

Reflection on Sunday 25 January 2026

by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Reading: Acts 9. 1-22

Two words that can change the world

I want to talk about the power that two words can have.

But first, here's a question: did anyone take part in a Secret Santa gift exchange this Christmas?

In case you haven't heard of Secret Santa (and that's not the two words, by the way), it's where a group of people draw names out of a hat or are allocated a name digitally online and they buy a present for that person anonymously. There's usually a cost restriction – no more than £10 or something like that – and sometimes you get clues as to what that person would like... this person likes candles or chocolate or cooking.

My extended family arranged a Secret Santa exchange this Christmas. I registered my interests as cricket, football, music. And someone gave me a book on Keeping Chickens – *Keeping Chickens and Other Poultry; looking after hens, ducks, geese and turkeys*. Now, I suppose you could argue that keeping hens is a kind of sport, but I don't think it qualifies.

After my initial surprise, however, I started reading this book and found it really interesting. I didn't know that there was so much information out there about chickens! The different types of chickens, the history of chickens, what they like or don't like, how they socialise, what their characteristics are. They all have different personalities. In fact, a flock of chickens is like the human race.

Now, in the Bible, Christ calls Himself a shepherd: John 10: verse 11 – *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep*. But he could easily have called himself a poultry farmer. It wouldn't have created the same cuddly, woolly image to call his followers pecking, scratchy chickens but it wouldn't have been wrong either.

Chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys like to be fed, led and loved just like sheep. They are sociable and fit in with the flock in their different ways, some making a lot of noise, others just mildly minding their own chicken business, getting on with their unobtrusive chicken lives.

So, I was thinking a lot about chickens when I re-read the familiar story of Saul's conversion. Here's the proud, self-important cockerel, strutting his stuff on the road to Damascus when there's a blinding light, and a voice from heaven. I don't know whether you've ever seen chickens when there's a sudden loud noise? They freeze and flatten themselves on the ground, just like Saul did. Once they've got over the shock of the noise, the hens will gather round the cockerel and flutter off together, pecking and scratching on their way.

Now, a strutting cockerel is no good on his own. You don't get eggs without passive hens. And tucked quietly into the story of Saul's conversion is a member of the flock whose faithfulness makes Saul's transformation possible.

His name is Ananias. He performs no miracles, writes no letters of Scripture, and preaches no recorded sermons. Yet without Ananias, the obedient member of Christ's flock, the story of Saul – who becomes Paul – would look very different.

Ananias appears as an ordinary disciple in Damascus. He is not seeking attention, not asking for a mission. But the Lord speaks to him in a vision and calls him by name: '*Ananias.*' His response is simple and faithful and these are my two words: '*Yes, Lord.*'

That response teaches us something vital. God often works through ordinary chickens in the flock, people who are listening, people who make themselves available. It's not always the colourful members of the brood who get the call.

God tells Ananias to go to a specific house and lay his hands on Saul of Tarsus. Ananias immediately objects. And his objection is reasonable. Saul is notorious. He has imprisoned believers, overseen executions, and

come to Damascus with authority to arrest followers of Jesus. Ananias knows the danger. His fear is not cowardice; it is just realism.

What's striking is that God does not scold Ananias for his fear. Instead, God reveals His greater purpose: *This man is my chosen instrument.* Ananias is invited into God's plan, not because he is fearless, but because he is willing. Courage, so often in Scripture, is not the absence of fear, it is obedience in the presence of fear. And Ananias goes.

When he enters the house, he does not accuse Saul or lecture him. He does something quite astonishing. He calls him 'Brother Saul.' Saul is still blind. He has not preached, repented publicly, or proven himself. Yet Ananias speaks gracefully before Saul has earned it. This is at the heart of Christianity: seeing people not only as they appear, but as God sees them.

Ananias lays his hands on Saul, and immediately Saul receives his sight. But something even more important happens. Saul receives the Holy Spirit. God could have healed Saul directly, but He chooses to use a human disciple as the channel of restoration. This is how God often works: not bypassing His people but involving them.

After this, Ananias fades from the story. Saul begins to preach. The spotlight shifts. But Ananias's obedience echoes through history. Every church planted by Paul, every letter written, every life changed can be traced back, in part, to the courage of one faithful chicken who said, 'Yes, Lord, I'll take a risk'.

My analogy of Christ's followers being like chickens is a bit of a comic stretch, I realise that. But, as we spend our lives scratching around and pecking for seeds and clucking to the chickens around us, we should also be listening for when God speaks to us. His call may not be a dramatic Road to Damascus experience but a quiet word in your ear from someone you know or an unexpected thought that comes into your head when you're doing the washing up or something you read in the newspaper or see online.

And when it happens, we have to be willing to go where the path might be uncomfortable. We have to be able to say those two important words:

'Yes, Lord.' Meaning *'Here I am'*. You won't know when it's going to happen, like Ananias didn't know. But tuck some readiness in a safe place because it could happen any day and, with an open mind, you will know when it does.

Good luck. Amen.

