

ACTS: Advance – “Purposeful Persecution” (Acts 7:54-8:8)

For the week of January 24, 2016

Testimony

Have a volunteer share their testimony (5-10 minutes) if there are still members who have not had an opportunity to share.

Tell the Story

Summarize or tell the story of Acts 7:54-8:8. Then read the passage. As a group discuss any missing details from the telling of the story. Finally, rebuild the story as a group.

Acts 7:54-60

1. People may not kill us for witnessing about Christ, but they may let us know they don't want to hear the truth and even try to silence us. Why is honoring God through your conduct and words important when you face resistance or outright hostility towards the gospel? Give an example of each (conduct and words).

2. Christ promised his followers that living for him would lead to trouble (read Luke 21:12-19). This is still true today. If we boldly live out our faith, the light of our lives will expose the sinfulness of others. Our words of truth will be convicting. Some will yield to the leading of the Spirit while others will become angry and hardened in their hatred of the truth. Contrast what it looks like to be a follower of Christ and live out your faith vs. being a follower of Christ and not living out your faith. Can you be a silent Christian?
3. Saul (Hebrew name) or Paul (Greek name) is introduced in 7:58. When Luke introduces him, Paul is going everywhere persecuting Jesus' followers. This is in great contrast to the Paul which Luke wrote about for most of the book of Acts, describing him as a devoted follower of Christ and gifted preacher. Paul is a powerful example of a person who was thought impossible for God to reach and change. But he did! Identify someone you know (it could even be you!) that you felt was impossible for God to reach...but he did! Share in your group.

Acts 8:1-3

4. Persecution pushed the Christians beyond Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria, thus fulfilling the second part of Jesus' command (see Acts 1:8). The persecution helped spread the Good News. So persecution forced believers out of their homes. Do you agree with the following statement? Discuss in your group.

"Sometimes we have to become uncomfortable before we'll move. Discomfort may be best for us because God may be working through our hurts. When you are tempted to complain about painful circumstances, stop and ask if God might be preparing you for a special task."

Have you experienced a time in your life when a painful circumstance was used by God for a special task?

Acts 8:4-8

5. Who is doing the preaching of the word in these verses and what is the significance of that?

6. Apparently, when the Christians were all together under the powerful and gifted leadership of the apostles, they had been fairly passive in their ministry. They had simply brought their friends to hear the "great preaching" at the church in Jerusalem. But when they were scattered, away from their leaders, they gathered up the courage to communicate themselves what they had learned. The result was that, though they were probably less eloquent than the apostles, they were in the end more effective. Why? How is this applied today?

Pray

Lift up in prayer Matt, Alicia, Isaiah and Eliana Vorhees. Pray for God's protection on their family. Pray for God's leading as Matt takes on the Senior Pastor position. Pray for God's continued guidance and direction of his church at RiverLakes.

Final Thought

How did Christianity spread in 300 years from a handful of people into every nook and cranny of the Roman Empire? Why did Christianity triumph in a world of dozens and dozens of competing religions and philosophies? Every Christian evangelized wherever they went. Every one of us has the responsibility to "preach the good news." God will use you if you're willing!