



WEEKLY STUDY

Stranger Things - Week Three

(Our August series is a look at the strange and unexpected events that take place in the book of Acts. While we are keenly aware of what is going on in the physical world in and around us, we sometimes lack awareness of the spiritual world which is just as real, only less visible. We'll look with spiritual eyes at the events of the early church to see how God was moving in those days, and what it might mean for our time.)

The early church grew with great momentum, a fact that caused distress to the rulers of that age. They persecuted the church which led Christians to disperse from the city. They weren't allowed to congregate because it was assumed that their strength came from mass gatherings. It turned out that the movement just took off like wildfire in the places they had been scattered. Their power was from God's Spirit and God's Spirit can not be snuffed out!

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for Christians around the world who are facing persecution for their faith.
- Pray for the unity of Christians around the world.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: ACTS 8.1-8 (NIV)

And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

- If you've been reading along, you'll notice that chapter 8 flows right out of the events of the previous chapters. Saul, whom we just met, is ramping up his persecution of the church. It's easy to imagine how he got caught up in the momentum of the moment. Momentum moves in positive or negative directions. It was leading Saul deeper and deeper into this anti-movement that was quickly being associated with him. Have you ever felt the energy of a moment push you in the wrong direction?
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- **Prayer Prompt: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. (Luke 22.31-32)**
- *God, I long for the kind of faith that serves as an anchor for my wandering ways. I want to remain steadfast in your Gospel truth. Amen.*

TUESDAY: ACTS 1.8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- The diaspora (the dispersing of God's people) has often been viewed as negative and that makes sense. People were taken from their homes and dispersed (potentially with the goal of diluting the movement) in a wider region. But here, we begin to see that even the forced scattering of the movement was used by God to expand the reach. Jesus had promised it before he ascended into heaven. How will we be witnesses to the things of God if we don't reach beyond our comfort zone? When have you been asked or called to step into a new place for God?
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- **Prayer Prompt: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28.19-20)**
 - *God, I want to go where you send me. I want to make disciples of the nation. Show me where you would have me go. Pick me up and move me if you need to. I am yours. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 8.5-8

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up.⁶ Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

- We learn from the times of diaspora that God can do good work even when we are scattered. Our prayer is that we would both find good soil and be good soil for the seeds of the Gospel to take root. We can serve as little mobile gardens that bring good news wherever we are sent. What is the “soil” condition of your heart right now? What tilling of the soil of your heart needs to take place in order for you to yield good things for God?
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- **Prayer Prompt: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9.36-38)**
- *O God, may I always be ready to produce fruit for your Kingdom. Make me a worker in your harvest field today. Amen.*

THURSDAY: GENESIS 50.20

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

- Joseph’s brothers were seeking forgiveness for all of the terrible things they had done to him. The grace that Joseph showed them was only possible because he saw the larger story of how God’s will was not thwarted by their actions. God can use even the evil designs of satan and of humans for his purposes. When have you seen God turn something bad into something good?
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- **Prayer Prompt: And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5.10-11)**
 - *All-powerful God, there are times when I feel like everything is going wrong. Everything or everyone seems to be against me. Help me to see your bigger plan at work even in my own suffering. Amen.*

FRIDAY: COLOSSIANS 2.14-15 (NIV)

He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

- The cross of Jesus Christ serves as a constant reminder of God's ability to turn death to life. It was a public spectacle, not of God's choosing, but of man's. And yet, Jesus lifted high on the cross drew attention to the redemptive work of God that was about to take place. A subtle execution might not have drawn the same level of attention. God said to evil, "You're going to lift Jesus high on a cross? I am going to lift him higher!" In your own moments of suffering or persecution, consider how you are still on God's path to higher things. Write about the places of suffering or even persecution you face today. Give them to God and ask him to redeem them all.
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- **Prayer Prompt: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1.18)**
- *God, you have never failed to meet me in my suffering. I am sorry for the times I didn't notice. I keep my eyes on Jesus—the one lifted high on a cross for my salvation. Keep your eyes on me! Amen.*

SATURDAY: EPHESIANS 4.3-6 (NIV)

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- As we look at the Christian movement today, there are clearly examples of disunity. We are scattered, but not always united. Paul offers these words to us in our imperfection: there is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Jesus is no longer on the cross. What is now on display is a broken and fallen world. So we lift that up to God and ask him to do his redeeming work! Come Lord Jesus. Write about the hope you have in Christ for the redemption of your suffering and the broken world we live in.
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- **Prayer Prompt:** I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17.22-23)
- *God, we are made for the kind of unity that propels the movement of the church even further. Help me to examine those things that I allow to divide me from my fellow Christian, and forgive me. Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

Pastor Jacob walked through the following passages to outline how God uses what was meant for evil for his own glory. Take turns reading the words below. Pause and reflect on the ways in which God might be redeeming your weakness and struggles today.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 2 Cor 4.16

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Cor 4.17

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Cor 4.18

Jacob reminded us: We don't lose heart no matter what happens, no matter how scattered we get. No matter how bleak the outcome may be seen. Outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are getting stronger. There is a Spirit in us, something unseen at work. So we go about work differently.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 2 Cor 12.8

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Cor 12.9

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12.10