

Acts 9 (Part 2): 19-31 • Jesus Changes People

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We're in Acts chapter 9, make sure your Bible is turned there. Acts chapter 9. We stopped in the middle of a verse last time for those of you that were with us last Sunday. We read the first part of verse 19 and then we stopped right there, so that's where we're picking it up. Let's start with prayer.

Father, open our hearts to this, the ministry of Your Word. And Lord, we just, we pause, we humble ourselves at Your feet. We long to hear from You. We long to receive from You, Lord.

And I'm so thankful, God, that You know everybody here and You know their hearts. And You know what's going on in their lives and You know best how to speak to each person.

You are so able and so capable to minister Your Word in just the way that they need. So Father, do that today we pray. We want to just be receivers, hear from You, be open Lord to You.

We thank You. Praise You. Worship You, and we just want to open our hearts to You in Jesus name, amen. Amen.

You'll remember that last week we talked about Saul of Tarsus. I keep trying to call him Saul at this point because they haven't yet started talking to him with his Greek name, but I'll mess up, I know. But he just went around, he was a madman. I mean, he was crazy. He went from place to place looking for Christians so that he might arrest them and drag them off to Jerusalem so they might be tried and punished for being believers in Jesus.

But last week, we talked about how he was on his way to Damascus from Jerusalem to do that very thing and how he was met by the Lord Jesus Christ in a blinding light along the road. He was personally blinded, knocked to the ground, met the Lord Jesus, told to get up and go back into the city where he would wait for instructions. And we were told that he sat there for 3 days. 3 days in Damascus, in the home of a believer where he just. He didn't eat or drink anything. He just prayed.

And then we were told that a man by the name of Ananias was called by the Lord to go and lay hands on Saul, that he might receive back his sight, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and then he was baptized in water. Pretty crazy.

Anyway, that's where we pick up the text. We're in the middle of verse 19. Look with me there in your Bible. It says there, *“For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.””* (ESV) Stop there for a moment, please. We need to talk about this.

Two things I want to really bring out. First of all, Saul didn't wait to go get a Bible college degree. He got saved, and he went right away into the synagogues and started telling people about Jesus, and the truth about Jesus. And that's just one of those reminders I want to throw out to you.

We've gotten so institutionalized in our thinking as it relates to people who have the qualifications to share the Lord. Hey, if you're saved, you're qualified. Period. You have new life. You're quite..., just start telling people. You don't have to worry about the words you say, or don't get weirded out about, well, I don't have a degree or I'm not ordained. Who cares? Just share Jesus.

In fact, you know what? Some of the most powerful sharing comes from brand new believers. Really, it does. I mean, people who are like hours old in the Lord as they just start telling people what happened to them and so forth. Just is pretty cool to see that.

Second thing I want to bring out though is I want you to notice what Saul is telling the Jews. Notice he's going into the synagogue. Man, I tell you, what guts, but he's going into the synagogue. Well, what is he saying about Jesus? Look at it in verse 20. Here's what he's telling them.

He's telling them that, *“He (Jesus) is the Son of God.”* Now you might be thinking to yourself, so? I mean, we Christians, we've heard that so much, we accept it. We say Jesus is the Son of God. Yeah. Okay, cool.

But you see, that was enormous for a Jew. Well, it should be enormous for us too. You have to understand something first of all. The Jews were expecting the Messiah but they didn't expect Him to be the Son of God, they expected him to be the Lord's Anointed. You know that's what Messiah means. That's the Hebrew word, Messiah. Greek is Christ. But it simply means Anointed One, and the people were expecting that. Even the Samaritans were expecting the

Messiah to show up. Remember when Jesus had that conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria? Let me put this on the screen. It goes like this.

John 4:25-26 (ESV)

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (that tells you there was an expectation, doesn't it? And it says,) (he who is called Christ). (that's the Greek, and then) When he comes, (she said) he will tell us all things." (but look at...) Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

There were times when Jesus publicly, He admitted to being the Messiah. He showed it all the time, of course, by the things He was doing.

You guys know that on Palm Sunday, the day we're observing today, this was the first time that Jesus publicly allowed the crowds to proclaim Him as Messiah, publicly. All right. That was what Palm Sunday was all about. That initial declaration and it made the religious leaders crazy.

They came to Jesus and said, tell these people to shut up. Do you hear what they're saying? They're calling you the Son of David, that meant Messiah. And Jesus said, no, I'm not going to tell them to be quiet. If they're quiet..., I love this in Luke's account. He says, the stones will rise up and begin to declare this very thing. (Luke 19:40) It's very cool. Very, very cool. All right.

Everybody knew that the Messiah was coming. Here's the deal, Messiah could have just been a man. You guys know that, right? Messiah could have just been like another Moses, another Elijah. Those guys were just men, another David.

Yet, when Saul goes into the synagogue there in Damascus, he doesn't just say, Jesus is the Messiah. We're told in verse 20, he said, "*He (Jesus) is the Son of God.*" What exactly does that mean? Well, what did the Jews think it meant? Let me show you this on the screen from John chapter 5, verse 18. It says,

John 18:5 (ESV)

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, (remember He'd healed a guy) but he was even calling God his own Father, (look at this) making himself equal with God.

See, this is something we Christians, we forget. We just go, Son of God. Yeah, Jesus is the Son of God. Sure, cool. Son of God. Yeah, cool. We forget the implications. It means equality, guys. You can't be a son of someone without being the equal to that someone. It's impossible. You and I, we're children of God. That's not equal.

He is the unique Son of God, right? So that's the way the Jews understood it. For some reason, other groups have forgotten it or they've chosen to forget it. Like when the J Dubs come to your door, they'll admit that Jesus is a Son of God, but they'll say, but He's not equal with God. And they completely blow off the actual definition of what it means to be the Son of God.

You got to understand that they considered that blasphemy. That was blasphemy. Look at Mark chapter 14 on the screen. This is the trial with Jesus again.

Mark 14:61b-64a (ESV)

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, (look at this) the Son of the Blessed?" (and that's a way of using God's name without saying it) And Jesus said, "I am, (in fact He says) and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (the right hand of power means, at the right hand of the power of God, literally the representation of the power of God) And (look at this, and) the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. (this is blasphemy)

Guys, can I just tell you, it was not blasphemy to say Jesus was Messiah. Anybody could say that and that was not blasphemous. They would have been bothered by it for sure. They wouldn't have liked it and they would have disputed it, but that wasn't blasphemy. However, they did consider it blasphemy to claim equality with YAHWEH.

And that, brothers and sisters, is what Saul of Tarsus was saying in the Jewish synagogue of Damascus. Talk about guts. He got in there, he didn't just say, this Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, he said, He's God in human flesh. I'm surprised they didn't kill him on the spot, seriously, because that's the kind of stuff that could get you killed real fast. Of course it was true. That doesn't mean they were going to accept it.

You know, what's really interesting though, how did Saul come to this realization? Well remember he met Jesus. He met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus revealed Himself to Saul, and he got the whole picture. Right, Saul knew because Jesus revealed it to him. I am God. I am God, the Son, and so he began to proclaim it.

Verse 21, it says, *“And all who heard him were amazed...”* That Greek verb means they were literally beside themselves so you can see the word, amazed, doesn't really even give you the full picture.

And they said, *“...and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?”*

Their heads are spinning, right? They're like, wait a minute, isn't this is a guy who came to arrest Christians. And he's now saying that what they believe is true. And they couldn't account for this because this is radical you guys. This is not a radical about face.

He came here to arrest these people because he believed that they were declaring blasphemy and now what do we hear Saul of Tarsus doing? He's declaring blasphemy. He's doing what he came to arrest them for doing. You see. Can you imagine yourself being one of those Jews sitting in that synagogue, hearing Saul say these things? They're just, they're blown away. Their minds are blown.

Anyway, it goes on, verse 22. Here's even a stronger word. *“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews (that Greek verb means, to throw into confusion) who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the (Messiah, the) Christ.”*

All right, so it goes on, verse 23. *“When many days had passed, (and by the way, we don't know how many days that was, it says) the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day*

and night in order to kill him,²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.”

Here we have the very man who came to Damascus to hunt these Christians who is now being rescued by them, saved by them, right? These very people he came to arrest and to hunt and, I'm sure he wanted him dead and they're saving his life. And by the way, Paul actually wrote about this very event when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians. Let me show you on the screen, 2 Corinthians 11.

2 Corinthians 11:32-33 (ESV)

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

At Damascus, (he wrote) the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

I love this. It's been said that as a Christian, it's okay if you're a basket case, as long as God's holding the ropes or something like that. Anyway. Yeah, we're all kind of a basket case, aren't we. Alright.

Paul knew that the Jews wanted him dead. Here's what's interesting, to add insult to injury, check out how the believers responded to him.

Verse 26, *“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.”*

They didn't believe he'd really come. They thought, no, this is a sham. No, no, no. I mean, here's the man with a history of violent action toward those of us who believe in Jesus. We know that he has been going around arresting people. We know that he was there when Stephen was stoned to death, and he was approving of that very thing. We know all of these things.

And now you want us to believe this guy's a Christian? Do we look stupid? Obviously he wants to try to ingratiate himself to us make his way into the inside and he's going to arrest us all. Sure, absolutely not. Can you imagine? The believers are like, no, he isn't getting in.

I want you to see how the Lord resolved this issue. Verse 27, *“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.”*

Isn't that cool? I mean doesn't that make you just want to kiss Barnabas on the mouth? What a cool guy. Do you know that Barnabas's name means, son of encouragement and he was being true to his name here, wasn't he?

I mean, a man who's willing to say hey, hey, come with me. And to march him right out in front of all of the apostles and say, listen, guys, you need to hear something. You need to hear what's going on here.

The Lord Jesus appeared to this man, and I know this is radical, I know it. I understand that. But this is real because here's the deal, the gospel changes people. Did you hear me say that? The gospel changes people, radically.

I wonder sometimes if we really believe that though. I've heard Christians talk about people who are caught in certain kinds of sin. And they'll say, well, I don't know about those kind of people though. I think once somebody gets entangled in that kind of sin, I'm not sure there's any hope for them.

I think there's always hope. I mean, call me stupid, but I think there's always hope. I believe in the power of the gospel to change a life. The early disciples didn't. They heard that this man Saul of Tarsus was now a believer, and they were like, yeah, forget that. No, no, he's been changed.

Barnabas brings him. No, this is real, you guys, he has been transformed. This is a new man. He's a new man. This man who was our enemy is now our brother. I mean, let that just sink in for a minute.

Verse 28 says, *“So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, (which is just kind of a fancy way of saying Paul was able to move freely among both the Jews and the believers, but it says, he was) preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.”*

Of course, that kind of preaching isn't going to keep you in a place of freedom for very long. And so it says in verse 29, *“And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.”*

You remember last time we heard about the Hellenists? Now, remember, Hellenists are Jews who were raised in a Grecian culture, right? They have a

Greek upbringing, but they're Jews. Who was the last person we read about here in Acts that was disputing with the Hellenists? Stephen. Remember what they did? They drew up all kinds of trouble, got Stephen stoned to death. Saul was there going, yes, kill him. Now here he is, full circle. He's coming around. He's disputing with the same people. The same people who got Stephen stoned to death.

And it says in verse 30, *“And when the brothers learned this, (that these guys were seeking to kill Saul) they brought him down to Caesarea (that's the port city of Caesarea) and sent him off to Tarsus.”*

They obviously put him on a ship and sent him off because Tarsus is where Saul was raised. And we're not really sure how long he was there. We do know he spent some time in Arabia. We don't really know the timetable, but anyway, they felt the need to get him into a place where he would be safe.

Anyway, it goes on to say, this is the way the chapter ends. Verse 31. *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”*

It was growing because there was peace. Here, Saul of Tarsus, gets saved, and essentially the persecution that's been going on, that was so nasty for a period of time has just settled out. Just settled and so the church is growing and it's just a cool time.

I got to thinking about this passage that we're looking at here today, and it reminded me of something that I used to do, long time ago, about 40 years ago. When Sue and I were living up in Washington, we were hosting a Bible study in our home. And by our home, I mean a little 2 bedroom apartment. We had little babies at the time, but we were doing a weekly Bible study. And I used to make a sign, I did it by hand and I put it up on the wall. I used to tape it up on the wall so that when people came, they would see this sign because it was a message that I really wanted to convey to the people. And I'll put it up on the screen for you. It was simply this,

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Jesus changes people.

And I wanted them to know about the power of the gospel to transform a life. And so, every week before the people would show up, I would get out my little

paper sign and tape it up on the wall. And it's interesting that people see this differently.

When I say, I've said right now, Jesus changes people. I'm willing to bet that some of you have had very different reactions to that, but here's a very common reaction among Christians. They'll start to become introspective and start thinking, well, has he changed me? And then they start thinking about their life and whether or not they've really changed. And if they're not careful, their introspection can get them into trouble.

You've heard me talking about the fact that introspection, self-examination, can be a good thing and it can be a very dangerous thing. It can be a good thing from the standpoint that we're supposed to, we're supposed to judge ourselves to see how we're doing in the Lord. But if you become too introspective or too focused on self, let me just tell you, that's fodder for the enemy. He'll get ahold of that and then you start doubting your salvation and gee, I don't know if I'm really saved and all the other garbage that goes along with it. You got to be careful.

You got to be careful. Self-examination is a slippery slope, but assuming that you have examined yourself in a reasonable way, and maybe you've even, feel that you have come up wanting. Maybe you think to yourself, well, I can see some areas in my life where Jesus has changed me, but probably not enough. I need, I probably should, there's probably should be more changing going on in my life.

Here's what Christians do. They start thinking, well, I need to get busy and I need to change more. And they move from self-examination into this posture of the attempt to change themselves. I want to, I need to be a better Christian, sort of a thing, which is a dead end.

And it really misses the point because the point is Jesus changes people. See, that was the point of my sign. It wasn't you better change. It was Jesus changes people.

This is what happened to Saul of Tarsus you guys. He didn't, get blinded by the Lord and think to himself, man, I tell you, I got to change. I got to change. I'm going to..., and he didn't spend 3 days just thinking about himself. But he did change, didn't he? He did change. I mean, it was radical. It confounded the Jews. What happened? Guys, he met Jesus.

He met Jesus. Somebody say amen. (The Church says, Amen!) That's what changes people, right? It's not you trying to get hold of yourself or pull yourself up by your bootstraps and try to be a good Christian, whatever the heck that is.

It's meeting Jesus and allowing Him to do that work, that only He can do. See that's the point of all this. Jesus changes people and it's a powerful, wonderful thing, but we often step in His way and we think that we've got to do the work on our own.

And in the power of self, you can alter your behavior a little, you can do that. You can actually, if you got a potty mouth, you might be able to stop swearing to some degree until you really get mad, then out they come. Or there might be something else that you don't like, and you just make up your mind. I'm going to turn over a new leaf. Isn't that what new year's resolutions are all about? I'm going to just change, I promise.

And we just we slip into this worldly thinking about how change takes place in our life and we forget the power of the gospel. The power of Jesus redeeming a life and transforming that life. And it is truly a powerful thing.

And it's interesting, even unbelievers, they'll hear us talk about this transformative power of the gospel and they'll wonder, they're not sure about it all. They'll wonder and they'll think, well, is it really true? Can I really change? Is it possible for me to change? I did a little experiment.

I don't know if you ever do this, but I got on Google and I just typed in, can I change? Well, of course, Google's going to give me mostly responses from the world. And the world has what they believe to be answers to these sorts of problems. In fact, one of the websites that popped up on the search at practically the top was a little quote from Psychology Today. And they talked about it. Here's what they said. They said,

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| <p>People have the capacity to change. However, they must choose to do the work needed to make change happen. Exposure to new ideas, experiences, or information often inspires change. Coaching can help people change by providing education, a safe space to practice, and accountability. — Psychology Today</p> |
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People (oh yeah, oh yeah, sure, People) have the capacity to change. However, they must choose to do the work needed to make change happen. Exposure to new ideas, experiences, or information often inspires change. Coaching can help

people change by providing education, a safe space to practice, and accountability.

Yeah, but again, this is the world. It's basically telling people, yourself up by your bootstraps, buck up and you can change. You want to see what God's Word says about responding to the question. Can I change?

This is given to believers, first of all. 2 Corinthians. I love this. He says, Paul writes and he says,

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

...we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

...we all, with unveiled face, (that means we're taking the veil off and we're looking at Jesus straight on) beholding the glory of the Lord, are being (notice that present tense) transformed into the same image (the image of the Lord) from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Did you see in that passage, the incredible things that Paul says, 3 things. He says, first of all, we are being transformed yet speaks of an ongoing work, right? We're being transformed. Doesn't say we have been transformed.

Secondly, I want you to notice he says that transformation is happening “*from one degree of glory to another.*” That means that it's a small, slow, progressive process of change. I find Christians becoming so impatient with themselves.

And I'm like, would you just chill, you're going to give yourself a stroke. Just let the Lord do what He's going to do. Let Him do that work of changing.

And then the third thing Paul says is, “*this comes from the Lord.*” It doesn't come from you, from self-effort, or reading a self-help book. Okay? It comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

In other words, it is the work of God's Spirit within you that is going to bring about that transformation, you understand? It is His work. Let it happen. It's not about you. It's not about choosing to do the work needed, like Psychology Today tells you. It's about letting Him do the work. It's about yielding to His work.

Do you understand guys though, that transformation is not an automatic process in our lives because you can resist it. We've all done it. There have been times in your life, and I'm sure, I know there have been times in mine where the Lord wants to do a work of transformation in my life and I just, I'm like, no, I dig in my heels.

And He'll keep bringing me around that same mile post until I get the message, right? He'll just keep bringing me back across the same area. You're ready now, Paul? No! Okay. We'll go around this block again. And He'd bring me back there again. You're ready now? Maybe.

Until finally, I'm ready to say, I submit to you, Lord. I yield, I yield to your Spirit, change my life. That's when transformation begins to happen. But you see, God is the most incredible gentleman I've ever met in my life. He does not force that transformation on my life. He'll make me miserable until I finally submit to it, don't get me wrong, but He won't force it.

He will wait for me to come to that place of saying, yes, Lord. Yes, Lord, I'll let you in. I love this other passage from Romans 12. Check this out. Paul says,

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...

You'll notice that he talks about these things like, these aren't automatic. And there's 2 things he's really telling you and me to do here. He starts off by saying, don't be conformed to the world. And what he means by that is that the world has a way of living, thinking, acting, speaking. He says, don't be conformed to that. Don't be conformed.

Because you see, the world is constantly trying to preach to you and me and telling us to conform. They want us to conform to their thoughts, their ideologies, their beliefs. And can I just tell you right here, right now, without getting too negative about it, it's working. The world is making..., I mean, they've won over a lot of Christians. Okay?

A lot of Christians have fallen into conformity with the world. Living together, no big deal before marriage, no big deal. Homosexuality, it's normal. Abortion,

sure, anytime, anywhere. And these are things that are clearly immoral, but we've allowed ourselves to become conformed.

Is that going to stop the process or slow down the process of transformation in our lives? Oh, yes. Yes, it will, so what does Paul say? Don't be conformed.

Look at what the world believes. Don't conform to that. See what the world holds dear. Don't hold that dear. Do not conform to the pattern of thinking and living and believing that the world holds to because it is contrary to the Word of God. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but you can't just go around saying, I reject the world. You have to fill up that void with something else, right?

Have you ever met somebody that all they do is just reject things? You say something, they go, I reject that. Really, cool, what do you believe? I don't know. I don't believe that. You can't just go around saying, well, I'm not going to conform to the pattern of this world and leave it there. That's why Paul doesn't leave it there.

He says, but, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And I believe personally that the renewing of the mind takes place when we actively and consistently bathe our hearts in the Word of God.

When we are constantly in the path of the Word of God, there will take place in our lives, a transformational work of God. You know why? Because the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. (Hebrews 4:12) And it will do its work in your life if you will expose yourself to it and allow God to do the work in your life that He wants to do.

And so you see, there's these two things that are very important. Reject the world. Sure, we reject the ways of the world because they're ungodly. That doesn't mean we go around pointing our finger at the world and condemning it. That's not what I'm saying. You reject them for you. You reject their truth as truth because it's not truth. It's deception.

But you embrace the truth, and that is the means by which our hearts and minds become transformed. By embracing the Word of God, opening our hearts to it and saying, Lord, change me.

For those of you who have thought when I threw up that thing up on the screen, Jesus changes people, and you're thinking to yourself, well, I don't know if God's changed me very much. Hey, listen, just make it a matter of prayer.

There's nothing wrong with just praying and saying, Lord, change me. Change me, change my life, change the way I think, change the way I speak, change the way I react when I get angry. Change the things I reach for when I get stressed.

Change the things I look for when I look for pleasure. Change the way I treat my spouse. Change the way I raise my kids. Change the way I speak about my boss at work. Change me. Transform my life, because it's a work I can't do on my own. It's a work I have to trust You to do, amen? Oh, you can do better than that. (The Church says Amen!)

Let's stand together. If you need prayer this morning, we would be more than happy to pray with you. Just come on down front and we'll have some folks up here to pray with you, so let's thank the Lord.

Father, as we get ready to head out here, we just want to pause for a moment and thank You that the hope that we have to transform is in You. And it is through Your Spirit living within us.

And Lord we repudiate any sort of worldly wisdom that says that I can change on my own through self-effort, because we realize that's just not a reality. And if change is going to happen in our lives, it's going to happen because we're yielding to the work of Your Spirit to form us into the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ.

And we just want to invite that Lord. I want to pray for those who recognize in their lives, you know, Lord, I think more change can happen in my life.

We just want to invite You to do that. We want to invite You and Lord remind..., please, tap us on the shoulder when we start resisting You. Remind us that we need to yield and become weak so that we might be made strong.

We thank You. We praise You. We worship You. The Lord who redeems our life and transforms our hearts and minds.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior, and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you.

Have a good rest of your Sunday.