

Acts 8:4-8



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4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

7 For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.

8 So there was much rejoicing in that city.

The year is 2025, Maryville TN, early Monday morning. You and your family are frantically packing up your home to flee to Ohio. Your mind is reeling, the events of the previous week so near, visceral, haunting the dreams during the few hours of sleep you've managed to get in your fight against the fear that you or your family could be next.

You still can't believe Daniel West is dead, murdered, right in the middle of the Greenbelt Park across from church. Shortly after the entire O'Dell family was rounded up and put in jail, then the Creasy's, rumors are rippling the van der Hoeven's may have been also been taken last night. You wonder who's caring for their kids.

Just a month ago everything had been so perfect, so incredible, you had heard the news of Jesus Christ, been forgiven of your sins, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, had been enveloped in a new joyful experience of Christian fellowship. That peace had been shattered, torn apart, and now you were packing up to flee your home and everything you were so hopeful for and happy about.

This is life for the early church upon the stoning of Steven.



Acts 8:1-3

1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

This should be a shockingly difficult passage to read. Families torn apart, suffering, death, great persecution, tremendous evil thrust upon an incredibly infant church. The response is astounding and it should grip us to our comfortable insulated American core.



Acts 8:4

4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

I struggle to share the word with neighbors and friends who are friendly, relatively sensible and definitely don't have murder on their mind. This infant church is being murdered, ripped apart yet as they scatter they spread. They do not lose one ounce of conviction in their faith. This blows my mind. I'd expect silence, a deep breath, some laying low. Absolutely not, preaching the word. The candle they lit in Jerusalem which caught and rose to a deadly inferno they continue to light everywhere they go.

Imagine. You move to Ohio, begin to pick up the pieces of your life, and the very thing which blew up your life in Maryville TN you insist on growing again. There's no church here, let's start one. No one is preaching here, let's start. It's incredible. They say the definition of foolishness is repeating the same actions again expecting different results. I mean, fools?!

What would possess a person towards such foolishness and destruction, exposing themselves, their families, friends, children to danger, death, hardship? I hope you know the answer, I hope it convicts you, I hope it terrifies you, it's the Holy Spirit. This early church is possessed by the Spirit of the living one true God and there is no sense above his command.

What to us may sound like a nice suggestion to go into all the world and preach the gospel was an all consuming inescapable overwhelming irresistible urge. It could not be escaped. Whatever human reason left in these early Christians to alleviate suffering, protect family, work and survive was entirely under the greater conviction to preach the word of God. We will run yes, it seems good to us to not be as available to be hunted down and destroyed, but wherever we run to, wherever our feet take us our mouths will be heard speaking full true things about our Savior.

Where you would find me pleading with God to alleviate my suffering, to bring back the good old days you find the early church already out the door, in another city, preaching and spreading salvation.

I'm not like that. To my shame. God forgive me. I am weak. I am not overflowing, overwhelmed by the Spirit. Awaken our hearts Lord. Bring greater conviction. Where today we have questions, confusion and doubts at suffering, tomorrow might we just be moved to preach the word. To keep right on. Break down our distractions and stupor from this deep level of conviction leading to an incredible effective gospel kingdom impact.



Suffering is the instrumental means for keeping your Christian life on track, not for derailing it.

This is so disturbing and astounding I needed to dig a bit deeper into the differences between these early church believers and myself to begin to identify some practical concrete areas I could begin and continue to address in my life that by God's grace I might become more like them and less like me. They understood Matthew 10:28–39 at a level I want to.



Matthew 10:28–39

28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

35 "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.



37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

At first blush the verses imply balance, amounts, more and less love but that is in not way applied in the way we so often do. With our time. We need to spend more time with God. The word is not intended to apply amounts but affections, but not in the way we so often phrase it. It's not that we need to love God more than we love others. Lest you think I've got it wrong let's look at this passage as paralleled in Luke 14:26-27.



Luke 14:26–27

26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

These passages are hard, really hard, they seem so contradictory, inflammatory, yet hidden for the understanding hearer is the entire framework for the Christian life we're intended to live within.

We're given our dead give away clue in verses 38 of Matthew "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." and 27 of Luke "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." We're commanded to take up our cross, our device of crucifixion, suffering, death, and follow Christ. Follow Christ where? To death? To Golgotha? No, quite the opposite. Read on in our Matthew passage verse 39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." There's so much here and we really need to hear it. You really need to get this. This is THE framework for your Christian life. This is mech suit of Christianity you need to be wearing to enable you to be effective in the essential tasks God is leading you towards.

There are two common problems we encounter when dealing with this passage or more generally dealing with the difference between early church Christians and us. The first is we think we have a choice here in how much we love God, how interested in Him we are, that we can get this right over time. We can't. This passage is really clear if you get this wrong you aren't a disciple. Now I absolutely do think you can sort of weakly understand this and kind of get it right accidentally and with great difficulty through tremendous striving and doubts, but that is no way to live.

The second is to just shrug this all off and say "who knows?" just love God a lot, whatever that means. Can we all agree this is too radical and essential and fundamental of a concept to treat that way?

The cross we bear is not our sin but our suffering. Our crucifixion is not a sacrifice for sin but of our earthly loves. Our problem is we think we know what life is, what value is, what's worth living for. The desperate fact of the matter however is we don't have a clue what's really valuable in life. We're eternal beings wrapped in mortal flesh. True value, eternal value, is veiled from our ability to perceive or pursue as long as we let our mortal lives rule our affections. So how do we unlock the eternal perspective, the view of God on what's most valuable and what we should truly live for? Death. Death to ourselves and our way of thinking. How do we crucify that worldview? The cross of persecution and suffering. By continuing to believe through the eyes of faith provided by the Spirit of God as we live through terribly difficult things.

It's not a matter of loving less or more it's about an entire perspective shift. A getting out of your selfish love, your worldly love, your mis-oriented mortal worldview and adopting entirely the perspective of God. Viewing every relationship, pleasure, choice and motivation through the perspective of a God who holds all value in view, all right and wrong appropriately. That eternity is longer than life.

Paul clears this up in more conversational terms in his first letter to Timothy and I want you to hear this as if Paul were writing to you. As you sit on your bed in 2025 about to move to Ohio due to persecution. As you struggle and suffer as a Christian in life and you're tempted to struggle with the fundamentals of faith vs moving forward in faith knowing this is the means of ensuring your success as a Christian not a barrier to some worldly selfish success which your flesh desires.



1 Timothy 6:6–21

6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,

14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

20 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge”—

21 which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

Do not go astray, do not live for the treasure of earth but spend your life for the treasures of heaven. Take example from the early church. What would seem to be foolishness is actually the most wise thing of all. Spending our earthly lives for the benefit of a better more blessed eternity.

- Do you see difficulty in your life as the instrumental means for keeping your life on track vs derailing it?
- Godliness is a means of great gain, the absolute greatest. Do you believe that? Are you willing to lose your life, bear your cross to gain it?