



SERMON-PLANNING GUIDE

GUIDE DEVELOPED BY LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

Like biblical commentary, this guide seeks to offer you seeds of ideas, theme connections, questions for deeper study, and real-world intersections. For each text, we've included suggestions for how to connect the scripture to the theme, *Unraveled*. These suggestions—a non-exhaustive list—offer a few ways of approaching and thinking about the texts in light of our theme.

We encourage you to use this guide as a starting point for your text study each week. You may wish to include our [Artist Statements](#) (included with the visuals in our *Unraveled* bundle) in your scripture research and reflections. Refer to our [Unraveled Theme Infographic](#) for more information about the *Unraveled* theme. Our [Unraveled Study Journal](#) also has additional reflection prompts for each text. Consider mapping out your ideas in our accompanying [Sermon Planning Grid](#).

About the Unraveling Theme:

What happens when our world falls apart? How do we press onward when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose threads? What do we become when our identity—or the path we're on—comes undone? What if all of this is not the end we fear it will be?

In our unraveling, sometimes life surprises us with unexpected joy, love, and hope—with a new beginning we couldn't have imagined. Sometimes we need God to unravel us, for we long to be changed. This worship series explores 12 stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. These are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans—and us—into something new. We invite you to customize this series and make it your own, structuring the stories in the order and duration that works best for your context.

Guiding Questions For Each Scripture Text:

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this text?
- What are the results of the unraveling?
- How is God working in the midst of the unraveling?
- What might we glean from this story of unraveling?

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ACTS 9:1-20 THE CONVERSION OF SAUL TO PAUL

(Discovering a New Path)

THEME CONNECTIONS

In a flash in the middle of the road, God unravels Saul's identity as a persecutor of Christ-followers and invites him to blindly stumble onto a new path. His conversion requires Ananias, a disciple vulnerable to Paul's threats, to place his hands on Saul's eyes so that he might see the world anew as Paul the Apostle. This new path for Paul later leads him to endure prison, persecution, travel, and trial. However, it also comes with new life, community, belonging, and hope. Sometimes God calls us into uncharted territory, and maybe our unraveling is simply a holy, fresh start.

WHAT HAS UNRAVELED AND/OR IS UNRAVELING?

- Saul's life, identity, and worldview as a persecutor of early Christians.
- Saul's understanding of the resurrected Christ.
- Ananias' perceptions of what the family of God looks like.

GUIDING Q'S

- Our first introductions to Saul come in Acts 7:58 and Acts 8:2-3. Why do you imagine Saul is motivated to persecute the early Christians? How does he participate in these acts of persecution and murder?
- Saul is transformed from an enemy to a brother, a persecutor to a "chosen instrument" called particularly to welcome Gentiles into the fold. In this story, what events and elements fulfill his conversion?
- Few people have experienced a radical transformation such as Saul's conversion to Paul. However, many of us may relate to Ananias' conversion experience. Where do you see the grace of God softening enemies with closeness and connection?

QUOTES & RESOURCES FOR INSPIRATION

Hans Mol in *Identity and the Sacred* describes the following steps within the conversion process:

- Detachment from former patterns of identity
- A time of meaninglessness and anomie
- A dramatic transition from darkness to light, from chaos to meaning
- The faith community supports and accepts the initiate into their life together

Here are a few examples of modern-day conversions:

- Christian Picciolini's transformation from a white supremacist, neo-Nazi to a producer, author, and speaker countering racism and extremism. View his Ted Talk, "My Descent into America's Neo-Nazi Movement And How I Got Out," here: https://www.ted.com/talks/christian_picciolini_my_descent_into_america_s_neo_nazi_movement_and_how_i_got_out?language=en#t-194102.
- Megan Phelps-Roper's transformation from a member of the Westboro Baptist Church to a writer and educator on bullying, extremism, and empathy. View her Ted Talk, "I Grew Up in the Westboro Baptist Church. Here is Why I Left," here: https://www.ted.com/talks/megan_phelps_roper_i_grew_up_in_the_westboro_baptist_church_here_s_why_i_left.

Read [this article](#) by Beth Scibienski about all the conversions occurring in this story: "Not Just Saul's Story." Published on bethscib.com. April 9, 2013. <http://www.bethscib.com/lectionary-reflections/not-just-sauls-story>

3 Mol, Hans J. *Identity and the Sacred*. New York: Free Press, Division of the Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977. 45-53.