

Leader Preparation Guide

Brother Saul

Movement Three: The Proposal and Surrender · Acts 9:1-22

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover that in the conversion of the Church's greatest evangelist, the human being involved contributed nothing but a frightened errand, that God was working both ends of the encounter before either party knew about the other, and that the risen Christ, having appeared in person, gave one instruction and deliberately left the rest to be delivered by a man.

Catholic Touchstone

The primacy of grace. The very desire to turn toward God is already the work of grace, and God's free initiative asks for a free human response. Notice also that Christ does not hand Saul a private illumination. He hands him to a man, and through that man to the Church and a sacrament.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The state Saul is in

Verse 1: still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. Acts gives no indication that he was seeking Christ; it shows him hunting Christ's disciples. He is on a journey to arrest people, with letters in his bag. His interior state is not something the text discloses.

Say this early and let it sit. Any account of evangelization that makes prior openness or active searching a precondition has to explain Acts 9. The Church's greatest missionary was recruited off a road while actively hunting Christians. Note the limit: this rules out a precondition of receptivity, not the free response to grace that CCC 2002 requires.

What the voice actually says

Verse 4: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Not why do you persecute my followers, or my Church, or my teaching. Me.

Verse 5 makes it unmistakable: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul had never laid a hand on Jesus of Nazareth. He had arrested believers in Jerusalem and was travelling to Damascus with authority to arrest more, and the risen Christ counts that as an assault on himself.

This is the classic text behind what St. Augustine called the whole Christ, head and members together, and it is the ground under CCC 795. It is also, quietly, an evangelization point: the people you are praying for are not outside the range of Christ's personal attention.

What the risen Christ declines to do

Verse 6: "But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Stop on that. He does give the immediate step: get up and go into the city. What he withholds is everything after that, and he withholds it so that a human being can deliver it.

This is the hinge of the session. At the exact moment when a human being was least necessary, Christ built one in.

Both ends, arranged in advance

Verses 11 and 12: the Lord tells Ananias that Saul is praying, and that Saul "has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him."

Saul was shown Ananias arriving before Ananias had agreed to go. Do not read that as making Ananias unnecessary. Read it as what it says: the obedience of a reluctant disciple was itself part of the arrangement.

The objection, and the answer that is not comforting

Verse 10: "Here I am, Lord." Instant readiness. Then verse 13, once he hears the name: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem." He argues. He objects, and the objection is entirely reasonable.

And notice what God does not do. He does not minimize the danger and does not promise Ananias will be safe. He does explain, and the explanation is not comforting. Verse 15: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

What he is given is that Saul belongs to God, that Saul will carry the name to Gentiles and kings and Israel, and that Saul is going to suffer for it. That is the whole of it, and it turns out to be enough.

The first word

Verse 17: "So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, Brother Saul."

Brother. To the man who came to arrest his friends, in the house where that man is sitting blind. Christ could have said it from the light. He chose to have a disciple say it in a house.

Then verse 18: something like scales fell from his eyes, he regained his sight, he rose and was baptized. Sight, and a sacrament. Acts phrases it passively, "he rose and was baptized", and does not name the minister; Ananias is the natural and traditional reading.

Where Ananias goes

Nowhere. He does not appear again in the narrative of Acts, and surfaces once more when Paul retells the story years later (Acts 22:12-16), where Paul is careful to describe him as a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews living in Damascus.

That is the pastoral payload of the session, and you should say it in plain words: almost nobody in your group is Paul. Most of them are Ananias, and Ananias walked to a house he did not want to enter, called the man brother, laid hands on him, and baptized him. Then he is gone from the book.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

People who argued with God about an assignment

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it. The passages are Exodus 3:11-12, Judges 6:15-16, Isaiah 6:5-8, and Jeremiah 1:6-8. Read all four before the session and pay attention to what God says in reply each time.

Three days in the dark

Saul is blind for three days and neither eats nor drinks (verse 9), and then rises and is baptized. Jonah 1:17 and Hosea 6:2 give the three day pattern, and the New Testament uses it constantly. Offer it as a resonance the reader is meant to feel rather than a claim St. Luke makes.

Light that blinds before it heals

Isaiah 6:5 has the prophet undone by the vision before he is commissioned by it, and the coal touches his lips before he is sent. The pattern of being disabled by an encounter before being useful because of it is old.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on the head and the members

St. Augustine teaches in substance that when the Lord asked Saul why he was persecuting him, no one had touched him in heaven; it was his body on earth that was being struck, and the head cried out for the members.

From this he draws the conclusion the Church has held ever since: Christ and his Church together make up the whole Christ, so that what is done to the least member is done to him. The Catechism states the same doctrine at CCC 795.

St. Augustine, summarized from his sermons and scriptural commentary. A faithful summary of a theme he returns to often, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on what happened to Saul

In his catecheses on St. Paul, Pope Benedict XVI argued in substance that what took place on that road is badly described as a moral improvement. Saul was not a scoundrel who reformed; he was a serious, observant, zealous man who was overturned by a Person.

He pointed to how Paul himself describes it: not that he found Christ, but that Christ Jesus made him his own, took hold of him. Grace was not the reward for a search. It interrupted one that was headed the wrong way.

Pope Benedict XVI, summarized from his general audience catecheses on St. Paul (2008-2009); the scriptural anchor is Philippians 3:12.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Council of Trent on where any of this starts

Against the charge that Catholics believe we start the work of our own salvation, the Council of Trent taught in its decree on justification that the beginning of justification is derived from the prevenient grace of God through Jesus Christ, that is, from his call, by which people are called with no existing merits of their own.

Keep this in your pocket. It is the Church's formal statement of exactly what Acts 9 dramatizes: the movement begins on God's side, every time, and a person who is running the wrong way can be called anyway.

Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, Session 6 (1547). Document-level citation; no chapter number given.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

This session sits on the Church's teaching about grace, which is more precise and more generous than most people in your room expect.

- **CCC 795.** Christ and his Church together make up the whole Christ. This is the doctrine behind "why do you persecute me."
- **CCC 153.** Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Argument alone cannot produce supernatural faith, though reasons, preaching and human witness genuinely serve grace.
- **CCC 1996.** Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help God gives us to respond to his call.
- **CCC 2001.** The preparation of a person for grace is already the work of grace. Even the wanting is given.
- **CCC 2002.** God's free initiative demands a free human response. The Catechism says demands, and the response is genuinely ours.
- Applying CCC 2001 to the person on your list who seems furthest away is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Inverted tonight in the most extreme form in the study: Saul meets Christ before he meets the Church, and is immediately handed to the Church anyway. Do not comment.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Tonight you press it hard and you do not resolve it. That is the whole assignment. Build 8 is designed to leave the room genuinely unsettled. If someone tries to tie it off with either "it is all God" or "God needs us," let the other half of the room push back and then say honestly that the question is not finished, and that next week is where the study answers it. Resist your instinct to be helpful here. The unresolved night is what makes Session 9 land.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." This is the thread's resolution in practice. Ananias names his fear out loud to God, is not reassured, and goes anyway. Everything the study has said about the room you dread comes to rest on verse 17.

Sealed sheet. Next session. Remind the group at the very end to bring their Take-Home 1 sealed page next week, still sealed. Do not say what it is for.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from verses 1 and 2 that Saul was not open, not searching, and not at a low point, and let that dismantle any theory that requires prior openness or searching.
2. Have the group notice that the risen Christ, appearing in person, declined to say what Saul should do and sent him to a man instead.
3. Track Ananias precisely: readiness, then a named fear, then an answer that does not comfort him, then obedience.
4. Land verse 17 on the whole room. The first word the Church says to its persecutor is "Brother," and a layman says it.

5. Have the group find the objection-and-answer pattern across four Old Testament call narratives, and see what God consistently does and does not say.
6. Press Thread B without resolving it, and send everybody home with the one small errand they have been avoiding.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:14	Field report on rung seven, the sentence said out loud. Give this one extra time; it was the hinge rung.
0:14-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:26	Read Acts 9:1-22 aloud.
0:26-0:38	Build 1 to 3, Saul's condition, what the voice says, and what Christ declines to do.
0:38-0:50	Build 4 and 5, Ananias's fear and the answer he gets.
0:50-1:00	Live discovery: four men who argued with God.
1:00-1:10	Build 6 and 7, the first word, the sacrament, and where Ananias goes afterward.
1:10-1:22	Build 8, the build-then-press. Do not resolve it.
1:22-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, reminder to bring the sealed page, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Drop Build 2 and summarize "why do you persecute me" yourself in a minute. Saves eight minutes, and CCC 795 can go on the take-home.
- Run the live discovery with Exodus 3 and Jeremiah 1 only. Saves five minutes and keeps the pattern visible.
- Cut Build 7 and fold "where does Ananias go" into Build 6 as a single sentence. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 8, and do not cut the field report tonight.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

The temptation tonight is to resolve Thread B because the room is uncomfortable. Do not. Say plainly, if you need to, that the question is real, that the Church holds both sides, and that next week is built for it. Discomfort held for seven days is the mechanism.

If someone concludes that evangelization is pointless because God does it all, do not argue them out of it in the moment. Ask them to hold the position for a week and write down what they think Ananias contributed. Then move on.

If someone in your group has been the target of religious pressure and hears "Brother Saul" as cheap, take it seriously. Note that Ananias had every reason to withhold the word and had to be sent twice before he said it.

Somebody in the room is Ananias right now, with a specific person they are afraid of. Do not draw them out publicly. The practice this week is designed to find them.

Discussion Guide

Brother Saul

Acts 9:1-22

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you met a man on a road who was hunting your friends, and you called him yours. And then you sent someone who was frightened of him to say so. Give us Ananias's obedience, which is the only part of this story we are ever asked for. And where we are afraid, let us say so plainly to you and then go anyway. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Eight minutes tonight, not five. This was the hinge rung and the room needs to hear from more than two people.

Last week you said one true sentence out loud to another person. What happened? And if it did not happen, say that too.

Leader: the reports where nothing happened matter most tonight. Receive them without a trace of disappointment, and do not let the group coach anyone.

WIN

- ▶ Who is someone you were certain would never change, who did?
- ▶ When has God asked you for something small that you did not want to do? What made it hard?

BUILD

Read Acts 9:1-22 aloud. On this pass ask the group to keep one eye on Ananias, who is easy to read past and is the reason this session is in the study.

1. Verses 1 and 2. Describe Saul's spiritual condition. Is he seeking?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He is still breathing threats and murder against the disciples. He is not seeking, not curious, not open, and not at rock bottom. He is on a business trip, with warrants, to arrest people and bring them back bound.

Now say the consequence out loud. Any theory of evangelization that requires openness as a precondition has to explain this chapter. The greatest missionary in the Church's history was recruited off a road while actively hunting Christians.

Ask the group who on their list they have quietly written off as too far gone, and let the question sit without being answered.

2. Verse 4. What exactly does the voice say? Read it slowly and notice the pronoun.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **me**?" Not my followers, not my Church, not my teaching. Me. And verse 5 removes any doubt: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Saul had never touched Jesus of Nazareth. He had arrested believers in Jerusalem and was on the road to arrest more, and the risen Christ counts that as an assault on his own person.

This is the text behind what St. Augustine called the whole Christ, head and members together, which the Church teaches at CCC 795. And notice the quiet consequence for tonight: the people on your list are not outside the range of Christ's personal attention. He is already involved.

3. Verse 6. The risen Christ has Saul face down on the road. What does he tell him, and what does he withhold?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." He gives the immediate step and withholds the rest, so that a man will have to bring it.

Sit on how strange that is. The risen Lord of glory has appeared in person, in light, and he does not finish the conversation himself. He gives one instruction, and sends a blind man into a city to wait for the rest from a disciple.

This is the hinge of the session. At the exact moment when a human being was least necessary, Christ built one in. Whatever else that means, it is not an accident and it is not efficiency.

4. Verses 10 to 14. Track Ananias's response in order. What does he say first, and what does he say second?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

First: "Here I am, Lord." Immediate, unqualified readiness, the classic answer of every prophet in Scripture.

Then he hears the name, and he argues: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name."

He objects, out loud, to God, and the objection is entirely reasonable. Acts records what he said rather than what he felt; fear is the natural reading. Notice that Scripture records the objection rather than editing it out. The saints in this book are allowed to be frightened in writing.

5. Verses 15 and 16. How does God answer the fear? Make a list of what he says, and then a list of what he does not say.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

What he says: go, this man is a chosen instrument of mine, he will carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, and I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

What he does not say: that Ananias will be safe. That the danger is exaggerated. That he understands how hard this is. That it will go well. Note that he does explain himself, at verses 15 and 16; the explanation simply is not reassurance.

The entire reassurance is that Saul belongs to God, and that Saul is going to suffer. That is all Ananias gets, and it is enough to get him out the door. Ask the group whether they would have gone on that.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them the pattern. Assign the passages.

Four readers. Exodus 3:11-12, then Judges 6:15-16, then Isaiah 6:5-8, then Jeremiah 1:6-8.

Then two questions, in this order. First: what does each man say when he is sent? Second, and this is the one: what does God say back?

What they should find: Moses says who am I, Gideon says my clan is the weakest and I am the least, Jeremiah says I do not know how to speak, I am only a youth. Isaiah is a different case and worth naming as such: he cries out that he is a man of unclean lips before any commission is issued, is purified by the coal, and then volunteers. The objections in the first three are about competence and worthiness; Isaiah's is confession, and it comes first.

And notice what God gives back. To Moses and to Gideon: "I will be with you." To Jeremiah both a direct correction, do not say you are only a youth, and the promise, I am with you to deliver you. To Isaiah, a coal from the altar for the mouth that had just called itself unclean, before any sending at all. Presence, in every case, and never a promise that it will be easy.

Then close the loop. Ananias stands in that line, and the answer he gets is the same kind of answer: not comfort, but the assurance that this belongs to God.

6. Verse 17. Ananias goes into the house. What is the first word out of his mouth?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Brother." Brother Saul. To the man holding letters authorising him to arrest his friends, in the room where that man is sitting blind and hungry.

Christ could have said that word from the light on the road. He did not. A disciple said it, in a house, having been sent twice.

Ask the group to name the person they would find it hardest to say "brother" or "sister" to. Do not ask for the names.

7. Verses 18 and 19, and then look ahead. What happens to Saul, who does it, and where does Ananias appear in Acts after this?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Something like scales fell from his eyes, he regained his sight, he rose and was baptized, and then he ate and was strengthened. The sacrament comes through the Church, through a man, through a pair of hands. Note that Acts says only that he was baptized, without naming the minister; Ananias is the natural and traditional reading.

And Ananias does not appear again in the narrative of Acts. He surfaces once more when Paul retells the story years later (Acts 22:12-16), described as a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews living in Damascus.

Say the last part plainly. Almost nobody in this room is Paul. Most of us are Ananias, whose whole recorded part was to walk to a house he did not want to enter, call the man brother, lay hands on him, and baptize him. Then he is gone from the book. That was enough, and it is roughly the size of what is being asked of you.

8. Someone says: if conversion is entirely God's work, then this study is a well meant waste of thirteen weeks. Either Saul was going to be converted or he was not, and my conversations change nothing. Are they right?

Leader: work this fully, and then leave it open. Do not resolve it tonight, however uncomfortable the room gets. Next session is built for it.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below, and then stop. The answer is deliberately unfinished tonight.

DIG DEEPER

Did the men hear the voice? Acts 9:7 says they heard the voice but saw no one. Acts 22:9 says they saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one speaking. This is a real tension and a friend who reads critically will find it. The standard resolution turns on the Greek verb for hearing taking different cases, so that one text says they heard a sound and the other says they did not understand the speech. That resolution is old and widely held, and some scholars regard it as strained. Give your group both halves, including the honest admission that it is debated. Do not present a contested resolution as though it closed the matter.

Three days. Blind, and neither eating nor drinking, and then rising and being baptized. Jonah 1:17 and Hosea 6:2 supply the pattern. Feel the resonance; do not claim St. Luke asserts it.

Not a moral improvement. Pope Benedict XVI argued that Saul was not a scoundrel who reformed but a serious and observant man overturned by a Person, and pointed at how Paul himself puts it in Philippians 3:12: Christ Jesus made him his own.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build this properly, because tonight's text seems to be the objector's best evidence.

No human being evangelized Saul. The risen Christ appeared in person. Ananias does not arrive until after

the decisive event, and by then Saul is already praying and has already been told a man is coming.

St. Paul himself writes that it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God who has mercy (Romans 9:16). That is the same man, describing the same economy.

And the experience in this room supports it. Everybody here knows somebody they have prayed for and worked on for twenty years with nothing to show, and somebody else who came back out of nowhere with no human help at all. The pattern looks like it has nothing to do with us.

There is even a spiritual danger on the other side. People who believe they converted somebody are insufferable, and worse, they are unable to cope when the person falls away, because they have made another soul into their own achievement.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text, and notice that the pressing does not finish the argument.

First: verse 6. The risen Christ, in glory, on the road, declines to tell Saul what to do and sends him to wait for a man. If human involvement were dispensable, this is the one place in Scripture where it would obviously have been dispensed with, and it was not.

Second: verses 11 and 12. Saul is shown Ananias arriving before Ananias has agreed to come. That is not evidence that Ananias was surplus. It is evidence that his obedience was inside the plan rather than outside it.

Third: verse 17. The first word Saul hears from the Church is "Brother," and Christ gave that word to a frightened man to say rather than saying it himself.

Fourth: verse 18. Saul is baptized, on the natural reading by Ananias, though Acts phrases it passively. The grace comes through the Church, through hands, through a sacrament administered by somebody who did not want to be there.

Now stop. You have not settled the question and you should not pretend you have. The Church holds both sides: the preparation of a person for grace is already the work of grace (CCC 2001), and God's free initiative demands a free response (CCC 2002). Trent taught that the beginning of justification comes from prevenient grace, with no prior merits of ours.

Tell the group the truth: tonight we can see that we are not the principal cause and that we are not decoration, and we cannot yet say how both are true at once. Bring the discomfort back next week. Bring your sealed page too.

SEND

- ▶ What is the one small errand you have been avoiding? Not the conversation. The text, the visit, the invitation, the apology.
- ▶ God was not powerless without Ananias, and he truly willed to include him. Does that make Ananias's going matter less, or more? Sit with it rather than answering quickly.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 8 of the ladder. Do the errand. Ananias's whole contribution was walking to a house.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Name the one small concrete thing you have been avoiding with one of them. The message you have not sent, the visit you have not made, the apology you owe, the invitation you keep almost extending.
- Do it this week. Not a bigger version of it. That one.
- Before you go, say the fear out loud to God, in plain words, the way Ananias did. Do not tidy it up first.
- **Bring your sealed page from Take-Home 1 next week. Still sealed.**

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you told a frightened man to go to a house, and you did not tell him it would be safe. You told him only that the man inside was yours. Give us that much and let it be enough. Send us on the errand we have been avoiding, and let the first word we say be brother. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."

Acts 9:15

SESSION 8 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

Brother Saul

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
Acts 9:1-22	Primary text, read aloud in full.
Acts 22:6-16	Dig Deeper. Paul's own retelling, including the description of Ananias at verse 12.
Exodus 3:11-12	Live discovery. Moses: who am I, and the answer, I will be with you.
Judges 6:15-16	Live discovery. Gideon: my clan is the weakest, and the answer, I will be with you.
Isaiah 6:5-8	Live discovery. Isaiah: a man of unclean lips, and the coal from the altar.
Jeremiah 1:6-8	Live discovery. Jeremiah: I am only a youth, and the answer, I am with you to deliver you.
Romans 9:16	Build 8, the objection at full strength.
Philippians 3:12	Voices of the Church and Dig Deeper. Christ Jesus made me his own.
Jonah 1:17; Hosea 6:2	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The three day pattern.