



ACTS

OUT OF JOY / THE CHURCH MULTIPLIES

GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS

WEEK 6

SCATTERED TO GATHER (ACTS 8-12)

VERSE FOR MEDITATION

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria....Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ACTS 8:1,4

OPENING THOUGHT

Movements of multiplication struggle to get off the ground in many churches due to an unhealthy, unbiblical dependence on professional pastors. Pastors, according to Greg Ogden's book *Unfinished Business*, are traditionally identified by churchgoers according to four common roles: teacher of doctrinal tradition, caregiver (hospital visits), public symbol of the sacred (head of church in public life) and presider over rites of passage (baptisms, marriages, funerals).

While these functions are all positive aspects of shepherding, they could overshadow the pastor's primary responsibility, allowing many to comfortably and passively receive. Paul states that God "gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). Pastors are, thus, primarily leaders or directors in the multiplying of disciples.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, modeled this role of ministry by entrusting His message not to the masses but to the few—not as a public face but as a mentor to a handful of disciples. In

his famous book on discipleship, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert E. Coleman notes:

Though he (Jesus) did what he could to help the multitudes, he had to devote himself primarily to a few men, rather than the masses, so that the masses could at last be saved. This was the genius of the strategy. Yet, strangely enough, it is scarcely comprehended in practice today. Most of the evangelistic methods of the church begin with the multitudes under the assumption that the church is qualified to preserve what good is done. The result is our spectacular emphasis on number of converts, candidates for baptism, and more members for the church, with little or no genuine concern manifested toward the establishment of these souls in the love and power of God, let alone the preservation and continuation of the work...A few people so dedicated in time will shake the world for God. Victory is never won by the multitudes.

Like mustard seeds and leaven, the kingdom of God advances when regular Christians, not just pastors, work their way relationally into a few lives that then work their way relationally into the lives of others. The church members, not just the pastors, have a part to play in the movement. In a sense, we should consider it our duty to continue and multiply the work pastors begin.

QUESTIONS

Read Acts 8-9 and answer the following questions.

1. The gospel message began to spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. Assuming we, personally and as a group, have identified our “Jerusalem” or those closest to us in need of Christ, who might our “Judea and Samaria” be? Are they those outside our closest networks of friends and family but still far from God? How might we engage them with the gospel?
2. God’s choice of Paul—the chief of sinners—to be His messenger of the gospel to the Gentiles should give us great hope that, for one, the arm of the Lord is not too short to save (Isa 59:1) and, even more, that God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). What sins or shortcomings have we used as an excuse not to be a messenger of the gospel?

Read Acts 10-11:18 and answer the following questions.

3. God's plan for the disciples to reach the nations would not be accomplished with their currently held racial prejudices. Why was Peter's revelation so groundbreaking and so necessary for the mission?

4. What prejudices based on gender, race and socio-economic status prove a hindrance to multiplication for our church and our group and for us as individuals?

Read Acts 11:19-12:25 and answer the following question.

5. Each section of Acts consistently gets summed up like verse 24 of chapter 12: "the word of God increased and multiplied." Yet, while the mission began in Luke's account, it is not actually accomplished within the 28 chapters of this book. John Polhill writes in *The New American Commentary*, "The ends of the earth are never reached in Acts. The mission goal is never completed. It remains open, yet to be fulfilled...each ending is the starting point for a new beginning." Acts is building up to something, begging for a new movement. How can you, your group and the church initiate a new movement of multiplication?

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Seek to overcome an unhealthy dependence on your pastors by taking initiative in your spiritual development.
- Consider how you or your group might support a missionary, perhaps through care, prayer, finances, etc.
- Consider who you might consider common or unclean and thereby unworthy of the gospel. Repent and pursue more diverse relationships.