



Be Reconciled to God
Bible Study based on Acts 9
By Envoy Tawnya Stumpf
Coos Bay, OR Corps – Cascade Division

In the beginning scenes of “The Sound of Music”, there is no sound. As the great Alps are captured by an aerial view we are drawn into the silence. Quite suddenly, the music becomes audible and the scene changes from snow-covered crags to trees and then green hilltop meadows. The birds begin to chirp, and we gain speed quickly, descending upon a lone figure singing and twirling. This is where we are introduced to the leading character, Maria. The movie begins.

Maria von Trapp wrote “The Story of the Trapp Family Singers.” It was published in 1949. Maria’s memoirs were the inspiration for a 1956 West German film, “The Trapp Family.” This film inspired the 1959 Broadway musical “The Sound of Music”. This musical became an award-winning film in 1965, bearing the same name.

If you are like me, you grew up listening and singing many of the songs written by Oscar Hammerstein II, Irwin Kostal, and Richard Rodgers. One of the songs that was carried over from the Broadway play to the movie was “Maria”. This song is sung by nuns in the corridor and courtyard of the Nonnberg Abbey located within the St. John’s Chapel, Salzburg Austria.

You see, Maria was 22, and had been studying to become a nun. She, however, was quite a handful. As the song indicates, Maria was always in trouble. Not malicious or deliberate. It was just difficult for her to stay within the boundaries. One of the complaints was that she was always singing.

Do you remember watching the movie “The Sound of Music” when you were younger? I was just watching it the other day. You see, I was working on my morning devotions, doodling with my colored pencils, when I became so absorbed with the music in my head that I began to conduct the invisible orchestra. My arm shot out in a dramatic gesture making a red mark outside the lines. As I looked at that mark, I thought about the many times in my life I left the pleasant boundaries near to Christ and I wandered away from His security. Not on purpose. I’m sure my enthusiasm to be of service to my Lord and Savior, just got carried away, and I began conducting the symphony in my own life instead of quietly listening to what God was conducting.

Does your life resemble this? Were you going along in your ministry, staying within the boundary lines, humming your favorite tune, when suddenly you found yourself a little lost? A little tired? A little powerless? Is there a red line running off the page of your life? Your ministry?

In the first step in recovery, “We admit we are powerless over our problems – that our lives have become unmanageable.” Have you been asking yourself lately, “How did I get to this point”? Are you feeling exhausted, frustrated, and unsure you’re still in control? Are you wondering how to get back? If you can get back? Right now, it’s so un-normal, what does “getting back” mean?

Wait... hear me out. Sometimes in our ministries, we work to the point of exhaustion. We find ourselves stopping for fast food to take home for dinner because frankly, our feet hurt. And, the thought of cooking makes our feet hurt even worse. Have you been sleeping in lately? Finding that you have no time for your morning devotions? Are you relying upon the radio to minister you? Do you feel satisfied after listening to a partial sermon from the radio host? Are you hoping you’ll hear something so profound that you will experience that grounding peace that has been eluding you lately? Are you thinking this just might help you get back inside the boundary lines? Recovery doesn’t work like that. In the first step, recognition of the problem comes before admitting we are powerless over it.

In Matthew 20: 29-34 we read about 2 blind men that call out to Jesus as the crowd was walking by.

As Jesus and the disciples left the town of Jericho, a large crowd followed behind. Two blind men were sitting beside the road. When they heard that Jesus was coming that way, they began shouting, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

“Be quiet!” the crowd yelled at them.

But they only shouted louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

When Jesus heard them, he stopped and called, “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Lord, they said, we want to see!”

Jesus felt sorry for them and touched their eyes. Instantly they could see! Then they followed him.

Question: "What do you want?"

Question: "What are you powerless over?"

Question: "What boundaries have you crossed?"

Question: "What is one thing you have recognized that you need Jesus to restore for you?"

We aren't alone in our good intentions to serve the Lord with **"all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and strength."** There is nothing to be ashamed of when we go out of boundaries. Luckily, admission is part of the first step, as is recognition.

Jesus wants to restore us. Saul, in Acts 9: 1-22, who later is called Paul, had a problem that only Jesus could restore. Let's take a quick look at Saul's encounter with Jesus and how we too can experience a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

Acts 9:1 isn't our first encounter with a man named Saul. Saul is introduced during the stoning death of Stephan, Acts 7: 59-60 & 8:1. Paul, as with many, was a self-righteous man. His qualifications listed in Philippians 3:4 tells us "If anyone else thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I (Paul) have more:

- Circumcised on the 8th day
- Of the people of Israel
- Of the tribe of Benjamin – a Hebrew of Hebrews
- In regard to the law, a Pharisee
- As for zeal, persecuting the church
- As for legalistic righteousness, faultless

Yes, Saul was doing wonderfully on his own in life...no out of boundary experiences for him... until he heard a booming voice from heaven. I am confident that this voice from heaven would have caused him to color right off the page too...

You see, Saul (later Paul) had a problem. He was working in his own strength. Where did his own strength take him? To the point of approving murder. To the point of persecuting people, throwing them in jail. His self-righteousness was leading him on the road to Damascus. He thought he was going to continue to live his life exactly how he thought was best, problems or not. But God had something else for him to do.

Acts 9:3-4 tells us; **"As he (Saul) 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!"** As this encounter was occurring, Saul was struck blind. He now had a bigger problem than working in his own strength, he was now powerless over his blindness.

Where do we relate? Like Saul, we too were going along just fine in our ministries, when we realized we were in trouble. Except, by the time we realized we were in trouble, we had gone outside the boundaries with our little red pencil. Are you tired? Are you exhausted? Do you feel far away from the Lord right now? Has it been a while since you've heard Him speak clearly into your heart? Are you ready to admit you are powerless over your problems? Are you ready to recognize your problem and answer Jesus' question: "What do you want me to do for you"?

Are you ready for the answer to those questions? In Acts 9:5 Saul is instructed to "**...get up and go...**" and wait, "**you will be told what you must do.**" We are even told that Saul remained "**blind for three days.**" You too might feel that you are blindly waiting for the Lord. OK, what do you want Jesus to do for you? Saul knew the answer to this question. He wanted his sight restored. He wanted his "problem" fixed. What he would learn during the three-day waiting period was that his life had become unmanageable.

What do you want to be restored? Is your life unmanageable? Are you realizing that you can't erase the red line that crossed the boundaries of your doodling? Recognition of what our problems are is important. Realizing that our lives have become unmanageable is just as important, but more difficult. No one wants to realize that their lives are unmanageable. Is this where God has you waiting? You know, it's at this place of "powerlessness" that God does his best work in and through us.

Has the question, "Can I be restored" run through your mind? I can imagine that question running through Saul's mind as he waited for the Lord those three days. The answer is "yes!" Acts 9: 17b - 18 tells us that God sent Ananias to Saul. Ananias, upon his entry to the house where Saul was patiently waiting, told him "**... 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 (Saul) got up and was baptized.**" Saul was powerless. He came to believe that a "power greater than himself could restore his life to sanity".

We learn in Step 2: "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves, could restore us to sanity."

Remember In the movie "The Sound of Music", the nuns singing about the "trouble with Maria"? This song has a few silly behaviors describing Maria. However, there is one important one that I want to point out. One of the nuns goes against negative thinking, speaks up on Maria's behalf, and boldly declares that "Maria makes me laugh... ha ha!" I am so thankful that the composers chose to put this great quality in the song. It is important for us to remember to laugh. As a solidifying point, Colonel Phil Needham wrote, "He Who Laughed First: Delighting in a Holy God."

It's a fact that our lives are serious. Recovery is serious business. Many times it means life or death for people. But, let's not forget that God created laughter as well as Holiness. When was the last time you laughed? I do not mean a chuckle or a wide smile with a "ha". I mean a belly laugh. Not there yet? Are you still struggling with the idea that you were quietly working on your devotional and you drew outside the line? Are you still focusing on the red mark outside the boundaries? Here's an idea, write down the truth in your journal. Remind yourself that you were conducting the Heavenly Host in song... and laugh while you're doing it! Powerless? Yes! Life feeling unmanageable. Yes! Do you believe a "power greater than yourself" will restore you? Yes! This, then, is something to rejoice and laugh out loud.

Let us jump back into the Academy Award-winning moving "The Sound of Music". Maria has been sent to be the governess for the von Trapp family. In the introduction scene she learns the children's mother has died and the father, Georg von Trapp has been raising them himself... similar to young officers under his command. After she has been introduced to the children and Mr. von Trapp exits the scene, Maria admits to the children that she has never been a governess before, and she will need a lot of help.

The children surround her. They start to tell her what she must do. It is rather silly when you hear them tell her to "be late for dinner" and to "slurp her soup". It is at this point that little Gretel yanks on Maria's dress and tells her not to pay attention to all the suggestions. Maria leans down and asks why. Little Gretel says; "Because I like you".

Do you know that God likes you? That He cares for you? Have you forgotten this? When was the last time you allowed the Holy Scriptures to reveal this truth to you? Have you ever allowed this truth to be real? Well, you're in luck today. **The 3rd step in recovery says; "Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God."**

I suggest you take a little more care than Maria did when she placed herself in the hands of a group of children who played nasty tricks and gave bad advice like "slurp your soup".

God cares for you. Philippians 1:6 says: "*...being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" In Philippians 2:13 "*...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*" These are from the New Testament, but they are founded in the Old Testament.

God, remembering his promise to separate a people to himself, raised up Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. If you remember, Moses had several issues himself. His first attempt at leading the Israelites to freedom began with murder! Then, after fleeing for his life, it took Moses 40 more years before God was able to get his attention. For instance, how long do you think the "burning bush" burned before Moses noticed it? How about the argument Moses had with God upon receiving his assignment? Thank goodness Moses answered the call of God on his life. Thank goodness you answered the call of God on your life! Remember, "*...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purposes.*"

Jump ahead a little in the story... Moses has led the people for 40 years, has viewed the Promised Land, and has died. Joshua, his helper, has now been commissioned by God, to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. One of the first things that God tells Joshua is, "***I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous...be strong and very courageous... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.***" (Joshua 1:5b-7b & 9)

Then, in Joshua 3:3-4 we find the Israelites moving forward, towards the floodwaters of the Jordan River. Joshua tells the Israelites, "***When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord our God... you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.***" What wonderful promises:

- **God will never leave us**
- **God will never forsake us**
- **God instructs us to be strong and courageous**
- **God instructs us not to be terrified (or afraid)**
- **God instructs us not to be discouraged.**

A very compassionate and comforting God we trust in. Not only will He be with us wherever we will go, but He will go before us, showing us the way... because we have "***never been this way before***".

Recovery is a strange concept. Yet, God who formed us in our mother's wombs (Psalm 139) knew all our struggles, all our failures, all our "miss-marks with a red pencil" and still tells us that He will go before us showing us the way! God truly cares for us. He truly cares where you are.

So, you and I have not been this way before –where to we start? At the beginning of course. In the movie, "The Sound of Music", there is a song, "Do, Re, Mi", the stanza says;

*"Let's start at the very beginning
A very good place to start
When you read, you begin with A-be-see
When you sing, you begin with do-re-mi"*

Spoiler alert and a word of caution. Sometimes we are so conditioned to drama and climatic endings we take a path that we know, but one that is not correct (or easy).

At the end of the movie, the von Trapp family is trying to get away (from the tyranny that wants them to compromise their beliefs and values). We watch as the family begins the ascent up into the Alps. The same Alps with snow-covered crags that we saw at the beginning of the moving. We understand that they will cross, and all will be well.

This is the "spoiler alert" ... The direction, over the Alps, would, in fact, take the von Trapp family into Germany! Maria von Trapp, during an interview, calmly states that anyone who knows geography would know this. The truth was, that all they did was leave their Villa and board a train to Switzerland. Very undramatic!

Sometimes the drama we're used to only works out in the movies. Reality can be so much more boring. In recovery, our view of freedom may look like we have to cross the Alps, but the reality is, all we have to do is take the beginning step, then the next, then the next. Our calling, as our value, has been predetermined. Our hope is in Heaven.

I want to encourage you, be reconciled to God. Whether you are just realizing that your life is unmanageable, or you have been working a recovery program for years, sometimes we just have to start at the beginning – right where we are – and be reconciled to God. He will take it from there.

*Song: I will build again the foundation
(author unknown)*

*I will build again the foundations,
I will make up the breaches thereof
I will raise up many generations
I will heal, I will heal, saith the Lord.
I will restore what the worm has eaten,
I will restore what the locust has destroyed
I will come and bring again my people
I will heal, I will heal, saith the Lord*