

January 28

“Turn the Page to Change”

Focus on Acts 9:10-12

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“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

11 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

Special Music: “A World Turned Upside Down”

Michael Card

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REWB36R-i\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REWB36R-i_o)



## **Acts 9:1-16**

**1** Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest

**2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

**3** As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

**4** He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

**5** "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

**6** "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

**7** The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

**8** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

**9** For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

**10** In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

**11** The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

**12** In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

**13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.**

**14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”**

**15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.**

**16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**

## **RESPONDING TO CHANGE**

**Change is inevitable,  
And often requires a crucible  
To return us to a state of plasticity  
While we simmer and wait  
And envision our fate,  
In life's shifting and turning complicities.**

**Two sides of one coin,  
Forever enjoined  
One side the remains of our past  
When flipped on its back  
We are taken aback  
By a future that leaves us aghast**

**From shifting mores  
And morals gone sideways  
We scamper to hang onto our pride  
We fear loss of decency  
Though we have the tendency  
To ignore all the changes in stride**

White blends to gray  
With black on display  
And colors remain undefined.  
We don't want to give in  
Though we know we won't win  
So instead, we pretend that we're blind.

Perhaps it's our prison,  
When we simply envision  
The past was better than today.  
It gives us concern,  
And we want to return,  
Though we know time flows only one way.

To return is not possible,  
Not even probable,  
For we seldom remember the past  
With the light of discernment  
And passive interment  
Of the things that were not meant to last.

**Rather than seek to return,  
Perhaps we should yearn,  
To encourage the present t'ward better.  
Let us stop where we are,  
And Get rid of the bar  
Forgiving each one of our debtors.**

**Let us look to tomorrow,  
With joy, and not sorrow  
And embrace what the new day will bring.  
For with every sunrise  
Comes a chance to be wise,  
And see change as the ultimate Spring.**

**God gives us a way,  
To capture each day  
And see change for the good it can be.  
Let us look to our Lord,  
And the peace he affords,  
And let the hands of the potter change me.**

I will be the first to agree that as we get older, change gets harder. I'm not sure why that is, but it certainly appears to be true. I remember when I was in grade school that Rock and Roll was going to be the end to common decency and morals, that lifting people of color out of squalor was considered to be a futile endeavor, that there were communists behind every door, and that the atomic bomb would lead to our ultimate destruction (which it still might). I remember George Harris putting a carnation into the barrel of an M14 rifle during the march on Washington to end the Vietnam War. I remember the deplorable way our Vietnam veterans were treated when they returned home, and even as a teenager, such atrocities that I watched on the television became sources of nightmares in my dreams. I watched the race riots on the TV and followed the mass murder-suicide at Peoples Temple in Jonestown, Guyana. I came of age in an era where so many, many people were killed fighting for one cause or another, when long hair on men was considered disrespectful and miniskirts were a sign of demon possession.

I try to say that in as non-judgmental way, but that proves to be difficult. My parent's values were different from mine. And that did not make them happy. But they seemed to forget that their values were different from their own parents. I listen to people say that would like to return to the good-old-days, simpler times. But I am not quite sure that such a time ever really existed. Growing up under our parents' roofs gave us a safe place to try and understand a complicated world, where we were taught to say the pledge of allegiance in school and always

started the day with a morning prayer, things we no longer find in our institutions of education.

I do know that attempting to return to what we remember as simpler times, would actually also remind us of how complicated the world was and that the world is constantly in a struggle for wealth, power, moral redefinition. We remember the good times, playing ball, riding bikes, having friends over for sleepovers, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, catching fireflies, playing games in our yards, and enjoying clubs at school. Many of those things that our children today will never experience. And yet, we forget that many of those activities didn't exist before our generation. I didn't grow up with a video game controller in my hand. I had to change the channel on the television with a knob and a fine tuner. People didn't cuss on television and nobody on TV took their clothes off. And we could count on Walter Cronkite to tell us how it was. Is there anyone we trust in the media today?

And yet, our parents grew up without a television, receiving their entertainment on the radio. Most of them had to talk on a wall phone where a call had to be placed by an operator. Church was mandatory for most people. Manners and morals were taught and practiced in the home and using a switch to keep a child in line was not morally objectionable. Most of us would have difficulty living in the world of our grandparents.

When I talk with young people today, the F-Bomb seems to be something that most of them drop naturally in a conversation with the excuse, "well, that's just how my generation talks." They forget that we grew up in a time when you



didn't hear the F-Bomb, even in movies for mature audiences. And often, this new generation that we have brought up feels little or no need to say Mr., Mrs, yes sir, no mam, or any of the etiquette we grew up with, where forgetting to say those things would get us paddled or sent to bed without dinner.

This is not a rant against the younger generations and please don't take it as such. It's just an attempt to show that change happens, it's inevitable, and yes, as older Americans we feel we are often dragged into the future kicking and screaming. We are embarrassed to have to go to our grandchildren to show us how to use our phones or fix our computers. It embarrasses us. We are supposed to be wiser and smarter than they are. We are supposed to teach them what we grew up knowing, phone etiquette on a dial or touchtone phone, and how to use rabbit ears on the TV. We are just full of worthless knowledge. And the truth is, we do not like change. We got along just fine with a land-line, Flintstones on TV on Friday nights, math the old way, walking to and from school, uphill in both directions. We certainly didn't lose any sleep over the latest Windows update, and the smell of bacon and coffee was a joy to wake up to. We didn't sleep in just because we could.

Change does not usually happen overnight. No. It comes slow, creeping in under the door like a cold drafty wind on a blustery day. It doesn't tell us it's coming, and we often don't even notice it until it has been around for a while. The 50's and 60's saw the beginning of the practical use of computers, but our parents never dreamed that we would one day have one in every home. But they also never dreamed of what Elvis, The Beatles, and Martin Luther King would do

to bring about change in the fabric of society. They would never have been comfortable with a car that could tell you where you were and where you were going. After all, their glove boxes were filled with folding maps of every state they had ever visited.

But sometimes change blindsides us like the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, the events of 9/11, or more recently, the Palestinian invasion of Israel. Whether man-made or natural disasters, moments like these change lives. And not just lives involved in actual events. The repercussions of such things can last for days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, or even millennia. Yes, millenia. And sometimes, something small and personal can have an effect for all future generations. God's plans for us can change everything around us.

Picture the events of our scripture today in your mind's eye. Saul is walking on the road on his way to Damascus. He has a purpose. He has a plan. He has documents in his hand sealing the fate of anyone that he find who follows "The Way," followers of Jesus of Nazareth. He believes that what he is doing is right and just. He is doing his best to rid the world of what he and his superiors believe is a threat to the very existence of Judaism. The very foundations of his faith is at stake. Surely, he is the hammer of God in an unjust world. Surely God will bless his cause. Christians are a threat to everything he believes. After all, what he is doing is meant to advance the kingdom of God. He feels his purpose is to eradicate false teachings and stamp out heresy wherever he finds it.

The Sanhedrin (the religious leaders in Jerusalem) has sent him to Damascus to quell a rising faction of Christians and either separate their bodies

from their souls or drag them back to Jerusalem for the Sanhedrin to deal with. It was his calling, and he felt justified in his actions. I can't emphasize this enough. Saul truly felt he was doing the work of God, that he was fulfilling the work for which he was intended. After all, the head priests in Jerusalem had validated his calling and were endorsing his actions.

Someday, we will explore this conversion of Saul in more depth, but today's message is on "Turning the Page to Change," and that is where we will bring focus. Saul was not changed by the blinding light on that dusty road to Damascus. He wasn't changed by the voice of Jesus speaking to him. He was not changed because he was blinded, nor because anyone in his entourage convinced him. He was not changed because he was led by the hand into Damascus.

You see, events do not change us. They affect us, but they do not change us. It is our response to the event that brings about a change in us, how we deal with the event and the aftermath. The physical world around us may change. It may even be destroyed by an event. People may die. Buildings may fall. Bridges may collapse. But the event itself never changes us. It can even take our limbs or leave us challenged. But even then, the event itself does not bring about a change in us. It is our response to the event that brings about true change.

So, let's think about this. Saul is blinded. He is being led around by hand. He has to have his needs met by others. He is in a strange city and completely vulnerable to the people around him. He is probably scared out of his mind. He has heard a voice from the heavens that has challenged everything he stands for,

everything thing he believes he has been doing righteously. His very calling that has been blessed and sanctified by the priests of the Sanhedrin is now being called into question. He is forced to look into a reflection of his soul and justify his actions to the Creator of the Universe, the Author of his soul. And what he finds is terrifying. His life's work is being nullified and he is being held accountable for his transgressions which he never believed were transgressions.

If it is our response to events that change us, how do we see Saul responding as he is forced to look into this mirror of his very dark soul? He has been blinded to allow him to feel vulnerable before God himself, his Creator, and the people now taking care of him. He's always been the one in charge, and now he is helpless to even take care of his basic needs. He doesn't know if he will ever be able to see again.

Saul could cower and accept his fate. He could also yell and scream, shout obscenities, pound his fists in rage. He could go through all the stages of grief, and in some ways, he probably did. He could have sent a messenger back to Jerusalem to seek the council of the Sanhedrin due to this unexpected turn of events. But he doesn't.

**10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"**

**"Yes, Lord," he answered.**

**11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.**

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The Bible tells us that Saul’s response to this tragedy in his life, this reckoning of his soul, this turning of the page, is prayer. Praying to God about the reality of his life as opposed to the façade he had built based on the words of the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

Saul has a “Come to Jesus Meeting” with well... Jesus. Literally. And the conversation could have gone in several different ways. But here is something about the character of Saul that we often forget. While we are busy condemning him for his actions against Christians, while the image of a martyred Steven is burned into our minds, Saul is, at heart, a man seeking the will of God for his life. He truly believed that he had found it by being the weapon of the Sanhedrin, a weapon that they encouraged so they did have to get their hands dirty.

But in these three days of darkness, the reality of Jesus comes in slowly, creeping in under the door like a cold drafty wind on a blustery day with no other purpose than to bring about change in the life of Saul, to give him a heart of flesh to replace his heart of stone. But to embrace what Christ is offering, he has to be open to his own past and be willing to set it aside, accept forgiveness, and allow his perceived purpose to be changed. He has to spend that time in prayer so that he can move past his history and into a new relationship with Jesus. He has to allow himself and his purpose to be rethrown by the Master Potter.

So, what is our takeaway this week? What does this tell us about ourselves? Are we living lives where we believe that what we are doing is what

**God would have us do? Have we taking the time to examine our purposes? Are we doing doing things for God without ever asking him if those things are what he wants us to do? Do we think that doing random things for God is our ticket to heaven? Is this how we define a right relationship with our Creator, where we are in control of our lives rather than Jesus?**

**You know, we don't have to experience a blinding light or be blind for three days to see the truth. What we need to do is spend time in prayer with our Savior and listen to what he is telling us. Maybe we are right where we are supposed to be. But maybe we aren't. And the only way to truly know is to ask the right person, Jesus Christ. When our Ananias comes to find us, will we be doing what we are supposed to be doing, praying about it? Listening to God's will for our lives is the source of our joy and our purpose.**

**God bless you All**

**AMEN**

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