

I hate being wrong—don't you? Whether it's something trivial or important, I really can't stand the embarrassment of being proven incorrect. I remember one time when I was teaching a Bible Study, and in talking about another denomination, I misrepresented one of their central teachings. Someone in the class who had experience with that church body called me on it. I was confident of my position, but promised to look into it during the week. To my dismay, I looked into it, and learned I was wrong. I reported my findings to the class the next week and "took my lumps." It ended up being a good thing, and I may have even gained a little credibility by admitting that I had been wrong.

We can only speculate about how Saul of Tarsus felt in the days following his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road. We tend to think of Saul's conversion in immediate terms; one moment he's Saul the Christian hunter, the next he's the Super Saint. And to be sure, coming face to face with the resurrected Jesus utterly changed him. But I have to think that mixed in with the shock and amazement and wonder was an almost sickening realization that his entire view of the world had been wrong.

It seems to be a very quiet Saul that we see early in Acts chapter nine, silently processing what had just happened to him. His way of looking at and functioning within his world had been wrong. His notions of what was pleasing to God had also been wrong. As if to underscore just how wrong he had been, God blinded him for three days. It was like God saying: "This is what you were, Saul—blind to the truth." Adding insult to injury, Saul was depending on the help of a Christian—the type of person that up until then he had been trying to eliminate. Saul had a lot to think about as he sat in that house on Straight Street. He had to find out how wrong he had been before he could do anything right. It was a painful process—he wasn't in the mood to eat or drink for those three days—but it was a necessary process. You may recall that it wasn't long

before Saul went public, candidly sharing what he had learned, pointing people to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises.

The story of Saul's turnaround is a dramatic example of Easter in action. For it is nothing else than a conversation with the living Messiah that shook the foundations of Saul's life. It was an audience with Jesus, once dead and now very much alive and well, that caused Saul to switch sides. Saul's conversion is great circumstantial evidence for the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

Why else would someone like Saul change so completely? He had nothing to gain by following Jesus, and had far more to lose. He had been thoroughly convinced that he was doing the right thing until the risen Jesus appeared to him. Something new was about to blossom in Saul.

Because of his contact with the Jesus of Easter, a new person was about to emerge from the old. Saul was getting a second chance.

It is at this point that we meet Ananias, who is one of those great saints of Scripture who makes up the supporting cast of God's salvation plan. A Christian living in Damascus, he is contacted directly by the Lord and told to go minister to Saul of Tarsus, who is in a house on Straight Street. This would be like God sending a message to you saying, "Go to the house on Main Street and look for Adolf Hitler—he is expecting you." Just as you might object to the idea, so Ananias offers up some mild protest, but then the Lord reveals His thoughts regarding Saul's second chance: He says, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." As astounding as these words would've seemed to Ananias, they would be proven true. Saul would do all the things God mentions here and then some. And to his credit, Ananias goes and finds the man who had been one of the most intimidating enemies of the faith. All sorts of thoughts and feelings must've swirled through Ananias as he drew close to the man

who had relished binding Christians and throwing them in prison to await execution. But Ananias speaks only words of grace, saying, “Brother Saul”—just think of it, Brother Saul—“the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately his vision is restored—moreover, his entire way of seeing the world is remade as he is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Now his second chance had really begun, and Saul, we can safely say, made the most of it.

Saul had to see how wrong he had been before he could do anything right. He endured those dark days, and now, because of the mercy and love of the very Jesus he had been persecuting, he was a new person. He was baptized into the Christian faith—the faith that held Jesus to be the Son of the Father; the true and greatest Passover Lamb; the Messiah from David’s family tree. Saul spent some time in the company of the Damascus Christians, and can you imagine what those conversations must have been like? Saul had been given a second chance, and he wasted no time in doing his first Christian preaching there in the Damascus synagogues. Saul confounded the Jews in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ, and Saul would continue confounding his world with the cross of Christ Jesus as his message and a Christ-like life as his living letter to the world.

I say all that about Saul so that I can say this to you: the life of Saul is proof that our God is the God of Second Chances. Our God wants everyone to admit how wrong they have been so that He can heal them with His mercy and fill them with His right-ness. Our God aches to forgive people and grant them a second chance. But here are the questions, and you probably knew they were coming. How do you do at offering forgiveness and second chances to those who hurt you? Is our church a place where forgiveness and “second chances” describes how we deal with one another?

I will never forget a statement made by Dr. James Bollhagen, a professor of mine. He said, “The church is not a place where people are granted forgiveness only if they can first prove that they don’t need it.” And yet so often that is exactly how Christians can act. It creeps so easily into any relationship—the withholding of forgiveness—a running tally of offenses committed—especially when the other person just doesn’t seem to care. We pass judgment on others, clinging to nuggets of conventional wisdom such as “A leopard doesn’t change his spots” and “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”

We should be overflowing with forgiveness and second chances. We should be quick to give people the benefit of the doubt and just as quick to explain things in the kindest possible way. If we’re not, then maybe we still don’t really get what Jesus is all about. Or maybe we just have to see how wrong we’ve been before we can do what’s right.

If you have guilt about the way you’ve treated people, be honest about it with God. Think of the shame that Saul must’ve felt as he sat in darkness for three days. You are invited to admit your sin to the God of forgiveness and second chances. If you are ready to own up to your sin, Jesus is ready to forgive it. The same Jesus who paid for your sin with His suffering and death is the same living Jesus who can send you on your way with new vision and new priorities. You have been given a precious gift: you have another chance to let the grace of Jesus dominate your thinking and spur you on to action. Do not take this gift for granted. Confound your world with Jesus in your words and deeds, and let’s honor Him by being second-chance people.