



FOREVER CHANGED - SAMPLE LESSON

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FOREVER CHANGED

Sample Lesson: From Saul to Paul

Bible: Acts 9:1-22

Bottom Line: Encountering Jesus changes your life.

Main Question: Am I allowing Jesus to radically change me?

SUPPLIES

- 3-4 small dry erase boards
- 3-4 dry erase markers
- 3-4 dry erasers

OPENING GAME: THE BRITISH-AMERICAN NAME GAME

GAME PREP

Divide your group into three or four teams.

Each team needs to quickly pick a captain.

The captain gets the dry erase board, marker, and eraser.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Say: Today, we're going to challenge how well you know basic English terms.

But before you get too confident, we're going to be working with both American English and British English.

And no, in this game, you cannot use any kind of digital device or a British-American dictionary (and yes, that's a thing).

Think of this like a fill-in-the-blank test.

For the first round, I'm going to describe an item to you with the British English term.

Your job is to take 30 seconds as a group to come up with the equivalent American English term and have your captain write it on his or her dry erase board.

If the answer isn't written before time is up, it won't count.

If you get it correct, your team gets 100 points.

If you're close but not exact, you'll get 50 points.

Ready?

1. In Great Britain, if you're hungry for a snack after school, you might grab a few "biscuits." But in America, the name for these would be... (cookies)
2. If you were having lunch with some friends in England, it would be common to find everyone eating "chips" with their fish. What's the American name for this side dish? (French fries)
3. You might choose to meet some friends at their "flat." This same location in the United States would have the name... (apartment)
4. Although it sounds like a recent video game, in England, "fortnight" is a name for a certain amount of time. We in America would say that is... (two weeks)
5. Since Worcestershire Sauce is so popular from its nation of origin, England, you can find "crisps" that even have that flavor. These would be called . . . in the USA. (potato chips)

Now, for Round 2, you can keep your captain as your writer or you can switch it up and have a different person be the captain.

In this round, I'll give you the American term, and this time you'll take your best guess at what you believe is the equivalent British term.

1. It would be common for you to go out and play in your "yard," but in Great Britain, they name that green space... (garden)
2. At your school, the name of the position for the person who is in charge is "principal." However, as you may know if you've read any British books or watch shows or films, this person in England is named... (headmaster)
3. Students all over the world love getting a break from school. On the west side of the Atlantic Ocean, we call this our "vacation." On the east side of the Atlantic Ocean, they name this break a... (holiday)
4. If you need to go up or down a building in the United States and don't want to take the stairs, the box you step into is named an "elevator." In Great Britain, they name this same device a . . . (lift)
5. Finally, if it's dark outside, you might grab a "flashlight" to see your way around. In England, this exact same device goes by a more ancient sounding name. (torch)

Add your scores up!

The team with the most points is the winner.

(For fun, you might consider picking up some Cadbury chocolates as they are a popular treat in England. Although, you can share that theirs are made in a chocolate factory in Bournville, England, while Cadbury sold in America is often made under license by Hershey and uses different recipes and manufacturing processes.)

Names are a big deal.

Whether you are in America or England, you want to be sure to clearly communicate who, what, or where you are talking about in a way that is understood.

Using the wrong term might literally mean talking about something completely different.

In today's lesson, we're going to look at the life of a man who was so radically affected by his encounter with Jesus that his name even changed!

TEACH

Ask: How many of you are good at remembering people's names?

That is a gift if it comes naturally to you, and a valuable skill if you have learned how to do that well.

There's nothing worse than confidently saying someone's name, only to find out that it's the wrong name.

(Share a personal story of your own or read this one:)

A friend of mine grew up with two brothers.

He's now married and has three kids—two sons and a daughter.

His boys are teenagers, and every once in a while, they catch their dad calling them by the names of their dad's brothers.

My friend wishes this didn't happen.

But it's a slip-up that gets both laughter and a bit of mocking, because names are so important, and a dad should be able to keep the names of his brothers and the names of his sons straight!

You may or may not know that a doctor named Luke did a ton of research and interviews and put all of his gathered information together into a document about Jesus' life and ministry.

We have it in our Bibles as the Book of Luke.

Did you know that was only the first of a two-volume set?

Luke also carefully recorded the history of how the church started after Jesus rose to heaven, sharing the story of the lives of the early Christians—including some of his own personal adventures.

Today, he introduces us to a man who seems to be the villain of this true story, but who quickly becomes a totally different kind of person in the story God was writing in history.

Also, today we're beginning a brand-new series called, "Forever Changed."

In the next four weeks, we will study the amazing transformation that happened in the life of Paul, who is first introduced to us as, Paul.

Acts 9:1-2 (New Living Translation)

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.

Say: This Saul guy does not sound like someone you would expect Luke to write about if he wants to share all that God was doing; but wait.

To get a better picture of who this guy is, we have to jump forward to when he is telling his story to a crowd of people in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:3-5 (New Living Translation)

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel.

As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs.

I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today.

And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison.

The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so.

For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.

Say: Saul explains how he grew up as a Jew in the most important Jewish city, Jerusalem, with one of the best teachers, Gamaliel.

And yet, Saul passionately tried to shut down Christians by having them arrested, imprisoned, and some even killed.

He called them, “followers of the Way,” as that was a common term for Christians at the time.

That’s his background.

Now let’s get to where Jesus entered into his life story and changed up everything.

Acts 22:3-9 (New Living Translation)

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.

Say: I’m not sure about you, but I’m glad my experience with Jesus wasn’t like Saul’s.

Of course, I also haven’t gone around having Christians beaten, arrested, put in prison, or killed.

Saul hears Jesus’ voice and then there is this bright light from heaven.

He’s knocked to the ground and when he stands up, he is blind.

His friends lead him to Damascus, where Jesus told him to go, and for three days he fasts—or goes without eating and drinking—probably spending that time in prayer and thought, processing what just happened and how he has been living his life.

Let’s finish reading how this part of Saul’s story wraps up.

To bring this to life, have students help you read as if this was the script to a play, with different students reading the parts of Jesus, Ananias, Saul, Narrator, and people in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:10-22 (New Living Translation)

Narrator:

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias.

The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling,

Jesus:

“Ananias!”

Ananias:

“Yes, Lord!”

Narrator:

he replied.

The Lord said,

Jesus:

“Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas.

When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul.

He is praying to me right now.

I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again.”

Ananias:

“But Lord,”

Narrator:

exclaimed Ananias,

Ananias:

“I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem!

And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.”

Narrator:

But the Lord said,

Jesus:

“Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.

And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

Narrator:

So Ananias went and found Saul.

He laid his hands on him and said,

Ananias:

“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.”

Narrator:

Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight.

Then he got up and was baptized.

Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days.

And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying,

Saul:

“He is indeed the Son of God!”

Narrator:

All who heard him were amazed.

People in Jerusalem:

“Isn’t this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?”

Narrator:

they asked.

People in Jerusalem:

“And didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?”

Narrator:

Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Say: Thank you to our actors who helped voice these parts today!

Later in Luke's history of the church, he records in Acts 13:9, "Saul, also known as Paul..."

We're not sure exactly when his name changed.

But we are sure that this experience changed Paul, and as Luke records Paul's story from Acts 13 on, he only refers to him as Paul.

So, I want you to notice a few things:

1. Jesus radically changed Pauls' life.

In case you missed it, we started Saul's story in Acts 9 with Luke writing, "Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers."

And then just twenty verses later, Luke writes of this same man in Acts 9:22, "Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah."

What?!

He went from hunting down followers of Jesus to shut down this crazy movement of people who he thought were going against God, to becoming a man who told people the truth that Jesus was indeed the Rescuer sent by God and he helped them follow Him!

That's a total change.

2. Jesus is able to radically change our lives.

You might think this was something special God did a long time ago in history.

You might be thinking that God might struggle to know who you are, similarly to how you might struggle knowing the names of other people.

You might think Jesus doesn't care about you—simply one of over 7 billion people currently alive on this planet.

And you would be wrong.

Saul's life was so radically changed that he started churches in cities where he traveled.

He then visited those places to see how the Christians were doing.

When he couldn't be there in person, he would write them letters.

If he had lived today, he might have been a popular author or blogger.

The Christians kept those letters and shared them with other believers because they were so full of the truths about Jesus and instructions for how to live like Him.

Those letters are still around today, filling up most of what we call the New Testament in our Bibles—each named for the city and church Paul was writing to or the name of the person to whom he was sending his letter.

The same Jesus who transformed Paul's life is around today and can transform your life, too.

We'll look more at Paul's life and ministry over the next few weeks.

Trust me—as we do, you'll see that if God can do some powerful work through someone that used to literally be His enemy, you are not too bad or too far away from God for Him to totally change your life.

And if you are here and you are following Jesus, but your life doesn't look as totally changed as Paul's, maybe you need to take an honest evaluation of whether or not you have allowed Jesus to transform your life.

Just imagine how different our church, schools, and community would be if we allowed Jesus to totally change us the way He changed Saul!

This should be some good stuff for us to discuss in our small groups!

As you go, think about this question:

Am I allowing Jesus to radically change me?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share a story of a time you called someone by the wrong name, forgot their name, or one of those happened with someone else doing it to you.
2. Saul's name change seemed to represent his life before Jesus and then after following Him.

In the same way, if you moved from the United States to England, you'd have to change the name you use for people, places, and things to reflect the names used over there.

Which one of the names from our game would be the hardest for you to make the change to using?

3. Paul should have known all about the Messiah, or Rescuer, God was going to send.

He should have recognized that Jesus was that person, especially from growing up in Jerusalem and being trained by Gamaliel.

How can people today grow up in church and, similar to Paul, never truly know and follow the Jesus whom they should be hearing all about all the time?

4. Saul was baptized, stayed with some believers for a few days, and then started his preaching ministry.

Have any of you been so excited about becoming a Christian or just learning something about Jesus that you couldn't wait to share it —whether in person, through a message, or on social media?

If you have become a Christian and haven't had this level of excitement or have been nervous to share, why is that so different for you than Saul?

5. We see in Saul's life story that he was already a bold man, passionately following God.

Jesus turned that passion into a powerful force that switched from turning people away into helping them follow him.

What is it about your life that God might use to help more people know Jesus or help those who already know Jesus to live more like Him?

6. Ironically, although Saul could literally see, it wasn't until Jesus made him literally blind that he realized how symbolically blind he had been to the truth of who Jesus is.

Sometimes in our lives, there are things we have heard about Jesus that, for the longest time, don't make sense or don't seem significant.

Then, something happens and changes all of that for us.

Share with us a moment where something you had heard, or read, before about Jesus suddenly made more sense or became much more important.

7. Saul didn't just realize the truth about Jesus and keep it to himself. He shared it with others.

Today, if we enjoy a video game we've played, or a movie we've seen, or an app we've downloaded, we are quick to share those with others, telling them about them.

What makes this easier for most people than sharing about Jesus with those same friends?

8. If you look back at Acts 9:21, you'll see that the people who heard Saul preach were a bit skeptical at first.

After all, they were the very same people he had originally gotten letters to help him arrest them for following Jesus.

Now he is preaching about Jesus.

If you are a Christian, what differences in your life have your friends and family noticed after you started following Jesus?

If you're not a Christian yet, what might be the biggest changes your friends and family would notice about you if you did follow Jesus?

9. As we'll see over the next few weeks, and as we saw a small glimpse of in Acts 9:22, God used Saul's training and knowledge of Scriptures and God to help him point people to Jesus.

What skills, abilities, interests, passions, personality, and/or experiences in your life might God be able to use to help you connect people with Jesus? (Think carefully and creatively.)

10. The best way to be changed by Jesus is to spend more time with Him.

Did you know that if you read one chapter a day from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—which is only about one to two pages—you'll read all four books within four months?

Who would be willing to take the challenge of starting this habit so you can spend more time with Jesus this year?

If you're really aggressive, you can read three to four chapters a day and read all four in one month!

Think of how much Jesus could change your life if you developed this habit of reading His words and actions every day like this.

Who's with me? (I'll check in with you next week to see how you are doing.)