

ACTS

A CHURCH THAT
CHANGED THE WORLD



CROSSROADS
BIBLE STUDY

LOCKEROOM

Podcast

By Crossroads Bible
Church



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listen to the sermon
breakdown each week.*

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WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to *Acts: A Church That Changed the World*.

I once heard the book of Acts summarized in three simple moves:

Acts 1 – Jesus goes up.

Acts 2 – The Spirit comes down.

Acts 3–28 – The people go out.

Simple, but spot on.

Acts tells the story of a people, commissioned by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit who took the gospel to the ends of the earth. What began with twelve disciples turned into a global movement that transformed the world.

This is a book of bold proclamation, fierce persecution, divine power, and gritty community. But more than

anything, Acts is the story of the Bride of Christ, on mission and Spirit-empowered, bringing hope to a broken world. It is marked by wholehearted worship of God, intentional community with one another, and a sacrificial, missional pursuit of the world.

Let's step into the story and become the Church the world desperately needs.



Basilica of St. John, near ancient Ephesus

The Curriculum Team

ACTS

LOGISTICS PROCESS



Use this 'Logistics Process' as a guide to structure your week during your Bible Study. Adjust it to fit your schedule, making it your own. This approach allows you to engage with the passage in a variety of ways, helping you fully absorb and act on God's Word.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This study is designed for one interaction with the text each day over five days.

We strongly encourage you to establish a daily rhythm. It's tempting to cram everything in at the end of the week just to meet a deadline, but that approach shortchanges what God might want to do in your life. Engaging daily with His Word creates space to truly absorb and respond to what He's revealing.

The goal of this study is for you to enter a deeper and more transformative relationship with Jesus and that cannot be rushed.

SCRIPTURE:

Reading is provided in Day 2 homework. All passages throughout the study are in NIV unless otherwise noted.

STUDY PROMPT, WORD FOCUS, AND DEEPER DIVE:

Throughout the study, you'll find extra information and resources in the margins:

- *Study Prompt*: passages to engage for extended study.
- *Word Focus*: helpful word translations and definitions.
- *Deeper Dive*: context or more robust explanations related to the study.

SACRED PAUSE:

At the end of each week, this is a moment to reflect and identify your "one thing" to carry forward.

NOTES:

At the end of each study week, you'll find space for sermon notes, plus an extra page for notes from other teachings or the sermon review podcast.

COMMUNAL QUESTIONS:

Throughout the study, questions marked with asterisks (**) are great prompts for discussion in community.



*Basilica of St. John, near ancient Ephesus.
The tomb of John, the beloved disciple.*

ACTS 1

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Welcome to the book of Acts. As we engage with Chapter 1, we enter a powerful and pivotal moment in God's grand story of redemption. This chapter marks a defining transition in the unfolding of the Kingdom of Heaven—a bridge between the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and the birth of His bride, the Church.

One of the beautiful things about the book of Acts is that it unfolds as a narrative—it reads like a story. Today, let it simply be that. Don't rush to analyze every detail or search for hidden meanings. Instead, immerse yourself in the moment. Walk alongside the disciples as they wait, wonder, and prepare for what's next. Let God re-introduce you to this new chapter of His unfolding plan.

As we open His book, we enter His presence. It is sacred space. It is a Holy of Holies. So let's approach His word with reverence and awe. As He welcomes you into His presence, give yourself some time to sit quietly before Him. **Pause** to let your heart settle. As things come to mind that distract you from Him, quietly but firmly give them over to Him. As your heart begins to focus, ask the Holy Spirit to cause His words to take deep root in your heart, shaping you into the image of Christ. Ask Him to open your eyes to see God for all that He is, and to help you see yourself and the world that He loves through His eyes. Pray for a heart of humble curiosity, ready to receive His Word as He weaves it into your life and transforms you from the inside out.

Read Acts 1—then read it again. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

God wrote a book filled with His very words to us. He intentionally and carefully wrote everything in it that He wanted us to know for life and life to the fullest. It tells us who He is, what He is like and what is important to Him. We hold this powerful, living and active gift from God in our hands. Take a moment to let that sink in. God, the Lord of heaven and Earth, wrote a book, and right now, *you are holding it in your hands*. As we begin to actively engage with this chapter, let's remember that the author is God Himself.

On Day 1, we engaged in a passive reading of Acts 1, simply taking in the words. Today, we step into active reading. There is no right or wrong way to do this next step, so approach it with confidence! As God's children, we come before Him with both humility and boldness, knowing that He invites us to engage with Him through His Word.

1. Go through Acts 1 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends. Remember to feel ownership! There is no right or wrong here!
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 1

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach **2** until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. **3** After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. **4** On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. **5** For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

SECTION TITLES

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. **11** “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city.

13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. **14** They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) **16** and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. **17** He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

18 (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. **19** Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“‘May his place be deserted;
let there be no one to dwell in it,’
and,
“‘May another take his place of leadership.’

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, **22** beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

SECTION TITLES

23 So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. **24** Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen **25** to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." **26** Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

ACTS 1 SUMMARY

DAY 3: THE CALL - COME!

The story of Acts begins with an account of Jesus' interactions with a group of people—the apostles. However, before they were called apostles, they were known as disciples. For many of us, the term "disciple" feels very familiar. Lately, I have been struck by the saying "familiarity breeds unfamiliarity." What is meant by this is that when a term or concept becomes too familiar, we stop asking questions. *Familiarity can cause us to stop seeking understanding and make assumptions instead of exploring.* So let's set aside familiarity and spend some time today taking a fresh and honest look at the basics.

We will start by asking one of the most foundational, important and poignant questions we can ask ourselves and God's Word: **"What is a disciple?"**

What is your definition of a disciple? Spend some time thinking about this. It is ok if it is not fully formed - just give it a try!

Read Matthew 4:18-19. What was Jesus' invitation to Simon and Andrew? _____

Read Matthew 9:9. What was Jesus' invitation to Matthew? _____

Read John 1:35-51. What is Jesus' invitation to Philip? _____

Jesus' call to His disciples is a simple yet powerful, two-word invitation to leave behind their former lives and follow Him. In Hebrew, the call is specifically **"lech acharai"**, walk after me. The call was personal and direct, and in every case, the disciples responded by leaving their professions, families, and comforts to follow Him. The way Jesus called each one varied, but the central invitation was the same: **"Follow Me."** He invited them to park their life behind Him, to be with Him, to drink in His words, and to watch how He lived. These two simple words began a revolution that would change the world. Jesus' invitation to us today stands unchanged: Lech acharai, walk after me!

לֵךְ אַחֲרַי (Lech Acharai) : walk after me

******Is there a time in your life when God invited you to follow Him? What did that mean to you? How did you respond? Write your story below. Think about how that moment shifted your perspective—your sense of identity, your choices, or your priorities.

******As time has passed, how has your understanding of that calling grown or deepened? Reflect and explain.

******In the next few days, take a moment to share what you've written in the two questions above with someone in your community. This could be a family member, spouse, friend or even your house church.

What does it really mean to follow Jesus? Again, this is a familiar idea—one we might easily affirm—but have we truly considered what it looks like in our lives? Being a disciple of Jesus is not just about knowing the right theology or doctrine. The word “walk” implies action—it’s not just about learning His teachings but metabolizing them, embodying them and living them. A disciple does not simply study, embrace, and affirm Jesus’ teachings; a disciple walks in His ways. *The goal of a disciple is not to know what Jesus knows but to live as Jesus lived. A disciple should **look, act, think and walk** just like Jesus.* That is the difference between simply being a student and truly being a disciple.

Take a moment for honest reflection. As you evaluate these terms and their definitions, which of the following most applies to you:

- ☐ I know a lot about Jesus and the Bible but I am not sure I have fully allowed His teachings to shape how I live.
- ☐ I affirm Jesus' teachings and try to apply them, but I sometimes separate my faith (spiritual) from my daily choices (material).
- ☐ I am actively seeking to live like Jesus, allowing His life to transform mine from the inside out.
- ☐ I tend to focus more on learning about Jesus than becoming like Him.

*Whoever claims to be in Christ must
walk as Jesus walked.*

1 John 2:6

Becoming a disciple of Jesus begins with a simple yet profound step: *saying yes to His call to follow Him*. But that is just the beginning. Since He is no longer here, how exactly do we “walk after Him?”

Read Mark 3:14. What is the first thing Jesus appointed His disciples to do?

Read Acts 4:8-13. Write out Acts 4:13. _____

Who is the “they” in **Acts 4:13**? _____

What are the two adjectives used to describe Peter and John in **Acts 4:13**?

Compare that description with the titles of the group Peter addresses in **Acts 4:8**:

What is the one noted qualification of the disciples in **vs.13**?

The path to becoming like Jesus is open to all. It’s a simple yet vital invitation: **be with Him**. Immerse yourself in His Word, seek Him through prayer, worship Him wholeheartedly, and intentionally pursue community with His people.

If Jesus calls us to follow Him and become like Him, what does that reveal about how He sees us? Implicit in His call is the powerful truth that He believes we can become just like Him! Though it may seem scandalous, *the rabbis teach that it is a sin to ask people to believe in God without first telling them how much God believes in them*.

******Do you see God as a God who is confidently cheering you on and believing in you, or as one who is distant, judgmental and critical? Why? What do you think has shaped your perception?

How does knowing that God believes you can become like Him and that He is deeply invested in that process impact you? How does His eternal posture of lovingly shaping you, encouraging you in truth, and cheering you on affect the way you view your relationship with Him?

As we close today, take a few moments to reflect and pray about your identity as a disciple of Jesus. Whether you've never fully considered this calling or you've been following Him for a while, now is an opportunity to step deeper into being with Him and discovering what it means to grow into His likeness. Begin by simply spending time with Him.

DAY 4: THE MISSION - GO!

If the first phase of Jesus' ministry is captured by the word "Come," the second phase is defined by the word "Go." As we move into the book of Acts, this shift becomes clear. The disciples that have been with Him intensely for three years are now commissioned as apostles which simply means "sent ones."

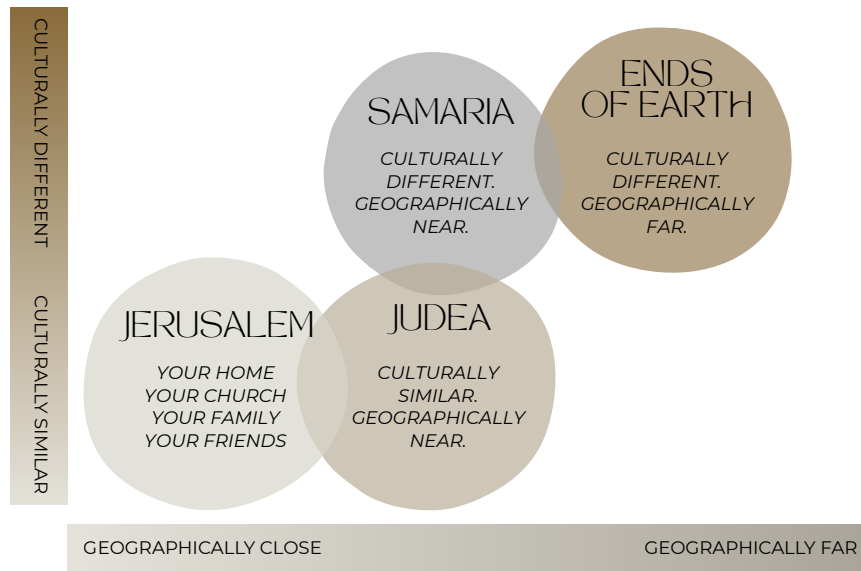
Read Acts 1:1-8.

From a human perspective, imagine the excitement and momentum the disciples must have felt. After witnessing His brutal torture and crucifixion, their hearts must have been filled with despair. But now, to their wonder and awe, He stands before them again—alive, having conquered death. For 40 days they had the joy of walking once again with Jesus. But this time He was the resurrected Christ—eating, drinking, and listening to Him speak once more about the Kingdom of God. The man they had embraced as Israel's Savior and Messiah was dead, but now He is alive.

What question do the disciples ask in **Acts 1:6**? Who do they think the Kingdom is going to be restored to?

How does Jesus respond in **Acts 1:7-8**? Where is the Kingdom going to go and who is it for?

Despite spending so much time with Jesus—both before and after His crucifixion—the disciples still had a narrow and limited understanding of the Kingdom He preached. Their ethnocentric perspective led them to anticipate redemption solely for Israel, while Jesus' vision was unlimited and epic, encompassing the redemption of the entire world. These apostles were being called into a bold, gritty and challenging movement, one that would stretch their faith and push them beyond their comfort zones—not only geographically, but also socially and culturally.



Jerusalem and Judea wouldn't have been a surprise to the disciples, but Samaria? That would have been a different story. Remember the Samaritan woman (John 4)? The Samaritans were seen by the Judeans as half-breeds—spiritually inferior people who had compromised by marrying outside of God's chosen family. And then there were the "Ends of the Earth"—regions filled with pagan temples, immoral worship practices, and unkosher sacrifices. For any devout Jewish person, stepping foot anywhere near the "Ends of the Earth" was unthinkable. It was a place far removed from the religious purity they ascribed to. This geographical and cultural progression of the mission of Jesus was not going to be comfortable for them. It was not going to come naturally, they would need a power.

******If Jesus were to speak into your life, do you have similar circles that feel like a stretch for you? Are there certain spaces, individuals or groups you struggle to believe God would use you to reach? Do hidden boundaries, prejudices, or doubts limit your view of the power of the Gospel? Be honest with yourself—true transformation begins with honesty. *God isn't afraid of your questions, doubts, or even moments of weak faith.*

What power does Jesus promise them in **Acts 1:5, 8**? _____

Instead of the hope for a regional kingdom built on Israel's human authority and political power, Jesus redirects the apostles' expectations toward a grassroots, Spirit-driven movement—organic in growth, supernatural in nature, and boundless in reach. No longer confined to Israel alone, this movement would shake the foundations of the entire world.

How does the idea of an organic, grassroots, Spirit-driven movement change the way you think about real influence, true change, and authentic authority in the world?

What is the culture of your prayer life? Are you praying bold prayers? *Are you listening for bold commands?* Is your vision vast and kingdom-minded, or is it confined to the familiar and the comfortable? Explain.

Reflecting on the idea that Jesus' movement would "shake the foundations of the entire world," what do you think this means for the impact the gospel is meant to have in our lives and communities? If this same power is available today, is there anything we are doing, big or small, that is shaking the foundations of the entire world?

STUDY PROMPT

Get a sneak peek of the promise and power of the Holy Spirit before next week's study on Acts 2 by reading these key verses:

John 14:26
John 16:13
2 Timothy 1:7
1 Corinthians 2:10-11
Romans 8:26-27
Romans 15:13

Write out John 3:16 below. Remember, familiarity breeds unfamiliarity. You may already know this verse by heart. As you write, consider each word, reflect on the message and let it penetrate your heart and mind. This is our King and this is His mission.

All that He did, leaving the Father's side, walking around Earth for three years with a ragtag group of ordinary and uneducated men, experiencing shame and disappointment, enduring agonizing torture and death, was because of His great love for the world that He spoke into being. If you are a disciple of Jesus and have accepted His mission and are striving to walk as Jesus walked, you too will need this power in order to have an urgent and fervent love for your family, your neighbor, your enemy, and the world.

Finish today by calling on the Holy Spirit to ignite God's missional heart within you. Ask Him to open doors for you to share His transformational gospel. Ask Him to fill you with bold, creative courage to engage every person He places in your path with the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

DAY 5: THE HARD WORK OF WAITING

Read Acts 1:12-26.

Someone once told me, "Never underestimate the hard work of waiting." After 40 days of walking with the risen Jesus—hearing His promises, feeling the momentum of His mission, and witnessing His supernatural ascension—the disciples are left with one clear instruction: *wait*. In these verses, the narrative slows way down and the mundane takes center stage.

What does **Acts 1:12-14** say they did? _____

What do they do in **Acts 1:26**? _____

Back in Jerusalem, they regroup—gathering, praying, and even casting lots to replace a missing member. On the surface, it might seem like just another meeting. Yet, this season of waiting is not a delay; it's exactly what Jesus intended. Often it is in seasons of mundane waiting that God is preparing us for what is to come.

Have you ever been in a season of waiting? Or maybe you are in one now. What is the hardest part of waiting? What questions occupied your heart and mind as you waited?

As you waited, how did the Holy Spirit show up? Who was Jesus to you in that space?

If you are looking back, do you think God had a purpose and plan in your waiting? What comes to mind?

Did God place other believers in your life to walk with you during that season? Is there someone you know who might be in a time of waiting right now? Take a moment to reflect—who has supported you in an in-between season? Consider reaching out to thank them. And if God has placed someone on your heart who is currently waiting, ask how you can pursue them intentionally and even sacrificially so that the Kingdom of Heaven might break through in their life.

This book is entitled “Acts.” The apostles had been promised that this was the beginning of Jesus’ *acts* through them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their journey was just beginning but by His power, they would eventually make it to the ends of the Earth.

STUDY PROMPT

If you are in a season of waiting, look to these texts for some important truths about this season:

Isaiah 40:31
Psalms 27:14
Lamentations 3:25-26
Psalms 130:5-6
Micah 7:7
Psalms 37:7



These disciples turned apostles would become witnesses just as He said. They would become just like their Rabbi, embracing His mission, taking up their crosses, leaving comfort, and giving their lives to sacrificially pursue the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rewrite a revised definition of a disciple, incorporating any new insights or changes you have gained since you first attempted a definition on Day 1:

The call to follow Jesus—to live as His disciples with the power of the Holy Spirit—was never meant to end with the first apostles. It continues with us. Whether you're still considering His call, waiting in obedience, or running full force, take time to be with Him. Seek His presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, listen for His voice, and let Him shape you into the witness He has called and created you to be.

Close this week by writing a “stake in the ground” prayer to the Lord. Ask for big dreams and visions of the Kingdom of Heaven. Ask for more of His Spirit. Ask for open doors. Ask for a heart for the world. Ask for boldness and courage. Ask for His help.

He is still the God who sent Jesus on the mission to seek and save the lost.
Disciple, ask Him to send you.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook or ledger paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

ACTS 1

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 1

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 2:1-41

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Welcome to Acts 2, a passage placed at just the right time and in just the right place. This might be the crux of the whole Bible. We are going to get the fruition of a plan that was started when God blew His breath, His ruach, His Spirit, over the chaos and hovered over the waters of a world that was formless and void (Genesis 1:1-2). In Acts 2 we will learn about something that the world, since the fall, had once again held its breath for. I won't spoil the surprise but if you know this text, you know you are in for an exciting ride. We call ourselves the church. We call the church God's bride. If the church is the bride, then this is the wedding day, the moment when the God of the universe stooped down, lifted the veil from our eyes, and made His lasting vow with us. He promised to be our God forever, to give us all that is His, to share His very life with us. He pledged to walk with us in sickness and in health, through joy and sorrow, in darkness and in light. And with unwavering love, He vowed never to leave us.

Let's start in the way we did last week, looking at Acts as it unfolds as a narrative. Let's dive head first back into the story. Today, let it simply be that. Don't rush to analyze every detail or search for hidden meanings. Instead, immerse yourself in the moment. Think about the feeling of the bride as she walks down the aisle. The sense of anticipation right before her groom makes his promise to her. Let God re-introduce you to this new chapter of His unfolding plan.

As we open His Holy Word, spend some time in prayer thinking, for those married, about your own wedding day and the feelings you felt, or the prayers that were prayed over you. Or, if you're not married, think about a time before you let the Lord into your life. What was the state of your heart, what were you searching for? Waiting for? As Jesus is our ultimate bridegroom, think about a walk down the aisle towards Him, let the anticipation build as you read His words in Acts 2. Settle in on the quiet—the quiet before the walk, the quiet before the party, the quiet before the doors swing open and you enter His presence. **Pause** in the quiet now. Pray for a heart open to the power of His Spirit. Pray for His words to mean something new to you, for His words to stir action in your heart.

Read Acts 2:1-41—then read it again. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Remember in the word of the Lord, we hold a powerful, living and active gift from God in our hands. Take a moment to let that sink in. God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, wrote a book, and right now, you are holding it in your hands. As we begin to actively engage with this chapter, God is the author of these texts and He will meet you as you read.

On Day 1, we engaged in a passive reading of Acts 2:1-41, simply taking in the words. Today, we step into active reading. There is no right or wrong way to do this next step, so approach it with confidence! As God's children, we come before Him with both humility and boldness, knowing that He invites us to engage with Him through His Word.

1. Go through Acts 2 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends. Remember to feel ownership! There is no right or wrong here!
2. This week, **highlight repeated words or themes** that you see and write them down. For example: underline with a squiggly line anytime you see the word 'fire' and underline with a solid line every time you see the word 'wind'. Or, you can highlight in blue anytime you see a familial word or word that denotes a group or togetherness. Use your own creativity and have fun!
3. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
4. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 2:1-41

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews

SECTION TITLES

from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! **16** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

22 "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves

SECTION TITLES

know. **23** This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. **25** David said about him:

"I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,

27 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the
dead, you will not let your holy one see decay.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

29 "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. **30** But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. **31** Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. **32** God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. **33** Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. **34** For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

35 until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet."

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom

the Lord our God will call.”

SECTION TITLES

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” **41** Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

ACTS 2:1-41 SUMMARY

DAY 3: THE PROMISE

Last week we talked about what it means to be a disciple. We talked about the time the disciples spent with Jesus, learning and preparing for what was to come. In Acts 2, we get to see the disciples’ minds blown. Everything Jesus said about the kingdom of heaven was about to be on full display and make so much more sense to them. What happens in this next chapter is something that will change them forever. *They will go from disciples to apostles.* They will go from engaged to married. They will go from eager hearts of learning to hearts transformed and burning with the fire to *act*.

Let’s look at how the God of the universe kept His promise to His people. We start Acts 2 in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Weeks (or Shavuot), one of the three pilgrim feasts that would bring thousands of devout Jews from all over the world into the Holy City. This would have been 10 days after the disciples saw Jesus ascend into heaven. They had waited and they were watching. They were ready for the Lord to show up, but they didn’t know when or how this would happen.

As a review, what did Jesus promise them? **Read Acts 1:3-5.**

How long did they have to wait? _____

Think about how they must have felt anticipating something but having no idea what it was or when it would come. What comes after the waiting? Last week we talked about the importance of the time the disciples waited and what happened as they did. The wait is an essential step, we can't skip this. *Before we can be filled, we have to know how empty we are.* We must sit in the loss of what was, to embrace the beauty of what's to come. We must pray. We must realize there is nothing we can do on our own to bring about the promise.

They were all together waiting for this promise, sharing the same love for God, the same trust in what He promised, at the same time and in the same city. The circumstances were ripe for a harvest.

Underline in the following verses the words Spirit or breath.

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Ezekiel 37:9-10 Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says; Come breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet- a vast army.

Every time you underlined *Spirit* or *breath*, it is the same Hebrew word: **Ruach (רוח)**.

Now read Acts 2:2.

What similarities do you see here to the Old Testament passages from above?

The Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem would have known their text. They would have known that this mighty wind was God's Spirit because He had shown up in similar ways before in Scripture!

Read Exodus 3:2-6 and Exodus 24:17.

Why did Moses have to remove his shoes in this passage?

What does the fire represent in these passages? Best guess?

Read Exodus 13:21.

What was the purpose of the cloud and the fire in this passage?

Read Malachi 3:2-3.

What is the purpose of the fire in this passage? _____

The fire represents God's glory. It's literally heaven meeting earth! It's His presence with His people! Fire also represents purification, refining, cleansing—that's why it's present at the temple. We see this fire again in **Acts 2:3-4**. Read this passage again and see what the Holy Spirit does!

Recap it here:

Throughout the Bible the Hebrew word for fire **עֵשׂ (Esh)** is used both literally and metaphorically, representing God's presence, judgment, purification, and the Holy Spirit. God uses fire to destroy *and* to refine. Fire represents God's holiness *and* power.

Let's go back to another story where wind, fire and clouds were present. This is a story that the Jews who were gathered during Pentecost would have been all too familiar with. Actually, the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) is a celebration of this specific story—when the fire came on the mountain.

Read Exodus 19:16-20:22.

What do you think the Israelites were feeling? _____

How do you think you would have felt?

Was God's fire bringing His presence? Judgement? Purification?

The WIND and FIRE of God are NO JOKE. Scary and powerful and beautiful and wonderful and holy, and above all else a *PROMISE*. A promise to never leave us. To guide us by day and night. To be a *POWER* in our lives (more on this later!) To restore everything that was lost. To bring us from the wilderness to the promised land.

Read Acts 2:3. What action does the fire take here?

In the Old Covenant, God's presence rested on the nation of Israel as a whole, but in the New Covenant, God rests His Spirit on those at Pentecost individually (the tongues of fire sat on each of them). Heaven meeting earth in the old covenant looked like God's presence in the temple at the center of the nation...heaven meeting earth in the new covenant looks like God's presence written on our hearts. He makes our hearts His temple. The body of believers is now the temple of God.

*"There had been no provision for, and no promise of, an abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of any Old Testament saint. This changes under the New Covenant."
Philip E. Hughes*

As we wrap up today, take a moment to reflect and thank God for fulfilling His promises to Israel and to us. Consider what this means in light of last week's discussion on being a disciple. Revisit the definition you wrote on page 17. How does it speak to you now? Based on what you wrote, what step comes next for you?

****If you consider yourself a disciple, the promise of the Holy Spirit is also for you. This means He will go before you and never leave you. If you actually believe this, how should this change your daily life?**

As we talked about in Day 1, just as a marriage covenant is permanent, as He's lifting the veil from your eyes, He wants you to know that His presence is permanent, His Holy Spirit is ever with you. He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Thank Him for lifting the veil and entering into a covenant with you.

There are so many of God's promises throughout scriptures. Spend time writing some promises of God from scripture. Revel in a God that loved you so much to vow these things to you.

DAY 4: THE PLAN

Now that we are clear on the promise, what's the plan? We talked last week about **lech achari- walk after me**. For the Israelites, when His cloud moved, they moved (see Numbers 9:17-23). For the disciples, when the Spirit moved, they moved. What does this mean for us? How does the refining work of the Spirit motivate us to move?

I've been walking 10,000 steps every single day for over a year –just a mission I made for myself to move. Sometimes the walks are fruitful and I hear God speak to me, I feel Him near. Sometimes I see a beautiful sunrise. Sometimes I walk with people, other times I walk alone. Some days are cold and icy and I'm slipping. But, I still walk. I keep walking. For my goal, for my mission, I walk. That's *why* I walk, but on hard days it's like I don't even know how to walk or don't want to, but it's a habit so my brain just does it. It puts one foot in front of the other and I don't even know it is happening. Let's look at this in the context of being a disciple. Jesus' disciples had been with Him and knew the 'why'. They walked every day behind Him, it was a habit. But once He left them, the 'how' became a little less obvious.

Read Acts 2:37.

"When they heard this they were *pierced (cut)* to the heart". The word here is used only ONE time in the whole bible. The definition is "to prick, pain the mind sharply, agitate it vehemently (especially of the emotion of sorrow) so the same people that were gathered just 50 days ago for the Feast of the Passover, probably shouting "KILL HIM", were the same people present and hearing Peter's words now. They were *cut* to the heart!

This “piercing” or “cutting” by the Holy Spirit refers to conviction. They understood, just as we do, that they were responsible for the death of Jesus. The very same Jesus whose Spirit was about to fill them. What was their response in the second part of **verse 37**?

Read Acts 2:38. What does Peter suggest? _____

Read Matthew 3:2 and 4:17.

What is the first word John and Jesus use? _____

Read Acts 2:38 one more time, what is Peter’s first word here? _____

It has been said that **“Repent”** is the first word of the gospel. The Hebrew word for repent is Teshuvah.

תְּשׁוּבָה (Teshuvah) : Repent or return.

Refers to the process of turning back to a path of righteousness after straying. It involves acknowledging one's sins, feeling regret, and making a commitment not to repeat those actions in the future.

They (the Jews at Pentecost) had their minds expanded as they realized the man they killed was the man that would save them. They had to turn from one way of understanding to another. *They wanted Him dead, now He was the only way they could live.* Imagine the despair. The sorrow.

Have you ever found yourself in a moment where you realized, too late, that you’d done something hurtful, harmful, or destructive, and felt that deep piercing in your heart? Write about it.

Now **read verse 38 again** and fill in the blanks below.

Peter replied, “_____ and be _____, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will _____ the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

If you find yourself asking “What should we do” like the Jewish people in verse 37, take Peter’s response and let it wash over you. *Repentance*. What a gift. If you need to repeat these words until they sink deep into your heart, go ahead and do that.

Repent. Believe. Receive. Repent. Believe. Receive.

We hear. We repent, cut to the heart. We believe. We receive. And even here, in our overtly human brokenness, even though we have “killed the author of life” (Acts 3:15),

God, as the good and loving Father He is, is still not wanting anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). His grace is extended “all the more”. (Romans 5:20-21)

STUDY PROMPT

If you have some extra time, look up these verses on what God thinks about sin.

Psalm 5:5
Isaiah 59:2
Romans 6:23

Read Mark 16:7.

Who is mentioned specifically by name in this passage?

The one who had denied the Lord 3 times is now called by name. After Jesus died, Peter was probably in the lowest place realizing he had betrayed his beloved. The difference between Judas’ betrayal (Matthew 27:3-10/Acts 1:18-19) and Peter’s is that Peter was cut to the heart!

Read John 21:15-17.

What does Jesus *say* to Peter and how many times? _____

Jesus is matching each of Peter’s denials with an invitation to re-engage with His mission. He’s graciously and mercifully inviting Peter into repentance. Telling Peter to turn from his old ways and step into a new way, into his mission. He’s saying, “It is not too late, I still believe you can be like Me.”

My all time favorite worship song is “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”. The line in the song, “*It was my sin that held Him there*” hits me every time. Listen to it.

Are you convicted to repent when you realize it was your sin that held Him on that cross?

HOW DEEP
THE FATHERS
LOVE FOR US
with lyrics

By JJ Heller



Scan the QR code to listen.

They were asking “What do we do now? What’s the plan?” When you have been changed, you can’t help but be moved to action, when you think about your sin putting Him there...what is your reaction? To stay in a Bible study for years and never tell anyone what you learn? To never ask a neighbor what they believe? To never tell others your story and what He did in your life?

Write out a prayer of repentance. Include what you want to turn from and what you want to turn towards. Remind yourself that you can’t turn to God without turning from the things He despises. Ask Jesus how you can walk after Him and “be *like* Him”.

DAY 5: THE POWER

The disciples had their marching orders. Jesus told them the kingdom was near, He died on the cross, He was resurrected and revealed to them. They had parked their life behind Jesus, the disciples knew what it meant to walk with Him. They were still fumbling a little when it came time to figure out how to walk *like* Him, without His physical presence.

Read John 16:7.

What did Jesus tell them? _____

The disciples had their ‘what’ and they had their ‘why’, but they were waiting for their ‘how’. *The Spirit was their ‘how’*. Something greater was on the way.

Do you think the disciples thought it was a good thing that He was leaving? How would you have felt?

I think I would have said, 'Can you just not leave though?' I imagine the fear they must've felt. I think the comfort of His presence was a scary thing to lose. But we are about to see exactly what they would do when He left.

Throughout Acts, we will see a lot of people with heart transformation, stories of how the Holy Spirit activates them and spurs them on. Their hearts were revived, their spirits within them were stirred. A spark in them was about to set the people ablaze. More people than they could imagine.

For now, let's focus on the first person to be moved by the Holy Spirit into a calling, into an action, into a revival—a revival of everything he had hoped for, now coming to pass. Let's watch as he steps up to the plate. Batter up! Peter bats first. Peter who denied Jesus, and was also cut to the heart and repented, will now do something remarkable.

Read Acts 2:14.

Peter steps forward, takes the mic, and delivers a sermon that is so Spirit-tailored to his audience—full of history, prophecy, testimony, and a call to repentance—that three thousand of them threw in their lot with God!

Who *is* this guy?! Not the one we've known!

Look up Luke 22:31-32. What was a serious warning Peter got from Jesus?

Peter's denial was that sifting. He'd spent 3 years with Jesus. He saw the miracles. He heard the truth. He witnessed the changed lives. His *own* life had changed. That denial must have torn apart his soul. According to Jesus, Satan aided and abetted that tearing.

But the Spirit would now be yelling like a herald in front of thousands *through* Peter.

The Holy Spirit calls us to respond like Peter. When I face trials, when I'm worn down by my own tempting choices and by Satan's efforts to shake me, I want to come through that darkness and, when I turn back to God, be able to strengthen, help and encourage others.

****Write about a time when you acted like Peter—when, after facing your own struggles or challenges, you were able to encourage or strengthen someone else. What happened? How did your experience help the other person?**

I want to be like Peter. I want to follow after Peter, as he followed after Christ.

Let's look at Peter's path. What did he do that we can follow, right into our own transformation?

1. Peter spent time with Jesus. He also spent time with like-minded believers.
2. Peter repented and obeyed Jesus. Jesus told him to go and wait. He did so, praying. Lots.
3. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Looking at Peter's path, what is the Holy Spirit inviting you to do?

In verse 2, Paul asks, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"
Answer: "No. We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit may be the most neglected part of the Trinity. Yet Jesus said in Luke 11:13b, "...how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Write out John 14:26.

This verse explains exactly what happens to Peter in Acts 2:1-4!

The Holy Spirit is our Helper, our Power, our Comfort. If you are not sure that the Holy Spirit is vibrant within you, simply ask the Father.

Peter repented, he waited, he prayed, he prepared, he messed up, he failed, he stepped out on the water, but at this very moment in time he did something that moved 3,000 to believe. He spoke. Sometimes we need words.

Read Jeremiah 20:9.

Jeremiah speaks of God's word being like a fire shut up in his bones, something he couldn't keep in even if he tried. Have you ever experienced that kind of spiritual urgency, a holy fire within that compels you to speak or act? If so, how did you respond? If not, do you long for that kind of encounter with God? What might God accomplish through you if He ignited that fire in your soul?

Do you think you could've done what Peter did? Speak to thousands about Jesus? I feel like my answer would be no... But Peter didn't prepare his words. They seemingly came out of nowhere, but we know from following Peter's journey that he was being prepared all along. He was becoming like his Rabbi. He had walked behind Jesus and he knew His Kingdom was near. If we walk closely behind our Rabbi, we are prepared too. And we know we have everything we need with the help of the Spirit.

Has there ever been a time in your life where you knew you should speak and exactly what you should say but you didn't? Explain.

Or adversely has there ever been a time in your life where you did speak out loud something you felt like the Lord was prompting you to speak? What happened as a result?

At times we can let fear/comparison/judgment stop us from speaking. We can feel like maybe we won't say the right thing. In those moments of fear or trepidation, have you ever asked God to fill you with His Spirit? Did you know you can? The Spirit will help you!

As Christians, we talk a lot about our "before and after Christ" salvation testimony. But aren't all of us always and forever being transformed more deeply into the image of Christ? Do you believe Christ can still transform you? Have you had a moment in your life where you just got it—where it went straight from your head to your heart in an inexplicable way? Have you seen this happen in someone else's life? When knowledge shifted to action, when information morphed to transformation? When did the Lord lift the veil from your eyes? Spend some time writing an answer to all or any of these questions.

Write out 2 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Prayer:

Thank You Lord for lifting the veil. For letting me see You so that ultimately my heart could not help but be drawn to You and transform for You. Thank You that You did exceedingly, abundantly above all Peter could have asked or thought! Teach us to follow Peter's path to Your comforting, helping power. Help us to ask if we do not have. Help us to wait in order to receive. Help us, as Peter tells us in his letter, to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to Him, both now and forever!"

ACTS 2:1-41

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 2:1-41

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 3

WEEK 3

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

This week we get to look at a miracle and a message in Acts 3—it's the Holy Spirit doing His job through ordinary people like you and me.

Life falls into a kingdom walk for the apostles and other believers, the rhythm of which shall attend them for the rest of their lives: there will be miracles, there will be messages, and there will be persecution (that's a spoiler alert for Acts 4). For our own lives, just like our brothers and sisters two thousand years ago, there will be people we know and people we don't know whom God will reach through our own kingdom walk.

Today, just read the text—and pray before you do. Ask the Spirit of God to show you the big picture. Ask Him to show you the little pictures. Ask for understanding, ask for refreshment in your heart, *ask that you will close the Bible today a little more equipped than when you opened it.*

Read Acts 3—then read it again. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Ah, anticipation!

The day before Thanksgiving, it's prep day. I'm in the kitchen preparing things like Pumpernickel Stuffing—made with a killer recipe from my neighbor's dad. Sweet potato casserole with crushed pineapple and vanilla—forget mini marshmallows; it's a pecan streusel topping all day for me. Three different kinds of pies—apple, pumpkin, and cherry are the usual suspects at our table.

Day one was our prep day. Today, let's feast.

The Word of God is like that, isn't it? We anticipate what is in front of us. We pull up our chairs, take glad note of those gathered with us, look over the wonderful things set before us. We take a moment to give thanks, and we dig in.

Today before you dig into the third chapter of Acts, take a moment to pray. Give thanks for those gathered around the Word with you in this season. Give thanks for the sustaining, health-giving Word of God set before you. We don't live by Pumpernickel Stuffing alone, but by every sustaining, health-giving word that comes from the mouth of God! Give thanks for this third chapter of Acts—*for what you already know about it, for what you want to know better, and for the unexpected insights that will come.*

Napkins at the ready. Let's feast!

As you interact with the text, take note of things that get your attention. You know what to do. You're old hat at this by now.

1. Go through Acts 3 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. It may be a shift in scene or a shift in conversation. Put a / where a section begins and ends. You may have only a few slash marks, or several.
2. **Underline or highlight verses** that get your attention as you go. (This is important as you will refer to this on Day 5 of this week's homework.)
3. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** with a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you made.
4. Finally, **write a summary** using your section titles to boil down what God has shown you this chapter is all about at the end of the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 3 (NASB)

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. **2** And a man who had been unable to walk from birth was being carried, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order for him to beg for charitable gifts from those entering the temple grounds. **3** When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple grounds, he began asking to receive a charitable gift. **4** But Peter, along with John, looked at him intently and said, "Look at us!" **5** And he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, "I do not have silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!" **7** And grasping him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. **8** And leaping up, he stood and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God; **10** and they recognized him as being the very one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg for charitable gifts, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

11 While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the portico named Solomon's, completely astonished. **12** But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why are you staring at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him walk? **13** The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, the one whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. **14** But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **15** but put to death the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. **16** And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers also did. **18** But the things which God previously announced by the mouths of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has fulfilled in this way. **19** Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; **20** and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, **21** whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets from ancient times. **22** Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your countrymen; to Him you shall listen regarding everything He says to you. **23** And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' **24** And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and his successors onward, have also announced these days. **25** It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God ordained with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' **26** God raised up His Servant for you first, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

ACTS 3 SUMMARY

DAY 3: A CASHLESS TRANSACTION

Last week we looked at Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost. The disciples and all the believers were together when the Spirit came upon them. At this time, thousands of Jews had traveled to Jerusalem for Shavuot. Many saw the results of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

שבועות (Shavuot)

A major Jewish festival held fifty days after the second day of Passover. It was originally a harvest festival, but now also commemorates the giving of the Law, the Torah.

Many were confused at all the languages being spoken because of the Holy Spirit. Can you imagine? Who wouldn't be?! Peter addressed the crowd and encouraged them with prophecies from their ancestors (Joel and David). About 3,000 chose to believe that day.

Acts chapter 3 is a continuation of what started in Acts 2. The disciples were given the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 3 shows them taking that power and putting it into action, in both deed and in word. First, we see a deed. Later we see how Peter stepped into the role to which Jesus ultimately called him: that of a preacher, teacher, and evangelist.

Read Acts 3:1-12.

First, let's look at the significance of verse 1. The ninth hour (3:00 PM) was the time of the evening **sacrifice** and **prayer** in the Jewish temple. This was a daily ritual where devout Jews gathered to offer sacrifices and to seek God.

Where else do we see **sacrifice** at the ninth hour in the Bible?

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Where else do we see **sacrifice** at the ninth hour in the Bible?

Read Exodus 29:38-39 and Numbers 28:3-4 and write what you find.

Read Matthew 27:45-46 and write what you find.

In the story of Elijah, 1 Kings 18:36 states that Elijah called on God at the time of the evening sacrifice (the ninth hour). At that moment, God sent fire from heaven to consume Elijah's offering, proving He is the true God and turning the hearts of the Israelites back to Him. This too connects symbolically to Jesus' sacrifice, where the true power of God was revealed *at the ninth hour*.

Where else do we see **prayer** at the ninth hour in the Bible? _____

Read Ezra 9:1-5. When did Ezra pray?

Ezra's prayer of repentance for Israel's sins happened around the ninth hour, as Ezra was begging for **atonement** and **forgiveness** for the people of God.

Read Daniel 9:20-26. Daniel had been praying for Israel's restoration, and God responded with a vision about the coming of the Messiah, who would bring ultimate atonement. This is another strong link to Jesus' death *at the ninth hour*, which fulfilled Daniel's prophecy of atonement and points to Jesus, God's ultimate and final instrument of atonement.

Now here's the New Testament, New Covenant difference regarding this *ninth hour* of sacrifice and prayer:

"Apparently Peter and John saw no problem in continuing their Jewish custom of prayer at certain hours of the day.... Peter and John were not going to the temple at the hour of sacrifice, but at the hour of prayer that followed the afternoon sacrifice. They realized that the sacrificial system was fulfilled in the perfect sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross."

Dave Guzik

Do you realize that once and for all Jesus paid the sacrifice atoning for your sin, and now we can boldly approach God in prayer at any time, in any place?

WORD FOCUS

'Atonement'

1. Amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong; expiation.
2. An individual's reconciliation with God by means of repentance and confession of one's transgressions.
3. The reconciliation of God and humans brought about by the redemptive life and death of Jesus.

How does knowing Jesus has already made that sacrifice change how you pray?

Read Acts 3:2-5.

As Peter and John approach the temple, they meet a lame man who had been crippled from birth. He was a familiar figure, a regular at the gate, likely ignored by most. I am struck by the communal effort that this lame man was brought there. Reminds me of the friends who lowered the paralytic through the roof (Mark 2:1-12). The Jewish people are so good at community. Why aren't we? *Lord, may we learn from the Jewish people!*

Peter looks down. The lame man looks up.

In our need, and in our sin, where are we looking?

Read Psalm 121. Write some verses that stood out to you.

Did this afflicted son of Abraham know these words? When he lifted up his eyes to Peter and John, did he have a clue that it was in fact to the Maker of heaven and earth? *Did he know that his "going out and coming in" was about to take on spectacular significance?*

Verse 6: "I do not possess silver or gold but
what I do have I give to you..."

This man's help was about to come from the Lord, and not the silver and gold kind. Besides the help of family or friends to get him where he needed to go, silver and gold may have been the only kind of help this man knew. Until today.

Where would you place your recent prayers on this scale—from practical "silver & gold" requests to bold, Kingdom-sized ones? Use the slider below to mark where your heart tends to land.



Recall a time when you asked God for what you thought you needed and realized later that your request was too small. Write about it.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.
Ephesians 3:20-21

Underline the superlatives, or words to the max, in the verse above.

Read Acts 3:8.

Walking and Jumping- This action symbolizes freedom and joy, often representing new life in scripture. The man's response, leaping and praising God, reflects a celebration of being healed:

Isaiah 35:6- *"The lame shall leap like a deer," a prophecy of the Messiah's healing power.*

Luke 15:22-24- *Just like the prodigal son, restoration is met with celebration—running, jumping*

This man was *lame from birth*. He'd never stood on his own strength. And now the power of God was such that not only was his body healed, but the power taught dead limbs how to walk and leap. After his initial, spontaneous celebration he likely clung to Peter and John (vs. 11) out of incredulity! Am I really doing this?! I'm walking? Leaping? I think I'll try dancing!

Read Acts 3:12-16.

What about Peter? Who did he give credit to?

A good friend once commented regarding this text:

An assumption I've carried around with me most of my life is that God has given me what I need to take care of things myself. I can get the job done and He's expecting me to. He made me good at planning and time management. So I took that as a way of saying, 'Thanks! I got this. I'll let you know if I run into a hiccup.' (Fat chance—I was still gonna try and figure it out myself.) But reading about Peter's life and the incredible impact Jesus had on him challenges this self-sufficiency. Peter walked with Jesus for years, was trained by Him, lived as He lived, so if anybody can say "I can take it from here", it's got to be him, right? But he doesn't do that! He remains completely "in the vine". (John 15:4.) He didn't learn to be self-sufficient, he learned about his need for the opposite—utter reliance on God.

In what circumstances are you tempted to take credit?

Peter gave all credit to God for the man's restoration. It was simple logic. Had Peter taken credit for this miracle, the lie would have destroyed him.

I once read this, and it stayed with me: *"It is the light in the lantern which shows you the path, not the lantern."*

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7.

******We all have opportunities to be used by God for the restoration of others. How can this truth from 2 Corinthians 4:7 encourage you when you feel weak or unqualified?

For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
Philippians 2:13 (NASB)

DAY 4: PETER'S SECOND SERMON

Take a moment and begin this study time with prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to speak to your mind and heart through His word.

Read Acts 3:9-10.

Imagine this scene: *See that guy?! I know him! That's Tom, I've passed him a million times! You know Tom—the guy in the wheelchair at the corner of Scribner and Leonard! I've seen his friends help him set up there. I sometimes gave him something. He's walking! And look at his face, such joy! What in the world happened to him?? Come on, let's go see!*

That day in **Solomon's Colonnade**, people came on the run to see what had happened to their particular 'Tom'.



Left Photo: The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, first century. The Temple is in the center. Solomon's Colonnade was the covered walkway that ran the perimeter of the outer courtyard, specifically along the eastern wall.

*Bottom Photo: Jesus heals a lame man in Solomon's Colonnade. (Matthew 21:14-16)
Artist: James Jacques Joseph Tissot.*

Solomon's Colonnade, in the first century, was a prominent feature of the Temple, mentioned in the New Testament as a place where Jesus taught, healed, and was questioned by the religious leaders.

Acts tells us that this is where the early church gathered (Acts 3:11, Acts 5:12).



Acts 3:12—"But when Peter saw this..."

Peter instantly saw that an opportunity had come. And at this point, it would have been quite easy to hand the mic to the formerly lame man for 'Testimony Time'. But Peter read the room. This wasn't that time. The people needed far more than the entertainment of a miracle. Yes, absolutely, the miracle did its work: a man was healed and restored, a man they knew. Who wouldn't want to hear that story? But God is in the multi-tasking business, and 'Testimony Time' was for another day. Today the miracle would not bring focus upon this man, but upon the hearts of everyone there.

Read Acts 3:11-26.

Moses and the Covenant: As the Jewish people knew their text, it was of high importance for Peter to use familiar stories and the character of God to persuade them regarding Jesus the Messiah. So crafty of Him! It makes me want to know my audience, to use language they are familiar with so I can effectively speak to them right where they are.

Match each verse (1–3) on the left with the correct description (A–C) on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. Acts 3:22–23 | A. Peter reminds them that God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in Jesus, referencing Abraham's covenant. |
| 2. Acts 3:25 | B. By tying Jesus' mission to God's covenant with Israel, Peter makes it harder for his Jewish audience to reject Him. |
| 3. Overall connection | C. Peter shows that Jesus is the promised prophet like Moses, quoting Deuteronomy 18:15. |

Even the location of Peter's sermon fit into this message. Solomon's Colonnade was well known as a place for rabbinic teaching and discussion. Jesus spoke there Himself.

Read John 10:22-23.

Maneuvering in their context, God through Peter did these four things:

1. He used the Temple as a familiar and authoritative location.
2. He appealed to Jewish scriptures (Moses and Abraham).
3. He addressed their Messianic expectations.
4. He offered hope and restoration instead of just condemnation.

Don't you marvel at how well He does things?

Peter's Sermon: You want the Good News or the Bad News first?

I'll never understand those who want the good news first. I *always* take the bad news first. I want things to end with hope!

This is what happens with Peter's sermon. He delivers the bad news first: **Go back to the text from Day 2** and **underline** every time you see the word "you," in **Acts 3:11-15**.

Vs. 13 "**YOU** handed Him over to be killed."

Vs. 13 "**YOU** disowned Him before Pilate."

Vs. 14 "**YOU** disowned Him and released a murderer."

Vs. 15 "**YOU** killed the author of life."

YOU did this. **I** did this. **Our sin** did this.

Fill in the blanks from **Ephesians 2:1-3, NASB**.

And you were _____, in which you previously walked
_____, according to the prince of the power
of the air, of the spirit that is now working in _____.
Among them _____ in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the
desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were _____ children of
wrath, just as the rest.

And then...things take a hopeful turn with the best pairing of words in the history of paired words: **BUT GOD**.

Now read the verse below.

***But God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

Ephesians 2:4-5

Dead in our wrongdoings vs. alive in Christ; quite the contrast, what does this evoke in your heart?

Now read Acts 3:17.

Peter's allowance of ignorance to the Jewish crowd—which perhaps helped them take a breath from the steady barrage of truthful incrimination—made way for the Good News:

But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.
Acts 3:18-19

Now that is **GOOD NEWS**.

On Repentance: thank God that He is always inviting people back to Him!

Read Acts 3:19.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Write some thoughts about what repentance is, and what it *requires*.

More on repentance: It's not just about feeling sorry for wrongdoing, it's about a complete change of direction. It's about turning away from sin and toward God. It's about a heart-level renewal that only Jesus can bring.

Search me, God and know my heart; put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts and see if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.
Psalm 139:23-24

Write this verse in your own words below. While you write, think about how you can turn from sin and turn *towards* the everlasting way.

God's word is powerful, and even just reading this call of Peter in Acts 3:19, He may be speaking to you, today. Take a moment to examine your life and heart. Is there something you need to repent of right now? How can you do more than feel sorry; how can you switch direction and get back on His path?

Read Psalm 51:9-12.

David's prayer is raw and honest. He is not holding back. He longs not just for forgiveness, but for renewal, and because of the New Covenant the renewal is ours too!

Let's end this day with gratitude. Gratitude for a New Covenant based upon God's great faithfulness to the former Covenant. Gratitude for a clean slate.

Take a moment to reflect on David's prayer. Consider which part speaks most deeply to you, and bring that before God. Ask Him to renew your mind and heart. Then, **write a personal prayer**—confessing your need for His mercy and receive His forgiveness.

DAY 5: STRINGING PEARLS

Good morning! (Afternoon? Evening?)

Remember Day Two, where you underlined or highlighted a verse or two in Acts 3 that got your attention? Let's have some fun today. Select one of those verses, whichever seems to stand out. Perhaps the theme of the verse gets your attention. Perhaps the way it is worded, or how it landed on your heart.

Note your verse here: _____

Today you will take that verse and string some pearls. Stringing pearls through His word is a joy for those who study the Bible: start with one verse, and let it lead you to another...and another...and as many as you can think of to create a whole picture. You simply start with one pearl of a verse, and add more. As you string them together, what started as mere hunch or interest reveals a truth, a theme, an image, a revelation, and it is personal to you.

We'll put Day Five into two parts. For the first part, we'll see an example of **stringing pearls**.

חֲרִיזַת מַרְגְּלִיּוֹת (Charizat Margaliyot) : Stringing Pearls

This ancient Hebrew practice links verses from across the Bible, threading them like pearls to reveal deeper meaning. Although each verse stands on its own, together they expose the rich depth and unity of Scripture. As one verse leads to the next, insight builds upon insight revealing consistent connections from the Old Testament to the New.

PART ONE: ON PETER, AGAIN.

Read Acts 3:14 (*first pearl*).

"You disowned the holy and righteous one..."

This verse got my attention, coming from Peter's lips. I thought, 'the pot calls the kettle black' since not long ago, Peter did some disowning, too. But as we have seen, *this* Peter is transformed. He is walking on water, and not sinking this time. His eyes are on Jesus as he steps into the role for which he was called.

That got me thinking about how much I adore Peter. I'm so grateful for his screwups, his mistakes, his awkwardness. Check out **Matthew 17:1-6** (*second pearl*). "Hey guys, it's so cool we're here. Let's build some tents. How 'bout Moses, you go there, Elijah there..." That was the worst reading of the room ever. Thing is—I could have said that!

I thought about how Peter's weaknesses were made strong. Made me think of Samson. I looked him up.

Read Judges 16:28-30 (*third pearl*).

Read Hebrews 11:32-34 (*fourth pearl*).

Samson, despite his mess-ups, went out with enough of a *bang* that he lands a mention in the Hall of Faith chapter in Hebrews (Hebrews 11). Reminds me that God is the one who equips. God is the one who qualifies us, despite our mess-ups, mistakes, and humanness.

That made me want to refresh myself about how God equips *me*. I looked up the word “equip” using **Blue Letter Bible**. Here's what I found:

Read Ephesians 4:12 (*fifth pearl*).

Read Hebrews 13:20-21 (*sixth pearl*). And look up the NLT version. I want a differently colored pearl here.)

Whoa! NASB is my go-to, but I checked out NLT.
“...may He equip you with all you need for doing His will. May He produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to Him.”
WOW, WOW. You know what? Sometimes the Word of God is too much. I have to push myself from the table, get up, walk around, eat a few Oreos—then I run back for more.

The writer of Hebrews prayed a prayer (*breathed* a prayer—ruach! The holy wind note from Week Two, Day One!) that made me think of a prayer from Paul in Ephesians.

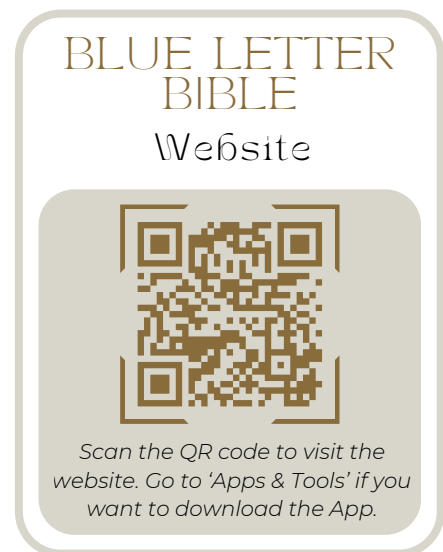
Read Ephesians 3:14-19.

“To *know* the love of Christ...” Yes, I want to *know* that love. It will change me! This potent prayer reminded me of something else Paul wanted me to know, through another prayer.

Read Ephesians 1:18-19.

This stood out: “That I may *know* the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” What will happen when I *know* it? Another verse came to mind. I consider it my “life verse”:

Read 2 Timothy 1:7.



It makes me marvel that God *has given* (that's past tense) to me the opposite of fear —*love*. And he added *power* and *a sound mind*. I possess those things! Lord, help me to believe it. Help me to own it. Help me to act like it. Oh, how gloriously equipped we are, courtesy of our heavenly Father.

What would change or be more fruitful in your life if you lived as if you possessed the gifts below:

Love: _____

Power: _____

Sound Mind: _____

What verse do you consider a “life verse”? Write it here.

This all made me think of one of my favorite quotes. This was spoken of a humble New York City Catholic priest, going about his everyday ministerial duties to his flock: *“He has faith in his skill, and faith that God will support that skill.”*

The priest had faith in the equipment God gave him. He had faith that God’s support of that equipment was enough.

Now. Wasn’t that fun?! We started with a restored Peter on mission, we ended with a verse that speaks to power, love, and a sound mind—things Peter now possessed in spades...and so do we. Cheers to bunny trails through the Word of God! What lovely pearl strings.

PART TWO: YOUR TURN

Take your imagination off the leash and let it run.

Write the verse you noted at the beginning of Day Five here:

Why did you select that verse? What got your attention about it?

Loosely using the above pattern (stringing pearls) of thought process, begin to build your own string of pearls. Use the Blue Letter Bible (Page 57). Use your Bible concordance. Ask the Lord to take you where He leads to learn more about what got your attention.

Note some scriptures here:

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

Do one of the connecting verses ring true to your heart? Refresh yourself with it by writing it out on an index card or sticky note, and put it in a place where you can meditate on it. **How blessed is the one who meditates on the word of God!** Let it rest on your heart so that, as stated in a rabbinical proverb, **when the finger of God cracks your heart, the word of God will seep in.**

*Lord, thank you for the REFRESHMENT and RESTORATION of your Word! Thank you that you met our culpability with your ability! Thank you God, for Acts 3:26—that you raised up Your Servant Jesus and **sent Him to bless us** by turning **every one of us** from our wicked ways. We bless your Name, and give you thanks, and praise.
Amen.*

ACTS 3

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 3

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 4:1-31

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Let me introduce you to a great Hebrew term: **Haverim**. A *havarim* is simply a group of friends that gather around God's word to study in community. Although we might not be physically together, we are journeying through Acts in community. And so, *havarim*, get excited about Acts 4. It is bountiful! As you allow God's story to wash over you, take time to *pause, sit...bask*. God doesn't rush, so why should we? The text is important. Allow yourself time to honor its importance. Read with the intention to *hear, listen and follow*. Read with the expectation that the Lord will meet you there.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

The Lord is calling to you...can you hear Him? He longs to be with you. He wants to meet you in His word. This first day of homework God has called us to His word, called us to approach the Bible knowing that it is a gift! He has given it to the hungry—*those desperate enough to depend on Him for sustenance*, willing to wrestle through challenges, and persevere through seasons of drought to ultimately taste its life-giving sweetness.

So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:11

Lord, we know that your word does not come back to us empty, so as we prepare to engage with your word, soften our hearts and open them to what you long to say to us.

Read Acts 4:1-31, then read it again. (Text provided in Day 2 homework.)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

*Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. **They are not just idle words for you – they are your life.** By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.*

Deuteronomy 32:46-47

“These are not just idle words for us – they are our life.”

In this study, we have tried to help you create a rhythm of engaging each passage multiple times every week. Why? Because, my dear brothers and sisters...these words on these precious pages are **our life**. They feed us, they sustain us, they break us and they bind us. We dive into the text over and over because we have been commanded to write God's word on our hearts! *Revolution cannot happen without repetition.* Repetition can cement God's word solidly into our memory so that it becomes a part of our DNA. So whatever morning, afternoon or evening habits you have cemented into rhythm over the years let us add one more, together. Take off your sandals and enter into His holy presence.

Read Acts 4:1-31 with me, one more time, engaging both your heart and your head... but first...

Examine us Lord, guard us and guide us through your word.

*What would **you** have for us in Acts 4:1-31?*

*What would **you** like to show us?*

*How would **you** like to engage our hearts and our heads so that we can go out and show you to others?*

If there is something new, reveal it.

If it is something old, bring it to light.

1. Go through Acts 4:1-31 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends. Remember to feel ownership! There is no right or wrong here!
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

ACTS 4:1-31

SECTION TITLES

1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. **2** They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. **3** They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. **4** But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. **6** Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. **7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! **9** If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, **10** then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. **11** Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.'

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. **14** But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. **15** So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. **16** "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it.

SECTION TITLES

17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! **20** As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. **22** For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. **24** When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. **25** You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“‘Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.’

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. **28** They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. **29** Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. **30** Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

ACTS 4:1-31 SUMMARY

DAY 3: THE FOUNDATION: CHRIST, SON OF GOD

Quick recap: Let's bring ourselves up to snuff with where we have been and where we are going.

Where we have been: **Write a brief summary of Acts 3.**

Where we are going: In Acts 4 we are introduced to the continuation of the opposition that began in Acts 3, reflecting the same kind of persecution Jesus faced during His lifetime. It has been transferred from Jesus and is now resting on His followers. In this chapter we see it specifically resting on Peter and John.

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.

That is why the world hates you.

John 15:18-19

Let's take a walk together and remember who Peter was. Last week we began to learn how to string pearls, isn't it exciting? Let's continue to build that muscle.

Read Luke 5:1-11 to review Jesus' call to Peter.

Read Matthew 16:13-19, write out verse 18.

Peter's leadership in the early Jerusalem church, along with the foundational role of the other disciples and those who would follow, stands as a direct fulfillment of Jesus' commission. It affirms the divine truth revealed in Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi: that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Crazy right?! No word Jesus says, no statement God has written will be left unfinished! (Matthew 5:18)

God knew that this obstinate, uneducated, impulsive, passionate fisherman was just who He wanted to use to advance His kingdom!

This is the heart of the Gospel. God using the "less than" to advance His Kingdom.

Peter, commissioned and equipped by God, is showing up in BIG ways. Now I want to introduce you to a second, amazing Hebrew term: **chutzpah**. *Chutzpah* is exemplified by boldness or gutsiness. The kind of daring confidence that speaks up or steps out, even when it's risky. Peter personifies *chutzpah*.

Read Acts 4:8-12.

Peter puts his finger directly on the issue and not in a delicate way, like we can sometimes be tempted to do. Here he is speaking directly to the Sanhedrin, the head honchos of his day and age, and he isn't messing around.

In your own words what does Peter say to the Sanhedrin, in **Acts 4:10**, about Jesus?

How about **Acts 4:11**, what does Peter say next to the Sanhedrin?

He does not tip-toe around the facts. He moves in *boldly*, exposing, once again, it was our (that is an all-inclusive "our") sin that killed "the author of life" (Acts 3:15).

To say that they didn't love these accusations would be an understatement. But they are missing the point. He did not do this to heap on condemnation, He was speaking truth to them. I would assume they, like us, don't always love being confronted with their sin.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable or even defensive when someone pointed out a flaw or sin in your life? (oh yah, me neither). What is your typical initial reaction?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Denial | <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shame | <input type="checkbox"/> Self reflective |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indifference | <input type="checkbox"/> Grateful |

Why do you think it can be so hard for us to be exposed or "seen" in our sin?

Read John 8:31-32.

How might facing the truth about yourself actually lead to freedom rather than condemnation?

Take a moment to be honest with yourself. What is one truth you've resisted that might actually be the key to your spiritual growth?

Sometimes we don't like having our sin exposed because it reveals that we are indeed...drumroll please... *sinners*.

Peter knows this! Peter was told by Jesus, directly, multiple times!

Come, string some more pearls with me.

Read Matthew 16:21-23.

What does Jesus say to Peter? _____

Woof. This happens directly *after* Jesus changes his name to Peter, the Rock His church will be built on. He went from “Rock” to “Satan” real quick. He was rebuked harshly.

Read Matthew 26:31-35.

What was Peter's response to Jesus?

Oh my dear Peter. There is an age old saying, “pride comes before the fall”, and don’t we know it?

Peter knows this because this is not the first time he has been exposed. **There is no grace without truth.** God’s grace paired with His truth, justice and righteousness is the foundation of our faith.

Read John 21:15-19.

The progression of Peter:

Peter exposed.

Peter, redeemed.

Jesus speaking truth.

Peter, forgiven.

And finally, Peter is called to *action*. He is called to *walk*.

And what does he do? Simple, **he walks!**

What about us? We are no different than Peter. We are no better; we are no worse.

If you are a blood-bought follower of Jesus Christ then you too have been **exposed, redeemed, forgiven** and you have been **called to walk!**

Recount a time you, like Peter, went through this progression in your own life.

Exposed: _____

Redeemed: _____

Forgiven: _____

Sent out: _____

Over and over in our Bibles we see stories of men and women being called by God to...*walk*. We should not be surprised that He has also called us to do the same.

Take some time to think about what it could mean to be “called to walk” in your life right now? What specifically is God calling you to step into? What is this going to require of you?

DAY 4: THE FRAMEWORK: BUILDING YOUR LIFE AROUND JESUS

There are many verses in the Bible that make my heart burst, and this is one of them!

*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been **with** Jesus.*

Acts 4:13

Paraphrase Acts 4:13 in your own words:

The Sanhedrin could visibly *SEE* the confidence of Peter and John! They could also *SEE* that they were both uneducated (remember Peter and John were fishermen). And they could *SEE* that they were untrained. I love that this completely baffled them. They assumed confidence came from education or formal training just like we often do today.

If “*being with Jesus*” is our only requirement for confidently sharing the Gospel, let’s cast out all the other hindrances or excuses we can create and boldly step out.

What do you believe you “*need*” in order to step out declaring boldly the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Scripture Memorized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Income | <input type="checkbox"/> A Mentor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influence | <input type="checkbox"/> Complete Biblical Knowledge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry Vocation | <input type="checkbox"/> More Biblical Understanding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Theology Degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Bravery |

Spend some time with the Lord and ask Him to reveal some beliefs or lies about yourself, your past, your character, or your personality, that you think make you ill-equipped to share the Gospel?

Let’s get these out in the open, expose them and call them what they are: *lies from the deceiver himself*. Let’s reclaim the truth.

Read Acts 4:13, again in order to be reminded of the only qualification necessary: **They had been *with Jesus***.

They had parked their lives directly behind Christ. They had lived, listened, followed, studied, asked good questions, asked stupid questions, and been taught by Him *for years!*

Take some time to self-evaluate by participating in the sliding scales below:

Who is in control of your life?



Do you study Jesus and His word?



Do you *sit* with Him, unrushed and undistracted?



Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.
Deuteronomy 6:4-6

******Based on your reflections above, what's one change you can make that would clearly show others you've been with Jesus? Can you commit to just one step today, something that will help you grow in your daily walk with Him? Maybe it's spending time in prayer, reading the Bible, or memorizing a verse. Write it down below.

Now put a stake in the ground. Set a reminder where you'll see it every day: on your mirror, in your journal, on your phone, on your hand! Jesus is worth the effort—and we all need the reminder.

Have you spent time with anyone who radiates Jesus? Has anyone made you long to love the Jesus they love? Was there someone you wanted to rub elbows with just to catch their heart and desire for the Lord? Write about them. What did you notice? What attributes did they have?

*"You teach what you know, but you duplicate **who** you are."*
Howard Hendricks

Peter and John had been *with* Jesus, they had been taught by Him and now, they were becoming *like* Him.

"Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else."
C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

*Lord, help us to "abide in You, as You abide in us" (John 15:5). We want our lives to reflect you, so that others will "recognize us as having been with **you**" (Acts 4:13). Only because of you and all for you. Help us to love you and seek you with all of our hearts. Amen.*

DAY 5: FUNCTION: THE PATTERN OF A KINGDOM WALK

Let's look back at the last few days.

Day 3. The two parts of the *foundation* of our faith are:

Day 4. The *framework* of our faith is:

Here, on day 5, we will reveal the *function* of our faith.

WORD FOCUS

'Function'

A function is a rule that takes an input, follows a specific pattern or process, and gives a consistent output.

Within the first few chapters of Acts, Peter and John, by the power of the Holy Spirit, had performed a miracle, which gave them an opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

Read Acts 3:1-10. Record below the miracle.

The miracle was not the “big show”, the miracle was a means to get to the “big show”...the gospel of Jesus Christ! This proclaimed gospel led to persecution and persecution led to growth. The function of faith in Acts seems to follow an emerging pattern: **Miracle. Message. Persecution. Growth.**

Is this true for us? Walk this back with me.

Miracle: Have you encountered Jesus? Have you fallen at His feet, a sinner begging at the door of mercy? Have you laid your sin at the feet of the cross releasing it to the Lord who so tenderly sacrificed everything to carry it for you? Have you accepted the amazing grace freely offered? Have you believed that He truly does love you that much...enough to carry your sin, your unending sin, over and over?

Share an *elevator version* of your testimony, your encountering of Christ, below. A helpful pattern would be “*I once was _____, but because of Jesus, now I’m _____.*”

Message: Read Acts 19:2-6. Baptized in Jesus, the Holy Spirit received. This is good news! *You are redeemed!* When God looks at you He sees His Son! Your sin has fallen away, washed by the blood of the Lamb.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 103:8-12

The miracle of your salvation should lead to sharing the message of your salvation!

You have had freedom, grace and unmerited favor poured out over you! Your sin is forgiven and forgotten. Jesus has freely given His life for you and sent His Holy Spirit. That same Jesus raising power now lives *in you*. If you belong to Him, He is *in* you. Let that settle into the depth of your soul.

Read Romans 8:9-11.

This is Good News! Have you told anyone? Have you shared? Remember the lame man, who jumped and danced for joy because of what the gospel of Jesus Christ did for him (Acts 3:8)?! That is our inheritance! We should be *THRILLED!*

Search your heart, ask the Spirit to search it: Is there anyone He is calling you to share His good news with? As you write their name below, attach a prayer asking for the Lord to give you the strength, courage and the opportunity to do so.

Read Psalm 100, now write your own Psalm of Praise, your own prayerful response to what God has done for you.

Persecution: Read Acts 4:3, 21. Peter and John were arrested, imprisoned, threatened, and endured physical bondage. Their freedom was stripped because they had healed a man in the name of Jesus and spoke boldly about that same Jesus. Peter and John knew this was coming.

Take a moment to reflect: Are you so confident in what Jesus has done for you that you'd be willing to face hardship or even persecution for His name? Does your trust in Him give you the courage to live boldly? Share your thoughts below.

Read Luke 22:31-32.

“Satan has asked to sift you like wheat.” Sifting isn’t fun. Literally, to sift wheat, means to separate the wheat kernel from the chaff (unusable pieces) by shaking it violently. Metaphorically it means to be purposefully tested or put through a difficult time where your faith and character is challenged—where the good is separated from the bad. Jesus endured, and Jesus has prepared us for what is coming. Let me string some pearls for you:

*You will be hated by everyone because of me,
but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Matthew 10:22

*But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you.
They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in
prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors,
and all on account of my name.*

Luke 21:12

*Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his
master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If
they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

John 15:20

Persecution is not “if”, it is “when”. For Peter, persecution had arrived in the form of sifting.

What is *your* definition of persecution?

Have you ever considered it could mean more than just physical danger to yourself?

Read Job 1:9-12, 20-21.

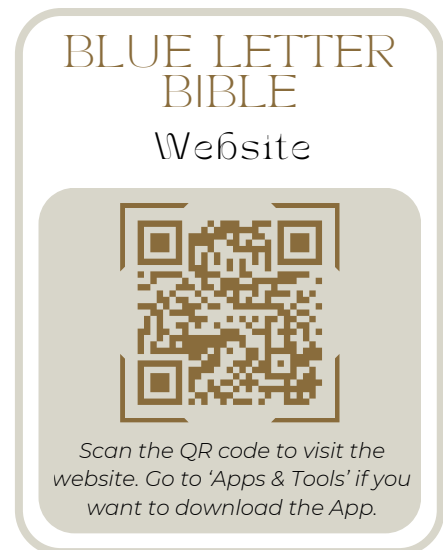
Some of us may never be physically bruised, battered or beaten for our faith, but Satan wages endless assaults against our minds. We need to be on guard. Opposition and persecution will be a hallmark of our ministries. There is no legitimate movement of the Kingdom of heaven that will not be met with opposition from the enemy.

What is your own experience with persecution?

Growth: *“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people.”* They reported everything they had gone through. This did not produce fear in the early believers, this produced growth!

Now it is your turn. String some pearls. Do any passages in the Bible come to mind regarding persecution? If not, that is ok! Plug “persecution” into the **Blue Letter Bible**. Or, here is a good start: **2 Timothy 3:12**.

Despite this persecution, the community in Acts was all in. They were going to walk and pray and pursue Jesus *as one*. They were going to celebrate the ups and help carry the downs. Through the imprisonment of Peter and John they were given a glimpse into what was to come for many of them.



“If God has shown us bad times ahead, it’s enough for me that He knows about them. That’s why He sometimes shows us things, you know – to tell us that this too is in His hands.”

Betsie TenBoom (The Hiding Place)

They listened, and then they prayed. **Read through Acts 4:27-30**. Fill in the blanks.

“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against _____ holy servant Jesus, whom _____ anointed. They did what _____ power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable _____ servants to speak _____ word with great boldness. Stretch out _____ hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of _____ holy servant Jesus.”

Seven times they acknowledge the power and authority of God. *Seven times* they relinquish to the will of God. They were acknowledging *seven times* that it was God's perfect power, authority and will they wanted to follow. The only will they could follow.

Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.'

John 6:68-69

Perhaps you're in a season of your faith where you've found yourself thinking or responding with statements like these:

"No, I have not received God's miracle of salvation."

"No, I have not shared His message boldly."

"No, I have not experienced persecution."

"No, I have not grown through persecution."

It is not too late!

Read 2 Peter 3:9.

So that NO ONE will perish. If you are in the camp of "not yet", reach out to a leader, a close friend, an elder or staff member of the church, they would love nothing more than to share with you the life giving, mountain shaking love and power of Jesus Christ! *Our Jesus is mighty to save*. He offers boundless grace and He loves you SO FIERCELY that He willingly gave up His life to save yours.

DEEPER DIVE

In the Eastern mindset, numbers are more than quantities. Numbers also have inherent meaning.

Specifically, in the Bible, **the number 7** symbolizes divine completeness, perfection and covenantal holiness.

Here are some examples:

Joshua 6: Israel marched around the city for 7 days, and on the 7th day, they marched 7 times.

The Gospel of John 7 "I AM" statements of Jesus

1. John 6:35 _____
2. John 8:12 _____
3. John 10:7 _____
4. John 10:11 _____
5. John 11:25 _____
6. John 14:6 _____
7. John 15:1 _____

Genesis 1-2: 7 days of creation.

There are many 7's in scripture. See if you can find some more.

If you are ready to begin a new life with Jesus, trust Him as your Savior and surrender your heart to His love and purpose for your life. Spend some time looking at the references in the box in the margin. Salvation is yours. Simply ask and you shall receive (Matthew 7:7-8).

If you are already a believer, refer to this same **Deeper Dive** to remind yourself just how simple it is to share the gospel with others.

*Not by my might, Lord, not by my wisdom,
or my strength, but by yours and yours
alone. You alone put the sun and moon in
place. You alone have seen the past,
present and future. You alone can soften
and change hearts of stone. Start with
me. Change me. Fill me. Restore to me
the joy of my salvation. Then, send me.
You alone can give me the courage and
boldness to step out and declare "Jesus
Christ is Lord"! So, I ask you to fill me with
a boldness that does not tremble and
does not falter. Fill me with courage to
boldly proclaim Your Name to the
nations, near and far. Your good news is
for everyone, so I pray for eyes to see
everyone.*

*After they prayed, the place where
they were meeting was shaken. And
they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and spoke the word of God boldly.*

Acts 4:31

DEEPER DIVE

'Romans Road'

1. **Romans 3:23** –

Everyone needs salvation.

*"For all have sinned and
fall short of the glory of
God."*

2. **Romans 6:23** – Sin has
a cost, but God offers a
gift.

*"For the wages of sin is
death, but the free gift of
God is eternal life in
Christ Jesus our Lord."*

3. **Romans 5:8** – God
loves us and made a way.
*"But God shows his love
for us in that while we
were still sinners, Christ
died for us."*

4. **Romans 10:9** –
Salvation comes through
faith in Jesus.

*"If you confess with your
mouth that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart
that God raised him from
the dead, you will be
saved."*

5. **Romans 10:13** –
Salvation is available to
all.

*"For everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord
will be saved."*

ACTS 4:1-31

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 4:1-31

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 4:32-37 + 2:42-47

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

God made us to live, breathe, teach, learn, and love in community. Community is an integral part of our walk with Jesus. We cannot do it alone. We can try for a while, and we may even think it's working—until it isn't.

Of course we have a call on our lives to share our faith with those that don't know the Lord, but even the disciples weren't sent out alone. The early church needed each other. We need other believers in our lives too. We need people that challenge us and disciple us. We need to look for those that we can walk after and also offer a hand to those coming after us.

Take time to truly consider the traits of the people you surround yourself with. Are you being shaped by them? Or are they being shaped by you? And even more so...

Are we all allowing the love of Christ to shape us?

This week, we'll explore two passages in Acts that describe the early church communities. Take time to soak in each word and truly observe how the pioneers of our faith lived. Their lives were radical, intense, and likely very different from how we live today. But I think there is something we need to learn from them. Let's dive in and consider how they lived.

Read Acts 4:32-37 & Acts 2:42-47. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

Since this week's reading is short but important, **read through it two more times.**

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

This week's active engagement will be short and sweet, but jam-packed with the goodness of God. There's a lot we can glean in these two short sections! Don't miss the richness these Scriptures have to offer. Remember, the goal of active engagement isn't to just add more work. Our aim is to study the Scripture carefully, examining each section for its significance. We know the Lord put every verse into our Bible with intention. I don't know about you, but I don't want to miss out on any of it!

1. Go through Acts 4:32-37 & Acts 2:42-47 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 4:32-37

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. **33** With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all **34** that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales **35** and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), **37** sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

ACTS 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **43** Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. **44** All the believers were together and had everything in common. **45** They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. **46** Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, **47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

ACTS 4:32-37 + 2:42-47 SUMMARY

DAY 3: DEVOTED TO THE WAY OF JESUS

After the ascension of Christ, the apostles and believers all had a choice to make: go on with their lives as if they had *never* met Him, or go on as if they *had* met Him. These are two very different directions to choose between.

Read Isaiah 58.

Do you notice two different ways of living? Can you see those who try to do it on their own vs. those who cling to the Lord and His goodness? What is His goodness?

In **Isaiah 58:7**, list 4 ways the Lord tells us to bestow His goodness upon each other:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

From **Isaiah 58:8-12**, jot down a few of the blessings the Lord promises when we bestow goodness on one another:

This is community. Isaiah 58 shows us how those who called on the name of the Lord in the Old Testament were hit back with a call to live side-by-side. God's people have always been called to live in unity and to walk in a manner that serves others. Look at Adam—God didn't want him to live alone, only serving himself. He gave him a wife to serve who would serve him in return. They were the first community. And who was the third in their posse? Christ Himself. They were a group. A community. They hung out daily and poured into each other. Now, in Acts, we get to witness a new way of living for those that had encountered Christ! They had walked with Christ, just as Adam and Eve had! How did that transform the way they lived? We're about to find out!

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
Acts 2:42

The early church didn't *stumble* into community, they made a plan for it—they *devoted* themselves to these four practices:

1. **Apostles' Teaching** – They taught what Jesus taught. They taught in large and small homes and in community. They then lived out the teachings they had received from Jesus Himself.
2. **Fellowship (the Greek word *Koinonia*)** – They did more than socialize. It was mutually participating in a deeply shared life.
3. **Breaking of Bread** – They shared meals and took communion together. They shared life around the table, remembering what Jesus had done (keep in mind, they actually remembered).
4. **Prayer** – They gathered to worship Jesus and seek Him in prayer together. They would intercede for each other. We even know some of the prayers they would have been praying: the **Shema** & many of the Psalms.

******Do these four practices exist in your life? In what ways are they present? Are they a part of your regular rhythms? How do they show up?

WORD FOCUS

'Koinonia'
Greek: *κοινωνία*

A deep, spiritual fellowship and communal bond among believers, characterized by shared life, mutual participation, and partnership in faith, mission, and resources. It conveys not just casual association but a profound, relational unity rooted in Christ.

'Shema'

(Pronounced sh'MAH) A Hebrew word meaning "hear" or "listen." It refers to a central biblical passage found in Deuteronomy 6:4–5, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*"

The Shema is a central part of observant Jews' morning and evening prayers.

Jesus quotes the Shema in Mark 12:29–30 when asked, "What is the greatest commandment?"

Rank each of the four practices below: **4** being your greatest strength right now, and **1** being the area that could use the most attention or growth.

_____ **Apostles' Teaching** (Engaging with Scripture, sound teaching, living out what Jesus taught)

_____ **Fellowship** (Mutual encouragement, shared life with other believers beyond surface-level)

_____ **Breaking of Bread** (Shared meals, hospitality, communion, practicing remembrance in community)

_____ **Prayer** (Seeking God in personal and corporate prayer, interceding for others)

Based on your rankings, which one of these is the hardest for you to live out? Why do you think that is?

Based on your rankings, which feels the easiest or most natural for you? Why do you think that is?

The frequency of their meetings wasn't normal in the ancient world. Most Greek and Roman religious groups met monthly, not daily. This was a radical, family dynamic, mostly resembling how people treated members of their own household. After these first believers encountered Christ, their *havarim* changed (remember this term from last week? Page 63). Their new *havarim* (family) became all those who walked after Christ with them.

On Day 1 this week, we all took some time to ponder the community around us. Our own *havarims*. Now take what you deduced then and compare it to the early believers. Does your rhythm of life with the people around you reflect this same kind of hunger for Jesus and His people?

Based on your observations, what characteristics do you notice in your community that exemplify devotion to following Christ? List them below:

What characteristics would you *desire* to see your community grow in in order to exemplify devotion to Jesus?

Reflect on this: What would it mean for *you* to devote yourself to these four practices? We can expect so much of others, but what about ourselves?

The outcome of the early church's rhythm and radical generosity wasn't burnout—it was *fruit*. Not manufactured. Not the result of a slick program or marketing campaign. Just Spirit-powered, everyday faithfulness.

Look up Galatians 5:22-23 and list the fruits of the spirit below:

Which fruit of the spirit are you noticing evidence of in your own heart and life? Are there any that do not necessarily come naturally to you? This week, invite a friend to pray for more evidence of that fruit in your life.

Father, we come before you together. We worship you Lord for who you are. You are Creator, Redeemer, Protector. You are glorious above all things. Thank you for blessing us with the gift of community, Lord. Help us to use this gift to glorify you and bless others. Move in our hearts to take physical steps in the direction you are calling us. We trust your leading, Father. Amen.

DAY 4: UNITY AND GENEROSITY

Let's look back and see how God's heart for generosity shows up in the Old Testament. It's amazing that while the ways it's expressed might change, His character stays the same all throughout history, and it is still relevant to us today.

Read Leviticus 25.

In the **Year of Jubilee**, debts were forgiven, land was returned, and slaves were set free. This was a radical reset of society. We don't see anything quite like this again, until the early church of Acts.

Read Acts 4:32-37 and 2:42-47 again.

Compare and contrast these passages from Leviticus and Acts.

Similarities:

Differences:

The early Christians here in Acts, filled with the Spirit, were living out the spirit of Jubilee—voluntarily—not by law, but by love and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The unity was *spiritual*, not manufactured. It was the fruit of a shared life, shared mission, and *mega grace (charis)* working among them (Acts 4:33).

χάρις (Charis)

The divine gift of God's love and mercy extended to sinners, not because they deserve it, but because He is compassionate. This love is the foundation of salvation, making forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformed lives possible.

WORD FOCUS

'Year of Jubilee'

In Leviticus 25, God instructs Israel that after seven cycles of seven years, the 50th year was to be declared the Year of Jubilee.

Land: The land was to rest and lie fallow. No farming or harvesting was done to allow the land to rejuvenate.

Slaves: Israelites who had sold themselves into servitude due to debt were to be set free.

Property: Land that had been sold or transferred because of hardship was returned to its original family owners, restoring economic balance.

Jubilee was designed to prevent long-term poverty and economic inequality by resetting land ownership and freedom. Jubilee called Israel to trust in God's provision and to live with generosity and fairness. It reminded them that everything ultimately belongs to God.

Read John 13:35 and write it here:

People *see* Christ through Christians. We have the ability to show the redeeming work of the Lord through our actions and how we love others. The early church of Acts lived this out well. Their example is the *fruit* of all of God's work and who He is. We are given clear evidence through their actions that their lives were radically changed by Christ's life and resurrection!

Take a moment and think of one person in your life that lives this way. Someone that you know is changed and transformed by the love of Christ because of how they live and how they treat others. Write their name below:

List two characteristics that describe this person:

Here's a hard question: *what would others in your community say about you?* What characteristics would they use to describe you? These don't necessarily have to be criticisms, they can be compliments! They might say you're generous or that you have a gentle and loving heart. Maybe they'll say that you think of others before yourself or that your love for the Lord is visible and obvious. On the other hand, it's also healthy to self-reflect, and consider some constructive criticism you could potentially receive. Take some time to thoughtfully and prayerfully answer the following:

How tightly are you holding on to what is "yours"?

Does your generosity reflect *trust* in God's provision and *love* for others? How?

How have you allowed the Spirit to cultivate *oneness of heart and mind* within your community? Give an example:

Let's be willing to challenge ourselves a bit with **3 steps**:

1. Take one of your answers to the above 3 questions and share it with someone in your community. Ask them to hold you accountable to grow in this area.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal one tangible thing you can share this week. Maybe it's your home, your time, the gift of food, a skill you have, or finances. Follow through with the Holy Spirit's prompting.
3. Pray for your community and how the Lord has called you to your role within it. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for your community and who you get to be with them:

DAY 5: COMPELLING WITNESS TO THE WORLD

We've been reading about how the believers lived—how they walked in faith and shared life together. But what was the purpose behind it all? Why did they live this way? The goal was the same then as it is for us today!

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

Write the Great Commission below and underline the words that impact you:

Read Acts 2:47b and 4:33.

Write these two verses below:

How does the early church of Acts follow Jesus' command in the Great Commission?

This family of believers, or *havarim*, was growing daily because the way they lived together was both beautiful and compelling. It wasn't about *doing church*—it was about *being* the Church, and Jesus was glorified. This community was a *living witness*, embodying what they preached. Their *compelling life together* made the message undeniable.

******Is thinking about *being* the Church as opposed to *going* to church a paradigm shift for you? If so, how?

******The 90/10 principle means that only 10% of your spiritual life is spent within the church building. The 90% is just as, if not more, important! In what ways does your life reflect being the Church in the 90 (the everyday) and not just in the 10 (Sunday)?

The way we live together as followers of Jesus has the power to either repel or intrigue the watching world. When the early church devoted themselves to generosity, sacrificial love, and deep unity, people noticed. Their community matched the message they proclaimed. However, the opposite is also true: when believers live in division or shallow connection, the message loses its power. *A self-centered church sends a confusing message to a world hungry for hope and authenticity.*

Is your community a picture of Christ's love on display? Be honest. What do you think people see about Jesus through the way your community lives, loves, shares, and worships? In what ways do you think your community might fall short and confuse the message?

This type of lifestyle doesn't come easy for everyone. The way the early church lived was exactly what we've been calling it: *devotion*. Look up the definition of devotion and write it down:

What's one obstacle in your community that you feel the Holy Spirit is prompting you to push through so you can fully live out this devotion?

Pray and ask that God gives you the eyes, the heart and the courage to live out *The Great Commission* today. Be open to the Holy Spirit's leading. Prepare yourself to be open to what He asks of you, even if it's uncomfortable! If it does feel uncomfortable, remember that we do all things by the grace of God.

Be intentional. Make your life visible and invitational. Write down one action step you plan to take:

Now give it all to the Lord and ask Him to be your helper as you long to obey His commands in your community.

Pray the following prayer:

*Heavenly Father, you poured out your Spirit at Pentecost, you breathed life into the early Church and set hearts ablaze with love, boldness, and generosity. We come before you longing for that same fire, that same unity, and that same devotion. Lord make us a people of deep prayer who constantly seek you. Help us to listen for your voice and follow you in all that we do. Give us the courage and boldness to speak truth with love and to lift up the name of Jesus without fear or hesitation. Revive us Lord and make us like the early church of Acts – devoted to you.
In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.*

ACTS 4:32-37 + 2:42-47

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 4:32-37 + 2:42-47

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 5:1-16

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

The book of Acts opens with power, unity, and undeniable beauty. In chapters 1-4, we saw the Spirit of God poured out, the Church being born and thousands coming to faith. There's bold preaching, miraculous healing, deep generosity, and a community marked by unity. It's a stunning picture of what life looks like when the Spirit moves freely among God's people. As we turn the page into Acts 5, we're reminded that the same Spirit who empowers and unites us, is also **holy**.

Before you open His Word, take a breath and remember, you are entering the presence of a holy God. The Bible is not holy simply because of its stories. *It is holy because it comes from Him, and He is holy.* When we come to His Word, we are approaching the voice of the One who burns with holiness. We enter the presence of the same God before whom the angels cover their faces and cry, "*Holy, holy, holy.*"

Pause. Take 2–3 minutes to slow your heart. Let the weight of this truth settle in.

Read Acts 5:1-16—then read it again. (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

As we begin to engage with God's Word today, He invites us to sit in the discomfort rather than rushing past it. Let the weight of this story press in and reveal something deeper about who God is. The beauty of Scripture is that it doesn't shy away from the hard things; it tells the full truth. In Acts 5, that truth shows us just how seriously God takes the hearts of His people and the purity of His church.

Each piece of this story has something to offer us. It's like a treasure hunt. Every detail, every conversation, and every consequence is packed with meaning. Let's lean in, pay attention to detail, and be ready to hear His voice.

1. Go through Acts 5:1-16 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.

2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 5:1-16

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. **2** With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? **4** Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. **6** Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **8** Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **11** Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

12 The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. **13** No one else dared join them, even

though they were highly regarded by the people. **14** Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. **15** As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. **16** Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 5:1-16 SUMMARY

DAY 3: A HIJACKED HEART

A culture has been created in the early church. It is one marked by radical generosity and selflessness. It must have felt like an incredibly exciting time to be a part of this world-changing movement. Being part of a community that witnessed such powerful change and revival, where people were so genuinely invested in each other's lives, would have undoubtedly made me feel like I was part of something big. In this space, every act of generosity and kindness seemed to contribute to something bigger. Nothing could go wrong, right? Unfortunately, in any good thing, the enemy is eager to step in and steal, kill, and destroy. If he can, he will find a way for hidden sin to creep in.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira really begins in Acts 4, where we see the generosity of the disciples as they live with one heart and mind. Barnabas (also called Joseph) sets an example of sacrificial generosity. Let's refresh our minds.

Read Acts 4:32-37. What does Barnabas do with his land?

People like Barnabas were likely held in high regard for their generosity. In a close-knit community like the early church, people would've seen and talked about those kinds of gifts. The boldness of their faith, paired with the sacrifice that came with it, would not have gone unnoticed by those around them. It must have left a clear and powerful impression on the community.

What do you think motivated Ananias and Sapphira to make the choice they did after witnessing Barnabas' generosity?

What is the contrast between Barnabas' generosity and Ananias and Sapphira's actions?

Have you noticed someone being praised for their faith? Examine your heart, do you think you are more motivated by praise than by faith itself? When and how so?

Read Acts 5:3. What happened to Ananias' heart? _____

That phrase should grab our attention. Throughout Scripture, Satan's strategy has always been to quietly infiltrate hearts — planting lies, twisting motives, and stirring up distrust in God. Read the following passages. What does Satan promise in each of these stories?

Genesis 3:1-5

Matthew 4:1-11

And here, Satan fills Ananias's heart to lie to the Spirit, driven by the (implied) promise of praise from his peers.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7 and write it here.

When we give our hearts to God, we can't divide them. Satan would be happy to take just half of us, but God desires all of us. This is where being in a relationship with God becomes extremely permeating. He moves into every corner of our hearts, even the places we'd rather keep hidden, because *He loves us too much to leave us in a divided state*. As you read the quote below, let it really sink in. Metabolize it.

"Ananais and Sapphira both wanted the image of great generosity, without actually being remarkably generous." - D. Guzik

Take a few minutes to honestly examine your heart.

When your heart is divided, what 'small doubts or twisted motives/schemes' from the enemy are you tempted to let take root? Write out two examples of times you've been tempted to appear *more* than you are.

******How would your daily life look different if you truly believed God cares more about your heart than your outward appearance or actions?

Now, spend some time taking your exposed heart to the Lord. Since you've potentially just named lies you're tempted to believe, let our loving Father replace them with His truth. *Let Him bind you back up.*

Read and pray through Psalm 51:6-10.

End your day in honest confession before the Lord, ask Him for forgiveness. Humbly align your heart with Him and pray that He would reveal His promises and truths to you.

DAY 4: HOLY FEAR

Yesterday, we explored the heart posture of Ananias and Sapphira, digging into the motives behind their actions. Today, let's dive into God's response to their choices.

No matter how many times I've read the story of Ananias and Sapphira, God's response to their gift always has a way of catching me off guard. In the middle of all the beauty and excitement of the early church, this moment drops like a heavy weight. It feels serious. It feels sobering. Maybe even a little unsettling—and that's okay. We aren't meant to breeze past it. God uses moments like these to slow us down and open our eyes wider. He invites us to explore His holiness not just as an idea, but as a reality that affects everything.

This isn't the only moment in Scripture where God's response to His people feels sudden. As we step into this story, it helps to look back at another moment where God demanded a response just as seriously.

Read Joshua 7. What about God's response in this story feels surprising or uncomfortable to you?

How was Achan's sin discovered?

The story of Achan (like Ananias and Sapphira) shows us that hidden sin isn't really hidden at all.

According to **Acts 5:4**, who did Ananias lie to? _____

When we read stories like this, it's easy to wonder, "*Isn't this a little extreme?*" But passages like Joshua 7 aren't about God overreacting. They're about God being who He always has been: *Perfectly Holy, and Holy requires holy.*

We like to draw a sharp contrast between the “gentle” Jesus of the New Testament and the “severe” God of the Old. But this story reaffirms that God’s holiness remains just as uncompromising after the cross and resurrection. *The grace of Jesus does not soften or diminish God’s holiness, it magnifies it.* Though it opens the way for us to draw near, we must not take it lightly. Sin in the presence of a holy God is no small matter, it cost Jesus everything. His holiness is weighty, uncompromising and demands reverence.

******How would you describe what God’s *holiness* means to you? Don’t worry about having the perfect answer, just take a moment to reflect and write whatever comes to mind!

Ananias and Sapphira’s sin is not just about lying, it’s about bringing corruption into the holy presence of God within His church. Their deceit wasn’t just horizontal (directed toward other people) but it was also vertical. A direct offense to the Holy Spirit.

To treat God casually is to profoundly misunderstand His nature.

Have you noticed the common response from people when they encounter God?

Read the following verses, and write what you notice about God’s holiness.

Exodus 19:16-19, 20:18-19 _____

Isaiah 6:1-5 _____

Ezekiel 1:26-28 _____

Revelation 1:12-17 _____

Whenever people glimpse His holiness, even a sliver, they are undone. *God’s perfect holiness means He is perfectly just and perfectly loving.* Anything that contradicts His character can’t simply be ignored or brushed aside. That truth may feel uncomfortable in a culture that often elevates *personal feelings and experiences* above objective truth, but it is essential to understand if we want to know God rightly.

******How does His holiness, justice, and truth challenge or encourage your view of Him? Why?

Read Proverbs 9:10.

How would you define “fear of the Lord”? _____

The fear of the Lord resets our perspective, reminds us of His holiness, and leads us into wisdom. *When we fear God rightly, we begin to live wisely.* It's a deep reverence, a holy awe stirred by the reality of who He is, compelling us to readjust our lives. These deaths may seem harsh, but Scripture assures us it was completely just.

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*
Psalm 89:14

When we struggle with passages like this, it's often because we lose sight of just how serious sin is and how holy God truly is.

Often, our discomfort with God's judgment reveals a distorted view of both His character and our own sin. But remember: God is perfectly holy, perfectly just, and perfectly loving and none of these traits ever contradict the others.

Have you ever found yourself relying on God's grace without fully turning away from sin? If so, in what ways?

How might your answer reflect what you believe about His justice and His love?

How could a deeper view of His holiness shape the way you respond to His grace?

Spend some time asking God to reveal more of Himself to you.

God, you are holy and just, and I'm grateful that you are also full of mercy. I trust that, as I seek you, you will reveal yourself to me in a way that changes my heart. Today, I ask that you show me more of who you are. Help me understand how pure and right you are in everything. Show me how to live in a way that reflects your holiness. Help me see why your justice matters in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 5: FRUIT FOLLOWS PRESENCE

After witnessing the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira, outsiders grew to respect the believers but also feared the serious cost of joining the Church, shaken by the sudden deaths they had seen. Let's refresh our memory, shall we?

Read Acts 5:12-16.

God reminded His followers that belonging meant holiness. However, *this fear didn't stop growth, it purified it*. The people being added weren't just along for the ride; they were serious disciples. Fear of the Lord became a starting point for revival. The movement wasn't limited to Jerusalem anymore. People from surrounding towns brought the sick and oppressed, and *all* were healed (v.16). God's power was visibly on display through His purified people.

However, much like the story of Ananias and Sapphira did not start in chapter 5, neither did this story of growth. Again, let's refresh our memory.

Read Acts 4:23-31.

The awe and growth described in Acts 5:12-16 didn't come from clever programming or impressive leaders. *It came from the presence of God*. In chapter 4, you just read that a desperate church cried out for boldness and Heaven answered.

******What area(s) of your life do you see as more dependent on your own efforts than relying on the presence and power of God? How often do you even think about the presence of God let alone cry out for it?

Ananias and Sapphira remind us that God's Spirit is not something we can manipulate or take lightly. Their story shows up right in the middle of this movement, not to scare them, but to wake His people up. God was protecting the unity and purity of His church, making it clear: this is a holy people, called to live with integrity before a holy God.

Why do you think God cares so much about protecting the purity of His people in the community, not just in individuals?

Are there any hidden things in your life that could quietly harm the unity of your community if left unaddressed?

God filled them with His Spirit, united them in one heart and soul, and purified their hearts through the revealing of His holiness. And what does this lead to?

Healing.
Deliverance.
Salvation.
Multiplication.

Read Matthew 5:14-16. Write down what happens when we allow God's presence to fill us.

How could experiencing God's presence change the way you interact with the people on your street corner or in your neighborhood? What specific differences might you see in how you live or engage with others?

This wasn't just a one-time event in Acts. That same Spirit is still at work today, and we are invited to be part of that movement.

To finish our week, we are going to put this challenge from the early church to practice! Let's spend some time seeking our Father's presence. Let us seek His holiness, His boldness, and His power to purify, heal, and guide us. Take time to reflect on the specific areas where you need God's presence; ask Him to move in your life—and expect that He will—just as He moved powerfully in the early church.

Inviting God's Presence for Purity and Integrity

But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.
1 Peter 1:15

Father, I recognize that holiness is not just an external act but a heart change brought about by your presence. I invite your Spirit to purify my heart and mind. Help me to live with integrity and reflect your holiness in all that I do.

Reflect: God, how can I reflect your holiness in my relationships and responsibilities today?

Asking for Boldness in Faith

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.
Acts 4:29

Lord, just as the early church asked for boldness in the face of opposition, I too ask you to fill me with boldness to speak your truth and live faithfully in a world that may not understand. May your Spirit empower me to step out in faith without fear.

Reflect: Lord, what fear or worry is keeping me from speaking your truth boldly?

Praying for Revival and Growth

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
Acts 2:47b

Lord, I ask for a revival in my heart, my church, and my community. May your Spirit move in such a way that people are drawn to you, and lives are transformed. I invite you to work powerfully in and through me to see your kingdom grow.

God, where you are stirring up revival in my life?

Use the QR code to end the day listening to *Forever and Ever Amen* by Maverick City.

FOREVER AND
EVER AMEN
with lyrics

By Maverick City



Scan the QR code to listen.

ACTS 5:1-16

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 5:1-16

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 5:17-42

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Our text this week begins in the middle of Acts chapter 5, following a season of radical community living, the Apostles preaching and performing miracles in the temple courts, and the number of believers increasing daily on a large scale. Oh—and let's not forget that couple who tried to pull a fast one on the Holy Spirit and ended up as an unforgettable plot twist. But that was last week's drama.

The Holy Spirit really did burst forth with His anointing on the earth and spread like an all consuming fire in the hearts of the early church. He is clearly on the move with a mission!

Let's finish out the second half of the chapter and **read Acts 5:17-42**.

You may have noticed the pattern of Day 1 each week as we have you go through and read the text twice. We *are* going to do that, but before you get started, let's pause. We don't want familiarity with the flow of our week to breed unfamiliarity with the text we are reading.

Take a couple minutes to slow down and absorb what you've read. Meditate over the parts that stand out to you and give them a chance to sink from your head to your heart. Ask God to have His way with the word in your heart as you prepare to read it again.

Ready? Go back and **slowly read Acts 5:17-42**. (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

There is a lot of excitement in our reading this week! Miracles, imprisonment, angels, flogging—*insert "mind-blown" emoji*. Having grown up in the church in West Michigan, saturated in the Bible and its stories, it is easy for me to breeze past the wild and chaotic events in this week's verses without truly pausing to take them in.

Like was said yesterday, familiarity can breed unfamiliarity if we're not careful. So don't let these events become "familiar". Try and think about it from the perspective of the ones experiencing it, these brothers in Christ: Peter, John, and the others. These events are HUGE. If one of these things happened in my *lifetime*, it would be life-changingly impactful.

Brace yourself and step back into this unfolding story, giving it another chance to settle into your mind and heart.

1. Go through Acts 5:17-42 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 5:17-42

17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. **18** They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. **20** "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. **22** But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, **23** "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." **24** On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

25 Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." **26** At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. **28** "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! **30** The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. **31** God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. **32** We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. **34** But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. **35** Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. **36** Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. **37** After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. **38** Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. **39** But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

40 His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. **42** Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

ACTS 5:17-42 SUMMARY

DAY 3: THE GREEN, THE GUARDIAN, AND GAMALIEL

Every time I read this text, I'm struck by how much is packed into these 25 verses—all occurring in 24 hours or less! Reading through our text, we can begin to break it into two obvious parties: *the Jealous and the Joyous*.

To kickstart, let's do a quick review of last week.

Read Acts 5:12-16 and write a summary of the events.

Read Acts 5:17-18. What's happening here and why?

Who are all these people? Use whatever resources you have (including the internet) to fill in the chart on the following page.

	WHO WERE THEY? WHO MADE UP THIS GROUP?	WHAT WAS THEIR ROLE/JOB?	WHAT DID THEY BELIEVE?	OTHER NOTES:
HIGH PRIEST				
SANHEDRIN				
SADDUCEE				
PHARISEE				

All of these groups had different beliefs and each had a specific function in ancient Israel, but they all had a common enemy, they all opposed Jesus and His ministry.

If you worked through the chart, great job! That's the kind of effort that makes truth stick. Now enjoy checking your answers against the information below:

The Priests were the religious and social leaders, and would challenge Jesus' authority. The **High Priest** was the one who held the highest religious position and the presiding officer of the Sanhedrin. (Acts 4:5-6 "The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family.")

The **Sanhedrin**, Greek for "sitting together" or "council", made up the supreme council of the Jews who had supreme authority over any religious or political decisions—like the U.S. Supreme Court. Their decisions and rulings were compulsory on all Jews from all over the world. In the New Testament, they are also referred to as "chief priests, scribes, or elders of the people."

The **Sadducees** were the Pharisees' political and religious rivals. They were a group with even more influence, making up the wealthy elite. Their beliefs and aspirations differed in that they adhered strictly to the written Torah and rejected all oral traditions. Even though they were rivals, they were still willing to join forces with the Pharisees against Jesus.

We may be most familiar with the **Pharisees**, since we encounter them repeatedly in the Gospels. They represented the common man and believed in strict adherence of laws and traditions—the "Blue Collar Scholars". Pharisees also took oral tradition as equal in authority to God's word.

From our text today, we have Gamaliel the Pharisee, "a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people." (Acts 5:34) He was given the title Rabban, *our teacher*, which was a step above the title Rab, *teacher*, or Rabbi, *my teacher*.

Read Acts 5:33-39. What does Gamaliel say to the council?

It looks like Gamaliel boldly steps in with wisdom to save the lives of Peter and the apostles! But on further inspection, in the context of the encouragement to wait for *even greater testimony* to God's work following Jesus' resurrection and the Apostles' miracles, we can see why some commentators see him as someone who is playing both sides.

Why were the high priest and his officials jealous of the apostles?

The Sadducees are green with envy at the ‘success’ the apostles are having with healing the sick and casting out demons in the temple courts, the playground of the Sadducees. They were also probably envious of the kind of authority the apostles spoke with that gave lasting success. Shouldn’t those be seen as good things? Aren’t they supposed to be on the same team? Not to the Sadducees—they felt threatened. And threatened people usually double down with their own control. We see this subtle form of control show up with the disciples as well:

*John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in my name and be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **For he who is not against us is on our side.**”*

Mark 9:38-40

I need this heart check. Like the high priest and his officials, I’ve been guilty of envy when I should be celebrating—especially when someone else finds success in an area I deeply desire to thrive in. Even in ministry and Kingdom work, these thoughts can quietly creep in. *Have you felt that too? If so, when, and how did it show up?*

The high priest and his officials certainly tried to hinder what was taking place at the hands of the apostles by throwing them in jail. They were just as wrong as John had been. *Thankfully, God’s plan and purpose through the apostles was stronger than the efforts of the opposers.*

Read Acts 5:19-21.

God, in His divine wisdom and power, used an angel to bring the apostles out of prison! He even gently locked the door behind them again. Go through the following verses and write the role of the angel. (We'll look at all of these stories through the lens of our Acts author, Luke!)

Luke 1:11-22 _____

Luke 1:26-38 _____

Luke 2:9-14 _____

Luke 24:1-8 _____

It's a bit ironic that God would send an angel as 'rescuer' when the Sadducee party was present, as they didn't believe in the afterlife, angels or the unseen spiritual world! But, God repeatedly uses angels in His ongoing work. Hebrews 1:14 speaks of their ministry of service to believers. They rescue, guide, instruct, announce, and validate. They declare good news and remind us of things Christ said.

There are many times in scripture where God *could* have used an angel to bring deliverance, but didn't. We know that God's ultimate plan and purpose is perfect. The apostles weren't freed from prison to preserve their comfort, but for the purpose of continuing to preach the Gospel in the most highly populated place, *the temple courts*.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
2 Corinthians 4:17

Describe a time in your life when you longed for divine intervention. Did you receive it? Was it what you expected? Or maybe you are still waiting? What are you hoping for from Him?

Last week we talked about the importance and value of a close-knit community as a whole. Today, we've honed in on some of the individuals who had influence on Christ followers in the early church, each with a massive impact on the apostles. Each character we've talked about today had the potential to change the trajectory of the apostles' lives forever. The Sanhedrin responded to God's work with envy and pride. Gamaliel provided a life-boat of intervention.

But at the end of the day, the sovereignty of God reigned. His plan was made perfect in the weakness of the religious leaders. The angel came to “let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe.” (Psalms 107:2) for the purpose of His kingdom.

Finish your day in prayer thanking God for His sovereignty, His presence, and His people in your life. Even if there are those that have been difficult, thank Him for them. Acknowledge His perfect plan even in the weakness of others.

DAY 4: NEW LIFE

One hot summer day when I was a kid, my sister, cousin, and I went down the street to the new pond that had just been installed by our home church. Upon finding what looked like thousands of tadpoles, we quickly ran home to get 5-gallon buckets so we could bring them home with us. By the time we filled our buckets to the rim with water and tiny tadpoles and trudged them up the hill to our house, it was dinner, bath, and bedtime.

When I returned the next morning to check on the tadpoles, to my astonishment I found *dozens upon dozens*, a micro-plagues worth, of the tiniest little frogs hopping all over the garage floor. The ones that made it out of the garage and into the driveway were sadly squished by my mom’s van when she left for work, their flat outline remaining visible well into fall.

It was nothing short of shocking to return to something I believed was securely contained, only to find it dramatically changed from how I left it. I didn’t know how to take in what was happening! (To be fair, and knowing now it takes weeks for tadpoles to turn into frogs, my story was most likely not overnight—but that is how I remember it.)

This was just a small taste of what I imagine the Sanhedrin felt when they showed up in the morning, expecting to find the apostles right where they’d left them, only to discover the cell empty, the door still locked, and the whole scene making absolutely no sense whatsoever. *How could they disappear—without a trace—overnight?*

Read Acts 5:24-26.

How did the captain and the chief priests respond when they heard the apostles were missing?

At this point, after the apostolic signs and wonders witnessed in the days prior, the religious leaders had to wonder what they were dealing with. Yesterday, we read about how jealous these leaders were. Today, we find them embarrassed and defensive. They bring the apostles to stand before the Sanhedrin and are outraged at how the apostles are making them look—guilty in the sight of their people with blood on their hands.

Write a summary of Peter's response to the religious leaders in **Acts 5:29-32**.

Verse 29 makes me pause over and over again. ***"We MUST obey God rather than men."*** This isn't just good theology, it's a line in the sand and a stake in the ground. It's a declaration that can only come from someone deeply rooted in their identity, secure in *who* they are and *whose* they are. Peter and the apostles are standing before religious authorities with the power to punish and even kill them. Yet they still speak with calm, unwavering clarity. Their allegiance is already decided. No matter the cost, they will obey God.

This is convicting. Do I live my life as if I MUST obey God? Do I rely too much on His unending grace that I forget He is the same sovereign God who is holy and just— as seen in the deaths of Sapphira and Ananias?

What are some ways your life might look different if you lived as if you MUST obey God? What actions would change? How might your conversations be different?

******Do you ever rationalize as to why you think you don't *have* to obey God? Are there moments when you find yourself justifying disobedience to God? What reasons or thought patterns do you use to excuse it, and what do those reveal about your heart or beliefs? Describe.

In Acts 5:30-32, Peter and the apostles testify before the Sanhedrin, which now included the Pharisees. They give witness to Christ by saying, "God exalted Him at His right hand as Prince and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

There was no condemnation in Peter's speech, although the Sanhedrin took it that way. Peter and the other apostles hope that the response will be coming to faith in Christ and experiencing the *new life* the angel told them to proclaim.

Acts 5:20 says "...speak to the people all the words of *this new Life*." Jesus Christ came into this world to provide abundant and eternal life to spiritually dead people.

Read through the following verses and write a few words that stand out to you:

John 1:4 _____

John 10:10 _____

John 11:25 _____

1 John 5:20 _____

All of these verses refer to "life". Let's use our **Blue Letter Bible** tool to dig into this word a bit more.

1. Open up *Blue Letter Bible*, either as an app or in a web browser (blueletterbible.org).
2. Type in the search bar: *Acts 5:20*
3. Click on the verse in the app or web browser. This should open up a '*Study*' section.

BLUE LETTER
BIBLE
Website



Scan the QR code to visit the website. Go to 'Apps & Tools' if you want to download the App.

4. Select '*Interlinear/Concordance*'.

5. Find the word listed for '*life*' and click on it. (If you are using a web browser, click G2222.)

You should now have a page all about the Greek word '*life*', which is *zōē*, or *ζωή*. Take some time to browse what the definition is and where else this exact word is used in Scripture.

Give a summary or a few of your favorite findings.

Peter and the disciples knew what God was talking about when the angel instructed them to go share about this *new life*. They experienced it. They lived it. And they shared it with abundance and vigor.

So when Peter responds to the high priest's censure in verse 29, it is within the context of being radically transformed with the zeal and drive to bring not just Jerusalem to Christ, but these religious leaders as well.

God's message went out to the top leaders in Israel that day. The plan of His Kingdom is plainly shown as a heart plan, not a nationalistic one. These top leaders were fittingly presented with the message of the Messiah. Surely, in the hearts of some of this audience who knew Scripture, an echo of Isaiah 9:6 must have risen: "And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

****Who in your life needs to hear and understand the *new life* that God offers? What is one step you can take today to boldly follow Peter's example through the Holy Spirit? Today, make a plan to choose obedience to God by sharing the free gift of *new life* through Christ!**

Spend some time ending your day with the following verses that reflect this kind of boldness, undivided heart and eternal perspective:

So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'

Hebrew 13:6

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel... Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:19-20

DAY 5: SACRED SUFFERING

After witnessing the boldness and vigor of the apostles yesterday, it's easy to forget that they used to be simple fishermen, unsure of their place yet eager to please their new leader.

Peter was an overzealous older brother who was more rough and reckless than righteous and redeemed. It wasn't that long ago that Peter responded very differently to the cost of following Jesus.

Read Matthew 26:69-75.

How were Peter's responses different in Matthew versus our text this week?

Peter is almost unrecognizable. He went from responding with cowardice to the cost of following Jesus to courageous and steadfast for Christ. What a transformation!

In what ways have you seen transformation in your life from Christ's influence? What parts of your old self have become new? If you can't answer this question, what parts of your life would you like to ask God to transform?

Read Acts 5:20-21, 25, 40-42.

As soon as they were released and instructed by the angel they went right back into the temple and began to preach again (v. 20-21) and they did not cease (v. 42)! I am struck by the disciples' sense of urgency and their obedient, bold, and unwavering response to being questioned, jailed, and flogged.

Read through the following events in John and Acts regarding Jesus and the apostles.

Read John 18:12-13, 19 and Acts 5:26-27. What's happening in both?

Read John 18:22, 31 and Acts 5:17, 33. How did the people respond?

Read John 19:1 and Acts 5:40. Now what happens in both of these verses?

The apostles might have viewed these events as a haunting callback to Jesus' last day. The apostles were put on public trial *just like Jesus*. The apostles were wanted dead *just like Jesus*. And they were flogged *just like Jesus*. From this perspective, we can understand at least in part why Peter was "rejoicing" after being beaten and bruised. But it doesn't say his joy was because he was freed.

Write out Acts 5:41.

I am stunned by their response after the cost is counted and their **creed** is met with consequences: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for His name." (v. 41)

They didn't leave bitter. They didn't leave quietly discouraged. *The suffering did not cause them to question the call.* They left rejoicing. Not because the pain didn't matter. Not because the humiliation was small.

*But because suffering for Jesus confirmed something sacred: **they were sharing in His story.***

When has following Jesus felt costly for you—and how might that experience actually have drawn you closer to His story? How did you respond to the cost?

That kind of joy doesn't come from either of the extremes...emotional hype or religious duty. *It comes from a life that's anchored in the presence of Jesus—a heart so gripped and changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ that even disgrace becomes a privilege. Even suffering becomes sacred.* This is a faithful, radical response, and this, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is what changed the world.

This humbles me and challenges me. Would I respond that way? Do I treasure obedience and nearness to Jesus more than comfort, reputation, or safety?

What about you? *Take some time to do a serious inventory of your heart.* **Set a timer** for at least 5 minutes to allow yourself a chance to do an accurate inventory.



Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

The promise of Jesus, Mark 8:35-36

WORD FOCUS

'Creed'

The Apostles' Creed is one of the oldest and most widely used statements of Christian faith. It's a concise summary of core Christian beliefs, traditionally attributed to the teachings of the apostles, though it was not directly written by them. It likely developed in the 2nd–4th centuries:

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Who have you seen rejoice in their suffering for Christ? Write about them.

God is mindful of the cost. He sees and values our offering—when we give everything for Him and His Kingdom, it matters to Him.

To me, this fits in the category of a shift in perspective. A faithful response isn't just about what we do—it's about how we see. If we can truly grasp this at our core it shifts us from a temporal to an eternal perspective. Knowing that we're not just sent but *accompanied* changes everything. He is orchestrating everything. He is walking with us. He is shepherding us step by step. That truth puts steel in my spine.

One of my favorite verses captures this...

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.
2 Chronicles 16:9a

God is actively looking for people who are fully committed so that He can strengthen them!

End your day working to memorize one verse that stood out to you in this week's homework. Use the lines below to rewrite it— several times if needed, to engrave it on your heart.

ACTS 5:17-42

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 5:17-42

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 6+7

WEEK 8

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Let's start this week a little differently. Before you reach for your Bible, take a moment to be still and simply sit with the King. **God is always available to you.** He is eternally, unshakably near. Do you know that? Truly?

No matter what your past month, week, or even this day has looked like so far, God has been with you. He has seen you. He has walked every step beside you. In our fast-paced, distracted world, it is easy to miss this truth. We move through life in the realm of the natural, busy, overwhelmed and preoccupied. But in every ordinary moment, there is a deeper reality: the supernatural.

The presence of God is not only real, it is active, near, and constant. Whether you sense it and acknowledge it or not, God is walking with you through your daily routines, your struggles, your joys, your doubts and your questions.

Today, let's pause and allow these two realities, the natural and the supernatural, to meet. Let's make space to become aware of what is already true: **God is here.**

Read these words slowly from Psalm 139, and let them remind you just how near He is and how intimately He knows and loves you:

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Set a timer for three minutes. Sit with the Lord and let these truths wash over you. Tell Him you need Him. Tell Him you long to see Him more clearly.

Now, with your heart quieted and your eyes focused, step into the story.

This week, we get to linger in two powerful chapters in Acts. After spending the past few weeks in smaller sections, these full chapters offer us a broader view of both the early church's continued challenges and one man's courageous faith.

Read Acts 6 and 7. Then read it again. *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

On Day 1, we engaged in a passive yet thoughtful reading of Acts 6 + 7. Today, we step into active engagement. Please remember that there is no right or wrong way to do this step. God has gifted His word to us to enjoy. John Piper says, *"The word of God is the kindling of joy."* This step is not meant to be a stressful performance or perfection. So enter this time not with pressure, but with expectation. You and the Holy Spirit are in this together. Look for what stands out to you: shifts in the story, repeated words or ideas, or moments that carry weight or meaning in your heart.

1. Go through both Acts 6 + 7 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create two summaries** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the each text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 6

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

SECTION TITLES

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

8 Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

9 Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. **10** But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. **13** They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. **14** For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

ACTS 6 SUMMARY

1 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. **3** 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. **5** He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. **6** God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. **7** But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' **8** Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him **10** and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

11 "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. **12** When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. **13** On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. **14** After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. **15** Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. **16** Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to

Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. **18** Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' **19** He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20 "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. **21** When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. **22** Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23 "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. **24** He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. **25** Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. **26** The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

27 "But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? **28** Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' **29** When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30 "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. **31** When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: **32** 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33 "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. **34** I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

35 "This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared

SECTION TITLES

to him in the bush. **36** He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

37 “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ **38** He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

39 “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. **40** They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ **41** That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. **42** But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

43 You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.

44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. **45** After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, **46** who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. **47** But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

48 “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

49 “Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

SECTION TITLES

50 Has not my hand made all these things?’

51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! **52** Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— **53** you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. **55** But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, **58** dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60** Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

ACTS 7 SUMMARY

DAY 3: WOHIKA (WOAH-HEE-KAH)

Every advance of the kingdom of heaven is fiercely opposed by the enemy. There is no holy ground gained without a battle. Sometimes the opposition is obvious and easy to name; other times, it's subtle, sneaky, and completely unexpected.

This fresh movement of the Kingdom in its infant stages in the book of Acts is no exception. As the church takes its first baby steps, the principalities and powers are gathering in opposition.

Re-read Acts 5:1-16 from several weeks ago. Summarize what happened on the lines below:

Read Joshua 7. Summarize what happened on the lines below:

Looking beyond the natural and into the supernatural. How would you describe Satan's tactics against the Older Testament people of God in the account of Achan and the New Testament church in the account of Ananias and Sapphira?

In both accounts, the enemy seeks to undermine the people of God and stall the advance of His kingdom. *Satan's strategies are marked by deception, disobedience, and compromise driven by personal gain.* God responds with unmistakable seriousness. It is not an act of harshness, but a measure of His deep commitment to protect the purity, integrity, and unity of His kingdom. He removes the offenders as a protective act of love for His covenant family, *guarding them from the destructive power of hidden sin.*

Can you identify a scenario or time in your life when Satan's strategies tempted you in a similar way? How did you respond? What was the outcome?

Re-read Acts 5:17- 42 from last week. Summarize what happened below:

In these verses, if you look beyond the natural and into the supernatural, how would you describe Satan's tactics against the early church? What is he trying to accomplish and who is he using?

Although most of us today do not face physical persecution for our faith, the strategy behind it is still very much at work. *Satan's goal has always been the same: to silence, intimidate, and discourage God's people.*

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10

Can you identify a scenario or time in your life when Satan schemed to silence, intimidate, or discourage you? How did you respond? What was the outcome?

Read Acts 6:1. What is Satan's tactic in this verse?

Read Acts 6:8-15. How would you describe Satan's tactic in these verses?

******Can you identify a scenario or time in your life when Satan tried to undermine your faith or your community through things like grumbling, complaining, slander, or disunity? How did you respond? What was the outcome? Was he successful?

Satan's tactics are not new. Although they come in many forms, the end goal is the same; to destroy us and stop, or at least stall, the movement of the Kingdom of Heaven. One of our greatest defenses is the ability to recognize and even anticipate his strategies. Discernment helps us avoid being caught off guard. The next time you find yourself in conflict, whether relational, spiritual, or ethical, pause and ask, "*What is Satan trying to accomplish here?*" It is a powerful question. While it's always wise to ask, "*What does Jesus want me to do?*" asking the opposite can sharpen your awareness.

In the last few years, my husband and I have adopted a term into our vocabulary, one we learned from dear friends and faithful partners in the Gospel: **WOHICA**. It's an acronym for "**Watch Out, Here It Comes Again!**" It's definitely humorous when one of us yells out **WOHICA!** But it has also become a meaningful tool in our walk with God. It is a simple way for us to name and anticipate the enemy's tactics. We're learning not only to recognize spiritual opposition but also to navigate it with more wisdom and even, by God's grace, to pre-empt it.

If we can step into the battle with spiritual clarity, reminding ourselves and each other with a firm “WOHICA!” we can anticipate and stand firm against the enemy’s schemes.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

DAY 4: TRIED + TRUE

In Acts 7, Stephen delivers a powerful, Spirit-led defense that draws on the shared identity and faith of his audience, revealing how the radical message of Jesus Christ is deeply rooted and fulfilled in the unfolding story of God’s people. He begins respectfully, saying, “Men, brothers, and fathers, listen to me,” as he responds to accusations of speaking against the temple, dishonoring Moses, and challenging the Law (God’s instruction). Let’s take a closer look at his speech and weigh the evidence for ourselves.

THE TEMPLE

What does Stephen call God in **verse 2**?

I love this title. It’s a new one! **God’s glory** is His manifestation of Himself. The Bible frequently talks about God’s glory appearing. So, when Stephen calls Him the God of Glory, He is highlighting His presence manifested, made visible and clear.

Read Acts 7 again. This time, take note of each geographical location where God shows up. *Underline or highlight* every place mentioned where His presence, voice, or activity is revealed.

DEEPER DIVE

The glory of God is the radiance of His presence, His beauty, His power and His holiness made visible. It is how the invisible God becomes seen and known.

When Scripture speaks of God’s glory, it often describes moments when God pulls back the veil between the natural and the supernatural and His character becomes unmistakably clear whether in fire, cloud, miracles, or the person of Jesus. This revelation does not add to who He is but reveals Him more fully. It is His presence shining through in such a way that we can’t miss Him.

The following passages illustrate instances of God’s glory revealed:

Exodus 33:18-19

Leviticus 9:23-24

1 Kings 8:10-11

Isaiah 40:5

Luke 9:32

John 1:14

John 2:11

Revelation 15:8

Revelation 22:3-5

Where does Stephen say Abraham is when God appears to him in **verse 2**?

Where does **verse 9** tell us God was and whom was He with? _____

Where was God in **verse 30-33**? _____

How did God describe the ground in **verse 33**? Why? _____

Are specific spaces holy and if so, what makes them holy? _____

In verses 48–50, Stephen skillfully draws upon common ground by quoting the esteemed prophet Isaiah (chapter 66), tapping into a shared and respected part of their story. In Isaiah's words, what does Stephen remind them of in **verse 48**?

Stephen draws on his roots, and the shared story of his accusers, to show that God is not confined to a single location. He contends that *wherever God is present, that place becomes holy*. By implication, the temple is not the exclusive or permanent dwelling of God's presence. At times, He was present in the temple but He has never been confined to it, thus making the tradition of it being a fixed, perpetual holy site both untrue and obsolete. His glory fills the earth and appears wherever He wills, always on His terms and never ours.

MOSES

What confirmations does Stephen cite to legitimize who God called Moses to be?

Acts 7:20 _____

Acts 7:31-34 _____

Acts 7:35 _____

How does Stephen recount the Israelite man's response to Moses in **verse 28**?

How does Stephen say the Israelite people responded to Moses in **verse 35**?

How does Stephen recount the “fathers” response to Moses in **verse 39**?

Stephen cites three affirmations of who Moses is and then gives three instances when Israel rejected the one God had sent. **Read Acts 7:51-52.** What does Stephen call the religious leaders and who does he say they are “just like”?

THE LAW (GOD'S INSTRUCTION)

How does Stephen describe God’s word in **Acts 7:38**? _____

What does Stephen accuse the religious leaders of in **Acts 7:53**? _____

Now it’s time to step into the role of judge and jury. You’ve heard Stephen’s defense, seen how he rooted his message in their shared history, and how he addressed each accusation with wisdom and scripture. So, what do you think?

Is Stephen speaking against the temple? Give your reasoning.

Is Stephen discrediting Moses? Give your reasoning.

Is Stephen diminishing God’s word? Give your reasoning.

Stephen skillfully turns the tables on his accusers, placing them on trial instead. Drawing on their shared history, he exposes a deep-rooted pattern of rejection, not only of Moses and God's law but ultimately of God Himself. Though they were graciously entrusted with the law, they disobeyed it. Though called to lead, they clung to power, insisting that access to God was limited to the Temple and controlled by their elite status. Yet Stephen reminds them that God is not confined to any building or human institution; His presence fills the whole earth and moves beyond their narrow boundaries. Like their forefathers, they have rejected, persecuted, and killed the Righteous One whom God sent. Ultimately, it is Stephen who reveals the deeper and broader faithfulness to God's unfolding plan.

How does this happen? How did the very people who knew God's law meticulously, served in His temple faithfully and embraced their story thoroughly completely miss the One they were longing for? *Not only did they fail to recognize Him, they executed Him.*

This is such a human response—we, like these religious leaders, can be a stiff-necked people. We're quick to cling to systems and religious rituals because they offer structure, predictability, and a sense of control. They give us something tangible—prayers, ceremonies, rules—that make faith feel more manageable. *While not all systems are harmful, they will fall short when they become the goal rather than a means to deeper connection.* In contrast, truly following God's Spirit calls for trust, vulnerability, and a willingness to step into the unknown. It invites us into a living, dynamic relationship that can't be confined to routine or tradition. When we cling too tightly to systems, we risk missing the personal, transforming presence of God.

Reflect on any systems you may have embraced in your faith. Are they helpful? Why or why not?

******Upon reflection, are there any systems or rituals that you have embraced that feed your need for control? Either to control your sense of "spiritual success" or to fashion a god of your own making that you can control?

They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.

Mark 7:7-8

Close today with this prayer. As you read it, underline the parts that speak directly to your heart. Take a little extra time to reflect on any sentences where the Holy Spirit brings conviction.

*God, I want to truly see you,
not as I've imagined or expected you to be,
but as you really are.
Open my eyes to your truth and presence.
God, I don't want to miss the fullness of who you are.
Free me from the limits of my own understanding.*

*God, help me to seek you with my whole heart.
Give me a deep and accurate understanding of who you are,
so I can fully experience your presence and purpose in my life.*

*God, lead me away from empty traditions that don't draw me closer to you.
Soften my heart, and draw me into a real, living relationship with you.*

*God, awaken me to the battle for your Kingdom.
Give me eyes to see the spiritual struggle unfolding around me,
not against flesh and blood, but against the powers that resist your rule
and truth.*

*Like Stephen, give me the courage to stand firm, to speak with wisdom and
grace, and to bear witness to your glory even when it costs me.*

*Clothe me with faith and fill me with your Spirit, that I may take my place in
your mission with courage, boldness and clarity.*

DAY 5: WELCOME HOME

Begin our final day this week by slowly **reading Acts 7:54-60**. Then pause and **read it again**, letting this account of the first martyr, the witness of our faith, sink deeply into your heart.

How do the following passages describe the eternal posture of Jesus at the right hand of God?

Mark 16:19 _____

Ephesians 1:20 _____

Colossians 3:1 _____

Hebrews 1:3 _____

Hebrews 12:2 _____

How does Stephen see Jesus as He is gazing into heaven? _____

Stephen has just stood trial in a corrupt and broken court, condemned by religious men blind to the truth. But in a breath, the scene shifts. The courtroom of earth fades, and Stephen approaches the throne room of heaven and the seat of ultimate justice. There, the true advocate rises. Jesus, who is usually seated at the right hand of the Father, now stands. He stands not in judgment, but in honor. He stands as the one whose blood speaks a better word and who claimed victory over death and Satan himself. The Son of God rises to His feet to welcome Stephen home.

What else did Stephen get to see in the first part of **Acts 7:55**? _____

Remember Stephen's powerful name for God at the beginning of his defense, the **God of Glory**? Little did Stephen realize that, in mere moments, he would come face to face with that very *God of Glory*. His eyes would meet the God of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, the faithful he attested to in his speech who walked with God throughout history. Stephen would be welcomed into the great cloud of witnesses. He would be counted among those who lived by faith and now dwell in God's eternal presence.

What did Jesus say in **Luke 23:46**?

What did Stephen say in **Acts 7:59**?

What did Jesus say **Luke 23:34**?

What did Stephen say in **Acts 7:60**?

How is Stephen described in **Acts 6:5**?

Stephen's life reminds us that the extraordinary work of God often unfolds through humble, ordinary people who are rooted in His story and filled with His Spirit. He lived faithfully in the natural, doing daily, mundane acts of service while carrying the power and presence of the living God that reflected something supernatural. Stephen knew the story, took in the story, lived out the story and then, when he had the chance, he died the story.

******Do you believe that God wants to work through you? That, by the power of the Holy Spirit, He can use your faithfulness even in the simple, ordinary tasks of everyday life?

- ☐ *I want to believe that, but I've never thought of my small, daily acts as something sacred or holy.*
- ☐ *Yes, I often remind myself that as I serve in the natural, my Heavenly Father and a supernatural cloud of witnesses are with me and cheering me on.*
- ☐ *Honestly, no. I struggle to believe that God could truly use me.*

God sees you and He is with you every moment of every day. Even now, as you study and reflect on your answer above, He is here. He wants you to know that His invitation is for you, too. We're not simply followers of a religion or observers of tradition, but *we are called to be disciples!* We are called to be active participants in a living story where heaven breaks forth on earth. As we walk with Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, *our everyday rhythms become sacred spaces filled with His presence.*

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, ***I am with you always***, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

*Living as if the Kingdom of Heaven is at stake means **boldly** advancing, **courageously** taking ground, and **sacrificially** expanding its reach.* As disciples, we, like Stephen, are called to run our race with boldness, courage and strength. May everything we say, do, and endure reflect the heart and character of our Rabbi, Jesus. He is so worth it.

There will come a day for all of us, when we, like Stephen, will enter that throne room and take our place among the generations that have gone before us. Many of whom will have a story like Stephen. I don't know about you, but I want to have a story. I want to have left it all on the field. Let's live in light of that very real moment when Jesus will stand to welcome us home.

'Hymn of Heaven'
Phil Wickham

*How I long to breathe the air of
Heaven
Where pain is gone and mercy fills the
streets
To look upon the One who bled to
save me
And walk with Him for all eternity
There will be a day when all will bow
before Him
There will be a day when death will be
no more
Standing face to face with He who
died and rose again
Holy, holy is the Lord*

*And every prayer we prayed in
desperation
The songs of faith we sang through
doubt and fear
In the end, we'll see that it was worth
it
When He returns to wipe away our
tears
Oh, there will be a day when all will
bow before Him
There will be a day when death will be
no more
Standing face to face with He who
died and rose again
Holy, holy is the Lord*

*And on that
day, we join the
resurrection
And stand
beside the
heroes of the faith
With one voice, a thousand generations
Sing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain"
And on that day, we join the resurrection
And stand beside the heroes of the faith
With one voice, a thousand generations
Sing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain"
"Forever He shall reign"*

*So let it be today we shout the hymn of
Heaven
With angels and the saints, we raise a
mighty roar
Glory to our God who gave us life beyond
the grave
Holy, holy is the Lord
So let it be today we shout the hymn of
Heaven
With angels and the saints, we raise a
mighty roar
Glory to our God who gave us life beyond
the grave
Holy, holy is the Lord
Holy, holy is the Lord
Holy, holy is the Lord*

**HYMN OF
HEAVEN**
with lyrics

By Phil Wickham



Scan the QR code to listen.

ACTS 6+7

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 6+7

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 8

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

As we begin our study this week, let's pause to remember Stephen, the servant of Christ, whose story concluded last week's study in Chapter 7. As he looked to heaven in his final moments, he saw Christ standing at the right hand of the Father, ready to welcome him home.

You spent time sitting with that last week. How did it stir you? What inspired awe? What gave you goosebumps?

Now, the story begins to move, just as Jesus said it would in Acts 1:8, when He promised the disciples they would receive power through the Holy Spirit and become His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." *That time has come.*

These next passages in Acts will take the early Christians and us on a literal journey. Believe me, while writing this homework, I went on that journey. At times I was lost and had no idea which direction we were going. There were twists and turns, Spirit snatchings and magicians. Take this ride with me. We will encounter cultural differences and interesting characters. You will walk alongside the first true missionaries and see the name of Jesus begin to be made famous.

I can't wait for you to read it! It's wild out here.

Read Acts 8—then read it again. (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Yesterday you read through the chapter and hopefully noticed some of the vivid imagery. I want to pause here and say, there is so much in this chapter. But this study isn't meant to cover everything. It's a space for reflection, guided by the Spirit. Maybe don't try to make sense of the stories in the full context of Acts 8 just yet. Read them individually first to ponder why God would put each of these stories in this place. You might feel drawn to Philip and want to look into his backstory. Do that. You may find yourself puzzled: why were people baptized, yet hadn't received the Spirit? Write your questions down so you can come back to them later.

Look for recurring themes and patterns. Notice what's repeated and why. Pay attention to intentions and moments of transformation.

Get excited, this journey will be a roller coaster, so buckle up and keep your hands and feet inside the ride at all times.

Stay alert. See what the Spirit might highlight for you. He is always faithful to speak.

Let's step into our active reading.

1. Go through Acts 8 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the each text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 8

1 And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed,

SECTION TITLES

"This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." **11** They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. **12** But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **13** Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. **15** When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **16** because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17** Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money **19** and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! **21** You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. **22** Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. **23** For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

25 After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the

SECTION TITLES

Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" **35** Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" [**37**] **38** And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. **40** Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

ACTS 8 SUMMARY

DAY 3: PERSECUTION

Stephen's death must have shaken the early church. I imagine they began feeling uneasy about continuing to share the gospel. There was no longer a lukewarm response. People weren't indifferent anymore. The apostles were no longer dismissed as fanatics rambling about a so-called prophet—they were seen as a real threat. They were no longer safe. They could now pay with their lives.

Read Acts 8:1.

What action word is used to describe what Saul did here? _____

In Greek, the phrase sometimes translated “approved of” or “consenting” can also mean “to be pleased with”—which adds weight to Saul's response. It seems his blood-thirst was just beginning. He was about to amp up his persecution and he would enjoy doing it.

Read Acts 8:3.

What action words are used here? _____

Saul's using a brutal methodology to try to stop the church. Even Saul's own rabbi, Gamaliel, advised against this (Acts 5:33-39). *Trying to stop something unstoppable is a futile effort.*

Remember the song *This Little Light of Mine*? As a kid, I never understood that song. What is a bushel and why would anyone try to hide a light there?

I looked more into this lil' song and this is what I learned:

No one knows who wrote it originally but some think it may have been an early African American anthem written by slaves. Possibly inspired by Matthew 5:14-16: “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Rutha Mae Harris, one of the four original freedom singers from Georgia, said the song "*helped steady protestors' nerves as abusive police officers threatened to beat them or worse.*" Singing this exuberant, spiritual song also helped to de-escalate the tension and agitation during the protests.- cited from 'Ballad of America'.

This little song carries a huge truth: His light will win against the dark, against persecution, against adversity, against threats, against death. It will break out into the world and spread far beyond the "little light" we believe it to be. That bushel doesn't stand a chance.

Now, think about this in light of the very first displacement of Christians in Acts 8.
Something good was coming from something bad.

Let's revisit **Acts 1:8**. Write it here:

The light was moving. Nothing was going to stop it.

******How about you? What gets in the way of your light? What things keep you from or scare you away from making disciples?

The persecution that began with Stephen's death didn't inspire a strategic missionary movement—it *forced* one. The believers fled for their lives. Sometimes God has to kick us out of our comfortable situations so we can see how He wants to use us. Sometimes we wait to be "called." But other times, life just moves us and suddenly, we're on mission whether we planned to be or not.

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE LYRICS

This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine,
let it shine

Out in the dark...

Everywhere I go...

All over the world...

Hide it under a bushel?
No!

This is often still true today. Crisis can force strategic missionary movements. When there is persecution, there can also be an explosion of believers. When the Chinese government started persecuting the church, they were forced to move underground to house churches. Guess what happened next? Yep... the church in China exploded. Here's another powerful example from today: James Keath, a strategy leader in the Middle East, once said "Syria is the humanitarian catastrophe of our day, but it is also one of the greatest opportunities of our day for the gospel advance among some of the least reached peoples on earth. In every country around Syria and now throughout Europe, we have the ability to openly engage Syrians like never before. And those working among refugees are finding not just broken lives but open hearts"

How about you?

We may not face the same dangerous kind of persecution as the early church or we may not be displaced, but we have other hardships and more covert dangers (i.e. comfort, apathy).

******Have you ever experienced a time when something hard—something you never would have chosen—actually brought about growth in your faith? What was your perspective around those circumstances? Did you embrace them reluctantly or with exuberance? What changed in you during that time?

Can God truly use us powerfully even when our obedience is hesitant, reluctant, or filled with doubt? This is a question worth wrestling with. What do you think?

The honest answer is yes. Time and again, Scripture shows us that God's power isn't dependent on our flawless willingness or perfect enthusiasm. Instead, God meets us right where we are, in seasons of mental, physical, emotional and even spiritual hardship, and uses those moments as a starting point for transformation and impact.

Looking back to Acts 1 Day 3 (page 8), what was your definition of discipleship? In light of that definition, how is God using or how has He used a season of hardship to position you for something strategic or greater?

Where in your life are you most tempted to keep your light hidden under a bushel? This could be political, social, or personal situations in culture.

Jesus encourages His disciples to "Let their light shine before men that they may see His good works and glorify the Father!"

It can be assumed the gospel thrives in comfort, that life should be easy once we become Christians, but history and Scripture show us that the Church and the disciples of Jesus grow most under pressure. God often uses hardship to strengthen us. Why do you think that is?

Ask God to reveal your blind spots or give Him permission to disrupt your comfort, and to use your hardships to shine His light. Is His light shining in *your* life now? Is there a comfort God is nudging you to lay at His feet?

"Comfort is the number one enemy of discipleship."
Rod VanSolkema

DAY 4: PLANTING

And here we are: Saul, along with the other Pharisees, are fiercely persecuting the followers of Jesus, so much so that they're being driven out and scattered in every direction. But where did they go? And why does that matter?

Read Acts 8:4.

The Greek word used for "scatter" here carries the image of seeds being sown—not random or wasted, but intentional. It's scattered with purpose: for planting, for taking root, for growth, and for spreading.

There's another Greek word for scatter that is more like the scattering of ashes or disappearing. *Intentionally Luke chose the first word.*

I have a garden stone in my flower bed that says, "Who plants a seed believes in God." It came from my grandparents' farm. I loved how my grandpa loved the dirt. He loved the fields. Besides Jesus and my grandma, the dirt was his first love. He loved the process of seed to harvest. He knew that, on his own, he couldn't make the seed grow—he could only plant it in the dirt. He needed the water. He needed a Savior. He needed the Grower. He was a man with failures and flaws and he toiled the dirt but in the end the dirt didn't love him back. And he knew that although he planted the seed, someone bigger had to make it grow. What is a seed without the water? What is the dirt without the corn and beans that sprout from it?

Read Mark 4:26-29, summarize the story below.

Who are we without Him? Just a seed with nowhere to grow.

There must've been a lot of fear in those first Christians that were scattered, but it was necessary that they scatter, so they could be planted elsewhere in order to spread and grow.

Remember that verse we keep circling around, Acts 1:8?

The early church was about to be planted far and wide just as Jesus had commanded: *"In Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* I can't help but wonder if those words were echoing in Philip's mind as he considered his next step.

“Okay, I’m in Judea... but I can’t stay here or I will be killed. So where next? What did Jesus say? That’s right... Samaria!”

Philip wasn’t just reacting to persecution, he was stepping straight into the unfolding mission of God. Every move, even under pressure, was part of a much bigger plan: the spread of the gospel to all people, everywhere. Whether he fully realized it or not, Philip was becoming part of the divine strategy to redeem the world, one step of obedience at a time.

Remember the beginnings of the church in **Acts 2**? Write a short summary here of what that was like:

Philip was leaving the comfort of being covered by his brothers. He was leaving the safety of the group. He was headed out on his own. He wasn’t necessarily ready to go or packed for the journey. He just went. So there had to be a little voice in the back of his mind saying, “What the heck am I doing?”

Think all the way back to week 1 of our homework. Do you remember the phrase **Lech Achari, walk after me?** Can you think of other times in the Bible when someone was called to go without knowing exactly where they would end up? A great starting point is **Hebrews 11**.

God doesn’t call the equipped, *He equips the called*. He would give Philip everything he needed. Think about your own life. Has God ever taken you out of something safe into an unknown destination? What moved you out of that comfort? Write down what you remember of that time in your life.

Think about your life right now. What best describes your posture?

- ☐ *I walk after God in faith, not knowing where I am going, but trusting in His leading.*
- ☐ *I stay where I am safest and most comfortable whenever possible.*
- ☐ *I will reluctantly go when forced out or when I have no other choice*
- ☐ *Other:* _____

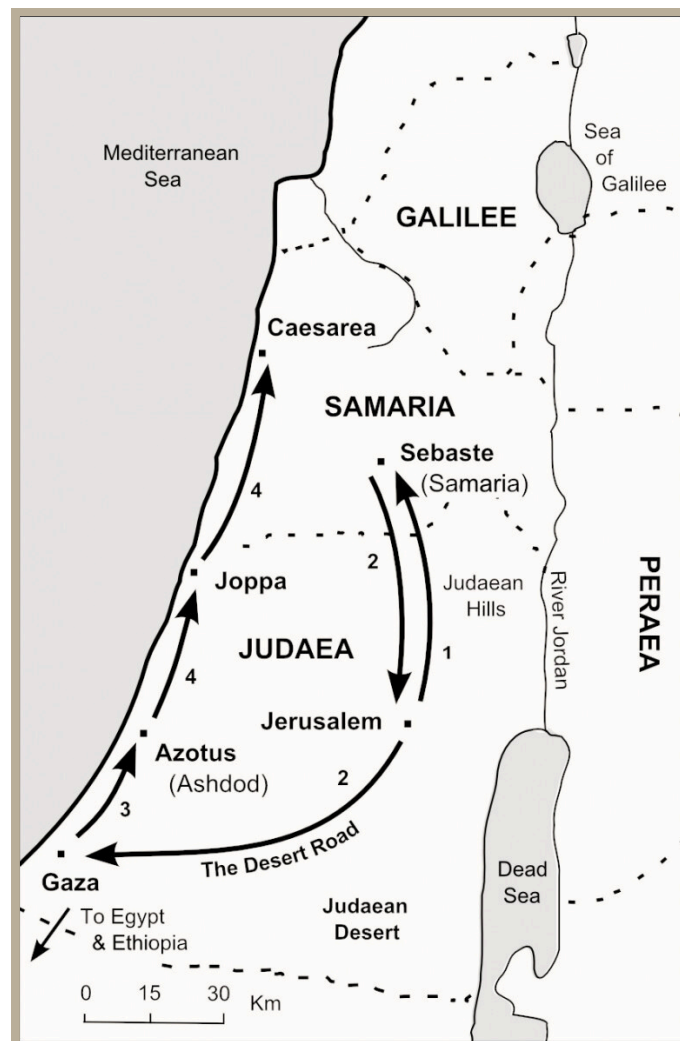
These early Christians were, in many ways, unexpected missionaries. They didn't set out with a five-year plan or a clear strategy. Many were fleeing for their lives, unsure of what was ahead. And yet, wherever they went, the message of Jesus went with them. They knew not the destination, they just knew the God who called them and they walked after Him. Sometimes we move out of faith and sometimes we move out of fear. *Either way, we are displaced and when displaced, the only option is to cling to the One who calls to us to come out.*

Let's zoom back into where God calls Philip.

Here's a reference for his journey:

Samaria- We know from context and historical conflict between Jews and Samaritans that Samaria was not the preferred destination of any Jew. However, Jesus had gone there, taking his disciples (Philip) out of their comfort zones. Philip knew it was where Jesus said they would go (Acts 1:8), and He had shown them by pursuing the Samaritan woman, but do you think Philip actually *wanted* to go?

Read Acts 8:4-25.



What words stick out to you in these verses? _____

What did Philip proclaim that made people believe? _____

What did Peter and John think the Samaritans needed after they believed?

What actions did they take? _____

There is a lot at play here. Philip *speaks*. The people *listen*. The people *believe*. The people are *baptized*. The disciples *lay hands*. The disciples *pray*. The people receive the *Holy Spirit*.

Let's take a look at Philip's next stop: **South (desert road) towards Gaza.**

Read Acts 8:26-40 and answer the following questions. (You may need to do some research on your own here.)

What do we learn about the man Philip encounters?

Where is he from? _____

What is his job? _____

Why is he there? _____

In **verse 29** what does the Spirit tell Philip to do? _____

The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage." That's it. He didn't say, "Jump up into that carriage and cast a demon out of that guy." He didn't say, "Go lay hands on that guy to receive the Holy Spirit." He didn't say, "That guy has cancer, go do a miracle." He said, "Hey, Philip, see that carriage? Go over and walk alongside it." And incredible things happened in the life of a court official from Ethiopia, all because Philip trotted alongside the guy's carriage.

Where do you think this Ethiopian eunuch goes after Philip baptizes him?
(hint Acts 1:8 again...)

Philip's next journey: **from Azotus to Caesarea**

Read Acts 8:39-40.

This part throws me off a bit. Maybe it was a timing thing, maybe the Spirit was like, “Let’s just teleport Philip to the next spot because walking would take too long.” Maybe there was a sense of urgency. I mean the eunuch was like, *find the nearest body of water, I want this Spirit now!* The Spirit was moving at a fast pace, outrunning the persecutors. And why does the Spirit bring Philip to the harbor towns? What are harbors for? Who comes to harbors? Who goes out from them? We are seeing God placing Philip in the most strategic places for the most strategic purposes. When I first read Acts 8 I kept thinking, *‘why are we talking about these places and these random people he meets along the way?’* **It felt like a listing of facts, but the more I sat with it, the more I saw the way God was planting and growing His gospel, one encounter at a time.**

Let’s take a moment to take it all in. Jesus and his disciples sowed the seeds and Philip was watching them take root and spread. He was getting to participate in reaping the harvest! He was seeing lives changed and miracles performed in the name of Jesus by the power of the Spirit in the power of the Name. The gospel was going to the ends of the earth!

Before we apply that to our lives today...let’s thank God for His work in this story at this time in church history.

Thank you Jesus for your name, for the power of your spirit. Thank you for the seeds you scattered and the lives you changed through the disciples and through Philip—perhaps the first missionary. We see through them that you do BIG things with little. You water the seed. You are the grower. We believe in your power then and we know that same power is still with us today. Thank you for the GREAT joy you gave to those early converts and the GREAT joy you also give to us when we see someone transformed by your name.

DAY 5: PREACHING

Now comes our part. What is our faithful response to Philip’s journey? What is being stirred in us? What movement is the Lord asking of us? Do you know that God wants to partner with you, just like He did with Philip, to reap the harvest?

One thing I know is that we can’t stay still and expect a harvest. We have to move throughout the fields, scattering the seeds and tilling the soil. It’s work—real, faithful labor. Another thing I know is this: *we can’t stay silent and expect lives to be changed.*

Read Romans 10:14 and write it down here:

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

What did the last person do with the talents?

What does this story tell us about God?

What does it tell us about what He wants from us?

Read Acts 8 fully one more time. If you haven't already, mark each time "preaching" or "proclaiming" appears in the chapter. I found five! Below record the verse and what happens after those words are used:

Verse ____ : _____

Verse ____ : _____

Verse ____ : _____

Verse ____ : _____

Verse ____ : _____

Look back at your answers, what themes do you notice? After they speak, what happens next? (Maybe you already discovered this in Day 2 this week!)

Movement to new locations, baptisms, people believing, people being healed, rejoicing.

Here's the thing: He wants us to speak. He wants us to open our mouths. He wants us to say His name. It's part of the work. It's part of the planting. It's our part in the harvesting. We get to be a part of His work! And sometimes that means simply doing the next right thing the Spirit prompts us to do—like when the Spirit told Philip in verse 29 to go to the chariot and stand near it. Sometimes the Spirit may prompt us, and we won't know why—or it might feel awkward. But He remains with us. Following the Holy Spirit isn't so threatening when we follow Him one step at a time. Look at what God did through Philip's obedience to simply walk up to that chariot. God will give us everything we need, and He will do great things through our obedience.

******When has the Spirit prompted you to do something uncomfortable or or even something that seemed weird to you? Were you surprised by the outcome? Explain. Or conversely, has God used someone else in your life to do something small that made a big impact or heart change in you?

What is your faithful response to Philip's journey? **Take a few minutes to think and pray about it** and then write down some things the Spirit is saying to you here:

It may feel scary to think God wants you to boldly proclaim His name, but just as He did with Philip, the Lord will lead you through the persecution to the planting and give you the words to proclaim. Be open to the Spirit's promptings, he will lead you to the next right thing. He never leads us down a path he hasn't already traveled. So, this week, rest in the peaceful thought of walking directly in His footsteps.

ACTS 8

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 8

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 9

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Well hello there, Saul/Paul!

Acts chapter 9 serves as catalyst to a major shift for the remainder of the book of Acts. Like shots fired across our bow, in Acts 7:58 and 8:1-3 Luke gives a provocative introduction to a very singular man, first known to us as Saul. Saul watched over the robes of those involved in the stoning of Stephen, whose murder he *enthusiastically approved*. Bloodlust for “righteousness” soon spurred him to his own violent actions against believers. That’s quite an introduction.

Let’s step into the sandals of those present in Acts chapter 9. It all starts with a murder-minded menace named Saul.

Read Acts 9. Sip some coffee or tea. **Then read it again.** (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
John 17:17

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.
Psalm 119:105

Every time we sit down to study the Word of God, every time we engage with it, every time we memorize bits of it, we enlarge the fund upon which the Holy Spirit draws. This wealth becomes apparent in our workaday lives:

- An unexpected change comes to our schedule: the Spirit may bring to mind **Psalm 31:14-15 NASB**—“*But as for me, I trust in you, O Lord. I say, “You are my God; my times are in your hand.”*”

- Worry for a wayward loved one arises: the Spirit may nudge you with **Luke 18:1 NASB**— *“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”*
- Fear of circumstances, or of our own weaknesses, may stop us in our tracks: the Spirit of God draws from your well, the living water of **Isaiah 41:10 NASB**— *“Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

The Word of God is there to steady us, refresh us, and remind and revive us. Lord, thank you for this time today to enlarge our fund upon which the Spirit of God draws. And thank you for a future time in our workaday lives when the living water of Acts 9 will come to us, because we came to it.

1. Go through Acts 9 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you’ve made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 9

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. **3** As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4** He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. **6** “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. **8** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see

nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **9** For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. **12** In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. **14** And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. **16** I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, **19** and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. **20** At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. **21** All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" **22** Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

23 After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, **24** but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. **25** But his followers took him by night and lowered

SECTION TITLES

him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. **27** But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. **28** So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29** He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. **30** When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

32 As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. **33** There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. **34** "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up.

35 All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. **37** About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. **38** Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. **41** He took her by the hand and helped her to her

feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. **42** This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. **43** Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 9 SUMMARY

DAY 3: SAUL'S CONVERSION AND THE ROLE OF ANANIAS

When I read a great book, I'd like to learn a bit about the author if possible. Sometimes what I learn surprises me. Saul, who later wrote most of the New Testament, was a man very uniquely called and gifted for his time. Let's get to know that murder-minded menace.

Saul's identity was significantly rooted in three different cultures.

JEWISH

- ▶ Look up **Philippians 3:5**. Saul was born a Jew from the tribe of _____. He was a Pharisee and describes himself as a "_____ of _____."
- ▶ He studied under _____, a respected teacher of the Law (**Acts 22:3**), which means Saul had an elite education in the Jewish Scriptures and traditions. He had a deep knowledge of the Old Testament (the only Scripture they had), which helped shape how he recognized and interpreted Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

GREEK

- ▶ Saul was born in _____ (**Acts 22:3**), a major city in Cilicia (modern-day Turkey), which was part of the Greek-speaking world under Roman rule.

- ▶ Tarsus was known for its Greek philosophy and schools (think Ivy League), so Saul would have been very well educated in Greek thought, language, and literature alongside his elite Jewish training.

ROMAN

- ▶ Saul was a _____ citizen from _____ (**Acts 22:28**) which granted him certain legal and social privileges. Since it was from birth, that means his Jewish parents were also Roman citizens; it was not a status granted to him later in life.
- ▶ Among other rights, a Roman citizen could appeal directly to Caesar in legal matters (which Saul does in Acts 25:11).

In short, Saul was ethnically Jewish, religiously a Pharisee—devoted to the law—legally and socially a Roman and culturally Hellenized and fluent in Greek language. This made him uniquely qualified to bridge the gospel from its Jewish roots to the Gentile world.

And before he built those bridges, he tried to destroy them.

SAUL'S CONVERSION

Read Acts 9:1-9.

Divine blindness not only struck Saul, stopping him in his tracks, but Ananias did not arrive right away; *Saul had **three days** in the dark to think about what had happened.* As he sits in the home of a man named Judas, his entire world upended and, staring into darkness, we can surmise some thoughts that might have run through his head as he tried to process what just hit him:

A light flashed from heaven and put me on the ground.
A disembodied voice spoke. I'm not crazy, others heard it, too.
I was persecuting *Jesus*?
Something deep within me resonated with that voice.
He's the *Messiah*?
He said He'd tell me what I must do.
What will that be?
When will that be?
What will my rabbi think?
What have I done?
That light. It flashed from heaven...

DEEPER DIVE

In Acts 4, we explored how, in the Eastern or Hebraic mindset, numbers carry more than just numerical value, they hold symbolic meaning. We studied the number 7, which signifies completion and perfection.

This week, we focus on another significant number: **three**.

Throughout Scripture, the number three often represents resurrection, reconciliation, restored life, and renewed hope. In Acts 9, Saul spends three days in darkness. On the third day, his sight is restored, and with it, a new understanding of Christ.

Here are a few other key “threes” found in the Bible:

Abraham’s three-day journey before God provided the ram in place of Isaac (Genesis 22:4)

Jonah’s three days and nights in the belly of the fish before being delivered (Jonah 1:17)

Israel’s three-day journey into the wilderness, out of slavery, to worship God (Exodus 3:18)

Jesus’ resurrection on the third day (Luke 24:7; 1 Corinthians 15:4)

There are many more...happy studying!

Over and over and over for **three** days, Saul marinated in thoughts like these, and I am sure, many more. Think about it: three days of no food, no drink, and no visual distractions. He does nothing but sit with new questions, new revelations, new concepts, for three straight days.

Jesus told Ananias in verse 11 where to find Saul. What did He say Saul would be doing?

Do we sit with new revelations? Do we pray about them? Or do we quickly jump from concept to concept, new thought to new thought without allowing knowledge to drop from our heads to our hearts?

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7.

Write out verse 7. _____

******What is something God is currently teaching you?

Take some time this week to sit with your answer. Take some time to pray. Ask God: Why am I learning this? What do you want me to do with it? Record your action steps.

It's exciting to think that the same divine power that sat Saul down for three days is the same divine power we have within us.

Write out 2 Peter 1:3. _____

What are some things for life and godliness you want to know more about? Are there biblical concepts you want to understand better? (Example: *For myself, I want to understand more about the "power" of a believer from 2 Timothy 1:7.*) Write a few here:

Make a note of these concepts and tuck it in your Bible for later study. The role of the Holy Spirit is that of *Helper*. He will instruct, lead, and help us in these things. All we have to do is ask!

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

John 14:26 NASB

What did Saul ask of God in those three days? He knew Scripture by heart. Did his heart cry out like David? *"I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord; I make supplication with my voice to the Lord... When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path..."* Psalm 142:1-3. Saul was pretty overwhelmed, and likely prayed the psalms without ceasing during his days of darkness.

Our times of affliction are in God's hands. Perhaps through fasting and prayer and meditation for those three days, God was working out in Saul an "*eternal weight of glory*". (2 Corinthians 4:16-18.) We'll talk more about spiritual blindness on Day Four; meanwhile, when Ananias finally showed up in God's timing, it's safe to say that Saul was ready for his life to change. The God Saul had "known" since birth, is who he was about to get to know in a whole new way.

THE ROLE OF ANANIAS: YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?

Read Acts 9:10-14.

Show of hands: anyone else recognize the huge "gulp" Ananias took upon receiving instruction from Jesus? We're not alone when it comes to certain acts of obedience. I'm glad for biblical examples of reluctant servants. Consider Gideon. Jonah. Zacharias.

Read Matthew 21:28-31.

Sometimes obedience doesn't look slick:

When I was a young believer, nineteen years old, I was looking out at the bus stop from my window one day and saw a guy standing there. I felt the Spirit say, "Go bring him a New Testament." I hemmed, hawed, and hoped the bus would get there before I could grab one. It didn't. I also felt plain stupid, striding out from my home with this guy as my sole destination. So what did I do? I put it in my pocket, laced up my tennis shoes, and pretended to be out for a jog. I jogged to the bus stop, acted as if I'd jog past. Then, as if a thought just occurred to me instead of ten minutes of obsession over that very thought, I stopped. I handed the New Testament to the guy, said, "Hey, this is for you." Then I jogged all the way around a very long block, just so I wouldn't have to see the guy again.

Read Acts 9:15-16.

Jesus didn't smack Ananias upside the head for his questions. In fact, interestingly, Jesus seemed to add a *P.S.* for motivation: "By the way—he will suffer for My sake." This seems to steady Ananias. At the time, maybe he's thinking it's divine payback. At the very least, there's no more backtalk. He plugs in 'House of Judas on Straight Street' to Google Maps and off he goes.

Let's look more closely at this obedience deal.

STUDY PROMPT

The Psalms are a great place to go if you are in a season of darkness or affliction. Take some time to read the Psalms below. Pick one that resonates with you and claim it for your life.

Psalm 61

Psalm 91

Psalm 107

Psalm 143

Ananias knew the physical danger he was in by being obedient to the Lord, yet he went anyway. Ananias and his people had done nothing wrong, they were the wronged; yet in humility he approached Saul *anyway*, out of obedience.

What about us? You may not be in the wrong about something. The “other person” may have caused offense. We love to focus on the person in the wrong and question God with things like: “Well what about them?! What will you have them do to right this wrong?”

Jesus’ response is clear: *“If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? **You** must follow me.”* (John 21:22)

We don’t get to decide what “they” do or what God asks of them: *we get to decide if we will be obedient to what He calls us to do.*

Evaluate your heart posture towards what God asks of us:

- ☐ *I feel weary/annoyed from always being the one to initiate reconciliation.*
- ☐ *It feels like the responsibility to “rise above” often falls on me, and I’m exhausted.*
- ☐ *I’m deeply hurt, and part of me longs for them to acknowledge that by taking the first step.*
- ☐ *Right now, my bitterness makes it hard to empathize with others’ perspectives.*
- ☐ *I feel overwhelmed and unsure I have the capacity to engage God’s requests right now.*

Is God prompting you to take the first step in something? For most of us, that doesn’t come easily. Bring your honest response before the Lord and ask Him to help you love with His kind of love: *boldly pursuing, selflessly sacrificing, and graciously forgiving.* Don’t rush past the discomfort of this. Wrestle through it with Him. Write out a personal commitment to taking that first step below:

What if we obey, but their response doesn’t match the level of obedience it took for us to make the first move? What if they respond negatively, or not at all? Well guess what? We are most fortunate, because I have a verse for us. It is one that has smacked me around (in a good way) many a time. In fact, I could use it right now.

Read Luke 6:35-37. Summarize it below:

Ananias didn't have the written Gospel then, but he likely carried some of the word-of-mouth rabbinical teachings of Christ in his head and heart. (John 14:26 in action!) Bottom line, Ananias loved Jesus. He displayed great trust in Him. So much so that by the time he arrived at the street called Straight, Ananias greeted Saul as a *brother*.

Read Acts 9:17.

*Lord, sometimes Christianity is hard. It's hard to obey when what you ask runs counter to how we feel. Help us, then, to be like your servant Ananias. Help us to stay in conversation with you about it. Help us to listen. And Lord, help us to obey. Bring the Gospel close to our hearts at those times, to remember why we love you in the first place—because of your great mercy to us, and to others. Transform us into your image.
In Christ's Name, Amen.*

DAY 4: ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS AND RECOVERED SIGHT

Morning! (Afternoon? Evening?)

Today we'll look at blindness (pun kind of intended). We'll look into ways God uses spiritual blindness.

Read Acts 9:18-25.

ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

Light often represents God's presence and revelation. Saul's physical blindness mirrors his spiritual blindness. His restored sight is a sign of his spiritual transformation.

Write out Psalm 119:105. _____

Write out Isaiah 9:2. _____

Blindness and sight are symbols of spiritual lostness and awakening. In Isaiah 6:10, God tells Isaiah that the people “have eyes but do not see,” showing how rebellion can lead to spiritual blindness.

Jeremiah 5:21 says, “Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see.” In John 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind and uses the miracle to show that some who believe they can see, like the Pharisees, are actually blind.

THE GOSPEL PATTERN:

Blind → ***Encounter Jesus*** → ***Sight!***

He wasn't seeking Jesus when Jesus sought him.
David Guzik

Saul's zeal and ambition blinded him from seeing the ones he persecuted as his brothers and sisters, *and* from seeing his Savior. When we fail to step back and see the eternal picture, we become absorbed in our blind spots—and in doing so, we lose an eternal perspective.

Saul is driving the ship of his life. Then Saul is knocked off his feet by the Lord. (Something we all need once in a while.) When Saul then encounters Jesus, he is no longer driving. *He's face to face with the Shepherd and reduced to sheep status.* He is led, needing to completely trust he is going where God needs him to be.

******Are you trying to be the shepherd of your life when you desperately need to be a sheep? And, why do you think we wait until we are at the end of ourselves to take the posture of sheep?

Take a moment to **read Psalm 23**. As you do, circle or underline every time a pronoun (He, His, you, your) of the Lord appears.

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
3. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Help us, Good Shepherd, to *be* sheep!

Back to Saul. *Before God's rod and staff comforted Saul, it whacked him off his donkey and set him up for transformation.* Before we look at that, let's look at how God uses spiritual blindness.

Was someone praying for Saul? Surely the Christ-followers he persecuted prayed for him (Matthew 5:44). Maybe he had a loved one doing the same. Maybe someone in his life knew of *'the Way'* that he did not.

GOD USES SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

God uses the dark times in our lives. He uses the severe mercy of affliction to bring us closer to Him. But do we understand that God also uses spiritual darkness in the lives of loved ones? The ones we pray for?

You may have heard the old saying: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." As Saul sat in spiritual blindness, the Spirit of God worked the soil of his heart. The Spirit worked with everything Saul had in the soil—his life experiences, his knowledge of God—and added the *fertilizer of truth*. Perhaps the work the Spirit is doing in the one you love needs a metaphorical "three days" to be effective. Perhaps it is a long softening that He must do, working to transform opinions and long-held beliefs. *Take heart, believer.* Know that God is working the heart soil, and that your faithful prayers will send an Ananias at just the right time, God's time, since He knows soil best.

You cannot draw anyone to Christ, but God can. When we pray urgently and faithfully by name for specific lost people, asking God to reach them, God works—often in unique and unexpected ways—to open hearts to Himself.

Billy Graham

Read Acts 9:17-18.

Your loved one's Ananias may appear in any form imaginable. Here are a few *Ananias* moments:

- ▶ Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, prayed long and hard and earnestly for the salvation of her son. Guess what finally reached him? A song.
- ▶ A Russian farmer was out working his field when he paused to consider his thumb. He marveled at its utility. Thoughts led to God. God brought salvation.
- ▶ A young agnostic pictured Christians on their knees. It led to the idea that there may be a God they knelt to. Years later, this seed-thought resulted in salvation.

Who are you praying for? _____

Don't lose heart. Keep praying. Keep trusting. Keep loving and following God. *Your conduct as a believer may be the only Gospel they read right now.*

ON RECOVERED SIGHT

The beginning of Saul's transformation was to know he wasn't in control anymore.

Accepting our powerlessness is a sacred discipline. God ... longs to display His power and might in our lives, but He won't kick us off the throne if we're committed to wearing the crown.

Margaret Feinberg

Powerlessness was a huge gear-shift for Saul. A different man arose from three days of blindness and fasting and prayer! A different man emerged from the house of Judas on Straight Street, one with recovered sight and a new heart, filled with the Spirit of God!

Saul's transformation is a testament to the power of God's grace and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. His life exemplifies the profound change that occurs when one encounters the risen Christ, moving from a life of opposition to one of fervent dedication to the Gospel. (Biblehub)

Write out John 1:4-5. _____

No more darkness for Saul. He gave up his crown and handed it to Jesus. Then his sight was not only restored, it was new. His driving force was no longer anything but Jesus. He began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. He kept increasing in spiritual strength, and became the first great **Apologist**.

Saul turned the Jewish community on its head by proving that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 9:22.) The persecutor turned preacher. What amazing grace!

Waymaker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness...my God, that is who you are.

DAY 5: BARNABAS, THE CHURCH AT PEACE, AND PETER'S SPIRIT-LED ADVENTURES.

We already know a bit about Barnabas. We met this Cyprian Jewish believer early on with his generous offering to help out the community of new believers (Acts 4:36-37). We learn more later about how well he was regarded—Acts 11:24 says “he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” Here in Acts 9, we see his character in action.

Read Acts 9:26-27.

These verses get to me. I feel compassion for Saul, and I feel joy over Barnabas. I feel for Saul because he's trying to “associate” with his new family, and they don't want him. Was Saul discouraged because of that reception in Jerusalem? Did it evoke shame? Then I love how it says, “*Barnabas took hold of him.*” He stepped in. He took charge. I wonder what that meant to Saul. Barnabas demonstrated that he would stake that nice reputation of his on this infamous new believer in Christ.

Are we willing to do the same for others? Are we willing to sit down next to one whom others may judge or suspect or criticize—knowing that judgment or suspicion or criticism may then fall on us? *Are we willing to risk our reputations to extend a clean hand to a hand others may consider very dirty?*

WORD FOCUS

‘Apologist’

The person or practice of providing reasoned arguments

‘Apologetics’

The practice of providing reasoned arguments and evidence to defend a belief system, particularly a religious one.

******Was there a time when God asked you to choose between fitting in and standing up for someone? Or have you ever been called to stand in the gap for someone, even when it meant conflict or isolation?

Remember it here: _____

My husband said to me long ago, “My job is to take care of my character; God will take care of my reputation.”

Barnabas was a good man. He was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. This showed up in what he did. He didn’t stand by and watch discouragement on one side and fear and suspicion on the other. He got involved. By his actions and his words, he became a bridge and brought understanding.

I remember when two of my sons were arguing. My husband told them to sit on a couch and put their foreheads together. My sons first looked at their dad like he had lost his mind, then did as he said. Sure enough—eye contact soon had them laughing. They forgot their argument.

(Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
1 Corinthians 13:7 NASB

Barnabas loved God and the apostles. He believed in Saul and had great hope for what he saw in him. He even endured possible censure to stake his reputation on it.

Thank you Lord, for the example of Barnabas!

THE CHURCH AT PEACE

Princess Comfort here. I love peace, good will, no stress, no smudge on my daily horizon. I love “kicking down the cobblestones, looking for fun and feeling groovy.” I love to see community in unity—communal conversation, and joking around, and connective joy. Who doesn’t? Isn’t that what we’re made for? It is. The times we do enjoy it here reminds us it’s *waiting for us there*. Forever!

Read Acts 9:31.

To be in a season of peace and comfort does not equal being stagnant. While they were in this season, work was still being done. Their numbers were increasing! They were still living into their fear of the Lord, they were still moving in the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to encourage and comfort. While they were in this season of peace and comfort, that foretaste of heaven, they were full steam ahead in furthering the kingdom of God.

So, when life is smooth, when no one's pushing back on your beliefs, how do *you* respond? Do you lean in, or lean back?

When life feels peaceful and I'm unchallenged in my faith, I tend to...

- ☐ *Relax and enjoy the break (not thinking much about mission)*
- ☐ *Stay steady in prayer, scripture, and growth*
- ☐ *Look for someone I can serve or encourage*
- ☐ *Drift into spiritual autopilot*
- ☐ *Ask God how He wants me to use this season*
- ☐ *Feel unsure what to do when things are "too quiet"*

Read Nehemiah 4:17.

I love the story of Nehemiah. I love the shoulder-to-shoulder image in Nehemiah chapter 3 of Jews from every walk of life rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem together. They did so with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other.

The believers in Acts went about the business of building the Kingdom of God in their everyday lives. They enjoyed fellowship while they had opportunity, and at the same time stayed on mission.

No matter what season we are in, a time of peace or a time of affliction, it doesn't mean there aren't others who still need Him. Just because we are "good", that all is currently fine with us, doesn't mean we get a vacation from the mission. If I know fully who He is, if I know His love for me, my work for His Kingdom should never stop. Good days or bad, our times are in His hands. *Your Kingdom come, your will be done.* May we pray it daily.

PETER'S SPIRIT-LED ADVENTURES

We last heard from Peter when he was sent to Samaria for the purpose of praying for believers to receive the Holy Spirit. He also took Simon, the former magician, to task for presumption. After traveling around a bit, Peter came to visit some believers in Lydda.

Read Acts 9:32-43.

What does Peter say to Aeneas? _____

He makes it clear to Aeneas, to all who will hear of it later, and likely to himself that he is not the one doing the healing. It's a very important distinction that Peter makes. It's a pattern he continues after the healing of the lame man in Acts 3.

Read Acts 3:12,16 and Acts 4:29-30.

Peter could not heal anyone. *Jesus could.* We cannot heal anyone. *Jesus can.*

Write out 2 Corinthians 4:7. _____

When God uses Peter to heal Aeneas and Tabitha, he mirrored Jesus's healing ministry recorded in Mark 2:11, where Jesus commands a paralytic to "*Rise, take up your mat and walk.*" This deliberate use of the command "rise" highlights how the early Church is actively continuing the mission of Jesus through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Both Peter and Jesus use the Greek word:

ἀνάστα (Anasta) : Rise or get up.

The word *anasta* carries deeper meaning beyond the physical act: it implies a change in posture and a decisive action toward new life and restoration. In the context of healing, *anasta* symbolizes God's power allowing a person to leave behind their old status and step into fullness of life.

Anasta encapsulates the gospel's message of resurrection life: leaving the old behind and walking forward empowered by God's grace and Spirit.

Look at a fallout of what God did in **Acts 9:35**. What was the result of Aeneas' healing?

Al!! My, my. That is one potent healing!

Believing in God's resurrection power, write a prayer that He would demonstrate this on behalf of the person you committed to praying for on Day 4.

Wasn't it great to step into the ninth chapter of Acts this week? We sat **shiva** with Saul. (Over his old life.) We dragged our feet like Ananias. (And kept going.) We took a firebrand new convert in one hand and passel of dubious apostles in the other and made them sit on the couch and look at each other. We enjoyed peace with the brethren while staying on task. And we rejoiced at all God had done through a clay jar, at the Name of Jesus Christ.

This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
Psalm 118:23 NASB

WORD FOCUS

'Shiva'

The Jewish mourning tradition is called sitting shiva. Shiva means "seven," and reflects the seven-day period of mourning observed after burial.

During shiva, close family members stay home, pause normal activities, and receive guests. Visitors sit lower than the mourners and wait in silence until the grieving speak first, offering presence without pressure.

Mirrors are covered to turn attention away from appearance and toward inner reflection and grief. Mourners wear torn clothing and refrain from personal grooming, as an outward sign of sorrow. Prayers are recited in community.

At the end of seven sacred days, the formal period of mourning concludes, and mourners are expected to honor the loss in their resumed normal rhythms of life.

ACTS 9

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 9

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 10+11

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Over the past few chapters of Acts we've watched the apostles *speaking* the Gospel to brothers and sisters who were waiting, watching, and listening—and were transformed! This is called **oral tradition**: the practice of passing down Biblical knowledge through spoken word. When we listen to others speak we don't get to rush them. We have to sit and be still. There is something so beautiful about the rhythmic cadence unique to each speaker. Our God did that! I love music and tone. So, knowing each voice was so distinctly and purposefully created by our Jesus makes my heart sing.

Scripture is no different. It is the gift of God's voice, His very presence breathed in and over every word and page of our Bibles. Today we get the privilege of experiencing God through the connection of Acts 10 and 11. The ancients didn't always have a written copy of the Bible; a lot of their experience with God's Word was listening. So, today, on our first day of the week, let's step into their sandals. You will need roughly 10 minutes to listen to both chapters.

Today's invitation is to simply listen. Don't make any notes, don't rush, just listen.

Listen to Acts 10 and 11.

Breathe, pause. Now...

Listen again and this time take note of anything that sticks out to you.

ACTS 10+11
AUDIO

NIV

By Bible Gateway

ACTS 10 AUDIO



ACTS 11 AUDIO



Scan the QR codes to listen.

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Yesterday we sat and we listened. Today I am beckoning you, with renewed awe, to recognize the *gift* most of us possess. Most of us own a Bible. Most of us may own more than one Bible. In my home we even have Bibles in Spanish; this is an abundant privilege. With that in mind, for our active engagement through Acts 10 and 11, I am going to ask you to put down your phone. Put down your Bible app and grab *your Bible*. Take it into your hands. Feel the weight of it. Is the cover rough or smooth? Is the binding worn or crisp? My Bible has years of notes in a myriad of colors. But maybe you and I are different. My husband's well-loved Bible is in straight, out-of-the-box, mint condition, and that is beautiful, too! Whichever condition your Bible is in, take it out and turn with me to Acts.

Enter into His presence with the awe He deserves and the reverence He requires. Enter expectantly. Enter boldly (Hebrews 4:16).

Read Acts 10 and 11.

1. Go through Acts 10 and 11 and **break them into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Pick a color and **underline anything that reveals God's character**, whether through His actions, words, or how He shows up in the story.
3. In a different color, **highlight any repeated numbers** you notice in the passage. Pay attention to how often each number appears and what it's connected to.
4. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
5. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it after the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 10

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. **2** He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. **3** One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

SECTION TITLES

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. **5** Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. **6** He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. **8** He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. **10** He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. **11** He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. **12** It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. **13** Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. **18** They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. **20** So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you

SECTION TITLES

have to say.” **23** Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. **24** The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25** As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. **26** But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. **28** He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. **29** So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

30 Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me **31** and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. **32** Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ **33** So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism **35** but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. **36** You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— **38** how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, **40** but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. **41** He was not seen by all the

people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **42** He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. **43** All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. **46** For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, **47** “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” **48** So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

ACTS 10 SUMMARY

ACTS 11

1 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him **3** and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

4 Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: **5** “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. **6** I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. **7** Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

8 “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

SECTION TITLES

SECTION TITLES

SECTION TITLES

9 “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ **10** This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. **12** The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. **13** He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. **14** He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

15 “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. **16** Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ **17** So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. **20** Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. **21** The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. **24** He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, **26** and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. **28** One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) **29** The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. **30** This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 11 SUMMARY

DAY 3: WHERE YOU LEAD

To start our time together let's establish some definitions. In this week's passages the thread of leadership is connected from start to finish, so let's start there.

In your own words, define "leadership".

Leadership will have different meanings to different people depending on their life experiences. For some the term will bring out reverence and respect, but for others it may stir up feelings of disappointment, frustration or pain. Defining it in our own words flushes out where our hearts are stalled, where they are resting, or where they are focused. As we will learn in our text this week, depending on who you were, Cornelius could've stirred up either a good impression or a bad impression of leadership.

Now, according to Google, what is the definition of "leadership"?

How does this definition match or differ from your definition?

The examples of leadership we may have encountered in our lives can often produce a worldly depiction of what leadership looks like. But God calls His leaders to something greater. Or maybe more accurately, lower. Just like we did in Acts 3, let's "string some pearls" again as we look at God's call on those he's put into leadership. (Page 56)

Read the following:

Matthew 20:26
Philippians 2:3

John 13:13-17
Hebrews 13:7

Now that you've read God's perfect Word, write how He defines "leadership".

Are you this kind of leader? Do you know someone who is? How many leaders have you met who truly live out the biblical model of leadership?

Name one or two who stand out to you. What specific characteristics did they exhibit? How did they look different from worldly leaders?

With God's definition of 'leader' in mind, let's dive into the story of *Cornelius*.

Read Acts 10:1.

What was his occupation? _____

Look up a definition for centurion. _____

Who does Cornelius work for? _____

According to commentators, Cornelius was a Roman army officer. Thirty-two Italian cohorts like his were stationed across the empire. They were elite units made up of Italian *volunteers*, known for their exceptional loyalty.

Without diving into the rest of the passage, we see a micro view here of our friend Cornelius' career, and it's a pretty controversial one. Cornelius was a loyal servant of Rome, the very empire oppressing Israel.

What is your initial impression of Cornelius? What assumptions does his career choice lead you to make about who he is and what he stands for?

In our eyes, and probably in the eyes of his Jewish neighbors, Cornelius wouldn't qualify as a "good" biblical leader based on his current job description. The micro view isn't looking too good for Cornelius. I know when I read it for the first time I couldn't believe his *chosen* profession. But then again, I am not surprised. The Old Testament is filled with stories of servants of God working **for** or **with** those who seem to be in opposition to the Most High (think Joseph, Esther, Nehemiah, Daniel).

To get the macro view of Cornelius, we should zoom out and look beyond his job.

Read Acts 10:2.

How does this verse describe Cornelius, the volunteer soldier loyal to Rome?

We may not fully agree with Cornelius's occupation, but it's hard to deny the strength of his character. That's why we need both a macro and micro view of his life. When our perspective is too narrow, we risk staying stuck in judgment. But if it's too broad, we might miss the small details that God values so deeply. God includes both perspectives in Scripture because *He sees* the whole picture.

In Acts 10:2, we get a glimpse at Cornelius' character, but who else is mentioned in this verse?

Herein lies true leadership. Cornelius wasn't just devout, God-fearing, generous or in constant prayer on his own. He was a disciple making disciples, whether he knew it or not. These actions trickled down to his family, establishing a beautiful legacy of faith.

According to the example of Cornelius, where should biblical leadership start?

Make a list of everyone who lives within your home (ie. parents, grandparents, spouse, kids, roommates). If you live on your own, make a list of your closest community.

In what ways are *you* currently leading in your home? Take a moment to reflect on ways you have been leading in everyday life. Leading isn't always loud and obvious. Often, it looks like quiet, steady faithfulness.

Use the list below to think about areas you may feel called to step into leadership in *new* ways.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Praying for your household</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Encouraging and building others up</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Serving in mundane, everyday ways</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Disciplining with grace</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Modeling study, prayer, and worship</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other: _____</i> |

Our lives are not our own. We have been placed in our homes and communities to live lives on mission, sacrificially and intentionally pursuing those around us.

Write out 1 Peter 2:9.

Cornelius was the chosen leader of his home and his priorities were apparent.

Read Acts 10:22.

If we really believe the Bible is true, and we believe it was written by God, then despite all of our imperfections, we are called to lead.

How would you describe where you are in your leadership journey?

- ☐ *Please don't follow me*
- ☐ *Tentatively leading*
- ☐ *Confidently leading*

Our leadership is molded and influenced by those we follow. Our confidence, or lack thereof, could potentially have something to do with who we are following.

Examine who you listen to. Are you more in tune with the voices of influencers, authors, and entertainers than with the voice of God through His Word and prayer? Does your use of time reflect a craving for the world's easily accessible content or a genuine desire for a deeper, intimate relationship with Jesus, even if that takes more intentional effort?

Ultimately, the real test lies in the fruit. Are you becoming more like Christ? Do the people or things you invest time in help you reflect the characteristics of Jesus: compassion, graciousness, slowness to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiveness, justice (Exodus 34:6-7)? If not, it may be time for us to refocus our hearts and our schedules around time *with* Him—woven into the rhythms of our daily lives.

Take some time to reflect: *If Jesus isn't getting the best and most of you: who or what is?* What is God asking you to give up? What is He asking you to take up? Use the lines below to process.

Read Acts 10:1-27. You will find the following characteristics of Cornelius and his family: Devout, God-fearing, generous, prayerful, humble, sharing the Gospel.

Let's string some pearls. Cornelius was modeling the character God had called his people to for generations. Look up the verses in the left column and **match** Cornelius' character traits on the right to an Old Testament example.

VERSE	CHARACTER TRAIT
1. Exodus 20:3	A. Devout
2. Exodus 20:4-5, Deuteronomy 10:12-13	B. Generous
3. Leviticus 19:9-10, Deuteronomy 24:19-21	C. God-fearing
4. Deuteronomy 6:4-9	D. Humble
5. Proverbs 11:2	E. Prayerful
6. Daniel 6:10	F. Evangelistic

Name one person (besides Jesus) you currently follow, admire, or look to for influence.

******As you reflect on who you're choosing to follow or be influenced by, pause and ask: *Why* am I drawn to this person? Is it their platform, their charisma, their confidence? *Or* is it their Christlikeness? Do they draw me closer to God? In what ways would I want my own life to look more like theirs?

Cornelius took the best of what he saw around him that pointed him to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through their example, his prayers and generosity became a "memorial offering before God" (Acts 10:4). God stopped to notice his life of reverence and obedience.

Read Acts 10:3-8.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, prayed regularly and gave generously. His faith wasn't hidden. He obeyed God immediately, shared openly with his household, and invited others into his faith journey. His belief was genuine and contagious. In the same way, our love, awe, and desire for Jesus should be just as infectious!

What parts of your faith do you hope others are inspired to imitate?

What aspects of your own faith would you prefer others *not* imitate?

I want my life to echo the life of Cornelius. I want people to look at me and see Jesus. I want my desire to know Christ to overflow into my family and community. I desire to joyfully bring people into my home, where they can encounter God and be washed by the Word.

Let's ask God to help us with this. A great format is one I learned back in grade school which seems completely appropriate for our study—**A.C.T.S.**

Adoration. *We adore a King, He deserves our awe and reverence.*

Confession. *We confess to that same King who is mighty to save.*

Thanksgiving. *We bless our King who sacrificed everything to bring us to Him, safe in the shadow of His wings.*

Supplication (Requests). *We ask, and the Spirit according to the will of God, intercedes and our King lavishly opens the door. Lord give us the boldness and the faith of Cornelius who heard and listened.*

Using the A.C.T.S. format, write a prayer asking for Holy Spirit wisdom, wisdom that puts Jesus first and yourself last.

DAY 4: GENTLE SHEPHERD

On Day 3, we highlighted the strong leadership and character of Cornelius and his family. Cornelius was a man in good standing within his community. He was doing all the right things. Acts 10:22 states that Cornelius was respected by all the Jewish people. Even so, because he was a Gentile, the Jewish people kept themselves separate. Their God and salvation through Christ was for the Jews only, not the Gentiles. Let's spend time discovering how God invites this Gentile centurion into His Kingdom, breaks down barriers and continues to expand His family beyond one people group.

He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 12:48-50

Read Acts 11:1-3.

It sounds like the apostles and believers were a bit upset. What did they do and what was their reasoning?

What *good news* had the believers and apostles in Jerusalem received about Cornelius and his Gentile family?

Instead of rejoicing that an entire family had received the Word of God, the believers and apostles were upset that Peter even entered a Gentile's home, just because they weren't Jewish. *'Really?' I catch myself shaking my head from atop my high horse.*

And then it hits me. How often have I drawn lines where God never did?

******Have you ever held a conviction that led you to judge someone else who didn't share it? Or maybe you judged them too soon, before really getting to know them? If you honestly examine your heart in those moments, what do you find your response is rooted in?

- ☐ *I tend to be quick to judge, assuming I know what's right and wrong in the moment.*
- ☐ *I crave justice and want to see things made right, even if my response is harsh.*
- ☐ *I rely on my good intentions and often respond instinctively without really thinking.*
- ☐ *I am full of compassion, but my response can sometimes lack truth.*
- ☐ *Other:* _____

Before we take time to pray, pause and quietly consider what you just uncovered about your heart. What judgments, assumptions, or quick responses do you need to bring honestly before God? This is your chance to be completely transparent with the Father, who welcomes you just as you are. Ask Him to reveal any blind spots and give you the grace to grow in both truth and love.

Now, **spend some time in prayer** using the A.C.T.S. format from yesterday to guide you. (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication).



Acts 11:1 says the apostles and the believers heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God and then criticized Peter for engaging and eating with them. But Peter himself was one of these apostles. What happened? What caused Peter to think differently than his fellow apostles?

Go back and **read Acts 10:9-20**. Summarize what Peter saw and take special notice of **verse 15**.

Peter's **kosher** world was rocked! He'd spent his whole life living by Leviticus 11—what to eat, what not to eat, all the rules. But now? Everything changed. God wasn't just freeing him from food laws, He was freeing him from the biases and barriers he had toward the people that didn't follow those laws. I love that God includes this shepherding of Peter. He knows his understanding needs to be stretched. He is kindly guiding him so that the Kingdom of Heaven can break forth!

Peter encountered the Lord three times in this chapter (think back to last week's homework with the "Deeper Dive" on 3's, page 183). He received three specific instructions. List the verses from chapter 10 and their instructions below:

Acts 10:13 _____

Acts 10:15 _____

Acts 10:19-20 _____

WORD FOCUS

'Kosher'

Kosher refers to food that is fit or proper according to Jewish dietary laws found in the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament). These laws outline what can be eaten, how it's prepared, and how it's handled, forming a key part of Jewish identity and obedience to God's commands.

"You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground, those that I have set apart as unclean for you. You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own."
Leviticus 20:25-26

See also: Leviticus 11

The Lord interrupted Peter's worldview with fresh instructions. As commentator David Guzik states, "Peter was willing to re-examine his traditions and prejudices in light of God's Word." This invites us to ask: am I willing to take that same step? What deeply rooted cultural or religious assumptions might the Lord be surfacing in you? Are there things He's asking you to surrender?

God is a Good Shepherd. If He has asked you to release something, you can trust Him to guide and sustain you.

Where does this gentle shepherding lead Peter? It leads him to Caesarea. It leads him to the home of Cornelius. It leads him to boldly share the Way, the Truth, and the Life that only comes from Jesus Christ. It leads him to recognize that favoritism is not in God's vocabulary—neither Jew nor Gentile is excluded from His grace.

Write out Acts 10:35.

Every nation. Every tongue. Every tribe.

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.
Acts 11:9

Now, remember those apostles and religious leaders we read about in the beginning of Acts 11? The ones who were peeved about Peter entering the home of a Gentile (impure and uncircumcised), carelessly glossing over the mighty work of the Spirit in the lives of those same Gentiles?! We just saw God gently shepherd Peter. Let's see how He steps in to open their eyes as well.

Read Acts 11:4-18.

Peter starts from the very beginning. He recounts the entire story: the trance, the vision, the weird sheet with dead animals, birds and reptiles, the voice, his three objections, the men who came from Cornelius three times, Cornelius' angel, and then the grand finale; "The Holy Spirit came on them!"

Fill in the blank: Acts 11:17.

"So if _____ gave them the _____ gift He gave us who
believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think
_____?"

Peter recognized that his favoritism and obedience to God's commands were not compatible. At times, true obedience to God is going to challenge our natural instincts.

'You, then, why do you judge your brother and sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.' So, then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.'
Romans 12:10-13a

Let's release the weight of being judge and jury. Give that over to God. When we hear of His Good News and the spreading of His Gospel, let's check our response. We should be full of joy! And if we aren't, let's remember how the Lord shepherded Peter's heart and ask Him to change ours as well.

Read and write out Acts 11:18.

Go forth in *joy* brothers and sisters! We serve the *same* God. We receive the *same Holy Spirit*. Therefore, we can have the *same faith* as Peter, Cornelius and the believers in Jerusalem.

DAY 5: THE FOUR CORNERS

Acts 10 and 11 substantiate God's plan in bringing all peoples, nations and cultures to himself. What started with the salvation of Cornelius and his family continues to spread throughout the region, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.

Reread Acts 10:9-23 to revisit Peter's vision.

Heaven opened and a veil was lowered, being held by its four corners. Within those four corners was an array of animals deemed impure and unclean, unfit for food.

What were the animals listed? _____

What do these animals have in common? _____

If you came up with an answer here, bravo! The commonality I found was that they breathed and they were all created by the same Creator, but that's about it. However the true similarity was that they were all *redeemed* and all *restored*.

When Peter witnesses the Holy Spirit fall on the family of Cornelius it becomes clear to him that God is completely *impartial* and deeply desires for the gospel to reach all people, not just a select group. So, if we are to be like Jesus, and if we are to reach the whole world as He commanded, (Matthew 28:19-20) then let's do some reflecting.

******What are the four corners of your world? Can you list four places within your world that the Lord may be calling you to share the Gospel?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

******Have you ever told the Lord you're willing to be used wherever He sends you—your "four corners"? What might be holding you back? What's standing in the way of your willingness to "go"?

Read Acts 11:19-21.

What had happened to cause a scattering of believers?

With whom were these believers sharing the message?

Acts 11:19 _____

Acts 11:20 _____

What was the result of the message being shared?

Acts 11:21 _____

When faced with persecution, Christians are often forced to flee their homes and communities. This scattering can lead to the gospel being carried to new regions and among new people groups. The persecution following Stephen's death led believers to preach the gospel in Judea, Samaria, and even as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

Read Acts 11:22-26.

Once news of the spread of the gospel reached the church of Jerusalem, reinforcements were sent.

What was Barnabas' first response upon arrival? _____

Who did Barnabas go looking for? _____

Together, what did they do in Antioch? _____

God is faithful! He calls us to share the good news of what He has done in our lives and He takes care of finishing the work in us and in others! We need only be willing. Does this bring encouragement in stepping out in faith with the 'four corners' you listed at the beginning of today's homework?

Close out today remembering the grace, mercy and kindness of God. He chose you to be His disciple. He believes you can become just like Him! He also gave you a rich heritage of faithful believers who have gone before you. They obeyed His command to make disciples and you are here today because of their faithfulness. Now, you have been grafted into this mission! Who in your life could you invite into this heritage?

Write a prayer of commitment to those God has placed on your heart, leaving any uncertainty squarely at His feet.

Acts 10 and 11 invite us to reflect on the wideness of God's mercy and the radical inclusivity of the Gospel. As God challenged Peter's assumptions and expanded his vision, we too are called to honestly look inward. These chapters remind us that no one is beyond God's reach, and that He is always at work, often in ways that stretch our comfort but reveal His heart.

Our God is the God of redemption, the one who carried the weight on the cross and made a way for us to be cleansed and restored. When we "go" to our four corners and share the Good News of the Gospel, we invite people into God's Kingdom. We invite people into the presence of the healer and redeemer and He does the work of making the broken whole and the unclean clean. Transformation is His work alone.

ACTS 10+11

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 10+11

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 12

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Let's begin like the body of Christ in our reading this week from Acts 12. We find them in **constant prayer** (Acts 12:5), better translated to "earnestly praying". The Greek word for earnest is *ektenos*, used also in Luke 22:44 to describe the agonizing prayer of Jesus when He is in the Garden of Gethsemane. This verb is close to the Greek word *ektenes*, which is a term used in the medical field to describe "stretching of a muscle to its limits."

Do we pray in earnest? Do we seek His word and truth in earnest? I invite you to do that today—now. Earnest prayer gives us a heart posture that shows we care passionately about the things of God. So let us approach the text this week stretching our hearts and minds to their limits, opening ourselves up to what He has for us.

Before you read, pray—earnestly—like the first Christians. If time feels like a distraction, setting a timer can free your mind to focus on what matters. Ask God to reveal Himself to you in the text today.

When you're ready, **read Acts 12.** (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

Reflect on what you've read. Sit with it and ponder the events. Grab a new cup of coffee—or heat up the old one if needed—and **read Acts 12 through again slowly.**

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Every time I read Acts 12, I am struck by the contrasts that occur throughout the chapter, as well as the abrupt double-shift at the end with Herod's death and an update on Barnabas and Saul. When I first read it, I was captivated by the paths of wonder and curiosity it opened—and I hope it did the same for you yesterday.

You've already read it through twice. So this time, if something makes you pause, then allow the pause and think about it. If something causes you to wonder what's going on, write your question in the margin. This is where pen hits paper as we begin to interact with the text—pause and be curious, ask your questions, and notice the shifts in the story. If your curiosity and questions take you down a rabbit trail, then follow that rabbit (aka the Lord in this case) and venture out to find some answers! The **Blue Letter Bible**, commentaries, or the good ol' internet are great tools for when you're ready to take a step further into studying His Word.



1. Go through Acts 12 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. This week, **highlight repeated words** that you see and write them down. You may use colored pens, markers, highlighters or different symbols to connect the repeated words. Write the words you find that repeat here. Also this week, **write down any observations** you have about the repeated words.

4. Another extra step we will take this week is to notice and **write down the contrasts** present in this chapter. Examples of contrast might be *light and darkness* or *life and death*.

5. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write it at the end of the text.

ACTS 12

SECTION TITLES

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. **2** He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. **3** When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. **4** After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. **7** Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. **9** Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. **10** They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. **13** Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. **14** When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept

SECTION TITLES

insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. **17** Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

18 In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. **19** After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. **20** He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. **22** They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." **23** Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

ACTS 12 SUMMARY

DAY 3: LAST CALL FOR HEROD AGRIPPA

We ended chapter 11 last week with the latest on Barnabas and Saul. This chapter deviates from their voyage—similar to how the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 is wedged between the pages of Joseph’s life story. The deviation we take this time is largely for Herod Agrippa. God must want us to learn something important about Herod’s life, which is why an entire chapter of Scripture is devoted to the end of his life and his death!

Let's do some history work on Herod, shall we?

You might have noticed that several men in the New Testament are called Herod. 'Herod' was both a family name and a title used by members of a ruling dynasty in Palestine, appointed by the Roman emperors.

To understand how we arrived at Herod Agrippa, let's begin with the first and most notorious Herod mentioned in the New Testament: Herod the Great.

HEROD THE GREAT

Read Matthew 2. Do additional internet searches to find out more and write your findings.

Who was he? _____

What was he famous for? _____

When did he rule? _____

Who did Herod the Great give his kingdom to? _____

Describe his character. _____

Other interesting facts about Herod the Great: _____

HEROD TETRARCH (ANTIPAS)

Read the following verses: **Luke 3:1,19-20; Matthew 14:1-11; Luke 23:8-11.**

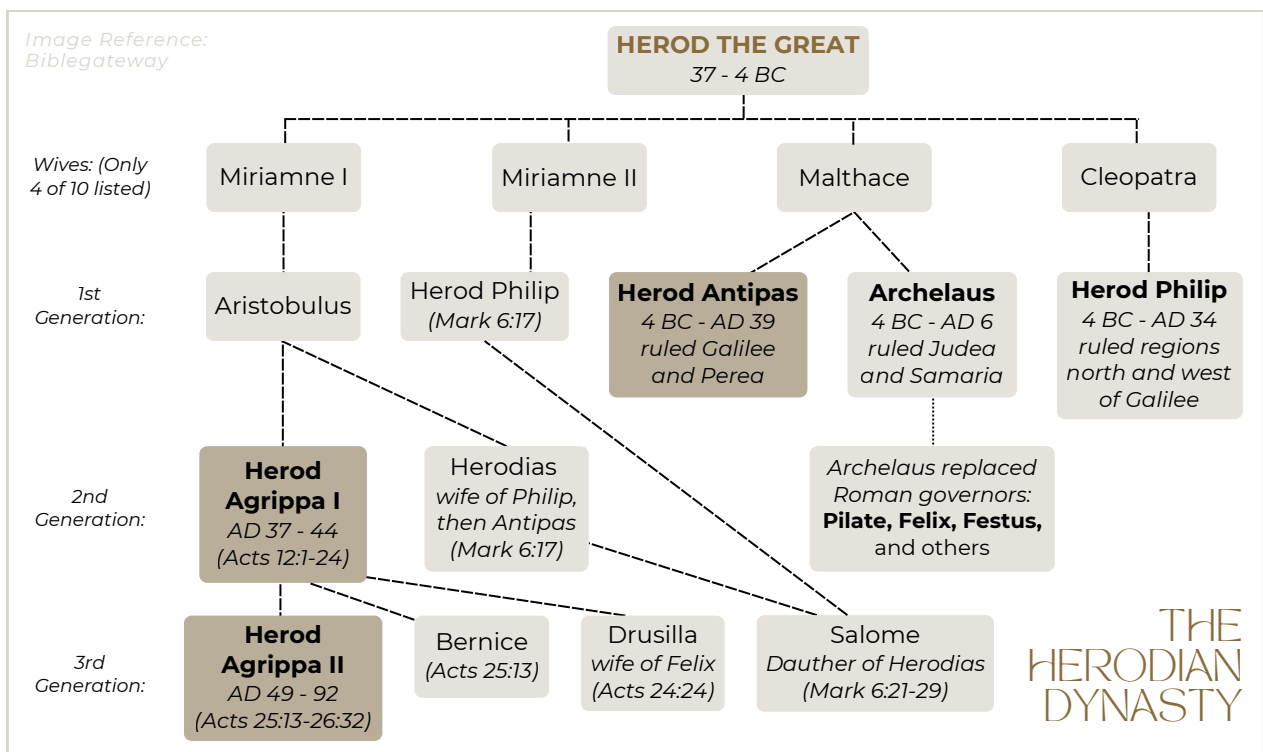
Write things you found out about Herod Tetrarch from your verses. Additionally, search the internet to find out more and write your findings.

HEROD AGRIPPA I

What does **Acts 12:1-4** suggest about Herod's personality or motivations? _____

What about **verses 20-23**? _____

According to Jewish historian Josephus' records, here are some helpful dates for who reigned when:



Our text this week focuses on Herod Agrippa I, a second-generation ruler and grandson of Herod the Great. He came from a family marked by violence, pride, and destruction—and he followed right in their footsteps, which ultimately led to his untimely death. The Agrippa we will see mentioned in the following chapters of Acts is Herod Agrippa II.

Herod Agrippa I's death wasn't immediate, even though the Greek word used in verse 23 for "died" is the same word used in Acts 5:5 and 5:10, where Ananias and Sapphira suddenly dropped dead. According to Josephus, Agrippa was "struck down" with intense stomach pains that lasted five days before he finally died—from worms in his stomach.

What is the reason **verse 23** says Herod died? _____

For some reason, the people of Tyre and Sidon were on Herod's bad side. So to try and remedy it, they exclaimed that he was a god, not a man. And because Herod sought glory for himself, he was killed. The people of Tyre and Sidon weren't killed. Their bellies weren't filled with parasites. God must have known something we don't know. Sometimes God does things that don't always make sense to us—but that doesn't mean they're without purpose. His justice and mercy aren't always measured by our standards, and we're not always meant to understand them fully in the moment.

Let's look to the Old Testament and read some stories of those who had similar fates to Herod:

Read Genesis 19:15-26. Why was Lot's wife killed? _____

Read Genesis 38:7-10. Why were Er and Onan killed? _____

Read 2 Samuel 6:7 and Jeremiah 28:12-17. Why was Uzzah killed? _____

There are so many examples of people dying from sin and judgement in the Old Testament. The New Testament only has 4, and 3 occur in Acts: Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5 and then Herod Agrippa from this week.

If you're anything like me, you've probably struggled to reconcile with this image of God; the fire-and-brimstone figure who rains down fire from heaven and seems ready to strike people down the moment they stumble into sin.

Take a look at the sliding scale below—where do you find yourself when it comes to your view of God’s wrath and judgment?



Let’s take a closer look at the true character of the God we serve. Read the verses below and write down how each one describes God in the space provided.

VERSE(S)	WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT GOD?
Genesis 1:27	
Acts 3:15	
Genesis 2:7; Job 1:21 & 12:10; Acts 17:25	
Psalms 99:8; Proverbs 11:21; Romans 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:6	
Proverbs 11:19; Romans 1:32	

Our earthly perspective is almost always upside-down compared to God’s. When we begin to understand more clearly who God is, our views on life, justice, and how the world should work begin to shift. And when we grasp the true weight and consequences of sin, our understanding of why God responds to it so seriously also changes. He owes us nothing. Yet He gave us everything

Let’s look at a few key verses that show us the reality of sin:

Romans 6:23a: *For the wages of sin is death.*

Isaiah 59:2: *But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

Proverbs 14:12: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*

Romans 3:23a: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

In your own words, summarize what these verses say about sin: _____

****Now pause.** How aware are you of the full weight of your sin? What about its consequences? Take a moment to ask God to help you feel the seriousness of it—to help you see your sin clearly, not through shame, but through truth. If the Holy Spirit leads you to, write a prayer of confession below.

Sin is not just a mistake or a bad habit. It's costly. It separates us from the very One who created us—our loving, holy, heavenly Father. From the beginning, God made it clear: the consequence of sin is death. Eternal death.

But here's the hope: the more deeply we understand our sin, the more clearly we can see how *incredible* Jesus's sacrifice truly is. If *my* sin deserves death, and Jesus willingly took that punishment so I could have eternal life with Him—then I'm left in awe.

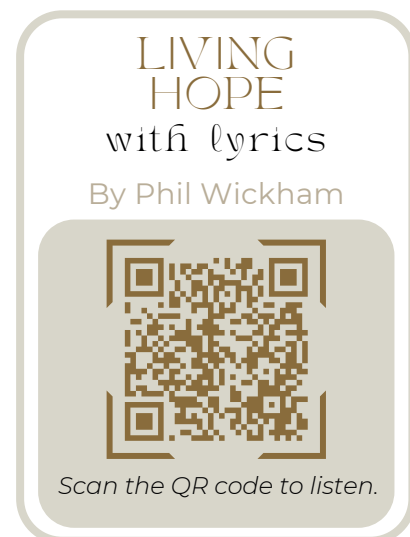
And that changes everything.

When we struggle with stories in Scripture (like Herod being struck down) it helps to remember that God sees the full weight of sin in ways we often can't. Herod wasn't just a flawed leader; he came from a legacy of deep, violent rebellion against God. Honestly, it's astonishing God was so patient for so long.

Let's close our day in awe—awe of His mercy, His holiness, and His undeserving grace. Read and then listen to this verse from **Living Hope** by Phil Wickham.

*Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame*

*The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The king of kings calls me His own
Beautiful savior, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope*



DAY 4: STRETCHED TO LIMITS

After yesterday, I hope you've come away with a clearer picture of Herod and the world the early Christians lived in. In the chapters leading up to this week, we've witnessed miracles, the Church breaking forth, and the powerful effects of the Holy Spirit being poured out on people. But this week, we start to see more cracks in the success and excitement of being an early Christ-follower—starting with the death and martyrdom of James.

Who was this James? As is often the case in the Bible, multiple people share the same name, so we can begin by clarifying which James we are really talking about here.

Read Acts 12:2. Who does it say James is? _____

Read Matthew 17:1 and Mark 5:37. Who is within Jesus' inner circle?

Read Matthew 26:36-37. How are James and John referred to here?

Read Matthew 4:21. Who is Zebedee? _____

Read Matthew 27:55-56. Who was with Jesus when He was crucified? _____

Based on this reading, what conclusions can you draw about James and John? What about their parents?

Read Matthew 20:20-23 and summarize it.

James, brother of John, son of Zebedee. A fisherman called from his nets, turned disciple, turned apostle. He stood alongside his mother as she made the bold request of Jesus: that her sons might sit at His right and left in glory.

Jesus answered not with denial, but with a question: “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” Without hesitation, James said yes, not fully knowing what that would mean. But in time, he did. He drank that cup of suffering, of obedience, of costly discipleship.

James became the first of the twelve to be martyred. His life became the answer to the request: not in power or prestige, but in sacrifice and faithfulness to the end.

What happens immediately following the death of James in **Acts 12:3-4**?

How did the church respond in **Acts 12:5**? _____

The sheer simplicity of the church’s response...they prayed. No rescue plan, no strategy, no campaign to clear Peter’s name. Just prayer.

That’s usually not my first instinct. When things go wrong, I want to fix it, manage it, text someone (or 10 people), or worry myself into exhaustion. But here, their leader is in prison, James has already been killed, and still, they don’t start with action. *They start with prayer.*

What if we lived like that? What if our first move wasn’t to figure it out, but to fall to our knees? *What if we really believed that prayer is the most powerful thing we can do?*

******Can you think of a time when nothing you did could fix it—but God showed up anyway? Write about it.

Remember on Day 1 when we referenced Acts 12:5? “The church was *earnestly* praying to God for [Peter].” If you’ll remember, that word ‘earnestly’ comes from the Greek word *ektenos*, an adverb derived from the verb *ektenes*, meaning “to stretch out.” It paints a picture of muscles being stretched to their limits. This wasn’t a casual, passing prayer. This was a desperate, continuous, pleading prayer.

Why are they praying so earnestly?

Because they just witnessed James' execution. And if you remember from Acts 5:17-21, Peter had already had a miraculous escape from prison with the help of the Angel of the Lord! From a human perspective, it seems the chances that God would choose to intervene here on behalf of Peter a second time are slim. Add on to that the fact that he *didn't* intervene for James, and it seems pretty impossible that Peter's walking out of here alive.

What holds you back from praying with that kind of intensity? Do you tend to slip into "autopilot" when praying for the needs around you? Check all the boxes that apply.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boredom | <input type="checkbox"/> Unbelief |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doubt | <input type="checkbox"/> Life's too busy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distraction | <input type="checkbox"/> Self Focused |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaustion | <input type="checkbox"/> Apathy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

******What would change in your prayer life if you approached God more like someone stretching out a hand for help rather than checking off a spiritual task?

Maybe you're struggling with a deeper feeling that's not on the list—like wondering, "*What's the point?*" When death and despair are the answer to earnest prayers on behalf of James, why would the church pray again? *And in earnest?*

The church's response to James' death and Peter's imprisonment is really something to marvel at. We may consider it a simple act but it was anything but easy. It really required stretching to the limit.

When you are discouraged and despairing, can you engage in *dark (desperate) kneeling*: still kneeling before the Father in the complete absence of answers, light, and hope?

Maybe you are in a season right now that the Lord is inviting you to continue to pray in earnest. What would it look like to engage in *dark kneeling*? Or maybe you've experienced a desert of deserts in your past and just closing your eyes brings those memories to the forefront of your mind.

If you are currently in that season, take some time to write a prayer. Like the early church, stretch yourself. Kneel. If you are remembering a season of *dark kneeling*, reflect and write about it here. If you need more space, feel free to use the occasional blank pages in between chapters.

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.
Job 13:15

Finish your day in prayer.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the early church and for faithful ones like Job who went before us, showing what it means to trust You wholeheartedly. Help me to pray with that same kind of earnest faith, especially when the path ahead feels uncertain or hopeless. When despair threatens to take hold, draw my eyes back to You—my source of hope, strength, and every good thing. Remind me of who You are, and anchor my heart in Your unchanging truth.

DAY 5: CONTRASTS TO THE FINAL STRETCH

But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.
Acts 12:24

There is still so much to unpack from our short 25 verses this week!

Remember how many contrasts are all over this text? Go back to your Day 2 homework and re-write your answer from question 4.

It's time we get to look at some of the contrasts you wrote down from this passage and break them down. Your list might be longer, but we will break down some of the key contrasts present.

CONTRAST: DEATH VERSUS DELIVERANCE

We open this week with the martyrdom of James. And yet, a few verses later, Peter is rescued from certain death. One apostle is executed, the other is miraculously saved—why does that happen?

What does persecution for some and/or deliverance for others tempt you to believe?

When life takes a hard turn—or when things fall apart completely—it's easy to assume we must've messed up. But following Jesus doesn't always lead to safety or ease. Sometimes, faithful obedience *still* leads to suffering.

So, does persecution mean we are on the wrong path?

Consider these texts. What does each one of these verses say about persecution?

2 Timothy 3:12 _____

John 15:18-20 _____

Matthew 5:10-12 _____

How does this potentially change your view of persecution? _____

You know what stood out to me this week? Peter is sleeping in prison. He wasn't afraid of persecution. He had no idea a miracle was coming; there's no hint in the passage that Peter expected to be rescued. He had completely surrendered to whatever God had in store for him, and somehow, that surrender gave him peace so real, he could actually sleep in the middle of a prison cell.

This is an invitation to just...rest. To trust that God's got you, even when it feels like you're chained up with no way out. This surrender isn't weakness, it's the open door to real peace.

This kind of trust enables us, whether in death or deliverance, to echo the words of Paul in Philippians 4:11-13: *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*

CONTRAST: RESCUE AND JUDGEMENT

The Angel of the Lord is an agent of rescue and judgement all over Scripture. Peter is miraculously rescued from prison by an angel while Herod is struck down by that same angel in an act of divine judgement.

Read Acts 12:8. What does the angel tell Peter to do? _____

Now compare that to **Exodus 12:11**. What do you notice?

The language in Acts 12:8 echoes the imagery of Passover in Exodus—the dressing, the urgency, the movement. Peter's escape is painted as another kind of Passover: He is still that same God sending His angel to rescue His people from death.

But just a few verses later (Acts 12:23), that same divine presence shows up in judgment—this time striking down Herod for his pride and refusal to give glory to God.

This theme isn't isolated. Throughout the Bible, the **Angel of the Lord** appears as both judge and rescuer. To some He is death to some He is life. The same divine presence brings opposite outcomes depending on the heart and posture of the people involved.

This tension—that the same holy God brings rescue to some and judgement on others—is echoed in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16: *"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death, but to the other the fragrance of life."*

STUDY PROMPT

Throughout the Bible, the Angel of the Lord appears as both judge and rescuer.

Search the Bible for passages that reveal God as judge: starting with *Isaiah 37:36*.

Search the Bible for passages that reveal God as rescuer: starting with *Exodus 14:19*.

CONTRAST: POLITICAL OPPRESSION VERSUS GOSPEL EXPANSION

The Jewish people are not new to political oppression. From the Israelites in Egypt to Herod the Great's massacre of infants, the Scriptures are full of examples of God's people being oppressed by political figures.

It's nothing new for Herod—or any ruler, really—to try to silence God's people through violence and intimidation. But you know what else isn't new? *The Word of God advancing in the face of it.*

God delivered His people from Egypt by opening the Red Sea, then brought it crashing down on their oppressors. And centuries later, Herod's paranoid attempt to kill Jesus drove Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt—fulfilling prophecy (Hosea 11:1) and preserving the life of the One through whom God's Kingdom would come.

Which is exactly what we see this week. But by the end of Acts chapter 12 and after generations of oppression from the line of Herod, “the word of God continued to spread and flourish” (Acts 12:24).

I've lived some stark contrasts myself—celebrating a beautiful wedding where a couple vowed their lives before the Lord, even as my own marriage was quietly unraveling at home. Or rejoicing in the birth of our daughter just a year after saying our earthly goodbyes to her Papa, my husband's father.

I've known friends who celebrated the birth of their best friend's baby just days after suffering a miscarriage. Another became her friend's loudest cheerleader when she landed her dream job, even as she quietly faced the heartbreak of closing her own business and unemployment.

What are some contrasts you've experienced in your life? Write them below.

Our world is full of contrasts. And to be honest, when my life is reflecting black and white, I start to question God. Ask, *where are you?* I also can get jealous of the good fortune of those around me, making it harder to celebrate with them due to my selfish focus on my suffering.

Why am I so quick to assume God isn't working when life is painful and glorious at the same time? What is it about my heart that is quick to see His hand in the joy but not in the suffering? Or maybe you're the opposite—it's easy for you to see God in your suffering but you forget about Him in your joy.

We can look at Acts 12 this week and recognize God's hand over *everything*. All for His Glory. We can look to the church as an example to respond to life's ups and downs by praying *earnestly*. And, we can look at the apostles. They were willing to die in the way Jesus did. They were willing to walk as Jesus walked and die as He died. God's promises are being fulfilled through His church and His bride. As they are dying for Him, they are seeds being planted (just as Jesus was) to continue to spread the gospel, bearing good fruit and producing a harvest that will be taken up in the end to the Lord.

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.
John 12:24

What does **Acts 12:24** tell us again? Write it out.

So why did James die and Peter didn't? Why did Herod Agrippa die and his father and grandfather didn't? Why does the Angel of the Lord bring rescue and judgement?

All for God's word to spread and *flourish*. Only He knows. Only He sees it all.

As we close out the final stretch this week, reflect back on what the Holy Spirit revealed to you through Acts 12. Take some time to write what He impressed on your heart. Flip back through the pages if you need a reminder. Jot down your takeaways below.

Finish with a prayer of praise for who our God is.

ACTS 12

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 12

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 13

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Before we step into Acts 13, let's take a moment and consider our posture. In his book *Savoring Scripture*, A. Abernathy reminds us,:

"As we enter our time of Bible reading, we need to begin by considering our posture before God. We come as children, dependent on God."

That's exactly how we want to begin. We come not as experts, but as beloved sons and daughters. Not to master the Word or impress God with our insight, but to be formed by it. We approach Scripture open-handed, aware of our need and trusting we will receive. Maybe this is your first time reading Acts 13, maybe it's your hundredth. Either way, pause and set aside what you think you know. Ask the Spirit to help you read with fresh eyes and a soft heart.

Read Acts 13. Let the story unfold. Don't rush to explain or solve, just listen.

Let's stay teachable. Let's stay interruptible. Let's come as children before a good and perfect Father.

Now what?! You guessed it! **Read it again.** *(Text provided in Day 2 homework.)*

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Yesterday, we slowed down to consider how we come to God's Word, as listeners, learners, as children dependent on the Spirit. Today, we step further into the chapter itself. Acts 13 is rich with movement: shifts in setting, characters and tone.

Where does the scene change? When does the focus shift from one person or place to another? What patterns or themes start to emerge? Trace the progression.

Resist the urge to force meaning or figure everything out on your own. Active engagement is about seeing clearly, not squeezing out answers.

Who knows what new insight or fresh wonder the Spirit might reveal today?

1. Go through Acts 13 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write at the end of the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 13

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. **2** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **3** So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, **7** who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. **9** Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, **10** "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? **11** Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. **12** When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. **15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! **17** The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; **18** for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; **19** and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. **20** All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. **21** Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. **22** After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

23 "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. **24** Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. **25** As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

26 "Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. **27** The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. **28** Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. **29** When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. **30** But God raised him from the dead, **31** and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

SECTION TITLES

32 “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors **33** he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

“You are my son;
today I have become your father.’

34 God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said,

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’

35 So it is also stated elsewhere:

“You will not let your holy one see decay.’

36 “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. **37** But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

38 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. **39** Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. **40** Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

41 “Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you.”

42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. **43** When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. **47** For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. **50** But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. **51** So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. **52** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 13 SUMMARY

DAY 3: THE STAGES OF SURRENDER

As we open our Bible to Acts 13 and step into Paul & Barnabas' first missionary journey, it is easy to graze past the first couple verses and jump to the action, but have we first considered what these moments hold? What was the backbone of Paul's ministry? Was it his surrender? His worship? His 'yes'? If you answered “all three” then ding, ding, ding! You are correct! Before we get there, though, let's back up a bit to verse one and get some background about the fellow believers God brought together to surround Paul & Barnabas.

Located in the Roman province of Syria (modern-day Turkey), about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, the city of Antioch was bursting with spiritual confusion. The people here worshiped Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon and Artemis. These idols shaped their everyday life. Yet, in the middle of this spiritually dark, idol-filled city, *God was building His church.*

Five names are listed in **Acts 13:1**. Let's do a little "Bible detective work" using whatever resources you can find. Write down the name of who each of these people are:

_____ : The man who carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26). His Roman name hints that he may have moved in Roman circles.

_____ : From North Africa, likely a Hellenistic Jew.

_____ : A man raised with *Herod Antipas*, the very ruler who had John the Baptist beheaded.

_____ : A Jew from *Cyprus*, the Mediterranean island.

_____ : A *Pharisee*, Roman citizen, and student of the best rabbis in Jerusalem.

Does anything surprise you about who God brought together to lead this new church? Even though these men came from different nations, cultures, and life experiences, one thing united them: **Jesus**. They each encountered the living God, and laid down their lives because of it. Left to themselves, they never would've crossed paths, *but God* gathered this group because they had the same *surrendered heart*.

In **verse 2**, what were they doing when the Holy Spirit spoke? _____

This moment is crucial. Their worship, prayer, and fasting created space for the Holy Spirit to move. Throughout Scripture, fasting appears as a powerful act of surrender, a posture where God's people humble themselves to seek His guidance and power. Read the following passages, and note below how God used fasting & prayer through Moses and then again with the church at Pentecost.

Exodus 34:28 _____

Acts 1:14 _____

Neither Moses nor the church knew what God was about to do. Being readers of these stories now, we get to see ahead, the explosiveness of God's response to their surrender and the impact that they had on those who they encountered, but to them, this was just another moment with their King. These five men in Antioch didn't gather with a plan or anticipate a dramatic voice. They had no promise that anything at all would happen that day.

What does this say about their hearts? What does this say about their motivations?

It was a simple surrender. And then *He spoke*. Interrupting their stillness, He called Paul and Barnabas into what would become a world-changing mission.

The calling came after the surrender.

How often do you approach God with an unspoken agenda? What if we flipped the script, and stopped dreaming up our own ideas of how God can use us, and instead just sat with Him, waiting for His voice? Do your prayers sound like any of the following?

☐ *God, show me my calling.*

☐ *God, give me clarity.*

☐ *God, fix this situation.*

What if, instead, we came like they did in Antioch, with open hands, no expectations, no guarantees, just a simple *'yes'*, ready to respond if (and when) God speaks?

******Where in your life are you tempted to come to God with an agenda instead of an open heart?

Sometimes this idea of open-handedness can be difficult when it seems like The One we need to hear from is silent. Consider this: *What if God's silence is not His absence, but His invitation to surrender even deeper?*

What would it look like for you to wait on God, trusting Him fully, even if you had no guarantee that an answer or direction would come quickly (or on this side of heaven)? How does that make you feel? What thoughts or fears rise up as you imagine sitting in that kind of surrendered waiting?

The hardest part in this surrender might not always be the waiting, but maybe the fear of what He will, in fact, call me into. If we are truly sitting in this surrender: fasting, praying, waiting... We have to be prepared for His voice to come. And when it does, the next step might not feel easy. It might require a costly 'yes'.

Let's go back to **Acts 13:2**.

What action does God call Paul and Barnabas into?

In your own words, what do you think it means to be "set apart" for God?

Paul and Barnabas were pulled away from what was familiar, comfortable, and known, in order to step into the assignment God had for them. To say 'yes' to God often means saying 'no' to something else. It might be a 'no' to comfort, security, control or even your own timeline. In this case, it was a goodbye to their community and home for a time.

What has God called you to say 'no' to in the past? Was it something that you thought was good?

"You cannot stay where you are and go with God."

Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God*

You can't cling to safety and walk into God's kingdom work. You can't demand a clear roadmap and take the next step of faith. You can't remain unchanged and become the vessel God intends to use.

Full surrender means full expectation that God will interrupt your plans.

Maybe He already has. Maybe He's stirring something in you, a cracked door of opportunity—and you've felt the tension of wanting to hold on to what feels secure. What would it look like to let go? What would it cost you to release control?

Read the following verses. What did each person have to surrender in order to say 'yes' to God?

Genesis 12:1-4, *Abraham* _____

Exodus 3:1-12, *Moses* _____

Esther 4:10-17, *Esther* _____

Luke 1:26-38, *Mary (the mother of Jesus)* _____

Matthew 4:18-22, *The Disciples* _____

As you can see from these several examples, walking with the Lord will bring change in your life. Paul and Barnabas had the same experience. Are you ready for this kind of surrender? The kind that rearranges your life, your comfort, and your plans?

Ask God honestly: Is there something You're asking me to release so You can lead me into what You have next?

God's call requires surrender, both before He speaks and after as we respond. Let's close our time today with a prayer of fresh surrender: surrender of our plans and agendas, surrender of our comfort, and surrender of our very lives. This is what He invites us to do, and out of our loving relationship with Him, obedience follows. This is where true freedom and purpose begin.

*God, I surrender _____ to you. I lay
down my plans, my dreams, and my agenda. I surrender the
desire to control my own path and choose to trust where You will
lead. Teach me to listen when You speak. Give me courage to
obey, even when the cost feels too great. Amen*

DAY 4: THE SPIRIT'S EDGE

As you look closely at Acts 13, take note that nothing happens apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He is at the center of every battle fought, every bold word spoken, and every victory won. Do you recognize this Spirit in your life? The same Spirit that filled Paul now fills us! He gives us an edge! He empowers us to overcome fear, to stand boldly, to minister with authority, and to live as faithful witnesses to God's kingdom.

Walking with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, the momentum picks up. They've courageously said 'yes' to God and stepped into the unknown, trusting Him to lead. *But stepping into God's call doesn't mean the path will be smooth.* In fact, one thing is certain when you follow Jesus: opportunity and opposition will come, often hand in hand.

Let's refresh and **read Acts 13:7-12.**

Paul and Barnabas arrive in Paphos, where they meet a Roman proconsul.

What was his name? _____

Who was standing in his way? _____

Can you think of a time when you said 'yes' to God's call, only to face opposition afterward?

When I'm trying to follow God's call and face moments of opposition, I often start to wonder if I'm in the wrong place altogether. Have you ever had any of the following thoughts when you hit resistance while trying to walk in obedience?

- ☐ *Maybe I misunderstood what God was saying.*
- ☐ *Is it even worth my time and energy to keep going down this path?*
- ☐ *Maybe this closed door means God has something else for me.*
- ☐ *If this is from God, why is it so hard?*
- ☐ *Did I mess something up along the way?*
- ☐ *Wouldn't God make it clearer if this was really His will?*
- ☐ *Other:* _____

Write out 1 Peter 5:8. _____

Good thing we have an edge!

Let what is happening here settle in. Can we expose the face of this opposition? Just as we see here in Acts 13, there is *still* a massive opposing force to the Gospel in our lives, communities, nation, and world. The enemy will use every trick (fear, doubt, shame, ambivalence, distraction, opposition) to convince you that what God is calling you to do isn't really meant for you, that you're not equipped, or that it's too risky. It's not a question of if this opposition will come, it's when.

When it does, how will you respond?

What does Paul do in response to these actions? _____

Who was he filled with? _____

While, yes, we still face the same enemy that Paul and Barnabas faced when proclaiming the gospel, *we also have the same Spirit within us.*

Let that sink in. **We still have that same Spirit within us.**

Read the following passages and write down what this Spirit has the power to do:

Acts 1:8 _____

Romans 8:11 _____

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 _____

In **Luke 10:19**, what authority did Jesus give the 72 He sent out? _____

God never calls us without also going before us, but the key is our willingness to obey with full dependence on Him. Only by trusting in His Spirit can we stand strong and claim the victory in this battle we face.

Reflect: How do you rely on the Holy Spirit in moments of warfare?

In your own words, describe how you want to rely on the Holy Spirit going forward.

As you say 'yes' to God's call, you must be ready to fight. How can you cultivate a deeper dependence on the Spirit in the midst of your own spiritual battles?

Let's end our day with a prayer.

Jesus, Thank You for the reminder that when You call, You also go before me. Forgive me for the times I shrink back in fear or doubt and for the moments when I forget that the battle is not mine to win but Yours to fight. Teach me to depend on You more deeply. Shape me into someone who carries Your truth with courage and humility. Let me not be discouraged when opposition comes. Lord, You are worthy of my 'yes.' Amen.

DAY 5: THE GOSPEL: PETER, STEPHEN, PAUL, AND YOU

"How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"

Penn Jillette (Atheist)

Let's begin today with a moment of Reflection: Is there anyone in your life that is lost? Is there a specific person that God brought to mind when you read that question? Write their name below.

As we go through this section, keep that person in mind and close to your heart.

In the latter half of Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas have moved on from Paphos to Pisidian Antioch. This required a 200 mile boat ride and a 100 mile walk. All in the name of following God's call.

Open your Bible and **read Acts 13:13-52.**

Write your own brief summary of this section:

Wow, that story never gets old! Paul shares what God has done, and the people respond. This particular sermon feels a little familiar. Peter stood before the crowds at Pentecost and boldly proclaimed Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah (Acts 2). Stephen, with courage, told the same story to the Sanhedrin. Clearly the story of Israel and Jesus is vital to the revival of the ancient church, and I believe this story is still vital today.

Throughout this week, we've surrendered ourselves to the Spirit's leading, prepared our hearts for spiritual battle, and now, like Paul and Barnabas, we are invited to speak boldly by the Spirit's power. The gospel message was never meant for apostles and preachers alone. It's meant for *all* who follow Jesus.

This may feel simple, but it matters deeply that we know this story so that it shapes the way we see the world and it can flow freely from our lips. Not as something memorized word-for-word, but as truth rooted deep in our soul.

As a reminder, here's the pattern of the gospel that Peter, Stephen, and Paul proclaimed:

God's Faithfulness — God created, called, and will always keep His promises.

Our Rebellion — People have turned away, rejecting God's ways.

Jesus the Savior — God sent Jesus to rescue, redeem, die, and rise again for our forgiveness and life.

The Call to Respond — Now every person must decide: repent, believe, and receive the gift of grace.

Take a moment and write these four parts in your own words to let the truth sink in and become part of how you see the world:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

We must let this story sink deeply into the core of who we are, not just shaping what we know, but transforming how we live and move.

May it become so alive in you that when the Spirit prompts you to share it, the words flow naturally, boldly, and with love.

The beautiful thing about the Gospel story is that it didn't end with Paul's sermon. God is continuing His story in and through you today. Write below how you could continue this message. What moments from your lifetime testify to who God is? Do you have a moment when God "brought you out of exile?"

Pause here and ask: *What is the Holy Spirit inviting me to do?*

Paul and Barnabas lived each day knowing that every single person was invited into God's kingdom, even those who rejected the message. The Jews in this passage turned away out of jealousy, but the call was still for them. Because Paul and Barnabas pressed on in the face of rejection and opposition, "the word of the Lord spread through the whole region" (Acts 13:49).

What about you? Do you live knowing that everyone around you is called? Are you seeing people through this gospel lens?

The Gospel isn't meant to be a private treasure or a quiet belief.

Read Matthew 28:17-20, and write what Jesus tells His followers to do.

As the Spirit works, He also reshapes how you see the world. Rather than walking through life thinking, "How is everyone affecting me today?" the Spirit invites you to wonder, "How am I affecting everyone around me for the sake of Christ?" Paul and Barnabas had a calling, and you have the same calling. The same authority. The same Spirit. The same Savior. The same crowd. All sinners in desperate need of grace.

Do you see your family, neighbors, and colleagues as: Good people and bad people? Or lost people and found people?

One perspective fuels judgment. The other fuels compassion. One builds walls. The other builds bridges.

Look at your street corner. Do you see people worthy of receiving the Gospel of Christ? What about that person that God brought to mind at the beginning of the day? Do you see them as worthy?

Where in your life today are you hesitant to step in and share the Good News?

As you wrestle, think once more on the quote below.

"How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"

Penn Jillette (Atheist)

Could one of your fears be rejection? Paul and Barnabas stepped out in faith, and oftentimes, they received rejection. In Acts 13, the Jews reject them to the point of banishment. How do they respond?

Read Acts 13:51-52.

Their joy didn't come from success, applause, approval, or an eager crowd wanting more. *Their joy came from the Holy Spirit.*

It wasn't about the outcome, it was about obedience. It wasn't the praise of people, it was love for Jesus. We don't share because we're promised a 'yes'. We share because we have already been loved, because Christ came for us. This truth frees us to leave the response in God's hands and simply walk forward in the joy of the Holy Spirit. The outcome isn't ours to carry.

Our invitation is simply to obey. And the good news in that obedience, is that there is joy to be found.

Ask the Spirit to fill you with that kind of joy, the kind that comes simply from walking with Him.

Write your own prayer in response to the Holy Spirit's prompting.

Now go. Shake the dust off when you need to, and trust the One who sows every seed you plant.

ACTS 13

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 13

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 14

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Let's let the Bible make its own first impression.

Read Acts 14. (*Text provided in Day 2 homework.*)

As you study Paul and Barnabas' journey and ministry, notice how unpredictable life, people, and ministry can be. While their message stays true, the responses they receive will range wildly. They will range from division and hostility, to being worshiped like gods, to barely escaping with their lives. The reactions are erratic, extreme, and even inappropriate. Sound familiar? Our world today isn't so different. Emotions, opinions and reactions are all over the place. Maybe we, too, are just as desperate for the steady truth Paul and Barnabas offered. As we continue through Acts, let's approach the text with open, examined hearts. Let's invite the Spirit to stir us, even if it's uncomfortable because that's often where the good work begins.

"Ministry would be easy if it weren't for people!"
Dr. Joseph Stowell

For those of us that deal with people, that quote probably brought a knowing chuckle—and rightly so! It perfectly captures what Paul and Barnabas are going to encounter in Acts 14.

Read Acts 14 again.

Be blessed as His Word washes over you. He is a good God of the utmost character and His Word is for *you today*.

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Hopefully by now the idea of active engagement doesn't scare you, but rather encourages you. The value of slowing down and taking the text into deeper consideration is a beautiful thing. Yesterday I asked you to look for aspects of God's character. Today I would like to encourage you to consider aspects of the character of Paul, Barnabas, the disciples, and the enemy/opposition presented.

As you break the text into smaller sections and flesh it out in such a way, these characteristics can become more obvious. Ask the Lord to reveal it to you. He can and He will! His goodness is jam-packed through this chapter! Let's dive in!

1. Go through Acts 14 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. **Highlight or underline the character traits** you observe for Paul (blue), Barnabas (orange), the disciples (green), the opposition/enemy (red), and God (purple) in the provided text.
4. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write at the end of the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 14

1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. **2** But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. **3** So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. **4** The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. **5** There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. **6** But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, **7** where they continued to preach the gospel.

8 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. **9** He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed **10** and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" **12** Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they

SECTION TITLES

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

ACTS 14 SUMMARY

DAY 3: OBEDIENCE OVER OUTCOME

Let's begin our day by backing up a bit.

Read Acts 13:49-52.

What just happened here? Let's do a quick "active engagement" of this section:

- ▶ *The word of the Lord is _____.*
- ▶ *The _____ are jealous and angry and find a way to get rid of Paul and Barnabas.*
- ▶ *They _____ off their feet and carry on to the next town.*
- ▶ *The disciples were filled with _____.*

This pattern of bold teaching, divided responses, and persistent movement continues, just like we saw at the end of Acts 13. Let's follow Paul and Barnabas into the next chapter and trace their steps as they remain faithful to their mission despite rising resistance.

Turn to **Acts 14:1-7**, and keep **verses 21-28** in mind as you answer the next question.

How many cities do you count them visiting? _____

Talk about dedication to spreading the gospel! Check out this visual of their travels:



Take a moment to really let this sink in. Let's break down what they went through. This distance is like traveling from Grand Rapids to Atlanta—a total distance of 560 miles!

More importantly, let's consider *their obedience to the calling*.

While looking at **verses 1-7**, focus on their time in Iconium and answer the following:

What kind of opposition do they encounter in **verse 2**?

What was Paul & Barnabas' response in **verse 3**?

Isn't that fascinating? Verse 3 says they "stayed a long time"—even in the middle of conflict. In our world today, we're so quick to want ease, to avoid difficulty, pain, or hard work. But they stayed. It begs the question, would you have?

What kind of opposition do they encounter in **verse 5**?

What was Paul & Barnabas' response in **verse 6 and 7**?

Is it possible that their experience here in Iconium was preparing them for what was to come next? We know that far worse opposition was to come, and these men were going to need some serious tenacity to be able to endure.

Have you ever felt resistance yet sensed a clear call to keep going *in obedience*?

Make a list: What are 5 things God has asked of you *in obedience*? Take some time to think through the last year. It could be as simple as *greeting a new neighbor* or as *challenging as repairing a broken relationship*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

List your responses to the things God asked of you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Evaluate the requests and your responses. **Circle** what felt fruitful. **Underline** what felt fruitless. **Highlight** what felt hard. Were there responses you wish had been different? Explain.

What does it look like to obey even when results are unclear? Do we give up when opposition arises or do we stay the course, clinging to God's calling? Difficulty doesn't always mean a "closed door", but it sure can feel like one.

Most scholars estimate Acts 14 spans several months—possibly up to a year— from Paul and Barnabas' arrival in Iconium to their return to Antioch in Syria. Think about how much was asked of them in that time. Yet we get to witness them obey again and again, even though they did not know how it would turn out. Thankfully, we get to see glimpses of the fruit later in the chapter.

Read Micah 7:7-8 and write it out below:

Meditate on the verse above and receive this prayer:

Father, help me obey you no matter the outcome. Give me discernment to know when to stay and when to go. Strengthen me when obedience is hard and remind me that you are at work even when I don't see the results. I love your voice, Lord. You have led me through the fire.

DAY 4: FALSE PRAISE, REAL PURPOSE

This is where the rubber meets the road, folks.

Read Acts 14:8–20.

Things escalate quickly—what begins with a miraculous healing leads to misunderstanding, misplaced worship, bold correction, and even brutal persecution. These moments reveal the cost of obedience, but first...

A lame man was healed! He walked! Can I get a "Praise God!"? Paul saw this man's faith and that was enough to heal him. Where have we seen this before?

Read Mark 2:1-12.

Note a few similarities you see:

Pause and Reflect: What does my faith look like? Is my faith *visible*?

The crowd responds to the miracle of Paul healing the lame man in a way that may seem crazy to us in our western world. However, we must acknowledge that this group of people was severely rooted in their mythological worldview which caused them to interpret the miracle as a pagan divine visitation: **Barnabas as Zeus & Paul as Hermes.**

When the crowd began to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods in **Acts 14:14-18**, how did they respond?

In response to this wild worship, Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes (symbolizing grief and rejection) and redirected the crowd's praise and worship toward the living God.

Have you ever been misunderstood for your faith, intentions, or actions? Can you think of a time where people gave you credit for something you knew, deep in your heart, belonged to God? Were you willing to confront the false worship or flattery? If not, what was holding you back? If yes, what compelled you to "tear your clothes" and redirect worship to our living God?

DEEPER DIVE

In Lystra, a local legend told of Zeus and Hermes visiting in disguise. Everyone turned them away, except one elderly couple, so the gods destroyed the rest.

Remembering this tale, the townspeople quickly hailed Paul as Hermes and Barnabas as Zeus.

Archaeology shows that devotion to these gods ran deep here: Zeus as king of the gods, Hermes as his eloquent messenger.

Have you ever heard an awesome message on a Sunday morning? One that challenged you, pushed you, encouraged you? You felt the Lord looking into *your* heart. You appreciated the words spoken. And then, after the sermon you happen to run into the pastor. What do you say? I've often found myself saying: "Awesome message! You rocked it!" Do you know what I love? When the pastor responds with "Praise God." When we do this, we echo the posture Paul and Barnabas modeled, one that turns everything we do, say, or receive into glory for the One who is worthy of it all.

How do you respond to praise? (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I take credit</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I have a ready response that brings glory to God</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I laugh it off or redirect</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I offer gratefulness to the Lord for using me as a vessel</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I shutdown/get quiet</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other: _____</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I downplay the comments</i> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I genuinely thank the person</i> | |

Let's flip the script. **From what posture do you give praise?** (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I have self contempt/compare</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I tend to idolize other's gifts and charisma</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I am tempted to elevate a person or people</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If I am honest, I might use flattery to manipulate something to my own advantage</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>My heart is filled with joy and sincerity</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other: _____</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>I want to normalize verbal blessing and affirmation</i> | |

Paul and Barnabas did exactly what they were called to. Although the praise and adoration of the people was served up on a silver platter to them, they redirected the honor due to the only one worthy, King Jesus. This is such a stark contrast to Herod Agrippa from Acts chapter 12 (remember the worms?!). Paul and Barnabas' proper understanding of and relationship with Jesus prohibited them from even considering accepting the praise of humans that only belonged to God. *Their hearts were so aligned with His greatness that they couldn't bear the idea of stealing His honor.* With everything in them, they gave praise, honor and glory to God. Even with this, the crowd resisted the truth. Soon, hostility took over.

Read Acts 14:19-20 and rewrite in your own words.

What is your response to Paul's return to the city after being stoned?

What is something in your life you feel you have *endured* for Jesus?

If Jesus asked, would *you* walk back into that hard place—like Paul?

Paul's life was so surrendered to Jesus that comfort had no claim on him.

Where do your responses to God's call typically fall on this continuum? Be honest.



Explain your response.

This is not spiritual recklessness for Paul; it's deep-rooted purpose.

Brother or sister, I want to remind you and encourage you that you too have access to that same deep-rooted purpose. You have that same calling. Spend time communing with your Heavenly Father about your calling, wrestling with it in prayer.

Let's pray together.

God, guard our hearts from pride and help us reject what belongs to you alone. Give us courage to speak truth in love, even when people misunderstand or oppose us. Build us up to have a deep-rooted purpose like Paul did. May we live for your glory, not our own.

DAY 5: PROMISES IN SUFFERING AND STRENGTH

Paul and Barnabas have already journeyed many miles, but they are still walking! *There is more work to do and more ground to cover.* The Lord is not done yet.

Read Acts 14:21–28.

After Paul's stoning and healing, he and Barnabas didn't retreat—they *strengthened* new believers, appointed leaders, and shared the Gospel.

What did Paul proclaim in **verse 22**?

How did Paul know this? **Read Acts 9:15-16** and write down God's promise for Paul.

This seems like a pretty depressing promise for him and us. Or is it?

What does **John 16:33** promise us?

Paul and Barnabas knew this. They knew that hardship and gospel go hand-in-hand, but because of Christ, we can have peace through it all. This can be easier said than done. Am I right? Take a step back, though, and remember all that Paul and Barnabas have been through so far. It's not like they accidentally stumbled upon such firm convictions. They experienced some real life suffering and that suffering shaped them. That same suffering led to refinement in their lives *and* hearts.

******Where in your life have you experienced suffering that produced faith and conviction?

Read Acts 14:26-28 and summarize the end of this journey for Paul and Barnabas.

Paul and Barnabas modeled a long-term vision: not just making converts, but building communities. They strengthened the church, appointed leaders, and left them with encouragement and clarity. But this all came at a cost to them. Thankfully their suffering was not the end.

In **Acts 14**, what sacrifices did Paul and Barnabas endure for the sake of ‘going out and making disciples of all nations’?

What was their constant response to these costs?

What have been some personal costs you've experienced as a result of choosing to follow Jesus?

What could this kind of faithfulness look like in your current season of life?

Write out verse Acts 14:28:

They rested! For “a long time”! They kept the ministry simple by: showing up, walking with people, giving God glory, and then *they rested for a long time*.

Do you need rest? Our culture thrives on busyness and accomplishments, and often the world of ministry and a life of discipleship does not operate that differently.

In this last section, Paul and Barnabas exemplify a healthy rhythm of ministry and Sabbath.

What kind of pace are you keeping right now? Is it Spirit-led? Is it sustainable?

What are some personal tell-tale signs that indicate you need rest?

What if the rest we're called to isn't a pause from purpose, but the very thing that prepares us for it?

If you're feeling weary, tired or worn out, turn to rest. Let Him renew and fill you. He is worthy of all your laboring but He has also created you for rhythms of rest.

Evaluate your rhythms with the Lord and ask Him to help you discern what you should remove or add into your schedule to promote a posture of rest.

I pray that the character of God you originally noticed in Acts 14 became more and more evident to you this week. He is a mighty God. A good God. A gracious God. He is *our* God. Be blessed and pray this last prayer with me.

Jesus, help us see hardship not as a barrier but as part of the journey. Shape us into disciples who endure, encourage, and multiply. Let us not grow weary in doing good. Show us how to rest well and finish well. Thank you Lord for the example of Paul and Barnabas. May we glean from their ministry work and glorify you as they did.

ACTS 14

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 14

SERMON NOTES

NOTES

ACTS 15

WEEK 15

DAY 1: FIRST IMPRESSION

Welcome to the last section of part 1 of our Acts study. As we promised at the beginning, we've walked through bold proclamations, fierce persecution, divine miracles, and gritty, Spirit-formed community. There have been some strong marching orders and important take-aways.

In this final week, we turn to Acts 15. Here, the early Church stands on the edge of some pivotal decisions. The questions before them are not small, they are weighty, with potential to either fracture the movement or propel it forward in strength and unity. Much like the Church today, they will wrestle with their purpose, their calling, and the very message of the gospel entrusted to them.

You know the drill by now. This is the day that we get to simply sit with God's word without highlighters, commentaries, or distractions. Don't rush. Read slowly and ask the Spirit to speak.

In many ways today's practice is a building block for the heart behind the mission of the book of Acts. The early believers weren't checking off their list of spiritual tasks; instead, their hearts were captivated by a beautiful vision, the Kingdom of Heaven. Like those early followers, we ask to be transformed into people who long for the presence of Jesus as we walk His way. Only He can do that. Only He can take us from behavior management to a deep love relationship with Him.

So, today we pursue that.

Begin by asking Him to stir in you a deeper hunger for His presence and a longing for His Kingdom.

Then, **read Acts 15.**

And yes, **read it again.**

DAY 2: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Before we begin active engagement with Acts 15, start with prayer. Pray that your mind would be stretched. Pray that your knowledge and understanding of God's word would increase. Pray that all of that would produce a grounding and an anchoring to Him, the firm foundation. But don't stop there.

Henry Blackaby, in his Bible study *Experiencing God* says this, *"If you cannot describe your relationship with God by saying that you love Him with all your being, then before you do anything else, you need to entreat the Holy Spirit to bring you into that kind of relationship today."* Before beginning to dissect the text, pray that what begins in your mind would take root in your heart as you pursue a deep love relationship with Him.

Now, with your mind sharp and your heart open, begin active engagement.

1. Go through Acts 15 and **break it into sections** by determining when there is a shift in one thought to the next. Since this is a narrative, it may be a shift from one scene to the next, or one topic of conversation to another. Put a / where a section begins and ends.
2. Once you have your chapter separated into different sections, **write a title** consisting of a few words or a sentence to summarize each section you've made.
3. Finally, **create a summary** using your section titles to encapsulate what God has shown you this chapter is about and write at the end of the text.

SECTION TITLES

ACTS 15

1 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." **2** This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. **3** The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.
7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them:
 “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice
 among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the
 message of the gospel and believe. **8** God, who knows the
 heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit
 to them, just as he did to us. **9** He did not discriminate
 between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.
10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the
 necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors
 have been able to bear? **11** No! We believe it is through the
 grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to
 Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God
 had done among the Gentiles through them. **13** When they
 finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me.
14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to
 choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. **15** The words
 of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

16 “‘After this I will return
 and rebuild David’s fallen tent.
 Its ruins I will rebuild,
 and I will restore it,
17 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
 even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
 says the Lord, who does these things’—
18 things known from long ago.

19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it
 difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. **20** Instead we
 should write to them, telling them to abstain from food
 polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of
 strangled animals and from blood. **21** For the law of Moses has
 been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read
 in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church,
 decided to choose some of their own men and send them to
 Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called
 Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the
 believers. **23** With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

SECTION TITLES

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. **25** So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— **26** men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **27** Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. **28** It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: **29** You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

30 So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. **31** The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. **32** Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. **33** After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. **[34]** **35** But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." **37** Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, **38** but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. **39** They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. **41** He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

ACTS 15 SUMMARY

DAY 3: A CHOSEN PEOPLE

Begin today by writing out **1 Peter 2:9**. It will set the stage and be a backdrop for Acts 15. We have used it a lot in our study. Maybe you have it memorized!

In Exodus and again in 1 Peter 2, God refers to both Israel and the Church as His “Chosen People.” But what exactly were they chosen *for*? From the beginning, God’s choice wasn’t random. It was purposeful. He chose them to be a distinct people, set apart to reflect His character, live under His covenant, and reveal His glory to the nations. Chosenness was never an end in itself; it was always meant to lead to *calling*.

Read Isaiah 43:10–12 and Isaiah 44:8.

What were God’s people specifically called to be?

What were they supposed to bear witness to?

In the Old Testament, God chose Abraham to be the father of a great nation. He promised him land and family. But first, Abraham had to take a step of faith and walk. Ur, his place of residence, was never meant to be the final destination. God had a specific place in mind: the promised land, Israel.

This land wasn't chosen at random either. Strategically located at the heart of the ancient world, it formed a land bridge connecting three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. As a major junction of trade routes, it saw a constant stream of travelers: merchants, messengers, armies, and pilgrims. Israel was a crossroads of culture, ideas and commerce.

Like a centripetal force, it drew the nations in. Right at the center, God placed His people with a purpose: Be *my* witnesses. **They were called to bear witness that there is no other God besides Him.**

But as we enter the New Testament, the strategy shifts.

Read Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8.

What does Jesus call His disciples to be?

Where does He send them on mission?

Notice the change, while the Old Testament people were centered in one geographic location like a **centripetal** force, Jesus now calls His disciples to move outward, like a **centrifugal** force, spreading the message far and wide. The focus moves from being a magnet that draws people to the stage, to now being a force that pushes outward, dispersing the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Although the mission's method has changed, the goal remains the same: *to be His witnesses, to proclaim that besides Him there is no savior and to make disciples.*

This centrifugal force, now empowered by the Holy Spirit, leads us directly to the tension we find in Acts 15. As the gospel spreads outward to all people groups, Gentiles are hearing the message, being saved, and wanting to become part of God's chosen people. But God's chosen people have always been marked by specific distinctions. So this raises critical questions: Do Gentile believers need to adopt all of the distinctions, laws and customs God commanded the Jewish people in order to fully belong? And if not, then what now truly defines a follower or a disciple of God?

WORD FOCUS

'Centripetal'

Centripetal: A force that brings things toward the center.

'Centrifugal'

Centrifugal: A force that sends things outward.

Read Acts 15:1-11.

What is the specific requirement that began this debate (**Acts 15:1, 5** - also see **Genesis 17:9-14** to read God's original command that they are referring to)?

Who did the debate originate between (**verses 1-2**)? _____

How is the intensity of this conflict described throughout the chapter (**verse 2, 7**)?

List all of the people you can find who are gathered at this scene in Jerusalem:

This was a passionate and important debate in the life of the early church. Being *chosen*, and the marks of being *distinct and set apart*, were central to the mission, witness, and calling of God's people. So, to make adjustments or to change what God had commanded was not something to take lightly. The debate was long and arduous and the participants were the leaders of this early movement that had **apostolic authority**. The strong convictions and passions of this debate had the potential to completely derail the unity of this baby movement.

While some Jews insisted that Gentile believers must follow the outward signs of the law God commanded for the Jews, what does Peter identify as the true means of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles?

The commands God gave the Jews were important for their calling and distinctiveness, *but they were never the way of salvation for anyone*, Jew or Gentile.

WORD FOCUS

'Apostolic Authority'

The unique spiritual authority given by Jesus to His apostles, especially in the early church. It included the power to teach, lead, correct, and lay foundational doctrine for the church, guided by the Holy Spirit. This authority was rooted in their direct relationship with Jesus and their role as eyewitnesses of His resurrection.

How would you describe the difference between being saved and being distinct (set apart)?

The doctrine of salvation stands at the core of Christian theology and identity. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we affirm that salvation is **Sola Gratia: by grace alone.**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9

There's nothing we can do to earn salvation, and no behavior that can improve it. It is fully initiated, accomplished, and completed by the grace of God through His Son, Jesus.

From its earliest days, the Church has wrestled with how to maintain its distinctiveness in the world. Navigating distinctiveness is often tied to deep and important convictions about holiness, identity, and obedience. *But when those convictions become disconnected from the heart of the gospel, they can slowly morph into something else entirely.* They can even distort the gospel itself, turning markers of identity into requirements for salvation.

DEEPER DIVE

The Five Solas are Latin phrases that emerged from the Reformation, a pivotal moment in church history that called believers back to the true faith. They state five foundational, essential truths rooted in Scripture that capture the heart of the gospel and anchor the Christian walk in what matters most.

1. Sola Scriptura: Scripture Alone - The Bible alone is the ultimate authority for faith and practice.
2. Sola Fide: Faith Alone - We are justified (declared righteous) before God by faith alone, not by works.
3. Sola Gratia: Grace Alone - Salvation comes by God's grace alone, not by anything we earn or deserve.
4. Solus Christus: Christ Alone - Jesus Christ alone is the mediator between God and humanity.
5. Soli Deo Gloria: To the Glory of God Alone - All of life and salvation is for God's glory alone.

******Have you ever experienced this kind of distortion, where convictions about being “set apart” were confused as ways to earn being accepted by God or others? What did that look like for you, and how did you begin to untangle it from the truth of the gospel?

Although being distinct from the world in outward ways is not salvation, it *is* important. Look up the following verses and write what you think they are saying about how the people of God should be distinct and set apart:

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 5:13

Philippians 2:15

******What are some ways you think your community is called to be distinct? What are some personal convictions you have about remaining distinct in the places where God has called you?

If you can't think of any ways your community or you are called to be distinct, that is a warning sign. God's people are always meant to stand apart in ways that reflect His character in a world that is fraught with sin and brokenness. As mentioned in Day 1 as we began our homework for this week, the early believers weren't checking off their list of spiritual tasks, instead their hearts were motivated and captivated by a beautiful vision, the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is beautiful. His way is beautiful. His people, when they reflect who He is, are beautiful. *Their witness is weighty, glorious, and almost unbearably attractive.*

The Bible's main metaphor for our distinctiveness is the contrast between light and darkness. Look up the following verses and note what they reveal about how God's people are called to be distinct and set apart:

John 1:5 _____

John 8:12 _____

Matthew 5:14-16 _____

Ephesians 5:8 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:5 _____

1 Peter 2:9b _____

The overwhelming brilliance of Jesus and His people is a direct assault on the dominion of darkness, meant not just to contrast it, *but to break through and displace it with light.*

But that light doesn't just shine *in* the world, it shines *through* the Church.

In my earlier years of ministry, I was a part of a community that embraced a beautiful principle often attributed to **St. Augustine**: *In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.* It provides a timeless framework for navigating disagreements and cultural differences within the Church:

In Essentials, Unity: We stand firm on the foundational truths of the gospel: the lordship of Christ, salvation by grace, the authority of Scripture.

In Non-Essentials, Liberty: We allow for freedom and diversity in secondary matters (like worship styles, traditions, or cultural expressions).

In All Things, Charity: No matter the issue, we respond with love, humility, and a desire for peace.

DEEPER DIVE

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD) was a North African theologian and bishop whose thought profoundly shaped Western Christianity. His teachings on grace, sin, and salvation continue to influence Christian theology today. Among his most enduring works are *Confessions* and *The City of God*, both foundational texts in Christian thought.

Perhaps the bride of Christ is at her most unattractive, *and ironically, least distinct*, when she forgets this final piece. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 offers a powerful example. Amid heated debate and passionate disagreement, the leaders grounded themselves in Scripture, treated one another with humility, and ultimately reached a peaceful resolution that honored the distinctiveness of both sides.

******Have you ever experienced a moment when **unity** in the bride of Christ was threatened? Take a minute to look back, evaluate and learn from what happened; hindsight is 20/20. In that situation, did the enemy gain ground, or did the beauty of Christ and His people shine through? Perhaps it was a mix of both. What lessons can you take from it?

Close today by reading **John 17:20-26**. This is a portion of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer that He prayed just hours before the cross. Take note of how important the church's oneness and unity was to Jesus in those final moments.

What does Jesus say will be the result of His bride's complete unity in **verse 23**?

Unity and oneness was so important that in verse 23, Jesus ties our unity directly to our witness in the world. As God's chosen people (saved), our distinctiveness (witness) was part of His mission for us from the very beginning. *Unity is central to God's plan to reveal Himself through His people.*

While God's children do not share every conviction, we do share one Savior.

Remember that that Savior *chose you, set you apart, and sent you* to declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Approach Him now with humility and honesty.

- ▶ Ask Him to soften your heart toward others in your church or community with whom you may differ. Ask Him if He wants you to reconcile with anyone.
- ▶ Ask Him to show you any barriers to unity (pride, unforgiveness, comparison, fear). Confess those things to Him right now.
- ▶ Pray that starting with yourself, the Church (local and worldwide) would live as a people marked by unity, humility, grace, and love.

DAY 4: A HOLY NATION

Read 1 Peter 2:9.

Yesterday we looked at what it meant to be chosen as a witness, distinctive yet unified in order to put Him on display. Today we will take another phrase from 1 Peter 2:9; a holy nation.

To better understand this identity, let's return to Acts 15 and step into the room where the Jerusalem Council gathered. Imagine the weight in the air. I would have loved to have been there to hear Peter, the apostles, and James, the brother of Jesus, speak. They did not just know about Him, they knew Him. They walked beside Him, heard His footsteps in the dust, touched Him, saw Him smile, saw Him cry, and listened as He spoke of His Father and His Kingdom. And now they are wrestling through a defining moment in church history.

In this moment of tension, we hear from one of them.

Who makes the final judgment in this weighty conflict **(verse 13)**? _____

What were the four things the Jerusalem Council decided would be the distinctives for the Gentile believers?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Today we will focus on the last distinctive, “abstain from sexual immorality.” Consider something profound: Before God gave the Israelites the Torah (His instruction), there was no sexual ethic in the world. None. God is the originator of the idea that sex, marriage between a man and a woman, monogamy and family are sacred.

In the time of the book of Acts, Gentiles completely lacked a sexual ethic. Instead, their views on sexuality were shaped by the worship of a pantheon of gods who expected sexual behavior as part of their rituals. In fact, open-air shrine prostitution was considered an act of religious devotion and piety. Sexual immorality was widespread, ritually institutionalized, and normalized.

Therefore, the call to holiness in this area was one of the most radical and visible ways the early church could be distinct and set apart. For Gentiles becoming Christians, the call to sexual purity wasn’t a minor adjustment, it was a total reorientation of their lives.

Look up the following verses and summarize what God, through Paul, has to say to the early church about sexual distinctiveness:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 _____

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 _____

Colossians 3:5 _____

DEEPER DIVE

James, the apostle, was martyred in Acts 12. The James mentioned here in chapter 15, is the brother of Jesus. He did not follow Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 7:5) but became a believer after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). He grew to be highly respected among the early believers and became a key leader in the Jerusalem church. By the time of the Jerusalem Council, James had emerged as a spiritual authority.

If there is someone you are crying out to God on behalf of, let this be an encouragement to you: James, who had done daily life with the Son of God from childhood, didn’t recognize and accept who He truly was until after the resurrection.

Keep standing in the gap. Keep priesting on behalf of your world. Trust the shepherd, His timing is perfect.

The need for this boundary has not changed. As our world pushes God out of the center, we are quickly losing all semblance of His sexual ethic. The call on our lives to be distinct and set apart causes us to stand in stark contrast with the culture around us.

Do you live a set apart life? What challenges do you face when attempting to live distinctively in a culture that often rejects God's standards?

We, too, like the early church, are wrestling through a defining moment of church history. In a time when desires and personal freedom are elevated above truth, choosing to walk in God's design for sex and relationships is an extremely countercultural act of faith. But it's also a powerful witness. *Our obedience proclaims that we trust God's goodness, that His ways lead to life, and that holiness is not outdated.* When we live set apart, we don't just say no to sin; we have a chance to show the world something far greater: The Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus' entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) was a call to live *radically* differently. He didn't soften the message. His was not a casual invitation, but a high calling to distinctiveness and to what it truly means to follow Him.

Summarize what Jesus says in **Matthew 5:27-30**:

Can we get up close, personal and extremely honest? Most of us struggle in the area of sexual purity. If we aren't now, we have at some point in our lives.

Read Ephesians 5:1-3.

Write out **verse 3**.

What is the “why” behind the “what” **(verses 1-2)?**

Not even a hint. That’s the standard God gives, not to rob us of joy, but to lead us into life to the fullest. He’s not a cosmic killjoy; He is holy, and His boundaries reflect His character. This is how Jesus walked: pure, set apart, and full of grace and truth. And as His witnesses, we’re called to reflect Him. As His disciples, we are called to walk like Him. When we follow Him, our lives proclaim the praises of the One who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

To close, take a moment for honest examination. Is there sexual immorality present in your life, even a hint? Consider the content you consume, the thoughts you have, the way you talk, the way you see people, and even the things you wear. Through the power of the Acts 2 Holy Spirit, you can change. You are not stuck. You can be made new. Spend some time in repentance. Invite Jesus to show you any blind spots, cleanse and transform you.

What practical steps can you take this week to set up healthy boundaries and live more fully set apart in your relationships and choices?

We were never meant to walk alone. If you’ve set new boundaries or committed to new patterns, sharing these with a trusted friend can make all the difference.
Community helps us stay accountable and walk faithfully in the light.

Who will you commit to sharing with, and by when?

Now go, empowered by the Spirit, and live a life that is distinct, holy, and set apart for His purpose. Let your life proclaim a better gospel and bear witness to the One who calls us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

DAY 5: A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

As we approach the last day of part 1 of our study, begin by **writing out 1 Peter 2:9** one more time. There is no revolution without repetition.

What a powerful verse to commit to memory. It speaks to both our calling and our standing. We are God's *treasured possession*, set apart to partner with One who regards us as precious, special, and highly valued. God also calls us His royal priesthood. We were chosen to be His only sanctioned religious representatives in the world.

Lay a foundation regarding what God requires for worship by reading the following verses and summarizing them:

Exodus 20:3 _____

Deuteronomy 6:14-15 _____

Review Acts 15:29 and take note of the four distinctives the Jerusalem Council decided applied to the Gentiles. Yesterday we talked about the fourth. Today we will talk about the other three. Record this *very* strange list of the first three below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Although the list may seem hard to understand at first, context helps. *All three are related to the practice of worshipping other gods.* The first item is key and more obvious: do not consume things that are dedicated to another god (meat offered to idols). The second and third relate directly to the first. In the ancient world, animal sacrifice was common. It was often done by strangulation, which killed the animal without draining its blood. **Consuming blood, which God considered the life of the animal, was a serious offense.**

STUDY PROMPT

Read the following
verses to see how
serious God was about
not consuming blood.

Genesis 9:4
Leviticus 17:10-14
Deuteronomy 12:23-25

Most meat eaten was first offered to pagan gods as part of a ritual. Meat was rare and valuable, so the context of eating it became special. Sometimes this happened at a worship feast tied to one's work or trade. Each guild or trade had its own patron god (goatherders, metalsmiths, wheat farmers, etc.) and they would sacrifice to their god and then feast together.

These feasts would often then devolve into worship practices that included sexual immorality, making the entire context completely unacceptable, evil, and even detestable in the sight of God.

That's why the Jerusalem Council gave the Gentiles these three instructions. They weren't just avoiding certain foods or behaviors; they were being drawn out of a pagan world and into a holy one. These commands kept them from even coming near the worship of other gods.

To us, these rules may seem obvious. But for them, obedience was incredibly costly. It meant a complete restructuring of their business networks. It led to social isolation. And it made them targets of suspicion and persecution.

Being set apart and distinct is a great idea until it costs us.

Read Luke 14:27-33.

What does Jesus say it takes to be counted among His disciples?

What might a costly decision of obedience look like in your life right now? Would you follow Him if it meant financial loss? What if your reputation or relationships suffered? Are there any costs you would hesitate to pay? Sit with those questions for a moment and ask God to reveal to you any areas that you are holding back.

The ancients understood something we often ignore: *every part of life had a spiritual pull*. Behind everything, sex, work, sport, entertainment, food, family, home, and health, there was a god demanding allegiance. They did not compartmentalize life; they recognized everything had spiritual weight. We, on the other hand, are quick to divide the sacred from the secular. Sunday is sacred, and Monday through Saturday is secular.

******What would it look like to put Jesus at the center of every area of your life, especially the ones you might consider “neutral” or “personal”?

Where in your life might you be giving undue devotion or attention (functionally worshiping) to something other than God? What lesser gods tug at your heart?

******If someone watched how you spent your time, energy, and money, what would they say you worship?

We all worship. The question isn't *if* we worship, but *what* we worship. As God's royal priesthood, His only sanctioned representatives in the world, we are called to a life of wholehearted pursuit of God. He alone deserves our worship. No divided hearts; no other gods before Him.

In the end, Acts 15 hits both parties where it counts. The Jewish believers had to lay down their tribalism, centuries of cultural and religious identity, and embrace the radical heart of God for *all* nations. The Gentile believers had to walk away from their own tribes too, trading financial stability, social networks, and even personal safety for the sake of full allegiance to Jesus.

But this has always been the call of the early Church:

Count the cost. Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow Me.

The world doesn't need more Christians who simply believe in Jesus.
It needs disciples who follow Him,
who preach a better gospel,
who long for His Kingdom to come,
who gain their life by losing it.

Let's close with the prayer He taught us to pray.

*Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we
ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within
us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*
Ephesians 3:20-21

Church—as disciples of Jesus, empowered by His Spirit—let's go change the world.

ACTS 15

SACRED PAUSE

1.

REVIEW THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK AND NOTES. PRAY AND ASK GOD TO IDENTIFY ONE OR MORE STATEMENTS OR SCRIPTURES HE WANTS YOU TO REMEMBER AND PRACTICE. THEN, RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS.

2.

WHICH SCRIPTURE OR STATEMENT DID THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSE TO STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST THIS WEEK?

3.

REWORD THE STATEMENT OR SCRIPTURE INTO A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT TO GOD.

4.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT HE HAS SHOWN YOU IN THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

ACTS 15

SERMON NOTES

CLOSING

One of the church's greatest gifts throughout the ages has been liturgy. Liturgy, simply defined, is the shared rhythms and practices that shape how we worship together. It is the way we respond to God as a community, often through set prayers, readings, blessings, and moments of commissioning.

We see Jesus model this in Acts 1, when He blesses and commissions His disciples, sending them out to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. That same commission still rests on us today. It is our hope that this study will put steel in your spine to courageously accept this radical mission from our Lord.

As a reminder of your role in the gospel story, we want to commission you and your community with a blessing. If you are with others, engage through call and response. If you are alone, read it aloud. There is power in both speaking and hearing words of blessing.

Leader:

May the God who called the Church, His bride, into being, fill us with boldness, unity, and joy.

All:

We are the body of Christ, empowered and sent.

Leader:

May the Spirit who empowered the apostles also empower us to proclaim truth, live in love, and advance the Kingdom of Heaven wherever we go.

All:

May we go in the strength of the Spirit, not our own.

Leader:

And may the name of Jesus be lifted high in our hearts, our homes, our city, and our world.

All:

To Him be glory, now and forever. Amen.



Gate of Persecution, Basilica of St. John. Near ancient Ephesus.

CROSSROADS
BIBLE CHURCH