

Worship Material
A change of perspective
Material from Roots Bible Study
Sunday 4th May

Begin with an opening prayer

Ever-loving God,
as we gather together in worship,
may we glorify your name.
Help us to make the most of this time together,
sharing honestly with one another
as we participate in this story of faith.
May we offer you our all and be glad when
you lovingly change our perspectives.

Amen.

Read Acts 9:1-6,(7-20)

Bible notes

Paul (then known as Saul) approved of Stephen's stoning and began to persecute the Church (Acts 7:58–8:3), pursuing the disciples of Jesus who had taken their faith as far as Damascus in Syria. Belonging to 'the Way', they understood their acceptance of Jesus as the right way of understanding the Jewish Scriptures, just as the Dead Sea Sect at Qumran argued that in their interpretation of Scripture they were 'those who have chosen the Way' (see The Damascus Document 9:18). Paul was 'persecuting the Church' because he was 'far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors' than others (Galatians 1:14-16). But it was while violently preserving the status quo that his perspective was radically changed, leading him to interpret his Jewish Scriptures afresh in the light of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The blinding light and regained sight recall Simeon's description of the infant Jesus as 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' (Luke 2:32), itself drawn from the prophetic vision of Israel as the servant given by God 'as a light to the nations' (Isaiah 49:6). The persecutor Paul now shares the vision of the persecuted Stephen (Acts 7:56,22:20). The risen Jesus is the suffering servant of his people (9:5), whose sufferings Paul will share (9:16) as God works in him to fulfil Israel's calling. Paul later recalled that the Lord had said, 'I am sending

you to the Gentiles to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light' (26:17-18).

The high priest's posse accompanying Paul lead him away, 'and for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank' (9:9). This suggests his participation in Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, death and burial (see Romans 6:1-4). In Damascus, Ananias, the disciple of Jesus, has also received a vision, responding as the prophets responded, 'Here I am, Lord'. Ananias finds the courage to go to Paul at Straight Street. By Ananias' touch and teaching the scales fall from Paul's eyes and, filled with the Spirit, he participates in Jesus' risen life, greeted as 'brother' by the courageous man whose life he had threatened.

Prayer

Refrain: **We thank you for lives touched by you.**

We give our lives to you.

Lord, you are the God of miracles, great and small.

Today we have heard some amazing things.

Fish appeared where there were none before.

Paul had his physical sight restored

and his spiritual eyes opened wide.

We thank you...

We thank you, Lord, that, if we trust in you,

you give us a whole new perspective on life.

Together we can work to further your glorious kingdom.

We thank you...

Amen.

A prayer to conclude

We go from this place with perspectives changed.

May we have eyes to see you at work

in our lives and community.

May we have words of love to offer to people

society often shuns.

May we trust and obey your call on our lives.

Amen.

