

Acts 9:10-19a: How Do You Overcome a VERY Stressful Situation?

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I. Introduction

If the Lord sent you to the leader of ISIS, the one responsible for beheading and crucifying Christians, and told you to lay hands on him because he'd now been converted to Christianity, would you go? Would it stress you out? Would it keep you up at night? How could you go on such a mission? How in the world would you deal with the stress and find the peace and strength to do as the Lord said?

II. Acts 9:10-19a: What Should You Do When You're So Stressed Out It Keeps You Up at Night?

9:10-12, Jesus Christ Himself having converted Saul on the road to Damascus, now tells one of His disciples, Ananias, to go lay hands on him. He tells him to go to the house of Judas and look for one called Saul of Tarsus. Since Saul was on his way to persecute Christians, the only people he would've known in Damascus (and would have welcomed him into their home given his current mission) would've been unbelievers. Thus, Judas was likely a non-Christian. In fact, Judas' house would've likely served as Saul's headquarters as he persecuted Christians. Judas must've also been well-known for Ananias to know exactly which house to go to on this street called Straight. We also note that what Jesus tells Ananias, i.e., of Saul's vision regarding Ananias, shows that the Lord kept communicating with Saul after his conversion on the road to Damascus.

9:13-14, Ananias has a concern with what the Lord is telling him to do. He's heard of Saul of Tarsus and what he's done to Christians in Jerusalem: Saul's been responsible for imprisoning them, voting against them so that they'd be executed, chased them in every synagogue, forced them to blaspheme against their God, was filled so much rage that he chased them into every foreign city he could find (Acts 26:10-11). It's also clear from what Ananias said that the Jewish Christians in Damascus have heard of Saul's mission to Damascus, particularly the authority he got from the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:5) to persecute more Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. It's not that Ananias doubts the Lord, but he's trying to make sense of all this.

9:15-16, the Lord doesn't give Ananias a long explanation of why he must go do this. But in the Lord's reply, He tells Ananias everything he needs to know. Saul may've been a Christian-killer before, but that's not what Saul was ever meant to be. Before Saul ever believed in Jesus Christ on the Damascus road, the Lord had already chosen him to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). This will be Saul's main mission, but he will also stand before kings (like Herod Agrippa [Acts 26] and Caesar [Acts 27-28] and his own people, which is why he always makes it a habit to go to the Jews first everywhere he went [Acts 17:1-4]). All this is enough to rid Ananias of any fears in going to Saul of Tarsus. But what the Lord says next seals it: Saul will actually suffer terribly for the rest of his life as a Christian! Just as he persecuted Christians, he will now be persecuted himself and suffer greatly (2 Corinthians 11:22-33). What does this say to Ananias? It tells him that Saul is no longer a Christian-killer. He is now one with Christ and what happens to Christ, will now happen to Saul, which is why Saul will now know the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24). Thus, when Jesus is persecuted, Saul will now feel it because he is now part of His Body (Acts 9:5).

9:17-19a, whatever concerns Ananias had at the beginning of his conversation with the Lord, they're now gone. He goes immediately to the house, and even though he's likely surrounded by unbelievers, he enters and proceeds to do as the Lord said. He begins by greeting Saul with "Brother Saul," which is astounding. The Christian-killer who was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus, including Ananias!, is now Ananias' brother! The Lord not only took Ananias' fears away, He gave him absolute peace about seeing Saul of Tarsus. Saul doesn't know Ananias, but Ananias begins to tell him exactly what happened on the Damascus road: the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to him. He's the One who sent Ananias to cure his blindness and so that Saul will be filled with the Holy Spirit. As the Lord empowered the other apostles (Acts 2:1-4; 4:31) so He empowers Saul for his mission. And as soon as Ananias laid hands on him, something like scales fell from his eyes and he received his sight. Ananias then baptized him and for the first time since the Lord appeared to him, Saul ate and thus was strengthened.

How do you stop paralyzing stress and anxiety? Ananias being sent to Saul is like being sent to the leader of ISIS in Iraq. How would you react if the Lord told you to go lay hands on the leader of ISIS, the one responsible for slaughtering Christians and many others? Would you be a little stressed? How did Ananias face this? Who was Ananias? He was a disciple, *a follower*, of Jesus (9:10) and like Saul he was zealous for God's Law, but unlike Saul he didn't become a Christian killer. Ananias also respected God's Law so much so that he was well regarded by all Jews in Damascus, Christian or not (Acts 22:12). Why was he respected by non-Christian Jews?! Because he walked with Jesus daily and thus imitated his Lord in word and action. People wanted to be around him like they wanted to be around Jesus (Mark 2:15). So how was Ananias able to do this difficult task of approaching the leading Christian killer? He, like Stephen! (Acts 6:5; 7), was always in personal conversation with the Lord, hearing His Word/voice. And when the Lord told him to go do this, he trusted everything Jesus said. Ananias lived the truth that Jesus promises in Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."...how can we obey such a command? How can we be "anxious for nothing" when we're so stressed out?

My struggle with fear these past several weeks, something's been weighing heavy on my mind and it's made it nearly impossible to concentrate. I couldn't stop thinking about it; it's kept me up at night. In fact, twice I asked the Lord to "let this cup pass from me" but twice He said, "you must do this." I wasn't running away from it; I knew I had to do it. So I've been taking the steps to address it, but all the while I've been stressed out. And I realized that though I was obeying the Lord and asking Him for guidance, I hadn't stopped to ask Him about the real reason behind my stress: fear. I was afraid of the devastation it would potentially cause. So I discussed it with Him and later with my wife and asked her to pray, to ask the Lord what I should do. As she prayed, through the words in her prayer, the Lord answered me. In fact, after her prayer, I asked, "What did the Lord say?" She replied, "Fear not and follow Me." And for the first time in weeks, I experienced what the Lord promised if you applied His command to be anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6-7). A peace came over me that surpasses all understanding. I realized that I did not truly trust the Lord with the fallout of what I had to do. I needed to do as Stephen and Ananias did, and as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane, have a personal conversation with God about my anxiety (Matthew 26:36-42).

III. Conclusion

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias went...