

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Paul



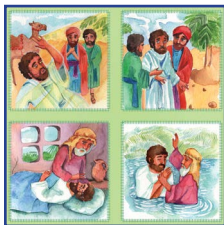
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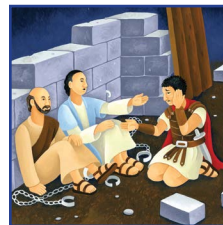
Unit Overview and Connecting page written by Carol A. Wehrheim
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Paul

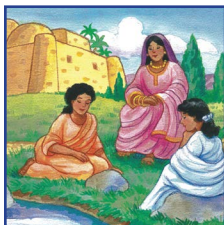
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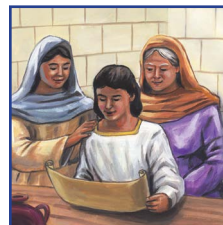
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

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🌱 **Goal:** To learn to welcome change bravely.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

We first meet Saul/Paul at the stoning of Stephen. Saul was assigned the task of holding the coats of the witnesses against Stephen (Acts 7:58). The men who witnessed against Stephen would be the first to throw stones at him in this public punishment. Saul was present and thereafter searched for the followers of Jesus throughout the city (8:3). Still later, we learn that Paul has sought permission to travel beyond Jerusalem (9:1-2) to search for followers of the Way. Specifically, he wants to go to Damascus. It is on the road to Damascus that Saul is struck by a great light so bright that it is blinding even in the middle of the day. That story of his encounter with Jesus Christ is the beginning of his change of heart.

For a brief commentary on this text, visit bit.ly/GLCalledService.

Connecting with the World

- 🌱 God told Ananias to go to a man who was searching for Jesus' followers in order to arrest them. Do you know of contemporary stories when someone has cared for an enemy, giving them food or water? Can you imagine doing so?
- 🌱 Saul made a dramatic change in this story. Some people change their minds or ways of looking at life through a chance encounter. While it may not be a moment of high drama, it is a life-changing experience. For some true stories of change resulting from a chance encounter, read "Chance Encounters That Can Change Your Life" (bit.ly/GLChanceEncounters).
- 🌱 You could be the difference in a child's life. Volunteer to be a Big Brother or Big Sister. Coach a sports team. Teach church school. Look for a setting that makes use of your skills and interests.

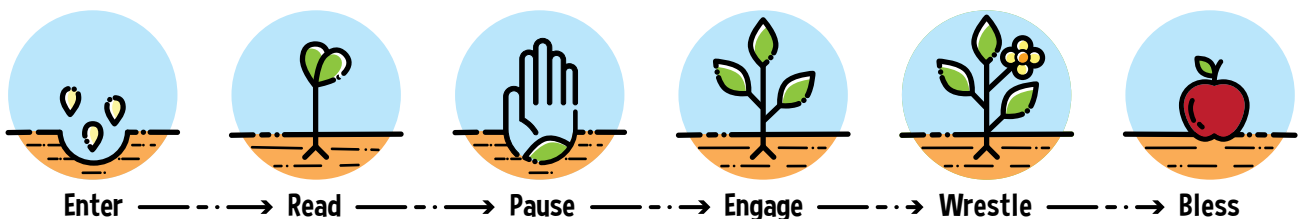
Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

The activities and surprises in "Saul's Change of Heart" keep most children engaged with this early story about Saul. It ushers in a new chapter in the lives of Jesus' followers. Older children will benefit from learning about the difficulties faced by the early followers of Jesus. At the same time, from this story children can draw the inference that God chooses surprising people to be leaders of the faith. All children will be helped to grow spiritually as they discover that adults, not just children, can grow in their knowledge of God and God's plan for creation.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

- 🌱 Saul's acceptance of Jesus as God's son is quite dramatic. How has your spiritual journey moved to a deeper relationship with God through God's son?
- 🌱 Paul, a Jew and a Pharisee, had three days to fast and pray before Ananias came to him. We don't know what he did during that time, but he may have turned to Scripture. When you are going through a difficult time, turn to the book of Psalms, especially Psalms 18, 37, 46, 55, and 130.
- 🌱 The stories about Saul/Paul and his letters do not suggest that he was concerned with the birth narratives that are later recounted in the Gospels. Instead, Paul was concerned with how we know Jesus Christ and follow him. What do you think Paul would write in a personal statement of faith?

Gracious God, you had a special plan for Saul. I pray that I am able to discern your plan for me so that I might be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



Leading

Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Drawing supplies
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible, Acts 9:1–19. As you do so, make notes of questions it raises for you. Then read the story “Saul’s Change of Heart” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 296).

Think about the following as you engage with this text:

- ✓ What are some of the most striking moments from the passage?
- ✓ In what ways do you see forgiveness play out in this passage?
- ✓ Why do you think Jesus chose Saul to carry out his message?
- ✓ Why do you think Jesus chose Ananias to help Saul?
- ✓ How have you seen God use people in surprising ways?

Recall the names and faces of the children you will teach. What do you know about them? Pray for them. In this session, you will explore how God changes people in big and small ways. Pray for God’s guidance in their lives as they learn how they will change.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with items such as floor pillows, cushions, or bean bag chairs in a circle. Place a battery-operated candle in the center of the circle. Do not turn on the candle yet.



Enter into sacred space together.

Invite the children to gather in the seating area and to repeat after you as you pray:

God of change, /
open our eyes. /
Help us to see /
what you have in store for us. /
Make us brave and strong /
so that we can look forward to what is next. /
Amen. /

Point out the drawing supplies. Encourage the children to use them during the session for illustrating anything they are hearing or considering as they engage with the story of Saul and Ananias.



Read a story of God's people.

Invite the children to listen to the story of Saul and Ananias. Encourage them to notice when there are big changes in the story.

Read the story “Saul’s Change of Heart” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 296).

Turn on the candle at the point in the story that says, “The men with Saul saw a bright light and heard the voice.”



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Suggest that the children may sit quietly or use the drawing supplies quietly to illustrate a word, image, or feeling from the story.

Turn off the candle.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Briefly share with the children Saul’s history with the followers of Jesus, found in “Connecting with the Biblical Text” (p. 9). Engage the children in a discussion using the following prompts:

- ✓ How might Saul have felt when Jesus spoke to him?
- ✓ How might Ananias, a follower of Jesus, have felt when Jesus told him to meet with Saul?
- ✓ What changes do you think God had in store for Saul and Ananias?
- ✓ How might Saul and Ananias have felt at the end of the story?

Opening Our Eyes

- ✓ Turn off the lights and invite the children to close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so. Encourage them to think about a time in which they went through a big change. One by one, gently touch their foreheads and say “Brother/Sister (*Name*), Jesus sent me to make you see again. You are now filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Leading

- When you have finished, ask the children to open their eyes and wonder together:
 - How did it feel to open your eyes?
 - What changes were you thinking about?
 - How did the changes make you feel?
 - How did this surprise change Saul?
 - How might Saul have felt when Ananias said those words to him?

Turn the lights back on.

Some children may not like to be touched. Prior to the activity, mention to the children that you will be touching their heads. Let them know that they can indicate they do not wish to be touched by holding their hand over their heart. For those children, simply say “Brother/Sister (*Name*), Jesus sent me to make you see again. You are now filled with the Holy Spirit.”



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Ask the children where they see themselves in the story. Are they Saul? Are they Ananias? Or are they someone standing nearby, watching Ananias and Paul? Continue the conversation about the story using the following prompts:

- Have you ever felt like Saul at the beginning of the story? How does it make you feel to remember those times?
- Saul was different at the end of the story than he was at the beginning. Can you think of a time that an experience changed the way you treated someone?
- Have you ever had to talk to someone who you were worried was not going to be nice? How did you feel before you talked to them? How did you feel afterward?

Younger children may not have these experiences. If they do not identify with the characters, draw them into the story by describing hypothetical situations. For example, ask: How might it feel to have to talk to someone who may not be nice to you?

Matching Our Lives to the Story

- Hand out copies of Resource Page 1. Read through the two sets of storyboards. Invite the children to create their own stories by drawing pictures or writing in the panels using the prompts provided.
- When the children have finished, invite volunteers to show and/or read their stories. Wonder together:
 - Was it easy or hard to come up with your stories? Why?
 - What caused the person in your story to change?
 - Do you think you or the other person believed that the one being unkind had truly changed? Why?

Older children may want to spend more time relating the story to events in their own lives. Make time and space available for them to do so.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Share with the children about a time in which you experienced change. Tell the children about how it felt to face that change. Let them know that, like Saul, they may change in big ways, or, like Ananias, they may change in the way they treat people.

Go around the circle, look at each child, and give them an individual blessing using the following prayer:

(*Name*), as you grow and change, may you grow also in bravery and in love for the world.



Grow with more.

- Sharing Art
 - ✦ Invite the children to share any art they made during the session.
- Acting Out the Story
 - ✦ Ask for a volunteer to be the following characters:
 - Saul
 - Ananias
 - Jesus
 - The people with Saul
 - ✦ Either read through the story slowly and have the children act out the story, or encourage the children to work together to write their own script for the story and act it out.
- Wrestling with Change
 - ✦ Ask the children if there was ever a time in which they changed. Encourage them to share stories about the change(s) they went through and how it felt to experience change.
 - ✦ Invite the children to share about a time in which they changed the way they treated someone. Encourage them to share their story and what it was that helped them make that change.

Matching Our Lives to the Story

3) Apologizing to the person you hurt
because you have changed

3) Becoming friends with the person
because they have changed

2) Realizing that you should not hurt
someone

2) Treating someone kindly when they have
been treating you or others unkindly

1) Saying or doing something that
hurt someone's feelings

1) Seeing someone treating another
person unkindly.