

8-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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VIDEO
ACCESS
INCLUDED

Acts

The Story of the Church, the Power of the Gospel,
and the Mission That Continues Today

SESSION TWO

Acts 1-4

*The
Church
Is
Born*



DAY ONE
1

POWER FROM ABOVE

Acts 1

As we begin this first day of study, my heart is filled with anticipation for you. I know how much the Holy Spirit has spoken to me through my own study of Acts, and I am excited for you to experience the same. This book of the Bible is not simply a collection of individual narratives; rather, every story, every event, every sermon tells the larger story of God's mission in the world.

Although God's mission—to redeem the world and draw humanity back to Himself—has remained the same since Genesis, the birth of the church in Acts was a turning point. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all believers and the commission for the church to take the good news about Jesus into Gentile territory were major shifts in how God was making His name known. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, we will start where Acts does—with Jesus's disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon them in power. So, let's begin by asking the Spirit to open our hearts and minds to this extraordinary book!

Key Verse

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 1:8

LAY OF THE LAND

Luke is the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. He was a Gentile (not of Jewish ethnicity) physician and companion of the apostle Paul. Think of the books of Luke and Acts as a two-volume work that begins with the story of Jesus's birth and ends with the story of Jesus at work through His people, the church.

+ READ ACTS 1:1-3.

Theophilus

recipient of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:3) and Acts (Acts 1:1); name means “loved by God” or “lover of God.”

Through whom did Jesus give instructions to the apostles (1:2)?

What person is mentioned in **ACTS 1:1** and also **LUKE 1:3**?

The Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2) is a key Person in the book of Acts. We will discover more about Him as we go. Keep your eyes open to each mention of His name and activity.

Scholars are unclear about the identity of Theophilus, the man to whom Luke addressed both his Gospel and Acts. He may have been a person of high social standing, a patron who helped with the cost of Luke’s manuscript, or perhaps a Gentile Christian who needed encouragement in an environment hostile to new believers.¹ We do know the name *Theophilus* means “loved by God” or “lover of God.” While many scholars believe Luke was addressing a single individual, others take a more symbolic approach—Acts is for anyone who is a friend and lover of God.² I like the idea that Luke addressed his writing to an individual named Theophilus whose name reminds us we don’t have to be expert Bible scholars to receive God’s Word. All we need to do is love God because “he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

What did Jesus speak about after His resurrection (1:3)? Circle:

THE GOOD NEWS

THE TORAH

THE LAW

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God

God’s rule and reign established on earth through the person of Jesus. The church makes up the subjects of His kingdom.

The kingdom of God is one of Jesus’s main preaching themes throughout the Gospels. Despite only a handful of usages in Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23; 28:31), the whole book is a testament to the kingdom’s reality. Every move of the Spirit, every healing, baptism, salvation, or act of God working through the Roman Empire is reflective of God’s kingdom expanding on earth. “The ‘kingdom of God’ is not an earthly political or military kingdom but the present spiritually directed reign of God, gradually transforming individual lives and entire cultures through the power of the Holy Spirit.”³ Because we serve the King, we get to participate in praying for and helping bring His kingdom right here to our broken world.

+ READ ACTS 1:4-8.

Jesus commanded the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and wait for what promise?

Among Jesus's final instructions for His disciples was the command to wait for the Holy Spirit. Along with this instruction, He made a distinction between the baptism of John the Baptist and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You can read about John's baptism in Luke 3:1-22. John baptized repentant believers (those who had turned from their sins and back to God) with water in preparation for Jesus's coming. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit signaled the Messiah had come, a new era had dawned, and a new kind of community was birthed—the Christian church.

LOOK UP LUKE 3:16. What did John say this new baptism would consist of? The Spirit and _____

In Acts 1, the disciples had little to no understanding of what this new baptism would look like or mean. And with Jesus about to ascend to heaven, they wanted to know if He would use His exalted authority and position to restore the kingdom of Israel (v. 6). At this time, the nation of Israel was under Roman occupation. The Jewish assumption had long been that when the Messiah finally arrived on the scene He would come in the image of King David—a strong military leader, a political force, a ruler who could conquer Rome and restore Israel to its national glory.

Not only did Jesus prove to be a different kind of king than that, but He also told His followers they didn't need to know the timeframe for restoration. That information belonged to God. This sounds familiar to me. How often do we tell God what needs to happen, and when it needs to happen, only to discover He is doing a new thing on an alternative timeline? But here's the encouraging news: Jesus didn't leave His disciples (then or now) hanging. He gave them what they needed to know when they needed to know it, and He does the same for us today.

THOUGHT QUESTION: In your own words, how did Jesus answer the disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel (v. 8)?

Although Jesus didn't answer the disciples' question like they might have wanted Him to, He did give an answer. The kingdom of Israel would certainly be restored, but its transformation wouldn't come through political, military, or even religious might. Restoration would come through the power of the Holy Spirit working through His witnesses to all nations. The focus would no longer be confined to the kingdom of Israel, but to the spread of the kingdom of God around the world, one heart at a time.

When the Holy Spirit came, He came with power that enabled Jesus's disciples to be bold witnesses for Him. Sometimes we don't share our faith because we fear we won't be able to explain it clearly, we won't have answers to the honest questions of skeptics, or we're not theologically educated enough. But bearing witness to Christ is first and foremost about testifying of His death and resurrection and how the risen Lord has changed your life.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: What is one way you bear witness to Jesus's work in your life?

+ READ ACTS 1:9-14.

What did the two men in white (angels) say to the disciples?

THOUGHT QUESTION: How might their message have encouraged the disciples who were sad to see Jesus depart?

The day Jesus ascended to the Father is a remarkable event we should all cherish. God the Father sent Jesus the Son to earth to save people from their sins and restore their relationship with Him. After His death and resurrection, that work was complete, and the Son returned to His place beside the Father in the throne room of heaven. What is troubling you today? What is weighing heavy upon your heart? Remember that Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth, is now seated at the right hand of the Father, fully in control of every aspect of your life (Col. 3:1). And He is coming again in the same way that He left!

After Jesus ascended, the disciples journeyed back to Jerusalem and gathered to pray. “At almost every important turning point in the narrative of God’s redemptive action in Acts we find a mention of prayer (e.g., 1:24; 8:14–17; 9:11–12; 10:4,9,30; 13:2–3).”⁴ As you look for the activity of the Holy Spirit throughout Acts, also look for how often prayer is mentioned.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Speaking of prayer, cast your worries and concerns on Jesus, the risen Savior who is one day coming back for His church.

Look again at verses 12-14. In addition to the many specific names mentioned, “the women” are also included. Why do you think Luke took pains to highlight the inclusion of women so early in Acts?

In Acts 2:17-18, Luke will show that the Spirit being poured out on all people, men and women alike, is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In a culture that often marginalized women, Luke sets the stage early on that they would play a prominent role in Christ’s church.

+ READ ACTS 1:15-26.

Judas was one of the twelve apostles, the original followers of Jesus, before he betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders (Luke 22:47-53), and later killed himself. Peter recognized it was necessary to replace Judas for practical purposes. But it was also symbolically necessary so the Twelve could continue being twelve, a number that connected the disciples back to the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 35:23-26). The twelve apostles symbolized the fulfillment of Israel’s renewal of the twelve tribes in the new age and God’s promise to fulfill all He had promised Israel.

What qualifications did the twelfth apostle need to have (vv. 21-22)?

His main purpose would be:

TEACH THE TORAH

GIVE WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

DEFEND THE FAITH

FIGHT AGAINST ROME

After the church prayed, lots were cast as a way of allowing God to make the final decision on who would take Judas's place. (Proverbs 16:33 teaches that the Lord determined how the lots fell.) It appears that after the Holy Spirit was given, lots were no longer necessary.

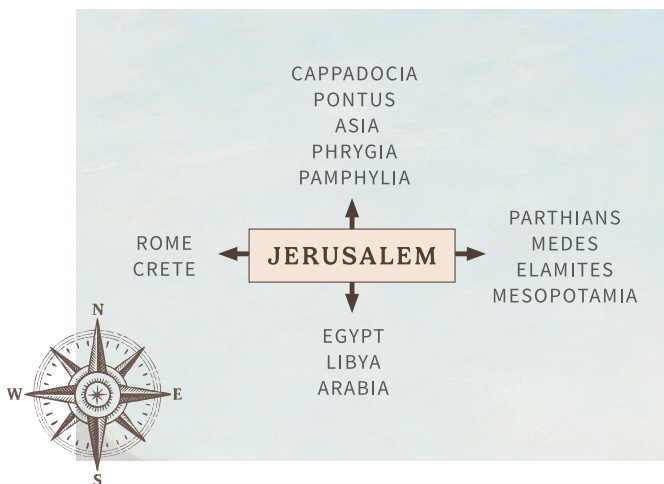
Who was chosen?

MATTHIAS

JUSTUS

Up to this moment in Jewish history, religious life revolved around the temple. Jews and proselytes (Gentile converts) from all over the known world congregated in Jerusalem to sacrifice and worship God. But soon, instead of worshipers streaming into the temple, God's people would move outward from Jerusalem. They would take the message about

the resurrected Jesus from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the farthest corners of the earth. A stone the size of the gospel had splashed into the center of Jerusalem and would ripple outward until Christ's return. Let it sink in that, just like Matthias, we are called to bear witness to the resurrected life of Christ wherever we go, wherever we live.



PERSONAL REFLECTION: Based on today's reading, what is one thing you can connect from the first chapter of Acts to your own story as a follower of Christ?

I hope you feel the excitement. Acts is not mere words on a page; it is the church's launch party. We are not to only read about this story, we're to live it. Yes, it is the first-century church's story, but it is also our story. Their mission remains our mission, and the Holy Spirit is alive and at work today in you and me.

DAY TWO 2

THE SPIRIT IS FOR EVERYONE

Acts 2:1-36



LAY OF THE LAND

Today we're reading about Pentecost. We most often hear about this festival in relation to Acts 2, but it is first mentioned in Exodus 23:16 and explained in Leviticus 23:9-14. In the Old Testament, Pentecost is known as the Festival of Harvest or the Festival of Weeks. The Jews celebrated Pentecost fifty days after Passover to commemorate God's provision for His people. Its observance is tied to God's rich agricultural blessings as well as His giving the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. These details highlight the intentionality and significance of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the day of Pentecost—God cares about the details.

Key Verse

Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

ACTS 2:36

Acts 2 begins with the disciples celebrating what they must have anticipated to be a normal Pentecost. A special day to be sure, perhaps like our Christmas or Easter, but they could never have imagined what would unfold on this particular Pentecost.

+ READ ACTS 2:1-13.

From verses 1-2, what do you learn about where the disciples were on the day of Pentecost?

What caused the surrounding Jews to take notice (vv. 4-6)?

What did they hear the gathered disciples saying (v. 11)?

Since the Holy Spirit is the One who equips God's people for His service, a clear filling of the Spirit was vital at the start of this new era in Christian history. This extraordinary event began with the disciples gathered in the most ordinary of spaces—together in a house. We might have expected them to be in the temple, the place of gathering and worship for God's people at that time. The fact God met them in a house instead marks a seismic shift. God's presence among His people would no longer be only at the temple. Because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when God's people are gathered a mere house can turn into a holy sanctuary.

Imagine the scene. As the disciples were gathered together (most likely this was the 120 who were together when Matthias was chosen, Acts 1:15), the rushing sound of wind roared through, and tongues like fire rested on each worshiper. Both wind and fire are important symbols in Scripture. Wind often represents the Spirit's presence, while fire indicates the Lord's holiness, cleansing, and judgment (2 Sam. 22:16; Ex. 3:2; Luke 3:16).⁵ The disciples were swept up in this holy phenomenon, filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other languages.

Meanwhile, the visiting worshipers in Jerusalem suddenly heard this large group of Galileans praising God. The astounding part is that each heard the outpouring of praise in his or her own language or vernacular. How could this be? Questions arise. Confusion abounds. Some are drawn in, while others turn away. In the midst of this supernatural event, Peter stood up and delivered a clear explanation (2:14-36). Thoughtfully read each of the following segments of Peter's sermon. Pause at the end of each one for some reflection questions.

+ READ ACTS 2:14-21.

This is the first of several sermons in Acts. Bookmark the chart on page 200 for a reference as you study these sermons and compare how each missionary presents the gospel in a clear way for his audience.

Briefly describe what the Old Testament prophet Joel said would happen (Acts 2:17-21; Joel 2:28-32) and how you see this prophecy being fulfilled.

What kinds of people would the Spirit come upon (vv. 17-18)?

Some thought the only explanation for the disciples' unusual behavior was drunkenness (2:13). But Peter explained this was all a fulfillment from the prophet Joel. For me, this is one of the most exciting moments in the Bible. Up to this point, God's Spirit was typically given to prophets, priests, and kings and on a very limited basis. Now, all people—men and women, young and old, slave and free—can receive the permanent power of the Spirit through belief in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Moses's words were inspired when he cried, "If only all the LORD's people were prophets and the LORD would place his Spirit on them!" (Num. 11:29). Neither gender, age, nor social class could prevent a person made in God's image from being filled with His Spirit.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then this filling of the Spirit of the living God is true of you. How does this truth encourage and/or convict you today? *Think about things like: where you're relying on your own strength instead of His, where you're seeking guidance online versus the harder work of reflecting on His Word, where you're justifying hindering behaviors rather than allowing the Spirit to convict and transform.*

The initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a confusing event for the Jews who were present that day, which is why Peter began his explanation with a passage from the prophet Joel. Peter aimed to demonstrate from their very Scriptures that what they were witnessing was indeed part of God's plan all along. But Peter didn't stop in the Old Testament. He continued to draw his listeners forward to the work of Jesus, the dividing line between those with the Spirit and those without.

+ CONTINUE READING ACTS 2:22-36.

What could not hold Jesus down (v. 24)?

One of the goals of Peter's sermon was to help his listeners understand the connection between Jesus's resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter argued that when David wrote in Psalm 16 about his body never decaying nor being abandoned by God, he was prophesying about Jesus, the Messiah.

How is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit directly tied to the resurrected Christ (vv. 32-33)?

Using the names "Father," "Jesus," and "Spirit," fill in the appropriate name with the corresponding blank (vv. 32-33):

The _____ gave the _____ to _____, who poured Him out on us.

Look back at verse 36. God made the crucified Jesus both _____ and _____.



Messiah

means
"Anointed One"
and signifies the
long-awaited
deliverer of the
Jewish people
in the line of
King David

That God had made the crucified Christ both Lord and Messiah was the most significant news the Jewish community could hear. The extraordinary event at Pentecost testified to God's presence in and among the disciples, but it also equipped them to carry on Jesus's work and ministry. It revealed and empowered. The Spirit's presence has the same impact on our lives today. The Spirit testifies to God's presence with us and helps us know Him more, and the Spirit fills and empowers us with what we need to carry out His work in our lives.

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

PART 1: How does the Spirit reveal God's work in your life to those around you? This might be as simple as others noticing that you're quick to listen, encourage, forgive, or that they know you to be a person of prayer, or worshiper of Jesus.

PART 2: Describe an area of your life where you know you need the Holy Spirit to empower you to do what He's called you to do.

One of the reasons I find it essential to begin my morning with prayer is I need daily engagement with the Spirit to stay connected to Him and recognize His leading. I look at it this way. First, I need Him to transform my character, soften my heart, convict me of what is hindering my relationship with Him and others. I need daily cleansing from things like my pride. Maybe unforgiveness is lingering, or worry is holding me back, or my mind is dwelling on false comforts. Then, I need to hear from the Lord. The Spirit reveals the mind and will of Christ. Lastly, I need to be prepared for the activities coming my way. Perhaps I will sit next to someone on a plane who needs encouragement, or a friend is coming for dinner and I want to give her what she needs, or I'm grieving a loss and I need the Spirit's comfort so I'm not snapping at loved ones.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit came upon all kinds of people, an event the prophet Joel foretold. This moment in history cannot be over-hyped. This is possible because of Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension. As the vindicated Lord, Jesus poured out His Spirit on those who bore witness to Him. This moment in history precipitated the gift of the Spirit we get to experience today—together. What an exciting time to be alive.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: How have you seen the Spirit's activity when gathered with other believers for the purpose of worship, prayer, or Bible study?

Tomorrow we'll continue to study this epic event in church history. In the meantime, ask the Spirit to fill you with a greater awareness of Himself. Ask Him to make you more aware of His activity. Be on the lookout for Him.



DAY THREE
③

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

Acts 2:37-47

Key Verse

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

ACTS 2:42

Today we pick up from where we left off yesterday. The Holy Spirit had come upon Jesus's disciples, stirring both interest and resentment from the visiting Jews celebrating the sacred feast of Pentecost. In the midst of confusion, Peter preached a straightforward message. He tied Joel's Old Testament prophecy that one day men and women, young and old would receive the Holy Spirit to the events unfolding in their midst. This was that day, and it happened because Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world, the Father raised Him from the dead, and He ascended into heaven. As the vindicated Savior, Jesus poured out His Spirit on His followers. A new day had arrived! But how should a person respond to the Spirit? This is the question we'll answer today. Let's pickup our reading with the final verse from yesterday's study.

+ READ ACTS 2:36-41.

Why were the hearts of those listening in the crowd pierced?

Those who understood the message about Jesus asked Peter and the disciples what they needed to do (v. 37). What two action steps did Peter respond with?

1.

2.

What would be forgiven, and what would they receive?

Their _____ would be forgiven.

They would receive the _____.

Sometimes the Christian faith is explained merely in terms of what we believe. But right belief should always lead to right action. Notice that when those in the crowd understood (believed) that Jesus was the Messiah they had rejected and crucified, they were heart sick. They wanted to know what they needed to do. Peter gave them two action steps: repent and be baptized.

READ MATTHEW 4:17 AND LUKE 3:2-3 BELOW. Who else had already taught a message of repentance and baptism? Circle their names in the verses below.

From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Matthew 4:17

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:2-3

Both Jesus and John the Baptist had taught about the importance and necessity of repentance and baptism. Peter wasn't teaching a brand-new concept, but he was announcing a new era. Now that the Holy Spirit had descended, repentance and baptism would take on a richer and fuller meaning.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Think about what your initial moment of repentance and belief in Jesus was like. If, like me, you came to faith in Christ when you were young and that moment is harder to remember, think of a more recent time of repentance that stands out.

Repentance

to turn around or change one's mind; turning from one's old way of life marked by sin and death to the new life Jesus offers



Baptism

to symbolically identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the cleansing from sin He offers

To be baptized is to symbolically identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus and show we have experienced the cleansing He offers. We are submerged in water (a symbol of death) and emerge victorious from the water (a symbol of resurrection), demonstrating how our sins have been washed away. All of this is done in the name of Jesus, signifying that He is the one we are being baptized into (v. 38).

LOOK BACK AT VERSE 41. What came first—baptism or the acceptance of the gospel message?

Repentance here is directly linked to the forgiveness of sins and receiving the promised Holy Spirit. Believing the gospel message leads to repentance, which brings about the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. What Peter describes is a transforming, heart-changing gift that begins and ends with God. And it's a gift offered more freely than Peter and the first-century Jews could have ever imagined. We might expect the Spirit to be offered to the most righteous Jews, the most Torah (Law)-observant in the synagogue, or those who excel at being decent moral people. But Peter casts a wide invitation.

For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.

Acts 2:39

Based on this verse, who in the crowd could be forgiven and receive the indwelling Spirit of the living God? Fill in the blanks below:

The promise is for _____

And for your _____

For those who are _____ off

For anyone the _____ calls

How many were baptized and added to the number of disciples that day?

3,000

400

10,000

12

It was somewhat expected that forgiveness of sin and the promise of the Spirit was for the Jews and their children. But for those far off? For the outsider, the blatant sinner, the rebellious, the non-Jew? This truth was shocking to their ears, but it wasn't new. Even the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "The LORD says, 'Peace, peace to the one who is far or near, and I will heal him'" (Isa. 57:19). The message of Acts makes it clear that because of Jesus the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to *all* whom the Lord will call! What a thrilling message then and now.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Have you placed limits on who you think is worthy of the gift of forgiveness? Who can you be praying for who you've been tempted to give up on? Take a moment to pray for them now.

The message of Acts 2:39 doesn't mean that every person will receive the salvation Jesus offers, but it does mean that no one is outside the gospel's reach. In Acts 2, salvation was given to whomever believed that Jesus is Lord, turned away from sin and toward Him, and was baptized.

+ CONTINUE READING ACTS 2:42-47.

Acts 2:42-47 interrupts the narrative to bring us a summary passage, a literary technique Luke will employ several times in the first eight chapters. He gives readers a beautiful description of the early church in Jerusalem, one that is often held up as the ideal picture of the body of Christ. While life (and church life) in modern Western culture looks very different than this, we can still hold fast to the core values of what transpired in this special moment in the church's history. Also, keep in mind that these verses describe the earliest church rather than prescribe how every church must look in the future.

What four things did the new believers devote themselves to (v. 42)?
Circle them from the list below.

ANIMAL SACRIFICE	TEMPLE DUTIES	FEEDING THE POOR
BREAKING OF BREAD	FELLOWSHIP	BAPTISM
TORAH OBSERVANCE	PRAYER	TITHING
APOSTLES' TEACHING	FEAST OF WEEKS	

True/False: The apostles no longer performed wonders and signs now that the Spirit had been given (v. 43).

Describe how the believers treated and viewed their possessions (vv. 43-45).

Describe the believers' daily activities (vv. 46-47).

THOUGHT QUESTION: As you think about your own life within the church, what about this passage is attractive to you? What might be challenging? Explain your thoughts.

Personally, I love the idea of daily meeting together. This past summer I took an extended vacation after graduating seminary, and by far the best part of my break was having open-ended time to linger with people, to fellowship, to talk over meals that included things like homemade pesto. We shared stories, shed tears, prayed, laughed deeply, and worshiped. In a society that often cultivates isolation, I love the togetherness of the body of Christ. While we may not need to function exactly like the Acts 2 church, let's hang on to the non-negotiables here.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: How are you doing in each of the following categories? Next to each activity give yourself an accurate but non-judgmental score, on a scale of one (not devoted to at all) to ten (fully devoted to).

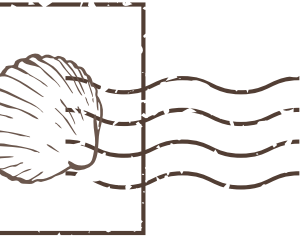
- _____ I'm devoted to regularly studying the Word (apostles' teaching).

- _____ I'm devoted to making time to be around other believers. (Some of my twenty-something friends meet weekly after church and call themselves the Accountabilibuddies. I love them so.)

- _____ I'm devoted to taking the Lord's Supper when I have the opportunity and do my best to intentionally prepare my heart. (Breaking of bread in Acts 2 can also mean sharing meals, but probably refers to taking the Lord's Supper together in v. 42.)

- _____ I'm devoted to praying regularly with other believers. (Two of my friends send text message prayers to each other every morning, another great idea.)

If you are feeling stagnant in your faith, perhaps some of these four corporate activities are missing from your regular routine. If life is busy, and I know it is, get creative. Maybe you listen to Scripture in your car on your way to work, call a friend once a week to pray, take a few extra minutes to prepare your heart before you take the Lord's Supper, make a simple meal and invite some friends over for fellowship. Remember, this kind of activity doesn't have to happen within the walls of the church. Notice that the early church is beginning to go back and forth between the temple and homes. When the Holy Spirit is present, your house is as sacred a space as a sanctuary.



DAY FOUR

4

GETTING BACK TO THE STORY

Acts 3

Key Verse

But Peter said, “I don’t have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!”

ACTS 3:6

LAY OF THE LAND

Acts 3 takes place in Jerusalem, particularly in and around the temple. We’ll notice as we move through Acts that as the good news of the gospel spreads beyond the temple walls, the role the temple plays in the book of Acts—and subsequently among the people of God—will wane. As we’ll see today, faithful followers of Jesus continued to go to the temple for worship and prayer. Today they will congregate in a portion called Solomon’s Colonnade (or Solomon’s Portico), a section on the east side believed to be the remains of Solomon’s temple after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Today’s portion of Acts begins with the account of a man who needed physical healing amidst a community who needed spiritual healing. On the heels of the more general summary of the early church in Acts 2:42-47, we see the Spirit working through Peter and John to heal a specific individual. When we’re faithful to take daily, even ordinary, steps of obedience, the unimaginable can happen.

+ READ ACTS 3:1-10.

When I read this story, I can’t help but marvel at how an extraordinary event arose out of a routine activity. Peter and John were on their way to do what faithful Jews in Jerusalem did every day—pray afternoon prayers in the temple.

Yet through this daily act of faithfulness, God opened up an amazing opportunity to change someone's life. You never know where consistent faithfulness might lead.

So often we ask God for much less than what He desires to give us. What did this beggar ask Peter and John for (v. 3)? What did he not ask for?

What did the man receive that far exceeded his request?

Into where did the newly healed beggar follow Peter and John?

He walked, leaped, and _____ God (v. 8).

A few coins tossed into his satchel. I can imagine that was the highest hope of this paralyzed beggar relegated to the outside of the temple. He couldn't have dreamed of anything more, so why ask for it? Walking? Impossible. Entering the temple alongside other God-fearers? Don't be ridiculous. No, he could only beg for whatever might eek him through another day. Interestingly, Peter and John did not have any money to give. When it comes to what others need from you, do you ever feel empty-handed? Maybe it's a problem you don't have the wisdom to solve. A friend who needs psychological help beyond your expertise. A loved-one in financial debt too deep for you to bail out. What do you do?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: What does it look like for you to offer Jesus to someone in your life when you don't have what their physical or emotional needs demand?

Acts 3:6 is one of my favorite verses in this book of the Bible. It's a reminder that what each of us needs more than anything in this world is Jesus and all that He offers. We may not be able to give others what they are asking for—in the case of the beggar, money—but we can always give them the love and hope of Jesus. This may mean praying in His name for someone's healing, restoration, or sustenance. It may mean giving the gift of your presence, making a meal, or watching a child. We should always give what we can, all the while knowing He is the only One who can accomplish the miracle.

PERSONAL PRAYER: Are you looking to your own resources to solve a problem for someone? Take some time to pray for that person in the powerful name of Jesus, asking Him to give you what you need to give them. You might start your prayer after the words of Peter and John:

Father, I don't have _____ or _____, but what I do have is . . .

+ CONTINUE READING ACTS 3:11-26.

Notice that the story of the beggar begins outside the temple but ends with him inside the temple. This man's physical healing resulted in his restoration into the community of God's people. He went from being a beggar to a walker and leaper and then to a worshiper. When the crowds inside the temple saw the miracle, they were astonished. Peter took advantage of their astonishment and proceeded to tell a story.

Look again at the events mentioned in verses 13-16. How did Peter turn these events into an invitation to the crowds for refreshment and renewal in Christ (vv. 17-20)?

One man needed physical healing, but a whole crowd needed soul healing. This is where Peter did the same thing he had just done at Pentecost—he explained that the phenomenon the crowds had witnessed is all about Jesus. He tells *the story*—the good news of the gospel. Throughout Acts this story will be told over and over in slightly different ways, with different starting points, and by different people.

COMPARE VERSES 19-20 WITH ACTS 2:38. What similarities do you see?

Repentance comes with three significant blessings: our sins are wiped out, we receive the refreshment of the Spirit of the living God, and we anticipate the Lord's return when all of creation will be restored. I love the word *refreshing*. The usage in Acts can be defined as "relief from distressful, burdensome circumstances—'relief, breathing space.'"⁶ Who doesn't need some relief? Some breathing space?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Where do you need the Lord's refreshment in your life?

THOUGHT QUESTION: Acts 3:19-20 shows that refreshment follows repentance. How does this help you think positively about the invitation to repent?

Notice how quickly Peter and John are able to take a man's physical healing and tie it to the message of salvation for the onlookers. Peter argues from the Old Testament (which Jewish worshipers in the temple would have known well) that Jesus was the Messiah whom all the prophets spoke of. He reasoned with them that He was the long-awaited Savior they needed to turn to for life. The gospel message is offensive in that it calls out our evil ways. But it is good news in that Jesus has come to turn us away from sin's destructive path in order to bless us (3:26). Do you hear that word, *bless*? I hope you do. Whatever He has called you to turn away from, it is to bless you. Whatever path of obedience He is calling you on, it is to bless you. Whatever heavy sin or nagging habit He desires you to leave behind, it is to bless you.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: We've covered a lot of ground today. What part of Acts 3 stands out the most to you and why?

As we consider the ways in which we tell about the love of Jesus, we can't leave out the joy, the excitement, the refreshment that comes when the Holy Spirit washes over us. The promise of renewal wasn't solely for a beggar outside the temple gates; it was for the crowds inside the temple who had yet to receive the Holy Spirit inside their hearts. Perhaps you will encounter someone today who needs the refreshment of the Spirit. Like Peter and John, you may not have (fill in the blank), but you can give what you have in Jesus's name.



DAY FIVE
5

NO OTHER NAME

Acts 4

Key Verse

There is
salvation in
no one else,
for there is no
other name
under heaven
given to people
by which we
must be saved.

ACTS 4:12

Just because something is verifiable truth doesn't mean everyone will accept or believe it as truth. We all have a tendency to believe that which serves us. For instance, I am deeply committed to the idea that butter is a healthy fat regardless of what nutrition articles tell me. I lavishly spread it on my toast without restraint believing I am doing myself a service. Sometimes our desire for something outweighs objective reality.

We'll see in today's text that the undeniable miracle of a paralyzed man regaining his ability to walk, and the fact that the resurrected Christ accomplished it, did not mean the Jewish religious leaders would accept Jesus as Lord. To do so would threaten their power and systems. This controversy between the religious authorities and Jesus's disciples is where our story picks up. As you read chapter 4, be on the lookout for why the miraculous healing of a paralyzed man threatened those in charge.

+ READ ACTS 4:1-22.

What specific people groups challenged Peter and John's message, and what bothered those groups about it (vv. 1-2)?

Sadducees

The Jewish
aristocracy in
charge of the
temple and
its services

The Sadducees were one of four prominent Jewish sects in addition to the Pharisees, Zealots, and Essenes. The Sadducees were some of the first on the scene to contend with Peter and John because they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Despite the hostility of the religious leaders, how much of the listening crowd responded to the gospel message (vv. 4,21)?

As we read this passage, the question that begs asking is why the religious leaders were hostile to Jesus followers who were performing wonderful deeds like healing a man in Jesus's name? Who would be against this?

PERSONAL TAKE: The religious authorities could not deny the miracle in front of them, yet they didn't want the message of Jesus to spread (vv. 16-17). List all the reasons you can find for why they wanted to contain it.

Perhaps the biggest reason the authorities bristled at the gospel message can be found in Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved." If Jesus is the risen Lord, then the religious authorities were not the power brokers they thought they were. If the true cornerstone of the temple is Jesus, then the physical temple they were trying to uphold was failing and finite. If the people of Israel chose to follow Jesus over the scribes, elders, and Sadducees, then the Jewish leaders were losing their precious sway over the nation. They rejected what was undeniable in order to hold on to their deep-seated traditions and power.

PERSONAL PRAYER: But for the grace of God this is something we all can struggle with. Do you know someone who is rejecting the love of Christ because it threatens their current way of life? Write down that person's name and take a moment to pray for her or him.

How is Peter and John's faith on full display in verses 19-20?

When I try to drum up a bold faith with my own strength, my words usually ring hollow. But Peter and John weren't trying to muster up confidence; rather, their boldness overflowed. The reason for their boldness is given in verse 13.

The religious leaders could tell Peter and John had been with _____.

Spending time with Jesus—whether in personal study and prayer, in corporate worship, or in everyday moments of regular life—is the secret to public boldness. We will be bold about a Jesus we know, a Jesus we experience.

I want us to finish the week by reading the longest recorded prayer in Acts. For anyone needing a reminder that the powers of this world are not ultimate powers, this is a beautiful prayer to return to. I have needed this reminder. What a gift it is to plant our feet firmly on the unshakable truth that while dark forces maneuver for control, God is in charge and working mightily through His people.

+ READ ACTS 4:23-31.

List the truths revealed about God through this prayer.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: How does God's sovereignty (His perfect rule and reign over all things) reflected in verses 27-28 encourage you?

We are living in the age of the already and not yet. This means the kingdom of heaven has come, enabling paralyzed men to be resurrected and sinful souls to be renewed, but it has yet to come in full. That will happen when Christ returns. In the meantime, the kings of the nations and the brazenly rebellious take their stand against Jesus. As a result, we as Christ followers will suffer. Hardship will be part of our journey. But we will also behold healings and wonders in Jesus's name. This is the glorious already and not yet of Acts. Chapter 4 ends with a most encouraging summary of what life looked like for the first-century community of believers.

+ READ ACTS 4:32-37.

The community of believers were of one _____ and _____ (v. 32).

THOUGHT QUESTION: Why do you think radical generosity like this flows from a community's understanding that Jesus Christ is the resurrected Lord?

The preaching of Jesus as the resurrected Lord flowed straight into the community taking care of one another, not counting their possessions as their own. The closest I can come to envisioning a community of one heart and mind is when I'm at JMI's annual Jungle Pastors' Conference. Every year we gather with more than a hundred indigenous pastors and missionaries in the Amazon jungle for worship, fellowship, prayer, and teaching. When I was a little girl dreaming of all the experiences I wanted to have and the community I wanted to be a part of, I didn't have the annual Jungle Pastors' Conference in the rainforest on a list *anywhere*. But God has knit my heart with these men and women in unexplainable ways. The daily trust they have in God instead of in their possessions continually challenges the affluence our Western culture esteems. But we are together in heart and soul. We do all we can to meet one another's needs, both physical and spiritual.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: The church in Acts 4 certainly had their differences, but they found common ground around their resurrected Savior. What is a difference you need to put aside with another believer for the sake of what you do share in common in Christ?

As you wrap up this week's study, remember you have the Holy Spirit living within you. He reveals the very nature of God in and through your life, and He empowers you to live the life He's called you to live. So, pray bold prayers. Live generously. Don't waste time on petty drama. Talk about Jesus to both believers and unbelievers alike. Walk closely with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask God to fill you anew with His Spirit. Look forward to His return.



CAROL'S FINNISH PANCAKE (PANNUKAKKU)

My friend Heidi is half Finnish and her mother's pancake recipe is one of her family's favorites. I love its light and fluffy texture (think the airiness of a popover). This delicious dish can be enjoyed multiple ways by adding different toppings. No matter how you serve it, it's a crowd-pleaser.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 large eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole milk
- 1 cup flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
- Optional Toppings: syrup, fresh strawberries, blueberries, whipped cream, powdered sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Set oven to 400 degrees.
2. Place butter in 9x13 glass baking dish. While oven is preheating, place dish in oven and melt butter until bubbly.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk eggs together until combined.
4. To the eggs, add flour, milk, salt, and sugar. Mix until batter is smooth. It will be thin.
5. Pull baking dish out of oven with melted bubbly butter. Slowly and evenly pour batter on top of melted butter.
6. Carefully put hot pan back in oven. Bake for 30 minutes until golden brown around the edges. Yours may bubble up over the sides (it will deflate).
7. Can be served hot or cold with desired toppings. "Be Finn Creative."

Watch and Discuss

Watch the Session Two video.

Use the space below to follow along with Kelly's teaching and prepare for your group discussion.

TEACHING NOTES

Four Phases of Acts 2:

1. The Coming of the _____ (2:1-13)
2. Peter's Defense of the _____ (2:14-36)
3. A Call to _____ (2:37-41)
4. A New _____ (2:42-47)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one truth you learned about God's character in this week's study?
2. Note one characteristic of being a witness for Jesus that was modeled in Acts 1-4. How can you embody that trait this week?
3. Share something Kelly said that stuck with you from the video.
4. Read Acts 2:42-47. When you think about your Christian community, how do you see these characteristics reflected in it? Share specific examples and use this as a time to encourage and challenge one another to make your lives and homes temples of the Holy Spirit.



To access the video sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.