

The Road to Damascus

[Acts 9:1-20](#)

The road to Damascus – for us that’s just a trip up 108! For Saul, it was a life changing experience that completely altered the rest of his life. He went from being a follower of the law to being a follower of Jesus Christ. He went from seeking a life separate from others, to one where he led the masses of the unlawful into a relationship with the son of God. This is truly a turn-around story – not a detour but a complete change of destination.

What is your road to Damascus experience? When have you actually felt God calling you in another direction? Perhaps you have been a good church person, reading scripture and attending services and doing good for your neighbors. Yet God calls you to something more – maybe God wants you to follow in faith not in works. Are we doing good to get into heaven, or

are we doing good because we are following the example of Jesus Christ and are reaching out to those in need out of true love and care?

Saul was a good Jew. He was a leader among the Pharisees – one of the priests in the Temple. He was one who offered sacrifices on behalf of thousands. He was the one who taught other Jews that the reason Rome had taken over Jerusalem was because God's people were not holy enough. He followed the laws of Moses and did what he thought God was leading him to do.

Saul was not one to sit back and allow the nuisance of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth to continue to corrupt the masses. The Jews had to remain separate, a holy people; otherwise God would not send victory and rescue them from the Romans. If

that meant killing every last one of Jesus' followers then so be it. There were greater things at stake than a few lives.

Saul was on his way to Damascus where I'm sure he heard groups of Jesus' followers were creating problems. He was fully prepared to wreak havoc. Acts 9:1-2 says, "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 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." I wonder how many of them would have made it to Jerusalem. I wonder if Saul would not have found a way to kill them in Damascus. With his stature and credentials, I have no doubt he could have committed murder in cold blood and would have felt God was blessing him

for his actions. At some point Saul forgot one of the important commandments – thou shall not kill.

I think we have seen this haven't we? We have seen terrorists and suicide bombers sacrificing their lives and killing innocent people all in the name of God. Our own church history is full of accounts where Christians have killed each other over a variance in doctrine – Protestants versus Catholics, East versus West. I wrote a paper on a case where a young scholar named Arsacius Seehofer was forced to denounce the teachings of Luther. The problem was he was told to renounce a Bible translated into German by Luther. In other words, the university was forcing him to renounce Holy Scripture, or he would be executed. If you think Christians haven't gone to the extremes in our sordid past, think again. The term 'martyr' came about because of a man named Justin Martyr, who wrote extensively

on the relationship between Christianity and pagan philosophy, including belief in a Supreme Being and life after death. Justin was martyred for upholding his Christian beliefs. There are countless others – follow the history of England to see all the executions that took place when a new king or queen took the throne who happened to hold different religious beliefs than the previous monarch.

When we lose our true focus on God we can most assuredly stray into dangerous territory. Jesus preached a message of peace and love and caring for the poor and outcasts. Jesus provided the atoning sacrifice for us so there was no longer a need for animal sacrifices to God. Jesus left a charge to us to share the gospel with others while extending a hand of kindness and genuine care for our neighbors in need. When we lose sight

of that, and get caught up in ways to divide instead of unite, we may be heading for a true wake-up call from Jesus.

Maybe we are simply following the path as best we know how – I know I was. I felt I was doing what I should by singing in 3 choirs, playing hand bells, working with the youth group, and basically working to be a good Christian. It may be that I had focused more on the works I was doing instead of the faith I needed to grow. I did not spend time studying scripture, I did not spend much time in prayer and meditation – I was too busy! I do remember thinking and wondering if I was on the right path – should I still feel uneasy when I'm doing God's will?

God has an interesting way of redefining busy! Just as Saul was struck to the ground by a flash of light, I was struck by a still small voice. I was being called to ministry. I was being called to put aside the path I was rebuilding in my health care

career and take a trip to Damascus – in this case to Etchison!
Jesus is calling us to a relationship with him. We are not just called to raise money for the church – we are called to make a difference in our community. We are not just called to host fun events to draw crowds – we are called to be witnesses to the love of God. Everything we do can reflect on how our neighbors perceive God – for many, you are the only Bible they will ever read.

So Saul gets up from the ground and realizes he's blind. His companions are dumb-founded by hearing the voice of Jesus. They help Saul to Damascus where he spends 3 days fasting and praying, and probably trembling! But Jesus sends someone to take care of Saul, Ananias, who knew all about Saul. He knew how Saul had made it his mission to wipe out all the followers of Jesus. Ananias was one of those and he probably

felt he was being sent directly into the lion's den. But Jesus reassures him that there is another purpose for Saul. Jesus was busy crafting a ministry for Saul just as he is crafting a ministry for each of us. For Saul, the most excellent Pharisee, high priest of the Jews, his ministry was to the Gentiles – the non-Jews. Don't be surprised if God calls you to a ministry that is completely off your radar screen. I never considered the ministry – it didn't even cross my mind. I like music – I thought if anything that was where God was calling me. But ministry it is, at least for me.

Is God calling you to a ministry? Is God wanting to use you in some way that will benefit others? We have a small group of young people here at Mt. Tabor who will be planning Youth Sunday after church today. Are you being called to help and support our youth? These same ones may soon be heading

toward confirmation. Are you being called to mentor a young person and model Christianity for them? We all are. We agreed to this at their baptism. We agreed as a body of Christ to nurture and support those young ones throughout their lives. VBS is coming up sooner than we think. We need helpers. Are you being called to witness not just to our young people but to the young people and their families of this neighborhood? Maybe you are being called to support our seniors or find deeper spiritual roots through Bible study. Maybe God is calling you to get involved in a local or foreign mission.

I encourage you to spend time in earnest prayer with God this week. Pray for God's calling in your life. Listen for God's guidance in where you are being sent to serve. Don't be surprised if you end up somewhere you were not expecting to be! Allow God to work in you. When each of us answers God's

call, our world can change, one life at a time. Can we welcome all who wish to worship here? Can we give of our time and finances to help those devastated by earthquakes and disease through support of our missionaries? Can we truly be the body of Christ? As a gathering of Christians let each of us say, “Here I am Lord, send me.” Amen.