

The Church is Born: A Startling Response to Pain
Growth Group Discussion Guide
Acts 5:17-42

Intro questions

- What's the first thing you do when someone in your inner circle gets sick?
- Pastor Josh made light of the tendency to become fearful and resentful when illness or hardship arises. But it's part of life, and especially life as a follower of Jesus.
- The underlying premise of this week's sermon was, "The church shines in suffering." Do you agree or disagree? How have you seen this principle playing out in your experience?
- Before we dive in, take a moment to pray, asking for God's Spirit to lead your discussion.

1. Read Acts 5:17-20, then discuss the following.

- What motivated the actions of the religious leaders in this instance?
- Have you ever experienced jealousy prompting hostility toward you? Share an example.
- Have you ever felt hostility to another because of jealousy? What might be the cause of this reaction?
- In v. 20, what was so significant about the angel's direction for the apostles?
 - God, through the angel, tells the Christians to use their new freedom for others, even though it will be costly. For what purposes are you currently using the freedom and power God has given you?
 - If faced with this same directive, what might lead you to make the choice to suffer again? What would possibly hold you back?
 - Josh said on Sunday, "**You will only be able to do what Jesus asks of you when it's costly if he is more precious to you than your own self-preservation.**" What's your response to this statement? Does it ring true? Why or why not?
 - "Tell the people all about this new life." If you were given this instruction, what aspects of the new life have you experienced that you would tell someone about?
- How does this paragraph challenge you?

2. Read Acts 4:21-32, then discuss the following.

- What is the essence of the Jewish leaders' complaint against the apostles (see v. 28)?
 - Who is actually guilty of Jesus' blood? (After several people answer, go back and read Acts 4:27-27, and see if anyone wants to add anything).
- What are the key points in Peter's response to the charges?
- What is so startling about the reason for Jesus' being exalted (see v. 31)?
- One way that we shine in suffering is when we **see it as an opportunity to explain the essence of our hope.**
 - Have you had opportunity to do this? What might it look like in your current challenges?

- Note in v. 32 that Peter’s response is based on his experience—what he has witnessed of Jesus, and what the Holy Spirit has done in him. To what degree could you also speak of what you’ve experienced in Jesus and what the Holy Spirit has done in you?
 - If nothing comes to mind, what steps could you take to begin having such an experience?

3. Read Acts 4:33-42, then discuss the following.

- What is the essence of Gamaliel’s argument? How does it bear out historically?
- In vv. 41-42, why are the apostles rejoicing?
 - How does one get to the place that he/she can rejoice in this kind of suffering?
 - How have we suffered (or are we suffering) for the name of Jesus—perhaps even at the hands of “religious” people?
 - Do we rejoice in this? How can we?
- Josh said, based on v. 41, **“We will shine in hardship when we see it as a chance to dig down deeper into the joy that Jesus offers.”**
 - Have you had opportunities to do this in the past? Please share about that experience.
 - Are you faced with this “opportunity” in any current circumstances?
 - Where do we find the means to keep declaring the good news, knowing that mistreatment will come?
 - On Sunday Josh said that another way that we shine in suffering is when we see it as an **opportunity to show the worth of the gospel**. Why is this true? How does it play out in *our* lives?
 - How can we support one another in this endeavor?

4. **Prayer:** Spend some time praying with regard to the things you’ve discussed—digging down into the joy of Jesus, finding him more precious than self-preservation, and showing the worth of the gospel in hardship, for example. Allow group members to share any specific hardships they’re facing, before you pray.