

# Remember...

Speak the Language: A Resource By Shelby Matteson

## **Remember who you were.**

Take a minute to think back to what you were like in middle school. Remember the haircut you had, the clothes you wore, the shows and movies you watched, the hobbies you had, the flip phones and passing of notes during class. Now you would probably hate for people to see you looking and acting like you did in middle school. Now take a minute to think back to a time before you knew Jesus or a time when you weren't as close with Him as you are now. Were you depressed, angry, bitter, confused, lost, alone, never satisfied, etc.? What were you like? How did you live your life? Did you act one way around friends or family, but when you were alone you were someone completely different?

You see, we all have a past and sometimes we forget to stop and remember who that person was because we're ashamed or embarrassed or disgusted by what we used to be. The past can be a painful thing to look back on. It's full of stupid decisions, regrets, selfishness, ignorance, and the list goes on. But without a past, without all the mess, we don't exist today. A great example of someone in the Bible who had a pretty messy past was Saul.

Saul was born in Tarsus. His parents were Pharisees which were Jews who strictly obeyed the Law of Moses, and they sought to keep their children from interacting with the Gentiles. He received a Jewish education from the Pharisean Rabbi, Gamaliel. He became very passionate about his faith, but his faith was one that didn't accept Jesus or anyone who claimed to be a follower of Jesus. Saul became determined to eliminate Christians which can be read about in Acts 7. Stephen, a Christian who was speaking to the Sanhedrin (basically the Jewish Supreme Court), ended up getting stoned to death. At the end of verse 60 we read, "And Saul was there, giving approval to his death." If you continue reading over in Acts 8 it states, "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison." That's a pretty intense past if you ask me! I know that I've had a pretty messy past full of a lot of terrible things, but I don't think I've done anything like going around killing and imprisoning Christians because I thought they were crazy for following this man called Jesus, but that was who Saul was.

## **Remember who you are.**

Even though you may have some things in your past that you aren't proud of or you've realized that you didn't truly have a relationship with Jesus like you said, those are not the things that define you. Today you are a Christian. Today you are a child of God. Today you are a disciple. Today you are free. Today you are forgiven. Today you are \_\_\_\_\_. You can fill in that blank with a long list of words that you would proudly tell people. We are all composed of so many different pieces, but without just one of them we're incomplete. We are all different people from who we were 10 years ago, 5 years ago, or even 1 year ago. Just as important as it is to remember who you were, you must remember who you are! The Lord has done some amazing things in all of our lives and even in Saul's life.

Just like in each of our lives, Saul had a "come to Jesus moment" or a turning point in his life. Remember that up until this time Saul was out to kill or imprison any and all Christians, even going so far as to raid houses to find them, but then everything. In Acts 9:1-18 we read the account of Saul encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saul was on his way to Jerusalem in search of more Christians to imprison when all of a sudden he hears a voice asking why Saul is persecuting him. After the voice spoke to Saul, he opened his eyes and couldn't see anything so his traveling partners had to lead him into Damascus where he

remained for three days. Also in Damascus was a disciple named Ananias who the Lord told in a vision to go place his hands on Saul to restore his sight. Ananias had heard of this Saul character who had been harming Christians and wasn't so sure about this task. Yet verse 15 says, "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." So Ananias went to where God told him Saul would be, placed his hands on him, and told him about the vision he had. At the end of the passage we read that something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, his vision was restored, and he was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

From this moment on, Saul's life was completely changed. Later on in the chapter we read that Saul immediately started going into the synagogues proclaiming Jesus and saying that He was the Son of God. While the people were amazed to hear all of things, they were pretty skeptical given Saul's reputation as the guy who murdered Christians. They even made plans to kill him because they just didn't believe that this was the same person they had been hearing about. Despite their skepticism and conspiracy to kill him off, Saul kept on sharing the good news with people and eventually joined the disciples.

It's highly unlikely that any of us have such an extreme story like Saul's conversion, but despite that fact we all still have a story. Isn't it inspiring that Saul immediately started to live his life as this new creation that Jesus had transformed him into and became the man that we know as Paul? Paul was the guy who took multiple missionary journeys and wrote thirteen books in the New Testament. He spent the rest of his life proclaiming Jesus as the risen Christ throughout the Roman world. If you do a quick keyword search on the bible app, you'll find at least nine different times where the phrase, "Paul, an apostle or servant of Christ Jesus" or some variation appeared. Now I don't know about you, but when I write a letter or a card or an email or when I introduce myself in person the first thing I say isn't, "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am an apostle of Christ Jesus." To us that isn't normal or a regular part of our conversation, but for Paul that was usually the first thing he would say in his letters. That was how he defined himself, that was who he was and he wasn't planning on hiding it. We can all learn from Paul in what it means to remember who we are, to never forget that we are Christians, that we are His disciples, that we are his sons and daughters, that we are His hands and feet, that we are His messengers, that we are His servants, that we are His. That's who we are and we need to remember that, even when it's not easy and life is overwhelming or when things are great and life's a fairytale, we must remember who we are despite everything else.

### **Remember who God is.**

When you stop and think about it, you don't get from who you were 10, 5, or 1 year ago to who you are today on your own. No, you get there with God. He is constantly working in our lives and transforming us to be more like him, but it's a process that takes time. We experience these changes and various seasons of life, but the one thing that stays constant is and always will be who God is. The same God that transforms us and is always with us, was the same God that was with Paul during his life too.

If we reflect on the life of Paul and his transformation process, we begin to recognize three things about who God is. First, we learn from Paul's story that God is a savior. The story of Paul is one that repeats itself every day as sinful, broken people all over the world are transformed by God's saving grace. All of us, like Paul, have done things to break our Father's heart and give Him plenty of reason to kick us to the curb, yet to God we are all worthy of a second chance. Next, we learn from Paul's life that God is empowering. He gave Paul the power and authority to go out and be one of the most recognized witnesses for His Kingdom. God could have easily said, "You know what Paul, I'm really glad that you decided to let me be a part of your life now, but just the other day you were putting my followers in jail and killing them off. So I think it might be best if you sit the bench for a little while and gain some of my trust." Instead, God gives Paul

the same power and authority that his son Jesus had to go out and share the gospel with everyone that would listen. If Paul can go out and preach the gospel without fear in places that knew him as the guy who was hunting down Christians to take them to jail, then we shouldn't have any fear to share the gospel with the people on our campus and in our lives. Finally, from the life of Paul we learn that God is worthy. He is worthy of more than we could ever say or do to him or for him. Paul saw that God was worthy enough to be completely sold-out for even as he sat in prison writing letters. It seems like it would be more difficult than Paul made it seem to set there and write letters in order to continue sharing the gospel and praising God, but Paul knew that no matter what he endured, through all the hardships and suffering he experienced, God was worthy to live his life for. In Philippians 1:21 Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." To Paul, God was worthy to live and die for. Can we say the same for us?

### **Conclusion**

It can be intimidating and scary to remember who you were before you met Jesus or in the early days of that relationship when you didn't know as much as you thought you knew. However, there is something really sweet and valuable about taking that time to reflect on the person you used to be, and then transitioning into remembering who you are now. Transformation is a beautiful thing, and we need to take time to remind ourselves of the transformation that has occurred in each of us. Yet, we all know that transformation doesn't happen on its own or because of anything that we do ourselves. It happens because of God and his infinite character. So don't be afraid to find a quiet place, take out your journal, and spend some time remembering who you were, who you are, and who God is.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

Take some time to go through the following questions and spend some time in prayer. Then journal down your response and what the Lord speaks to you during that time.

1. What about who you used to be is different from who you are now?
2. What has God done to transform you into who you are today?
3. Throughout your life, the past and present, what have you been learning about God's nature and character?
4. What are some areas in your life that need to change in order to become more like Him?
5. Practically, how can you make those changes?