

Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

Go Therefore: Acts 8:1 – 4, April 11th, 2021

I. Starter Questions:

- Who is someone in your life who is bold? What is it about them that makes them bold?
- When has God used something that you did not want to go through for his glory and your good?

II. Discussion of Scripture:

Context:

Stephen, after doing great signs and wonders was seized due to the testimony of false witnesses. He then spoke to the people of Jerusalem and confronted them with their history of stubborn rebellion against the Lord and his chosen servants. He claimed that as they rejected the prophets of the past, now they have rejected Jesus, the Lord's Messiah.

Once Stephen was finished, the crowd was enraged and after laying their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul, they stoned Stephen. With Stephen's final breaths he cried out to the Lord in a loud voice and said "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." This brings us to perhaps one of the lowest points in the book of Acts as things got even more difficult for those in the early church.

Acts 8:1-4:

¹ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. ⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Acts 7:54-60. What was Saul's role in Stephen's persecution?

Acts 7: 54-60

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. But they cried out

with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

2. What do Stephen's final words before he died, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!", foreshadow about Saul?
3. In verse one, why didn't the apostles scatter?
4. Who were the devout men who buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him?
5. What do the phrases "house to house" and "he dragged off men and women" in verse 3 reveal to us about Saul's persecution of the church? Read Acts 26:9-11 to hear more about how he persecuted the church.

Acts 26:9-11

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them even in foreign cities."

6. To what regions was the church scattered, and how does this relate to Christ's command in Acts 1:7-8?
7. How would you be tempted to feel if you were forced to move because of your faith to protect yourself or your family?
8. How did those who were scattered respond and what can we infer about them from their response?
9. How could this instruct our response to difficulties that the Lord allows in our lives?
10. Read Acts 11:19-21. What was the result of this persecution?

Acts 11:19-21

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and great numbers who believed turned to the Lord.

11. If repentance is still possible even for Saul and the people of Israel who rejected Jesus and stoned Stephen for proclaiming the truth about Jesus, what does this teach us about the grace and mercy of God?
12. What do we know about God that gives us hope and sustains us in times of trial and suffering? What specific passages of Scripture remind us of these things?
13. What steps can we take to remember these truths and to remind one another of them in all of our circumstances?

14. Viewing the early church as a model, what might it look like for us to go about preaching the word today?
15. What about your present circumstances might the Lord be using to provide opportunities for you to share the gospel and to help you grow in boldness?

III. After today's study what can I apply to my life?

- Pray that God would embolden us through difficulty. That we would depend more desperately upon him, that he would strengthen our faith, and that he would use hard times to give us opportunities to share the gospel with the lost.
- Thank God for his faithfulness and his promises. Praise him for working all things together for the good of those who love him.
- Pray that God would help us to trust in his sovereign plan regardless of our circumstances.

The Cure by John Lynch, Bruce Mc Nicol, and Bill Thrall

Transforming Grace by Jerry Bridges

A Praying Life by Paul Miller

The Insanity of God by Nik Ripken