

Leaning Out

In the beginning of Acts chapter 8, we read how the early church was persecuted by Saul and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. However, as we see in verse 4, “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”. The early believers had to make a choice: either lean in, or lean out. No one would have blamed the church for keeping quiet, looking out for themselves, or giving up. Instead, they kept their eyes focused on Jesus, ever determined to spread the good news of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. “Leaning out” is extremely easy in an American society which promotes selfish and self-centered lifestyles. In fact, leaning out is often the cause for the majority of our sin as our hearts are hardened and we live for ourselves, not Jesus.

1. When you examine your relationship with Jesus, do you believe you're leaning in or leaning out? What would others around you say?
2. How does your effort of leaning in for Jesus compare with how you lean in to other areas of your life? Does this line up with your answer from the previous question?
3. What aspects of your life do you lean into the most? In turn, what aspects of your life are you therefore leaning out of? For example, if you lean into your work, what is the effect of your capability to lean into your family or relationship with God?
4. An easy way to discover what you're leaning out of is to examine where you tend to make excuses for not participating, acting, or sacrificing. Where do you seem to always have an excuse or where do you make the most excuses? Why do you think this is?

Leaning In...For Yourself

Later in chapter 8 we read about Simon who witnesses miraculous healings as Peter and John simply place their hands on the sick. Desiring to lean in, Simon offers the apostles money and exclaims, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” Simon was leaning in! He wanted to see people being healed, so what's the problem? The problem was that Simon leaned in for himself. He wanted the glory of walking through the streets performing miracles as the spotlight shone on him. Many of us today do lean in. We may serve the local church, volunteer in the community, pick up the extra load at work, do our share of chores, and labor for our marriages. What we must examine, like Simon, is why we're leaning in. While we may put up a front that we're sacrificing for and serving others, are we really trying to better ourselves or gain the spotlight in the end?

1. Examine the areas you lean into in your life. What's the motivation for your leaning in?
2. Do you ever expect something in return for your leaning in for someone or something else? Do you practice the “you owe me” or “I scratch your back, you scratch mine” principles?
3. Are there any areas where you lean in, expecting gratification, praise, or the spotlight in return?
4. How does this mindset compare with our call to be image bearers of Jesus? Did Jesus lean in for those around Him? Why? What did He expect in return?
5. What are personal signs that you can begin to notice when you lean in for yourself? How can others around you help you to realize when you begin to fall into this trap?

Leaning In...By the Spirit

At the end of Chapter 8, we read about the interaction between Philip and the eunuch. After Philip gave his testimony, the eunuch exclaims, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”, and after his baptism, “went on his way rejoicing”. Like Simon, the eunuch desired to lean in. The difference between the two men was their motivation. The Holy Spirit pierced the heart of the eunuch and he desired to lean in to receive more of Jesus that moment. We will never get to this point in our lives until we start viewing every opportunity as a privilege to serve Jesus Christ and not ourselves. While we may serve or lean in for others in our lives, we must look through the current situation and serve for the advancement of the name of Jesus, not for others or ourselves. The eunuch did not get baptized for Philip or himself, but in response to the life-changing, life-giving truth of Jesus. Leaning in by the spirit is not a commandment, it's a response. We are called to be image bearers of

Jesus and, by reading God's Word, we observe how the Messiah leaned in for His entire ministry, even to the point of death on the cross for our sins. The pain or sacrifice that we experience when leaning by the Spirit will never come close to the sacrifice or pain that Jesus experienced. No, leaning in may not be easy or exciting now, but on that glorious day when the door is opened and we hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" all will be fulfilled. Our reward is not of this earth - not success, careers, relationships, or ourselves. Our reward is eternity with our Savior - that which has only been made available to us as a gift by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who leaned in for our lives.

1. Do you ever feel a movement of the Spirit to guide you to act on a specific instance? When and/or how often does this occur? Do you answer the calling and lean in, or do you lean out?
2. How can we distinguish the difference between the Holy Spirit's call to lean in versus our sinful and selfish desires to lean in for ourselves?
3. Do you ever view leaning in for others as degrading or unnecessary? Do you view leaning in for Jesus as degrading or unnecessary? How can you incorporate serving Jesus into every opportunity that you have to serve or sacrifice for others?
4. Does God taking pleasure in your service to Him feel "worth it" to you? Do you care if Jesus is pleased when you lean in, or would you rather experience earthly rewards?
5. If Jesus leaned in for others despite being perfect and sinless, how should we feel about leaning in by the spirit, not for ourselves, but for the betterment of others?
6. Is leaning in by the spirit to serve others enough, or are we called to lean in for the advancement of Jesus' name? Which do you do?

Prayer Focus

- That we would ask the Holy Spirit to pierce our hearts and reveal when we begin to lean out of an opportunity to serve the Kingdom of God
- That we would become aware of our sinful desires to lean in for the advancement of ourselves
- That, by being image bearers of Jesus, we would long for opportunities to lean in by the Spirit to share the gospel with all who have ears