

The Man Who Made Trouble



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

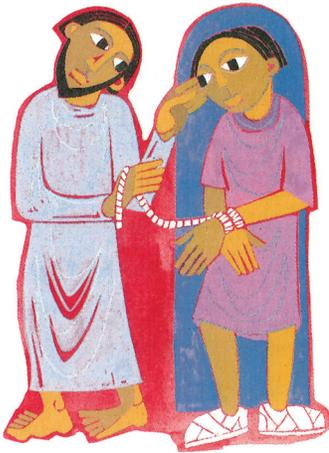
Then begin with a prayer.

The story of Paul's conversion is in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The Saul we read about early in Acts is certainly different from the Paul of the later chapters or the Paul we know through his letters in the New Testament! The difference is Paul's acceptance of Jesus' loving forgiveness, even after he had imprisoned Jesus' followers.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When was the last time you knew you had a second chance, a chance to change and improve? What happened?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long, long time ago, a man named Saul hated the people who followed the new Way of Jesus, the Christians. He felt they were not following the Law of the Hebrews and he wanted them punished.

One day, a Christian named Stephen was arrested. He was taken before the council and the high priest. Though Stephen spoke the truth about Jesus, he was condemned to death. They stoned him, and Saul was there watching and approving of this killing.

After that event, Saul went from house to house in Jerusalem. Whenever he found Christians, he would drag them off to prison. No one was more feared than Saul.

Saul decided to go into other lands to arrest more Christians. He went to the high priest in Jerusalem with his plan. “I want you to write some letters for me. In these letters, you can explain to the Jewish leaders in Damascus who I am and what I am doing. Then I will have their support when I find any followers of the Way of Jesus. I will go find these traitors in Damascus and bring them back, bound and gagged, to Jerusalem. Here we can imprison and punish them.”

With these letters in his pocket, Saul set off for Damascus. As he approached the city, Saul was surrounded by a bright, blinding light. He fell to the ground and tried to cover his eyes, but the light was too powerful. Then he heard a voice, “Saul, Saul, why do you hate me? Why do you punish me?”

Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” (Saul called the voice “Lord” because he knew this light had to be from God, even if he did not yet understand what was happening to him.)

The voice answered, “I am Jesus, the one you so hate and fear. Get up now, Saul, and go into the city. You will be told what to do.”

The people who had been traveling with Saul had heard the voice, too, but they saw nothing. They were speechless. “You must help me, I am blind,” Saul said to them. Indeed, even though his eyes were wide open Saul could not see anything so the others took Saul by the hand and led him into Damascus.

Three days passed, and Saul remained blind. It was a very difficult time for Saul and he felt lonely and unsure.

Saul prayed and prayed for forgiveness. In his prayers one night he had a vision. A man would come to him and touch him and restore his sight. Saul hoped this would happen soon.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the city, a disciple named Ananias was also having a difficult time. Jesus appeared to Ananias in a vision also and gave him very clear

instructions. “Get up, Ananias. You will go to Straight Street and find where Judas lives. [This was not the betrayer of Jesus, but a different man with the same name.] In Judas’ house is Saul of Tarsus. I’ve already told Saul you are coming and that you will place your hands on him and he will regain his eyesight.”



Ananias was not thrilled with this message. “Lord, you can’t be serious. Saul of Tarsus! I have heard about him and how cruel he is to us. He has done much evil in Jerusalem. And he is here in Damascus with letters giving him permission to catch and imprison us. All this he does because we are trying to be your followers. Now you tell me I am to go and cure him?”

The Lord answered Ananias, “Yes, I am telling you to go to Saul. He is to speak for me to the Gentiles and to kings and queens and even to his own people of Israel. I can use anyone for good. Now get going.”

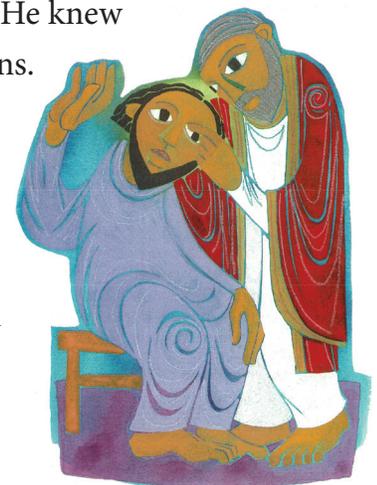
Ananias got up and found the house of Judas. There, just as Jesus had told him, sat the now blind and humble Saul. Ananias spoke to him. “My brother Saul, I know Jesus appeared to you on your way here to Damascus. Jesus has appeared to me as well, and it was he who sent me here to you. I am here to lay my hands on you and then you will be able to see again. More than that, I will lay my hands on you and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” Then Ananias placed his hands on Saul’s head and shoulders.

Saul’s eyes cleared as if something like the scales on a fish had been covering them and now fell away. More importantly, the heaviness of all the fury and violence he had held in his soul left him, too. He rose to his feet and asked to be baptized right then and there.

When he was well again, Saul went out to the people in Damascus and began to preach, “Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God. I know and I believe.”

The people of Damascus could not believe their ears. “Isn’t this Saul who came to our city to arrest Christians?” one man asked.

But Saul (or Paul, as people began to call him) was patient and wise. He knew Jesus had forgiven him and he knew he must be forgiven by the Christians. He continued to teach in the synagogues (Jewish places of worship) and on the streets. He proved he was very sorry.



Paul went on to visit many lands and speak to many people, Jews and Gentiles both. He wrote letters to the communities of Christians he helped to start, and we have some of his letters today in our Christian Scriptures. Paul faced many sufferings, just as Jesus had warned, but he never stopped following the Way. The forgiven Paul became one of the best teachers and missionaries of the risen Christ.

The power of the Holy Spirit never leaves us. We can make mistakes or sin terribly, but Jesus is always ready to pardon us and heal us. Sin can make us blind, just like Paul, but forgiveness makes us see again. The Spirit with us can take any anger or hatred in our hearts and turn it into freedom and love.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. If you had been Ananias, what would you have thought about Paul? What would you have done? Why?
3. How do you think Paul felt when he knew he had been wrong to imprison the Christians? Pretend you are Paul. What would you say to the Christians? What would you say to the people in Jerusalem who sent you to capture the Christians?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. (The answers are 8, 1, 4, 7, 2, 3, 6, 5.) Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: Each of us sometimes does wrong and must ask for forgiveness.

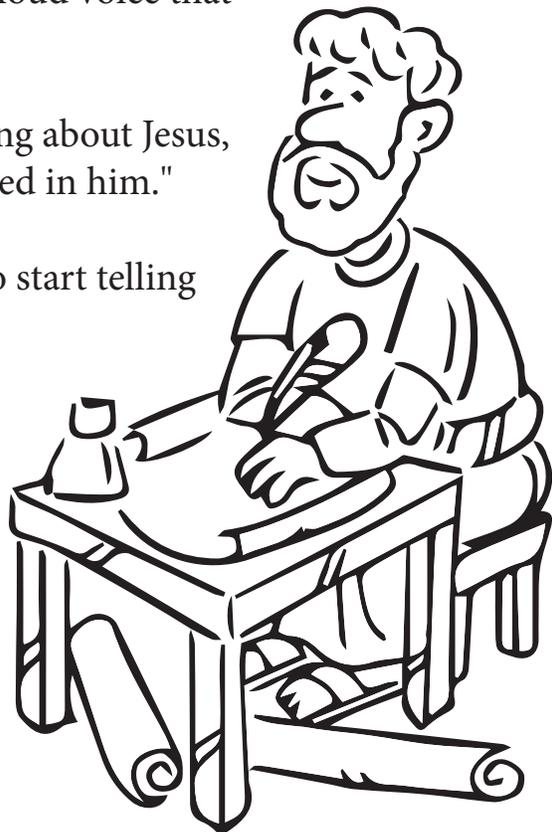
If Paul can change from an angry persecutor to a powerful preacher, think how much can happen through the power of the Spirit! We all get second chances; we all get to begin again. This is a wonderful and liberating truth of our faith. God will always forgive us our sins because God is always ready to love us. Sin blinds us, just as Paul was blind, but forgiveness makes us well. It is not without good reason that we recognize Reconciliation as a Sacrament of Healing.

A Message From Paul

Paul wrote many letters to the Christian communities he helped start. But what has happened here? It looks like Paul's pages became separated and are out of order.

Can you number the sentences to put them in the order in which they happened?

- ___ "Being blinded actually let me see what I couldn't see before, that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah and Savior!"
- ___ "I stood and watched them stone Stephen, and I knew then that I wanted to see all the followers of Christ be punished."
- ___ "So I asked the voice in the brightness, who are you? And it answered 'Jesus.'"
- ___ "They actually had to lower me down the wall in a basket, that's how angry some in Damascus had become! But I got away."
- ___ "I went to Damascus determined to imprison as many followers of Jesus as I could before returning to Jerusalem."
- ___ "There was this incredibly bright light and loud voice that knocked me to the ground!"
- ___ "At first, they wondered why I was preaching about Jesus, I who had so persecuted those who believed in him."
- ___ "When I regained my sight, I knew I had to start telling everyone that Jesus is Lord."



Saying 'I'm Sorry' and Being Forgiven

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to the next step.

2

If we never have the experience of being forgiven, how will we be able to forgive others? Answer the reflection questions below.

Reflection Questions

To prepare for the closing prayer service, look back at the circles of hurt from the last session. Using these "sins" as your guide, finish these sentences:

"I'm sorry _____."

"We need you God, to _____."

"I will never again _____."



Asking for Forgiveness

We learn how to forgive others by being forgiven ourselves. If we think we are too good to need forgiveness, we can begin to think too highly of ourselves and think that others are beneath us. If we think we are so bad we can never be forgiven, then we are denying our own goodness, which comes directly from God. None of us is perfect, but all of us belong to our forgiving God.

Reflection Questions

To prepare for the prayer service, look back at the circles of hurt from the last session. Using these "sins" as your guide, finish these sentences:

"I'm sorry; God, that I _____."

"I need your help, God, because _____."

"Something I will never again do is _____."

You may not know it, but you have just written a prayer. This kind of prayer is called an "Act of Sorrow" or an "Act of Contrition."

Here is an Act of Sorrow you can learn by heart and use if you wish:

O my God,
I am sorry for all my sins,
because they displease you,
who are worthy of all my love.
With your help, I will sin no more.
Amen.

Forgiveness and Second Chances

1

Visit whatever space is used for Reconciliation at your church, if it is accessible. Explain to your child how the process works and share your own experience of what it is like to be forgiven.

2

Talk about some of the programs in your community that offer people a second chance (such as halfway houses, hospitals, Twelve Step programs, soup kitchens). Visit one if possible, and talk to a volunteer there about forgiveness and second chances.

Closing Ritual

3

Be open to the reality that we can *all* experience forgiveness because our loving God is waiting for us to come home. Come together with your young person to share this prayer service.

Prayer of Reconciliation

Opening Prayer:

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Reading:

Mark 2:5-12

Response:

There are many stories of Jesus forgiving people when others don't think he should. But Jesus never hesitates to forgive people. Take a minute of silence to ask Jesus in your heart for forgiveness for something you did (or didn't do) that hurt someone.”

Prayer of Sorrow:

(*Adult leads; young person responds “Amen.”*)

“God of loving mercy,
we are not perfect people,
but we are trying to be your followers.

Help us to admit when we do wrong.
Lead us to reconcile with others.
Guide us to healing the world
with your justice and peace.

We ask all this through, with,
and in Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.”

Sign of Peace:

Close by exchanging a sign of Christ's peace.

