



## WARM-UP

We recommend you choose 1 or 2 of the following questions.

Have you ever had someone point out one of your blind spots or tried to point out someone else's? How'd that go?

What prejudices did you grow up around?

If you could have one superpower what would it be and why would you choose it?

## WORD

*"And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

*When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter*



## WORD CONTINUED

*and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

*When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages."*

**- Acts 8:1-25 (NIV)**

## INTRODUCTION

No one wants to suffer, and few would initially see suffering as part of the purpose and will of God, but the story of Stephen reveals that deliverance from personal suffering is not the ultimate goal of Christian service.

The goal is glorifying God and seeking the advancement of his kingdom. When we encounter suffering, our first inclination is to pray for immediate deliverance. Perhaps our prayers should include a request for boldness in the moment, vision for eternity, and for God's will to be done. The suffering of Stephen led to the first great expansion of the early Church.



## DISCUSSION

1. What effect might Saul's approval have had on the crowd that ended up stoning Stephen? What role do you think witnessing Stephen's stoning might have had in Saul's subsequent persecution of the church? (v.1-3)
2. What role did Stephen's death play in the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8? (v.4-8, 14, 25) What does this say about God?
3. Despite Jesus' clear commandment, the church did not go to Samaria to preach the gospel until they were forced to leave Jerusalem due to persecution. Do you think the Jews' prejudice against the Samaritans may have contributed to this delay? (John 4:9) Can you identify any prejudices that might be hindering you from sharing the gospel with specific individuals or groups?
4. What motivated Philip to go to Samaria? (v.4-5) What motivated Peter and John to go to Samaria? (v.14-17) Which motivation for ministering to others and spreading the gospel do you most closely associate with and why?
5. What motivated Simon to believe the gospel? (v.13, 18-20) What motivated you to become a believer? How has that changed or stayed the same as you've grown in God?

## APPLICATION

1. It took Stephen's death and the subsequent persecution to motivate the church to obey Acts 1:8. Is there anywhere in your life that you've hesitated to follow God or share Jesus with others? How can you take a step of obedience this week rather than wait for persecution?
2. Are there any people that you may have overlooked sharing the gospel with or reaching out to because of your prejudice. Take a step this week to break down that prejudice and reach out.



## APPLICATION CONTINUED

3. Have you had any wrong motives for following Jesus? Take a moment this week and get your heart right with God through simple humility and repentance.

## PRAYER

1. Ask God to show you any areas where you are not fully following him with all your heart. Ask God to help you pursue him in full obedience.
2. Ask God to show you any prejudices against others that you might have and any people you might have been 'blind' toward. Ask God to help you see them the way that he does and to show you how you can show them God's love.
3. Ask God to purify your heart from wrong motives and give you right motives in following Jesus and helping others.