

## Home Group Series 2024

### 4. Witness through suffering.

Some years ago, there was a young man who, with very bad grace found himself on a summer Christian houseparty. In short, he didn't want to be there. Although he attended church, he was somewhat hostile to anything religious, and that included the vicar who had somehow inveigled him into attending. So he planned to leave as soon as possible. However, he was there long enough to be somewhat overcome by the other young people with whom he was staying, and it stopped him going.

Something about them hit him which he didn't quite understand. It was as though they had something that he didn't have – and he wanted it.

Now, of course we know what it was. Without him knowing, he had been immersed in a group of people his own age who had been born again by the Spirit and who, artlessly, were simply living out that experience in front of him. And after a few days of that, he joined them, by giving his life to Christ – and, as they say, 'The rest is history' (actually my history because I was that young man)!

But the whole point is, that it wasn't the teaching especially which led me to Christ. It was their behaviour – it was *what* they were – and that is the essence of effective witness.

Jesus put it this way in His Sermon on the Mount. Having described what can only be transformed Christian character (in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5 : 1ff), He told His disciples, 'You ARE the salt of the earth – and You ARE the light of the world'.

'Witnessing' has, at times, got a bad reputation in the past – being seen by outsiders as religious extremists making a nuisance of themselves. For some it might be good to learn the following anonymous poem:

'Not only in the words you speak, not only by your deeds confessed,  
but in the most unconscious way is Christ expressed.  
Is it a beatific smile? a holy light upon your brow?  
Oh No! I felt His presence when you laughed just now.  
For me 'twas not the truth you taught, to you so clear, to me still dim,  
but when you came to me you brought a sense of Him.  
And from your smile He beckons me, and from your heart His love is shed,  
till I lose sight of you and see the Christ instead'.

That's witness!

JB

# Questions for Home Groups

## Witness through Suffering Acts 7 v51 - 8 v8, John 12 v20-27

### Additional Resources for Acts:

**Podcast:** Unstoppable Church Then and Now (UCB) available on Spotify and other platforms

**Book:** 'The Challenge of Acts' A crash course on the book of Acts and its relevance for Christianity and culture today by Tom Wright 2024

<https://www.eden.co.uk/christian-books/bible-study>

1. Where do you look or who do you rely on when you are under intense pressure?
2. Where did Stephen look and who did he rely on when facing intense persecution?
3. Can you think of other Christians, past or present, who have died for their faith? What is their legacy?
4. Martin Luther King Jr once said, 'Violence begets violence.' How is this seen in the move from Acts 7 to 8 and how is it still true today? (and see Matthew 26:52)
5. 'God brings light out of darkness, life from death and beauty out of ashes.' How does God bring about good from this persecution? (and see Acts 8 v8 and Isaiah 61 v3)
6. We're unlikely to make sense of suffering this side of heaven, but God can bring glimmers of grace from it. Where have you seen God bring good from suffering? Are there situations of suffering today (either personally or globally) you'd like to pray God would do that?
7. Are there times when you have felt too comfortable in your Christian life and felt the need to move or do something different? Is God nudging you to step out in some way for Him today?