

The road to Damascus

Planning

Theme Seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary

Eight weeks in which we explore Luke's understanding of what it means to encounter the risen Christ. Throughout the Easter season (31 March–19 May), we shall be reading about the way that the gospel spread out from Jerusalem following the resurrection of Jesus.

Week 3 of 8

The road to Damascus Acts 9.1-20

A second, and dramatically different, key witness appears this week as we meet Paul the apostle.

This week's reading provides an opportunity to:

- become familiar with this account of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus
- recognise the call of Jesus in life-changing moments
- consider how we might respond in times of disempowerment.

Other Bible readings for this week

RCL Easter 3 Year C, Psalm 30, Revelation 5.11-14, John 21.1-19

Lectionary variation Resources for the RC Gospel reading can be found in the resources bank on the [WEB](#).

On the [WEB](#) you can find a *Peter & Paul: factfile* that can be downloaded and given to everyone.

ROOTS www.rootsontheweb.com

Week by week

Bible notes
Prayers
PostScript: up-to-the minute comment
Bible study worksheet
Children's Sheet
Templates for craft activities
Further resources: film, website and book suggestions
Links to other materials for this week

Prepare your session

Read **Acts 9.1-20** and the *Bible notes* on page 32. Choose from the materials to suit the age range, length of session and preferences of your group. Integrate prayers and singing at appropriate moments.

For shorter sessions, use the story opposite and *What's the story* on page 33.

Prayers

Additional prayers can be found within this weekly material. All prayers are on the [WEB](#).

A prayer of following

Jesus, who called Paul to become an example of your message, help me to become like him, shining your love and goodness out for everyone that I meet.

Show me, each day, how to be more and more like you.

Amen.

A prayer to be led

Lord, who leads the way, you sent help to Paul when he couldn't see.

Help me to notice the people you send to help me, and let me be a person you send to help others.

Amen.

A prayer in the dark

Living God who is with us always, whom Paul recognised in his darkness and shock,

help us to follow you, too.

Living God who wants us to follow you, who called Paul to follow you out of his darkness,

help us to follow you, too.

Living God who brings light to the world, who enlightened Paul to the brightness of your message,

help us to follow you, too.

Amen.

Music

See p.1 for key to abbreviations.

Sing

All that I am (CHY, RSJ)
Come on, let's get up and go (CHY, JP, RSJ)
From heaven you came
God forgave my sin
How lovely on the mountains
I danced in the morning
I, the Lord of sea and sky
Jesus is greater (CHY, KS, RSJ)
Jesus went out of his way (KS, RSJ)
Lord, the light of your love is shining
Love will never come to an end (CP, RSJ)

Listen

'Open the eyes of my heart', Paul Baloché

Gather

Prepare the space

Get together some maps and photos of the region where Paul was travelling, from Jerusalem to Damascus. Google these or find them in an illustrated Bible.

Gathering activity

Have a 'What happened next?' quiz. Play clips of sporting events, or films, pausing them just before a key event. Ask the group to guess what happened next, then play the clip on to find out if they were right. Examples can be found using Google or YouTube. In today's story, what happened next was extraordinary.

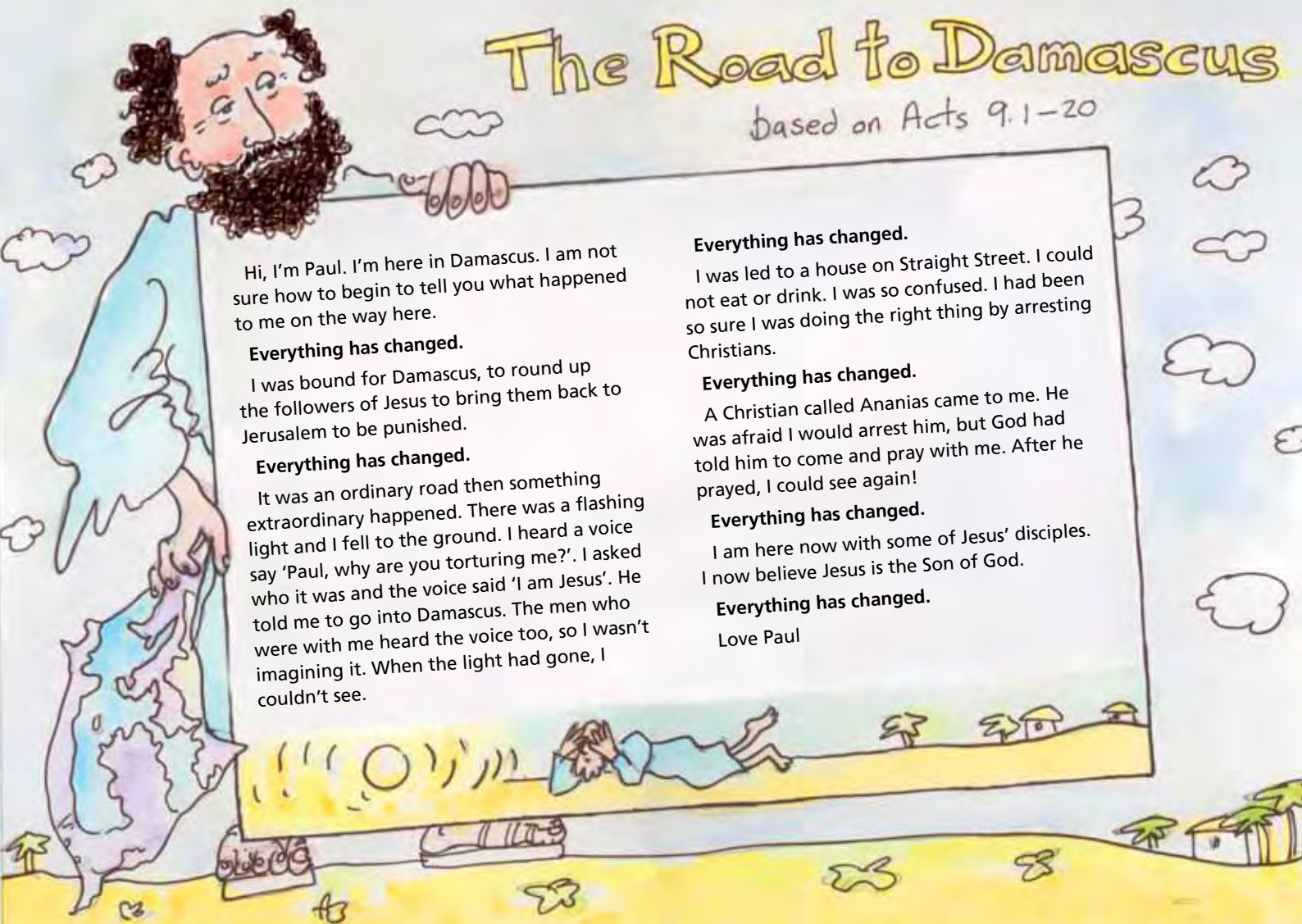
Gathering prayer

God, our Creator and our guide, you call us to be your witnesses and you are with us as we go.

As we gather together today, shine your light into our hearts so that we may see how we can be your witnesses

in the lives that we live every day.

Amen.



The Road to Damascus

based on Acts 9.1-20

Hi, I'm Paul. I'm here in Damascus. I am not sure how to begin to tell you what happened to me on the way here.

Everything has changed.

I was bound for Damascus, to round up the followers of Jesus to bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished.

Everything has changed.

It was an ordinary road then something extraordinary happened. There was a flashing light and I fell to the ground. I heard a voice say 'Paul, why are you torturing me?'. I asked who it was and the voice said 'I am Jesus'. He told me to go into Damascus. The men who were with me heard the voice too, so I wasn't imagining it. When the light had gone, I couldn't see.

Everything has changed.

I was led to a house on Straight Street. I could not eat or drink. I was so confused. I had been so sure I was doing the right thing by arresting Christians.

Everything has changed.

A Christian called Ananias came to me. He was afraid I would arrest him, but God had told him to come and pray with me. After he prayed, I could see again!

Everything has changed.

I am here now with some of Jesus' disciples. I now believe Jesus is the Son of God.

Everything has changed.

Love Paul

Open the Word

Based on Acts 9.1-20

Bible notes are on page 32.

With very young children

A chance to explore Paul's experiences on the road to Damascus

You will need: a strip of cloth or a play road system; wooden or plastic people; torches; blocks or bricks to build Damascus.

Share this short paraphrase and actions.

Paul was walking along the road to Damascus.

(use your hands to make a walking action)

He saw a bright light.

(put your hands over your eyes)

He fell to the ground.

(bang the ground with your hand)

Paul heard Jesus speaking to him, *(cup your ears)*

but he was blind, and could not see.

(cover your eyes with your hands)

Paul walked on to Damascus.

(walking' action)

Ananias went to meet Paul.

(walking' action)

Ananias prayed.

(put your hands together in prayer)

Now Paul could see again. *(cover your eyes and then fling your hands away)*

■ Invite the children to make a 'road' and build Damascus at one end. Invite them to walk the figures along the road, and use the torches to make the bright light that blinded Paul.

End by repeating the Bible actions.

With children

Over these eight weeks we are going to encounter two key witnesses to the gospel: Peter and Paul.

This week, Paul sends us a postcard from Damascus where his life has been turned upside down.

If you have introduced Peter in previous weeks, set the scene that this is Paul, a very different character. You might read this story with a different intonation from the previous two.

Talk about

After reading the Bible story to your group, use these discussion points.

- Talk with the children about changes they have faced. This might be in school, family life, moving house. Be sensitive to those who may have struggled.
- Talk about what the changes meant to them. How do they cope with change?

With young people

Ideas to explore the Bible reading are on page 32.

Bible study and response with young people

- Beforehand, read **Acts 9.1-20**. Read and print out a copy of the Bible study sheet for each group member. There are additional Bible notes on the [WEB](#). Read the story of Stephen (Acts 7 into Acts 8): although this is our first encounter with Paul, his back story is important.
- In the session, read the Bible passage together, look at the *Bible notes* and *Make connections* sections. Use this conversation spark to provoke first reactions from the group:
People who claim to have 'life-changing conversions' are just attention seeking. Do you agree?
- For the *Explore* section blindfold a person and have them stand at one end of the room. Have other young people sit or stand in their way as 'obstacles' (who 'baa' constantly!). Then have one group member trying to lead the blindfolded person through the maze of bodies to reach the other side.

Respond Timed listening **YP** 10 MINS

An exercise in 'zoning in' in order to listen well

- Play 'Just a minute' – ask the young people to take it in turns to talk about a subject – without hesitating, repeating themselves or going off the subject. If they do, the other young people can 'buzz in' and the player has to stop. Do it quickly; get everyone to have a go (subjects can be general, such as church, football, my Xbox, and so on).
- When everyone is done, instil a minute of quiet. In this time, just pray together (you can lead it, or invite a young person to):

In the week to come we pray we will not be so focused on what we are doing or have to get done that we miss God trying to speak to us – if we need to, let us pray that we let God interrupt our lives so we can draw closer to him.

Live in faith

Peter and Paul find their own ways of doing what God wants of them. Invite the young people to think about ways they might respond to Jesus using their skills and individual personality.

The road to Damascus **Acts 9.1-20**

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 217 km 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

- 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?

Listening to God, hearing his voice, seeing him at work can be hard – unless we come away and spend time with Him.

Respond to the Word

Based on Acts 9.1-20

See p.31 for ways of presenting the Bible reading.

Play Dominoes



Follow the lead

You will need: sets of dominoes, perhaps one for every six children. You could use picture dominoes with younger children.

- Divide the group into groups of six, or all play together.
- Explain the rules of dominoes. Divide the pieces out between the groups. People take turns to put down a domino – it has to have the same number as the last one shown by the previous player. Play is started by the person holding double six.
- People take turns adding pieces, as long as they have a number that follows on from one at the end of the line of pieces. Double numbers can change direction.
- Link this to the idea of following a direction, but then having to change.
- This game may be very familiar to older people in your congregation, so you might invite some to come and play with the group.

Walk What's the story?



Walk through the story of Paul's experience

- Take your group for a walk around your space. Talk about the journey Paul was on. Who was Paul? Where was he going? What was he going to do there?
- Talk about what it was like on his journey. How did he feel as he made his way along the road towards Damascus?
- Suddenly bring the group to a stop. If possible, get another leader to do this so that it is unexpected for the children. Talk about Paul's encounter with Jesus. Ask them how they think Paul felt now. How would they feel?
- Finish your journey by walking to 'the house in Straight Street', and talk about how Paul's encounter with Jesus changed him from the man in verse 1, who was breathing threats against Jesus' followers, to the man in verse 20, who is proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues.

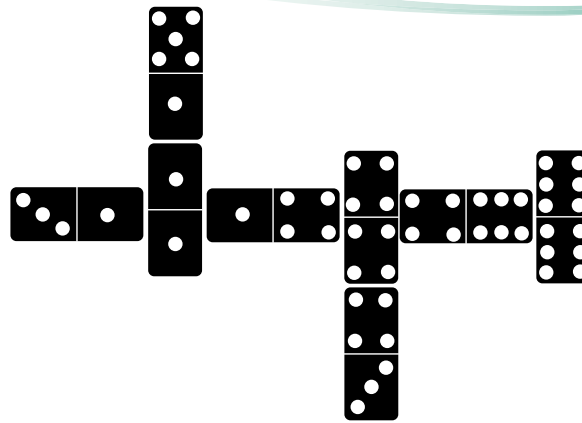
Imagine Power cut



Think about how it feels to be disempowered

You will need: pens and paper.

- Ask people to make a list of everything they do in a day. This should start from getting up. Prompt them with things such as having toast, listening to the radio, playing on the computer.
- Once they have written the lists, invite them to work in groups to cross out all the things they do that rely on electricity. What is left?
- How does it feel to think that they will have no power?
- When Paul went blind he had no power. How do you think that made Paul feel?
- In what ways can we, or others, be disempowered? How might we react?



Compare Before and after



Think about the change meeting Jesus made in Paul's life

You will need: Bibles; pens and paper; copies of the Paul cartoon [WEB](#), one per person.

- Using the Bibles, get the youngsters to find and read Acts 9.1-2, and then Acts 9.17-20.
- Talk about the difference between Paul before his experience on the road, and afterwards. What made that change in Paul?
- Get the youngsters to draw 'before' and 'after' pictures of Paul on either side of their cartoon copy of him (using the template from the [WEB](#)), writing or drawing around him the characteristics that describe him.

Pray Keep walking



Ask for God's help to keep going

You will need: coloured paper, pens and scissors.

- Give each person a piece of paper to stand on and draw round their foot. Cut out the footprints, and lay them in a line on the floor, as if they are walking along the road.
- Talk about how Paul got up after his encounter with Jesus and kept walking along the road, even though he needed help to do it. Sometimes in our lives things happen that make it seem difficult to keep going. Sometimes we feel disempowered the way Paul did. But if we ask Jesus to help, we too can keep walking along the road.
- Pray together, asking Jesus to help us when we feel we can't keep going.

Next week Please invite your group to bring something with them that is precious to them, something they would be happy to show and tell.

Send out

Live in faith

Every day, ask Jesus to walk with you when you feel you can't keep going.

Pray

We ask your blessing, Lord, as we go out to be your disciples. Keep us on the right path. Keep our eyes fixed on you and guide us in our efforts to bring others to you. **Amen.**