

TAKEAWAY:

God wants surrendered hearts, not spiritual shortcuts.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- In what ways have you seen God move in your life or someone else's life recently?
- At what times in your life has it been hard to see God move?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 8:9-25

- 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?
- Simon was drawn to the visible effects of God's power but not to God Himself. In what areas of life are we most tempted to want the results of spiritual maturity without the process of getting there?
- Peter's rebuke to Simon is sharp but ultimately an invitation to repentance. Think of a time someone corrected you. How did you respond, and what made the difference between receiving it well or poorly?
- The apostles traveled to Samaria specifically to affirm and celebrate what God was doing there. What does it look like for your group to celebrate the Spirit's work rather than try to manage or control it?
- Acts 8:22 calls Simon to repent and pray that God might forgive the intent of his heart. What does it mean to bring the intentions behind your actions before God, not just the actions themselves?

APPLICATION:

- What's one area in your life where you are seeking a result without the surrender that should come with it?
- If there is a correction or rebuke you have been resisting, take a step toward receiving it. Consider reaching out to the person who offered it and having an honest conversation.

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:

Getting to the heart of the matter: Some English Bibles translate the Greek phrase *cholēn pikrias* of v. 23 as either "the gall of bitterness" or "full of bitterness." That's a literal translation of those two words that

doesn't do justice to a key point of Peter's rebuke of Simon. This original Greek phrase was often used as an idiom to refer to an envious or resentful person. Peter rebukes Simon for his jealousy of the apostles' ability to bestow the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.

- When interpreting passages like Acts 9:23, what tools help you better understand the text? Typically, a good study Bible is sufficient for someone's devotional time.
- What English translation of the Bible do you read from and why? Click [here](#), for a discussion on the key differences between Bible translations, their strength and weaknesses, etc.
- Sometimes we're not aware of unresolved internal sins and hidden resentments—either in our heart or someone else's. What steps can you and/or a Christian community take to regularly and safely audit their hearts for internal, hidden flaws without making it like the inquisitions of old? How might corporate prayer help in this regard? Preaching? Worship? Community fellowship? The “iron-sharpening-iron” dynamic of living and working together for Christ?
- Why might Philip, despite being filled with the Spirit, have missed the deep-seated, systemic issues in Simon's heart that Peter later identified? How might we apply this lesson to our own personal life—whether we find ourselves in the role of Stephen, Simon, or Peter?
- Ultimately, the text of Acts 8 encourages both Christian leaders and congregants to ask themselves questions: Am I (are we) pursuing God's blessings to build our own kingdoms? What internal motivations propel our outward actions? Do I/we possess a surrendered heart? Is our heart, and therefore our prayers and actions, turned inward toward the love of self(gain) or outward toward the love of God and neighbor?

The Community's Role in Spiritual Discernment: Philip baptized Simon, but Peter and John recognized his false motives. Think through what this teaches us about the necessity of plural leadership and community accountability in discerning true transformation.

- Why might Philip, despite being filled with the Spirit, have missed the deep-seated, systemic issues in Simon's heart that Peter later identified?
- How does this narrative explicitly highlight the danger of isolating ourselves from a broader, diverse Christian community?
- Why is it structurally and theologically important for church leadership to operate in a plurality rather than relying on a single charismatic figure?
- How can we cultivate a trusting community environment in our Life Group where we actively invite others to point out our spiritual blind spots?
- What is the fundamental difference between destructive judgmentalism and biblical, communal, loving discernment?

QUOTES:

- **A.W. Tozer:** "The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One... He may be deprived of his earthly treasures, but he cannot be deprived of his True Treasure, which is God Himself. Let us beware lest we seek the gifts of the Giver, rather than the Giver of the gifts."
- **Augustine of Hippo:** "Two loves, then, have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city, and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city. Thus the former glories in itself, and the latter glories in the Lord."
- **Martin Luther:** "Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin [i.e., Adam & Eve's], so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them ... but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly ... viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake."
- **Andrew Murray:** "God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.... The surrendered heart is the only vessel that can contain the fullness of the Spirit, for God will not pour His power into a heart that seeks to use it for its own glory."
- **Jonathan Edwards:** "The premier sign of a truly gracious heart is a holy, disinterested love of God for His own sake, and not merely for what He can do for us. Hypocrites love God for the benefits

they receive, but the saint loves God for the beauty of His holiness."

Group Prayer: Share prayer requests, and have each person in the group pray for the person on their left.