

## Acts 9:1-20 A God Smack-Finding true North

I heard the word about fifteen years ago from Sally. Sally filled two roles in the church: mission coordinator and co-youth director. She combined both to help the youth. When Sally said the word "Godsmack" I give her this strange look: God Smack. I knew I had to explain my reaction. I told her that when I was working in substance counseling, my clients taught me that a god smack was a lethal dose of heroin. I knew she didn't mean that. She replied, "Of course not, silly, God smack. It's a band the kids are listening to, but it not Christian. I have taken the word and turned it into something positive. It helps the kids understand that our God wants to speak to them and use them. Kids are looking for meaning in life and youth and missions go hand in hand. Never know when a Godsmack will happen.

Guess when I heard the word God smack, I think of the burning bush, or Moses raising his arms watching the water part. Or Jesus saying to someone, be healed. That is until I worked with Christopher one summer in a local building team created by our youth. They called it EPIC: Embracing people in Christ. It was a multi-generational effort at the church. The elders would fix breakfast and dinner for our work teams for a five-day event. Normally about 20-25 people, and lunch for the worksite for our team of six or seven to be shared with those we were serving. I not much of a painter, so I volunteer to drive the van and serve on a team-building handicap ramp. It was during one of the building sites, I ask Christopher to get a 2 x 6 x 10 and cut a 4-foot section on a cross-cut saw. He was just learning. I saw him go over to lumber and picked up a plank. I turned around looking at the kids working on the deck, and then it happened. A whack. It was loud enough that the whole team stopped. I didn't see a star, but I should feel it on the back of my head. Good thing I have a hard head. I turned around and Christopher had this look on his face. What was going to happen? Christopher was at that awkward stage of thirteen at the time. His mother Lee was a single mom. No father in the picture.

So, I looked at Christopher, and said, Thanks for the Godsmack. We all laugh. It was that year that I not only was his pastor but his friend. Godsmack.

Now, when I heard god smack, God is trying to tell me something. Sally's statement did contain a truth, we are all looking for meaning in life, and God wants us to pay attention to be used by him.

*The woman puts on a happy face in front of her friends, unwilling to let them know that her home life is miserable.*

*An employee teaches his children that stealing is wrong. Yet at work, at the request of his employer, he is willing to manipulate the company's books.*

*A man purchases a new car to look successful and then fights the depression because of how close he is to filing bankruptcy.*

These scenarios are all fictional. But they're also close to reality.

We avoid. We lie-to other people -to ourselves – to what's going on in our lives. We put up fronts to hide from . . . what?

It takes a toll on us—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—to try and live in two worlds. It drains the energy from us.

Have you ever been caught in the middle of two worlds? This image comes to my mind from an early age. Crossing a barb wire fence, I attempt to straddle the wire fence where my feet barely touched the ground. Stuck in the middle, I discover you only do it for so long.

Paul was straddling the fence, living between two worlds, until a

"god smack." I guess when you're walking along, doing what you think you should be doing, then a god smack happens, your course changes. One moment, Paul walking along, then a voice, an awareness, eyes open, yet blind, hungry. The next moment, chosen, confirmed, restored, and sent, Paul discovers his call- his being and doing. That's a God smack.

Rather than living in two worlds, Paul discovers the God who created him with a call upon his life. The same is true for us.

In Rob Fuquay's book "Which way Lord. I ponder a question he asked, "what is your mission statement? It was a wilderness question. Then he made this comment: "perhaps the world I want to live in is the one where I want to be who God created me to be regardless of what I'm doing, where I am, or who I'm with."

My statement is equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Short and simple.

I pondered about Paul's conversion and what his mission statement might be: As I study the scriptures, I believe this would be Paul's mission statement. Listen to his Philippians 4:4-9

What would happen if we listened for God? You never know what might happen on the path you are on. Often, you head in a direction you set your minds on when all of a sudden, your plans change. I'm not talking about a detour. What I am talking about is a racial change- a God change. Where God gets your attention in a way that you know it's God speaking to you. That's how you could describe Saul's conversion. Heading down Damascus road, focused on a mission of murderous threats, he is stopped dead in his track by a flash of light, by a voice.

I'm sitting in my make-shift prayer garden on the farm Tuesday. It's a tree stump. I'm trying to hear, to listen in silence. I found myself with a word, a thought, a question, "Listen, what makes birds sing?" Listening, it seems singing comes naturally for a bird, not forced, not putting on airs. It is what they are. They sing. Like the unseen wind silently moving among us, their song whisper and moves something deep within us. Yet, if we listen, pause long enough to be silent, allow ourselves to baste in the sun's warmth, we can hear why birds sing. Listen, they sing of life, new life beginnings. They sing of life appreciated, life experience, a life transform.

That's Saul's story, as well as ours. The good news is that when we listen for God, God will empower us. God will transform us beyond our wildest imagination. When was the last time you step outside to listen? Listen for that small still voice that transforms. A voice that speaks softly and yet roars, moving us in a completely different direction. It's like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, or a budding rose, opening, or bird overhead, soaring.

The strange thing is it was always there. We didn't notice. Until, an event, a happening, an unexpected moment, shocking the very foundation of our soul, breaking into a hardcore heart, penetrating through a tuff outer surface.

It's an earth-shattering moment, where another voice speaks louder than our own. Its direction not detected, its source unknown, and yet, we know. Perhaps at first- denied, but we know that voice speaking louder than a steam locomotive rushing down the track blasting whispers at the top of its iron-clad lungs. It's a call for transformation, a momentous transition, a change of heart. It's a god smack that turns your life around.

It caught you off guard. It irresistibly pulls you into itself. It is as powerful as the rushing water of Nantahala rapids. Like the coup of a dove perched on a dogwood tree. Both

are just as transformational; both are just as moving. For one, it blinds, another it opens for all it changes the heart.

Once a hardened heart, stone-cold, unable to hear, unable to see, unable to know, forced open by a small still voice. A blinding light, an invisible hand or arm, a silent whisper, the brush of an angelic wing, touches the heart's core. Then it happens, often unexplainable, often inexpressible. It can happen on a road, in a room, in a corner, in church, in the great outdoors of life, but it happens.

When it does, the hearer hears, the blind sees, and the heart feels. For the first time in a long time, you can see yourselves not as you see yourself, but as the divine God sees you. With love, with hope, with a faith that transforms, taking our dirty rags making them whiten linens created by a light brighter than the human eyes can stand. A voice speaks louder than the rush of mighty winds, taking a heart of stone and casting upon it more love than it can stand.

And people will notice. People all around will ask, what happened? Is not this the same person that I use to know? It is not the same person I now hear speaking. Something has happened.

What has happened was foretold long ago:

'I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart. Jeremiah 24:7

There once was a man named Saul, who could only see what he wanted to see, and do what he wanted to do, and be what he wanted to be until he hears a bird sing. It was the voice of God singing. It was the voice of God that was ringing in his ears. It was the voice of risen Jesus blinding but allowing Paul to see. Transforming him into something God created him to be, a disciple of Jesus Christ. It was his moment of conversion.

When we listen for God-a new life is given. It brings a New Heart that leads to new actions.

Saul was a privileged citizen, a Pharisee, scholar, zealot, a participant in a stoning. Then he heard that undeniable voice radically changing his direction. The Apostle Paul became known as a disciple for Jesus who was persistent, courageous, humble, patient, yielding, and forgiving. Paul experienced God's promise in Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

It's not our greatest longing. It's that not what we are seeking. A new beginning, a new life, a new course, to know God words Psalm 51:10- Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. So that I may hear, so that I may experience standing in His presence, to be transformation, to make a transition from this life of burden to being set free to be me.

It's conversion, it's a transition, its transformation, and it waiting to happen again and again if we listen for God.

Do you remember when you were touch by the master's hand? Do you remember the time your burden heartfelt the release of the power of the Holy Spirit come rushing in? Listen, that moment is still here with you today. It might seem like long ago, it might feel like a long time since you hear the whisper, it might seem like a long time when your heart shed tears, but our faith knows God still walks and talks with us today.

Take a moment, listen to your heart, listen with those spiritual ears, listen for brush of angel wings or gentle wind of Holy Spirit. Why do birds sing, I believe they hear God's voice and are rejoicing.

Ron Fuquay asks a hard question in his introduction: What's your story, and where will it take you? That's a God smack that will take you to a new horizon. A journey to:

New life brings a new heart, and a new heart brings a change in our actions. All of the creation teaches us to listen. Like Paul, listen to Jesus that lives within our heart. Since Jesus came into my heart, there's a melody. The good news is Jesus Christ is the giver of new life. Jesus Christ is the giver of a new heart. I'm heading in a new direction because "It is well with my soul." Listen-New life, a new heart, a new direction is what Saul experienced, and so can we. We find it as we journey into the wilderness of our soul.

Like a compass, following Jesus is keeping yourself pointed in the direction God wants you to travel. I call it finding true north. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. It is there you will find your true self, your real purpose in your stories.