

*Jacob's Well***Lesson Title:** The Life of Paul—God's Irrevocable Calling

**Key Concept:** Paul was highly influential in the early church, and examples from his life still guide us individually and as a church body. His life demonstrates that God's calling cannot be overruled by human objections.

**Scriptures:**

<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!"

(Acts 9:4–5 *New Living Translation*)

<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."

(Acts 9:15–16 *New Living Translation*)

**Context Scriptures:** Acts 9:1–31; Acts 22:3–21; Acts 26:9–23

**Lesson Thoughts:**

Saul was traveling on the road to Damascus, eager to continue his persecution of Jesus' followers. His purpose was set, and he was not open to any other perspectives. Then, a light shined from heaven, and a voice began questioning him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" Jesus revealed himself to Saul as the Lord, the God of Israel, and sent him to Damascus, blinded and astonished, to await further instructions.

While Saul was waiting, the Lord spoke to Ananias, a believer in Damascus, and told him to minister to Saul. Ananias pushed back, citing the egregious acts Saul had committed against God's people. This concern, however, was not relevant to God. Saul's past, as dark as it was, did not preclude him from God's calling and purpose for his life. In obedience to the Lord, Ananias visited Saul and told him,

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"The God of our ancestors has chosen you. . . For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard." It was at this point that Saul received not only his sight, but also his calling. He immediately was baptized and began preaching Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Everyone in Damascus and Jerusalem who heard Saul preach was shocked, and for good reason. This was the man who was so set against Jesus that he became his chief persecutor. There were even believers who doubted that Saul had truly made a change in his life. Those believers were afraid of him and did not want to let him near the church. But while their qualms were understandable, they could not overrule God's calling.

No one could have predicted how God would use Saul. He was not a likely candidate to become an influential apostle in the early church, especially given his previous horrific acts against it. But God was able to see beyond what Saul had done, and was able to use him and all his giftings for the growth of the church. God's will for Saul didn't need approval from others, and neither does his will for us, because when God calls, that's all that matters.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Why do you think God chose Saul, given his persecution of the church?
- 2) How do we respond to God's call when it upsets our agenda?
- 3) Have you ever been surprised by who God calls? Why?
- 4) What are some obstacles that get in the way of us following God's call? How can we overcome these obstacles?
- 5) Romans 11 says God's call can never be withdrawn. But can humans ever stop God's calling? Why or why not?

**Next Lesson:** When Conflict Matters

*Jacob's Well***Notes and Reflections**

- 1) Luke tells Paul's story in Acts 9:1–31. Paul gives his own account of his story in Acts 22:3–21 and in Acts 26:9–23. Read through these passages. Why do you think they vary slightly from each other? (Consider who the audience was in each passage.)
- 2) God let Saul know that he would suffer for the name of Jesus. We also have promises in Scripture of what *we* will suffer in this life for Jesus. Find some of these promises in Scripture and meditate on them so that when trials come, your faith will remain unshaken and you'll stay true to God's call.