



WEEKLY STUDY

Stranger Things - Week Four

(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.)

This week's passage from Acts is a lesser known story of Simon the sorcerer. He was a magician who had convinced the city where he lived that he was essentially the manifestation of a god. He had built up everything around him to make himself look good, and to make himself untouchable. The contrast between him and Peter (who came to point not to himself but to Jesus) was shocking. It got the attention of the people, and it led to the exposure of Simon's selfish disposition. If we are to fully respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ, repent and be baptized, we necessarily put God's will before our own. Let this story reinforce for you the truth that God's Spirit and your very salvation is a gift and can not be purchased or earned...only received.

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 all of those who misunderstand the grace of God in Jesus Christ and try to earn salvation..
- Pray for groups of people who, like the Samaritans, are unsure they have a way to be adopted into God's story of salvation. Pray for God's Spirit to fall on them and bring them the peace and assurance of salvation.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: ACTS 8.9-11 (NIV)

Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.”¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.

- As much as we like to talk about leadership, we would do well to focus on our followership. Who are we following? What is it about them that has our attention? Are the people we are following pointing to themselves or to something or someone bigger than themselves? Simon had built up a following by telling everyone how great he was. The people were amazed at his magical abilities. And the title they gave him (the Great Power of God) was meant to set him apart as the very presence of God walking around among them. The apostles of the early church were also given noticeable gifts of healing—it garnered them a good bit of attention. But what they did with this power is what set them apart. They used it to point to Jesus. What gifts and talents has God given you that seem to get attention from others? Where do you direct that attention?
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- **Prayer Prompt: There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12.4-7)**
- *God, I recognize the ways in which you have uniquely gifted me. I'm humbled to carry around the strengths or attributes that you've seen fit for me to display. May I only ever point to you instead of myself. Amen.*

TUESDAY: ACTS 8.12-13

But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

- How profound was this message that Philip proclaimed? It stood in such contrast to the ways of the world that crowds noticed it, thought that the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ was worthy of their devotion, and were washed in the waters of baptism. Amazing! I picture a school of fish that suddenly (and uniformly) switches directions. One minute they were captured by Simon and his sorcery, the next they had given their lives to the pursuit of the kingdom of God! What great things of God have gotten your attention?
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- **Prayer Prompt: and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. (John 6.2)**
 - *God, make your kingdom so known to me that I can't help but proclaim it even to those distracted by the latest trends and celebrity. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: ACTS 8.14-17

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria.¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- The fact that the Holy Spirit seemed delayed for the Samaritan baptised believers is interesting. It doesn't seem to fit the pattern of the early church to this point. As the gospel spread, the contexts changed as well. It seemed important that the Samaritan believers experienced this moment of the apostles laying hands on them as they then received the Holy Spirit. It tells us that we don't force the Spirit of God just by our baptisms. Rather, we open ourselves—make ourselves vulnerable to the Spirit—when we repent and confess the name of Jesus. Have you ever been keenly aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in a baptism?
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- **Prayer Prompt: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ (John 1.32-33)**
- *O God, I rely on your Spirit to give me power as I follow Jesus. I thank you for the church that lays hands and shares the Holy Spirit with each generation. Amen.*

THURSDAY: ACTS 8.18-19

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money¹⁹ and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

- Suddenly Simon reveals that his conversion is not complete. His heart is still bent towards his own ability to impress the crowds. He has yet to discover that the Spirit of God is a gift that can not be bought. What if he was never meant to be one who God used to impart the Spirit to others? Would Simon have been ok with that? Church tradition teaches that Simon went on to stir up trouble for the church. His teaching proved to be harmful for the church and ultimately contrary to the message that Philip had proclaimed. The pull towards self-glorification is strong. Where do you see this tension in your own heart or in the world around you today?

- **Prayer Prompt: Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (Matthew 6.1)**
- *Merciful God, reveal to me those moments when I am tempted to make myself look better instead of lifting up your Son. Expose this tendency also in the world around me today. May we all turn to you alone for our salvation. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ACTS 8.20-24 (NIV)

Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!"²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴ *Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."*

- Peter's rebuke of Simon's request to purchase the Spirit was strong. Yet he also called him to repent. Simon had believed and been baptized, but had not repented of his ways. Peter had hope that God might forgive Simon if he could only allow his heart to be changed. Are there any old ways of thinking and acting that seem to be following you around even as you begin to follow Jesus?

- **Prayer Prompt: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1.9)**

- *God, your Spirit is a gift that I can not earn. Remove from my heart any barriers to my ability to receive the Spirit you long for me to have. Amen.*

SATURDAY: JOHN 2.9-11 (NIV)

...the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

- Read the passage again. Imagine the scene. What would feel like to witness the very first miracle of Jesus? The gospels are full of miracles that point to Jesus. Each miracle was a sign that revealed Jesus' glory. They led to a deeper belief in him. What miracles have you heard of or witnessed that reveal God's glory in Jesus? Are there some that you might have missed? Who in your life is quick to point out the miraculous movement of God?

- **Prayer Prompt: The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners, (Isaiah 61.1)**
- *Jesus, I know that your mission here on earth is bigger than miracles. But I thank you for the signs that you give us that point us to your power and mercy. Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

Pastor Jacob said that the Holy Spirit can't be earned or bought. It has to be received. Share your responses to the following questions with your group.

- Do you have a Holy Spirit story?
- When have you had an encounter with the Holy Spirit?
- Have you ever longed for the Spirit but felt its absence?

- How is your life serving as a sign pointing to Jesus?