their thinking changed by the Holy Spirit and describe their paradigm shifts in thinking/believing.

**Work (30-45 minutes)**

1. What about you? Have you had any paradigm shifts in your thinking over the years?
2. Are there people in your life who don't know Jesus that you have been praying for? Do some of them seem beyond the reach of God, like Saul must have? How then should you pray for them?
3. Spend the rest of the evening praying for your friends and loved ones who don't know Jesus. Perhaps break into smaller groups or pairs.

**Prayer**

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:

- A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
- B. Pastor Adrian and the **Radiant Life** ministry.
- C. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
- D. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
- E. **Our missionary of the week:** ????
- F. **Local CR church:** ????