

Title: **The Stories We Tell: Breaking Out (Part 1)**
Text: **Acts 9:1-20**
Date: **July 14, 2024**

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Big Idea

On the road to Damascus, Jesus doesn't just break into Paul's life. He also begins to break out from it. From this time forth, Paul starts to tell a different story, a better story—the story of Jesus and the gospel. And the whole of his ministry and theology is, in some ways, going to be shaped by this conversion experience. He writes every letter, we could say, “under the influence” of Damascus. He takes of what Jesus did with him there and then and applies it to us here and now.

Branch #1: Anthropology (the doctrine of man)

Everything flipped for Paul there on the way to Damascus. He went from thinking he was the “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5) to realizing he's the “chief of sinners” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15). He went from holding out his own righteousness as a sort of trophy, to calling it “rubbish” or “excrement” or “crap” (cf. Phil. 3:8). What a turn! How could he have gotten it so backwards?! It's in his reflecting upon these things, no doubt, that he started to gain new perspective, not just on himself in particular, but on human nature in general, on the heart of man, and on sin. Prior to this point Paul clearly thought of sin more as something out there, external, something that he could avoid if careful—a set of behaviors that you didn't want to give into. But there on the road, he realized at once: sin isn't just something *out there* . . . it's something *in here* (the heart). It runs deeper than he knew!

Branch #2: Christology (the doctrine of Christ)

“The language about a light from heaven shows that we have an instance of theophany Saul as a rabbi knows from the Old Testament what a theophany is. He knows that he is experiencing one. What he does not know is the personal identity of the human figure: ‘I am Jesus.’ This appearance revolutionizes Paul, because it brings together two sides that he thought were utterly at odds: the God of Israel (who

can appear in theophany) and Jesus of Nazareth” (Poythress, Theophany, 392).

Upon reflection, Paul realizes that Jesus didn't look so glorious when he came at first, not because he didn't have any glory, but because he set aside that glory to come down after us—so he could bear our sin; so he could die in our place on that cross; so that when he rose up from the dead—triumphant over Satan, sin, and death—he wouldn't just be our *Lord* . . . he would also be our *Savior* (cf. Phil. 2:6-11)!

Branch #3: Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation)

“If we ask what caused Saul's conversion, only one answer is possible. What stands out from the narrative [in Acts 9] is the sovereign grace of God through Jesus Christ. Saul did not ‘decide for Christ,’ as we might say. On the contrary, he was persecuting Christ. It was rather Christ who decided for him and intervened in his life. The evidence for this is indisputable” (Stott, BST).

“What was there in you to suggest a motive why God should call you? O beloved, we can hardly ask you that question without a tear rising in our own eye. . . . I think, throughout eternity, if we had this problem to solve—why did he call me?—we should still go on making wrong guesses, but we never could arrive at the right conclusion, unless we should say, once for all: ‘I do not know.’ He did as he willed. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. He will have compassion on whom he will have compassion [cf. Rom. 9:15; Exod. 33:19]” (Spurgeon, “The Special Call and the Unfailing Result”).

The beauty of all these truths when strung together is this: If I didn't start this work it's not up to me to finish it. My salvation isn't based on my ability to hang onto Jesus but on his ability to hang onto me. And he will not let me go! So Paul writes in Phil. 1:6: “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”



Reflection Questions

- Which of the three “branches” we considered today seemed most significant to you personally and why?
- Nick said that when we really receive the truths discussed in the sermon, it will make us more *humble* and more *stable*. Do you agree? How else might receiving these truths change us?

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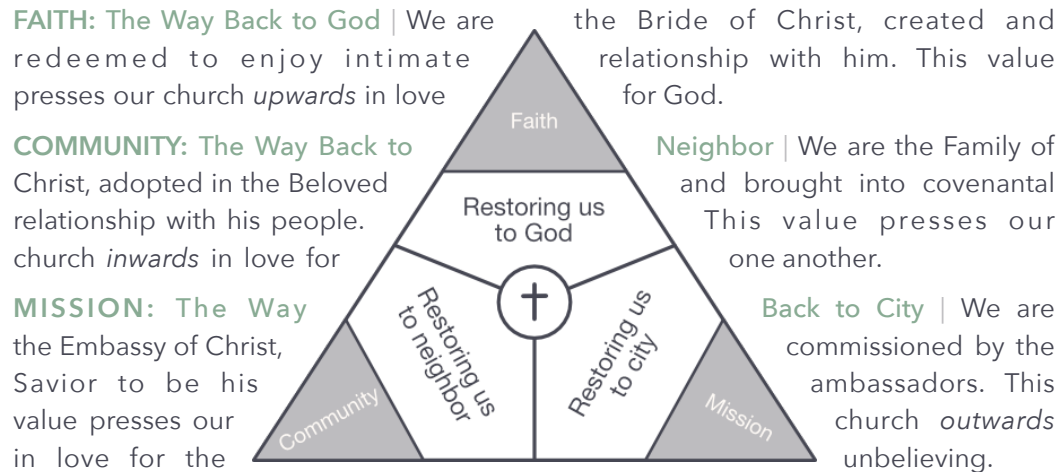


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We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

All Church Campout - Register Today!

We are excited to announce that we'll be hosting an All Church Campout at Mount Madonna County Park over the weekend of August 2nd-4th! We have a huge group campsite all to ourselves and lots of options in the park for having fun together. Whether you love to camp or you'd rather still sleep in your own bed, we have something for everyone. Because the park is only a 45 minute drive from south San Jose, people can feel free to come and go as it works with their schedule and preference.

Option #1: Day-Use: For those not wanting to camp but still wanting to participate, the Day-Use option is best. You can come in for the day, enjoy activities, meals, etc., and then head home to your warm bed while the rest of us "rough" it :).

Option #2: Camp: This option is for those who want the full camping experience. We have the site for Friday and Saturday nights. You can choose to camp for one or both of these depending upon your availability and desire.

Scan the QR code below for more info and to find a link to sign up.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

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