

# Acts Highlights - Part 4

by George Verwer

---

*The sermon explores the transformative experiences of Saul's conversion and Peter's vision, emphasizing God's grace and inclusivity in the early church.*

**Duration:** 34:05

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:4, Matthew 6:33, Acts 9:27, Acts 10:42, Acts 10:45, Acts 10:47

**Topics:** "Book Of Acts"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the highlights and challenges of the Book of Acts, specifically in chapters 9 and 11. He emphasizes the reality of suffering for those who are sold out to Jesus, using the example of Gary Witherall, whose wife was murdered in Lebanon. The speaker also discusses the importance of racial inclusivity in the early church, highlighting how the Lord Jesus welcomed people of all races and nationalities. The sermon concludes with Peter having to explain his actions to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem and the conversion of the Apostle Paul.

---

## Transcript

God bless you all my friends there at Zion Fellowship. I miss gathering together with you, especially the Indian lunches, but we're so grateful for the privilege of sharing and would love to get an email or even a note from some of you that you're actually listening. We've extended the opportunity for what we call our lockdown book packs.

If you're in USA or Canada or Mexico or South Africa, India, all of Europe, but other parts of the world, I'm afraid for now, you can get one of these lockdown book packs. What are some of the books? You can't predict what book will be in the pack, but some of them have my out of the comfort zone. The only book I wrote that's really about global missions and the challenge of of what Swindoll calls grace awakening, to have a grace awakening in global missions.

And then of course, my newer book, Messiology, that's going and fits very well into our Bible exposition of chapter 9, 10, and 11 this morning of the book of Acts, where there's lots of controversy, lots of problems, and things seem very messy, but God worked in the midst of it. I wanted to also mention that we now have Messiology in audio book, especially for people that don't read. So you can even contact me personally, if there's a particular title that you're interested in.

Turn now in your Bibles, and this is very much a study in which we need our Bibles in front of us. So I'll be reading some passages. Turn, of course, to Acts 9. For some of you who are new, this is the fourth lecture.

I'm usually covering three chapters at a time of the highlights and challenges of the book of Acts, which some people are connecting with on YouTube, some through my site, [georgeferber.com](http://georgeferber.com). We're going to be reading about lots of complexities, lots of challenges, and I wanted to start, as I did in some other times, with one of the quotations I wrote in my old Bible. I don't actually use this old Bible very much anymore, but when I was using it for about 15, 20 more years, I wrote a lot of quotes, and I often incorporated. Some people have thought the best part of my George Rerwer books.

There are quite a few of them, other quotations from other books, especially people like A.W. Tozer. I just put one of his quotes on my Facebook, had some interesting response. But this is something that has really helped me as I face some of the challenges, similar to what we're going to read about in these three chapters.

Very different, but similar. I thought it would be a blessing to some of you, especially during this pandemic, now riots and people being killed, the suffering level around the world. How do we stay emotionally stable? I was an emotional person and went through many different struggles emotionally, which is, of course, tied in with our walk with Jesus.

This word from a man I had never heard of, William Menninger, on emotional maturity, really helped me. So allow me to read this. Emotional maturity.

Number one, the ability to deal constructively with reality. And there's a lot of sort of heavy reality, including the virus, hitting us from all sides. And we need to know how to deal with that constructively.

Number two, the capacity to adopt to change. Enormous change is taking place. We're now told we can't get on public transport unless we wear a mask.

We know there's huge changes in connection with what's impacting us financially across the globe with so many unemployed. And all that's linked with that. Number three, a relative freedom from symptoms that are produced by tension and anxiety.

And many people are wrestling today with anxiety. And we really believe the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which we're going to be very much looking at in these three chapters, really can help us to deal with anxiety. Though it is normal, of course, to have some struggles.

I was helped by books like *How to Win Over Worry and Care*, *The Philosophy of Jesus*, and *Mental Health*, which is mainly the Sermon on the Mount. And this is a great, great concern. If you're following the news, you know there's been an increase of domestic violence.

There's been an increase of divorce. These things really impact us as we read about them. And we need to be available under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, just as we see in these three chapters.

And the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit is especially impacted by one of the verses referring to that comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit. And then the capacity to find more satisfaction from giving than receiving. And number five, the capacity to relate to other people in a consistent manner with mutual satisfaction and helpfulness.

Of course, that's one of the greatest challenges of life. And number six, the capacity to supplement, sublimate, to direct one's instinctive, hostile, hostile energy into creative and constructive outlets. It was quite a shock to me as a young Christian that I still had what seemed to be some kind of hostility.

And only the Lord and his word helped me to deal with that. And then number seven, the capacity to love. Now let's turn to chapter nine, and we're immediately thrust into the conversion of the Apostle Paul.

We've already seen the Apostle Paul witnessing the murdering of Stephen, the martyrdom of Stephen. Remember Stephen's final words, radical grace is what I call it, when he said, lay it not to them, put it not to their charge. In other words, he forgave them as he was plunged into eternity.

I really felt it was important when we think of the conversion of Paul to really read at least some of the verses connected with that, telling the story. And the book of Acts is a book of stories. And of course, it's a book of history.

And some of it may not seem relevant to you where you are, but history in the end can help us lay the foundation to deal with other things that may seem to be a lot more relevant. Let's read this. And again, I'm reading from the New Living Translation.

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers. And he went to the high priest.

He requested letters addressed to the synagogue of Damascus asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the way. And that's interesting, as it seems that in the early days, the way was one of the ways they referred to these believers. And I think it's important to understand that believers can be referred to even today in different ways.

They don't have to be called Christians, a word that is completely misunderstood in some countries. They may be called followers of Jesus, followers of the way, and that will open the door to explain what that is. In some cases, believers is a key word that is used.

But we get that example right back here, because later we're going to see how in Antioch, the believers, people in the way were first called Christians. Let's go back and pick it up at verse three. As he was nearing Damascus on his mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him.

He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Who are you, sir? Saul asked. And the voice replied, I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

Now some men were with him. So let's read their reaction and see what happens. The man with Saul stood at speeches, was surprised for they heard the sound of someone's voice, but did not see anyone.

As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind. So his companions led him by hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days.

In all that time, he went without food and water. Of course, this is when Ananias comes into his life. The Lord had spoken to Ananias in a powerful way.

Let's pick it up at verse 11. The Lord said, go over to this straight street in the house of Judas. When you arrive, ask for Saul of Tarsus.

He is praying to me right now. I've shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming and laying his hands on him that he will be able to see again. Of course, Ananias didn't handle this very well because he knew that Paul was persecuting Christians.

But the Lord explained to Ananias, I have heard about this, the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem. And we hear that he's authorized by leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus. And the Lord said, go and do what I say.

For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for me. Perhaps those words are almost the most important in this chapter and represents a totally revolutionary concept for these early believers who were mainly all Jewish.

This gospel was going to be for the Gentiles. Now, of course, in our day and age where Gentiles totally dominate the Christian population, how we would long, of course, for more Jews to come to Jesus. Some have.

We're hearing wonderful reports even from Israel. This seems quite normal, but actually it was very radical in that day. And that's why Ananias initially responded the way he did.

And so he goes to Paul and we pick up the important story. So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Instantly, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. He regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

Afterward, he ate some food and was strengthened. Well, after not eating for three days, I would have thought he would be very, very hungry. But here's the conversion of Saul, later to be called Paul, quite unusual.

And all of history shows that not so many people have this kind of unique conversion experience where they actually have a face-to-face direct encounter with the Lord Jesus. But here it is in God's word. I know it may seem unusual, especially the fact that he was also immediately baptized and that it refers, of course, to him being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Spirituality throughout the whole New Testament, including the Old Testament, is often expressed in different ways. And I think it's always dangerous if we just try to copy someone else's experience. So I don't recommend trying to copy the experience of the Apostle Paul.

But this was to be one of the most historic moments in the entire history of what later, of course, would be known as Christianity. And it's important for us to grasp it and to celebrate what God has done. Another thing that is quite amazing and often is not allowed in our day is that Saul immediately started speaking.

Now, let's remember, he was a trained orator. He was already a speaker. And so suddenly, through his new experience with the Lord, he is preaching the gospel.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days and immediately began preaching about Jesus in the synagogue, saying he is indeed the Son of God. All who heard him were amazed. Isn't this the same

man who persecuted Jesus' followers with such devastation in Jerusalem? They asked.

And we understand that he came here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests. Saul's preaching became more and more powerful. And the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

After a while, the Jewish leaders decided to kill him. Remember what God had already promised through Ananias that Paul would suffer a lot for Jesus. And as we follow the life of Paul through the book of Acts, we discover how much suffering he went through.

So important today when there just seems to be an extreme commitment, especially in certain Western churches and it's spread to Africa, to stay away from any kind of suffering. Always emphasize God is a good God. He only wants good things to happen to us.

It's a distortion. Of course, God is a good God, but we live in a real world. We live in a fallen world.

We live in a world where the Bible describes human beings as having deceitful hearts and desperately wicked. And we need to face the reality that sometimes being sold out to Jesus, we're going to experience suffering. And our friend Gary Witherall experienced that when he went to the clinic where in Lebanon many years ago, there's a book about it, where his wife had been murdered.

And if we study what's going on in the world today, we know there's a great number of martyrs and this should move all of us to greater prayer and greater reality. And so there was a plot to murder him. And then we read about how he escaped from Damascus, verse 25.

So during the night, some of the other believers let him down in a large basket through an opening in the city wall. That's a very interesting part of the film. There's a film you can get professionally done about the book of Acts on Washington.

And of course, it's amazing to see the apostle Paul escaping in that basket. We could get stuck a long time in chapter nine, and our time is limited. We find a whole challenge of Peter as Paul then went to Tarsus.

Seems that he stayed in Tarsus for about three years. And I wonder if the Lord was just pulling him out of the very heart of the controversy and his new ministry and just giving him a quieter time in his hometown. That's something I guess we'll only know when we get to heaven.

We don't have time to go into Peter's encounter with Dorcas in that amazing healing. And notice what it says as a result of that. The whole population, verse 35, the whole population of Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord when they saw Ananias walking again.

Again, these apostles seem to have an extra anointing to do healing. Not that that does not happen anymore, but it doesn't seem to happen at that same degree. And I embrace the mystery of it because we cannot escape that emphasis when we read the book of Acts.

And then that chapter ends with these wonderful words in verse 42. The news raced through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed a long time in Sheba, living with Simon the leather worker.

Praise be to God for his great working in those early days. As we go into chapter 10, we get this vision. And we get the encounter of Peter with Cornelius.

And it brings us to the climax of accepting Gentiles into the kingdom, into the faith. But all that comes with that, including a change in diet. And a breaking down of some of the heavy rules concerning eating.

In our limited time, let's pick up the vision that God gave Peter in verse 9. Now in chapter 10. The next day, as Cornelius' messengers were nearing the city, Peter went up to the flat roof to pray. Prayer, by the way, is mentioned through the whole book of Acts.

I have a little clipping prayer in the book of Acts. Maybe I'll look at it in one of the sessions in the future. So he went up to pray around noon.

He was hungry. But while lunch was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the sky open and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners.

In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice said to him, get up, Peter, kill and eat them. This is just so unusual, especially for a Jewish person.

Notice when Peter got to the home of Cornelius, the Gentile, of what he said in verse 28. You know, it is against the Jewish laws for me to come into a Gentile home like this. But God has shown me that I should never think of anyone as impure.

So I came as soon as I was sent. For now, tell me why you sent for me. And then, of course, Cornelius shares how God prepared him for the visit of Peter.

And how, of course, they came to the conclusion that, see verse 34, God doesn't show partiality. In every nation, he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. I am sure you have heard about the good news for the people of Israel.

And there is peace with God through Jesus Christ. I think one of the first books I ever read after my conversion in that Billy Graham meeting in New York City, just a little over 65 years ago, a bit hard to believe, was Billy Graham's book, Peace with God. And one of the most important aspects and realities in our life, when we come to know Jesus personally, is peace with God.

And here that very terminology we find in this early chapter in the book of Acts. Notice what it says then in verse 42. And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is ordained of God to be the judge of all, the living and the dead.

He goes on to speak about the Holy Spirit. Pick it up at verse 45. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles as well.

And there could be no doubt for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked, can anyone object to their being baptized now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did? So he gave orders to them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay there for several days.

This was a historic moment. In the whole laying of the foundation of the church, which exists to this very day, that the gospel is for everyone. No partiality.

This is also incredibly relevant, in which right now there are marches all over the world, standing against racism. And we hope the situation and connected, especially with how police handle these situations will greatly improve. But racism will never be liquidated from the human mind and the human heart without the

transforming grace of the Lord Jesus, who welcomes people right from these early days in the book of Acts.

Whatever their race, whatever their nationality, Jew or Gentile. This was a spiritual revolution in its day, and in some ways it still is a spiritual revolution. But in closing, we need to move on to chapter 11, where Peter now has to explain his actions to some of the leaders of the church back in Jerusalem.

Wow. Pick it up there at verse two. But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, some of the Jewish leaders criticized him.

You entered the house of Cornelius and even ate with him. Isn't it interesting that here we are 2,000 years later and Christians often so quickly criticize for small things. Actually in India, some when they come to Christ, who were vegetarians start to eat meat and they get criticized by those who have stuck to their vegetarian diet.

This is spoken about quite openly and clearly in the book of Corinthians. But to me, it's a warning against judgmentalism. It's a warning against also speaking out before listening.

If they just gave Paul, I mean Peter, a chance to explain, then they would have avoided that. So then Peter told them exactly what had happened. One day in Joppa, he said, while I was praying, I went into a trance.

And so he explains what happened. And fortunately, they changed their minds and he was welcomed. And that's a great story in the body of Christ that we need to remember.

Pick it up at verse 15. Well, I began telling him the good news. But just as I was getting started, the Holy Spirit fell on it, just as he fell on us in the beginning.

Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, John baptized with water, but you will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And since God gave these Gentiles the same gifts he gave us when he believed in the Lord Jesus, who was I to argue? When the others heard of this, all their objections were answered. This is a bit of a miracle.

It doesn't always work that way when there are problems and difficulties in the church or even among leaders, even among leaders of whole networks or denominations. They said God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life. Praise God for this great transition, this great whole new day, of course, planned before the beginning of time.

And then we, of course, find ourselves in Antioch. Pick it up at verse 19. Meanwhile, the believers who had fled from Jerusalem during the persecution of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria.

They preached good news, but only to the Jews. However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Syria began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. And the power of the Lord was upon them.

And large numbers of Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord. Well, this is just so amazing, isn't it? Such a huge, sudden transformation. Verse 25.

Then Barnabas went up to Tarsus to find Paul. Now, Paul has been out of the picture, and quite a bit of time has passed. Some commentators say three years.

When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching great numbers of people. It was there at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.

In our next session, session five, we'll be looking at the Antioch church. We'll be looking at that great prayer meeting I recorded in the beginning of chapter 13, where the Holy Spirit calls Paul and Barnabas out into missionary travel, missionary endeavors. And later on in one of the chapters, just listening to it on audio, we discover Paul and Barnabas had a bit of a breakup and went their separate ways.

But it's the apostle Barnabas that really helped the leaders at Jerusalem to accept him. Let's pick that up again at verse 25. Then Barnabas sent on to Tarsus to find Paul.

When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching great numbers of people. During this time, some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch.

One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings to predict by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. This was, by the way, fulfilled during the reign of Clodius. So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the believers in Judea.

You know, sometimes people criticize relief work. I've met many people that say, well, we just, we should preach the gospel. We shouldn't be getting involved in relief work.

And yet here way back in the early chapters of the book of Acts, we see a clear testimony concerning the needs of helping people physically. And right now around the world, the need for relief, even food as we're expecting increased starvation, has to be part of what God has called the church to do. Of course, it's way more complex.

And we're not saying it's easy, but it's a biblical principle. And this is one of the nuggets that helps us. What does it go on to say? So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the believers in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could.

Yes, they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders in the church in Jerusalem. And so our little Bible study of these three chapters ends up, of course, in one of my favorite themes, the whole challenge of being generous. And if there was ever a day on planet earth, at least in my lifetime, where we need to be more generous, it's right now.

Many believers have lost their jobs. Many believers are not able to give. In fact, they need our help.

And that is happening much more in the church than people ever realize. But also there in the global village we now live in, there's opportunities to help tough situations like India, where there's just all this lack of food among the migrants and people lost their jobs, a couple of million of them. And I thank the Lord that our own churches there and our schools, some of them have been changed into feeding stations.

I thank the Lord we've got these clinics. And I celebrate many different ministries in India and Africa and around the world that are meeting the medical needs. And I celebrate some of you right here listening to me who are involved in the virus crisis right here in the UK, working in health care.

We honor you. We bless you. And what you are doing has its biblical roots back in the New Testament.

God bless you. I look forward to session five. Let's just pray together.

Father, we thank you for the challenge of the life of Paul. We thank you for his amazing conversion. We thank you, Lord, for the testimony of Peter, the vision you gave him to change the course of history, to set us free from legalism, and bring us into the day of grace.

We thank you for the transformation that is taking place, even among many legalistic believers, to discover what real grace is all about. Lord, we embrace the complexity. We embrace the mystery, especially concerning when you heal and when you don't seem to heal, even after much prayer.

And by your grace, we will continue to walk by faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/29/SID29459.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/george-verwer/acts-highlights-part-4/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**