

Date: *Who is Jesus to you?*

**PRAY** Father, enable me to identify today one or two things I can do to draw closer to you.

**READ** Acts 9:1–22

### REFLECT

Saul was an angry young man (Acts 7:58). He hated Christians and tracked them down to throw them into prison. So much for religious tolerance. But Saul's vendetta raises an interesting question: Why does Jesus make some people so angry? For some it has to do with their unwillingness to give up a particular lifestyle. Others feel they've been betrayed by a Christian. Still others can't accept Jesus' claim to be the only way to God (John 14:6).

But often, all these reactions are a smokescreen for a deeper issue: external anger at Jesus can be a clue that an internal spiritual struggle is going on. That seems to be the case with Saul. There was no question about his passion for God. Elsewhere in the Bible we learn that he devoted his life to Judaism; he was a model Pharisee (Acts 22:3; 23:6). But when Saul literally 'saw the light' it burned off all his anger. He still had questions (9:5), but until he let go of the anger he couldn't hear the answers. That's true today as well.

I've heard some Christians apologise for the fact that, 'My testimony is not that dramatic', as if the only way to be truly converted is to get knocked to the ground and to hear the voice of Jesus.

Sometimes conversion is immediate and dramatic, and we can thank God for the times he chooses to work that way. But, more often, conversion is a gradual process where a person comes to faith in Jesus over time. Even Saul's conversion demonstrates this: he grew up in a religious environment, developed a passion for God, had a dramatic encounter with Jesus but then received support from the Christian community in Damascus (9:17–19). It took all these steps to transform the angry young man into God's chosen instrument who could preach that Jesus is the Son of God (9:15,20).

**APPLY** What is the next step you could take in your relationship with Jesus?

**PRAY** Ask God for the courage to take that next step.

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**PRAY** Thank you, Father, for everything you've taught me during my journey through the Bible. Please show me anything else you want me to know.

**READ** Luke 9:18–27

### REFLECT

When I was in high school, our pastor invited me to share my testimony in front of the entire church. I agreed because I had grown up in a Christian home and I felt confident I knew what to say. But when the day finally arrived and I stepped to the front, I suddenly realised the challenge wasn't just to say what my pastor, or my parents, or anyone else wanted to hear. With the eyes of everyone staring at me, I had to say what I really believed about Jesus.

It's that kind of crunch moment that the disciples have reached in our reading today. As a result of Jesus' preaching, parables and miracles, everyone is talking about him. So Jesus asks a general question, 'Who do the crowds say I am?' (9:18). Most people today would be comfortable with that one; they could simply repeat what they've heard from others, which is exactly what the disciples did (9:19).

But Jesus didn't come to earth to help people memorise a textbook answer about him. He came so that everyone could have a personal relationship with him. So he presses the point; perhaps this is what he had been praying about earlier. 'Who do *you* say that I am?' (9:20). That's the **EssentialJESUS** challenge. And it is Peter, the impulsive fisherman, who rises to the challenge: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (9:20; Matthew 16:16). The disciples still had a lot to learn about Jesus, and a lot to go through with him (9:21–27). But they had crossed a threshold in their relationship with Jesus.

As I hope you've discovered in our journey through the Bible, what you believe about Jesus is the most important issue you'll ever face. And my prayer is that you'll join Peter and countless millions throughout the ages who have affirmed with all their hearts, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', because when you do, you will have crossed the threshold into eternal life.

**APPLY** What do you really believe about Jesus?

**PRAY** Spend a few minutes talking to Jesus, imagining that he has personally addressed his challenge to you: 'Who do *you* say that I am?'...