

TAKEAWAY:

God advances His gospel through faithful obedience, even in suffering.

INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS:

- When have you had to choose between doing what was popular and doing what was right?
- When have you faced a situation where obeying God required you to defy human authority or cultural expectations, and what helped you choose faithfulness over comfort?

UNDERSTANDING:

Have a few group member split the read of Acts 5:12-42

- 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?
- What signs accompanied the apostles' ministry? How did people respond?
- Why were the religious leaders so threatened by the apostles?
- What was Peter's response in verse 29?
- How did Gamaliel's counsel save the apostles? How did they respond to being beaten (verses 40-42)?

APPLICATION:

- What would it look like for you to prioritize God's authority over human approval in your workplace? Your family? Your social circles?
- Verse 41 says they rejoiced that they were "counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." How does this perspective challenge our culture's pursuit of comfort and approval?
- How can we as a group support one another when obedience to Christ brings criticism or hardship?

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:

Deconstructing Social Constructs: The main takeaway from Acts 5:12-42 is that God spreads His message when we stay faithful, even when it's hard. That was basically the whole playbook for the early church. As believers, we should expect some pushback. We're called to care more about following God than pleasing people, and honestly, that's always going to ruffle some feathers with society and the

powers that be. The apostles rejoice at being disgraced for Jesus (Acts 5:41). They take society's biggest weapon—public humiliation—and wear it like a badge of honor. It's a huge challenge for us to stop worrying so much about our reputation and start looking at suffering for the cause of Christ through an eternal lens.

- How does God turn society's definitions of honor and shame upside down?
- If suffering for Christ is considered a mark of divine "worthiness," how should this reshape our prayer life with respect to primarily praying for personal comfort, safety, material blessings, etc?
- What specific fears regarding reputation, social standing, or career advancement prevent you from speaking boldly about Jesus in the workplace or the broader community?
- How do we build even more our church culture to celebrate, rather than pity, those who sacrifice their status or money for Christ?
- How did the apostles' focus on Jesus death and resurrection help them find joy in the middle of their own pain and trauma?

A Theology of the Holy Spirit's Co-Witness: In Acts 5:32, Peter states, "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him". This introduces the concept of a dual witness: the human proclamation coupled with divine authentication.

- What does it mean practically that the Holy Spirit acts as a "co-witness" to the gospel message whenever believers share their faith with others?
- In his commentary on Acts, John Stott writes, "Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible... no Christlikeness of character apart from His fruit, and no effective witness without His power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead." Stott also notes that the unstoppable praise and proclamation seen in Acts 5:42 were the "natural overflow of hearts full of the Holy Spirit". How does the realization that the Holy Spirit is actively testifying alongside the believer alleviate the anxiety and fear of failure associated with personal evangelism?
- The text specifically links the giving of the Holy Spirit to those who "obey Him" (Acts 5:32); how does active, daily obedience create a greater receptivity to the Spirit's empowering presence in a believer's life?
- In the absence of the explicit physical "signs and wonders" seen in Acts 5:12, how does the Holy Spirit currently authenticate the truth of the gospel message to a skeptical culture? How does a community of believers cultivate an environment where the Spirit's witness is undeniably evident to outsiders who visit their gatherings?

QUOTES:

- "When ordered by religious authorities to stop teaching, they say: 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)... a law that is not just does not seem to me to be a law." Augustine of Hippo
- "On the contrary, It is written (Acts 5:29): 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' Now sometimes the things commanded by a superior are against God. Therefore superiors are not to be obeyed in all things." Thomas Aquinas
- "The power of the magistrate is not to forbid or command what he pleases, but according to the rule of the Word... if both the powers be lawful, their objects cannot be contradictory: for God has not given to two lawful powers any lawful liberty that the one may command what is lawful, and the other what is unlawful." John Owen

- "One way of rejoicing in suffering comes from fixing our minds firmly on the greatness of the reward that will come to us in the resurrection. The effect of this kind of focus is to make our present pain seem small in comparison to what is coming... This is what the apostles seemed to experience when, according to Acts 5:41, after being beaten, 'they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.'" Jonathan Edwards
- "Everything in this life is going to be taken away from us, except one thing: God's love, which can go into death with us and take us through it and into his arms. It's the one thing you can't lose... It's in death that God says, 'If I'm not your security, then you've got no security, because I'm the only thing that can't be taken away from you.'" Tim Keller

GROUP EXERCISE: Memorize Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than men"

PRAYER: Pray bold prayers this week: for healing, for salvations, for God to work miraculously through your ordinary obedience.