

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 3 | Unleashed through Individuals | Acts 6:8-9:31

As we've launched into Acts, we've seen God exploding His Kingdom and the message of Jesus by unleashing the power of His Holy Spirit working through His newly formed Church. Jesus' earthy life wasn't the end of the story but the beginning. Now His Church, which Paul describes in his letters as the very "body of Christ" on earth, is growing and thriving and expanding God's kingdom. This powerful living organism—the Church—is comprised of individuals, all a part of the whole, all transformed by Jesus Christ, all called to be a part of expanding God's Kingdom. This week we focus in on three cameos of individuals and how God used these men, as He uses each of us, to carry out His mission.

1. STEPHEN: Read Acts 6:8-7:60.

- a) We met Stephen briefly last week as he was chosen to serve in leadership; now we look more closely at his story. How is Stephen described? (6:8)
- b) What happened in response to Stephen's character and ministry? How did Stephen respond through the turmoil? (6:9-15)
- c) In his statement to the Council before the crowd, Stephen recounts Israel's history and reminds them of God's glorious work among His people through the empowering of individuals. Briefly, what were his highlights of each of these men's lives?

Abraham (7:2-8) –

Joseph (7:9-16) –

Moses (7:17-43) –

Joshua, David, Solomon (7:44-50) –

- d) At the climax of his speech, how did Stephen characterize his audience of Jewish opposition? (7:51-53)
- e) As the crowd erupts, describe their response and Stephen's response. What strikes you in the contrast? (7:54-60)

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- f) Personal Reflection: The contrast between someone “resisting” the Holy Spirit (the Jewish crowd – 7:51) and someone “full of the Holy Spirit” (Stephen – 6: 8, 10; 7:55) is sharp. How can you assess at any given time or in any given situation which you are doing?

2. PHILIP: Read Acts 8:1-40.

- a) What was the immediate fall out from Stephen’s death? (8:1-3)

Devastating. Yet, the followers of Jesus seem far from devastated. What did they do? (8:4)

- b) Now we track another individual, Philip. Describe Philip’s reception in a city of Samaria. (8:6-8)

How did the people of Samaria respond to Philip’s good news about the Kingdom of God and Jesus? (8:9-13)

When the news of Samaria’s acceptance of the word of God reached Jerusalem, they sent the apostles Peter and John, two primary leaders of the church. How shocking must it have been to the Jewish believers to hear the Samaritans, who they considered of mixed, impure religion, had responded to the gospel! What did Peter and John do that replicated the experience of Jewish believers in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and authenticated the faith of the Samaritans who had believed? (8:14-17)

- c) Peter and John head back to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel along the way, and Philip heads in a different direction. Why did he head south? Who did he “happen” to come across? And why did he engage him? (8:26-29)

Describe the interaction between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. What was the result of the conversation? (8:30-38)

How do we leave Philip in this vignette of his ministry? (8:39-40)

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- d) Personal Reflection: How do you typically look at difficult, even devastating, events? Can you think of an example in your life or a friend's when a devastating experience turned into an opportunity for God to work?

What aspects of Philip's story challenge you to seek opportunities to talk to people about the great news of Jesus?

3. SAUL (PAUL): Read Acts 9:1-31

- a) Meanwhile, we jump to catch up with Saul, later referred to by his Roman name Paul. We last saw him in Acts 8:3 as he began aggressively attempting to destroy the church and imprison the new believers in Jesus. With written orders from the high priest, he heads for Damascus on a mission to imprison followers of Jesus. His trip turned out to be dramatic in an entirely unsuspected way.

Describe his encounter. (9:3-9)

What was unfolding concurrently in Damascus? (9:10-16)

What did God tell Ananias about Saul and his purpose? (9:15)

When he went to Saul, what did Ananias tell him was the purpose of his visit? (9:17) What was the result? (9:18-19a)

- b) The trajectory of Saul's life changed course immediately. Describe Saul's actions directly after this life-changing event. How do these actions confirm his conversion? (9:19b-22)

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Verse 23 indicates “many days” elapsing. Think 3 years (see Galatians 1:15-18 where Paul (Saul) fills in the gaps). After he returned to Damascus, how did he end up heading to Jerusalem? (9:23-25)

Upon arrival to Jerusalem, Barnabas (truly the “Son of Encouragement” we met in Acts 4:36-37) helped introduce him to a fearful Jerusalem church and some of the apostles. What characterized Saul’s activity as described by Barnabas and then as demonstrated in Jerusalem? How did that go? (9:27-29)

- c) Personal Reflection: In Saul’s dramatic cameo, we see Jesus pursuing Saul. How have you experienced Jesus’ pursuing you, in subtle or extraordinary ways?
4. Final Reflection: God used these 3 “leading men” in this week’s passage, as well as several other “supporting actors,” in significant ways, all to further the spread of His Kingdom and to reach people with the great news of the gospel of Jesus. Each ordinary individual was uniquely “unleashed” for His purposes. How have you seen God weave individuals in your life to move you toward Jesus?

How do you think God has uniquely placed and wired you to move others toward Jesus?

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