

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD MOVES US

10 MAY, 2026

SUMMARY

This message explores the paradox of God's work through disruption, using Acts Chapter 8 and the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom as the central teaching. Bruce Downes challenges the congregation to recognize that God often works most powerfully when our comfortable circumstances are dismantled. The early church's scattering due to persecution wasn't a failure but God's intentional method of spreading the gospel beyond Jerusalem. The true strength of the church has never been in buildings, locations, or visible structures, but in Christ living within ordinary believers. The message emphasizes that our hardships, losses, and disruptions are often the very vehicles God uses to deepen our faith and expand His kingdom. It calls believers to understand that Christian identity isn't rooted in attendance, programs, or sacred locations, but in carrying the presence of Christ wherever we go. The message concludes with a call to prayer through a nine-day Novena starting on Ascension Thursday, asking the Holy Spirit to fall upon the community as they discern future directions for ministry.

KEY POINTS

- God often disrupts our comfort and security to accomplish His greater purposes
- The early church spread not despite persecution but because of it—believers fleeing Jerusalem carried the gospel to new regions
- The true strength of the church is Christ living within His people, not external structures or buildings
- Ordinary believers, not just specialists or leaders, are the primary carriers of the gospel
- Stephen, chosen to serve food, demonstrated that God's power works through the ordinary and humble
- Our personal disruptions—financial struggles, relationship breakdowns, losses—can be God's way of deepening our faith
- Christian identity should not be reduced to attendance, programs, or environments
- The church remains alive even when scattered because it is communion with Christ carried within His people
- God uses our struggles and hardships to soften our hearts and give us faith to believe for miracles in others' lives
- Ministry requires sacrifice and often means stepping into uncertainty without knowing how God will provide

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- Acts 6 (Stephen chosen as a server, full of grace and power)
- Acts 7:58-60 (Stephen's martyrdom)
- Acts 8:1-4 (Persecution and scattering of the church)

- Romans 12 (Being transformed by the renewing of your mind)
- The Great Commission (Gospel going to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth)

STORIES:

- Stephen's election as a server/waiter in the early church, his wisdom, power, and eventual martyrdom
- The scattering of believers from Jerusalem after Stephen's death, with only the apostles remaining
- Bruce 's personal story of his mother as a refugee who sacrificed everything for her five sons, going without shoes and food
- Bruce Downes's experience of losing a television ministry, which initially felt like failure but led to deeper community building
- Bruce Downes and his wife Rosemary going without salary when the Ukraine war impacted ministry finances, learning to trust God's miraculous provision
- The Sisters of St. Joseph convent declining from 120 members to four elderly sisters, yet recognizing God's new work emerging
- Bruce Downes's ministry losing a building owned by a wealthy donor, revealing how people's faith was attached to place rather than God
- Catherine of Siena's story of falling from a carriage into mud and questioning God's treatment of His friends
- Biblical examples of disruption: Abraham leaving his country, Joseph sold into slavery, Moses driven to the wilderness, Israel's exile, disciples leaving everything to follow Jesus

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work during this Easter season. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

ICEBREAKER

Share a time when something you thought was stable or secure suddenly changed. How did you initially feel? Looking back, can you see any purpose in that disruption?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understanding the Scripture

1. **Read Acts 7:58-8:4 together.** What stands out to you about Stephen's death and the immediate aftermath?
2. Why do you think the apostles stayed in Jerusalem while everyone else scattered? What does this tell us about God's plan?
3. How does Acts 8 challenge our typical understanding of "church growth" and "success in ministry"?

Personal Reflection

1. The message stated: "We attach our sense of security to places, structures, routines, and circumstances." What are you currently attaching your security to? How might God be inviting you to shift that?
2. Bruce Downes shared about losing his television ministry and later his salary. Have you experienced something being "ripped away" that you thought was good? How did God work through that disruption?
3. "Would you be the woman or man in your heart if everything had gone right?" Reflect on this question. How have your difficulties shaped your character and faith?

Application to Our Lives

1. The early church members were "ordinary, frightened, disrupted people" who carried the gospel into new regions. How does this challenge the idea that spreading the gospel is only for "specialists"?
2. Where is God calling you to carry Christ in your everyday world? (home, work, school, neighborhood) What would that look like practically this week?
3. Bruce Downes mentioned that when he struggled financially, it changed how he prayed for others. What current struggle might God be using to deepen your compassion or faith for others?

4. For those in ministry or leadership: How does this message speak to disappointment over small attendance, lack of volunteers, or programs that didn't work out as planned?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one of the following to practice this week:

Option 1: Gratitude in Disruption

- Journal about a past disruption in your life
- List 3-5 ways God used that difficulty for good
- Thank God specifically for what you learned through it

Option 2: Carry Christ Consciously

- Choose one sphere of your life (work, home, neighborhood)
- Each day this week, pray: "Lord, how can I carry Your presence here today?"
- Look for one specific opportunity to be Christ to someone

Option 3: Surrender Your Security

- Identify one area where you're clinging to comfort or control
- Pray daily: "Lord, I give this to You. Use even disruption for Your purposes."
- Share your journey with one trusted person

GROUP ACTION

Commit to praying the Novena to Mary MacKillop together for nine days (starting Ascension Thursday).

- Set up a group chat to share daily reflections
- Check in on how God is speaking through the prayers

CLOSING PRAYER

Guided Prayer Focus:

- Pray for openness to God's disruptions and movements in each person's life
- Pray for the youth ministry initiatives mentioned in the sermon
- Pray for the leadership team as they discern future direction
- Pray for the vision of a Formation for Life school and building