



Introduction

This month's story is set two or three years after Jesus died and rose from the dead. It is one of the most dramatic conversion stories in the Bible. Saul was a traditional Jewish leader who, no doubt, had his eyes set on high office. He was threatening to kill the followers of Jesus and was on his way to the Jewish leaders in Damascus where he was going to arrest and take to Jerusalem any man or woman who was found to be following Jesus. No-one expected him to become a follower of Jesus himself, but as he was going to Damascus his world was turned upside down.

The bible passage is from Acts 9:3-18

³ When Saul had almost reached Damascus, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice that said, "Saul! Saul! Why are you so cruel to me?"

⁵ "Who are you?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus," the Lord answered. "I am the one you are so cruel to. ⁶ Now get up and go into the city, where you will be told what to do."

⁷ The men with Saul stood there speechless. They had heard the voice, but they had not seen anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and when he opened his eyes, he could not see a thing. Someone then led him by the hand to Damascus, ⁹ and for three days he was blind and did not eat or drink.

¹⁰ A follower named Ananias lived in Damascus, and the Lord spoke to him in a vision. Ananias answered, "Lord, here I am."

¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. When you get there, you will find a man named Saul from the city of Tarsus. Saul is praying, ¹² and he has seen a vision. He saw a man named Ananias coming to him and putting his hands on him, so that he could see again." ...

¹⁷ Ananias left and went into the house where Saul was staying. Ananias placed his hands on him and said, "Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me. He is the same one who appeared to you along the road. He wants you to be able to see and to be filled with the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸ Suddenly something like fish scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see. He got up and was baptized.

Contemporary English Version

Everyone's journey to faith in Jesus is different – only a few have as dramatic a conversion as Saul. Sometimes there may be a moment or a period of months in a person's life when everything begins to make sense; for others, the light of Jesus comes much more gradually, like a slow dawn at the break of day. This story encourages us to believe that God still breaks into people's lives as a result of our prayers and our faithful witness. God is already at work in the lives of Messy Church families, and we are being asked to join in with what the Spirit is doing to bring them home to God in Christ. The bright light of Jesus, which shone into Saul's life, can shine into the lives of those we meet each month. If someone as hostile as Saul can become a disciple, then any adult or child who walks through our doors this session can have their eyes opened to see themselves, others and God in a new way.

Activities:

1. Bright light

You need: a bright light (e.g. a torch or a desk lamp).



Paul was blinded by a bright light. See what patterns you can make with a light reflected in a mirror onto the ceiling, a wall or onto a piece of paper. **Talk about:** When Saul was on a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, a sudden dazzling light appeared that only he could see, and something life-changing happened to him – so life-changing that he ended up changing his name from Saul

to Paul. Was the light you've been watching something that changed as it moved? Did it have an effect on you?

2. Saul on the road

You will need: A split pin, some gold paper/a doily, one A4 sheet of card, paper, pens, scissors.

On the card draw a background of a road scene and colour this in. Use the gold doily or paper to make a bright, shining light in the sky.

Make a cloud with some white paper to cover the bright light and fix this to the top of the card by the top edge only.

On a separate piece of paper draw a figure for Saul and cut him out. Fix him to the card with the split pin, so that it looks like he is walking on it, but so that you can fold his legs in half to look as though he is on his knees in the road.



Talk about: what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. As you tell the story, what new questions and understandings come to you?

3. A blindfold challenge

You will need: a cloth bag or pillowcase, 'mystery' household objects

Saul couldn't see after his experience and had to trust others to look after him. It must have been very humbling for someone used to being in charge. Invite people to feel a series of objects which are inside a bag or pillowcase without looking inside. Perhaps you could include items linked to the story (e.g. a toy soldier, a torchlight). Can they guess what they feel?

Talk about what you think Saul might have learned from this experience of being led by others that helped him become a follower of Jesus.

4. Pairs game

You will need: sheets of cardboard, pens, scissors.

Cut the cardboard into small pieces (12 or more) which are playing card size (approx. 9x5cm). Write words from the story on the cards, or draw pictures,

so that two cards have the same word or picture on. Turn all the cards upside down so that the words or pictures cannot be seen and use them to play pairs. Each player has a go at turning over two cards. If they match they keep the cards. If they don't match they turn the cards back over. It is then another player's turn. Once all the cards have been matched, the winner is the player with the most cards.

Talk about how Paul changed his behaviour, so he was completely unlike what he had previously been. Sometimes Jesus can make a dramatic change in us, but more often we remain much the same.

5. Mosaic house

You will need: empty junk boxes, packets, tubes, pots and so on; scissors; glue; sticky tape; pens; paper.

I wonder what the house in Damascus was like, where Saul was taken. Pictures of old houses in Damascus show rounded arches around courtyards inside the house, with beautiful, tiled floors and walls, lots of green plants and often a pool with a fountain in the centre of the courtyard. Try making a small version of the courtyard of Judas' house in Straight Street out of the bits and pieces you've collected. Maybe you could even make tiny mosaic tiles?

You could make small figures from today's story to act out what happened – Judas who owned the house (this was a different Judas from the one who betrayed Jesus), Saul and Ananias who was a Jesus-follower.

Talk about how the Jesus-followers like Ananias might have felt

when they found out they'd got this dangerous man in their city. What could they have done to Saul while he was unable to see, eat or drink?

When they eventually baptised him, do you think they might have used that pool in the courtyard?



Song: This little light of mine

Saul was blinded by a very big light. The effect that light had on him was very dramatic and his life changed significantly, so that afterwards something of the light of Jesus shone through all that he did. Can we shine the light of Jesus in

our lives today through what we do? Here's a link to a YouTube video of a song which reminds us about this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKkblZtqhyQ> .

Here are the words:

This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine. (x3)
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Jesus is the light,
I'm gonna let him shine. (x3)
let him shine, let him shine, let it shine.

I will stomp my feet, and I will clap my hands and shout, shout.
I will run around and I'll jump off the ground and shout, shout. (x2)

Prayer

Seeing and not seeing are at the heart of today's story. For the prayer below, follow the actions before each line of the prayer:

(Point to your eyes) Thank you, Lord God, for the gift of being able to see the beauty of your world and each other.

(Put your hands over your eyes) Forgive us, Lord, for failing to see so much because of our own selfishness, stubbornness and short-sightedness.

(Open your eyes wide and put your hands out in front) Open our eyes, Lord Jesus, to see you at work around us in the lives of our friends, family and neighbours.

(Shade your eyes with your hands) By your Holy Spirit, help us to see beyond our normal eyesight so that we see the world and each other as you do.

(Put your hands up to your eyes like a pair of binoculars) And help us to look out for you and your kingdom wherever we go this coming month.

Messy Grace:

This is a prayer that we say at Messy Church to ask God to always be with us, as we try to keep connected to Jesus.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (hold out hands as if expecting a present)

And the love of God (put your hands on your heart)

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (hold hands)

Be with us all (raise arms)

Amen (drop hands)

Next date: Friday 13th August 2021

www.facebook.com/MessyChurchWestWickham/

We also plan to have an in-person session running on this date, starting from 3.15pm at St Mary's Church, The Avenue, West Wickham. BR4 0DX. Bring your own picnic food for our meal together.