

Surprise! (or The Real Conversation between Ananias and God)

by Susie Ford, guest speaker

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“Now, there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. Just now he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come and lay his hands on him so that he may regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “I have heard from many about this man, about how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument I have chosen to bring my name before the Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Ananias: OK! OK! Don't leave yet. Help me process this a little. I'm afraid for my life, and you want me to do it anyway? Can't I just leave him blind and give him what he deserves? What is there to see anyway? Me? Oh, you want him to see me – You want me to be there to nurture him back to health. WHAT – ARE YOU CRAZY? Oh, sorry Lord – I forgot who I was talking to for a minute.

God: I AM WHAT I AM. Get over it.

Ananias: What? Get over what?

God: Get over your fear. Fear is captivity to sin.

Ananias: Come again? What's that you say?

(silence)

Oh come on! Get over my fear? My fear is rational. This man is breathing threats and murder. What if I go there and he hasn't changed? What if this is some kind of ruse? I mean, it says right here (go to bible passage) in Acts 8:3, But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging of both men and women, he committed them to prison. And once we're in prison, we're dead. He wants to silence the church. What if it goes wrong? What if he ravages Damascus? If I go there and this goes wrong, the church is doomed. I AM RATIONAL!!

God: I AM what I AM. Get over it.

Ananias: You already said that. Is there something else I should get over?

God: Get over your RATIONAL expectations. My way is not your way.

Ananias: Let me get this right. What do you want me to do?

(silence)

Your way is not my way? Yeh, no kidding! If it was up to me, I wouldn't have me go out looking for Saul. I'd be sensible about it. I don't think you've planned it out very well. For example, what if I decide not to go? Then what? Don't count on me. I already told you, I'd rather see him stay blind – at least for a little while. You gave me free will. I can say no.

God: Right.

Ananias: What? Now you're agreeing with me? How does that challenge me? Aren't you going to say Get over it?

God: I AM what I AM. Get over it.

Ananias: What now?

God: Get over thinking I can't do it without you. Choose.

Ananias: Sorry? Either I wasn't listening, or you said, "Choose." Could you speak a little louder?

(silence)

But will I suffer Lord?

God (whispered): My spirit is with you.

Ananias: So – there it is. You were eavesdropping – you heard that, didn't you? Well, then, let me ask you – what would you do? I mean, think about it. Would you just go out there and – and *believe* that God is working her purpose out? Or what about bringing a murderer into your fold without any regard for the safety of others – and especially for the children among us?

I'm sorry – this is inappropriate. I can't ask you to figure this out for me, I need to decide for myself. Alright, then the first thing I need to do is to make sense out of our

conversation. God doesn't provide many details. So maybe you can help me fill in the blanks. I mean, I heard "I AM what I AM. Get over it." That part was loud and clear. But what was I supposed to get over?

Let's see – what did God say first? Get over your fear. Did he say fear is captivity to sin? What did he mean by that? Hmm...what do I know about sin? Peter said sin is anything that gets in the way between humans and God. It can be a personal failing, like being dependent on things instead of God. It can be structural, like racism or classism, that stands in the way of the Kingdom of God. What do I know about fear? Well, I know for sure it paralyzes us. It keeps us from acting. Oh – I know. It keeps us from *trusting* God. When the scriptures talk about fearing God, that is a natural fear of the divine, but it actually means to *put all my trust in* God. I can't trust if I'm fearful of some earthly event. So fear is sin, if I'm captive to fear, I'm captive to sin. And God wants to release us from our captivity. OK, if I'm supposed to build up the Kingdom of God I can't be afraid. That make sense.

So, what was the next thing God told me? "Get over your rational expectations. My way is not your way." Well. the second part is easy to understand. God's way is not my way. If it was, I wouldn't be having this conundrum. But what about that first part? "Get over you rational expectations." But aren't we created to be rational beings? Whatever it is that I expect to happen according to my rational, human mind, it won't happen. If God acts, the only thing I can expect is to be surprised. Oh – and I am expecting doom. God's actions are never doomed. I AM what I AM. Let God be God. God's actions are never doomed. When God acts, something surprising will always happen. I think I'm starting to get it. If I'm supposed to build up the

Kingdom of God, I can't do it my way. If I try, I'll never get anywhere. It's God's mission, so it must be God's actions. I have to rely on God.

And what was that third thing he said? Get over thinking I can't do it without you. That sounds like God will act whether I decide to go or not. I can't possibly stand in the way of God's actions, even if I refuse to budge. Why then, should I go? Saul is going to be God's chosen instrument, whether I go or not. But there was more – CHOOSE, she said. But choose what? Wait – God is choosing me. She is asking me. She is – *inviting me to participate* in this great mission. So I must choose. I can choose to take a chance, and, even if I don't know where I'm going, to participate in God's incredible plan for the world, or I can be safe and secure, and miss out on it.

Well, I hear you loud and clear now, Lord. Get over my fears, get over my rational expectations, and choose to participate in this crazy, upside-down, everything-backward magnificent plan of yours. OK. I accept your invitation.

God: (whispered) My spirit is with you...

Ananias: (Turn toward congregation) Oh – and thank you. If you hadn't been listening, I might not have been able to figure this out. Would you like to come along?

(Go to Stage Right). "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

(Turn toward congregation) “And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.”