

# scattered

## Sermon Outline

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Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Acts 8:4

### Persecuted, Scattered and Growing

Advancing the Kingdom in the Face of Adversity

Acts 8:1-8

#### Introduction:

In many places across our world Christians live under the imminent threat of persecution and violence. According to Release International, 80 percent of global religious persecution today is directed against Christians. The rise of militant Islamic Jihadist groups targeting Christians and Jews has resulted in untold numbers of deaths and waves of refugees fleeing from the violence to safe havens around the world.

While most Christians would like to go through life loving others and being loved, that's not what is happening across our broken and hurting world. What we're experiencing isn't new and shouldn't be unexpected. Jesus warned His disciples (John 15:18-20) this world would not be their friend, and that living and sharing their faith would involve hardship, hurt and persecution.

Just as Jesus had forewarned, the book of Acts records the growing tension, resentment and hostility against the early church that escalated into open violence. In Acts 7, the story of Stephen's martyrdom is told, as well as the subsequent organized persecution that exploded across the city of Jerusalem. Christians fled for their lives. The Church was scattered. Acts 8:1 records: "All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."

How did these first generation Christians respond to the violence against them? How did they handle displacement from their homes and the loss of their livelihoods and many relationships that had sustained them? The Bible says simply (Acts 8:4) that, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." There is a huge amount of content behind that statement! What an incredible example of Christians who, while facing devastating circumstances, maintained a vibrant faith and powerful witness to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's look at their example.

#### These persecuted and scattered Christians:

**1. arrived in their new circumstances with their faith intact and a renewed sense of urgency to share it.** (Acts 8:4)

These followers of Jesus may have lost their homes and even some of their loved ones, but they didn't lose sight of God. Even though they were scattered in all directions, they knew God was aware of where they were and what they needed. The Church was scattered, but it wasn't decimated. Their displacement created new frontiers of ministry and opened the door for an expanded audience to hear and respond to the gospel. As a direct result, Samaria accepted the Word of God (Acts 8:14). A church grew up as far away as Damascus, Syria (Acts 9).

**2. were serious about their discipleship.**

Howard Snyder wrote an article entitled "Fourteen Favorite Ways to Twist the Gospel." One of the

twists/distortions he listed was to “make believers instead of disciples.” This is in reference to Jesus’ command to go and make disciples. Disciples are involved in the work of making disciples — of reproducing themselves. In order to make disciples one must first be a disciple.

Dallas Willard, in his book *Spirit of the Disciplines*, wrote about the “great omission from the great commission.” That omission is the failure to lead baptized believers deeply into the life of Christ (discipleship).

These scattered Christians weren’t mere believers — they were disciples whose lives bore witness to the truth of Jesus and bore fruit in the making of more disciples. Disciples do not share their faith in Jesus out of a sense of duty or responsibility or obligation — it is their life!

### **3. used adversity as a springboard for ministry.** (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Gymnasts use springboards for added height and thrust. These boards boost their abilities to approach and complete a maneuver. Adversity has a propulsive force and power to put us in God’s hands and align us with His purposes. Adversity can authenticate and empower our witness.

#### **Illustrations:**

“The greatest evidence of God is His love flowing through us against the backdrop of hurt.” — Bill Elliff, *White Water*

“To our most bitter opponents we say: ‘Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you ... Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we will still love you. And one day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your hearts and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.’” — Martin Luther King, from his sermon: “Strength to Love”

#### **Conclusion:**

Just as a cancer survivor has a powerful and authentic message of hope to share with those battling cancer, so, too, a persecuted and scattered and, yet faithful, church has a powerful witness to the world of God’s love and provision for His people in the midst of this broken and hurting world.

#### **Prayer by Missionary to Africa, David Livingstone**

Lord, send me anywhere,  
Only go with me.  
Lay any burden on me,  
Only sustain me.  
And sever every tie,  
But the tie that binds me to Thy service and Thy heart.