

Week Six

Conversations with God

ACTS 6–12

READ

We naturally crave comfort. We enjoy the safe, the familiar, and the known. And yet sometimes this very natural craving can become an obstacle to our own growth. The child craves the pacifier long after it is good and healthy. The young graduate craves the familiarity of her high school environment despite the potential of the college life that awaits her. The young dad clings to the security of the known salary as he hesitates to consider a promising new business venture.

The pacifier, the high school friends, the steady job—these are all good and healthy in and of themselves, but when we cling to them, they can become our downfall. Though we crave comfort, it is often *discomfort* that pushes us forward into uncharted waters and motivates us to live up to our true potential. When mom adds a foul-tasting solution to the pacifier, or when high school friends move away, or when the job is lost, we grumble and we gripe, but then...we grow!

The early followers of Christ were no different. Not long after receiving the promised Holy Spirit, their world grew increasingly comfortable:

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

Suddenly, the disciples found themselves enjoying miraculous abilities, abundant provision, sweet fellowship, special favor, and great success. Together these made for a relatively contented environment for the disciples in their local community of Jerusalem. Quite naturally, they were likely unmotivated to change much, if any, of their strategy for ministry—after all, why fix what isn't broken? But earlier Christ had made clear the full scope of their commission:

... to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

God's intention for their ministry was the expansion of his kingdom *throughout the whole world*, and yet the comforts of early success threatened to dramatically limit the spread of the gospel to the familiar confines of Jerusalem.

This week in Acts 6–12, you will read about the powerful way God uses discomfort to advance his kingdom rapidly and radically throughout the world.

First, grumbling breaks out among the once unified community of early believers, motivating the apostles to develop new leaders...

The Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said,...

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“Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.” (Acts 6:1-3)

And the result...

So the word of God spread. (Acts 6:7)

Next, persecution arises causing them to flee:

A great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1)

And the result...

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

Finally, the Jewish believers are confronted with their own prejudice. Peter, the lead apostle, acknowledges:

It is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. (Acts 10:28)

And the result...

The gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. (Acts 10:45)

No one wants to listen to constant complaining. No one wants to be persecuted. No one wants to face up to one's own prejudices. And yet God uses all of these discomforts in the lives of the early believers to motivate the spread of the kingdom of God past the bounds of Jerusalem. Now, some two thousand years later, even we are affected by this radical and explosive move as we, too, are able to experience the riches of life in the kingdom of God.

In your conversations with God this week, talk to God about the current circumstances of your own life. Are there places in your spiritual walk where you are currently experiencing discomfort? Is it possible that God is allowing this discomfort as a motivator for your own growth and development, or to further advance his kingdom? Listen for God's voice to you in the Scriptures that you read this week, and consider how he might be calling you to respond.

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 *“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.”*

Matthew 6:19-21 *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized.

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Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your Conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



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