

## Acts 8:1-8

# How ordinary Christians produce extraordinary change

City Church | Standalone

**Bottom Line:** Ordinary Christians can produce extraordinary change when we commit to proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds

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### PRE - INTRO

City Church it's so good to be with you this morning. I want to give honor where honor is due and say thank you Pastor Trevor for having me. Your life, love, and leadership have been a tremendous blessing.

One of the things that wasn't mentioned about me in the introduction is that I'm a native of Houston, TX, and Alum of North Dakota State University. Now, anytime I tell someone that the next question is "how in the world did you end up in Fargo, ND all the way from Houston, TX"?

In fact, when I moved there it was .6% AA, so I tell people "I was like a pinch of pepper in a pound of salt"!

But, when my parents realized that a full scholarship to play football meant free food, free housing, and a free education, they essentially said, son you are about to make .7%.

But, little did I know that's where God would change my life. He would heal my body from a FB injury that paralyzed me and save my soul from sin and death that enslaved me and I wouldn't be standing here today, if it weren't for what God did in my life back then.

And neither would I be on this journey of church planting. A journey that has been harder than we expected, but better than we deserve.

- It's hard moving to a new city
- It's hard trying to find new friendships
- It's hard seeing my family grieve what was
- It's hard experiencing what feels like an intensification of spiritual warfare

Yet, our journey has been better than deserved...

10 months ago when we moved to Charlotte we came by ourselves, knowing a handful of people that would join us and since then God has built our team to be about 75 people.

All of which represent people that we get to disciple, develop, and deploy into the mission of God. So as we prepare to plant, I'm encouraged by what God is already building, but I don't believe he's done.

I believe there are more people he is stirring to partner with us through praying, giving, or going.

- We need people to pray, because we can't do this without God.
- We need people to join us, because it takes many laborers to reach a great harvest
- We need people to give, because your resources help fuel the mission of God.

Speaking of which, our mission at Oasis "is to glorify God by multiplying a movement of gospel renewal in Charlotte and around the world."

- **Why glorify God?** Because that's the highest purpose and priority on all things!

- **Why multiply a movement?** Because from the beginning God has been on the move redeeming and his redemptive work is not meant to stop at us, but be multiplied through us as we carry out the great commission.
- **Why gospel renewal?** Because Gospel renewal is God's redemptive work through Jesus to reconcile and restore all things back to himself and his design. Sin has broken our relationship with God, self, others, and the world, but through the Gospel they are renewed back to what God designed them to be.
- **Why Charlotte and around the world?** Because the mission of God doesn't have a geographic ceiling!

So every prayer you pray, every person who joins, and every dollar you give, is going towards helping that mission come to life. So thank you for our partnership and for being such a generous church.

### INTRO TEXT | ACTS 8:1-8

Alright, that's enough about our church, let's tether ourselves to the text. If you have your bibles in your lap or on your app, you can meet me in Acts chapter 8 verses 1-8.

**“8 ...On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him. 3 Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison. 4 So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to a<sup>[a]</sup> city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. 6 The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said, as they listened and saw the signs he was performing. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many**

**who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.**

### PRAYER

Gracious father before we take a seat I want to say thank you.

- Thank you for your world that we get to live in.
- Thank you for your word that we get to feast on.
- Thank you for the wonder of your son Jesus that we get to behold today as we worship you in spirit and in truth...

Meet us in this place!

### LETTER FROM A BIRMMINGHAM JAIL

In his letter from a Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed eight white religious leaders who criticized his nonviolent protests against segregation in Birmingham, Alabama.

If you know anything about the Civil Rights movement back then, you're probably familiar with threats posed by groups like the KKK or the white citizens council - two groups dedicated to stopping the advancement of African American citizens and you might assume they were the greatest obstacle to forward progress.

But interestingly, as he sat behind metal bars, surrounded by cemented walls, with pen and paper in his hand, he wrote: **“I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the African American's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate... Who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”... Who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom and lives by a mythical concept of time constantly advising us to wait for a “more convenient season. Shallow understanding from people of good**

will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, what Dr. King began to progressively conclude is that the greatest obstacle to progress were not the radical groups that outright rejected the civil rights movement.

Rather, it was the moderate who sympathized with the cause, but failed to play their part in supporting it. On the one hand, they say we are for you, but on the other hand they didn’t do anything to help...

Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection!

### WHY LISTEN

I think if we were honest about nominal, lukewarm christianity a very similar indictment could be made.

That is to say, what if the greatest threat to the Kingdom of God impacting a place as deeply and broadly as it could wasn’t the radical Christian hate groups, but the professing Christian who sympathizes with christianity, yet fails to play their part?

In fact, one of the reasons why we are so burdened to plant a church in Charlotte is because when we survey the spiritual landscape of the city two things stand out:

On the one hand it’s littered with lostness... One study showed that nearly 50% of the population would identify as religious “**nones**” meaning they don’t identify with any religion whatsoever!<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, there are a lot of “**nominal christians**” in this city who would say in profession they believe in Jesus, but in practice don’t follow Him.

- Many who claim Jesus in private, but fail to proclaim him in public
- Many who affirm gospel content, but fail to practice gospel character
- Many who will complain about how broken and dark the world is, yet not burdened enough to do anything about it

Could you imagine if people like that, who professed faith in the King, actually oriented their lives around the kingdom, the type of gospel impact we would see here and around the world?

Listen, never doubt the gospel joy & transformation that could saturate a city when we are committed to playing our part by proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds!

Or said another way, “**Ordinary Christians can produce extraordinary change when we commit to proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds**”

### EXPLANATION | ACTS 6 - 8:1-3

Which is what I want to show you from our text, but let me take a step back and bring you up to speed on the context.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://charlotte.stateofourcity.com/en#realities>

In the events leading up to this mass persecution against the church, there was a conflict within the church...

The Greek-speaking Jews known as Hellenist said their widows were being overlooked by the Hebraic Jews in the daily distribution of food.

So the Apostles chose seven deacons to ensure that everyone was cared for which resolved the issue and allowed the word of God to continue spreading in Jerusalem.

Then, Stephen, one of these deacons, began performing miracles among the people and it angered the religious leaders.

So much so that they challenged him to a debate, but when they couldn't win, they seized him, brought him to a council, and began to spread lies about him which eventually resulted in his death.

Now, off the heels of his murder, things began to go to Mayhem.

- People are lamenting and wailing over the loss of their dear brother
- A mass arrest has been sanctioned against the church in Jerusalem
- Men, women, and children are having to flee their homes

It was an absolute tragedy, but, ironically, what was meant to stop the gospel, actually helped propel the gospel forward!

### **Application | Gospel + Opposition**

Let me pause here and give you a small dose of Application...

I know we may not be living in situations as horrendous as the early church here in the west, but we may be lamenting the state of our society and terrified about the future of the church.

Acts 8 seems to suggest that external opposition against the gospel and the flourishing of the gospel aren't a dichotomy. They go hand in hand.

The church is like a Pinata, the more you hit us, the more the gospel spills out...

So, it doesn't matter how much the world is in disarray, the gates of hell through kings and queens, governments and groups will not stop the kingdom of god from expanding, but the vehicle through which it expands is the church!

### **ORDINARY CHRISTIANS | ACTS 8:4 - 5**

Notice, in verse 4, it says **So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them.**

This is a significant turning point in the history of the early church because it marks the first time the gospel is being carried outside of Jerusalem which represents the fulfillment of Acts 1:8, where Jesus said "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And it doesn't say the gospel spread outside of Jerusalem because of the apostles, pastors, or professional staff...

No, the gospel spread outside of Jerusalem's walls because **ordinary, Christian's were committed to proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds...**

Let me unpack that statement for you...

The word “ordinary” means “that which is common, or doesn’t have any special, distinct features about it”.

And though the text doesn’t use that specific word to describe those who were scattered, we know from context they weren’t some elite group of christians that Jesus commissioned to carry out his mission.

They were regular “old folk” who encountered the saving grace of Jesus and were empowered by the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit...

How is the mission of God going to advance in Murfreesboro and around the world?

- It won’t simply be because of weekend sermons
- It won’t simply be because of well resourced events that churches host

It’s also going to take ordinary Christian’s like you and me being committed to proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds where we live, learn, work, and play.

### **PROCLAIMING GOOD NEWS | ACTS 8:4-5**

It’s also important to understand that when I say “proclaiming good news” I’m talking about storytelling.

In Greek, the word used to describe what these scattered believers are doing is called “*Euangelion*” which is where we get the word “*gospel*” from and it literally means “good announcement or good news”.

Historians note that the word “Euangelion” or “Gospel” wasn’t only used by christians, but also by the Roman Empire

Following a bloody civil war, The Roman Emperor Augustus was crowned as the bringer of peace, or “*saviour*”, in gratitude for rescuing Rome from civil strife and their enemies.

Well, throughout the ancient world, this message was proclaimed on statues, in poetry, in song and speeches and the announcement of this story could be spoken of as ‘*euangelion*’ or ‘gospel’.

So, what the church is seen doing is repurposing the word to tell an even better story...

Namely, that God himself put on the wardrobe of flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to dwell among us. But, he didn’t simply come to take a tour of earth, he came to live the life we could not live by perfectly obeying God’s law so that every righteous requirement necessary for us to be reconciled to God would be fulfilled.

Yet, it wasn’t enough for him to simply live a perfect life in our place!

Someone had to pay the penalty for sin... So, he took it a step further and willingly offered himself up as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins on the cross.

He would be beaten, bullied, bruised, battered, bloodied, and worst of all condemned by his own father because he was laying our sin on the sinless, in our place!

But, the news gets even better.

This Jesus who lived and died, lived again, but this time death died, instead. For, his resurrection put a nail in the coffin of death and our greatest enemy was defeated and now he is ruling and reigning and one day he’s returning to right every wrong, restore what was lost, gather his spotless bride, and judge his enemies.

- Because of that news, we are forgiven
- Because of that news we are free
- Because of that news we are faultless in the eyes of God
- Because of that news we are fortified against the enemy
- Because of that news we are in God's family

That's the story that they were telling naturally, and enthusiastically in their everyday lives... They were captured by the awe of what Jesus had accomplished and literally leveraged their persecution to gossip about the gospel.

### **Application | How are you leveraging your life**

How are you leveraging your life to do the same? You say, Pastor Rich, you don't really understand the demands of my life?

- I'm really busy with family, work, school and extra curricular activities.

You have no idea...

Listen, I get it. I have to wrestle with some of the same things... Life is busy for all of us!

And yet, when I read about a group of persecuted believers, running for their lives, left wondering where they are going to eat, sleep, and live, while also spreading the gospel, I'm inclined to believe that the issue for us isn't really "time", the issue is "priority".

For some of you, it's that you don't care to prioritize sharing your faith and you have a really clever way of justifying why God uniquely allows you to opt. out of that part of following Jesus.

But, ironically even in your silence you are telling a story about Jesus.

You see, by identifying as a Christian but choosing to stay silent you're effectively telling the world Jesus is worthy to claim in private, but he isn't worthy enough to proclaim in public.

If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus and you're ok with that, I think Jesus would say you are neither hot nor cold, but luke warm.

And you are implicitly positioning yourself as a threat to the mission of God because you're simply not playing your part as a disciple.

But for others of you, that's not your heart. For you, it's not that you don't care to prioritize it, it's that you don't know how to prioritize it which is fundamentally different.

Here are a few things you can try, that aren't exhaustive but could be a great start:

- Spend time identifying people in your life that are far from God, but close to you.

I once heard someone ask the question **who's your FRANC?**

- **Friends**
- **Relatives**
- **Acquaintances**
- **Neighbors**
- **Co-workers/classmates.**

Once you've identified who your FRANC is, spend time praying for them.

Then what if you made a plan this summer to practically hangout with one friend, one relative, one acquaintance, one neighbor, and one co-worker or classmate?

And you used that time to ask how you could pray for them, asked questions about their life, asked if you could serve them in any way?

Maybe you could even ask intentional questions like “what would you say the greatest problem of our world is and how would you suggest we solve it?”

- Is it education
- Is it politics
- Is it religion?

Just listen intentionally, and if they offer a perspective that’s detached from Jesus and the Christian worldview, it’s a great opportunity to offer them a fresh gospel perspective.

The list could go on and on, but the point is instead of viewing your life circumstances as a barrier to sharing the gospel, consider how God might be using your circumstances as a bridge to share the gospel in the same way he used their persecution.

### **PRACTICE GOOD DEEDS ACTS 8:6 - 8**

Furthermore, not only did the good news of the kingdom spread, good deeds of the kingdom spread.

In verse 6, it says **6 The crowds were all paying attention to what Philip said, as they listened and saw the signs he was performing. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.**

So, Phillips' ministry was one of both word and deed: On the one hand, he told people about the King, but on the other hand he showed them the Kingdom which the text describes as “Signs”.

Signs that were primarily done to validate the authenticity of the gospel and prove that God’s redemptive Kingdom was breaking through.

But, I also want you to notice something else about the signs... For one, they are miraculous! People are getting physically healed and delivered from demonic suffering.

That’s because where the gospel is preached faithfully the kingdom of darkness is confronted and people get set free from its bondage.

But, I also want you to notice how these signs are being done in the context of vulnerable, afflicted people. Why? Because God deeply cares about suffering, oppressed people!

Sometimes, God demonstrates his care for suffering and oppressed people by intervening in miraculous ways as demonstrated in our text, but more often than not he demonstrates his care in natural ways by extension of the church practicing good deeds.

### **Example | Tabitha**

A great example of this is Tabitha who the next chapter describes as a disciple full of good works and charity. So much so that when she died, the widows she served, wept.

You see, through her acts of service she adorned the gospel (as 1 Peter would say) and became a living, moving, tangible expression of God’s heart for vulnerable people.

And I believe what she's recorded doing individually, the church is commissioned to do collectively because practicing good deeds opens the door for proclaiming good news.

- When we help the orphan find a home
- The Immigrant find a community
- The impoverished find stability
- Or confront injustice

Those types of good deeds often open the door for proclaiming the good news!

That's what we want our Church to be about! We don't want to simply be a gathering of people, but a movement of ordinary Christians who are committed to **proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds** wherever we go so that the joy of Jesus would saturate the city of Charlotte.

We want to have such an impact on our city that if the doors of Oasis Church were to ever close, people would mourn in the same way people mourned Tabitha's death!

## CONCLUSION

But, for that to happen it's going to take us being willing to do what we wouldn't naturally do and going where we wouldn't naturally go, just like Philip did which is what strikes me most about this story.

You have to understand that much of this is happening in Samaria which was a place Jews avoided because of deep racial tension.

Yet Philip, A Jew, went because the gospel changed him and he was mimicking the footsteps of Jesus who also ministered to Samaritans.

This reminds us that we are not called to proclaim good news and practice good deeds to one homogeneous group of people, but to all people everywhere, and sometimes that means doing things we wouldn't naturally do and going places we wouldn't naturally go, but because we've encountered the gospel we do it anyway.

For you that could mean.

- Being more intentional to meet the felt need of someone in your community
- It could mean saying yes to the mission field or re-prioritizing your time to share the gospel where you live, learn, work, and play.
- Or it could mean partnering to help plant a church

Whatever it is, when ordinary Christians commit to proclaiming good news and practicing good deeds in their everyday lives, that's when the mission of God spreads and communities of people experience joy because it brings a fresh sense of hope to people who have lived in darkness for far too long...

I believe God wants to do that in this city through you and I believe He wants to do that in Charlotte through us!

## REFLECTION MOMENT

As I close we are going to transition into a time of reflection... For 90 seconds, I want you to reflect on what God is saying to you at this moment?

- What truth is he using to renew your mind?
- What sin is he exposing to convict your heart?
- What next step is he inviting you to take to shape your obedience?

Take 90 seconds to reflect on that and if you'd like to pray about what God is putting on your heart or anything else, we're going to have a prayer counselors available for you up front and in the back.