

## Share Your Story (Acts 22:6-16)

### Seven Rhythms • March 10, 2024 • [www.isonrise.com](http://www.isonrise.com)

We are hoping to help you have cringe-free conversations about Jesus with your friends and family members, who are not yet following Jesus. We are crafting a simple tool to help you shape your story, which will allow you to put your story in written form. We will release this tool to you on Palm Sunday. As we go through each spiritual rhythm, we have tried to follow a “lecture and lab” strategy. We are teaching on each rhythm in our weekly sermons (lecture) and at the end of each month we are providing an experience to help you put what you have learned into practice (lab). The tool we are making available to you on Palm Sunday is our “lab” for the rhythm of “telling our story.”

I confessed something to our staff several weeks ago when we were discussing how our perspectives shape our conversations with others, especially when we are sharing our stories. We were reflecting on the idea that our perspectives are like the colored stripes on a beach ball. There is a red, blue, yellow, and white stripe. The beach ball is reality. The stripes are the parts of reality that we are aware of or decide to focus on. From our perspective or vantage point on the beach ball, we may be unaware that there are other colors. Standing on the red stripe could lead us to believe the whole beach ball is red. A piece of reality is indeed red, but that is not the full picture. When we look back at our story, we are often tempted to only tell a piece of the story, one stripe on the beach ball.

When I tell my story, I like to share the parts that make me seem heroic. I have and you have had heroic moments in our lives. We most likely exaggerate how big the heroic stripe is on the beach ball of our stories. I confessed to the staff, that when I reflect on my story and retell it to others, the role I cast for myself is mostly that of the victim. Maybe I feel that the role of the hero is too hard of a sale and casting myself as the victim will get me a similar amount of attention, even though it will be sympathy and not admiration. I have and you have had moments in our lives where we were victims. When we narrow our focus on when we started to follow Jesus, we need to rightly present ourselves as the villains, not heroes or victims. That is the largest stripe on the beach ball of our story of how we started following Jesus. I’m not negating your heroism or victimhood in your life. Your moment of faith, which is the second part of your story, came about when you were made aware that you were also a villain. This is how Paul came to see himself at the moment of his conversion. Let’s explore together how Paul understood his villainy in his story and learn how we also need to confess our villainy.

**Big Idea: Take sin personally.** Sin is a personal offense against God and we bear personal responsibility for our sin. Sin is not just a legal infraction. It is a relational offense. Sin is not just breaking the law. It is also betraying a person, God. We have offended God personally with our sins. We are called to take personal responsibility for our sins. We can not hide behind the actions of others hoping our sins will be excused or overlooked. We must

personally call out to God for forgiveness. Let me show you how Paul took sin personally when he came to faith in Christ.

*Acts 22:6-8, “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? <sup>8</sup> And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.”*

Paul was blindsided by a divine encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ. His experience overloaded his senses. The message he heard gave him identity whiplash. He has been persecuting Christians in the name of the Lord and now it was being revealed to him that he was actually persecuting the Lord. How was Paul persecuting Jesus? Paul was not directly persecuting Jesus. Jesus had already resurrected and ascended. He ascended in Acts 1. Stephen had a vision of Jesus in heaven while he was being martyred in Acts 7.

Jesus took the sin of persecution of his church personally. When Paul was inflicting pain on the church he was striking out against Jesus himself. I want to pause here for a moment and see how the Bible reveals how God takes our sin as a personal offense against himself. I must warn you that some of the language we will encounter is not PG-13. If you have little ones in the service with you today, it might be a good time to check them into our children’s ministry. I am not going to use vulgar language, but I am going to read a passage in scripture where God painfully expressed how the sins of his people hurt him. He used the language of marital betrayal and I just want to make you aware that your child may ask you to help them understand the words that God decided to use.

Before we cover that passage, let me show you another passage that shows how God takes our sin against our fellow man personally. This concept is shown to us in the Old Testament prohibition against murder. *Genesis 9:5-6, “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.”<sup>6</sup> Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”* God explained to Noah that those who commit murder should face the penalty of death. The part of this passage I want us to focus on is how God grounds this consequence. The reason given for this heavy consequence for such a horrendous action was the fact man was made “in his own image.” Striking down a human being was seen as a strike against God. Most of us can empathize with personalizing the sins that are committed against other people. If you hit my wife or my kids, you have sinned against them and me. I would take that sin against my family personally. In Genesis 9, attacking the image of God was portrayed as an attack on God. We see this type of reasoning in the New Testament as well. Jesus told his disciples that when they acted kindly to other followers of Christ, they were acting kindly to him. God takes actions for or against humanity personally. The next passage we are covering will show the emotional impact sin has on God.

God speaks of sin as adultery. When we sin against him, we don't just break a law that is detached from him. We betray him as our loving creator. *Ezekiel 16:8-15*, “<sup>8</sup> When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. <sup>9</sup> Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. <sup>10</sup> I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. <sup>11</sup> And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. <sup>12</sup> And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. <sup>13</sup> Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. <sup>14</sup> And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.”<sup>15</sup> But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his.” You can feel the depth of betrayal that God was experiencing when his people chose to worship other gods. God had done so much for Israel and they turned their backs on him and even used the blessings that God had given to them to attract other lovers. It's like using your wedding dress to pick up a random guy at the bar.

Paul was confronted with the brutal nature of his betrayal. As a follower of Christ, you too realized the gravity of your sin before you placed your faith in Christ. We can not forget to share that part of our story. I was so angry before I started following Christ. The pain and hurt I experienced in my life made me angry and bitter. I once chased someone down with a knife and repeatedly stabbed a piece of furniture in our house until my arms were tired. On April 4th, 1997, I told God how terrible and evil I thought he was. I directed all my rage at him. After hours of ranting against God, he flooded my mind with the depth of my sin. I felt the enormous weight of my guilt and realized how God took my sin personally. I was undone and absolutely certain that I was without a doubt guilty before him. The cross of Christ humbles you before it gives you hope. Paul was humbled by the fact that he was persecuting the Lord when he was persecuting Christians. I was humbled by the amount of rage I nurtured in my heart. How did you come to see your own villainy before you came to Christ? How had you personally offended God with your sin? After Paul's brutal confrontation with his sin, he was called personally to take action.

*Acts 22:9-16*, “<sup>6</sup> As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? <sup>8</sup> And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Rise, and go

*into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do. <sup>11</sup> And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. <sup>12</sup> And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name. ”*

It is important to note that this wasn't a vision, but a public appearance of the resurrected Christ. Paul's companions heard and saw what he experienced. When we pair this account with Acts 9, we see that Paul's traveling companion saw a light, but not a person, and heard a voice, but didn't understand the message. They witnessed the experience, but they didn't participate in it like Paul did. Paul wasn't having a subjective vision, but an objective experience.

Paul submits to the instructions given to him by Christ and makes his way to Damascus. Ananias healed Paul of his blindness immediately and called Paul to take action. I think it is important for us to note that Paul hadn't yet converted. He had experienced Jesus and been healed miraculously. Paul still needed to take action himself. So far the primary actors in this account have been Jesus and Ananias. It was now time for Paul to move. He needed to take a personal step of faith. Experience was not enough. He couldn't hide or rely on the actions of others. He needed to take action, himself. Ananias' question makes this clear. He asked Paul, "Why do you wait?" Ananias didn't see any real hurdles in Paul's way, besides himself.

He instructed Paul to *"be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name."* We need to be careful how we read these actions. We should not understand these commands as teaching us that baptism is what washes away our sins. The grammar here does not support that. The participle "calling" is dependent on the verb "wash away" and explains how one's sins are washed away. We can fairly translate this as "wash away your sins *by* calling on his name." Calling on the name of the Lord is what brings about the forgiveness or the "washing away" of our sins. Baptism is a separate action that is symbolic of our sins being washed away. "Calling" on the name of the Lord was the action Peter set before his audience on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Paul emphasized calling on the Lord as the proper response to the gospel (Romans 10:12-13). This calling was not an incantation or magical turn of phrase. The background of this exhortation is found in the prophet Joel. There the prophet warns of the coming judgement of the Lord and says that those who call out to God for mercy will be saved from that judgment. "Calling on the name of the Lord" is like crying out for help. You are aware that you are in trouble and that you are incapable of saving yourself from your situation. This is how faith in Christ is described to us in the Bible.

We must admit that we are sinners and believe that only Christ can save us from the just judgment of God. Paul was only going to be right with God if he made this step. Experiencing Jesus wasn't enough. Being healed wasn't enough. He needed to take personal responsibility for his actions and call out to God for forgiveness.

Paul took that step. I remember reaching out to my Christian basketball coach the night I was overwhelmed by my sin and asking him to tell me how Jesus could save me from the judgment I knew I deserved. He shared with me that Christ died for me providing me a way to be forgiven and that I needed to make him the "boss" of my life in order to receive that forgiveness. I knew that I was a villain and Bobby shared with me that night, that Christ died for villains like me. Christ is an odd hero like that. Heroes normally defeat villains. Christ dies for them.

**Take sin personally.** When we share our stories, we must be honest with the role we play in our salvation. We have personally sinned against God and are personally responsible for calling out to God for forgiveness. We bear the weight of our guilt for the sins we have committed and the responsibility to ask for forgiveness. We can not hide behind the actions of others. We can't only see ourselves as victims and never admit to being villains. We can't see our religious experiences as our way of being right with God. We must personally call out to him.

If you are here today and you would not yet call yourself a Christian, I want to speak directly to you. I would like to ask you to consider the question Ananias gave Paul, "What are you waiting for?" What is holding you back from receiving the forgiveness of God? Why are you delaying this decision? Hear me out, there are good reasons to delay. Jesus told a crowd of people to "count the cost" before following him. I believe that the cost of following Christ is worth the reward. Maybe right now you realize you don't have a good reason to delay this decision. You know what it will cost you and you have come to grips with that. If that is true, "What are you waiting for?" Today is the day! Give your life to Christ today.

If you are a follower of Christ, we want to guide you into something a little different as we close out our time together. As we were discussing the plan for this service, we felt, as a pastoral team, that we needed to do something slightly out of the ordinary. We want to guide you in a time of examination before we move into communion. Your sins are forgiven at the moment you place your faith in Christ. The sins we commit still affect our relationship with God. They don't sever our relationship with God, but they do create distance. I invite you to personally examine your heart and see if there is any unconfessed sin in your life. Pray with me. "Lord, have I sinned against you by sinning against my spouse? Have I harbored bitterness, resentment, or anger? Have I said "I forgive you" with my mouth, but not meant it in my heart? Lord, have I sinned against you by sinning against my kids? Have I been impatient, overbearing, or negligent? Have I looked past their pain or pushed away their invitations to play? Lord, have I sinned against you by sinning against my friends? Have I lacked sympathy? Have I not taken the time to listen to their hurt? Have I been

indifferent to their struggle with sin? Lord, have I sinned against you by sinning against my neighbors and coworkers? Have I been embarrassed about my commitment to you in front of them? Have I compromised my values to get ahead or look better than them? Lord, have I sinned against you by sinning against my enemies? Have I forgotten to pray for those who have caused me pain? Lord, forgive me of the sins you have revealed to me.”

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### ----- Life Level Application -----

- 1) **Head:** Read Romans 10:12-17. What does calling “on the name of the Lord mean? List out the chain of events that Paul said proceed someone calling “on the name of the Lord.” How do you see yourself in that chain of events for those around you?
  
- 2) **Heart:** Read Jeremiah 3:19-22. How does the prophet describe the sins of God’s people? What emotions do you believe the author intended his readers to feel when he portrayed sin in this way? How often do you view your own sin this way?
  
- 3) **Hand:** Recall the moment you first placed faith in Christ and share that story with someone you care about.
  
- 4) **Habit:** Read Psalm 139:23-24. Would you consider setting aside two blocks of time this week to pray this scripture and ask the Lord to show you the sins you have committed but haven’t yet confessed to him?