

A Good Shepherd
Early Church Story

Given A New Name

Adapted by:
Brenda J. Stobbe

Illustrations by:
Tiffany Deflraaf

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GIVEN A NEW NAME MATERIALS

medium wicker basket to hold:

- brown felt road
- wooden Saul figure
- wooden follower figure
- wooden Ananias figure
- wooden Barnabas figure
- small basket with handle
- cord to tie to basket



Saul



Barnabas



Ananias



Follower

GIVEN A NEW NAME ... ACTS 9

ACTIONS

Stand and get the story from its shelf
Carrying it with two hands, return to the
circle and sit down.

Reverently stroke one or more of the wooden
figures to center the children and yourself

Place the Saul figure to the right center of the
storytelling area.

Touch the Saul figure as you speak sadly.

Move the Saul figure slightly father right.

Pantomime reading a letter, following the
imaginary lines with one finger of one hand on
the open palm of the other.

Place the brown felt road in the center of the
area and place Saul and his followers at the end
closest to you.

Move the figures slightly down the road.
Gently push the Saul figure to the ground.

Lift one hand, palm open, toward the sky.

Touch the Saul figure.

Gesture toward the city of Damascus.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so
you will know where to find it if you choose to
make it your work today or another day.

Children of God, if you will make silence with
me I will find all the words to this story of
God's people.

The man named Saul had stood and watched as
Stephen was stoned to death.

After that he kept trying to hurt the people of
the Way, the ones who followed the teachings
of Jesus.

Saul went to the high priest and got letters to
take to the city called Damascus.

The letters said if he found any of the followers
of the Way there, he could capture them and
take them back to Jerusalem to be punished.

Saul started on his journey from Jerusalem to
Damascus.

But along the way suddenly a bright light from
heaven flashed around him. Saul fell to the
ground and he heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul,
why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you?" asked Saul.

The voice replied, "I am Jesus whom you are
hurting."

Then the voice said, "Now get up and go into
the city and you will be told what you must
do."

Touch each of the follower figures.

Stand the Saul figure up.

Place your hands in front of Saul's face.

Touch the Saul figure to one other figure as you move them to Damascus.

Place the Ananias figure across the road from Saul.

Lift your hand, palm open, to the sky.

Touch the Ananias figure.

Again lift your hand upward.

Touch the Saul figure.

Touch the Ananias figure as you speak.

Move Ananias close to Saul and place both hands gently on Saul's head.

There were men traveling with Saul. They stood there unable to say anything. They heard the sound, but they didn't see anyone.

Saul stood up from the ground and opened his eyes.

But he couldn't see. Saul was blind!

The men who were with him led him into the city of Damascus. For three days Saul was blind. During that time he didn't eat or drink anything.

There was a follower of Jesus in Damascus who was named Ananias.

In a dream the Lord called, "Ananias!" And Ananias said, "Yes, Lord."

Then the Lord told him, "Go into the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus, named Saul.

For Saul has had a vision. In his vision he saw a man named Ananias come and put his hands on him and then he could see again."

But Ananias had heard of Saul and how he hurt people who didn't believe Like him. And Ananias said, "Lord, I've heard of this man and the terrible things he has done to your followers. He has come to our city to arrest all who call on your name."

But the Lord told Ananias, "Go with him. I have chosen this man to tell unbelievers about me. I will show him how hard his work will be."

So Ananias went to the house and put his hands on Saul's head and said, "Brother Saul, Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me to you so you can see again and so the Holy Spirit will come inside of you."

With both hands brush your fingers over your eyes, as though brushing away scabs.

Pantomime pouring water over Saul.

Move the Saul figure farther into the city.

Place a Jewish leader near the front of the city.

Shake your head as you speak.

Place Saul in the basket with the rope, lift him up and then gently lower him to the floor.

Move Saul back to Jerusalem.

Shake your head as you speak.

Place the Barnabas figure next to Saul.

Place your palms together, as though praying. Turn your hands to the right, the left and then open them, palms down and move them away from each other. This is the sign for peace.

Right away something like scabs fell off Saul's eyes and he could see again.

Then he was baptized and ate some food to get strong again.

After several days Saul began preaching there.

All the people were surprised. They thought he was going to arrest them. Instead he told them about Jesus.

The Jewish leaders didn't like what Saul was saying. They planned ways to kill him.

They watched the city gate every day and night. They decided they would capture him as he tried to leave the city.

But his friends put him in a big basket and lowered him out a window in the city wall.

Saul went back to Jerusalem where he tried to join the disciples.

First the disciples didn't believe that he was a follower of Jesus.

But Barnabas told them what had happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. Then Saul was with the disciples and spoke to all the people about Jesus.

During this time Saul was also called Paul. And Paul is the name he used as he went to all the different churches teaching about Jesus.

And for a while there was peace in the churches in that area. The young churches grew and got strong and God's Spirit was with them as they lived for Jesus.

WONDERING QUESTIONS

I wonder what the light was like that Saul saw?

■ wonder what God's voice sounded like?

■ wonder why God would choose someone who had hurt God's people to be a preacher and missionary?

■ wonder if Saul like being called Paul?

Carefully place the wooden figures back in the basket.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to its shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Be certain each child has had the opportunity to choose his or her work before you dismiss the entire group.

Watch carefully how ■ return these materials to the basket so you will know how to handle them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where ■ return the story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

I wonder what you will make your work today? Let's go around the story and decide what each of us will do.

GIVEN A NEW NAME TEACHER HELPS

The story of Saul's conversion is one of the most loved stories in our faith. It is a story of eternal hope. No matter how terribly one lives, there is always hope for intervention by God's spirit and acceptance of salvation.

The main character of this story is obviously Saul. But also playing a very important role is the disciple Ananias. Imagine being asked to go and help a person with a reputation for killing people who believe as you believe. That's exactly what God asked Ananias to do. And when Ananias reminded God of all the things Saul had done to the followers of the Way, God basically told him not to question, just to do as he'd been told. God said that Saul was the person chosen for this ministry to both Gentile and Jewish unbelievers. What courage it took for Ananias to go to Straight Street and introduce himself.

This story uses the term "follower of the Way." We also will refer sometimes to "people of the Way." This was a term given to early believers. By that I mean those Jewish people who believed that Jesus really was the Messiah. At that point there were no "Christians." There were fulfilled Jews, those whose hopes for Messiah had come. The designation of "people of the Way" was set aside for those who still practiced Jewish customs, but believed that Jesus was the Messiah ... the way to salvation and eternal life.

We have used only the Acts 9 account of Saul's conversion. The author of Luke-Acts gave us two other accounts of the same story. The second is found in Luke 22:4-16, 17-21 and the third is in Luke 26: 12-18. While the basis of the story is the same each time, there are additional materials given in each account. The final account tells more about the light, even saying that Saul's companions as well as the apostle fell to the ground. It even tells us that the communication to Saul was in Hebrew. In Acts 26:16-18 there is a statement of why God appeared to Saul, telling him that he's been appointed for service and witness to all that he has seen. Saul is told he's being sent to the Gentiles so they may have their eyes opened and receive the Holy Spirit. Reading the New Testament, by PHEME PERKINS, Paulist Press, New York, 1966, Second edition.)

Please remember that Acts was probably written between 90-100 AD. (Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible.) This is a good 40 years after the letters of Paul were written and sent around to the churches. So again, we have hindsight stories that would lend themselves to amendment.

The first two of the wondering questions deal with what the light and God's voice were like. These are some of my favorite kinds of questions because the children all have an opinion. They have all seen lights and heard voices and they immediately relate their own experiences to Saul's.

The third wondering question is more difficult. The children may struggle with why God would choose someone who has hurt, even killed the people of God to be a minister/ missionary. Encourage the children to focus on God's ability to forgive and Saul/Paul's ability to change behavior and live a more faithful life.

The final question deals with Saul's name being changed to Paul. Every child, at some point their life, fantasizes about having a different name. Yet, when we come right down to it, most children cherish their names and wouldn't want them changed. Please notice that nowhere in the scripture is that name change precipitated by God.

Paul is one of the primary heroes of the early church. Peter is the other. Several of the upcoming stories focus on these two men and their roles in the beginning of the early church.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Saul was convinced that he was doing the right thing. Have you ever done something that you believed was right, only to find out later that it was not? How did you feel? What did you do?

We have always thought about God's presence with us as warm and wonderful. But in this story God came to Saul in a way that was a little scary, although exciting. What is your favorite way to think about God being with you? What is your least favorite way to think about God being with you?

Ananias was not happy to go and be with Saul. Think about a time when you had to be with someone you didn't like. Was it as bad as you thought? Did you end up liking or at least appreciating that person? What happened?