

# DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

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## KEEP JESUS WEIRD: ACTS and the birth of non-religious Christianity

### Session 1 – Following Jesus

#### DAY 1

##### Introduction:

Studies have shown that the vast majority of weapons taken through x-ray airport security go undetected. In 2010, a study suggested as many as 70% passed the eyes of TSA representatives. While they are trained to look specifically for weapons, how does this happen so frequently? Since guns are so rarely brought through TSA, the screeners simply don't see them. The bags that carry these weapons blend into the pattern the TSA agents are used to seeing, and the screeners struggle to see these weapons with "fresh eyes".

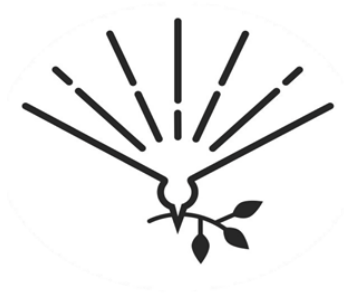
Reading the Bible allows for fresh eyes as well. Reading through a text with the baggage of cynicism and past hurt can hinder our ability to encounter God with the awe and wonder He intends. Keep this in mind as you go through the book of Acts.

What begins with a small group of believers births the worldwide movement of non-religious Christianity. We will peel back the layers of our preconceived notions of the Church and see what it means to authentically follow Jesus.

##### Questions:

What skepticism and past hurt do you need to address in order to read through Acts with fresh eyes?

What does non-religious Christianity mean?



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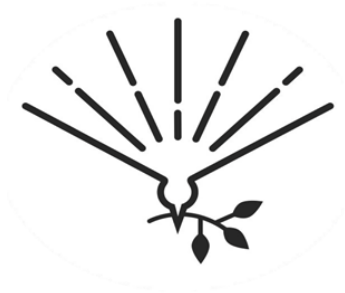
## DAY 2

1. Who wrote the book, Acts of the Apostles? See Acts 1:1 and Luke 1:1-4
2. What do you know about the author? See Colossians 4:11,14; 2 Timothy 4:11. If your Bible has notes, refer to them.
3. What do you think the purpose is for the book of Acts?
4. What barriers, if any, do you have to relying on Acts as a trustworthy account of Jesus and the Apostles?

## DAY 3

### Read Acts 1: 1-7

1. Luke begins by recapitulating Jesus' final moments on earth. What was Jesus doing in his final days according to Acts 1:3-5?
2. What instructions did Jesus give the apostles in 1:4? The Jewish people were waiting for the restoration of Israel. In 1:6, the apostles ask Jesus if He will restore the kingdom to Israel. How does Jesus respond?
3. Discussion question: How does baptism by water differ from baptism by Spirit? Also see Matthew 3:11. What is the significance of "baptism by the Spirit?"



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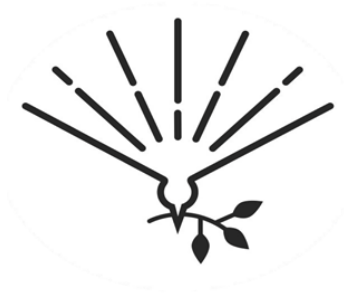
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DAY 4

Read Acts 1: 8-11

1. What promise did Jesus make in 1:8? How did this shift the apostle's mindset of evangelism?
  
2. In your own words describe how Jesus ascended into Heaven. What is the significance of this?
  
3. There are times when we need to stand and be in awe of Jesus, and there are times when we are called to action. When in your life have you been called to "be still, and know that God is God" (Psalm 46:10), and when in your life have you been called to action? How did you respond to those specific callings?
  
4. Discussion Question: See 1:8. How is this significant? How can you be a witness to your:
  - a. Community
  - b. City
  - c. Country
  - d. World



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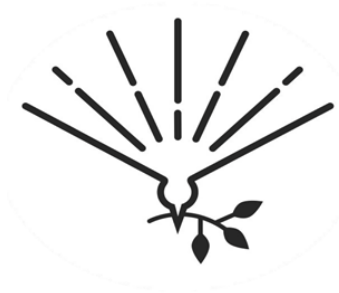
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DAY 5

## Read Acts 1: 12-26

1. Luke mentions in verse 14 that the apostles were all in one accord. What one thing were they constantly doing and why was that so important?
2. On a scale of 1-10 (lowest to highest) how would you rate your prayer life? What practical steps could you take for a better prayer life?
3. In Acts 1:16-17 we read that Judas “served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus.” What do we know about how Judas Iscariot led to the arrest of Jesus? Read Luke 22: 1-6, 22, 47-48. Be honest with yourself. Do you see reflections of Judas in how you treat Jesus?
4. Discussion question: Read 1:24-26. The apostles first sought God’s wisdom when deciding upon Judas’ replacement. What would your decision-making look like if you sought God’s wisdom first? Would it be different than your own and why? What decision can you seek God’s wisdom first for today?



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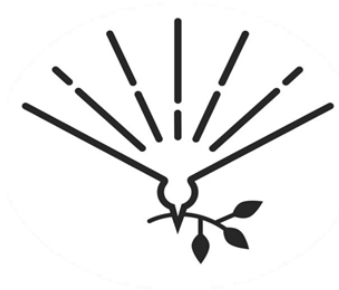
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DAY 6

Review Acts Chapter 1

1. What did you learn about Jesus this week?
2. How does it challenge your view of God?
3. What is the main takeaway that you can use this week from the Scripture?



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KEEP JESUS WEIRD: The Book of Acts and the birth of non-religious Christianity

## Session 2 – Birth

### DAY 1

#### Introduction:

The Oxford Living Dictionary defines birth as “the start of life as a physically separate being.” In our culture, we sometimes go to extremes to remember the birth of those we love, our country and our relationships. There is something uniquely captivating and mysterious about birth. It is the start of something new. Something that previously didn’t exist.

This week we will witness the birth of the church that begins with the arrival of the Holy Spirit’s presence. Billy Graham said, “The Holy Spirit illuminates the minds of people, makes us yearn for God, and takes spiritual truth and makes it understandable to us.” We will see the Holy Spirit embolden believers to spread the gospel in a new way. This Jesus movement left the world forever changed.

#### Questions:

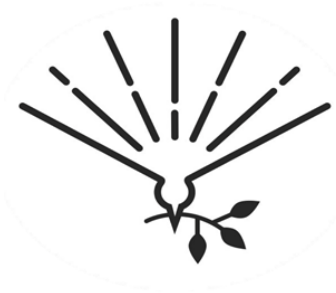
Have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit? How would you describe this presence?

Oswald Chambers says, “The Spirit is the first power we practically experience, but the last power we come to understand.” What is your current understanding of the Holy Spirit?

### DAY 2

Read Acts 2: 1-4

1. Describe what happened at Pentecost. In your own words, explain why this is significant.



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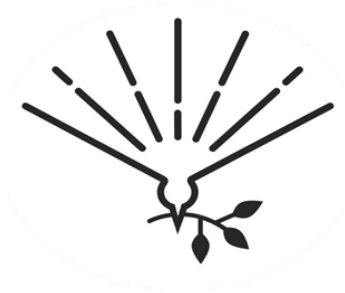


2. Many Jews had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast of harvest. Why did Jesus choose this time as the day when He would pour out the Spirit on His disciples?
3. Notice in verse 2 the Spirit comes “suddenly.” When the Spirit comes in power, he comes suddenly: on His own terms and in His own time. How have you seen the Spirit work like this in your life? In someone else’s life? Name an example.
4. Discussion Question: In Exodus 18:16-18, we see God descend upon Mt. Sinai to deliver the law for the Israelites. Fire came down in one place. At Pentecost, we also see fire, but this time “tongues of fire that separated and rested on each of them”. What, in your opinion, is the significance of fire in these accounts? What does it take for your heart to burn within you for Christ in such a way?

## DAY 3

Read Acts 2:5-13

1. What compelled them to run toward this house? What did they hear? How would you react to this?
2. In verse 11, the literal translation is that they were declaring “the greatnesses of God.” What is compelling about the Gospel that causes people to run to the greatness of God? How can the Spirit use you to fulfill that?



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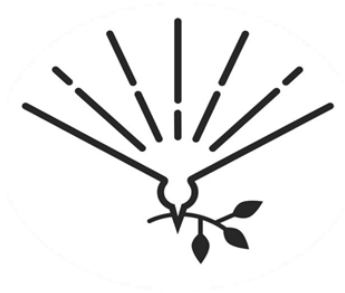
3. The people were rightly skeptical and said the apostles were drunk. Name a time when you have been skeptical of the Holy Spirit in your lives or others. How do we combat that worldly skepticism?
4. Discussion Question: Some were bewildered and explained it away, and some were in awe and asked, "What does this mean?" How can we ensure that the unexplained in our lives propels us to a place of seeking God rather than apathetically dismissing Him?

## DAY 4

Read Acts 2:14-36

1. How does Peter address the skeptics? Why do you think he quotes the prophet Joel and David?
2. Read verse 21 again. "Everyone...." He says everyone who calls on Him will be saved, but then says that everyone there had a part in crucifying Him as well. This is the Gospel. How is this significant and how could you articulate this to your non-religious neighbor?





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3. Merriam-Webster defines Lord and Messiah the following ways.

Lord: one having power and authority over others

Messiah: the expected king and deliverer of the Jews.

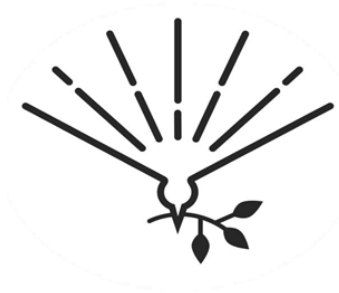
If God has made Jesus Messiah and Lord, what does that mean to the Jewish audience? What does that mean to us today?

4. Discussion Question: Peter refers to the crowd continually as “fellow Israelites...” Why does Peter keep saying this? What wisdom can we impart from Peter’s choice of words, and how does this affect the way we engage with the world around us?

## DAY 5

Read Acts 2: 37-47

1. Those who heard Peter speak were cut to the heart. Read Hebrews 4:12. Have you experienced this kind of conviction from the Spirit?
2. Define repentance. Why is it needed for salvation?
3. Who can receive the promise and the gift of the Spirit? How is that encouraging news? (verses 38-39)



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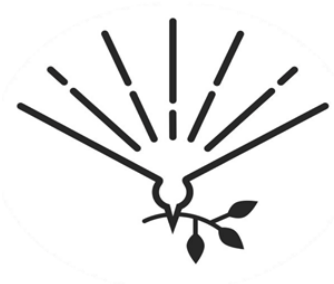


4. Where and when did they break bread together? What was the condition of their hearts? Did their actions lead to the condition of their hearts or did the condition of their hearts lead them to their actions?
5. Discussion Question: The community of believers looked more like a family than they did a network of people with a common interest. What characteristics tie them together as a family? What can we do as a church body to look more like this?

## DAY 6

### Review Acts Chapter 2.

1. What did you learn about the Holy Spirit this week?
2. What can you take away from the Scripture to strengthen your faith?



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KEEP JESUS WEIRD: The Book of Acts and the birth of non-religious Christianity

## Session 3 – Cornerstone

### DAY 1

#### Introduction:

The Coliseum, Taj Mahal, and the Sydney Opera House are included in the impressive structures throughout the world. Humans have used their creativity and ingenuity to build an array of amazing structures.

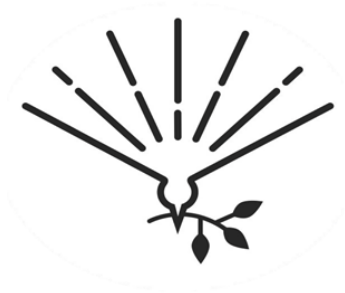
This week we are going to learn about another ‘structure’, the Church, built by the Master Architect. In biblical times, a cornerstone was the foundation of the building, and required the rest of the structure to adhere to its shape, size and angles. If the cornerstone were to be removed the remainder of the building would come crashing down. The cornerstone is the pure representation of the grade of stone presented in all the other stones, and we will read in Acts 4:11 that Jesus is, “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone”. What does this mean for us today? Paul explains to early believers in Ephesians 2:19-22:

“...you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Paul’s words hold true when they were first written, and still hold true today.

#### Questions:

1. What or who is your cornerstone? How is this visible throughout your ‘structure’?
2. In Him, we are “being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” What steps do you need to take to allow Him to do this work in yourself and the community?



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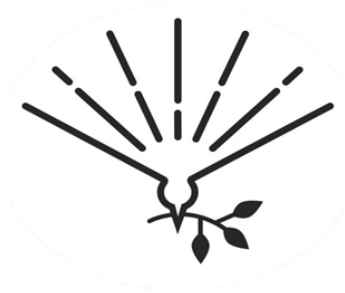
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## DAY 2

Read Acts 3:1-11

1. Why was the beggar at the temple gate? What specifically did he ask for?
2. How do Peter and John react to the beggar? What do they do? Based on their reaction, how should we treat people on the fringes of society today?
3. In verse 6, what does Peter instruct the lame beggar to do and how is that different than what he asked for?
4. How did the onlookers respond? Who does Peter say is *not* responsible for this healing?
5. Discussion Question: The onlookers were used to seeing this man sit and beg for money, and now he is “walking and jumping and praising God” (vs.9). Have you seen an astonishing change in someone else’s life after putting their faith in Christ? How would you describe this change?



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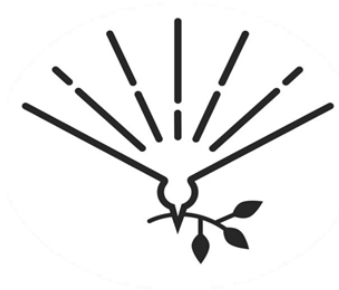
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## DAY 3

Read Acts 3: 12- 26

1. What do we know about Peter during Jesus' earthly ministry? (See Matthew 14:28-31) How does verse 12 differ from his previous reputation?
2. The Israelites acted in ignorance regarding the crucifixion of Jesus. What did this accomplish and why? Is ignorance an acceptable excuse?
3. In verse 16, Peter states the cause of this man's complete healing. What is it? What are ways that we are healed by faith?
4. Verse 13 reminds the onlookers that this is the same God as the fathers of our faith. What is the promise mentioned in Genesis 12:3? It is echoed throughout Scripture. Read Galatians 3:16. Who does this promise come through?
5. What are "times of refreshing" and when do they come? Do you have those times in your life?
6. What do covenants look like today? What covenants have you entered into? Why



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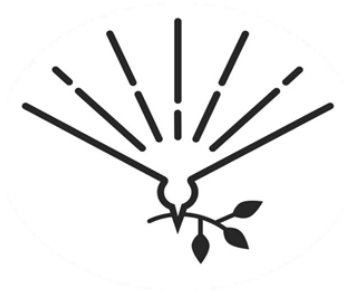
are they important to God?

7. Discussion Question: Peter reminds the Israelites in verse 25 that they are heirs of the prophets and the covenant. What does this mean? Who are God's people now? What are the characteristics of His people?

## DAY 4

Read Acts 4:1-21

1. Why were Peter and John seized? What were they commanded to do by the ruler and elders?
2. Those with authority and power were disturbed. Why does the Gospel disturb people in positions of authority and power?
3. Despite the authority's best attempts to dampen the spread of the gospel, their numbers grew (verse 4). How would you explain this?
4. Discussion Question: How do you see the relationship between the Gospel and authority and power today? What has changed, what has stayed the same?



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## DAY 5

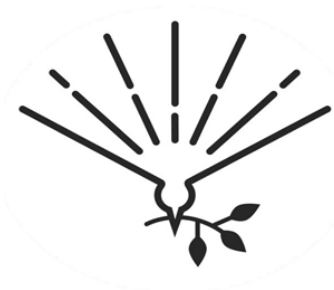
1. Peter quotes Psalm 118:22, and calls Jesus, “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” Why is this significant?
2. Read Luke 20:17. Who is rejecting the “cornerstone?”
3. How is verse 12 exclusive? How is this faith inclusive? See Acts 10:43.
4. Discussion Question: In Acts 3:11 the onlookers were “astonished” and run to learn more about Christ. Then in Acts 4:13, the religious leaders were “astonished” (same Greek word *ekpliktoi*) and instructed Peter and John not to speak of the name of Jesus. Why is there such a stark contrast in the responses? What steps can we take so that our response is to run toward Christ and not away?

## DAY 6

Review Acts 3 and 4: 1-21

What did you learn about God this week?

What steps can you take to increase your faith this week?



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KEEP JESUS WEIRD: The Book of Acts and the birth of non-religious Christianity

Session 4 – Obedience

## DAY 1

### Introduction:

Like seasoning that flavors the entire dish, Jesus called his disciples to be the “salt of the earth” in Matthew 5. Salt gives food flavor.

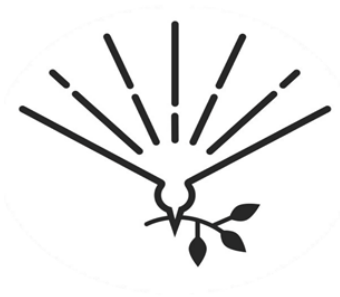
Tim Keller wrote, “The early church was strikingly different from the culture around it in this way- the pagan society was stingy with its money and promiscuous with its body. A pagan gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. And the Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body and they gave practically everybody their money.”

In the kingdom of God is the inverse of the kingdom of the world. Through their trust in God, the early believers modeled the Good News of the gospel, and the world around them noticed. This week, we will see how the early believers flavored the world around them.

### Questions:

1. If salt gives food flavor, what do Christians give the world?
2. Can your non-believing friends see the presence of Jesus in your life? Does the way you live draw non-believers closer or farther away from faith?





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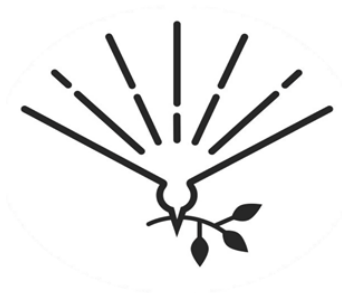
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## DAY 2

Read Acts 4:23-31

1. What did Peter and John do right after they were released from questioning? What did they first say to God? How do you respond in similar situations?
2. What two requests do the believers ask of God in verses 29-30? What can we learn from how they pray?
3. The believers pray big prayers. Do you? What holds you back from praying like these early believers?
4. In a few passages in the Old Testament, God answers prayer by shaking or thunder (Isaiah 6:4, 1 Samuel 12: 17-18). Sometimes He elicits a big



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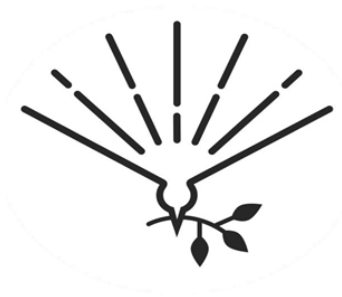
response, what prayer is He answering here?

5. Discussion Question: Read John 5:14-15. It has been said that God answers prayer with a “yes, no, or not yet.” How do you respond to unanswered prayer?

## DAY 3

Read Acts 4:32-35

1. In verse 32, we learn that “all the believers were one in heart and mind.” Read John 17:21-26. How does this align with Jesus’ prayer? How can we be a people who are of one heart and mind?
2. What examples does the author give that describe how the believers were of one heart and mind?
3. What is the significance in knowing that Joseph’s nickname, Barnabas, means Son of Encouragement?



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4. Discussion Question: What are the practical ways we could emulate the sense of care described in verses 32-35?

## DAY 4

Read Acts 5:1-11

1. Compare the qualities of Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira. How do their accounts differ?
2. What was the true transgression of Ananias and what was Peter's response?
3. Peter asks Ananias why he conceived this deed in his heart. What can we learn about the condition of our heart and our behavior? Name an example of how the condition of your heart has influenced your behavior, either



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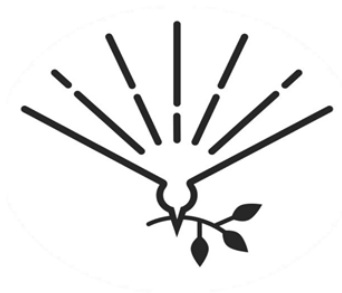
positively or negatively.

4. Discussion Question: Verse 11 states that “great fear seized the whole church”. What the believers feared was half-hearted commitment. Where in your life are you half-heartedly committing to God?

## DAY 5

Read Acts 5:12-16

1. When all the believers met together, this was the formation of the first “ekklesia” or church gathering. What were they doing during these gatherings?
2. Read Matthew 10:7-8. The apostles are being obedient to the commands of Jesus. What does this obedience look like? How are you called to freely give as you freely received?
3. In verse 14 we read that, “more and more men and women believed in the Lord.” How does the obedience of the believers play a role in people



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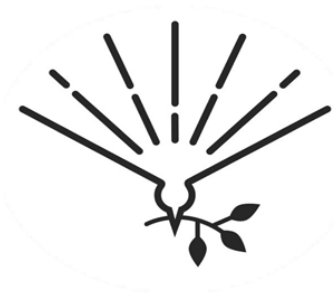


accepting Christ?

DAY 6

What did you learn about God this week?

What steps can you take to walk in obedience to His word this week?



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KEEP JESUS WEIRD: The Book of Acts and the Birth of Non-religious Christianity

Session 5 – Discipleship

## DAY 1

### Introduction:

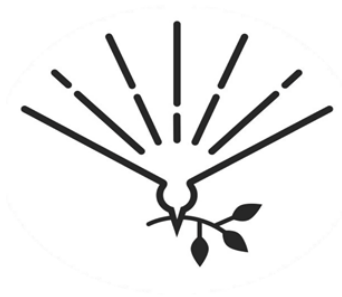
Margaret Atwood said, “You can only be jealous of someone who has something you think you ought to have yourself.” Jealousy has blinded many individuals to the truth, and it consumed the Jewish leaders as the Gospel spread. We learn in Acts 5:17 that, “the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy.”

This week’s reading mentions two Jewish groups: the Sadducees and the Pharisees. While these groups were united in their opposition to Jesus and the spread of the Gospel, they differed in their reasoning. The Sadducees were politically oriented aristocrats who were highly concerned with maintaining the temple and the beliefs of the past. The Pharisees held a strong influence in the Jewish community and ruled in local synagogues. They devoted themselves to the study and interpretation of the Law of Moses and believed in strict adherence to the Law. They took it so seriously that they added thousands of laws to those found in the Torah (first five books of the Bible). Both groups were represented in the Sanhedrin, the “full assembly of the elders of Israel” (verse 21). The Sanhedrin (like our Supreme Court) made decisions for Israel, with the final authority retained by the Roman Empire.

We will see the apostles go before their jealous opposition in the Sanhedrin and how they react. We will also see have a glimpse of true discipleship.

### Questions:

1. Reflect on the Margaret Atwood quote. What do you think the Sadducees and



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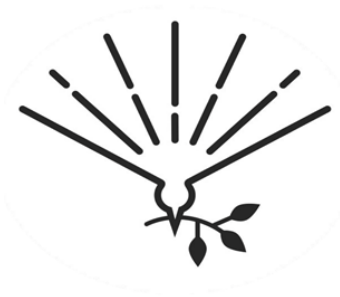
Pharisees wanted that the apostles had?

2. Where in your heart has jealousy taken root? What can you do to recognize and manage your jealous feelings?

## DAY 2

Read Acts 5:17-28

1. What do we learn is the reason the apostles were put in jail in verse 17? Sadducees in the leader copy answer.
2. What instructions does the angel give to the apostles? How do the apostles respond?
3. In verse 24 and 26, we can sense that the opposition felt fear. What were they afraid of and why?
4. Read Deuteronomy 21:7-8. Those responsible for murder were guilty of the person's blood. Behavior such as murder brought judgement on the land. What implications does this have for the elders (leaders) in the Sanhedrin?



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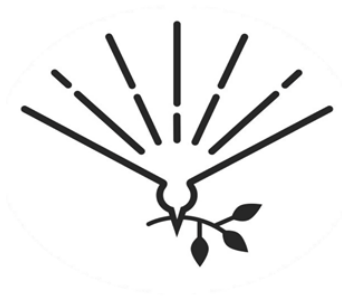
5. Discussion Question: Christians must submit to government authorities (Romans 13:1-7). What do we learn from the apostle's example of how to submit to authority while maintaining obedience to God?

## DAY 3

Read Acts 5:29- 42

1. Why must Peter and the other apostles obey God rather than human beings? What was the reaction of the Sanhedrin?
2. How does Jesus' revolution differ from the previous ones mentioned in our reading? What does Gamaliel propose?
3. Discussion question: What was meant to discourage the apostles from preaching the news of Jesus, only emboldened them further to proclaim the good news. Why do you think this is?





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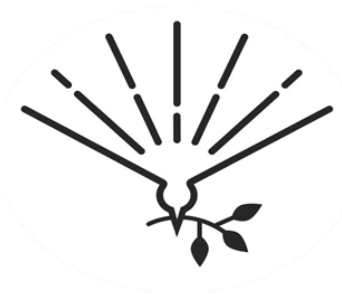
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## DAY 4

Read Acts 6:1-7

1. The church is faced with division. What plan do the apostles come up with and what is the result?
2. What was the criteria for the seven that were chosen? Why are these qualities necessary for servant leadership?
3. The apostles have a clear sense of their calling. Where do they need to focus their time, and why is this clarity important?
4. Discussion Question: We have seen several passages pointing to many people accepting Jesus (2:41, 2:47, 5:14). Verse 6:7 notes, "the number of



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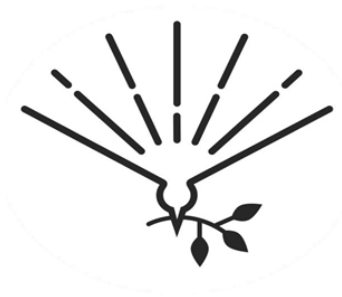


disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” What is the significance of priests becoming obedient to the faith?

## DAY 5

Read Acts 6:8-15

1. Who opposed Stephen and why? What did they do in order to convict him?
2. What ceased the argument between Stephen and his opposition? How can you stand firm in your faith in tumultuous times?
3. False witnesses testified against Stephen. See Matthew 15:19. Where does defilement come from, and what does bearing false witness point toward?



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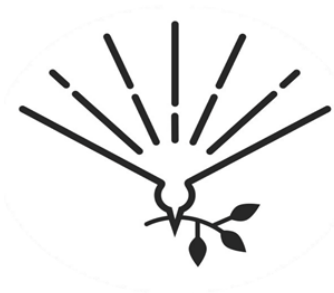


4. Discussion question: In John 15:18-25 Jesus tells his disciples that “if the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first”. Would this have brought Stephen anxiety or peace? How do you react to this statement?

## DAY 6

Review Acts 5:17 – 6:15

**What did you learn about the will of God this week?**



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KEEP JESUS WEIRD: The Book of Acts and the Birth of Non-religious Christianity

Session 6 – What Is Preventing Me?

## DAY 1

### Introduction:

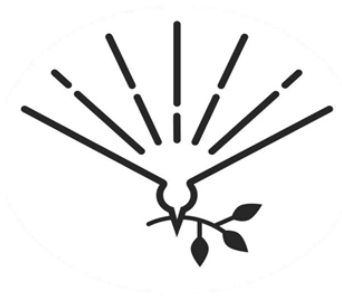
Who remembers Atticus Finch representing innocent Tom Robinson in the book *To Kill a Mockingbird*? He reminds the courtroom that all men are created equal in the deeply moving speech. While his defense didn't change the minds of the jury, and they found Tom guilty, it left a lasting impression on generations of readers. We will also see a powerful defense speech this week. An innocent man "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:55) will defend himself against false witness. He moves beyond defense and goes on the offensive. He recounts God's dealings with Israel, their rejection of Moses, the Law and the very one sent for their salvation, Jesus.

Hang on to your seat, and pay attention to what Stephen says, and doesn't say. It will not only leave a lasting impression on the opposition and the early church, but the modern reader as well. The Jesus movement can't be stopped.

### Questions:

1. Has false witness ever been brought against you? What was your reaction and how did you defend yourself?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to defend a position but ended up going on the offensive? What was the outcome?

## DAY 2



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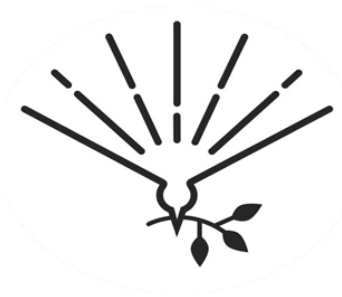
Read Acts 7:1

1. In verse 1, the high priest, probably Caiaphas, asks Stephen to defend himself. What charges have been brought against him in 6:11-14 and what will he need to defend?
2. What was "this holy place" that Stephen was speaking against in 6:13? What significance does it have?
3. Read Matthew 26:59-61. What similarities and differences do you see between the accusations brought against Jesus, and those brought against Stephen?

DAY 3

Read Acts 7: 2-50

1. What do we learn about obedience through the life of Abraham (verse 3-4)? Why do you think Stephen point this out to the council?

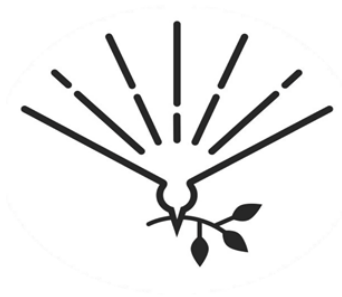


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2. Why does Stephen include the story of Joseph? In what ways does his story echo that of the ultimate Savior?
  
3. What do we learn about how God felt about Moses? Which of Moses' characteristics contribute to his ability to lead Israel?
  
4. Moses was called by God to deliver the very people who rejected him. What is the purpose of Stephen making this point?
  
5. Read verses 44-48 again. What do we learn about where the presence of God dwells? Why does Stephen emphasize this point to the council, and how is he calling them out?
  
6. Discussion question: When Israel rejected Moses and God's work through him, they built a golden calf, a god of their own. Then they rejoiced in the



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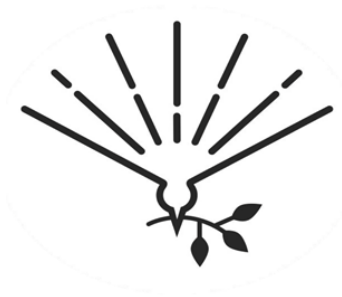


work of their own hands. How have you, either intentionally or subtly, rejoiced in the works of your own hands?

## DAY 4

Read Acts 7:51-60

1. Throughout Stephen's indictment he refers to the Israelites multiple times as "our fathers". However, in verse 51 it shifts to "your fathers". Why does Stephen exclude himself?
2. Who does Stephen charge with the responsibility of the death of Jesus?
3. Stephen was given a chance to speak to defend himself, but he goes from a defense to a prosecution. What is he doing in verses 51-53? How does this relate to the rest of his speech?
4. Discussion Question: Stephen was unafraid to lay out the entire truth and



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that resulted in his death. What power enabled Stephen to ask for the forgiveness of the very people who were stoning him? Where in your life are you resisting the Holy Spirit? How can you allow the Holy Spirit's power to work through you?

## DAY 5

Read Acts 8: 1-40

1. While those in Samaria were asking to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon asked and offered money to receive the authority to give the Holy Spirit. What is the difference and how does Peter rebuke him?
2. Who was the Ethiopian eunuch and what was he going to Jerusalem to do?
3. Discussion Question: The eunuch said, "How can I understand what I'm reading unless someone explains it to me?" Then Philip goes on to tell him the good news about Jesus. *We live in a world where people are waiting for Jesus to be explained to them.* How can you be led by the Spirit to proclaim the good news about Jesus? Who in your life is waiting to hear about



