

The road to Damascus

EASTER 3

You will need: a blindfold.

In **Acts 9.1-20**, we read of Paul's great moment of conversion. A man of power and influence, Paul had to take a back seat, lose that power and rely on others to lead him. Only then could God speak to him about the way ahead. We consider how we too might be 'brought up short,' or challenged to notice what we have been missing.

This is the third of eight Bible studies in which we explore Luke's understanding of what it means to encounter the risen Christ.

Bible notes

Earlier in Acts we have Paul as a witness and giving his approval to the stoning of Stephen, then trying to destroy the Church, going from house to house in Jerusalem. Paul saw this as his duty. For him, the 'law' was of paramount importance, and what Stephen said about it (and about Jesus) before he was stoned would have been blasphemy to Paul's ears. News came from Damascus of Christians in the synagogues preaching so Paul set off on the 217km journey to Damascus to stamp them out.

Make connections

Read through the account of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus and also the account in John's Gospel of Peter (John 21.1-19). Paul is just about to begin his journey with Jesus, while Peter has already been with Jesus for years, witnessing all that he did during his life, and then being the one to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. Yet, in this passage (John 21.19), just as when Jesus first called Peter, we hear Jesus say to him 'follow me'. Jesus calls us to follow him every day, however long we have been on the journey, we need to choose daily to follow.

Sometimes it can be a clear call, as with Paul, other times we are not sure and need to wait for clarification. Paul was put in this position: something was going to change – it started on the road to Damascus, but just as he was struck blind and could not literally see, he could not 'see' the way ahead – others had to lead him. A man of power and influence, Paul had to take a back seat, lose that power and rely on others to lead him. Only then could God speak to him about the way ahead.

Explore

Have you ever felt completely powerless? Nothing you can do will mean anything or make a difference – you cannot change a situation; stuff is beyond your control?

It can be hard to trust others at these times. Sometimes we can be so busy (just as Paul was) that we have to be brought up short or challenged to notice what we have been missing.

Sheep and the shepherd

A volunteer should be blindfolded and should stand at one end of the room. The rest of the group should sit or stand in the blindfolded person's way as 'obstacles' (all 'baa' constantly!). Then one group member tries to lead the blindfolded person through the maze of bodies to reach the other side.

- What is it like to be blindfolded? Did you trust the person who was leading you? Was it easy or hard to get to the other end of the room?

Do the exercise again – but this time, in complete silence (apart from the guide).

- Was it easier to get to the other side of the room?

If you are unable to play this game think about a time when you were unable to see where you are going. How did you feel?

Think about a time when you were unable to hear properly. How did you feel?

- How can you make sure you see and hear what God is saying to you?