

TAKEAWAY:

Ordinary Christians can produce extraordinary change when we commit to proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- Share about a time when someone's simple act of kindness or words made a significant impact on your life. What made it memorable?
- In your opinion, what does “lukewarm” Christianity look like?
- Share an example of when you have seen the gospel have an “extraordinary” impact on someone's life?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 8:1-8

- How did this sermon help you better understand this passage of scripture? Is there anything that was mentioned during the sermon that stuck out to you?
- What surprises you about how the gospel spread in Acts 8?
- How did persecution actually help advance the gospel rather than stop it? What does this teach us about God's sovereignty over difficult circumstances?
- The early Christians were described as ordinary people empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel. What prevents ordinary Christians today from having the same gospel impact in their communities?
- Philip went to Samaria, a place Jews typically avoided due to racial tension. What does this reveal about the reach of the gospel and who it's for?

APPLICATION:

- The text emphasizes both proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds as essential to gospel witness. How balanced is your own Christian witness between these two expressions, and which needs more attention?
- The sermon referenced Dr. King's observation that “lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” How does this challenge apply to our Christian witness today? Where might you be sympathetic to the gospel cause but not actively participating?
- The early Christians faced persecution, yet still shared their faith. What circumstances in your life do you view as barriers to sharing the gospel that God might actually be using as bridges?

GO DEEPER:

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material.

You can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting and to deepen your study of our text from this week. Here are two "Going Deeper" discussion prompts that build upon the above provided questions without repeating them:

Professional vs. Ordinary: Acts 8 exemplifies a key doctrine called the "Priesthood of All Believers" (see 1 Peter 2:9; Eph 4:11-12); it marks a transition from the Jerusalem-centered apostolic ministry to a Spirit-led lay movement: The Apostles (the professional clergy) remained in Jerusalem (v. 1) while ordinary believers "preached the word" (v. 4) and did Christian acts of service (vv. 7-8).

- People often distrust or can't relate to those who have paid positions in the church. Further, when a "professional" preaches, people admire their skill, but when a "refugee" preaches, people must reckon with the reality of their faith. What "credentials" did those "scattered," ordinary refugees, have for gospel witness/service? How did their lack of formal training make them relatable and effective to the Samaritans? In what ways can your lack of professional polish be an asset that allows others to look at what Jesus has done in your life and can also do in theirs? How does the witness of an "ordinary" Christian (who isn't paid to love Jesus) carry a different kind of weight with a skeptic than the witness of a pastor?
- Professional ministry often relies on "strength" (budget, strategy, and platform). The ministry in Acts 8 relied on "weakness" (displacement, poverty, and fear), prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Discuss this contrast in light of 1 Cor 1:17-31; 2 Cor 12:9. How does ministering from a position of weakness not strength challenge our modern idea that we need to have our lives "perfectly together" before we either share the gospel or help others in need? Is there an area you've been waiting for "permission" or "expertise" to do, where God might simply be waiting for you to step out as you are and do it?
- The scattered believers were forced into areas not of their choosing. This can also happen in our lives by way of loss, geographical moves, crises, etc. Is there an interruption in your life or that of someone you know whom we can pray for, that will allow you/them to be God's witness to others.
- The scattered believers likely shared the gospel at "tables" and in marketplaces of those who were ethnically different from them. Who's in your life who may sit at your table but not come to church, be your neighbor in need, or shop at your marketplace? Who is that non-believing person whom God has unexpectedly put in front of you that is either ethnically different from you or has a different world view than your Christian worldview?

The Cost of "Lukewarm" Safety: The sermon references Dr. King's quote on lukewarm acceptance (see below) and contrasts it with the early church's scattering. The early Christians lost their safety (homes) but found their purpose. Often, in modern Christianity we cling to safety and subsequently lose our purpose.

- *"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the African American's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate... Who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"... Who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable*

for another man's freedom and lives by a mythical concept of time constantly advising us to wait for a "more convenient season. Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

- "What if the greatest threat to the Kingdom of God impacting a place as deeply as it could is the professing Christian who sympathizes with Christianity, yet fails to play their part in the mission of God?" Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and focus in on verse 5. What do you think Paul means? How is it possible to hold to a form of godliness and yet deny its power? How do you think King's quote above relates to Paul's warning to Timothy?
- Read Psalm 11. It's safe to say that as a modern western society we are obsessed with "safety". From seatbelts to helmets to rubber mulch to disability insurance to alarm systems there are entire industries built on mitigating risk. Psalm 11 addresses the question of safety. What do you think the main point of Psalm 11 is when it comes to security and safety in our lives and what are the implications for how we live?
- If "extraordinary change" requires risking our comfort, what specific "safety net" (i.e. social reputation, financial security, fear of awkwardness) is currently preventing you from moving from a "lukewarm" witness to a "hot" one?

Related Quotes:

- "There was great joy in that city... It was a joy born of a great sorrow. Usually that is the best kind of joy. The good which comes to us through that which is apparently an evil, is usually the best of all good things... They were scattered, and that was a grief; but they went everywhere preaching the word, and that was a glory." Charles Spurgeon
- "Philip is the vessel of this mercy, bringing both light to their minds (preaching) and relief to their bodies (healing). It shows us that the work of redemption is a work of restoration—restoring the creature to the Creator and to himself." Jonathan Edwards
- "The devil overreached himself. He had hoped to destroy the church; instead he succeeded only in extending it... The diaspora (dispersion) of the disciples led to the diaspora of the word. They were like seed seemingly lost in the earth, but destined to bear much fruit." John Stott
- "This is the moment when the 'Samaria' part of the Acts 1:8 mandate comes true... It happens not through a planned mission committee meeting The gospel is about God putting the world to rights, and that includes our physical bodies and our social relationships. When Philip went to Samaria, he was showing that God's healing justice ignores our human borders." N. T. Wright
- John Piper, in an often quoted thought of his, states, "'So there was much joy in that city.' Why? Because Philip didn't just bring a new philosophy.... The joy of the city was the joy of freedom. **Mission exists because joy doesn't.** Philip went to Samaria to export the joy of Jesus to a place that had only known the misery of magic and division."

PRAYER:

Ask the Lord to open doors to proclaim the gospel and serve others. Open the prayer time for members of your group to pray for people they know specifically by name that need to hear the gospel truth and that they would have an opportunity to share it with them.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE:

Plan one service project together with your group's local mission partner that addresses a need in your community.