

## **Back to School: History Class**

### **Welcome/Prayer**

#### **Introduction**

The stated mission of our church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The word “disciple” literally means “learner.”

1. Discuss the idea that being a disciple means being a student of the Christian faith.

For some, the thought of going back to school does not bring about positive memories.

2. Talk about your experiences in school. Were they positive or negative? Discuss any ways you see now God’s hand at work in your life then.

Our Christian faith is rooted in some historical facts, many of them contained in the Bible. Many people don’t care much about its content because they view it simply as “ancient history” that has no bearing on our lives today.

3. How have you experienced people viewing the Bible as “ancient history”?

The central figure of the Bible is Jesus Christ. So, the Bible is “His-Story.” In order for the Bible to be relevant to us, we must make connections between stories in the Bible and our own lives. This connection occurs when we follow Jesus and become His disciple. In doing so, His-Story becomes Our-Story.

4. What are some stories/figures in the Bible that you have felt connected to in the past? (i.e., Moses and his lack of confidence in public speaking; Paul and his antagonism towards Christians)

In order to become a follower of Jesus, we must change direction in our lives, also known as having a conversion. We turn from doing things the world’s way to doing things God’s way. Our pastors have spent this summer sharing their testimonies.

5. What testimonies stood out to you or meant something specific to you?

In Acts 9, we read about the dramatic conversion experience of a zealous religious persecutor named Saul of Tarsus, who later became the Apostle Paul. Read his story aloud.

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around

him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” “Who are you, lord?” 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 must do.” The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone’s voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink. [Then] 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 might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. (Acts 9:1-9, 17-18 NLT)

Paul shows how His-Story can become Your-Story.

The 3 C’s of Christian Conversion will help us find our own place in history and will give us tools to share our story with others.

### **Break It Down**

#### **Christian Conversion: His-Story Becomes Your-Story**

##### **1) Conviction**

**We become convicted when we realize we’re headed the wrong way.**

Conviction always brings recognition of one’s true condition. Many people are unaware of their need for conversion because they are ignorant of the fact that sin infects their lives.

Prior to the Damascus Road experience, Saul considered himself “blameless” (or “without fault”) under the Law (Philippians 3:6). But later he wrote that he was chief among sinners. Everyone sins and falls short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). Like Paul, when we meet Jesus as Paul did, we discover that we have “missed the mark”/sinned.

1. Discuss a time when you felt convicted about a sin in your life. How did God convict you (i.e., the Holy Spirit, God’s Word)? How was your life affected by this realization?

Unfortunately, many people use the wrong standard of measure. “Comparative theology” is when our standing before God is determined by comparing ourselves to others. So we decide we’ll be saved and get into heaven by virtue of not being as bad as other people.

2. What should the standard of measure really be?

True conviction shows us how much we come up short compared to the benchmark set by God’s holiness and convinces us against whom we have sinned. For Saul, it came in a clear and unmistakable way when a voice from heaven asked, “Why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!” (v. 4-5). His oppression of Christians was actually directed against the Lord, Jesus Christ.

3. What does it mean to you that when we sin, we are sinning against the Lord?

The first step in His-Story becoming Your-Story is being convicted of your sin and convinced of your need for a Savior.

## **2) Crisis**

Crisis in this instance does not necessarily mean a traumatic event. It is a point of decision or “turning point.” Saul’s encounter with Jesus certainly met that definition. His life was never the same again.

**For most people, conversion does not come as an isolated event. However, there are key decision points in everyone’s life that require definite choices.**

Our Methodist founder, John Wesley, viewed the Christian life as a dynamic process. On occasion, he likened it to a house, calling it the “house of religion.”

He said conviction/repentance is its porch; justification/new birth is the door; and sanctification involves all the rooms in the house. Using this analogy, conversion is the decision to walk through the door. It happens for us, as it did for John Wesley, when we choose to trust in Christ and Christ alone for our salvation. Then, like Paul, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and confirm our decision through baptism.

1. How does Wesley’s analogy of the “house of religion” help you understand the Christian life? Where are you right now?

This crisis of belief can happen anywhere. For Saul it happened on the road to Damascus. For others, it may happen at church.

2. Discuss the meaning of a crisis of belief?
3. When and where have you experienced a crisis of belief in your own life?

## **3) Change**

**If conversion involves turning around, then real change is inevitable.**

In Saul’s case, the before and after snapshots are striking, and it’s vividly portrayed by being blind, then having the scales fall off and regaining his sight. Before his conversion, he was persecuting Jesus by “uttering threats with every breath and [being] eager to kill the Lord’s followers.” (Acts 9:1 NLT)

After his conversion, he was preaching Jesus everywhere he went (see v. 20). He viewed the change in his life so radically he compared it to being dead and raised again.

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20a NLT)

And he encouraged others to see themselves as a “new creation” in Christ. When His-Story becomes Your-Story, Jesus doesn’t just make you better, He makes you entirely different.

1. Why are we willing to settle for improvement when a radical transformation is available...and necessary?

We tend to rely on our own natural ability to change rather than on God’s supernatural power. He doesn’t just apply a Band-Aid to our problems; He performs radical surgery and makes us into something new through the power of His Holy Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

Twentieth Century historian, Gerda Lerner, once said, “What we do about history is what really matters.”

1. What will you do with the His-Story lesson in your life?

Close your discussion time thanking God for His supernatural power that changes us. Ask God to continue to change you and grow you closer to Him.