

# A WHOLE NEW TEAM

WEEK 10

AN  
ATHLETE  
STUDY

## ALL PART OF THE PLAN

Scan the QR code to watch part of the post-game interview with Miami Dolphin's head coach, Mike McDaniels responding to a question about the "Mike" Linebacker, Tyrel Dodson, calling his own defense on a critical 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2-point attempt. Maybe this wasn't the coach's plan, but as Mike McDaniels said, *"It's less about the play call and more about the conviction of the entire group on how you're playing it."*



Stephen's death rocked the church in Jerusalem. Fear swept the city as Christians were now being hunted like wild game. Saul, the mysterious man from last week, is mentioned twice in just a few verses as leading the charge of persecution. I'm sure these events led some people to question the play call as if the signal was interrupted or something. However, it's not about the play, but the conviction of the team.

Jesus told the disciples that they would be persecuted (John 15:18-25). He also told them that the message of the gospel would spread all throughout the world (Acts 1:8). It just never clicked that persecution would be the means God would use to spread the message of the gospel. Despite this, they took this setback in stride and continued on the mission.

ACTS 8:1-8

<sup>1</sup> And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup> And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was much joy in that city.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*The Lord, is my Savior, So why should I doubt my victory? Why would I question, The rod and the staff that comforts me? He quiets the waters, He quiets the storm inside of me, So, what could be better; Than walking with Him when I believe?*

It is easier to believe God has good plans, than to walk through the challenging seasons of those plans. Scan the QR code to worship the God who has good plans for you.



## DISCUSSION

How does your attitude impact the way you react to opposition?

1. Broadly speaking, what happened to the believers in Jerusalem? What did they do? (4)

2. Who, specifically, did Luke report about? Where did he go? What did he do? (5)

3. How is Philip's activity in this passage related to God's mission in Acts 1:8?

4. What do you think is meant when the study notes say, "Don't waste your suffering"? How might recent struggles or events in your life hinder or help you as you pursue God's mission of advancing the gospel?

How are you doing praying for lost people in your life? Have you had a chance to share? There's only a couple Weeks of our study left. Talk to your coach for help!

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

# A WHOLE NEW TEAM

WEEK 10

AN  
ATHLETE  
STUDY

## STUDY NOTES

### UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the navy base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Their 2-hour blitz left 2,403 killed, 1,143 injured, and 18 ships hit, including four battleships destroyed, with four more damaged. Their unprovoked attack looms in American history as “a day which shall live in infamy.”

This infamous attack also looms large in Japanese history; not for its boldness, but for its folly. The Japanese intended the attack to disable and demoralize the US Pacific fleet. What looked like a strategic victory carried massive unintended consequences. On January 9, 1942, only a month after the attack, Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto supposedly said, “I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve.”

Similarly in the book of *Acts*, Stephen’s execution at the hands of the Sanhedrin must have felt like a decisive win for Israel’s religious leaders. They silenced a bold preacher. They removed a perceived threat. They sent a clear message: this Jesus movement would not be tolerated. But in reality, their violent act awakened a sleeping giant. Instead of crushing the Church, they launched it outward. The gospel would soon spread far beyond Jerusalem, just as Jesus promised. In fact, the early Christians would be accused of “turning the world upside down” (*Acts* 17:6).

### GOD’S TEAM

### OVERCOMES ADVERSITY...

Stephen’s death *on that day* marked a key turning point for the spread of the gospel. Until this moment, the Church that had begun in Jerusalem had mostly stayed there. No longer! **A great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem.** Everyone **except the apostles were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.** (Notice that the very next passage led to Samaria.) Do those two regions ring a bell? That’s where Jesus said they should go after they began their work in Jerusalem (*Acts* 1:8). Now, because of the great persecution, they had little choice.

Some **devout men buried Stephen**, honoring his faith even in death. Meanwhile, the young man, **Saul, was ravaging the church.** No longer did he give them a chance to gather in the temple courts. He was **entering house after house.** When he found believers present, **he dragged off both men and women and committed them to prison.** An intense spiritual battle for souls raged publicly.

### ... AND STAYS ON MISSION

While persecution required Christians to flee for their safety, they never abandoned their hope or their mission. In fact, **those who were scattered** out of Jerusalem **went about preaching the word.** Ironically, while Saul worked to extinguish the gospel message, newly dispatched believers worked to set it ablaze. In light of Stephen’s death, chief among these workers was **Philip**—second of the chosen seven in *Acts* 6:5.

The Twelve must have taught Jesus’ strategy well: **Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth** (*Acts* 1:8). The apostles had already reached many thousands in Jerusalem. **Philip** had likely learned that the Savior’s next area of operation led to Judea and Samaria.

**Philip went down to the city of Samaria.** Once he arrived, he **proclaimed to them the Christ.** Much like God supernaturally empowered the apostles at Pentecost in *Acts* 2, on this occasion the Lord granted special abilities to Philip to validate his messenger and the gospel message. **The crowds with one accord paid attention to what Philip said.** Although he was probably a gifted speaker, what really caught their attention was **when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.**

Luke, the doctor, specifically described what Philip did for those with serious ailments. Once Philip began to care for the spiritually afflicted, the **unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of the many who had them.** Other Samaritans were physically afflicted. Luke reports that **many paralyzed and lame people were healed.** As a result of Philip’s ministry **there was much joy in that city.**

Although Philip could have been saddened or angered by the injustice in Jerusalem, nothing stopped his focus. He could have been justified focusing on his own suffering or the suffering of friends and family in prison. Instead, following God’s mission, he went to Samaria to care for those who were suffering and to advance the mission of spreading the gospel.

As you face difficulties in life, one question that you might ask yourself is, “How can this be used to advance the gospel?” Suffering happens for a variety of reasons. However, we have hope that surpasses our suffering (*Romans* 8:18). And, we have the opportunity to use our suffering for a greater purpose—advancing God’s mission of the gospel. You are leaders in your schools and soon you’ll be leaders in your community. When suffering strikes, people will be watching. How you respond to suffering will be one of your greatest witnesses for Jesus Christ. Therefore, don’t waste your suffering.