

TAKEAWAY:

God turns hardship into new opportunities for His mission.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- Tell about a time when something you thought was a setback actually opened up a new opportunity.

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a group member read Acts 8:1-8

- 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?
- How did persecution change the trajectory of the gospel?
- The believers were scattered by persecution, yet they preached as they went. How do we reconcile suffering with believing God is present and active?
- The scattered believers didn't wait for "official" ministry opportunities—they shared Jesus wherever they went. What keeps us from doing the same?
- Verse 8 mentions "great joy" in Samaria. How have you experienced joy on the other side of obedience, even when the path was hard?
- How should the church scatter, practically speaking in today's world?

APPLICATION:

- What current difficulty might God be using to position you for new ministry opportunities?
- What are some ways you can jump into serving others without fear? What are some practical ways you can share your faith this week?

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:

Biblical joy is not strictly reliant on favorable external circumstances, nor does it ignore the reality of suffering. Rather, it is a profound, eschatological reality that invades the present when the gospel is proclaimed and received (cf. Acts 8:8). This principle is even seen by an often misunderstood verse: "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10b). This joy is not baseless. Nehemiah wanted Israel to find their joy in who the LORD was to them. That day, which the reading of the law reinforced, was a festival day

of celebrating being in covenant with the LORD that brought to them God's gracious faithfulness, love, forgiveness, provision, guidance, lawful instruction, purpose/mission, etc. The knowledge and experience of this covenant, with its commission to be a kingdom of priests to the nations (Exo 19:6), Nehemiah say, should result in a sense of joy and well-being in their hearts; it is how they were to find perspective, purpose, meaning, and "strength."

- When facing personal or corporate hardship, what specific steps can believers take to access this transcendent joy, ensuring their witness remains compelling and not fake or trivial to a skeptical world? Similarly, how should we cultivate a culture of joy that is deeply authentic and grounded in the gospel, rather than resorting to superficial positivity or emotional manipulation?
- Physical healings and deliverance as well as the reception of the gospel were all part of the joy in Samaria. Discuss the concept of preaching the gospel with a holistic restoration of broken lives (physical, emotional, spiritual).
- Now discuss your answers to the above prompts with Rom 12:11, 12, 15 in mind.

A Theology of "Scattering": One of the primary points of this passage emphasizes that God turns hardship into new opportunities. The Greek term for "scattered" in this passage implies the purposeful sowing of seed rather than a random, chaotic dispersion. When a community of faith faces immense hardship, cultural exile, or systemic marginalization, it is exceedingly easy to adopt a posture of defeat and victimhood. However, the text demands that believers reinterpret their involuntary displacement—whether cultural, vocational, or geographical—as a deliberate planting by a sovereign God.

- *"The word scattered (diasparēsan) is related etymologically to speirō used of sowing seed. Indeed, the ancient method of seed-sowing, flinging a handful of seed taken from a seed-sack, was in effect scattering".* F.F. Bruce
- How does understanding the etymology of "scattering" as "sowing" fundamentally alter the way a believer processes unexpected life disruptions or systemic hardships?
- In what specific ways does the modern church often confuse "being scattered" (implying defeat) with "being sown" (implying divine purpose and impending fruitfulness)?
- Can you identify a historical or contemporary example where the cultural marginalization of the church directly resulted in a purer, more expansive presentation of the gospel?
- When experiencing a season of involuntary transition, what spiritual disciplines are most effective in helping an individual transition from a mindset of survival to missional intentionality?
- How does the metaphor of the seed challenge the contemporary idolization of comfort, stability, and institutional permanence within modern Western Christianity?

QUOTES:

- "But I would have thee admire how even in a season of calamity they neglected not the preaching". John Chrysostom
- "Though persecution must not drive us from our work, yet it may send us to work elsewhere. Wherever the established believer is driven, he carries the knowledge of the gospel". Matthew Henry
- "The gospel of Christ is always a gospel of joy. It brings healing to the body and deliverance to the soul, and where these are experienced, a city cannot help but rejoice." – John Stott
- "'So, there was much joy in that city.' Why? Because Philip didn't just bring a new philosophy.... The joy of the city was the joy of freedom. Mission exists because joy doesn't. Philip went to Samaria to export the joy of Jesus to a place that had only known the misery of magic and division." John Piper
- "The scattering in Acts 8 led to a shift in the way the church had been functioning. Up to this point, it was the Apostles who were doing the preaching... Now, after the scattering, it was the generality of believers who took up the evangelistic task". John Stott

Group Accountability:

- Find 1-2 ways you can support Apex Baptist Church in way of serving. Follow up with one another this week to see what progress is made.

Group Prayer: Pray for the leadership of our church; Staff, Pastors, Deacons, and those that serve in a leadership role.