

WEEK 6 | *ACTS 8:4-9:31*

# JESUS-LED CHURCH

Now that we've been given a clear gospel mission, as a church we might think it's just up to us to get on with it however we think best. As we'll see in this study, that's *exactly* what we should do! But often God has other ideas about how this gospel mission is going to work out in practice. So the question for our church is this: When it becomes clear that God is shutting one door and opening another, *will we be willing to follow God's lead?*



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## JESUS LEADS HIS CHURCH

### Read Acts 8:1-4

1. Following from Stephen's execution (last week), what happens to the rest of the church? (8:1-3)

To the church at the time, would it have felt like God was in control at that point? Why or why not?

2. In the middle of these unexpected circumstances, what did the church do? (8:4)

How is this related to the church's mission from Acts 1:8?

When your own life takes an unexpected turn, how can Acts 1:8 provide guidance for you?

### ***Jews vs. Samaritans***

Jews and Samaritans had a long and far-from-friendly history! Around 930 BC God's chosen people Israel divided into the northern kingdom "Israel" and southern kingdom "Judah". In 722 BC Assyria defeated northern Israel at war, exiled its people to other lands, and brought in other nations to occupy the land. Those new occupants intermarried with the few Israelites who remained and they developed and practiced an alternative version of Israel's religion, taking a new name from their capital Samaria. Because they were so close geographically, ethnically and religiously and yet in other ways so far from them, the Jews of Judah hated the Samaritans of northern Israel more than any other people!

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## JESUS LEADS PHILIP

Last week we saw Stephen - selected as a deacon to serve tables so the apostles could concentrate on word ministry - immediately engaging in word ministry himself! Clearly, spreading the gospel of Jesus is so central to being the church of Jesus that everyone gets involved (recall 8:4 too). Now we see *another* deacon doing the same thing...

### Read Acts 8:5-40

3. Philip follows the Spirit's lead by preaching the gospel in *Samaria*. How is Simon the Sorcerer different? How does he think he can control the Holy Spirit himself?

4. Apart from one small village, during Jesus' time on earth (John 4), this is the first time Samaritans have believed in Jesus. Given the history between Jews and Samaritans, why do you think the Holy Spirit waited to enter them until the Jerusalem apostles could be there to witness it happening? (8:14-17)

What does this suggest about our role in relation to the Holy Spirit? (Have you seen people who try make him work when they want him to, rather than wait for him?)

What does it suggest about people we might exclude?

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## JESUS LEADS US AS GOD LED HIM

God's lead for the church is often surprising. But perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised, since his lead for Jesus was even more surprising...

5. The passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading (8:32-33) was from *Isaiah 53*. Philip, directed by God's angel, meets him on the road and explains how the passage has now been fulfilled by Jesus (8:35). What characteristic of Jesus does it emphasise?

How might it have felt to Jesus to follow God's will for him?

What would have happened if he hadn't?

The one who died for sin is King! Isaiah said that after his life was made an offering for sin, God would prolong his days and prosper him. Keep reading in Isaiah and just a couple of chapters later there's a promise that when God finally steps in to put things right, eunuchs and foreigners will be included (Isaiah 56:2-3)! It's no surprise that Jesus rose, and commanded his gospel be spread "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). The surprising thing is that persecution has helped the spread. It's not how the *church* expected it to happen, or wanted it to happen - they just have to follow the surprising lead of *Jesus*. Now we see that the way Jesus plans to spread the gospel to "the ends of the earth" is even *more surprising*...

### *Servant of the Lord*

7 He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

**Isaiah 53:7-12**

**Read Acts 9:1-31**

6. Both Ananias (9:13-14) and the Jerusalem church (9:26) have a hard time accepting Jesus' leading in regard to Saul. Given Saul's past, can you empathise with that? How so?

Why did they need to follow his lead anyway? (9:15)



7. Saul will become the major human agent of the gospel in the second half of Acts. But what good comes from his surprising selection here already?

What does this suggest about Jesus' knowledge of what he's doing versus ours?

As a result of all Jesus' surprising leads working out as they did, the whole church lived "in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit" (9:31). What appropriate awe and encouragement should we take for our church today?

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## GOSPEL VISION

Part of our vision (page 1) is to *"explore new times and places to regularly gather as God's people, adding fresh ways to deepen our love for God and one another."*

8. What should prompt us to try new and different things at MPC?

When that feels difficult for us personally, how could the lessons of this week's passage help us?

If we're a church on gospel mission, we'll need to notice and follow the gospel