

SERMON STUDY GUIDE
For the sermon preached on
6/14/2020:
“Why I Still Believe”
Acts 8:1-8

How to use the Study Guide During Our “Stay at Home” Online Group Meetings

Group life is even more critical during this incredible season. Over and over, group leaders are reporting that there is a new hunger to connect, share, pray, and meditate on Scripture together, and so we are making these guides available weekly and suggesting a new format during this season.

As you know, our Group Life’s vision is to “practice the way of Jesus.” And while Jesus never had to lead a Torah study over Zoom, he was strategic in his teaching ministry, and we want to be as well.

There are a number of differences between meeting in person and meeting online, ranging from the obvious to the subtle. One is, given our attention spans for online meetings, we want to encourage you to limit the length of your call between 45-60 minutes and we are calling this “Check-In Plus One.” Meaning, spend a few minutes checking in with your group and see if there are any new needs with them (or even amongst their neighbors). “The One” is to spend time in study. As our Stay at Home continues, our desire for meaningful content and interaction will grow. Given our new format, the study guides based on Sunday’s Sermon will be designed to be more application based (as opposed to unpacking the text with the Inductive Bible Study method). You might consider sharing the passage beforehand with your group in hopes that they might spend more time with the Scripture before the gathering.

As always, we are so grateful for you, your gifting, your servant leadership, and all that you do in practicing the way of Jesus in community.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Tim, on behalf of the Group Life Team

For the Leader: “Check-In Plus One”

Welcome everyone to the Zoom call and outline the goal of this call being 45 minutes. Spend 15-20 minutes checking in with one another, then move into a time of prayer, and then spend some time discussing the application of the Scripture passage.

A “Check-in” question might be, “How are you doing, and is there anything new that has arisen in your life or in your neighborhood that we can pray about?”

For the Group:

As mentioned, throughout our Stay at Home quarantine, we have shortened our study, given the confinements and attention spans on Zoom calls. So these three questions are designed to be less inductive and more practical. Let's get started.

This week we are taking a break from our "What Now?" series, and Pastor Bryan is speaking into the state of the church with a message called "Why I Still Believe."

Q – In the message, Pastor Bryan shares three reasons to be hopeful and confident in the face of current challenges. The first is that we can **still believe in the sovereignty of God**. He goes on to explain: "When we say that God is sovereign, we're not saying that everything that happens is God's will. Sin is not God's will. We're saying that everything that happens can be worked together for God's will. God is able to bring good from evil; to turn tragedy into triumph."

- When have you seen God bringing evil from good in your own life experience?
- How might followers of Jesus partner with God to bring light out of the darkness we are experiencing in society right now?

Q – The second reason to be hopeful and confident even in the midst of the tumult around us is that we can **still believe in the power of the gospel** to change people's lives.

- When have you seen the good news of Jesus Christ transform a heart, a mind, a life, or a community—your own or someone else's?
- In what area of your life right now are you most in need of the transforming power of the gospel?

Q – The third reason to be hopeful is that we can **still believe in the mission of the church**. The passage we are working from this week, Acts 8:1-8, says:

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. . . . Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. . . . So there was great joy in that city." (Acts 8, vv. 1, 4, and 8)

Reflecting on how God used the scattering caused by persecution to bring about the growth that was God's purpose, Pastor Bryan explains: "I believe the Lord is using this pandemic to scatter us like seeds all over greater Boston. He's reminding us that our mission isn't to fill buildings, but to reach people."

- How do the current challenges we're facing as a society invite you to think differently about how we live out our mission as a church ("to make and mobilize more disciples for Jesus Christ, in Greater Boston and beyond")?

Confident that God is on the move, let's close our time in prayer, thanking the Lord for the gift of the gospel and seeking God's direction for our lives. Let's pray ...