

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Momentum: The Suffering That Grew the Church “Momentum” Series October 14/15, 2017

Main Idea

The early church experienced firsthand the way God can bring good out of suffering and persecution.

Discovery Questions

1. Have you ever attended an event or activity that you thought would be terrible but ended up being better than you expected? Describe that experience to your group. What did you learn from it?

This week in our “Momentum” series, we’ll look at the first person to lose their life for the sake of Jesus, a man by the name of Stephen. Stephen’s death, we read, begins a turning point in the church, when for the first time it became “dangerous” to be a Christian. But this worked out for the greater good of the Gospel, as the Christians who underwent persecution fled to other regions where they then shared their faith. Today we’re going to look at their example and what we can learn from it.

- 2. a. Read Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-8:3. How and why do we see Stephen and the early church suffer in this passage?**
b. Read Acts 8:4-8. What good do you see God bring out of that suffering?
- 3. a. What examples have you encountered of Christians who have undergone some degree of suffering / shame / ridicule for their faith?**
b. How have you seen a person’s suffering—either for their faith or otherwise (sickness, financial difficulty, etc.)—ultimately turn out for “good” either in their own faith or in the Kingdom of God?
- 4. a. Have you ever had to endure some degree of suffering, insult, or ridicule for your faith? Describe that circumstance to your group. What lessons did you learn from it?**
b. Is there an area in your life where you might be avoiding potential suffering, insult or ridicule by not living out your faith or taking a stand for an issue? What would it look like for you to live out your faith, despite the possibility that it might lead to an uncomfortable experience?
c. What might keep you from doing what you answered in part “b,” and how could you overcome that?
- 5. We talked this weekend about how anytime we suffer, the world watches to see our true beliefs revealed in our suffering. Is there an area of difficulty you are experiencing right now? What do you think outsiders are learning about what you believe based on how you endure it? What changes could you make to ensure they see your faith in God in the midst of these difficulties? How can your group help support you as you go through this difficulty?**

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Leader Guide

- 1. Have you ever attended an event or activity that you thought would be terrible but ended up being better than you expected? Describe that experience to your group. What did you learn from it?**

This is a “lighter” question designed to get the conversation going. Spend about 5-7 minutes on this question.

This week in our “Momentum” series, we’ll look at the first person to lose their life for the sake of Jesus, a man by the name of Stephen. Stephen’s death, we read, begins a turning point in the church, when for the first time it became “dangerous” to be a Christian. But this worked out for the greater good of the Gospel, as the Christians who underwent persecution fled to other regions where they then shared their faith. Today we’re going to look at their example and what we can learn from it.

- 2. a. Read Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-8:3. How and why do we see Stephen and the early church suffer in this passage?**
b. Read Acts 8:4-8. What good do you see God bring out of that suffering?

For part “a,” Stephen ends up suffering for proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and trying to persuade others to believe the same (6:8-15), for accusing the Sanhedrin of being opposed to God (7:51-7:54) and for declaring that Jesus is standing at the right hand of God in heaven (7:55-60). It’s actually this last thing that ends up getting Stephen killed; by declaring that Jesus is at the right hand of God, Stephen is saying that Jesus held a position of power and authority on this earth, thus claiming He was more than just a man, He is like God Himself. The Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah would have considered this blasphemy, and in the Jewish faith blasphemy was a crime punishable by death.

For part “b,” we see that the early Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem, but when they left they did not leave as refugees; they left as missionaries. They began to proclaim the Gospel in the regions of Judea and Samaria, and as a result many came to faith in Christ.

Spend 7-10 minutes on this question.

- 3. a. What examples have you encountered of Christians who have undergone some degree of suffering / shame / ridicule for their faith?**
b. How have you seen a person’s suffering—either for their faith or otherwise (sickness, financial difficulty, etc.)—ultimately turn out for “good” either in their own faith or in the Kingdom of God?

For part “b,” we note that the “good” we’re looking for is not necessarily, “I lost my job but then God gave me an even better job with higher pay,” but instead “good” in the form of strengthened faith or more people coming to Christ. Sometimes God is gracious and does bring

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material blessings out of difficulties. But whether or not He does that, He is always able to work things out for His glory and to spark faith in the life of the unbeliever.

Spend 5-7 minutes on this question in its entirety.

4.
 - a. **Have you ever had to endure some degree of suffering, insult, or ridicule for your faith? Describe that circumstance to your group. What lessons did you learn from it?**
 - b. **Is there an area in your life where you might be avoiding potential suffering, insult or ridicule by not living out your faith or taking a stand for an issue? What would it look like for you to live out your faith, despite the possibility that it might lead to an uncomfortable experience?**
 - c. **What might keep you from doing what you answered in part “b,” and how could you overcome that?**

For part “b,” sometimes we don’t face ridicule because we can bend too easily to the world around us, perhaps in an effort to fit in or to be liked. For example, some Christians won’t be honest about their views on issues for fear of what others will say. As Christians, we aren’t necessarily always to proclaim our personal views on issues, but when asked we should be graciously honest. God wants us to take a stand for our faith, which means that there may be some things we feel that we can’t or won’t do. Fear will always try to keep us from taking a stand, but God promises to give us courage to live out our faith, and so we need to listen and trust Him.

Spend about 10-12 minutes on this question in its entirety.

5. **We talked this weekend about how anytime we suffer, the world watches to see our true beliefs revealed in our suffering. Is there an area of difficulty you are experiencing right now? What do you think outsiders are learning about what you believe based on how you endure it? What changes could you make to ensure they see your faith in God in the midst of these difficulties? How can your group help support you as you go through this difficulty?**

Make sure to pray for each person who shares their difficulties. One of the ways we’re strengthened is through the encouragement and support of other believers who come alongside us. Be that for your group as they share.