**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

**Acts 5:12-42**

**\* Read Acts 5:12-42. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

At Fegenbush, Pastor Scott will emphasize this point: “Living on mission for Jesus can bring persecution, but nothing can stop the gospel from going forward.” His outline will be: expect persecution, be committed, be obedient, be reminded.

At East, Pastor Blake will emphasize this point: The gates of Hell will not prevail over the church of the resurrected King, so followers of Jesus Christ will not bow to the will of man. His outline will be: boldness, commitment to explicit gospel, wholehearted devotion, and advancement of gospel despite persecution.

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 5:12-42?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*Despite the opposition/persecution from without and within, the gospel goes forth in great power, great grace, and great fear. Following the story of Ananias and Sapphira, the Spirit-empowered apostles go to the temple boldly proclaiming the message of Jesus and performing miracles in the name/power of Jesus, in answer to their prayers for boldness in Acts 4:23-31 (vv. 12-16). The religious leaders are filled with jealousy due to the rising power/influence/authority of the apostles so that they arrest all the apostles (vv. 17-18). Yet, an angel of the Lord releases the apostles and gives them instruction to go to the temple and speak the “words of this Life” (vv. 19-21a). On the next day, when the religious leaders send for the apostles to bring them to trial, the apostles are not in prison, but rather are standing boldly in the temple proclaiming the name of Jesus, highlighting the powerlessness of the religious leaders and leaving the religious leaders perplexed (vv. 21b-25). Once again, the religious leaders arrest the apostles, doing so gently out of the fear of man (v. 26). The religious leaders give stern instruction to the apostles to stop preaching the name of Jesus and to stop impugning their character/authority, but rather than follow these instructions, Peter immediately proclaims the name of Jesus and challenges their character/authority, noting that obedience to God is of utmost importance (vv. 27-32). The proclamation of the “words of this Life” and the name/message of Jesus leads the religious leaders to murderous rage, but in this moment of rising tension and anger, Gamaliel steps forward with a word of caution/moderation: if the movement is not of God, it will fail, but if the movement is of God, it will prevail (vv. 33-39). Heeding Gamaliel’s counsel, for the moment, the religious leaders opted for beating and threatening the apostles before releasing them (vv. 39-40). After being released, the apostles left “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” and proclaiming/teaching/preaching Jesus as the Christ (vv. 41-42). In short, though persecution intensifies, the gospel goes forth unhindered and with all boldness through his Spirit-empowered witnesses.*

*As you read and pray through this passage, what themes stand out in this text? Take time to read Acts 3-5 and to note how the persecution/opposition to the gospel intensifies across those chapters.*

**2. What is going on in Acts 5:12-16?**

*Flowing out of the instantaneous judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, great fear fell upon the whole church and all who heard of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Though the great fear caused some to weigh the cost of joining the apostles, the apostles daily went to the temple to heal in the name of Jesus and to proclaim the name of Jesus. As a result, many were healed of their sicknesses and freed from their demon possession, and more important, many came to save faith in the Lord, at a greater rate than ever. The fear that was brought about by the death of Ananias and Sapphira created an opportune backdrop for God’s great power to be proclaimed and God’s great grace to be displayed.*

*Note that the signs and wonders happening in Acts 5:12-16 are an answer to the believers’ prayer Acts 4:23-31. The purpose of these signs and wonders was to point to the Word of God, in whom they could find spiritual healing/salvation. Also, these signs and wonders point us to the fact that new era of God’s work has dawned, and this era points forward to the end when God will make all things new.*

*For similar miracles of Jesus, see Luke 7:20-23; 11:20.*

**3. What is going on in Acts 5:17-26?**

*As you can imagine, the signs and wonders done by the Spirit-empowered apostles garners much attention from the people. However, the religious leaders do not like that the apostles/followers of Jesus are gaining in power/influence/authority with the people. Thus, the text tells us that the religious leaders were jealous, which led them to arrest the apostles. However, though the Sadducees do not believe in the power of the resurrection or the existence of angels, God sends an angel to release the apostles from prison and to commission them to go preach the “words of this Life” in the temple. When the religious leaders send to have the apostles brought before them for trial, they are informed that the apostles are not in jail. The religious leaders are puzzled by this situation because the cell was securely locked and properly guarded. In the middle of this chaos and seen of the powerlessness of the religious leaders, one comes to tell them that the apostles are standing in the temple area proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. Once again, the religious leaders arrest the apostles, yet they do so gently for fear that he people might stone them for arresting the apostles.*

*Note that angel releases Peter in Acts 12:6-11. For angels in Acts, see 1:10-11; 8:26; 10:3-7, 22; 11:13-14; 12:6-11, 23; 27:23-24. For “words of this Life,” see Acts 13:26, 46, 48; 11:18; John 6:35, 68; 14:6.*

*On angel’s release of apostles, Darrell Bock writes, “This is the ultimate, cosmic overrule of the Jewish leadership as the sovereign God acts to free the apostles, opening the doors of their prison. This passage shows the leadership’s powerlessness before God’s action, something that Gamaliel later notes might be possible with this troublesome group (5:39). So, at a literary level as well as at a historical level, the release is God’s anticipated answer to Gamaliel’s options.”*

*On verses 21-26, John Polhill writes, “The Sanhedrin was totally thwarted in its designs, totally helpless to control the situation. All was in God’s hands. The only reason the apostles finally appeared before the Council was their own willingness to do so. And they were willing to do so because the events of the night had convinced them once more that they were very much in God’s hands.”*

**4. What is going on in Acts 5:27-40?**

*After arresting the apostles a second time, the religious leaders give them explicit instruction: (1) stop proclaiming the name of Jesus; (2) stop impugning/undermining our character/authority. Right after hearing this, Peter responds by undermining their authority (We must obey God, not man) and proclaims the name of Jesus Christ (God raised Jesus whom you killed, God exalted Jesus, God poured out His Spirit, we and the Holy Spirt are witnesses to these vents). As you can imagine, this boldness of Peter only leads to more anger on behalf of the religious leaders, with the text portraying them as men filled with murderous rage. In the midst of this heated scene, Gamaliel steps forward to offer his counsel: Take heed, lest you be found opposing God. Remember our history—Judas the Galilean led a tax revolt but he came to nothing and Theudas too led a revolt and came to nothing. Thus, if this movement is of man, then it will fail, but if this movement is of God, then it will prevail. Heeding Gamaliel’s advice, for the moment, to wait and see what comes of the movement, the religious leaders threaten and beat the apostles before releasing them.*

*In this interchange between the apostles and the religious leaders, we see the following things: (1) The religious leaders are concerned about their own self and their own kingdom, but the apostles are concerned about Christ and His kingdom. (2) Peter continues to be a witness to the name of and power of Jesus Christ, which is the very thing the religious leaders want to end. (3) Peter continues to highlight the sinfulness of the religious leaders and the majesty/beauty/victory of Jesu Christ. (4) Peter begins and ends his speech focusing on obedience to God.*

*John Stott writes, “To be sure, Christians are called to be conscientious citizens and generally speaking, to submit to human authorities (see Rom 13:1ff; 1 Tim 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13ff). But if the authority concerned misuses its God-given power to command what he forbids or forbid what he commands, then the Christian’s duty is to disobey the human authority in order to obey God’s.”*

*John Polhill writes “The high priest’s concern about being charged with responsibility for Jesus’ ‘blood’ may have had more significance than appears at first sight. To ‘lay someone’s blood’ on someone is an Old Testament expression for a charge of murder and in accordance with the ius Talinis demanded the death of the guilty party. In essence the high priest was saying, ‘You are trying to get us killed for responsibility in this man’s death.’”*

*For other texts linked to 5:30, see Acts 10:39; Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24. Compare the reactions of Pilate and Jesus to Gamaliel and the apostles, as you look back at Luke 23:1-25. Maximum of 39 stripes prescribed by Jewish law (see 2 Corinthians 11:24; Deuteronomy 25:3), which is possibly what the apostles endured in verse 40. Note that “Leader/Prince” is connected with “Author of Life” title in Acts 3:15.*

**5. What is going on in Acts 5:41-42?**

*The response of the apostles is twofold: (1) rejoicing to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus and (2) proclaiming the name of Jesus everywhere they go—in the temple, from house to house. The gospel goes forth in the midst of persecution because the apostles are empowered by the Holy Spirit and convinced of the power of the name of Jesu to save. We are beginning to see the disciples of Jesus live as Jesus lived, empowered by the Spirit who brings great power, grace, fear, and growth.*

*As you think about persecution, what is it that enables one to stand firm during persecution? Should Christians experience persecution/opposition? How can we pray and should we pray for our brothers/sisters in Christ who are being persecuted throughout the world?*

For joy in the face of suffering, see Matthew 5:10-12; 10:17-22; 16:24-28; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 6:22-23; 12:11-12; 21:13-19; John 15:18-25; 16:2-3; Romans 5:3-4; Philippians 1:29; 3:10-11; Colossians 1:24; Hebrews 10:34; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Revelation 12:11-12.

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. The people of Jerusalem noticed the gospel work being done in their midst (vv. 12-16). In our lives, do people see the gospel at work in and through us? If so, how so? If not, why not? How have you seen God work in and through you recently? What are some practical ways that we as a community group could do missions together, specifically ministering to those who have needs?

2. Imagine the scene following the death of Ananias and Sapphira. How would seeing God’s judgment at work cause you to examine your walk with Him? How does this event and the persecution in Acts 5:12-42 bring purity to the church and wholehearted commitment to the church? Is your walk with Christ important in every sphere (where you work, live, and play) of your life?

3. What are the reactions of people today as you share the gospel? What obstacles/barriers keep you from sharing the gospel with people?

4. Are you prepared for persecution/opposition to the gospel? Think through passages that speak about persecution/opposition to the gospel (for example, see John 15:18-25; 1 Peter 4:12-19). Why do we fear opposition/persecution? How can we stand firm in spite of persecution?

5. Look at Peter’s response in 5:29-32. Why is Peter able to boldly stand and proclaim the gospel at this moment (look back at Acts 4:23-31)? What do you notice about Peter’s succinct gospel presentation?

6. Knowing that God’s purposes/plans are unstoppable/unthwartable, how does that encourage us to boldly proclaim the gospel? Knowing that the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it (the church),” how does that give us confidence to stand firm and to share the gospel boldly? Did you have a chance to have a gospel conversation this week? If so, take time to share that story and to pray for that individual.

7. If we’re not facing opposition/persecution at some level, does that say anything about our Christian walk? Have you counted the cost of following Jesus? Take time to pray for one another that you will be wholly devoted to the Lord, that you will be one who knows and follows Jesus daily in that you say, think, do, and feel.

8. Around the world, we have many brothers and sisters in Christ who are enduring much persecution. Take time to pray for them. Pray that God will strengthen them to stand boldly and proclaim the name of Jesus, even if it means the loss of their life (see Revelation 12:11-12). Pray that God will move in great power to redeem and restore a people for himself in the midst of persecution. Pray that God will raise up many at Highview who will count the cost of following Jesus and will risk it all to carry the name of Jesus to places where He is not named. Pray that God will strengthen us to suffer dishonor for His name and empower us to proclaim Jesus as the Christ this week.

9. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. Jones):

A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

10. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

A. Understanding the Bible

1. What do we learn about God?

a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

2. What do we learn about people?

a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

b. Look for the fallen condition.

c. Look for how God’s people should live.

3. What do we learn about relating to God?

a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

4. What do we learn about relating to others?

a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

B. Applying the Bible

1. What does God want me to think/understand?

2. What does God want me to believe?

3. What does God want me to desire?

4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

Pastor Scott: “Living on mission for Jesus can bring persecution, but nothing can stop the gospel from going forward.”

Pastor Blake: “The gates of Hell will not prevail over the church of the resurrected King, so followers of Jesus Christ will not bow to the will of man.”

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—2 Corinthians 6; 2 Samuel 13

2. Tuesday—2 Corinthians 7; 2 Samuel 14

3. Wednesday—2 Corinthians 8; 2 Samuel 15

4. Thursday—2 Corinthians 9; 2 Samuel 16

5. Friday—2 Corinthians 10; 2 Samuel 17

6. Saturday—2 Corinthians 11; 2 Samuel 18

7. Sunday—2 Corinthians 12; 2 Samuel 19

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 1)**

1. October 15th –Acts 6:1-7

2. October 22nd –Acts 6:8-8:3

3. October 29th –Acts 8:4-40

4. November 5th –Acts 9:1-31

5. November 12th –Acts 9:32-11:18

6. November 19th—Acts 11:19-30

**\* Advent 2017 (Passages are Likely to Change)**

1. November 26th—Luke 1:1-25

2. December 3rd—Luke 1:26-38

3. December 10th—Luke 1:39-56

4. December 17th—Luke 1:57-80

5. December 24th—Luke 2:1-21

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 2)**

1. January 7th—Acts 12 (Herod’s Persecution and Death/No government can stop God’s church)

2. January 14th—Acts 13-14

3. January 21st—Acts 15:1-35

4. January 28th—Acts 15:36-16:5

5. February 4th—Acts 16:6-40

6. February 11th—Acts 17:1-15

7. February 18th—Acts 17:16-34

8. February 25th—Acts 18:1-23

9. March 4th—Acts 18:24-28

10. March 11th—Acts 19:1-41

11. March 18th—Acts 20:1-16

12. March 25th—Acts 20:17-30

--. April 1st (Easter Sunday)

13. April 8th—Acts 21:1-26

14. April 15th—Acts 21:27-22:29

15. April 22nd—Acts 22:30-23:35

16. April 29th—Acts 24:1-27

17.May 6th—Acts 25:1-12

18. May 13th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 25:13-26:32

19. May 20th—Acts 27:1-44

20. May 27th (Memorial Day Weekend)—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)