

The Way of the Early Church, Part 4: Persecution!

Remember, small groups are primarily for growing closer relationships with other believers. We can learn wonderful things in this environment but keep relationships first.

- Make sure everyone knows each other's names. Have everyone share a little about themselves and how life is going right now.
- **The Way of the Early Church**
 - In this series we unlock several powerful eternal principles in order to see God do mighty things!
- **This Week: Persecution**
- Everything was going great. They had solved a major internal problem. However, now they have a major external problem.
 - Stephen, one of the Seven, gets stoned to death and a great persecution broke out!
- **Acts 8:1-3**
 - This is a major hinge point in church history regarding **Acts 1:8** and **Matthew 28:18-20**.
 - The believers had not yet conceived of the idea that salvation could be extended to the Gentiles.
 - They had stayed in Jerusalem. They were not going out.
 - Do you think God gave them a strong push out of Jerusalem so they would reach the nations?
- **Acts 8:4** Off they go!
 - What if they had done that before the persecution?
- Philip's headlines:
 - **Acts 8:5-8**. That's good stuff! Great evangelism is happening!
 - **Acts 8:9-13**. Even a sorcerer is converted!
 - **Acts 8:14**. The Apostles investigate. He is in Samaria by the way!
 - **Acts 8:15-17**. Philips told the message performed miracles, but the Holy Spirit came on them when the Apostles arrived! Why do you think it happened that way?
 - Simon the sorcerer gets in some trouble, but hey, that can happen...
 - **Acts 8:26, 8:29-35**. That's a God moment! The Eunuch get's baptized!
 - Philip continues to preach all over that region up to Caesarea!
- Lesson's to learn from this:
- First, Obey God when things are going well.
 - They had forgotten to go make disciples of all nations. Things were nice.
 - Is it hard to believe that they forgot the Great Commission?
 - Does the Great Commission apply to us as well?
 - It's not the Great Suggestion! Have today's believers forgotten too??!!
 - We must not be complicit with darkness because we are comfortable and self-centered.
 - What does God think of that? Discuss this for a while.
- Second, God knows what he is doing even when things are hard.
 - The persecution was very painful, but the Gospel was still spread according to God's plan.
 - There is no record of any believers getting mad at God here.
 - Two types of people: those who love God when things are good but get mad when things are hard, vs those who are complacent but cry out to God when hardships hit.
 - They just trusted God all the time!
 - Self evaluate, but trust God and be at peace whatever the trial!
- Third, the Gospel is for everyone, not just people like you.
 - Philip goes to the Samaritans!!!!!!!!!! They get saved and belong!!!!!!!!!!
 - Not only were they forced out of their comfort zone, but they had to welcome in people they hated!
 - The Gospel is still for everyone, not just the people that you like.
- Last point, God expects every believer (you too!) to be part of the solution.
 - **Ephesians 5:15-16**. What opportunities are in front of you?
 - Stay hungry. Stay diligent. Live out your purpose in Christ!
 - Pray for each other before you finish up!