

ACTS: Growth & Opposition: Acts 6:1-7

ACTS is a discipleship training manual for Christians. Disciples are learners and doers. What can we learn from Acts 6 & 8?

Discipleship lesson: Praying scripture

- They asked for boldness to speak God's word.
- They asked for miracles to confirm the power of Jesus' name.

Growth: Acts 6:1-7: Church growth:

1. Holy Spirit-empowered evangelism producing inward conviction (John 16:7-10 & Acts 2:32 "cut to the heart") supported by "signs & wonders" (attesting miracles). Miracle first and then gospel preached (Acts 3). Gospel preached followed by attesting miracles (8:4-7). "Signs & wonders" includes freeing people from demons (8:7) and removing satanic opposition (Acts 13).
2. Angelic intervention (Acts 5:17-21)
3. Loving sacrificial fellowship (2:43-47)
4. Unified prayer (Acts 1:14, 4:23-31)
5. HS-filled leadership (deacons - 6:1-7)
6. Problem-solving wisdom (from the HS, 6:1-7)
7. Courageous martyrs (Stephen - Acts 7)

The first-century church had two language groups: Hellenists (GR-speaking Jews) and Hebrews. There may have been some prejudice involved, but more likely each group focused on its own interests and neglected the other group. We have a church of 3 language groups: Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. We support each other as one local church. One of the ways we can do this is with bilingual slides for contemporary songs in the combined service.

Acts 6:7: And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

6:7: "The word of God continued to increase." Increase = grow, spread. As it increased, disciples multiplied. The HS worked with the word of God to

multiply disciples. More and more people heard the word of God, believed it and studied it. IF we increase exposure to the word of God, then more people will believe. If we increase understanding and obedience to the word of God, then disciples will increase. There are many programs for church growth, but one thing is necessary for spiritual and numerical growth - **increase the word of God.**

Discipleship lesson: Increase the word of God in your life.

How will you “increase the word of God” in your life?

DESIRE and COMMITMENT and PLAN.

Desire is fundamental; it is motivation. The motivation is “I want to know God and His plan for me.” If you don’t have the motivation, then ask the HS to give it to you. Make a commitment to increase the Word. Make a daily plan to increase the Word. Friday and Sunday are good, but daily Bible reading and prayer is better.

Overcoming Opposition: Acts 6:8-8:3, 9:1-19

Acts 6:8-7:53 is the stoning of Stephen and his speech. Stephen condemned the Jews for their unbelief and the murder of the Messiah, Christ.

Read 7:54-8:3.

The reason for the long chapter 7 description of Stephen’s sermon and martyrdom is 8:1: “And Saul approved of his execution.”

“The witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Two or three witnesses were required to stone to death and it had to be done outside the city. There was no trial. Saul was the official religious ‘supervisor’ of the stoning. The stoners took off their robes so they could throw stones and laid their robes at Saul’s feet.

7:55: Stephen saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God and died “full of the Holy Spirit.” Maybe he didn’t even feel the pain of the stones. Saul heard the sermon and he heard about Jesus standing at the right hand of God! Saul heard the man he murdered say, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Do not hold this sin against them.”

Stephen’s martyrdom prepared Saul to repent and believe. But before Jesus revealed himself to Saul, he used Saul’s evil to scatter the Christians who were huddled in Jerusalem.

Refer to Acts 9:1-19. I imagine Saul riding to Damascus and he cannot get out of his mind the image of Stephen being stoned to death and hearing his prayer over and over again “Do not hold this sin against them.”

Repentance precedes forgiveness. Sometimes forgiveness precedes the repentance of the offender because the prayer of forgiveness will be answered. Stephen’s forgiveness prayer was answered when Saul repented and received Christ.

Two lessons:

First, someone you think would never believe in Christ may be very likely to get saved and have a dramatic testimony. Saul went from passionately against to passionately serving!

Second, one sure way to overcome opposition is to pray for the conversion of the person who opposes you - the main persecutor. (Jesus said to pray for our enemies.)

*VOM has a Saul-to-Paul story about a soldier in Myanmar.

*Christians in India arrested for “practicing unlicensed medicine” by praying for sick people according to James 5:14-16. People were healed in the name of Jesus Christ and Hindu nationalists didn’t like it.

*Tell the miracle story from Bibles for Mideast - pastor beaten, miraculously healed, now hold Bible study in the hospital for over 500 doctors, nurses and staff.

Discipleship lesson:

Increase the word of God (desire & discipline) and the Holy Spirit in your life (submission & obedience).

Increasing the Word in your life requires desire and discipline.

Increasing the HS in your life requires submission and obedience.