

Sermon Based Small Group Guide

For January 3, 2021 sermon:

Empowered (Book of Acts): "Good News for the neighbor you don't like"

Warm up: (Questions for discussion)

What is one way you grew through the challenges of 2020?

What are you asking God to do in you, our church and our nation in 2021?

What do you feel you need to be more confident in sharing your faith?

Digging deeper: (20-30 minutes)

1. Jesus told his followers to "wait" in Jerusalem until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit but then they were to go and share the Good News of who he was and what he had done (forgiveness of sins, salvation) with everyone. When we get to Acts 8 it is obvious that it wasn't until severe persecution broke out against believers that they scattered and spread the Gospel. Read the following passages and see how God uses detours and disruptions to move His people into the right places to use them.

Genesis 39:19-23, 41:9-13, 41:37-41 Daniel 1:1-6, 1:18-21, 2:26-28, 2:48-49

Can you think of other examples of this principle in the Bible (ie: Moses, etc.)?

2. Luke, the writer of Acts, uses the experiences of Philip as one example of how the scattered believers were being used by God. Philip was a fellow "deacon" with Stephen (who was killed for his faith). He finds himself in Samaria...the same area where Jesus talked with the woman at the well (John 4). "Devout Jews" and Samaritans generally hated each other for reasons that dated back hundreds of years, but both Jesus and Philip find them to be very open to spiritual truth. Read the following verses and talk about the truth contained in them that shows we ALL have the same issues and needs:

1 John 1:8

John 8:1-11

Romans 3:10-12

3. The story of Simon the sorcerer is complex and sobering for a number of reasons. We assume that when it says in Acts 8:13 that "he believed and was baptized" that he must have been truly converted/saved, but then Peter comes and pronounces him "wicked" and "held captive by sin" and warns him to repent. Here's what I want you to discuss, allowing freedom and grace for people to express both their thoughts and questions: "Has our idea of being 'right with God' been reduced to a simple formula where we agree with 4 or 5 spiritual laws and pray a brief prayer? What does it really mean to be a Christian? Can a person be saved but not change and grow?"

How do James 2:14-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 speak to this?

Apply it: (10 minutes)

This week, read Matthew chapter 7 multiple times. This is the final part of "the sermon on the mount" and Jesus talks very clearly about what it looks like to be his follower, in right relationship with God and other people. Let Jesus' own words challenge you!