



Reading through the New Testament—Week 20

May 21-27

Reading Plan available on
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Becoming more like Jesus—growing in His Word

This week our readings start out with the story of Stephen. His story ends at the end of Acts chapter seven:

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

As he fell asleep He became the first known martyr for the Gospel. The Holy Spirit worked through the scattering of people that happened as a direct result of Stephen’s death.

Persecution of those who are connected to Jesus still happens throughout the world today. People continue to lose their livelihood, families, and lives for their faith. An organization called Voices of the Martyrs (persecution.com) works to help those who are in the midst of persecution worldwide. Through their work they have learned what persecuted Christ followers ask for the most is prayer.

Simply knowing they aren’t alone, and that they are being covered in prayer, helps strengthen their faith and allows them to persevere through the persecution.

As you read through the chapters of Acts this week, you may want to learn more or God may place on your heart those who have a person or family who may be dealing with persecution. Take a few minutes each day to pray for them. Learn more about what you can do and the work of Voice of the Martyrs at persecution.com

This Week's Sermon Outline

Scattered & Gathered

Acts 8:2-4 and 11:19-21

Scattered & Gathered: In N _____

S _____ & Gathered: In A _____

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 8:1

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.
Acts 8:4

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest... so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Acts 9:1-2

Scattered & G _____ : In A _____

Those who accepted [Peter's evangelical] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. Acts 2:41

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. Acts 11:20-21

So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.
Acts 11:26

Scattered & Gathered: T _____






P _____ still happens

G _____ still shared

C _____ P _____ to Jesus

New Testament in a Year—May 21-27

Acts

Chapter 7  8  9  10  11 

Additional Reflections from this week's reading

This week our readings help us gain an understanding of how the first century church formed and was scattered and gathered. As you read the narratives, what similarities or difference do you notice with our church today? As you process these differences, here are some helpful questions to process through the five chapters:

1. **What from this narrative caught my attention?**
2. **So what about that section connects to my life, right now?**
3. **Now what is God speaking into my life through this reading?**

Acts 7 | Stephen's Story

What impact does this story have on the spread of the Gospel?

Acts 8 | Philip walks alongside an Ethiopian

How do you see the Holy Spirit at work in Philip's story?

Acts 9 | Saul's story of becoming connected to Jesus

Saul is a pivotal figure in the New Testament writings. As you read chapter 9, go back and read Acts 7:54-8:3 for context.

Acts 10 | Cornelius' story

Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work within this chapter?

Acts 11 | Church in Antioch

*Note: The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:26)

Blessing the World

Gathered

This weekend's sermon talked about the church scattered and gathered. Part of the church gathering in the first century was having regular meals together to have fellowship and discussion. This week, is there a person or family you could invite to have a meal with you? What would it take to make this a regular practice? (Like Meatless Mondays, Taco Tuesdays, First Fridays, etc.)

Belonging in Community

This week as we continue to read about the beginnings of The Church, we see how persecution was and in many cases today is still a prevalent part of the story of the Church. Yet, many of us struggle with the problems of comfortability and abundance — instead of being in want or even persecuted. This week we are going to talk about abstinence and/or fasting as a spiritual practice as a way to bridge the gap and grow in compassion for those who are living in extreme need or persecution. (Note: It's not that we don't already have compassion or understanding, this is a way to continue to grow.)

Read Isaiah 58:1-12. What stands out to you about the fast that Isaiah talks about in vs. 6-12?

Fasting and abstaining has long been a vehicle for biblical justice, a way for those with too much food to share with those in need of food. Early on in the history of the church, fasting was tied to generosity, serving, and justice. On fasting days, Christians would take the food or the money they would have spent on food and give it to the poor. Often, they would also give the time they would have spent cooking, eating, and cleaning up to serve the poor. This simple practice of giving away the money we would have spent on ourselves has the potential to transform not only the lives of the poor, but also our own lives and communities.

Fasting is associated with food and abstinence is associated with other areas of our life. Take some time to talk through what practicing fasting or abstinence could look like for you. You may not be able to or ready to give up food, but perhaps you will intentionally turn your phone off and take time to pray or learn about the persecuted church. Or maybe you will use some of your money you usually use for an extra treat for yourself to instead support a mission. Perhaps use time in your week to serve at a community outreach. If you are ready to try a fast but not sure how that looks, take one meal by yourself or with a group and pray and be still during the time you would have been eating. As you talk this out be sure to think subtraction not addition. This practice is not mean to be added into your already over busy, overfull life. You are likely already stressed and tired. Instead think: What can I cut out? How can I slow my day down? Where can I find a little more time to pray and focus on God?

As you practice this, ponder these questions and when you come back as a group be ready to share. What was your experience like? Where did you feel resistance? Where did you feel delight? Did you grow in compassion and connection? How?

End your time in prayer together, asking for guidance and provision as you practice this spiritual discipline.