

Unstoppable

Stories from the Book of Acts

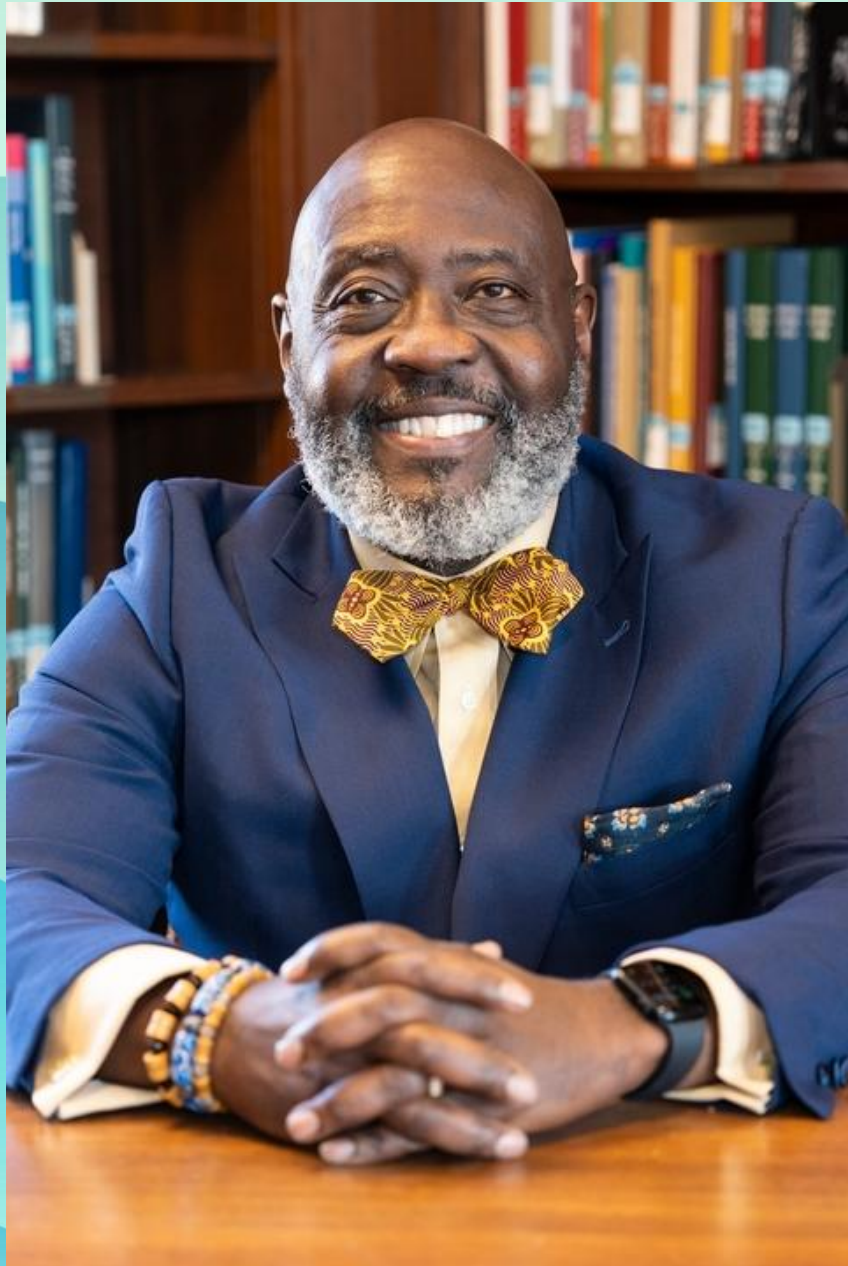
GOD'S UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH IS:

- **Spirit Empowered**
- **Courageous & Compassionate**
- **Holy**
- **A Faithful Witness**
- **Radically Inclusive**



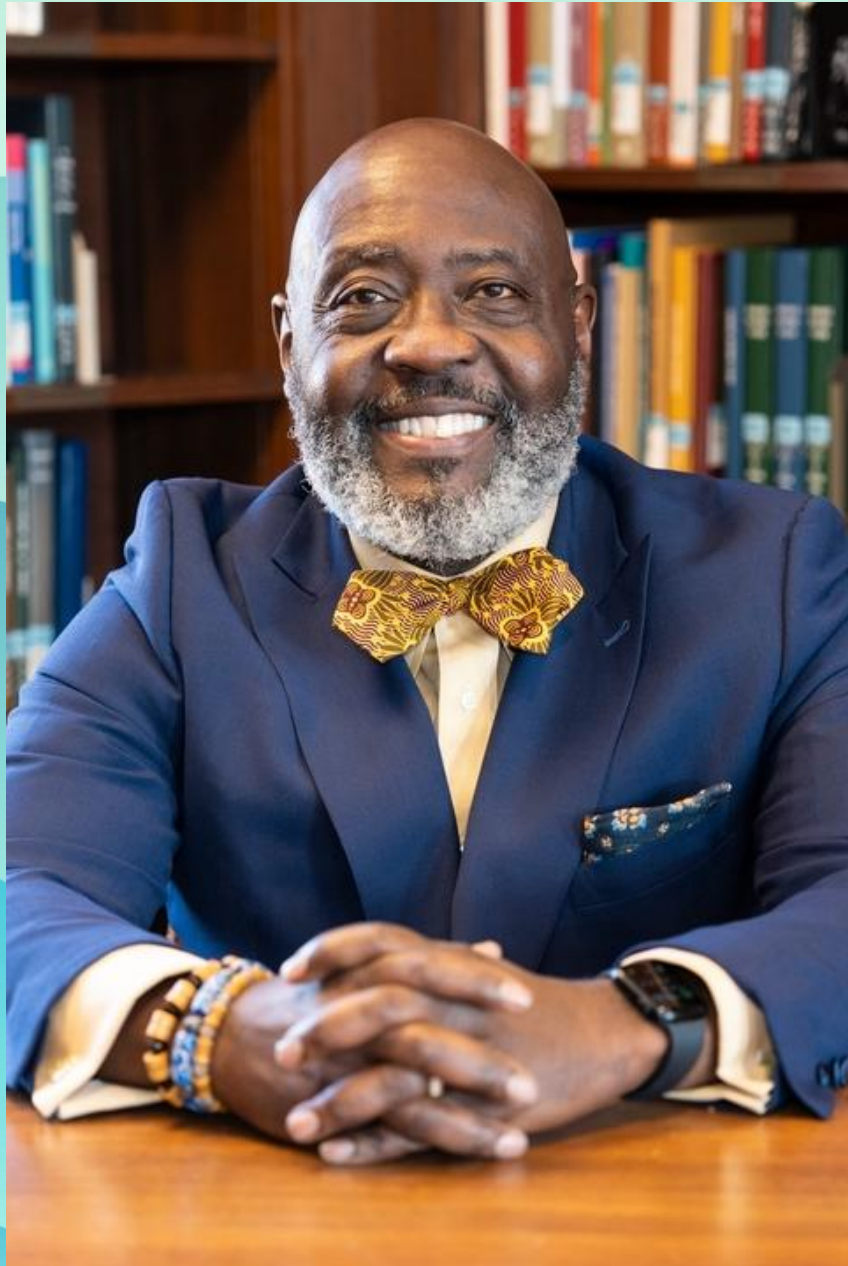
GOD'S UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH IS GRACE-SHAPED





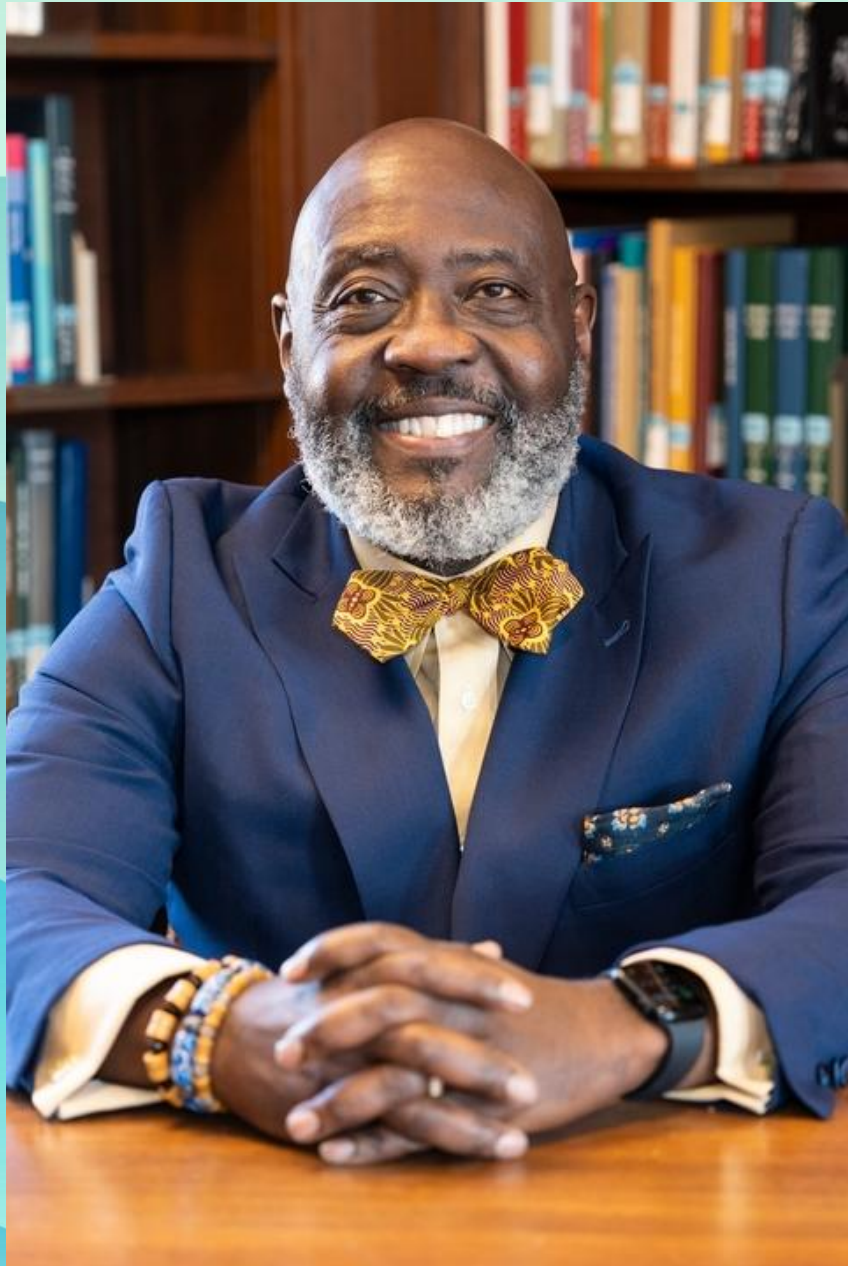
Willie James Jennings

Saul is a killer. We must never forget this fact. He kills in the name of righteousness, and now he wants legal permission to do so. This is the person who travels the road to Damascus, one who has the authority to take life either through imprisonment or execution. No one is more dangerous than one with the power to take life and who already has mind and sight set on those who are a threat to a safe future.



Such a person is a closed circle relying on the inner coherence of their logic. Their authority confirms their argument and their argument justifies their actions and their actions reinforce the appropriateness of their authority. Violence, in order to be smooth, elegant, and seemingly natural, needs people who are closed circles. The disciples of the Lord, the women and men of the Way, have no chance against Saul.

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They have no argument and certainly no authority to thwart his zeal. They are diaspora betrayers of the faith who are a clear and present danger to Israel. This is how Saul sees them. His rationality demands his vision of justice. But what Saul does not yet know is that the road to Damascus has changed. It is space now inhabited by the wayfaring Spirit of the Lord. Saul pursues, but he is being pursued.

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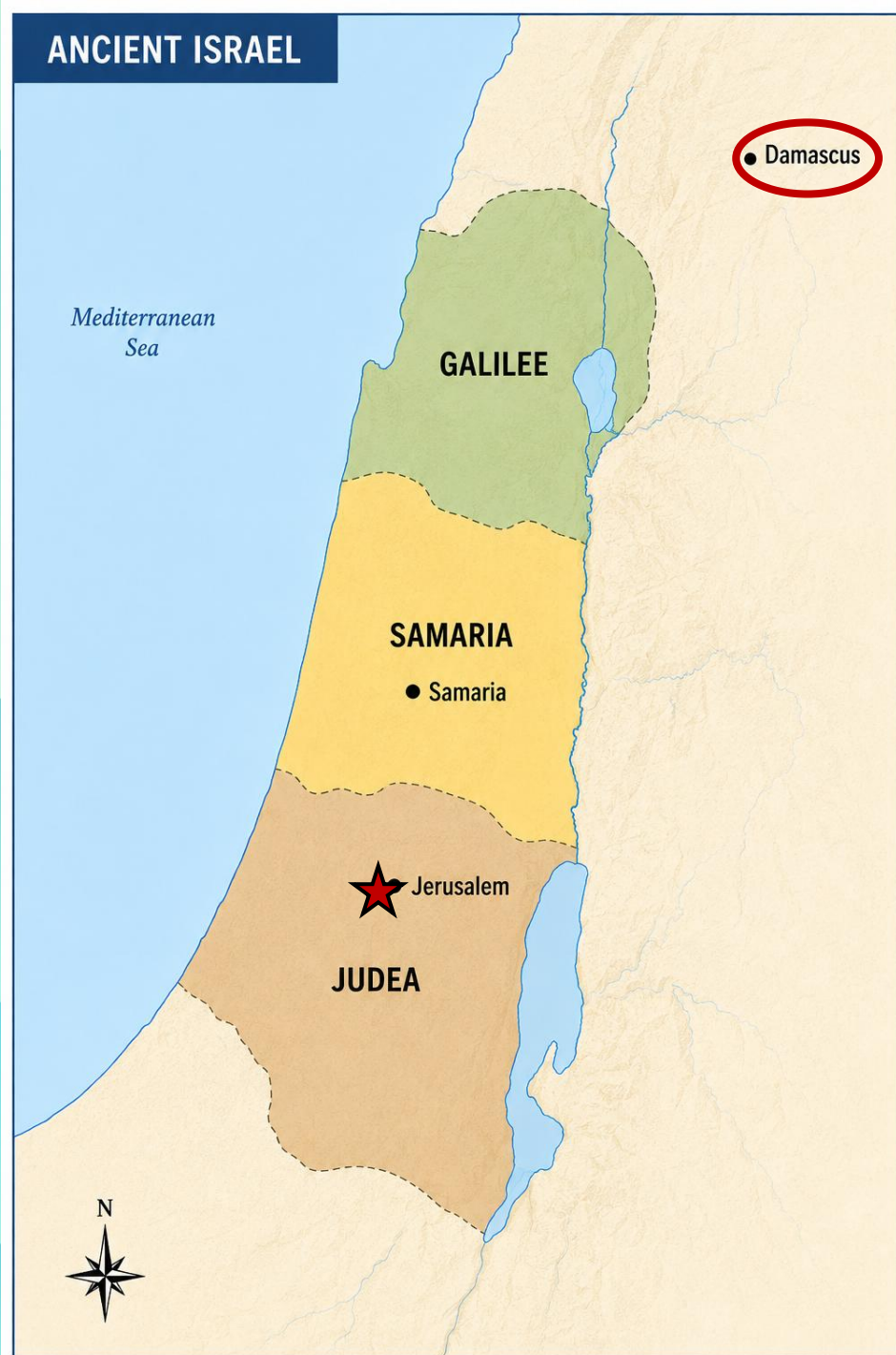
Acts 9: 1-6



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.

Acts 9

- **Saul will become Paul**
 - “Apostle to the Gentiles”
- **Travels north to Damascus**
 - To prevent the spread of Christianity
 - To maintain peace with Rome
- “The Way,” or “Followers of the Way,” is one of the first names for early Christianity and distinguishes them from Judaism



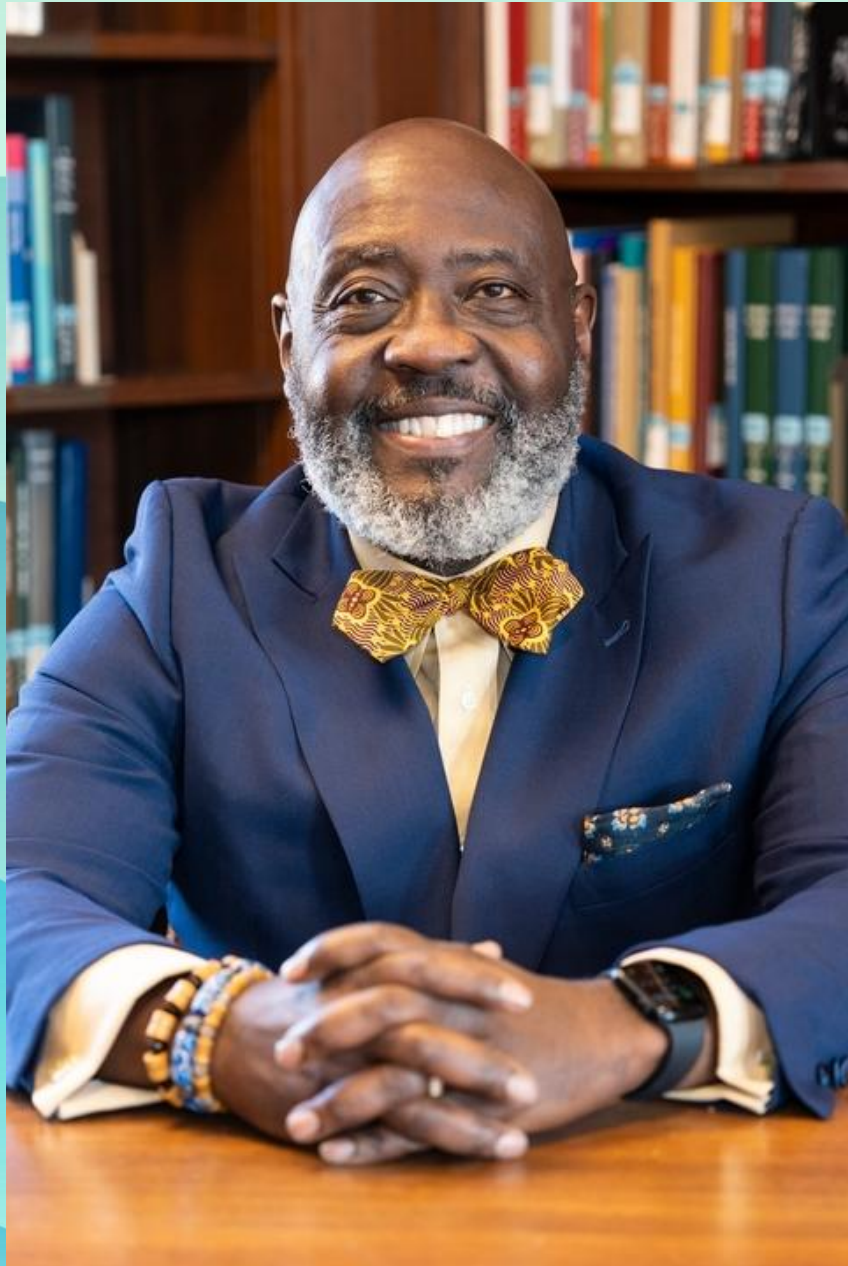
Acts 9: 1-6



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."



Saul, the closed circle, is broken open by God. Yes, a killer was confronted and stopped in his tracks, but equally powerful, the rationality for his murderous actions was shattered. There is no rationale for killing that remains intact in the presence of God.

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Acts 9: 1-6



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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."

Acts 9:7-9



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.

Jesus Pursues People



Luke 19:10

**For the Son of Man came to seek and save
those who are lost.**

Romans 5:8

**God showed his great love for us by
sending Christ to die for us while we were
still sinners**



1 Timothy 1:15-16

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life



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Grace Changes Everything



2 Corinthians 5:17

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)



Galatians 2:20

**My old self has been crucified with Christ.
It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in
me. So I live in this earthly body by
trusting in the Son of God, who loved me
and gave himself for me.**



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Transformed People Become Witnesses



Acts 9:10-14



Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

The Lord said, "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."

Acts 9:10-14



“But Lord,” exclaimed 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.”

Acts 9:15-19

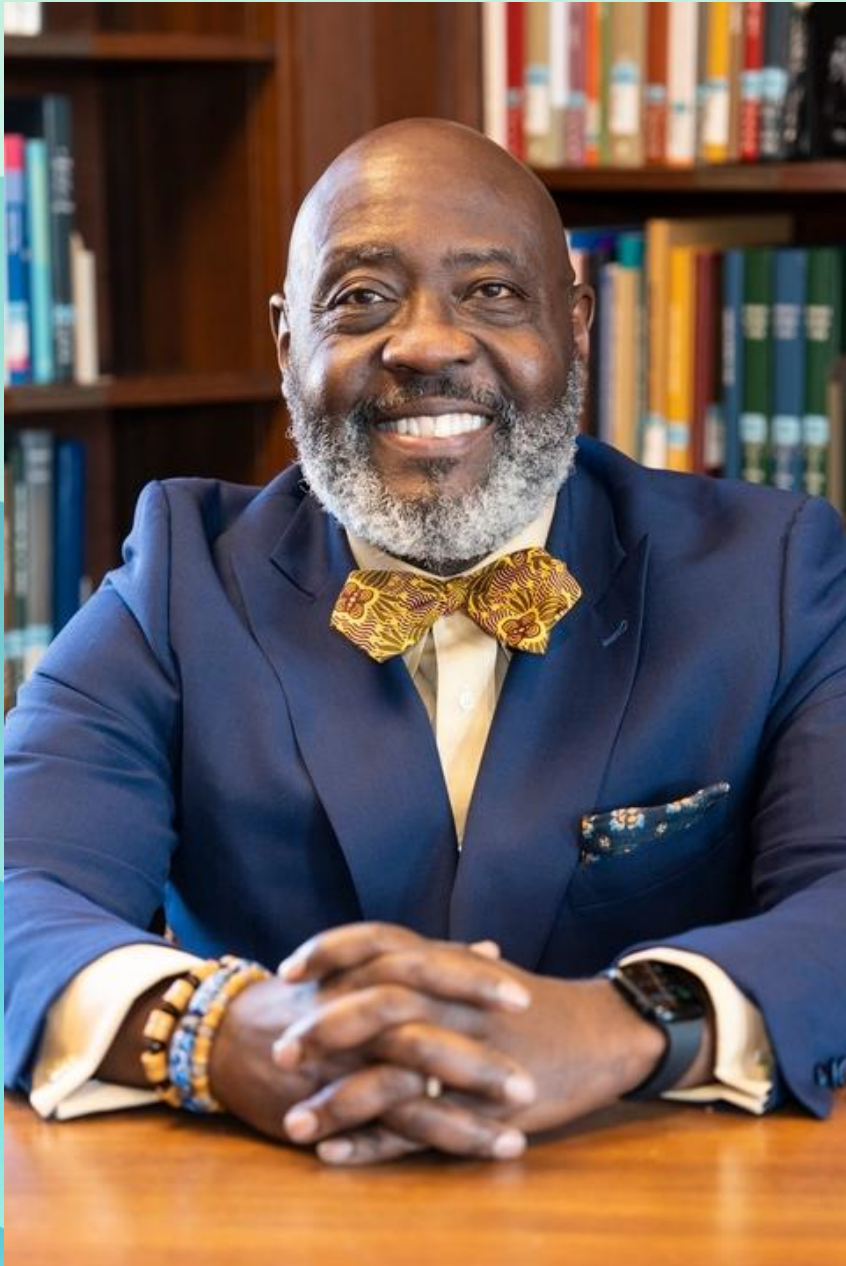


But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

Acts 9:15-19



So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "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." 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.



The truth we know of a person or people must move to the background, and what we know of God's desire for them must move to the foreground. The danger we imagine inscribed on their bodies must be read against the delight we know God takes in their life. That same divine delight covers us.

Willie James Jennings

Acts 9:19-22



Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!"

Acts 9:19-22



All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?” they asked. “And didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?”

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

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