

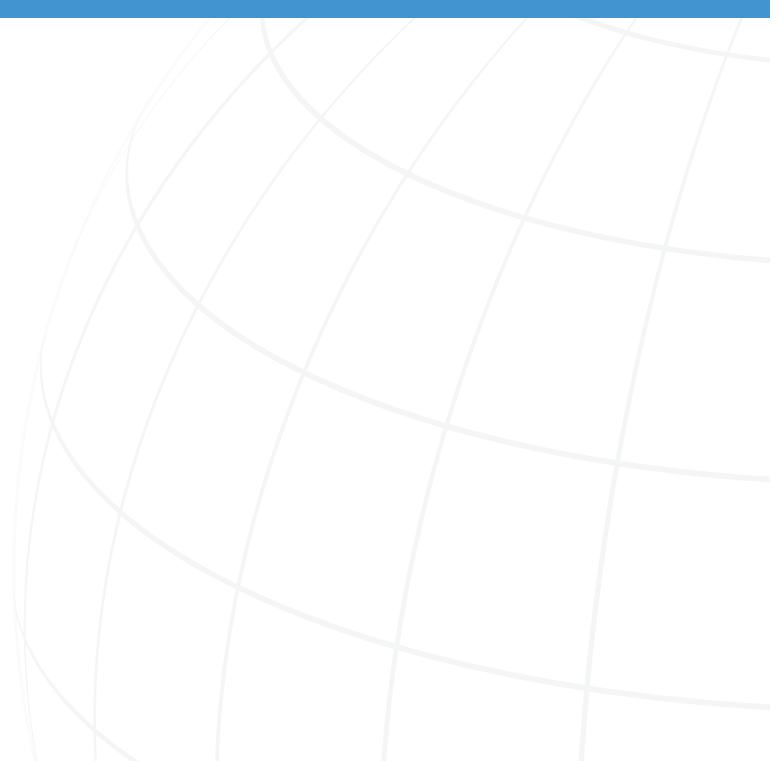


# GLOBAL WARMING

Making an Environmental Impact

A 12 Week Study through Acts

†  
Westbrook  
— CHURCH —



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HOW TO USE THIS

# CURRICULUM

Thank you for your willingness to be the church by joining a small group community. Thank you for your willingness to go deeper in your walk with Jesus Christ and the others he has placed in your life to help you along your journey. It is our hope that this curriculum will do more than impart information about the book of Acts; we hope it will draw you closer to Jesus and the community that bears his name.

This curriculum was written by men and women within the Westbrook community. Hopefully, you will see their wit and wisdom come out in the book. We understand that this curriculum in itself will not change lives, but lives can be changed by the corporate study, reflection, and application of God's Word. This book is meant to be a guide in your discussion. Please do not feel as if you need to discuss every question at great length. There might be some questions which you want to quickly look over, and others that you may want to marinate in for a while. Please use this curriculum in a way that connects with your group.

If you have questions or want to go further in your study, we have included references at the end of the book for additional resources. On the following pages we have listed an outline of how each lesson is laid out. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with it before you begin your study, and may God himself warm the world through the presence of His church!

## Big Idea

The first statement for each study is the central theme of the study. Our hope is that each small group leader and participant will walk away knowing the big idea, which is taken directly from the passage being studied.

## Outcomes

Each study will list anticipated learning outcomes. Our desire and prayer is that every person in the group be challenged cognitively (think), emotionally (feel), behaviorally (do), and existentially (be).

Here is an explanation of each outcome...

**Think:** What we want every person to know and understand about the content of the lesson.

**Feel:** How we want every person to be affected emotionally as a result of the study.

**Do:** What we want every person to do as a result of learning the content.

**Be:** Who God wants every person to be as a result of the study.

## The Study

This section shows the flow of each study and how they are broken down. Each section is designed to build upon the next, and provide a context where the outcomes can be reinforced.

### HOOK:

The purpose of the hook is to get the group interested and engaged in the subject. Each hook might include a story, a thought provoking question, a form of media, etc...

### BOOK:

This is the portion of the study where everyone digs into scripture in order to see what God says about the particular subject being studied.

### LOOK:

In this section you will ask how the particular truth conveyed in the study applies to your life.

### TOOK:

In the last section you will come up with a plan of action- i.e., what am I going to do as a result of what I have learned?

## Prayer

It is vital that we begin and end every lesson together in a time of prayer. Spend time praying how God might begin to shape us into the individuals and church that He wants us to be. Spend time praying for the pre-believers that God has placed in your life. Perhaps you could use the ACTS acrostic as a template for your prayer time.

**Adoration:** Adore God for who He is and what He has done in your lives.

**Confession:** Confess your need for God and the difficulty and inconsistency of living out what you are studying together as a group.

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God for all the blessings in your life. Thank Him for the growth that is taking place in your group.

**Supplication:** Pray for others in need, both inside and outside your group. Pray for pre-believers God has placed in your lives. Pray that they will come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.



## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts is one of the most influential books in the New Testament as it narrates the first thirty years of the Christian Church. It provides us with valuable details about how the Christian Church grew beyond Palestine, spreading all the way to Rome, the Capital of the Roman Empire.

Luke, the physician and author of the gospel bearing his name, is the author of Acts. Acts is the second part of Luke's two part collection of Luke-Acts. Luke provides the purpose for writing his accounts:

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*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,<sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,<sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.<sup>1</sup>*

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Acts contains a series of first person accounts of all the adventures in this book. It was written around A.D. 63. As in Luke's gospel, there is a strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit's empowerment of the church to boldly proclaim the message of Jesus Christ in a hostile world. The book has typically been divided into three main sections: the witness in Jerusalem (1:1-7:60), the witness in Judea and Samaria (8:1-11:18), and the witness to the ends of the earth (11:19-28:31).

The book shows how the early church dealt with the surrounding Pagan, Jewish and Roman cultures, and how it transformed the world around it. It contains accounts of healings, powerful encounters with government authorities, demons, sorcerers, murder/deception, persecution, miraculous escapes, near-death experiences, great travels, shipwrecks, survival, trials, speeches, and the underdog church triumphing over the evil forces bent on destroying it.

Chapter one of Acts begins where Luke's gospel left off. We read about the resurrected Jesus who commissions the disciples to preach the message of Christ to the world beyond Jerusalem. Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit who will empower the apostles and church to be his voice to the world. We also see the fledgling group of disciples transformed into the Apostles of Christ. Many of these men became martyrs because of their uncompromising allegiance to Jesus and His church.

The book of Acts also introduces the newcomer and persecutor of the church, Saul. Later in the book the persecutor will become an Apostle, and one of the strongest voices in the early church. In fact, over three fifths of the book is devoted to the Apostle Paul's ministry. The book abruptly ends in chapter 28 with the Apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome (ends of the earth).

# OUTLINE OF ACTS

## Prologue (1:1 – 2)

### A. Preparation for Pentecost (1:3 – 26)

1. Instructions before the Ascension (1:3 – 8)
2. The Ascension (1:9 – 11)
3. After the Ascension (1:12 – 26)

### B. Witness in Jerusalem (2:1 – 7:60)

1. The Day of Pentecost (2:1 – 47)
  - a. The Coming of the Spirit (2:1 – 13)
  - b. Peter's Pentecostal Speech and the People's Response (2:14 – 42)
  - c. The New Community (2:43 – 47)
2. Healing at the Temple and Its Consequences (3:1 – 4:31)
  - a. A Cripple Cured (3:1 – 10)
  - b. Peter's Speech (3:11 – 26)
  - c. Evangelism Proscribed by the Sanhedrin (4:1 – 22)
  - d. The Believers Respond with Prayer (4:24 – 31)
3. Radical Community (4:32 – 5:11)
  - a. Radical Sharing (4:32 – 35)
  - b. Radical Generosity (4:36 – 37)
  - c. Radical Discipline (5:1 – 11)
4. The Apostles before the Sanhedrin (5:12 – 42)
  - a. Continuing Power (5:12 – 16)
  - b. Arrest, Trial, and Beating (5:17 – 40)
  - c. After the Beating (5:41 – 42)
5. The Appointing of the Seven (6:1 – 7)
6. The Ministry and Martyrdom of Stephen (6:8 – 7:60)
  - a. Stephen's Ministry (6:8 – 10)
  - b. Accusations against Stephen (6:11 – 15)
  - c. Stephen's Speech (7:1 – 53)
  - d. Stephen's Death (7:54 – 60)

### C. Witness in Judea and Samaria and the Beginnings of Gentile Evangelism (8:1 – 11:18)

1. The Church is Scattered (8:1 – 4)
2. Philip's Ministry (8:5 – 40)
  - a. Public Ministry in Samaria (8:5 – 25)
  - b. Personal Ministry with the Ethiopian (8:26 – 40)

3. Saul's Conversion and Call (9:1 – 31)
  - a. The Damascus Road Experience (9:1 – 9)
  - b. Ananias's Ministry to Saul (9:10 – 19a)
  - c. Early Attempts at Ministry (9:19b – 25)
  - d. Finally to Jerusalem (9:26 – 30)
  - e. A Church at Peace (9:31)
  
4. Miracles of Peter (9:32 – 45)
  
5. The Story of Cornelius (10:1 – 11:18)
  - a. Cornelius's Vision (10:1 – 8)
  - b. Peter's Vision (10:9 – 16)
  - c. Peter Meets the Messengers (10:17 – 23a)
  - d. Peter and Cornelius Meet (10:23b – 33)
  - e. Peter's Speech (10:34 – 43)
  - f. Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:44 – 48)
  - g. The Jewish Christians Approve (11:1 – 18)

#### **D. Witness to the Ends of the Earth (11:19 – 28:31)**

1. The Church in Antioch Established (11:19 – 30)
  - a. Gentiles Converted (11:19 – 21)
  - b. Encouragement from Barnabas (11:22 – 26)
  - c. A Gift to Jerusalem (11:27 – 30)
  
2. A Parenthesis on Judean Christianity (12:1 – 25)
  - a. James Martyred (12:1 – 2)
  - b. Peter Imprisoned and Miraculously Freed (12:3 – 19)
  - c. Herod's Death (12:20 – 25)
  
3. The First Missionary Journey (12:26 – 14:28)
  - a. A Missionary Team Is Sent Out (12:26 – 13:3)
  - b. A Proconsul Converted in Cyprus (13:4 – 12)
  - c. Ministry to Jews and Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch (13:13 – 52)
  - d. Ministry in Iconium (14:1 – 7)
  - e. Rejection and Reception in Lystra and Derbe (14:8 – 21a)
  - f. Return Visits to Churches and Antioch (14:21b – 28)
  
4. The Jerusalem Council (15:1 – 35)
  - a. Paul and Barnabas Go to Jerusalem (15:1 – 4)
  - b. Settling the Issue of Salvation and the Gentiles (15:5 – 20)
  - c. Fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians (15:21 – 35)

5. The Second Missionary Journey (15:36 – 18:22)
  - a. The Team Breaks Up (15:36 – 40)
  - b. The Macedonian Call (16:1 – 10)
  - c. Ministry and Imprisonment in Philippi (16:11 – 40)
  - d. Ministry and Riot in Thessalonica (17:1 – 9)
  - e. Ministry among the Noble Bereans (17:10 – 15)
  - f. Ministry among Jews and Intellectuals in Athens (17:16 – 34)
  - g. Ministry and Legal Victory in Corinth (18:1 – 17)
  - h. Itinerating En Route to Antioch (18:18 – 22)
  
6. The Third Missionary Journey (18:23 – 21:16)
  - a. Ministry in Galatia and Phrygia (18:23)
  - b. Insertion: The Completion of Apollos (18:24 – 28)
  - c. The Completion of Twelve Ephesians (19:1 – 7)
  - d. Apologetic and Power Ministry in Ephesus (19:8 – 22)
  - e. The Riot in Ephesus (19:23 – 41)
  - f. Encouraging the Churches in Macedonia, Greece, and Troas (20:1 – 16)
  - g. Encouraging the Ephesian Elders in Miletus (20:17 – 38)
  - h. In Tyre and Caesarea (21:1 – 16)
  
7. Paul in Jerusalem (21:17 – 23:11)
  - a. Paul Meets the Jerusalem Christians (21:17 – 26)
  - b. Paul Is Arrested (21:27 – 36)
  - c. Paul Speaks to the Mob (21:37 – 22:21)
  - d. Paul Uses His Roman Citizenship (22:22 – 29)
  - e. Paul before the Sanhedrin (22:30 – 23:11)
  
8. Paul in Caesarea (23:12 – 26:32)
  - a. Paul Moves to Caesarea (23:12 – 35)
  - b. Paul before Felix (24:1 – 27)
  - c. Paul Appeals to Caesar (25:1 – 12)
  - d. Paul before Agrippa (25:13 – 26:32)
  
9. The Journey to Rome (27:1 – 28:15)
  - a. The Journey Begins (27:1 – 12)
  - b. The Storm (27:13 – 26)
  - c. The Shipwreck (27:27 – 44)
  - d. Ministering in Malta (28:1 – 10)
  - e. Rome at Last (28:11 – 15)
  
10. Ministering in Rome (28:16 – 31)
  - a. A Rented Home in Rome (28:16)
  - b. Paul and the Jews in Rome (28:17 – 28)
  - c. Bold Preaching and Teaching (28:30 – 31)2

# LESSON 1: WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

## Acts 1:1-26

### Big Idea

Jesus promises His disciples power from the Holy Spirit to continue the ministry he began on earth.

### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will understand the role and importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

**Feel:** The participant will embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life.

**Do:** The participant will be moved to answer Christ's command to spread the gospel message in their circle of influence by relying fully on the Holy Spirit's power.

**Be:** The participant will live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### Notes

The four Gospels record Christ's life and ministry on earth. Acts can be seen as a sequel to the Gospels, documenting Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and the charge to the apostles to carry on His work. Chapter 1 is the prequel to the continuation of Jesus' ministry through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1:1-3, we see Jesus demonstrate the proof of his resurrection and the beginning of 40 days of preparing the disciples to carry on his ministry (Lk 24:13-40, Jn 20:19-29). He walked with them, invited them to see and touch his resurrected body, talked to them, ate with them, and miraculously appeared to them in locked rooms. He taught and instructed the disciples about the kingdom of God, and his fulfillment of the Old Testament. He also shared with some disciples the spiritual significance of the cross and resurrection (Lk 24:25-27, 44-48).

Acts 1:4-8 Jesus shares with the disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit. He encourages them not to leave Jerusalem or begin their work until they have received the promised Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38, we find that if we turn from our evil ways (repent) we will receive the Holy Spirit into our lives. Along with baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit one is also adopted as one of God's children (Ro 8:14-16, Gal 4:6).

In Acts 1:9-11 we see Jesus taken up (ascension) into heaven in a cloud, "before their very eyes". Every Christian can look forward to His physical return. In Heb 4:14-16 we read that Jesus is now representing us to the Father as our High Priest. 1 Jn 1:9-2:2 tells us that He is our advocate before the Father forgiving us when we confess our sins.

After witnessing the ascension of Christ, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. They along with 120 others were obedient in waiting ten days in concentrated prayer together. In the original Greek text, the word for together (v. 14) was *homothymadon*, which means "with one mind or passion." Mary mother of Jesus was among the group along with other women. Mary not only gave birth to the Savior she was also involved in the birth of the church (Lk 11:13).

In verses 15-26, the disciples hold a business meeting to replace Judas. They prepared for this decision by relying on God's leading, searching the Word of God, and in constant prayer. Peter step forward and takes a position of leadership. The disciples identify clear qualifications for this replacement—1) a man who had been with and involved in Christ's earthly ministry, 2) he had witnessed the resurrected Christ and was prepared to witness this fact to the world. Replacing Judas was necessary to have 12 witnesses at Pentecost who could witness to the 12 tribes of Israel. In Acts the disciples are now referred to as "apostles" meaning messenger or missionary representing their new assignment of spreading the Gospel message.

## HOOK:

Can you think of a book or movie which had a sequel that was as good, or even better, than the original? What was the name and how was it better?

Do you have a favorite book or movie that you wish had a sequel?

## BOOK:

### Read Acts 1:1-26...

1. In what ways is Acts a sequel to Luke's gospel?
2. List some of the things Jesus did to prove his resurrection?
3. Why do you think it was crucial that Christ proved his resurrection?
4. After reading this chapter, what does Jesus teach the disciples about how to spread God's good news with the world? Do you feel sufficiently taught and prepared to do this? Why or why not?
5. Do you wait on God's complete instructions or do you move forward ahead of His plan?
6. How do the disciples' ideas of the Kingdom differ from Jesus' ideas (vv. 7-8)?
7. Which method used by the apostles should we be using as we choose our leadership? Which method should we not be using and why? What qualifications do you think we must have as we move forward in God's work?
8. What do you think the men and women of verses 13-14 were praying for?
9. In light of Peter's recent denial of Christ how do you think the others were feeling about him taking the leader role?

## LOOK:

10. After the crucifixion the disciples were scared, disillusioned, insecure and scattered. After the 40 days of teaching and preparation with Christ they emerge confident, courageous, focused, fearless and willing to risk it all to spread the Gospel message. Can you share an example of how spending time with the risen Jesus has dramatically changed you?

11. Christ's last words to the disciples were that they would receive the Holy Spirit, and be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Can you explain what this looks like in your life? How are you using His power through the Holy Spirit to witness first to your family, your local community, city, country and the world at large?

12. What do the disciples anticipate is going to happen when they receive the Spirit (v. 6)?

When you first confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, what did you think would happen when you received the Holy Spirit?

13. What information do verses 9-11 give you regarding the second coming of Christ?

How can these verses encourage or challenge you to be living in light of the second coming of Christ?

14. When you, your family, your church has a major decision to make what process do you use to arrive at a decision?

## TOOK:

15. What do you plan on doing this week in order to live according to the Holy Spirit's strength?
16. What specifically do you plan on doing to impact your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Ends of the Earth? How can this group help you accomplish this?

## LESSON 2: IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

### Acts 2:1-47

#### Big Idea

God is pleased when we are in living our faith in close proximity to others.

#### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will learn more about what the early church community looked like.

**Feel:** The participant will trust God's plan to live in community with others.

**Do:** The participant will strive to stay connected to this community.

**Be:** The participant will continue to grow in their understanding of their need to surround themselves with other believers.

#### Leader Notes

Community = ("A body of persons living in the same place or having common rights, interests, and privileges.")<sup>3</sup>

The word for community here in this passage (Acts 2:42) is commonly referred to as "fellowship". The idea of fellowship carries the idea of partnership, in their commitment to Jesus Christ and His purposes.

This passage tells us what happened in Jerusalem as the early Christians began meeting together. A common misconception about the first Christians was they rejected their Jewish faith. But these believers saw Jesus' message and resurrection as the fulfillment of everything they knew and believed from the Old Testament. The Jewish believers at first did not separate from the rest of the Jewish community. They still went to the temple and synagogue for worship and instruction in the Scriptures. But their belief in Jesus created great friction with the rest of the Jewish community who didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. As a result the Jewish believers who believed that Jesus was the Messiah were forced to meet in people's homes for communion, prayer, teaching and sharing meals together. <sup>4</sup>

## HOOK:

Which of your family traditions have you passed down to your own family? Which ones have been lost?

What has been the most exciting time in your life? What made it so exciting?

What has been the most exciting time for you in your faith journey?

## **BOOK:**

### **Read Acts 2:1-47...**

1. What does verse 42 tell us about the early Christian community? What were their priorities as they met together?
2. Verse 44 tells us that the believers were 'together and had everything in common'. Does this mean they were communists, socialist, or simply believed in a social gospel? What is Luke highlighting about the community?
3. Luke gives us a beautiful picture of this Christian community. What was God doing through this community? What means was He using to grow the church?
4. What was so compelling about this community? Do you think this kind of growth in the church is normal or extraordinary? Have you ever seen a community like the one described in this chapter?
5. Do you think the early church would be a compelling place today? What things could we regain from the early church in our lives today? Have there been things that have been lost over time?

## **LOOK:**

6. What encouraging trends do you see right now in the church today? Which alarming trends do you see right now? What are you doing right now to contribute to the health of the church?
7. Have you experienced this kind of community (partnership) described in chapter 2 with other believers? Why or why not?
8. What would it look like for you to work harder at getting connected with other Christ-Followers?

## **TOOK:**

9. God created us to live in community with others. Why is it dangerous to try to live life on our own? Are you an active participant in the Church?
10. Westbrook's mission is to help people discover a loving relationship with Jesus Christ, be developed as His disciples and be deployed in his service. Which of the three D's do you need to be more involved? How can this small group help you?

## **Prayer**

Thank God for the gift of the Church...

That the group would take a look at their lives to see if they are staying connected with other believers...

That people would Discover a relationship with Jesus because we are living obediently...

That this group would encourage each other to live as Disciples of the Messiah...

## LESSON 3: PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

### Acts 5:12-42

Big Idea The Gospel (“good news”) transforms lives, but for that transformation to occur it must be presented by faithful believers who have themselves been transformed.

### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will understand the boldness of the apostles, their response to demands that they stay quiet, and their persistence in presenting the good news.

**Feel:** The participant will feel compelled to present the good news of the Gospel to someone in their life.

**Do:** The participant will present the good news of the Gospel more often, more naturally, and more effectively to the culture.

**Be:** The participant will daily grapple with whether or not the gospel has taken root in their life and what effect it has had on others.

### HOOK:

Describe a time in your life when you were unjustly punished.

Have you ever been in trouble with the law? What effect did this have on you or your family and friends?

### BOOK:

#### Read Acts 5:12-42...

1. What in this passage seems strange to you based on your 21st century, North American experience?
2. How do you see the statement in 5:13 (“No one else dared join them...”) as being in conflict with that of 5:14 (“...more and more...believed in the Lord and were added to their numbers”)?  
How can we understand these 2 seemingly conflicting verses?
3. How would you characterize the apostles’ response to their miraculous release from prison?  
What do you think they were thinking as they “began to teach the people” immediately after their release from jail (vv. 17-21)?
4. How would you characterize Peter’s response to the demands of the religious authorities (vv. 29-32)?  
How would you have responded?
5. How did the apostles react to their release from the Sanhedrin and their beating at the hands of the Jewish authorities (vv. 41, 42)? How were they able to do this? How did the fact that they were living in community with each other affect their perspective on their situation?
6. The entire group of apostles had been arrested, not just a select few, and their response was a “group” response. What does this tell us about the power and potential impact of “community life” in the pronouncement of the Good News of the Gospel?
7. How does this passage come “full circle” to the apostles’ request which we read in Acts 4:29, 30?

## LOOK:

8. Had you been standing with Peter as he responded to the religious authorities, what do you think you would have been thinking (be honest...)?
9. Had you been one of the apostles standing with Peter what would you have done after you had been beaten and then released into the city?
10. Do you think the community of apostles could have encouraged you to continue teaching and proclaiming the gospel even after your encounter with the Sanhedrin? How about today? How does community encourage you to live out your faith in present day?

## TOOK:

11. Read again the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 10:14-15 "How, then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they have been sent?" Who in your life this week needs to hear the "good news" of the Gospel? How will you respond to that need? Remember Peter, the apostles and the community that surrounds you and pray for God's strength and boldness.

## LESSON 4: CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEF

### Acts 6:8 - 7:60

#### Big Idea

The reward for belief in Jesus surpasses any consequence that may result from belief in Jesus.

#### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will gain an understanding from the life of Stephen that belief in Jesus may have difficult consequences.

**Feel:** The participant will identify a way, either intentional or unintentional, that they have been compromising their belief in order to minimize a potential negative consequence.

**Do:** The participant will trust God for the ability to live according to their belief in Jesus Christ in an uncompromising way.

**Be:** The participant will live out their belief in Jesus despite the consequences.

## HOOK:

Is your tendency to be a boat-rocker or a peace-keeper? How has this positively or negatively affected your relationships?

What was the biggest consequence you paid for either tendency?

(Though Stephen enters into the account of Acts for only a short period of time, he is pivotal in Luke's description of the movement of the church and its differentiation from Judaism. As we look at Stephen this week, we will look at three things from our passage: Stephen the Man, Stephen's Message, and Stephen's Martyrdom.)

## **BOOK:**

### **Read Acts 6:8-7:60...**

#### **I. Stephen the Man.**

1. Stephen was a Hellenistic<sup>5</sup> Jew who had been chosen to help solve a problem that was causing dissention in the early church. Why was Stephen chosen and how does he appear to respond to the task? With all of Stephen's qualities does this seem to be the right job for him? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of a time when you were overlooked for a big role and were given a smaller role? How did you respond?
3. What does this account of Stephen's selection teach us about serving in the church?
4. Stephen had been chosen to serve tables not because of his food service-ability, but because of his belief-ability (Acts 6:8-15). Luke describes Stephen as a man "full of faith", "full of the Holy Spirit", "full of grace", and "full of power". Define briefly each of these 4 qualities. What do they look like in a person's life? Which one would you identify as most lacking in your life? Why?

### **Read Acts 7:1-53...**

#### **II. Stephen's Message**

Having been accused of speaking blasphemy against God, Moses, the Law, and the Temple, Stephen is dragged before the Jewish Religious Council, the Sanhedrin. There, the High Priest invites Stephen to respond to the charges. In the longest speech recorded in Acts, Stephen lays out in historic form the glory, promise and faithfulness of God to the nation of Israel. God had revealed His working through Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David. Time and time again, though, Israel had failed to comprehend or understand God's purpose and plan. That failure was an indictment on Israel's leaders. The patriarch brothers had rejected Joseph, Moses had been repudiated and failed to be obeyed, and the Temple was erroneously recognized as the dwelling place of God. Stephen builds his case that the failure of leaders in the past was still occurring. Like the past, they as leaders were resisting the Holy Spirit and God's work. They had missed God's Righteous One, Jesus, by betraying Him and putting Him to death. Stephen points the finger at them as the ones who were blaspheming God, not him.

5. What does this message reveal about Stephen? What does the response of the religious leaders reveal about them? What did they find most offensive in Stephen's message?
6. Knowing that the charges against him could be punishable by death, Stephen chose the "uncompromised road" in his commitment to truth. Can you describe a time that you either did or did not compromise your belief? What was the consequence that resulted?

### **Read Acts 7:54-60...**

#### **III. Stephen's Martyrdom**

Hearing Stephen, the religious leaders were pierced to the heart. Truth has a deep effect, even if it is rejected. Gazing into heaven, Stephen sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand.

7. What was the final truth (blasphemy to the Religious leaders) that Stephen was stoned for? How did that truth separate the early Christian Church from Judaism?
8. What are some similarities between how Jesus responded at His crucifixion and Stephen's response at his stoning? What enabled Stephen to respond in a similar way?

## LOOK:

9. What impact do you think this event had on the early church? What impact would a similar event have on the church today if persecution and martyrdom were legally and politically acceptable? What impact has Stephen's story had on you? How can you be more unswerving in your commitment to Jesus?
10. Have you compromised your belief out of concern for a negative/unfavorable consequence?

## TOOK:

For Stephen, his belief resulted in the ultimate consequence. The question must be asked, why? Why would God stand by and let this happen? Stephen had all the markings of a servant leader who had great potential to accomplish much for the name of Jesus: he was just getting started. I don't think Stephen awoke that morning anticipating that his day would end with his martyrdom. Yet Stephen most likely did awake that morning rejoicing knowing God and being full of His presence. His belief in Jesus was the central defining aspect of his life. He lived that belief full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith, full of grace, and full of power. He also knew that life lived that way could have consequences, but that Jesus far outweighed whatever consequence might come his way.

11. What circumstance in your life do you need to stop worrying about the consequences of obedience and start trusting God? What do you plan on doing about it today? How can this community help you accomplish this?

## LESSON 5: PHILIP'S MINISTRY

### Acts 8:1-40

#### Big Idea

Opposition, fear, or cultural differences should not keep us from sharing the Gospel with all people, wherever we go!

#### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will learn about the response of the early church to persecution, particularly the public and personal proclamation of the truth about Jesus by Philip.

**Feel:** The participant will be inspired by the example of Philip to trust and obey God in being a bold witness to Christ even in difficult, dangerous, and culturally different situations.

**Do:** The participant will ask the Holy Spirit to give them His power to proclaim Christ and the Word clearly no matter what, and to direct them to people who do not yet know Jesus but who are seeking Truth.

**Be:** The participant will deeply care about lost people, and will become a more effective, Holy Spirit-led witness for Christ "wherever" they are!

## HOOK:

Matthew Henry wrote in his Commentary on the Whole Bible, “The enemies designed to scatter and lose them... Christ designed to scatter and use them.” As the first century believers grew in number, so did many Jews who opposed them and determined to stomp them out, but God used their vain attempts to strengthen and spread the gospel. Can you think of a time in your life when a bad experience turned into a blessing for you or someone you know?

Imagine if you heard of our church’s leaders being killed and families being dragged from their homes and jailed because they were part of this church. What would be your normal human reactions and feelings? How would it affect what you would think, say, and do regarding your faith in Christ?

## BOOK:

### Read Acts 8:1-4

(See also Acts 11:19-21, and look at a map to find the places mentioned). . .

1. What effect did the stoning of Stephen have on the church?
2. What strikes you about the believers who fled the persecution in Jerusalem?

(Note on v. 4, “The people went as missionaries more than as refugees. Luke could have used the general term for scattering but chose instead to use a word diaspeiro that means to scatter as seed is scattered on the ground.”)<sup>6</sup>

3. Where was Samaria (v 5)? Why was it unusual for Jewish Christians to go there?  
How did God perhaps use the persecution to help the early church begin to fulfill Acts 1:8?

(Note: Look at Matthew 5:10-12, Mark 4:17, I Cor. 4:12-13, and 2 Timothy 3:10-12. How do these Scriptures, and perhaps others shape your view of persecution and suffering? See also Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4, and I Peter 1:6-9).

### Read Acts 8:5-40...

4. Who was Philip (Look at Acts 6:1-7 & Acts 21:8)? What qualities do you see in his life that made him effective in ministry? Describe the similarities and differences between Philip’s public ministry and personal one-on-one ministry.
5. How do you see the Holy Spirit at work in Philip’s ministry (vv. 5-13 and vv. 26-40)?  
How were Philip’s methods unique & revolutionary? What principles of evangelism do you observe?
6. How were the two seekers in this chapter (Simon and the Ethiopian eunuch) alike?  
How were they different?
7. What was one consistent response to the proclamation of the Gospel (v 8 and v 39)? What status did a eunuch have with the Jews (Deut 23:1)? How was Philip’s ministry to the eunuch the beginning of the witness “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)?
8. What do you observe about the attitudes and actions of the older leadership (Peter & John) in relation to a younger leader’s (Philip’s) innovative, pioneering ministry (vv 14-17, and 25)?
9. What are the main “P” words in this chapter? How do they help you remember the main themes of Acts 8?

## LOOK:

10. Is your tendency toward fight, flight, as you express your love to “hard to love” people?
11. When you think of evangelism or sharing God’s love with others, what frightens you? How might loving people help you overcome that fear?
12. What do you see as your opportunity and responsibility for taking the gospel to the ends of the earth?
13. Has the Lord ever sent you down “a desert road” like Philip for His purposes?
14. Have you experienced any “divine appointments” where you had an obvious opportunity to share the Gospel with someone you didn’t expect to? If so, tell about what you did, and how the person responded. How can you “see” more people like this along the way?

## TOOK:

15. When has focusing outward helped you grow personally and share God’s love more effectively? How could “loving the world” (John 3:16) become a part of your lifestyle and not just something you make yourself do occasionally? What do you plan on doing about it this week? How can you help each other accomplish this?



**PRAYER TIME:** Confess times when you have tried to serve Him without relying on His strength and priorities. Pray for believers still being persecuted around the world, that their representation of Jesus will expand the church in those hard to reach places. Ask God for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for ears to hear His voice, eyes to really see people and opportunities around you locally and globally. Pray also for a heart that obeys Him in taking the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ wherever He sends you this week!

## LESSON 6: CONVERSION AND CALLING

### Acts 9:1-31

#### Big Idea

In order to truly follow God we must fully surrender to His will for our lives.

#### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will understand that God desires to transform their lives completely.

**Feel:** The participant will desire to be transformed by God.

**Do:** The participant will surrender their life to the transforming power of God.

**Be:** The participant will live differently because of God's ongoing transformation in their life.

#### HOOK:

What has been the biggest change that has taken place in your life (losing weight, earning a degree, getting married, etc...)? What was the cause for this change?

What positive effects has this change had on those around you? What have been the negative effects?

#### BOOK:

##### Read Acts 9:1-31...

1. What do we find out about Saul from Acts 7:58 and 9:1-2?
2. What term does Luke use to describe the early Christians in verse 2? How does this describe who we follow (Jesus)? How does this term still describe the church of the 21st Century?
3. Who does Jesus accuse Saul of persecuting in verse 4? Why is this significant?
4. How does Luke describe Saul's conversion? What would happen to Saul as a result of becoming a Christ-follower (vv. 15-16)?
5. What did your first encounter with Jesus look like? Was it sudden, terrifying, emotional, gradual, powerful, subtle, or still in progress? What sacrifices have you made as a result of accepting Christ into your life?
6. How did Paul's experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus change his profession? How has becoming a Christ-follower changed your priorities?
7. How did God use Saul/Paul after his transformation? (Note: Saul is his Hebrew name and Paul is his Greek name. Saul's name-change signified his work as a missionary to the Gentiles)
8. If you were to change your name as a result of becoming a Christ-follower, what would it be? How would this change describe your new relationship with Jesus?
9. How would you feel if you were Ananias and you heard about Saul coming to faith in Jesus? Have you ever questioned someone's conversion to Jesus?

## LOOK:

10. Where was the road that Jesus first met you? What was your first response when you heard his voice?
11. How has your life been transformed as a result of your encounter with Jesus? How is your life being transformed daily as a result of walking with Jesus?
12. What are the barriers in your life that are preventing you from following Jesus?
13. How has God used you since you have become a Christ-follower? In what ways have you regretted not being used?

## TOOK:

14. In which areas of your life do you need to surrender more fully to Jesus? What steps do you need to take today to do this?

## LESSON 7: GOD'S INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES

### Acts 10:1-11:18

#### Big Idea

God will place us outside our comfort zones in order to reach every person in every corner of the world with His good news.

#### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will learn that God has extended his promise of salvation to all people.

**Feel:** The participant will experience the joy of being included into God's family.

**Do:** The participant will share God's gracious invitation of salvation to others by sharing the gospel with their words and with their lives.

**Be:** The participant will be characterized as a person who desires to see all people come to a saving and sanctifying faith.

## HOOK:

Have you ever felt like an outsider, excluded from a group? Describe what it was like.

When was the last time you excluded someone from your group?

How often do you associate with people who are different than you?

## BOOK:

### Read Acts 10:1-11:18...

1. How did God prepare Cornelius for Peter (10:1-8)? What evidence is there that Cornelius expected God to do something in his life (10:24-26)?

2. Notice the result of listening well to the Lord and the Word in Acts 10:33, 44, and 11:18. What would have been the consequences if Cornelius or Peter had not listened and obeyed God?
3. In what ways did God prepare Peter for Cornelius (10:9-33)? What is the significance of him staying with Simon the tanner (See Leviticus 5:2)? Perhaps God was preparing Peter to be open to change by having him stay with someone who, from a Jewish perspective, was ceremonially unclean.<sup>7</sup>
4. Why was Peter's vision such a big deal for Peter and the other Christ-followers during this period? How did the Jewish believers react to the news of Peter sharing the Word of God with Gentiles?
5. What did Peter say in response to the criticism and objections of the Jewish Christians? How did they respond? Why was their response pivotal to the spread of the gospel to places Jesus had commissioned his disciples in Acts 1:8?<sup>8</sup>
6. Re-read Acts 10:34-36. What is the big conclusion, and new conviction which Peter and the early church were learning (See also 11:18)?

### LOOK:

7. What artificial boundaries and distinctions have we put in place today on those who are outside of God's grasp?
8. How can placing ourselves in difficult and uncomfortable situations help us take Jesus to people who need Him?
9. When was the last time your understanding of God was challenged?
10. When was the last time you experienced some discomfort in order to share Jesus with someone (walking across a room, taking time out of your busy schedule to share coffee with a friend, saying hi to your neighbor before the garage door closes)?
11. How have you seen God use discomfort in your life to draw others to himself?

### TOOK:

12. What lessons do you learn from Cornelius' life? To what extent are prayer and the poor priorities for you?
13. What do you plan on doing in order to be more open to God's movement in your life and in the lives of those around you? What do you plan on doing together as a group?
14. Who in your world of relationships is most unlike you? How is your communication with that person affected by these differences? How has this study affected your desire to grow in relating to people of other cultures, races and walks of life? Ask God to reveal and transform any subtle or overt prejudices you have.

### CLOSING:

Memorize Acts 10:34-36 as a group and quiz each other the following week.

*<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism<sup>35</sup> but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."*

## LESSON 8: THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY

Acts 11:22-26

### The Big Idea

God works through the strength and weakness of relationships.

### Outcomes

**Know-** The participant will learn the importance of partnership and what qualities make a good partner.

**Feel:** The participant will appreciate the importance of working with others, supporting and being supported by them.

**Do:** The participant will encourage others to work together for God's purposes.

**Be:** The participant will be characterized as a partner in the gospel.

### Notes

We glean a little about Barnabas in Acts 4:36. Also known as Joseph, the apostles called him "Barnabas," which means "Son of Encouragement." He is shown as a positive role model for the early church in Acts 4:37, selling his land and giving the proceeds to the church, in sharp contrast to Ananias and Sapphira.

He was originally from Cyprus, an island near Antioch, so it's likely he was familiar with the area where he was sent to minister. (Antioch is east of the island on the mainland of Syria at the east end of the Mediterranean.) The church here was the first to include both Jews and Gentiles in a single fellowship.

Barnabas is described in this week's passage in glowing terms, as a godly man who delighted in God's grace, who was a true encouragement to those he came into contact with, filled with the Holy Spirit. (Stephen is described in similar terms in Acts 6:5.) Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch to work with him. The two ministered together there for a year.

It should be noted that although Barnabas was an early associate of Saul, vouching for him with the apostles and ministering with him for long stretches of time, the two did not always see eye-to-eye. In Acts 15, the two disagree over whether to take John Mark with them to revisit towns where they had previously preached (which implies that the two worked together in more places than just Antioch.) Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul wasn't so sure. The two ultimately parted ways over the issue, with Barnabas taking Mark to Cyprus and Paul taking Silas with him through Syria and Cilicia.

### HOOK:

Whether you remember Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita as Daniel and Mr. Miyagi in the original "The Karate Kid" from 1984 or Jaden Smith and Jackie Chan as Dre and Mr. Han in the 2010 remake, the basic plot remains the same. In both versions, a boy who is being bullied finds help in an adult mentor who teaches him martial arts which ultimately helps him defeat his adversary, and at the same time valuable life lessons. Do you have a Mr. Miyagi in your life? Or are you Mr. Han to someone?

Make a list of famous partners/pairs. We'll start you out with a few. See if you can come up with others: John Lennon and Paul McCartney...Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler...John Smith and Pocahontas...Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston...Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie...Barnabas and Saul...Adam and Eve...

Did the partners on your list ever have conflict? Over what? Did the conflict ultimately strengthen them, or did it cause them to split up? How do you handle conflict in your relationships?

### **BOOK:**

#### **Read Acts 11:22-26**

1. Why did the church think it necessary to send Barnabas to Antioch? How did Barnabas help the church there? What made him especially equipped for this task?
2. How is Barnabas described in this passage?

### **LOOK:**

3. Share a time when you've taken on a project on your own. What was that experience like? How was the outcome? What were your frustrations?
4. What difference would it have made if you would have a partner in that project?
5. Now share a time when you were encouraged by a co-worker or partner – or when you were able to offer someone help or encouragement.
6. What are your natural talents and spiritual gifts? How has God used these to equip you to help others?
7. Who are your ministry partners? What does your partnership look like?

### **TOOK:**

8. What will you do this week to encourage another believer in their walk with Jesus?
9. What talents do you need to use in order to benefit the church, others, your family? What will you do this week to start using them?

## **LESSON 9: SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL**

### **Acts 15:1-35**

#### **Big Idea**

At the Jerusalem Council church leaders approve and accept the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Justification is based on Christ's atoning sacrifice not on the law or good works.

#### **Outcomes**

**Know-** The participant will know that faith in Jesus is sufficient for salvation.

**Feel:** The participant will feel the weight of offending another person.

**Do:** To rest and rejoice in your faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice.

**Be:** To experience confidence and security in your salvation in Jesus Christ.

## Notes

After the persecution of Stephen, the revival in Samaria, and the conversions of Paul and Cornelius, many non-Jewish believers were pouring into the Christian community. The Gentiles had little knowledge of OT teaching, ceremonial and traditional laws, and many had immoral, godless habits and lifestyles which needed correction. The Gentile influx was gaining momentum and some zealous Jews saw this as a threat. Jewish Christians were concerned that this would weaken the law and moral standard of the church. The increasing tension and confusion that spawned between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians was apparent. The zealous Jewish Christians, known as Judaizers, traveled to Antioch and insisted that the Gentile Christians be circumcised and follow Mosaic law. The gospel truth of how one is saved and the future of the church were at stake. The Judaizers claimed they were sent by James with the message that Jesus + circumcision + observance of the law =salvation. In Galatians 2:2 God gave Paul a revelation instructing him to take the whole matter to the Jerusalem church leadership.

## HOOK:

How does your family or church usually decide what to do when areas of controversy arise?

What is the most controversial thing you have personally witnessed or been involved with? What was the outcome?

## BOOK:

### Read Acts 15:1-35...

1. What was the main difference between the Christians at Antioch and the Jewish Christians (vv. 1-12)?
2. What were the two groups arguing about? Why do you think the Jewish Christians were concerned about the number of Gentile Christians that were joining the church?
3. Why did the Judaizers insist that the Gentile converts be circumcised? What were the Judaizers actually doing and why was it so dangerous?
4. Why did Paul oppose the circumcision of the Gentile Christians?
5. If you were one of the Gentiles hearing the regulations required of you how would you feel about your faith?
6. Why was it essential that the Christians not offend their brother or sister in their daily living (vv. 13-21)?
7. What did James suggest as a solution to the controversy between the Gentile and Jewish Christians? What were the long term accomplishments of the Jerusalem Council?
8. What impressed or challenged you after studying the model for conflict resolution set forth by Paul and the Jerusalem Council?

## LOOK:

9. How have you seen people today try to add on to what Jesus requires for salvation? How have you seen this cause destruction and division in the Church?
10. What things have you let go in order to prevent someone else from stumbling in their faith? What are you willing to let go of to advance the cause of Christ? What things are you willing to embrace?

## TOOK:

11. How do you plan on responding to other Christians whose worship or lifestyles may be different than yours?
12. What do you plan on doing this week to begin reconciling with someone with whom you have had disagreements? How can this group help you with this?

## LESSON 10: CONVERSATION WITH THE WORLD

### Acts 17:16-34

#### Big Idea

One of the most effective forms of sharing our faith in Jesus is to enter into dialogue with the non-believing world, not diatribe.

#### Outcomes

**Think:** The participant will design a response to the predominant world view.

**Feel:** The participant will be provoked to share the message of Christ with those around them with clarity and sensitivity.

**Do:** The participant will associate with people who do not know Christ.

**Be:** The participant will develop a habit of listening to the world around them and offering the good news of Jesus.

#### Notes:

As the Apostle Paul enters the city of Athens he encounters the Jews and devout worshippers in the nearby synagogue. He also discussed faith with the people he encountered in the market place. He then comes across two groups of philosophers who take him up to the Areopagus, also known as Mars Hill, in order to debate. This place was a hotbed for political and philosophical debate. In fact, five centuries earlier the great philosopher Socrates was brought to this very site to face his accusers.

This area was full of altars to unknown gods.

First, Paul encounters the Epicurean philosophers. Their believed the following: that everything happened by chance; that death was the end of all; that the gods were distant from the world and did not care about the affairs of human beings; that pleasure was the chief goal of humankind (not necessarily for carnal and material pleasure).<sup>9</sup>

Second, Paul encounters the Stoic Philosophers. Paul quotes one of their philosophers, the Stoic poet Aratus of Soli Cilicia: "For we are also his offspring." The Stoics believed the following: that everything was god; that spirit grew dull in matter, but it was in everything; that everything that happened was the will of God and therefore must be accepted without resentment; and that the world was in a cycle of disintegration and rebirth.<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious that both groups of philosophers had very divergent ideas from the Gospel that Paul was presenting. It is important to note that the Apostle took time to find the “cultural markers” that would allow all of the groups to have a similar vocabulary. In spite of the many differences, some of those present wanted to hear more of what Paul was speaking (v. 32), while others became believers after hearing Paul’s message (v. 33).

### **HOOK:**

When was the last time you were confronted by someone who held a different world view than you? Describe the encounter...

Have you ever been confronted by another Christian who questioned the authenticity of your faith? How did you handle the situation?

What do you find more annoying/challenging:

- People who have weak opinions?
- People who have overbearing opinions?

Which do you struggle with more?

Do you have a harder time engaging people with different world views or listening to people with different world views? Why?

### **BOOK:**

#### **Read Acts 17:16-34**

1. When was the last time you were deeply distressed at the condition of our world (v. 16)?
2. What are the things that people idolize around you?
3. When was the last time you shared your faith in Christ with someone else?
4. How did you go about sharing? What was the effect?
5. What methods did Paul use to share his faith with the people in the market place? What was the progression of Paul’s message to the Athenians?
6. Why is it important to take the time to listen to other’s interpretations of the world around them?
7. What effect did Paul’s preaching have on those who listened (v. 32)?
8. Do you feel you need to listen to your friends more about their religious views, or be more direct about sharing your own views about Jesus? How can you be uncompromising in your own faith while being sensitive to the views of others?

### **LOOK:**

9. How do you typically share your faith with others?
10. Why must we enter the “Areopagus” of our modern world to dialogue with the world around us? Why is the methodology that we use so important to how we communicate the gospel?

## **TOOK:**

11. Who are the people in your life right now with whom you need to share your faith?
12. How do you plan on accomplishing this?

## **LESSON 11: THE ADVENTURES OF PAUL**

**(Acts 27:1-28:15)**

### **The Big Idea**

Through difficult life situations, God gives His people courage and places them where their voice and influence is needed.

### **Outcomes**

**Know:** The participant will recognize the importance of living by example.

**Feel:** The participant will desire to learn the importance of trusting God amidst difficult circumstances.

**Do:** The participant will trust God's control over their circumstances.

**Be:** The participant will be available for God's use whatever the circumstances.

### **Notes:**

In Paul's third visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1) it appears he stayed about 3 months in the home of Gaius, and from there wrote his Letter to the Romans (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). In his letter he told the Christians in Rome how eager he was not only to visit and encourage them, but also to preach the gospel in the world's capital city (Rom. 1:8-15), and then to travel on to Spain (Rom. 15:18-29). However, before he could do, so he had some unfinished business: he had taken up a collection to aid the poor in Jerusalem, and now had to take this to Jerusalem, (he did so with some misgiving (Rom. 15:31). Though the risks were great, Paul committed himself to go to Rome via Jerusalem (20:21-24; 21:13). Paul's plan did not work as he intended. He would visit Rome, but not for three more years, and then it would be as a prisoner.

Leaving Corinth, Paul and his group began their long journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:3-21:16), taking with them the collection for the Judean church. At the ports called Troas and Miletus, Paul gave a moving address to the elders of the Ephesian church.

They were in Jerusalem probably not more than a week when some Asian Jews started alleging that Paul had undermined Moses' law by his teaching and defiled the temple by bringing Greeks into it. A riot broke out but Paul was rescued (Acts 21:17-22:29). During the next two+ years Paul was held prisoner. During this same period, Luke was in Palestine, possibly gathering material for his gospel and the book of Acts.

Paul underwent a series of trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30-23:10), before the procurator Felix (Acts 24:1-21), before his successor Festus (Acts 25:1-12), and before King Agrippa and his wife Bernice (Acts 25:13-26:32). But as a Roman citizen, he exercised his right to appeal to Caesar and was eventually sent to Rome for trial.

The voyage by sea was long and perilous, including an exciting escape from shipwreck on the island of Malta, which Luke tells with detail (Acts 27:1-28:10) and Paul's great ambition to reach Rome with the gospel was at last realized. The Christians welcomed him, and the Jews came to visit him and hear the gospel from his lips.

Paul's imprisonment and subsequent trial in Caesarea probably took place around 57-59 AD; thus, all references to "Caesar" in Acts 25-28 are referring to Nero. Throughout the years of Paul's missionary journeys, Christianity was rapidly making inroads in Rome. By the time the apostle himself arrived, there were already many there who followed "the Way" (Ac 9:2; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), including numerous individuals employed in the imperial palace (Phil. 4:22).

### HOOK:

Have you ever been stranded in an unfamiliar place? How did you get out?

What is the most adventurous thing you have ever done?

Would you rather be stranded on a deserted island with a bunch of strangers or dropped off in a busy city alone and without any money?

### BOOK:

#### Read Acts 27:1-12- 28:15...

1. According to vv. 1 & 2, who is travelling with Paul? Who is in charge (v. 1)? What impression does Luke give of this man (vv. 1-3; 43)?
2. Why had sailing become dangerous by the time they had reached Fair Haven? How do we know the approximate time of year (v 9)?
3. What did Paul think was going to happen (v10)?
4. According to vv. 13-20 & 33, how severe was the storm? How long were they in this situation (v 27)?
5. After being in Caesarea for at least two years, why might Paul especially need to hear the promise of 23:11 repeated at this time (v 24)?
6. If you had been on board, how would you have felt at this point (Compare v. 31 with v. 11)?
7. What do we know about how the centurion felt about Paul now? About the God Paul serves?
8. How do Paul's words and examples serve to encourage the others? How would your estimation of Paul have changed during the two weeks of the storm?
9. In light of the fact that God intended for Paul to get to Rome, why do you think He allowed all of the events of 27:1-28:9 to happen? What stories do you think the centurion could have told his fellow officers on arrival in Rome?
10. How did God use Paul's imprisonment to advance the gospel (see Phil. 1:12-13)?
11. Given the long delay, his shipwreck at sea, his continuing prisoner status, and friends coming to visit from far away places (28:15), how might Paul have felt about arriving in Rome?

## LOOK:

12. How did God show unexpected kindness to Paul and those with him? How have you experienced unexpected kindness from someone recently?
13. Have you ever felt caught in a “Northeaster” (pressure situation) driven along by the wind? What happened? Are you facing a difficult situation right now? How can Paul’s example encourage you?
14. How do Paul’s attitudes and actions compare with those of the sailors? To what would you attribute Paul’s ability to remain calm under pressure? How did God use Paul’s example to his shipmates as a tool for ministry? How has God used your life as an example to others?
15. In the midst of a storm what is your responsibility and what is God’s? When was the last time you were tempted to bail out of a stormy situation?
16. How has God used a recent difficulty or disaster in your life as an opportunity for helping others?

## TOOK:

17. In what ways do you need to trust God in the storms of your life right now? How can this group help you?
18. What difficult situation in your life right now needs to be used as an opportunity for God to speak through you? What will you do this week to be more willing to allow Him to use you as an example?

## LESSON 12: PAUL’S LAST DAYS

### Acts 28:16-31

#### The Big Idea

In spite of Paul being in chains, the gospel was unleashed!

#### Learner Outcomes

- Think:** The participant will see how in spite of limitations the gospel can continue to expand.
- Feel:** The participant will feel the weight of what it means to suffer on account of Jesus.
- Do:** The participant will respond to the gospel message in their own lives.
- Be:** The participant will be a witness to the world, no matter their limitations.

#### Notes:

Luke has now traced the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the world. He ends his narrative with a picture of Paul, who although under house arrest didn’t retire, but remained a tireless evangelist- ‘he...welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered’ (Acts 28:30-31).

During his two year imprisonment, the Romans gave him freedom to preach to all who wanted to come to him, and the Gospel spread throughout Rome. During this time Paul:

1. Directed a team. Many of his leaders were either with him or came to him for instruction or carried messages, including: Luke and Aristarchus (Acts 27:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:11); Timothy (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Phile. 1); Tychicus (Eph. 6:21); Epaphroditus (Phil. 4:18); John Mark (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

2. Shared Jesus with countless people. Through his imprisonment, Paul was able to influence groups he might never have been able to reach while free. In fact, as he tells the Philippians, his chains actually helped to advance the Gospel (Phil. 1:12). The whole Praetorian Guard (Caesar's elite troops) heard the story of how Paul was in chains because of Christ (Phil. 1:13). Fellow Christians were encouraged and a great many believers responded to Paul's example by also boldly preaching Christ (1:14). Members of Caesar's own household became Christians (Phil. 4:22).

3. Spent time writing to various churches. The so-called 'prison epistles' are the letters to the Ephesians (circular letter), to the Colossians, to Philemon (personal letter), and to the Philippians (some think this was written during imprisonment in Ephesus).

Acts ends with Paul in custody in Rome. The delay came because the Jewish authorities from Jerusalem had to appear personally at the trial to press charges; however, the mid-60s was a turbulent time in Jerusalem. The Jewish Sanhedrin was about to lose everything in the bloody insurrection of the Zealots, which eventually broke out in A. D. 68 and ended in decimation of Jerusalem and the temple two years later—hence their delay in prosecuting Paul. It is conceivable that a Jewish delegation was never sent and Paul was released, however with stigma on his record.

From this point, it is difficult to reconstruct Paul's movements. He may have managed a 4th journey. Following ancient tradition, Paul was released from prison at Rome about A. D. 62. He may have journeyed to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28); then headed back east to Crete (Ti 1:5), visiting former places like Ephesus and Macedonia as well (1 Tim. 1:3). Other travels could have taken him to Miletus and Corinth (2 Tim. 4:20), Troas (2 Tim. 4:13), and Nicopolis (Ti. 3:12). During these travels he could have written 1 Timothy and Titus.

Paul was arrested a second time in either Troas or elsewhere in Asia Minor (2 Tim. 4:12-20) and taken to Rome which is probably the occasion for writing Second Timothy in which Paul alludes to his chains (1:8; 2:9). He expects to be condemned to death (4:16-18). Church Tradition records that Paul was beheaded (as a Roman citizen would have been) on the Ostian Way. His execution was probably a part of the persecution which broke out in Rome when Nero tried to deflect responsibility for the great fire from himself to the Christians in the mid 60s AD.

## HOOK:

If you were going to jail and could take any three items with you, what would they be?

What do you envision your retirement looking like? What plans are you making in order to get there?

## **BOOK:**

### **Read Acts 28:16-31...**

1. Why might Paul take the initiative to call this meeting with the Jewish leaders in Rome? Four times since this episode began in chapter 21, Paul's innocence has been clearly stated. Why does Luke emphasize this point so strongly?
2. In light of all Paul has been through, how do you think he felt when he heard the Jews' response in verse 21? How is their attitude different from that of the Jews in Jerusalem? How do you account for that difference? Why do you think the Jerusalem Jews did not pursue their case against Paul after he left their area?
3. After reading verses 25-28, we find out that Christianity is no longer viewed as a narrow Jewish sect (v. 22), but as a faith for all peoples (v. 28). How do these verses relate to Acts 1:8, 9:15-16 and 26:22-23?
4. Verse 31 is similar to other summary verses in Acts (see 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20, etc.). What does this ending show about Luke's central concern in writing Acts?

## **LOOK:**

5. Have you ever suffered on account of your faith in Jesus? Have you ever given reason for others to be upset with you because of your association with Jesus? If not, why? If so, describe.
6. How did Paul continue to serve Jesus in all his limitations?  
What limitations do you feel placed upon you by circumstances beyond your control?
7. How has God used your limitations as opportunities for His message of hope to be shared with others?
8. How does verse 31 set the stage for how your life should be a continuation of the book of Acts?

## **TOOK:**

9. What excuses have you used for not serving others on behalf of Jesus?  
What do you need to do today in order to remove those excuses from your vocabulary?
10. What do you plan on doing this week in order to come out of "retirement"?  
What will you do today in order to be more available for use by God?

## STUDY RESOURCES

### Free Online Study Tools

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)  
[www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com)  
[www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com)  
[www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org)

### Electronic Resources

Logos Bible Software ([www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com))  
Bible Works ([www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com))



### Commentaries & Books

Barclay, William. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Daily Study Bible. Rev. ed. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1976. Devotional insights arising from a great background knowledge.

Barrett, C.K. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. Vol. I. on chapters 1 – 14. ICC. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1994. A replacement volume in the ICC series. Takes a moderately critical approach to the issue of historical accuracy. Possibly the most comprehensive treatment of the Greek text available in English.

Bruce, F.F. *The Book of the Acts*. NICNT. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988. Unparalleled for how it makes the historical background accessible to the general reader.

Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles 1 – 13*. Trans. John W. Fraser and W. J. G. McDonald. *The Acts of the Apostles 14 – 28*. Trans. John W. Fraser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, 1966. Sage comments from one of the greatest expositors ever.

Fernando, Ajith. *Outline of Acts*. NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Acts. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, ©1998.

Freedman, David Noel. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993. Helpful insights on the cultural and historical background of the text.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The Acts of the Apostles*. TNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. Short but insightful comments from a master of the Lukan writings.

Marshall, I.H. *A Fresh Look at the Acts of the Apostles*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992. Basic contemporary introduction to Acts.

Ogilvie, Lloyd J. *The Communicator's Commentary: Acts*. Dallas: Word, 1983. Brief expositions.

Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts*. BST. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990. Sheer exposition with flashes of brilliant application from one of the great expositors of the twentieth century.

Wagner, C. Peter. *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. Vol. 1: Spreading the Fire; vol. 2: Lighting the World; vol. 3: Blazing the Way. Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1994 – 1995. Strong on contemporary missiological application.

Willimon, William H. *Acts*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Atlanta: John Knox, 1988. Lively, relevant expositions.

Winter, Bruce, et al., eds. *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993 – 1996.



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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible : New International Version. electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Lk 1:1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando, Ajith. "Outline of Acts" In NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Acts. By Ajith Fernando, 42. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, ©1998.

<sup>3</sup> Pocket Webster Dictionary. (New York, World Publishing Company, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Life Application Study Bible Commentary. (Wheaton, IL, Tyndale House Publishers).

<sup>5</sup> A Greek convert to Judaism.

<sup>6</sup> \*Harrison, Everett F. Interpreting Acts: The Expanding Church. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986. Godly scholarship with reverent application.

<sup>7</sup> Fernando, Ajith. "Outline of Acts" In NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Acts. By Ajith Fernando, 329. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, ©1998.

<sup>8</sup> Note: Later, Paul expanded on the new Christian attitude toward Gentiles (non-Jews). Look at 2 Cor. 5:16, Gal 3:28, and Eph 2:11-22.

<sup>9</sup> Barclay, William The Acts of the Apostles, The Daily Study Bible Study. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Penn, p.130.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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