**Thesis:** Everyone faces forks in the road of life. Decisions we must make that will dictate our future. But there is one decision that holds the greatest weight when it comes to our fate - the decision to follow Jesus. Christ’s sacrifice has made salvation available to anyone. But only those who answer His call to follow Him will experience His blessed promise for new life.

**Introduction:** This is the Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_ your host from Pray.com. I’m so happy you’re here with us today. As we dig into part of the story of the Apostle Paul’s conversion, we’ll learn how we can embrace the transformation that Jesus offers for our lives.

**Context:** With letters in hand giving him permission to persecute the followers of Jesus outside of Jerusalem, Saul sets out with his men down the road to Damascus. In his mind, this was the moment that could lead to his glory. If all went according to plan, he would return a hero and become renowned among the Jews as the man who stopped Jesus’ movement and the people of the Way. But as Saul’s mind is filled with his conquest, his eyes become filled with blinding light from heaven. In our story, we’ll feel the tremendous power that flows from encountering Jesus. We’ll see Saul’s heart moved at the words of the Lord as his life hits a proverbial fork in the road. While he may not know what lies ahead, the choice is clear: To continue to follow his flesh, or make a change and follow Jesus. Immerse yourself in Saul’s conversion story as the Lord moves not only in his heart, but ours as well.

**Message:** The gospel message promises transformation. This promise of change and hope for a better future. Oftentimes, the thing that hinders us the most from finding transformation is ourselves. Whether this is physical transformation as we search for the discipline to be healthier, emotional transformation as we seek help and guidance from professionals, friends, and family, or spiritual transformation as our souls long to be made whole. Saul wasn’t just an enemy of the people of the way. In many ways, he was his own worst enemy. He was blind to the gospel, and his physical blindness was merely a condition that reflected the spiritual blindness that had afflicted him for years. But although his past was brutal and dark, it wasn’t too thick for the light of Jesus to pierce through.

Saul experienced a radical transformation on the road to Damascus that led to one of the most well-known testimonies of God’s faith under the new covenant. He had spent years investing in himself and his religiosity, and it paid off. Nobody could compete with Saul when it came to living by the law. But through his encounter with Jesus, he learned that he was missing out on the most important part of his faith: A relationship with Jesus Christ the Savior. But his moment with the resurrected Lord that interrupts his determined drive is exactly what he needed to experience transformation. There’s three lessons Saul shows us that will help us experience transformation as well.

First, Saul teaches us that we need to learn to recognize when God is speaking. Before his encounter with Jesus, Saul would have said he was listening to the voice of God. He would have believed that he knew God’s heart, and was a man who pressed after it like King David. He would have considered himself as someone who was smack dab in the middle of the perfect will of his heavenly Father. Living on this side of his testimony, we know that he didn’t see things quite as clearly as he may have thought. But Saul’s problem may not be as different from our own as we might think. We’ll often hear voices, whether it's our own internal dialogue or the words of others in our life, that we believe are giving us a word from the Lord. Whether it’s a gut feeling or affirmations from a friend, we take that as a sign that we’re aligned with God’s will. But unfortunately that’s not always the case. There will be times where it’s not God speaking to us, and it’s dangerous when we don’t know when those times are. Part of the transformative process is learning to hear God’s voice and knowing when it’s actually Him speaking. As we get more comfortable with what it feels like to have Jesus’ Spirit moving in our hearts, we’ll grow more confident to know when God is speaking to us. Whenever you feel like you may be sensing a word from the Lord or are looking for Him to speak, make sure that you also ask Him to specifically help you discern what is really from Him and what isn’t. We can only follow God if we know when He is speaking.

In John 10, Jesus and the disciples are in Jerusalem for the Festival of Dedication, what we know as Hanukkah. While there, some of the Jews ask Him to tell them plainly if He is the Messiah.

In part of His response, Jesus says in *John 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*

For those who have placed their faith in Jesus, they will know the sound of the Good Shepherd's voice. As you spend time with Jesus reading the Bible and praying, you’ll learn to hear it more clearly with each day.

Saul’s conversion also teaches us to learn to be obedient to Jesus’ commands. Saul recognized that the voice he was hearing was from heaven, a message from God. Confused and afraid, he asks a very important question: “Who are you, Lord?” After a lifetime devoted to God, Saul was realizing that he didn’t actually know who He was at heart. In some translations, Saul asks a second question: “What do you want me to do?” Jesus simply tells him to arise, go to Damascus, and trust that Jesus would guide him from there. Blinded on the road to Damascus, Saul was given a choice. Was he going to continue to live in spiritual blindness to who God truly was and live for himself, or was he going to open the eyes of his heart to see Jesus clearly for the first time and obey Him? The choice was completely his. Would he stay the same, or would he choose change and see his life transformed? And this is the same choice that we all have to make. Will we obey Jesus’ commands or will we continue to live life on our own? If we want to experience transformation, we have to learn obedience to Jesus. The two are mutually connected.

In the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal, Jesus is teaching the disciples and says in *John 15:14 “You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”*

Jesus doesn’t demand obedience out of vanity or egotism. He calls us to obedience because He has revealed the Father’s perfect plan to us and wants us to be a part of it. Don’t despise Christ’s command. Learn to love them, knowing that He’s leading us to better places.

Lastly, Saul’s conversion teaches us that we must embrace our new identity. In Christ, we are a new creation. If we identify with Christ, the old person we once were is buried in the grave, and new life has begun because Jesus is alive! Even if we have a dark and weighty past, like Saul, we don’t have to let it hold us back from being the person God wants us to be now. The light of Christ makes our futures bright. Likewise, for those of us who are followers of Jesus, when someone else comes to a saving faith, it benefits no one to judge them for their past. We all come to Jesus with a past riddled with sin. We have the privilege of seeing others come to Jesus and enter into His transformative presence. Just like Ananias welcomes Saul into the family of God, we should have the same heart of forgiveness, compassion, and joy in seeing the spiritually blind receive sight.

Paul writes this in *2 Corinthians 5:16 “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*

Saul knew what it meant to be on the opposing team. He knew what it was like to learn to leave a shameful past behind and embrace his new identity in Jesus. But in doing so, God softened his heart in order to have a lasting impact on the world. After Saul’s conversion, he becomes an apostle and begins spreading the Good News of Jesus far and wide. And as he travels, he senses God leading him to specifically minister to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people. For centuries Gentiles were considered unworthy of God’s grace and mercy. But Saul, a man who understood what it meant to be unworthy of God’s grace and mercy, and learned that the gospel was meant for every person, there would be nothing stopping him from seeing as many souls saved.

While Saul’s conversion story may seem radical, it’s not too dissimilar from what happens in every heart when one receives Jesus. Without the revelation of Jesus, we’re all spiritually blind. We’re stumbling in darkness. But when we see Jesus in His glorious light, hear His voice, and obey His commands, nothing stops His Spirit from transforming the lives of men and women around the world.