

## IGNITE!

### Story Focus:

Saul's radical encounter with the living Christ transformed him completely. Yet, despite his personal transformation, he still faced the reality of a public transformation. Saul chose to take up the call God revealed to him. As part of his call, God ignites the journey of holiness by filling Saul with the Holy Spirit.

**Student Tension:** How have I allowed the Holy Spirit to ignite my own life with the passion to pursue holiness?

**Scripture:** Acts 9:1-19

**Resources:** \* Resources needed will change based on which options you choose when creating your lesson.

- Paper bag
- Miscellaneous everyday items (rock, pencil, eraser, stapler, candy, etc.)
- Digital photos of all types
- Contemplative background music
- Index cards (enough for student to have 3 each)
- Writing utensils
- Video or DVD of *Bruce Almighty*
- Old or very thick reading glasses
- Eye chart

### Lesson Summary:

“No!” It was amazing to me how much defiance a two-year-old could muster. I had just asked my little girl to pick something up off the floor that she had dropped. I was somewhat taken aback when this sweet, somewhat innocent, chubby-cheek-faced child turned to me, looked me square in the eye, and refused. *She learned that from her mother*, I thought to myself. Here was the love of my life, snubbing her nose at me in the midst of such a simple request!

We all understand what it feels like to be rejected. At some point in our lives, we've either been the one rejected, or the one doing the rejecting. All of us have to wrestle with that independent spirit within us that wants to do things our way, in our time. Left unchecked, our rebellious attitudes and actions can lead us down a miserable path of wrong turns and hardened hearts. We find ourselves fighting against everyone and everything that gets in our way—even God.

In this lesson, we focus on the dramatic conversion of Saul and the effect that it had on his life. If you asked Saul if he were rebelling against God before his conversion, he would have flatly denied any wrongdoing on his part. In fact, Saul considered himself a very religious man. He was well studied in Jewish law and worked diligently to follow it obediently. Unfortunately, the God whom Saul was serving wasn't the God whom Jesus had come to reveal. In fact, Saul had become one of the greatest persecutors of those who followed after Jesus, those people who belonged to “the Way.” Saul was living life according to a different “way,” a way that was violent and hateful. Little did he

realize when he embarked on a journey to Damascus to destroy the Church there, that he would come face to face with the One to whom he had been saying, “No!” all these years.

While Saul’s encounter with Jesus is remarkable, what’s even more amazing is the change of heart that resulted. After meeting Jesus on the road, Saul couldn’t eat or drink anything for three days. He had been blinded by the encounter, left alone to the dark torment of his thoughts that had been exposed by the light of Christ. For three days, he wrestled with the choices he had made, the life he had lived, the people he had destroyed. Camped out at the home of Judas, who lived on Straight Street (a fitting street name for someone who is turning his life around, don’t you think?), he slowly began to listen to the voice that had been calling out to him all these years.

At this point in the story, we meet a disciple of Jesus by the name of Ananias. Just as Jesus showed up on the doorstep of Saul’s heart, He breaks into Ananias’s life with a special message, “Saul, the persecutor of Christians, is in town and I want you to go and pray for him.” Ananias hesitates. Whether out of fear for his own life or his loathing of Saul, Ananias’s heart betrays his own “No!” to God. It would seem that God is teaching Ananias something about himself, as well as working in the life of Saul.

The truth is, God is continually exposing our areas of rebellion toward Him. Through the power of His Holy Spirit, God is at work to get our attention. Whether you are a new believer or have been a Christian for a long period of time, God is aware of those areas in our lives that fight against Him. He is willing to do whatever it takes to change us from the inside out. That may mean that we find ourselves outside of our comfort zones. It may mean that we have to witness the destructiveness that our own will can cause in the lives of others. Whatever the case may be, God is pursuing us with reckless abandon, to fill us with his reckless love, so that we can be fully His.

As you teach this lesson, be mindful of the differences between simply being a good person and becoming *God’s* person. When all of our attempts focus on simply being good, we begin to think that there are areas of our lives that we can take care of all by ourselves. In fact, we pride ourselves on our accomplishments. But when our focus is on becoming God’s person, we release control of our lives to the power of God at work in us. We begin to become passionate about pursuing only those things that will bring honor and glory to God. Our perspectives change as we begin to see life through God’s eyes rather than our own. For Saul, his detour on the road to Damascus set his life’s journey in a whole new direction. More than just changing his name from Saul to Paul, God worked a change in Saul’s heart that He then used to change the world around him.

### **My Story #1: Grab Bag**

Fill a bag with miscellaneous everyday items. Make sure you place enough items in the bag for each person in the class to draw one out. When the class begins, invite students to pass the bag around and pull one item from the bag. They must then describe how the item represents some characteristic or event of the Lenten/Easter season. For example, a rock could represent the stone that was rolled away from the empty tomb, an eraser could represent how Christ came to forgive and erase our sins, a pen could represent God’s ability to write His words upon our hearts, etc.

Once everyone has had a chance to share, transition into the next section of the lesson by saying something like: **“For some of us, it might have been a stretch to make a connection between an ordinary object and the celebration of the Easter season. But the Holy Spirit does that within us everyday: helping us to discover how to see life through the eyes of God. Today we look at how the perspective of one man was changed through a dramatic encounter with Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, a man named Saul was able to see life in a whole new way.”**

### **Creative Option: Images**

Instead of pulling items from a bag, collect some digital pictures of different scenes (of nature, people, expressions, landscapes, etc) and put them into a PowerPoint presentation. The images don't necessarily have to be spiritual in nature. Consider playing contemplative music in the background as you show the PowerPoint presentation. The object of this exercise is to get your students to make their own connections between what's on the screen and the Lenten/Easter season. Allow your students time to reflect on each image. Have them jot down their feelings and ideas. When the slideshow is over have students share their reflections with the rest of the class.

### **My Story #2: A Very Personal Taboo**

Distribute three index cards to each student. Instruct them to write their names on each card. Then, depending on the size of your group, divide the students into groups of 3 or 4. Explain that you would like each student, one at a time, to tell a personal story about him or herself (it could be something about their home, their pets, their hobbies, likes, dislikes, etc). The only catch is that they cannot use the words, “I, me, mine, myself, or my” at any point in the story. Whenever a group member catches the storyteller using one of those words, he or she can take a card from them. Once everyone has had a chance to tell a story, have each group count up who has the most cards and declare a winner. You may want to have the winners advance to a championship round.

Transition from the game to the next section of the lesson by saying something like: **“It's difficult at times not to focus on ourselves. We live with ourselves everyday. Yet if all we see is ourselves, then we'll miss out on all that God wants to do in and through us. Today, we're going to look at the life of a man whose focus was changed when he encountered Jesus in a radical way. He was changed from the inside out. As we look at his experience, we will be able to identify some things that are true about our own experiences as well.”**

**God Talk:** The only person who was surprised that day on the Damascus road was Saul. God wasn't surprised. God wasn't surprised by the evil in Saul's heart, nor the plans that Saul was on his way to fulfill. God knew Saul. He called him by name. Nothing was outside of the watchful gaze of this compassionate and loving God. When Saul was confronted that day, he found himself face to face with One who knew him completely. As a result, God was not only able to change Saul's *mind* about whom God was, but He was able to change his heart as well.

### **God's Story #1: Saul Speaks**

Prior to teaching this lesson, select an adult who is able to dress up like Saul. The person should be able to share the Romans 9:1-19 passage dramatically in the form of a first person monologue. The adult should be able to embellish a bit on how he/she thinks Saul might have felt throughout this incredible encounter with God. When the adult finishes, have him/her open the floor for questions and answers. You may want to serve as a moderator at this time. Try to direct questions back to the students and have them wrestle with the answers or try to discover the answers on their own. Follow up this exercise with some questions of your own should these not get asked:

- **What was Saul like before he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus?**
- **Was Saul considered to be a religious man? If so, in what way?**
- **Why do you think it was important for Saul to go and see Ananias?**
- **Why do you think Saul needed to stay with the other disciples in Damascus?**
- **How do you think that God gets the attention of most people today?**

### **Creative Option: Sign Language**

One way to enhance the reading of this or any Scripture passage is to invite someone who knows sign language to come in and sign the passage as someone reads it. In using sign language, your students will engage the scriptures through more than just their ears. Sign language can provide beautiful imagery for students to be able to both hear and see the scriptures being read.

### **God's Story #2: Close Encounters Of The Real Kind**

Read the following account to your students. This excerpt was drawn from an article in Christianity Today and recounts the incredible conversion of Chuck Colson.

*“Colson has earned the respect of Christians and non-Christians, liberals and conservatives. He has won numerous awards, including the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion (1993) and, most recently, the Canterbury Medal for the defense of religious liberty. And with the help of collaborators, he has written dozens of books.”*

Read this excerpt from Colson's book that describes the details of his conversion experience to Christianity: *“The Watergate controversy intensified. The climate in Washington grew more hostile. By late 1972 even the indomitable Chuck Colson began to buckle. He was tired. Nixon was forever calling him at odd hours, summoning him to the Oval Office to talk over this or go over that. When Nixon was reelected in November of that year, Colson resigned as Special Counsel to the President and longed to retreat into private life. But the web of Watergate only tightened its hold.*

*In Born Again, he recounted the story of his dramatic conversion. He had been visiting the home of friend and colleague Tom Phillips, who had been converted at a Billy Graham crusade. Phillips had confronted Colson with the gospel and read him a portion from C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity that stuck with him: ‘A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.’*

*That summer evening in August 1973, Tom Phillips asked Chuck Colson if he would like to pray with him. Colson, aching inside but hard on the outside, awkwardly agreed. (‘Sure—I guess I would—fine.’)*

*He felt the inner movement of the Spirit, but did not cough up the words of surrender.*

*Later that night, 'outside in the dark [sitting in the car], the iron grip I'd kept on my emotions began to relax. Tears welled up in my eyes . . . And suddenly I knew I had to go back into the house and pray with Tom.' Only Tom had already gone to bed. Colson parked along the roadside and hoped his friend couldn't hear him sobbing.*

*Colson was truly converted that summer. But he had made so many enemies and had done so many nasty things that even Christian Republicans didn't believe it.*

*At this year's Founder's Dinner, Tom Phillips recalled, 'I prayed about what to do. I wished the problems would go away. Sometimes I prayed Chuck Colson would go away. But God gave me no peace with that kind of prayer.' Instead, Phillips connected Colson with Doug Coe, National Prayer Breakfast organizer and a Christian networker inside the Beltway. Coe tried to convince the believers in Colson's political camp of the authenticity of his conversion, to no avail.*

*As a last resort, Coe contacted Harold Hughes, the well-known Democratic Senator and outspoken Christian. Coe recounted at the Founder's Dinner, 'I called Senator Harold Hughes and said, "Senator, I have a friend who is in tremendous need and needs a friend. I was wondering if you could meet with him and maybe help him along with the Lord."'*

*When Hughes learned this friend was Colson, he uttered a stream of curses and hung up on Coe.*

*An hour later, the phone rang. The senator was on the other end. 'I'm sorry. I know that's not what Jesus would want me to do. If you'll forgive me, I'll meet him. But it has to be after 11 o'clock at night. And it has to be out in the countryside.'*

*At this stage of his Christian life, Colson had never prayed aloud and had not finessed the art of Christian testimonials. Hughes was understandably skeptical. He asked Colson to tell him about his newfound faith. In halting gestures, Nixon's onetime hatchet man made his confession. After 20 minutes, Coe said, Hughes got up, walked across the room, and embraced Colson. 'We are brothers for life,' he said."*

(July 9, 2001, [The Legacy of Prisoner 23226](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/009/1.28.html) by Wendy Murray Zoba, copied from the Internet at <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/009/1.28.html>>)

When you have finished reading the excerpt, discuss the following questions:

- **What kind of person was Colson like before he accepted Christ?**
- **How did accepting Christ change his life?**

Invite some of your students to share their conversion experiences with the rest of the class. It may be helpful to ask some students prior to class to think about and prepare to share their stories. This way, you won't have to wait in awkward silence if your class suddenly turns shy on you.

Read Acts 9:1-19

Ask the following questions:

- **What kind of person was Saul like before he accepted Christ?**

- **How did accepting Christ change his life?**
- **Are there any similarities between Colson's experience and Saul's experience?**
- **How would you compare Ananias' reaction to that of Senator Harold Hughes?**
- **What role did the Holy Spirit play in Paul's conversion?**
- **What does the Holy Spirit do in our lives?**

**Soul Food:** In Acts 9:2, Doctor Luke refers to the Christians whom Saul is going to persecute as those "belonging to the Way." The name was probably borrowed from a group who lived in Qumran, a wilderness city outside of Jerusalem. Qumran was home to the Essenes, an extreme sect of the Pharisees. These followers of God lived a communal life and shared everything. It's also interesting that John the Baptist used the term when he declared, "Make ready the way of the Lord," quoting from Isaiah (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3). The term "The Way" was used to refer to a path of life that was different from the path that everyone else was on. How have you discovered that following "God's Way" has set you apart from those who travel different paths? Do people recognize "the Way" in your life?

### **Our Story #1: A Change Of Heart**

Bring back the index cards that were used in *My Story #2 – A Very Personal Taboo*, and distribute one card to each student. Give each student a pen or pencil and instruct them to write down, on the back of the card, one aspect of their lives that changed when they accepted Christ into their hearts.

Invite students to share what they wrote with each other. Then read the following quote: "The conversion of a soul is the miracle of a moment; the manufacture of a saint is the task of a lifetime." (Alan Redpath, late pastor and Bible teacher).

Instruct students to write down one thing that they think the Holy Spirit is working to change in them right now. Say something like this: **"God's Spirit worked to change the hearts of people like Saul and Charles Colson and you. God continues to work in each of our lives through the Holy Spirit. He changed the hearts of His followers Ananias and Senator Harold Hughes. His desire is that we be a holy people. That means that we live our lives set apart for God's purposes and God's glory. In what way do you think the Holy Spirit is working and speaking to you right now?"**

Finally, once students have had a chance to write something down on their index cards, instruct them to turn the cards over. Tell them to take their pen or pencil and draw a cross over top of their name. Say something like this: **"We are better able to live holy lives when we take the focus off ourselves and place it on the cross of Jesus Christ. As we become more like Christ, we will then live lives that reflect Christ to the people around us. When our eyes are on the cross of Christ, we are in a better position to allow the Holy Spirit to mold us into people who bring honor and glory to God."**

Close the class in prayer. Invite those who may not have been able to draw the cross of Christ on their cards to stay afterwards so that you can explain how they can experience a personal relationship with God.

### **Creative Option: Movie Clip from *Bruce Almighty***

Show the clip near the end of the film where Bruce is in heaven with God. God invites Bruce to pray. God questions the sincerity of Bruce's first try. He tells him to pray from his heart. When Bruce does this, the last line of the prayer is that he wants to see life, "through (God's) eyes." Use the clip as a discussion starter on how life looks different when we view it from God's perspective. How do we know what God's perspective is? In what ways can we develop and mature that perspective?

### **Our Story #2: Removing The Scales**

Before class, find some old reading glasses or prescription glasses (the thicker, the better) and have them ready for this exercise. Depending on the number of students in your class, you may want to get more than one pair. You will also need to bring an eye chart, or make one of your own. Hang it on the wall before class begins. At this point, have students each try on the glasses and instruct them to read the eye chart from a distance. If some of your students wear glasses, you may want to simply have them take them off. Let students compare their ability to see the eye chart with glasses on and glasses off.

Use the following questions for discussion:

- **What did it feel like to try to read the eye chart when everything was so blurry?**
- **What would life be like if you had to wear these glasses all the time and you didn't need them?**
- **After Paul met with Ananias, something like scales fell off his eyes. What do you think that was?**
- **What kinds of things keep us from seeing clearly what God desires?**
- **How does coming to know Christ change your perspective on life?**
- **What role does the Holy Spirit play in guiding our perspectives?**

End this time with the following teaching outline:

The Holy Spirit gives us God's perspective on how we should live. When we see life through God's eyes, we are able to see –

1. Clearly – The Holy Spirit helps us to see how life is meant to be lived.
2. Confidently – The Holy Spirit gives us the assurance of God's love for us.
3. Compassionately – The Holy Spirit ignites our hearts with a love for others.

Close the class time with prayer.

**30-second Skill Builder:** Some may feel it a daunting task to teach a lesson on holiness. Many are sometimes confused by the terms of holiness or sanctification, wondering what those terms really mean in our relationship to God. W.T. Purkiser has offered the following definition of holiness that I trust will be helpful. He states, "The doctrine of Christian holiness is the conviction that, within the limitations of our humanity, the sanctifying grace of God is sufficient to free the Christian heart from the power and presence of inner sin, to fill it with pure love for God and man, and to impart power for Christian life and service in this present world. The provision for this gift of grace is found in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and its dynamic is the fullness of the Holy

Spirit.” (*Interpreting Christian Holiness* by W. T. Purkiser. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City. Kansas City, Missouri, 1971.)

-*Tim Milburn*  
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