



ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

How God Turned a Band of Nobodies into a Movement for Everybody

How did a handful of ordinary people become ten thousand followers of Jesus in the year following his public execution? How did his movement gain so much momentum, especially as ten of the eleven charter members were crucified, burned, or stoned to death? How did ten thousand Christians become one million by the second century, and 3.3 billion today?

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Group Discussion Guide: Week 1

Acts 1:1-8

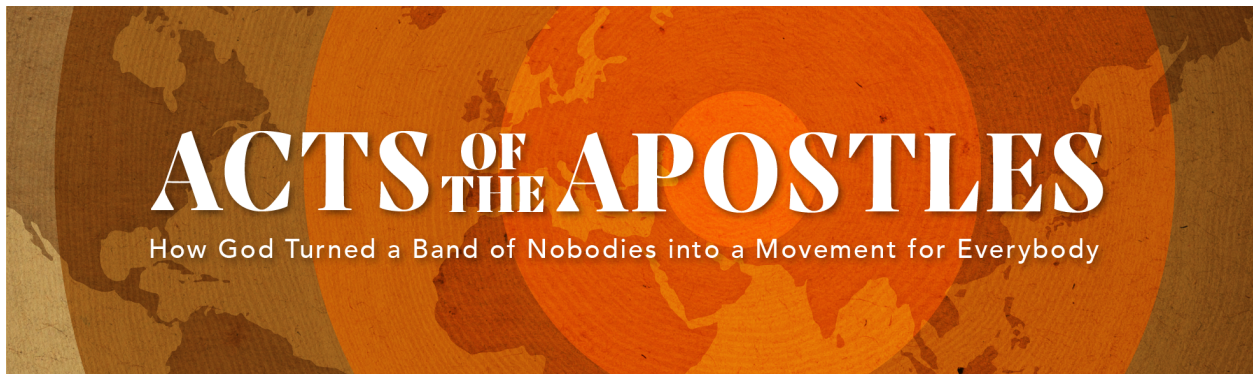
Who is Luke, and how does his upbringing, career, and relationships with the apostles influence his work in Luke and Acts of the Apostles?

- Optional Read Luke 1:1-4 and Colossians 4:18
- Luke was the only Gentile (non-Jewish) author of Scripture
- Luke wrote two Bible books - the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, which together make up about 28% of the New Testament
- Luke was a close friend and associate of the Apostle Paul, serving for several years alongside the Apostle Paul and stuck with him through thick and thin - through all the dangerous journeys, the many arrests, the trials, and even the imprisonments
- Luke was a physician, which suggests that he was a man who valued observation, research, and factual evidence. Paul introduced Luke as a doctor in his letter to the Colossians...
- Luke was a remarkable historian who went to great lengths to get the story straight:

After the ascension, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples teaching and pouring into them. Jesus mentored his disciples. Who has mentored, or poured into you?

Personal Answer

In Acts 1 we see three concepts Jesus focused on before he ascended into heaven.



1. Jesus taught about The Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is [Present](#) (Mark 1:15)

[The Kingdom is at hand, it's not something that will come in the future, or at the end, it is here and now.](#)

The Kingdom of God is our [Prayer](#) (Matthew 6:10)

[When Jesus taught his disciples to Pray it was Kingdom centered. When we pray our prayers should focus not only on our needs, but the Kingdom as a whole. Prayer can be our entry into viewing the world through God's eyes.](#)

The Kingdom of God is our [Priority](#) (Matthew 6:33)

[God and His Kingdom, not any earthly nation or ruler, should be our priority. If we make Jesus and His mission the priority, then the rest will fall into place.](#)

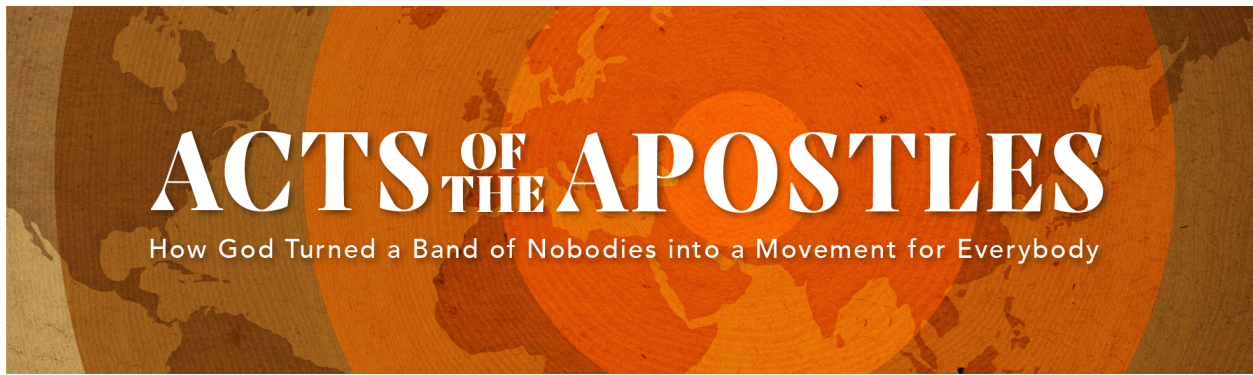
Why were the disciples confused about the Kingdom Jesus was inaugurating?

[The disciples thought Jesus would usher in a physical kingdom, the kind they are used to. They hoped Jesus would take back Jerusalem, and sit on a physical throne like other earthly rulers. Jesus' Kingdom is different.](#)

2. Jesus taught them to wait for the Holy Spirit

Jesus told his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit before they got to work spreading the good news. Why do you think Jesus gave this command to wait when there was so much to be done?

[Waiting is difficult. We are all doers and we like getting stuff done, but when it comes to Christ's mission for the Church we cannot do it on our own. If we try to do it with our own power that eventually leads to burnout and disappointment](#)



Why was and is the Holy Spirit essential in the expansion of Jesus' Church?

- The Holy Spirit was foretold by Old Testament prophets like Isaiah (ch32), Ezekiel (36), and Joel (2), among others.
- Whereas the baptism of water brought repentance and forgiveness, the Spirit's baptism will bring the POWER OF GOD.
- We need the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Power that comes with it. (1 Timothy 1:6-11)

3. Jesus taught them that they will be his witnesses “to the ends of the earth.”

From the first pages of the Bible there has always been an emphasis on God reaching the entire world. Where do we see this in the Old and New Testament?

- Genesis 12:1-3
- Genesis 17:3-8
- 1 Kings 8:56-61
- Isaiah 56:7
- 1 Timothy 2:3-4

How can we join the disciples in becoming witnesses in Houston, Texas, and beyond?

Personal

We are citizens of God's Kingdom, empowered by God's Spirit, to do God's work in the world.

Spend a good amount of time discussing these last 3 questions with your group. This is how Eric's sermon will end and should be great discussion topics.

Whose Kingdom do you call home? - A nation, company, family?

Whose power moves you? What energy, purpose, or fuel drives you?

Whose work are you doing? Are you participating in Kingdom work or selfish?



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Discussion Guide: Week 2

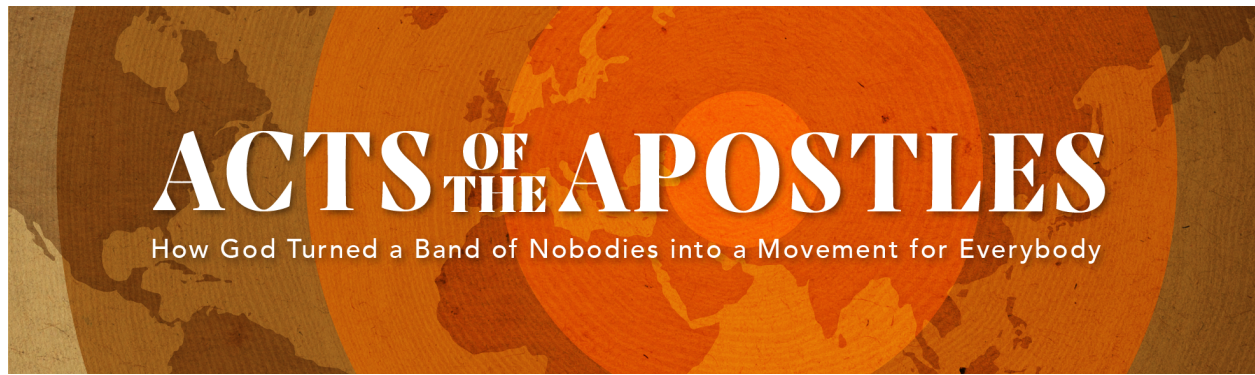
Acts 2:1-13

What is your experience with the Holy Spirit? Would you consider yourself charismatic, closed off, or unsure?

In your groups you will have people all across the spectrum. Your leaders might even have different experiences with the Holy Spirit. Try to read today's passage like you have never read it before. Come in with fresh eyes and see what stands out to you and your group. Make room for people to share and be honest about their views on the HS.

For the Jews, what is the day of Pentecost and what does it celebrate?

Pentecost: happened on a Jewish holiday that was one of the three Jewish feasts that called for a pilgrimage for all Jewish people to flood into Jerusalem. Every Jewish family in the known world would make the trek to Jerusalem. It got its name, Pentecost (fiftieth), from the fact that it took place 50 days after Passover (the last one being concurrent with Jesus' crucifixion) It was a feast of harvest and Pentecost had symbolic significance: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to be a great harvest for the world, and that's precisely what happened.



The festival remembered Moses going up to Mount Sinai to receive the law. The difference is that Mt Sinai people are terrified and 3000 perish from the fire that came, but at Pentecost people are amazed and perplexed and we'll see later that 3000 are saved by the fire that came down that allowed everyone to speak in every different language.

Acts 2:1 says they were "all together in one place" who is all and why is this important?"

More than just the 12, Acts 1:14-15 says - They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.... (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

This is important because the HS is poured out on all believers. Not just men, or the 12 apostles, but all. This was prophecy in places like Joel 2:28-32. The Holy Spirit does not move through any hierarchy or have any bias.

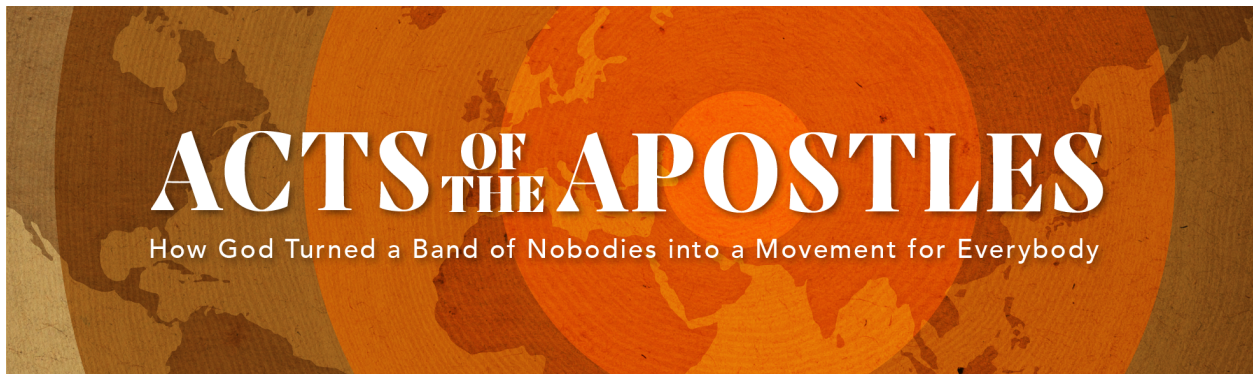
The Holy Spirit Comes in Power

What words are used to describe the Holy Spirit indwelling the disciples? What does this teach us about the Spirit's movements and presence in our lives?

The power of the Spirit is repeated over 90 times in the New Testament. The Spirit always comes in power. We see images like "blowing like a violent wind from heaven" and "tongues of fire" - Wind and fire are untameable forces that come with theophanies in the Old Testament (Exd 3:2, Deut 4:24, 2 Sam 5:24, Job 38:1)

You cannot control fire and wind. They're terrifying and exhilarating. Devastating and purifying. The Holy Spirit cannot be tamed. And that's what He wants to do in our lives. To powerfully shake us up that there's no other explanation but it's a move of God.

The speaking in tongues we see here is probably different then what you initially think of. It's clear in Acts 2 that the believers were empowered to speak in foreign languages they didn't know but the travelers understood (a linguistic phenomenon)



The purpose of this manifestation was so the Gospel could be preached and all could understand in their own language.

This is different from what Paul mentions in his letters. The speaking in tongues he writes about is more focused on prayer, prophecy, and praise, and you need someone to supernaturally interpret what is being said. Speaking in tongues is a clear gift from the Spirit, but it is not the only manifestation of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Further Reading on Spiritual Gifts and Speaking in Tongues

- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
- 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

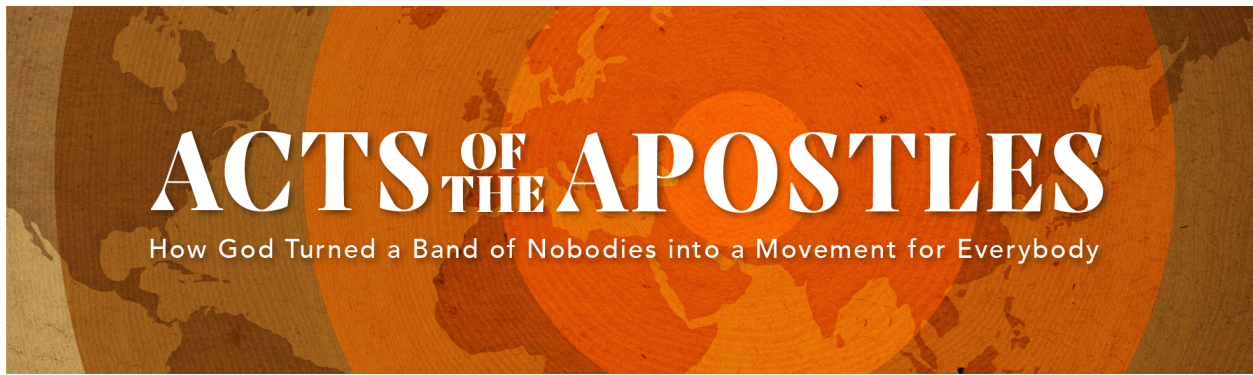
The Holy Spirit Unites

In Acts 2:5-11 Luke says every nation under heaven was represented then lists the people present and the regions they came from. This passage parallels the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 that precedes the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11:1-9. How can Pentacost be read as a reversal of Babel?

The Holy Spirit doesn't come to divide, but to unite. This is a cosmic reversal from a story in Genesis 10 called the tower of Babel:

Gen 11:1;4,8-9 - Now the whole world had one language and a common speech ... Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves... 8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Babel - because of human pride, arrogance and defiance of God the human race is divided. They denied God's call to spread out and settle the land, tried to manufacture a way to reach God, and created a fake uniformity. God divided the people and gave them their own languages so they couldn't understand one another.



In Pentecost this was reversed. Every language and nation and tribe under heaven is at once united by the the gospel. Even though they all spoke different languages, they could all understand the Holy Spirit. The curse at Babel is being reversed at Pentecost through the unity of the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Map of all the nations:

https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/nations_in_jerusalem_at_pentecost_acts_2_map_1.jpg (This is covering tens of thousand of square miles)

The Gospel does not seek manufactured uniformity, but unity. What is the difference between the two? How does the Holy Spirit produce unity among believers?

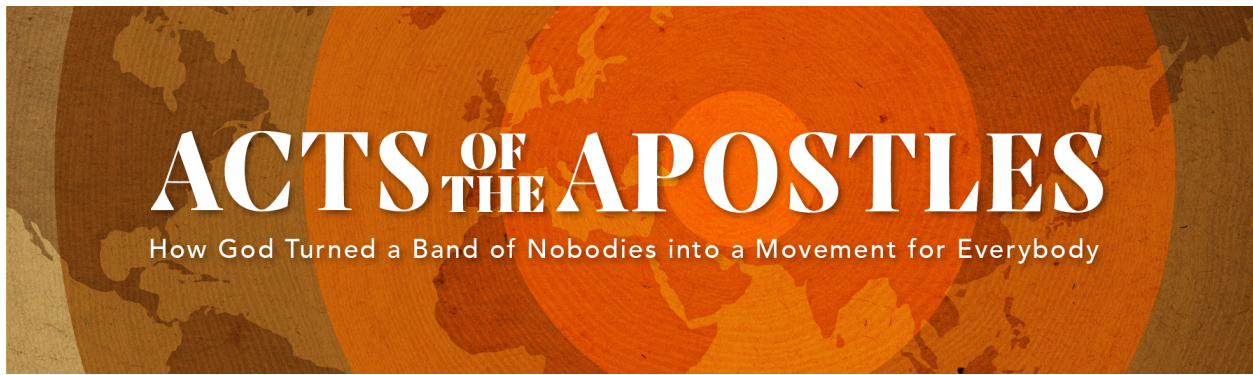
Today we can find syncretism everywhere we go. This is the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. The world is trying to force everyone to look, believe, or behave the same. This is manufactured uniformity.

Unity is what the Gospel provides. Christians can look, talk, and act differently but what binds us together is Jesus. Even though people assume the average christian is a stuffy white American man in his 40's the reality is 65% of Christians are african/asian/latin american. Only 10% of Christians live in North America. The Holy Spirit unifies us with believers all across the globe who probably look and act nothing like us. The only thing that could possibly tie an American male businessman in Houston to an African female farmer in Ethiopia is the good news.

The Holy Spirit Produces Joyful Fearlessness

Many in the crowd in Jerusalem thought the Spirit filled believers were drunk. Why would the crowds think this? How does the Holy Spirit transform our lives in such a way that makes us look strange to the rest of the world?

Being full of the Spirit almost looks like being drunk.



Ephesians 5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit

The difference is alcohol is a depressant. You became less aware of reality. The things that bother you become dulled down. It dumbs you down.

The Spirit awakens reality. He enlightens you about the wonders of God and what Jesus has done. He illuminates and helps you understand the ultimate reality that God loves you more than you can ever understand. He should transform your life and cause you to live so generously and joyfully that the world is confused. The Holy Spirit should violently shake up your life. You will find yourself thinking about God more, falling in love with Jesus more, and wanting the things that don't matter a little bit less.

Reflection Questions

There is a difference between knowing about something and experiencing it? Is your faith primarily fact based or experiential?

The key here is not to shame people who haven't experienced God. When we talk about the HS some people can feel shame or guilt for not experiencing His presence. While we should spur and encourage people to experience God more fully, the last thing we want to do is leave them feeling like they aren't saved or there is something they have to work towards to be better Christians.

To receive the Holy Spirit Jesus' followers didn't conjure Him up or follow a specific formula; they simply gathered together in prayer and waited. Have you waited and made yourself available for the Holy Spirit?

Group Leader, how can you follow the example of the early church and gather with your people in prayer and eager expectation waiting for the Spirit to show up?



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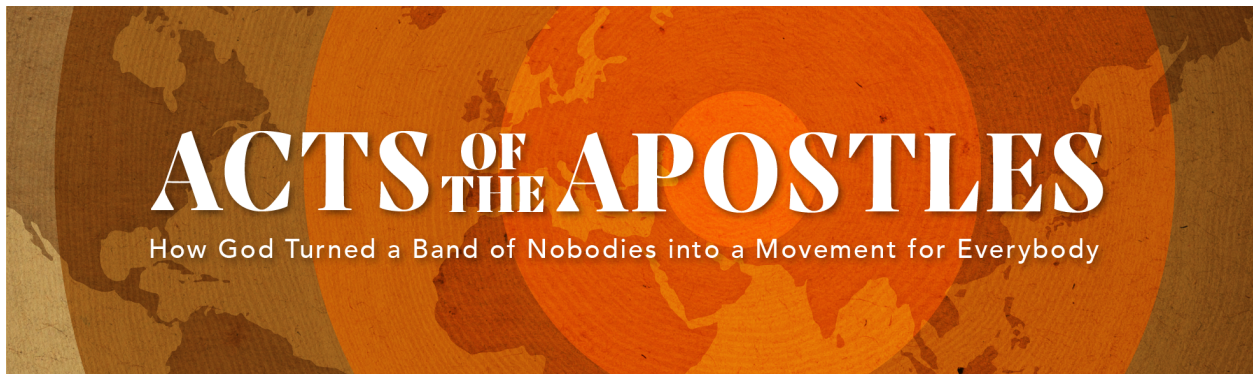
Discussion Guide: Week 4

Acts 2:22-41

Reflection Question: What makes Jesus so special? How can we say that he's any better or any different from all the other well-spoken, charismatic religious leaders that have come and gone?

Jesus was either a liar, lunatic, or Lord. No other options. C.S. Lewis said it best in his Book Mere Christianity.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. (CS Lewis, Mere Christianity, 55-56)



David's Prediction

What does Psalm 16 say about the coming messiah? How do we know this song was not about David himself?

Psalm 16 says “the Holy one will not see decay”, but David definitely decayed. He died, like every other person and was buried. People in Jerusalem knew where his body was laid. They also knew that Jesus’ body was nowhere to be found. Hundreds of years before the life of Jesus, David was prophesying about a greater one who would come. One who would be from the line of David, but a different kind of king who would never be defeated by death.

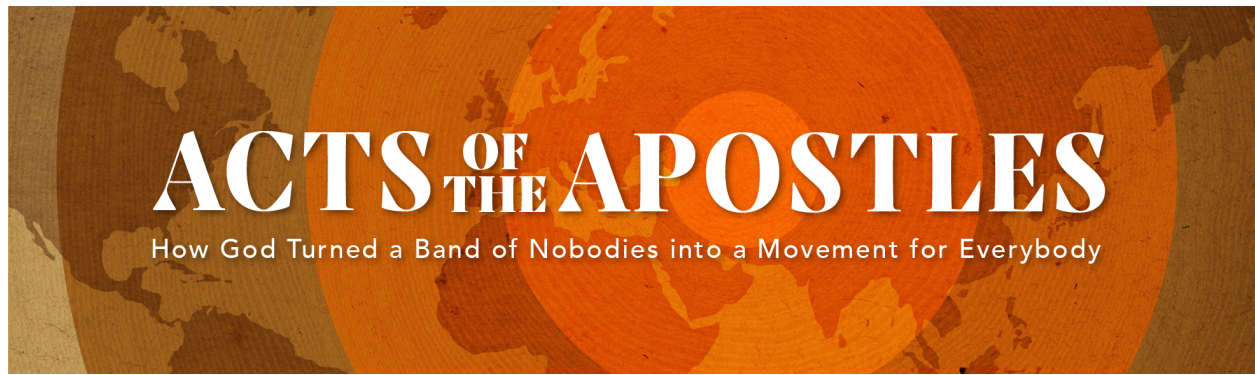
How does Psalm 110 point to Jesus? What does Jesus say about this passage in Matthew 22:43-46?

Psalm 110 says “The Lord said to My Lord”. Once again in a passage that was written hundreds of years before the life of Jesus King David saw that someone would come who was much greater than he. That was a huge statement, because David himself was the greatest King Israel ever saw! He was their hero, the GOAT, but he knew that the one who was to come would be incomparably greater.

In Matthew 22 Jesus quotes this passage in an argument with some Pharisees about whose son the Messiah would be. The Jewish lawyers and teachers claimed the Messiah would be David’s son, but if that was true then why would David call him my lord? David could not, that’s impossible. He was the King. This is why this Psalm does not point to just an earthly decedent, but someone who was entirely different - A heavenly king who would reign forever.

How do the cross and resurrection play a central role in Peter’s Sermon? How do you think the crowds in Jerusalem would have reacted to Peter’s claims?

Peter was preaching to Jewish crowds who knew of Jesus. They heard all about him, maybe saw him teach, they could have even been present for the trial and crucifixion. All of the people there had heard that the body was missing and Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter could not have made these claims about Jesus in



Jerusalem if they were not true. Peter also knew his audience and used the Old Testament, their sacred scriptures, to prove to them Jesus was the messiah that they had been waiting for. Jesus was who He said He was.

Peter says 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 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.

The bad news is Peter preaches to the Jewish crowds that they played a part in Jesus’ death. Peter is pretty blunt, but probably in the back of his head he is remembering how he himself denied Jesus three times. The truth is all of our wickedness and sin contributed to the death of Jesus. Not just these Jews in the crowd, but all of us stand responsible.

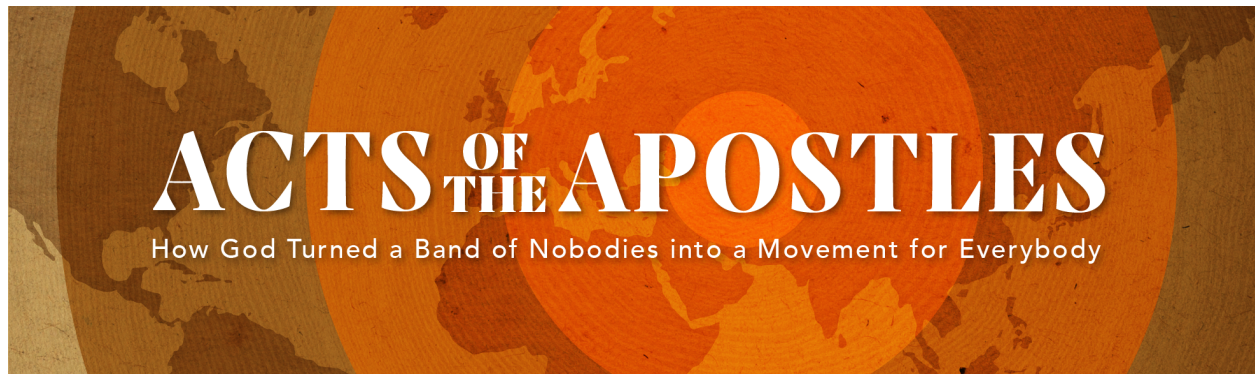
The good news is God is in the business of redeeming human wickedness for His glory. It is actually in Jesus’ death, which was due to our sin, that we find grace and forgiveness!

Your group could easily get into long drawn out arguments about verse 23 and God’s plan versus human responsibility, but we should notice that Scripture can hold both of these ideas in tension. We should too.

God’s Promise

Peter says “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” How is the Gospel both inclusive and exclusive?

The Gospel is for ALL. He uses specific people to spread his good news to the whole wide world. From the beginning, God told Abraham he would use him and his family to bless all nations. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars. (Genesis 15:5-6). Through Jesus this became a reality. Through a select few apostles this faith has spread to 3.3 billion people today!



Why is the belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus a non-negotiable in the Christian faith?

The resurrection is the seal of God's promise. Without the resurrection, the gospel is just a political tool or social justice movement. Without the resurrection the rest of the Bible would be useless. If that sounds harsh read 1 Corinthians 15:12-18 as a group.

Our faith loses its power and uniqueness if you remove the empty tomb. If we can't believe in the empty tomb then the rest of our faith can come into focus. If you are struggling to buy every word of the Bible, start with Jesus and let Him show you the rest.

Peter's Warning

Peter warns the people to "save themselves from this corrupt generation". What do you think Peter was referring to in his context, and how would this warning apply to us today?

Peter was talking to the Jews who killed Jesus, they were pretty wicked, but so are we. The point of this passage is not calling out one single generation, but all of us. Even today we should not just call out Gen Z or the boomers, but be aware of the ways in which all of us have fallen short of God's perfection.

In your group you can talk about society at first, BUT I encourage you to spend time reflecting on the ways each of us have individually been corrupted. **Don't let this question be an opportunity to simply attack the other, but look within at the ways you need to obey Jesus.**

The fascinating truth of the Gospel is the only way to save yourself is to stop trying to save yourself. What does this mean?

In your group discuss this statement, and how we aren't saved by trying harder, or being a better person, but by giving control over to God. It's easier said than done.



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Discussion Guide: Week 4

Acts 2:42-47

The Foundation

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”

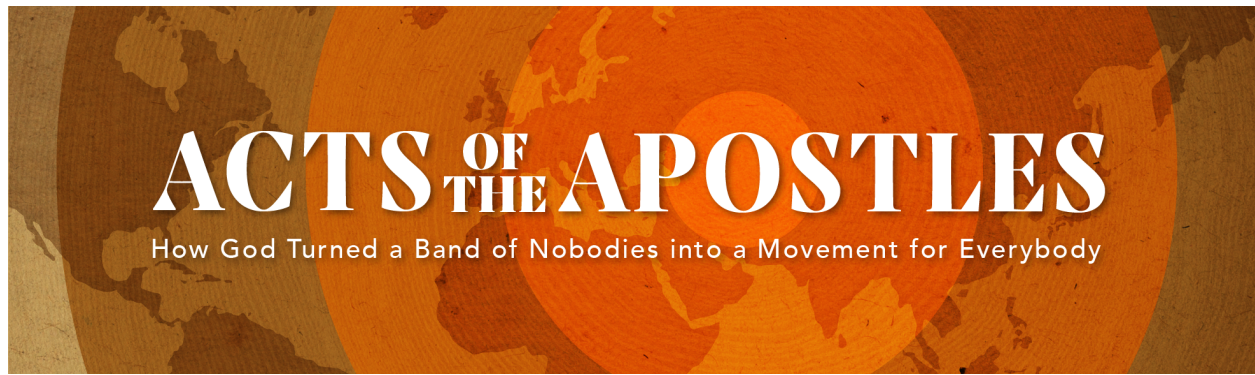
Based on what we know about Peter’s first sermon (2:14-41), what were the apostles teaching the first Christians and where did they receive this information from?

Peter’s sermon had two major sources. The first was the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures - our old testament. He used the Psalms as well as the prophet Joel to point to how Jesus was the promised messiah. These first followers of Jesus were primarily Jews and still saw themselves as Jewish so when they gathered they would surely spend time reading the same texts they read all their lives, but with new insight.

The second source of teaching was the 1st hand experiences of the apostles. These men followed every step of Jesus for 3 years. They heard all his sermons, witnessed his healing and miracles, and saw the way he loved others. Most importantly they testified to Jesus’ death and resurrection. While the apostles told these stories to the believers they were establishing the oral tradition that would soon be recorded in the Gospels around 50 AD.

What does it actually look like for believers to “devote themselves” to sound doctrine?

It’s one thing to hear a teaching and another to devote ourselves to it. Many Christians respect Scripture, but do you submit to it? Do you obey even when it is difficult? Spend some time in your group discussing how you can obey the Bible. Also spend time discussing how to determine what is sound doctrine and what is misleading (The key is to always go back to Scripture!)



“...and to fellowship...”

What is fellowship, and what did that word (*koinonia*) mean in its first-century context?

Koinonia - A fellowship, partnership, or communion. This term describes a group of people who are united and gathered for a higher purpose. Koinonia can be used to describe our relationship with other believers but also our relationship with Christ.

Other uses of this term for further study 1 Corinthians 1:9 (describes our personal relationship with Jesus) and 1 John 1:6-7

What's the difference between fellowship and just casually hanging out? How can you take your fellowship to the next level so that it becomes a spiritual discipline?

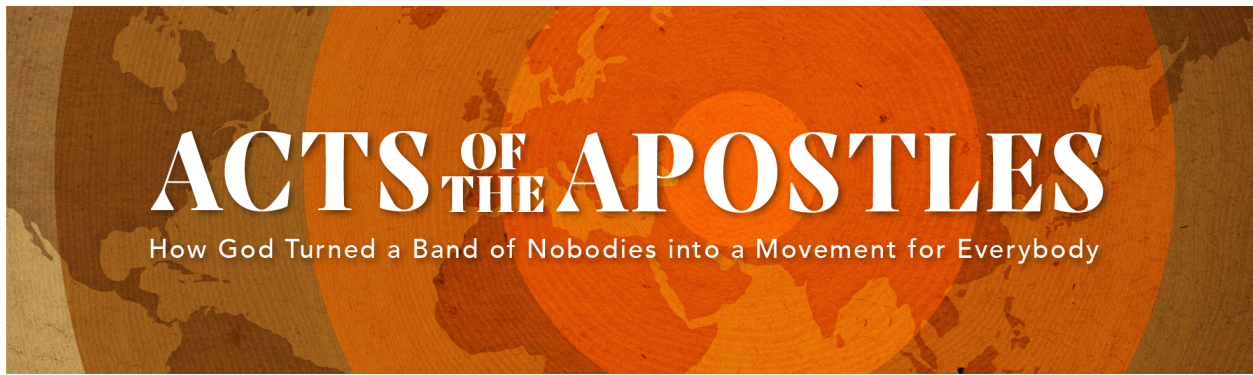
Christians can get in the habit of adding “fellowship” to anything to make it sound more spiritual. Fellowship is more than just Christians casually getting together to eat tacos, it requires us to intentionally gather in pursuit of Christ.

This is a great question to be honest with your group and potentially examine the ways your fellowship has become too casual. Do you spend more time talking about the Astros or gossiping rather than Scripture? Is your fellowship truly focused on Jesus or some other ulterior motive like networking or image. How can your group commit to deeper fellowship?

“...to the breaking of bread...”

What was the deeper significance of breaking bread together in the first-generation Church?

While breaking bread included a meal, it also likely meant communion - to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This was an act of worship. So when they gathered they just didn't eat out of necessity or convenience, but it was a way to ground their meetings in Christ and worship of Him.



For further reading check out - 1 Corinthians 11:20-26. In this passage Paul gets upset at the Church in Corinth for messing communion up. Some would bring their own meals, others indulge too much, and they were neglecting the real purpose of the meal - worship.

“...and to prayer.”

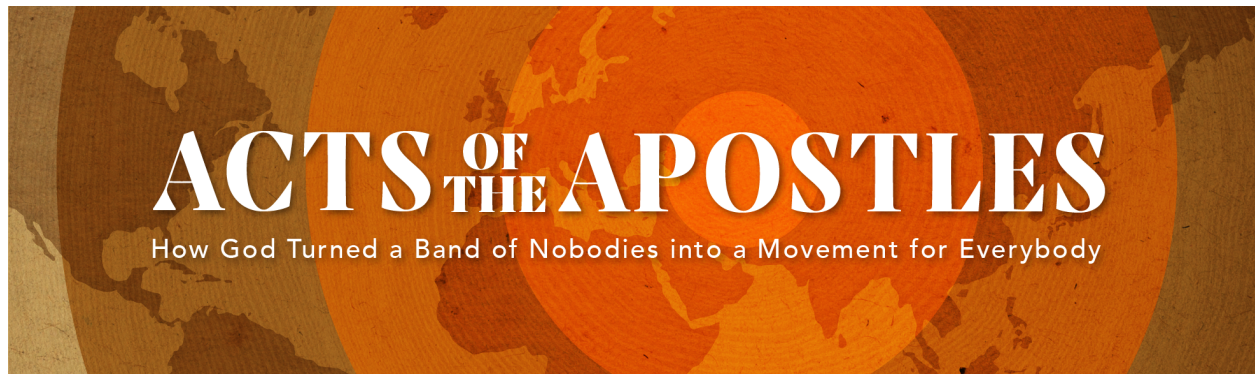
How would you rate your current prayer life on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being non-existent and 10 being constant? Why did you give yourself that score?

Really good discussion question. Some in your group may not be willing to share, but as a leader begin with vulnerability and hopefully your group will open up as the Spirit leads.

How can you double down on prayer in your personal life as well as your family and the groups you are a part of?

Maybe the most important question of the week. Make a game plan both personally and as a group to make prayer a bigger priority going forward. Here are a few options of ways you can do this, but be creative! I am just offering a few options

- Set an alarm - have everyone in your group set an alarm for the same time everyday this week and commit to stopping and praying when it goes off.
- Fasting - Spiritual disciplines don't do anything on their own, but they move us to the place where God can work. Fasting whether it's for a full day or just a few hours is a great way to rely on God and remove the idolatry of comfort.
- Move prayer to the beginning of your group time going forward - when prayer is last on our itinerary it often gets rushed or neglected. What if you prayed first every week? What if a few people got to your group early and prayed over the meeting before it got started? What if you added prayer meeting on zoom?
- Cover one member in prayer - elect one person in your group each week and have the entire group pray over them for the everyday the upcoming week. Ask for their needs and followup. Pick someone else next week.
- Pray when needs arise - instead of saying I will pray for you, commit to stopping on the spot and praying for anyone who needs it this week!



The Result

In verses 43-45, we read about the results of this foundation built on sound doctrine, fellowship, worship, and prayer. What were the results? How did these disciplines contribute to the way the believers viewed personal property?

The results were authentic and effective evangelism. They weren't trying to be an attractional church, but they were attractive by just being who God called them to be people! This foundation also created a unique community where believers provided for one another whenever a need arose.

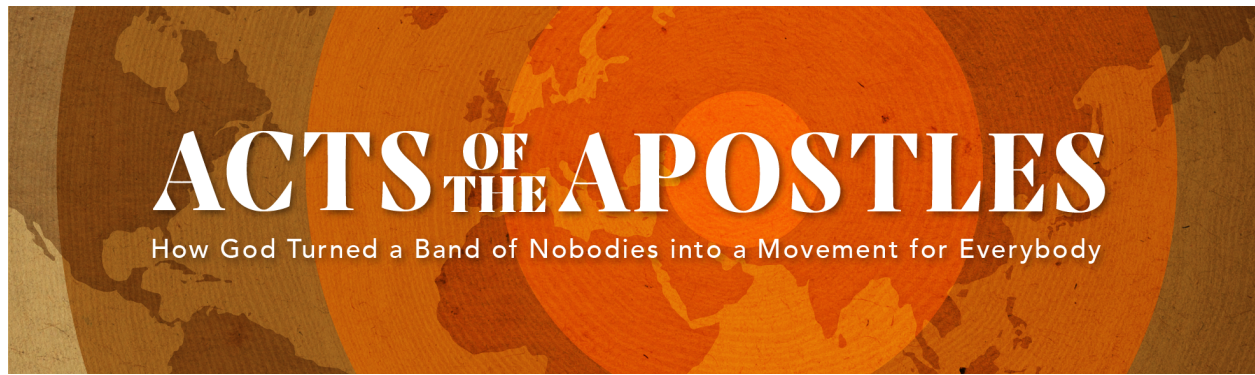
This group was not socialist. They were not getting rid of private property and living in a commune together where everything was shared. Instead they voluntarily sold some of what they did have in order to care for one another. This is a higher and harder call than the church simply requiring some form of socialism. Yes God wants us to give radically, but it is not a rigid requirement, instead we give freely and joyfully from time to time when needed.

Acts 4:34-35 confirms this model of giving

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.

Verses 46 and 47 describe Christians who were happy, sincere, joyful, and beloved by "all the people" - including unbelievers. What was it that made first-generation Christians so appealing to the world around them?

The believers in the 1st century church lived such counter cultural lives that outsiders couldn't help but take notice. Their love and care for one another was revolutionary. People thought the believers were drunk or crazy because they had such exuberance and contagious joy. What made them so appealing is that they were not trying to win people over with catchy sermons or the best facilities, but with sincere love and truth. Our world craves this type of authentic community.



A few centuries Emperor Julian remastered how Christians were so loving and charitable that it made his pagan priests look bad!

*“when it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, then I think the impious Galilaeans [i.e., Christians] observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy.” **

“[They] support not only their poor, but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”

In what ways have you witnessed churches failing to mirror the Church's heart as described in Acts 2? What may be some of the underlying reasons why some congregations look nothing like the Acts 2 Church?

This question is a chance for skeptics or those who have been hurt by the church to share the pain and flaws they have seen. Acknowledge people's pain and disappointment, but don't stay here too long. Use this question to inspire your conversation on the next one!

Think of one or two church practices described in Acts 2:42-47 that are lacking in your own life or our community. As you write them down, think about how you can introduce them to your personal faith and our church.

It's easy to point out or complain about a problem, it is much more difficult to be part of the solution. Our church is not perfect, there are many ways we have fallen short of the model shown in Acts 2. How can your group help us move towards the ideal community described here? How can we do a better job of sharing our resources with those in need, inviting new people in, and building a foundation on teaching, worship, fellowship, and prayer? Join us



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Discussion Guide: Week 5

Acts 3:1-19

Do you believe there is power in the *name* of Jesus? If so, what kind of power is it?

Let each group member answer.

In what ways do you think people misuse or trivialize the name of Jesus today? In doing so how do we violate the third commandment?

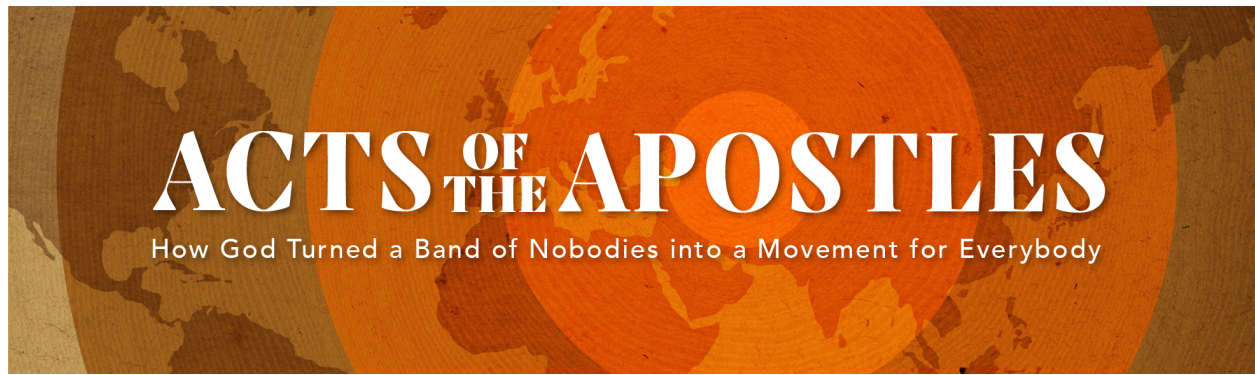
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:7) There are many ways church people violate this command today.

The first is offering God and others a show, by saying one thing with our lips and not believing it in our hearts. In this case, our words are just words, they are empty and unfulfilled.

The second is teaching doctrines or commandments in Jesus' name that are not aligned with God's truth and have been diluted by human teachings. There are many people today claiming to be believers who say things under the guise of Christianity that Jesus would never say.

The third is what we have already talked about and throwing out words without thinking about them. It makes our faith statement cliches.

Our words matter. Especially our words about God. We misuse the Holy name of Jesus and throw it around casually. This isn't only an infraction against God, but damages our witness to others. When we say his name it should be done carefully and meaningfully.



Names served as expressions of identity and authority in the ancient world. What can we learn about the identity and authority of God through His name (Yahweh) and the name of Jesus?

God reveals himself in the burning bush in Exodus 3 and tells Moses his name is YHWH meaning "I am who I am". This was an incredible revelation about the character of God. God was uncreated, eternal, and unchangeable, He would always be there, a constant for his people. Even though God was Holy He wanted to reveal himself to his people.

Jesus' name means "God Saves" and establishes Jesus' role as our messiah. Jesus' name is the name above every name. This means that God has given Jesus authority and power over all of creation. In Jesus Colossians 1 says "We see the visible image of the invisible God"

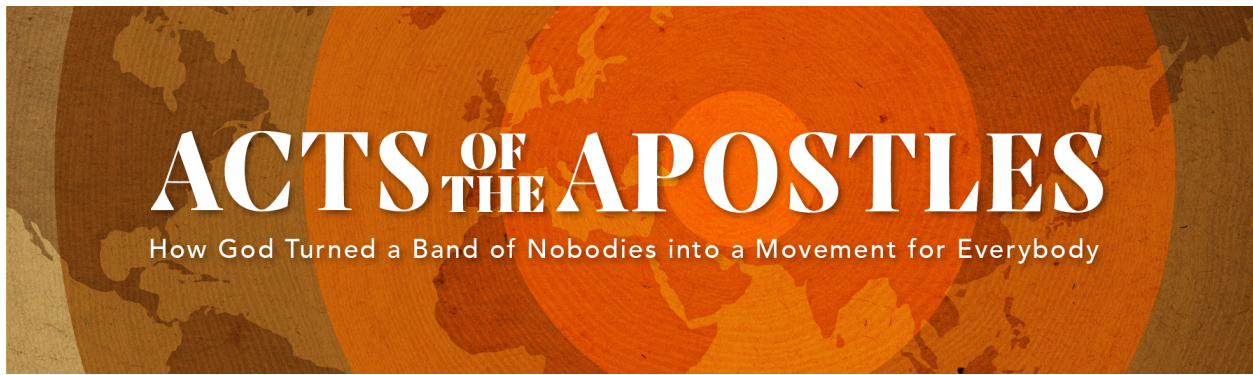
The Jewish people treated the name of God with deep reverence, a practice they still follow to this day. What can we learn from the way they treat the name of God?

In order to protect the sacredness of the personal name of God they refuse to write it and substitute different spoken names for Him. Usually "Adonai" which means Lord, but the Old Testament is filled with many different names that describe his character. Names like Jehovah Jireh (The Lord Will Provide), Jehovah Shalom (The Lord Is Peace), or ELOHIM.

[Here is a great Jewish resource with more information!](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-name-of-god)
(<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-name-of-god>)

What does Philippians 2:9-11 teach us about the Authority in the name of Jesus?

Every knee will bow before the Lord Jesus. The Father has given Him authority over all of creation, and in the end, every knee will bow before him one way or another. Some of us will do it willingly, and others might be forced. Jesus has authority over the earth, the heavens, and even over those under the earth - the demons.



How does Jesus grant us access to and intimacy with the Father?

Because of The Son, we have direct access to the Father. We are welcomed into a place we have no business being in. We are ushered into the presence of God.

Ephesians 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Hebrews 10:19-22

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

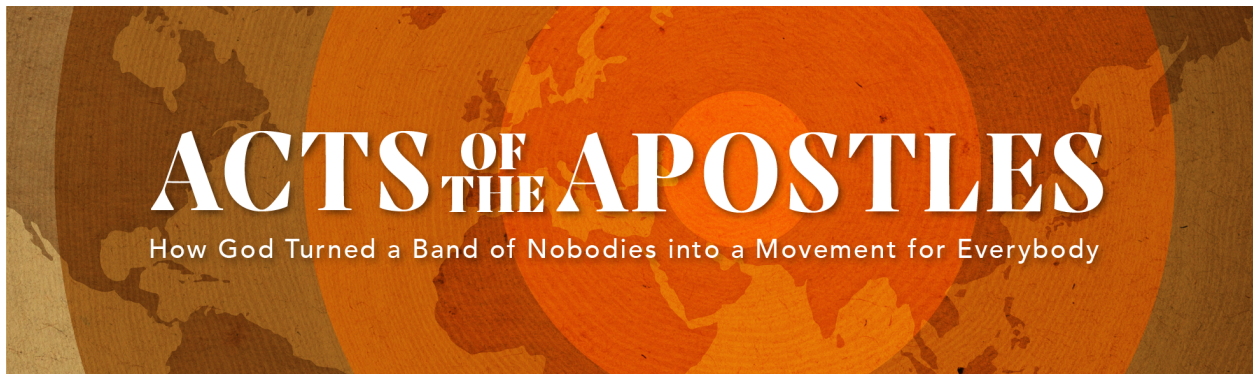
John 14:6

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

How does repentance allow us to participate in the power of Jesus' name? What is the connection between repentance and refreshing?

We can experience intimacy with God through repentance. Repentance can be framed as a harsh word. One that brings shame and judgment, but do you see what Peter says repentance leads to? A time of refreshment - to vitality and renewed energy.

There is refreshment in repentance because in that moment we turn from our sin to God and go from being sinful to righteous. From lost to found. From deserving God's wrath to swimming in God's grace. From being far off to His loving embrace.



2 Cor 7:9-10

9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Reflection Questions

How do you use the name of Jesus? How can you use it more carefully and meaningfully?

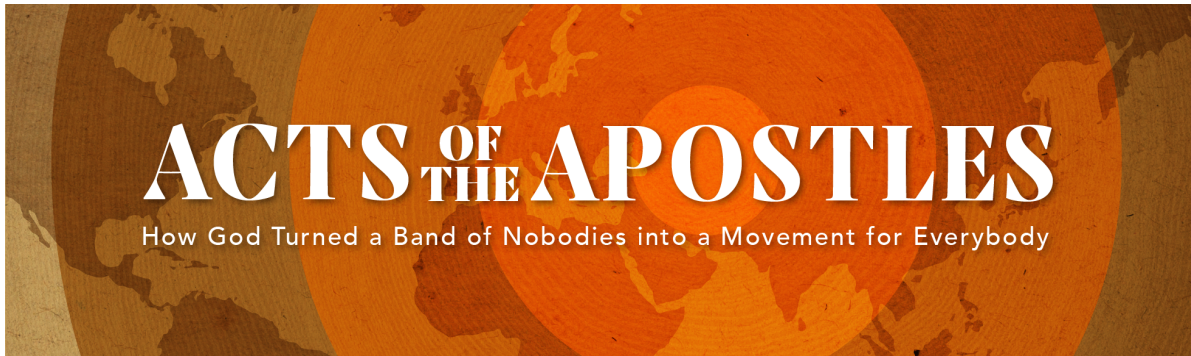
Personal reflection. Ask people to think of their conversations, their social media posts, and prayer life. We shouldn't be scared to use the name of Jesus but we cannot use it flippantly.

Is the Church we read about in Acts just an ideal, or do you believe the Church can still be that force for the Kingdom today?

What happened in Acts still happens to this day. We may not see it as much in America, but go on a mission trip or read testimony from the Global church. Believers are healing, casting out demons, and praying powerful prayers in Jesus' name. If people in your group can witness this, ask them to share examples!

In what areas of your life do you need to repent and be refreshed?

Personal Answer.



Discussion Guide: Week 6

Acts 4:1-12

How does the statement “Jesus is the only way to salvation sit with you? Why?

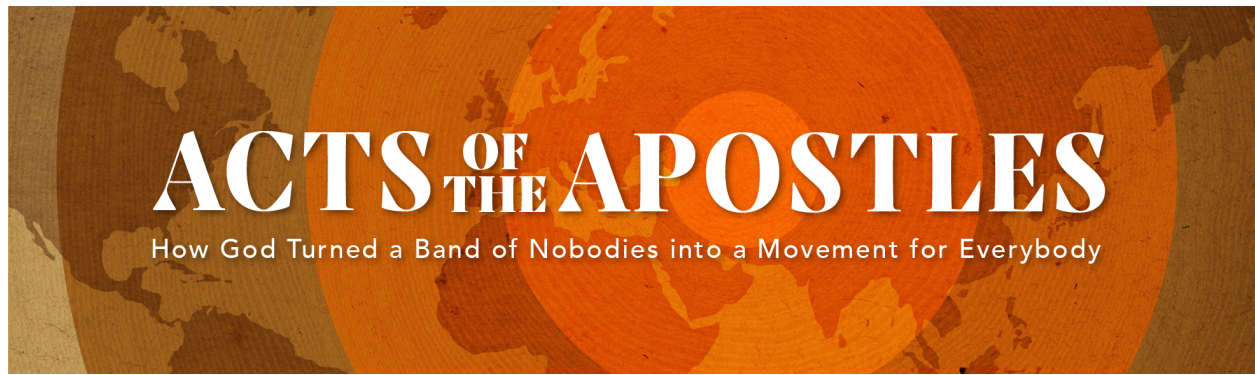
To some this seems old school, exclusive, or even combative. Allow people to answer this question honestly and vulnerably. I know as leaders we all accept this statement and understand that Jesus said as much Himself, but for skeptics or those with doubts they might be less sure. Many of our secular friends and even some who go to church may say “sure Jesus is a way, but there might be other ways as well” If they answer they believe there are other ways to God or heaven, don't be alarmed, you will have a chance to read the Bible and explain the scriptural backing for this statement later in this lesson.

Do you, or your friends, have trouble accepting the exclusivity of Christianity? Can christianity coexist with other faith claims and worldviews? Why or why not?

It can be uncomfortable to say we as christians have all the answers and others are wrong. Our society has even canceled christians for saying things like Jesus is the only way. Statements like “turn or burn” definitely haven't helped our cause.

So can we coexist? Yes - christians can work, befriend, and even partner with people with different faiths and worldviews, but we can never compromise our core beliefs. Mainly that Jesus is the way to the Father. At the end of the day all religions believe they are right and are exclusive by nature, trying to sync them and say they all believe the same things is offensive to all. So at the end of the day Christianity cannot not just be another religion, a you pick what works for you kind of thing. Jesus is either our Lord or nothing.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:23



How is not just Jesus, but Christ Crucified, a stumbling block? Why do some, especially the religious, struggle with worshiping a savior who was sacrificed on a cross?

Deuteronomy 21:22–23 teaches that there was a divine curse placed on a hanged person: “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance” (ESV).

For the Christ, messiah, to be hung on a tree (cursed), was a non-starter for Jews. The religious elite would never worship a messiah who was killed like that. Especially one who was a nobody from a back-water region like Galilee. For further reading and study check-out Galatians 3.

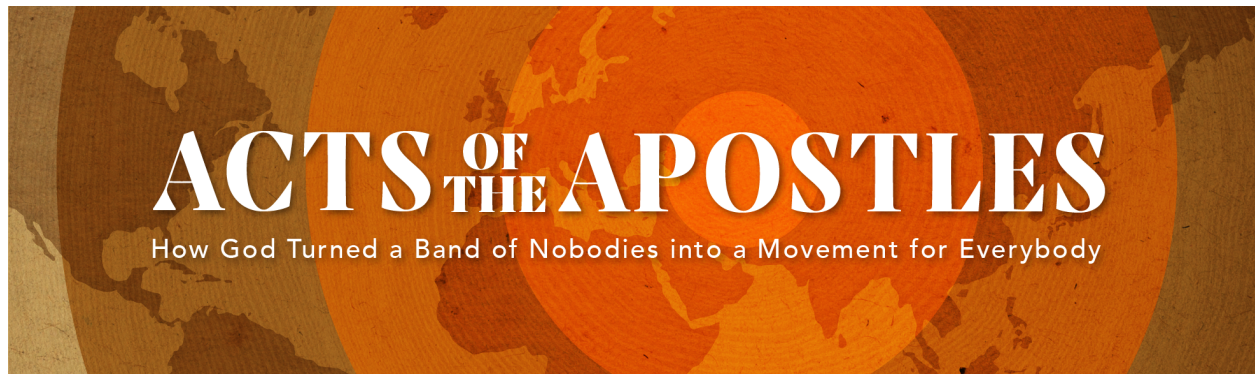
Today there are also many who stumble upon the fact that a Jewish man who died 2000 years ago can bring us salvation. It sounds too much like a fairytale or some sort of wild unproven event. Their intellect won't let them accept this truth.

How is it not just Jesus, but Christ Crucified, foolishness? Why do some, especially in our wider culture, struggle accepting Jesus is the name above every name?

When Jesus doesn't believe what we want him to believe it is easy to think He sounds foolish. We start thinking that we are wiser, more moral, or more loving than God is when he doesn't agree with us on xyz. In this case the Devil tricks us into believing we are our own God. We no longer need Jesus because WE are the one in charge. This is foolishness. Remember the picture Eric showed with Dave? Don't be like Dave.

How is Jesus' statement “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” offensive?

Jesus is the only way. This offends anyone else who doesn't see it this way. Non-believers may say the Bible trips them up, or christian view of marriage, but at



the end of the day it is the idea that we need Jesus and he is the only way to God. This is the one thing that determines our eternal destination. God gives us free will so we are able to choose whose way we will follow - my way or Gods. This sounds unfair or exclusive, but SALVATION is - a free gift, for all, only from Jesus Christ. All are welcome; they just must submit their will to God.

In Luke 19:10 Jesus says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." You cannot be saved unless you first realize you are lost. Why is an understanding of our own inadequacy essential to accepting God's free gift of grace?

You cannot be saved if you don't realize you are lost. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God. All of us need His grace, but before we can receive it we must first recognize our brokenness.

Reflection questions

If you have been saved, how were you lost before Christ? What did Jesus save you from?

Please spend time on these final three questions! Leaders step up and lead with vulnerability, and ask your people to share. This can be a really awesome moment to witness to the miracles God has done in your groups life!

If you would still consider yourself lost. What or who do you need to be saved from?

Once again, make room for this question!

John Wesley once said "You have one business on earth - to save souls" If you have already been found by Jesus, who do you need to share this good news with this week?

Have this be your challenge for the week. Have every person share or think of one name, prayer for these people as a group, and spend time in prayer throughout the upcoming week asking God to lift the scales off these peoples eyes and to give you the opportunity, and then boldness, to share the gospel with them.



ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

How God Turned a Band of Nobodies into a Movement for Everybody

How did a handful of ordinary people become ten thousand followers of Jesus in the year following his public execution? How did his movement gain so much momentum, especially as ten of the eleven charter members were crucified, burned, or stoned to death? How did ten thousand Christians become one million by the second century, and 3.3 billion today?

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Discussion Guide: Week 7

Opening Question

Can you remember a time when your convictions got you into trouble or made your life complicated? If so, what happened?

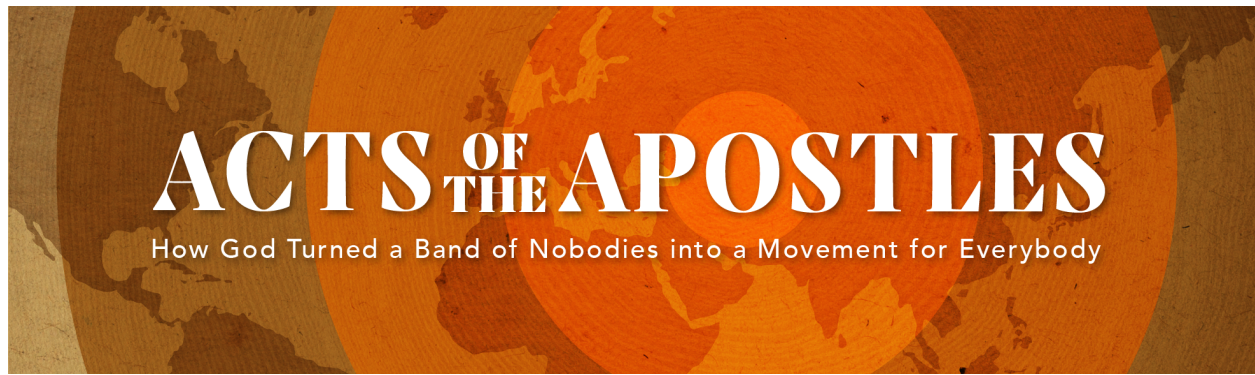
Personal Answer

Acts 4:13-21

Read verse 13. Why do you think the authorities were so astonished by Peter and John and their educational background? What made them significant?

Peter and John were bold but uneducated, ordinary men. The religious leaders were upset because these peasants were showing them up. The Apostles were speaking with a power and authority that couldn't be denied. They were performing miracles that couldn't be ignored.

What made Peter and John significant was not their education or oratory skills, but their time spent with Jesus. This extends to us today as well. We don't gain Kingdom significance through our diplomas, bank accounts, or our children's success, but through being with Jesus. Time spent in Scripture, prayer, and Community allow us to be filled by Christ's love, joy, and peace so that we can overflow and share with others. When Moses came down from the mountain after speaking with God (Exodus 34:29) his face shined. When we spend time with Jesus today the same phenomenon occurs. Our countenance changes, and people take notice that we have been with Jesus. **Follow up - How do you spend time with Jesus**



Why would Jesus choose such “Ordinary” men as his followers, and then to be the ones who would spread the good news to the ends of the earth?

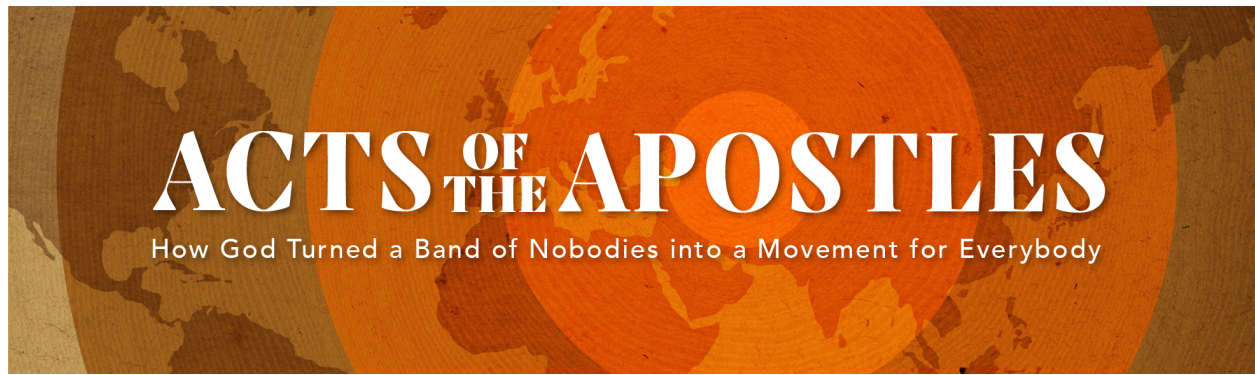
If you were starting a new initiative or launching a company you probably wouldn't pick the guys Jesus selected to be his disciples. Jesus picked tax collectors and fisherman, people who had no business preaching to the masses. He didn't chose them based on their qualifications, but because they were called. Reminds me of an old saying - “God doesn't call the equipped, but he equips the called”

Paul himself says he is the worst of sinners, but in a vision Jesus tells him *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

God doesn't work despite our weaknesses, he works through them. We are all Christ's ambassadors, and it doesn't matter if you feel like you aren't knowledgeable or “good” enough, God can use you. God using ordinary people like you and me only adds to his glory!

Read verse 14-17. What dilemma did the Sanhedrin face? Why were they so adamant about stopping the apostles from speaking the name of Jesus?

The man who was healed was lame for 40 years. These crowds walked by him everyday at the temple gate, they personally knew him. His healing couldn't be ignored or explained away, the name of Jesus was, and still is, powerful! The Sanhedrin had to accept the miracle was real, but they didn't want to lose their position of power, and role as religious leaders. Once they realized the Jesus movement had substance the only way they could attempt to stop it was through silencing the apostles or attacking their character.



In Verse 19 the Apostles replied, *"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!"* What point are they making about the allegiances and priorities of disciples of Jesus?

We all have allegiances to our families, companies, and even the nations we are a part of. As believers though, our ultimate allegiance must be to the Kingdom of Jesus. In the face of persecution the apostles had to make a choice. They disobeyed the authorities, and put their own lives in danger, to follow God.

Romans 13:1 says *"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."* While this is true, and we are called to submit to local authorities in the vast majority of circumstances, there might be occasions when we have to decide who we should listen to - man or God.

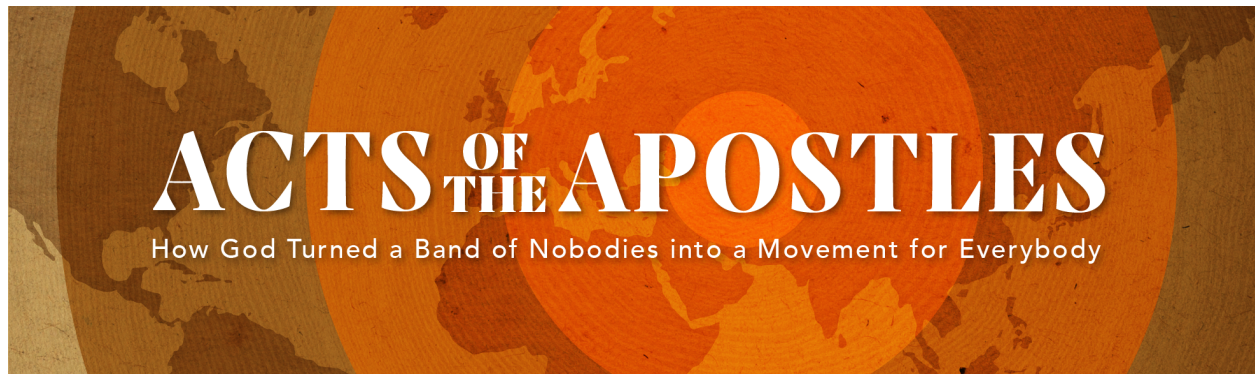
Our primary struggle in America is not yet political persecution, instead our allegiances are challenged in much more subtle ways. We prioritize our kids' success and happiness in such a way that compromises our fidelity to Christ and His Church. We prioritize our jobs in a way that goes against our christian convictions. We say and do things to make people like us, seeking their approval over God's.

Follow up - Where have your allegiances become disordered?

Peter and John said they could not help but speak about what they had seen and heard. What had these two witnessed over the past few years, and even the past few days? What does this passage tell us about the power of testimony?

These men heard Jesus teach the Sermon on the Mount, witnessed lame men walk, blind men see, storms ceasing at Jesus' command, demons cast out, dead men rising from the grave, and Jesus' death and resurrection. They had witnessed the Holy Spirit move in radical ways among them as their numbers multiplied.

All Christian movements and revivals are built on the back of prayer and testimony. One of our greatest evangelistic tools we have is sharing our story with others. Witnessing to how God is working miracles in our lives.



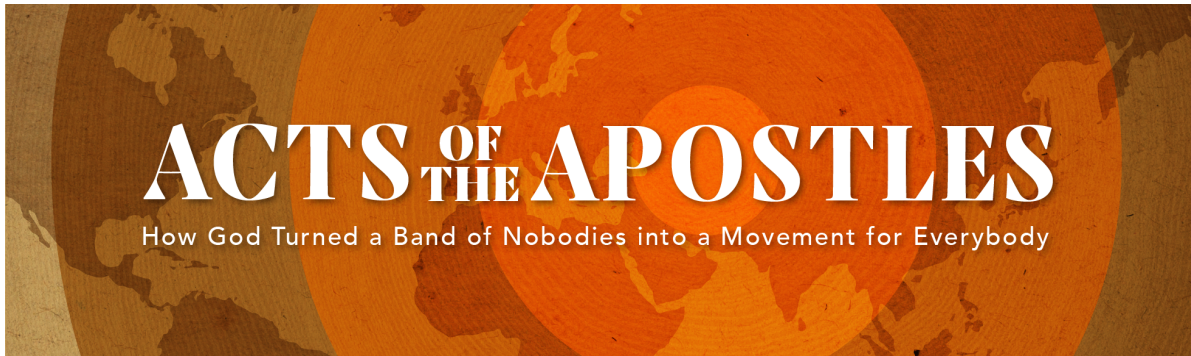
Reflection questions

Have you ever felt so inspired by something you couldn't help speaking about it? What was it? (It could be anything, does not have to be faith related)

Personal Answer

Have you ever experienced God in such a real and transformative way that you just had to tell someone about it? If so, how did you feel when you told them? How did they respond?

Personal Answer - **MAKE THIS QUESTION A PRIORITY**



Discussion Guide: Week 8

Opening Question

When Peter and John were released from their detainment they immediately went to their people, the church. Where do you go when you are in trouble or have been hurt?

We often run to social media to complain or play the victim card. Possibly go to a lawyer or even law enforcement to find justice. The last place most of us go in the church. Have people share where they go when they have been treated unfairly.

Acts 4:23-31

When Peter and John found the others what's the first thing they did?

Pray.

In verses 29 & 30 the believers ask for boldness and for God to continue to perform signs and wonders. In light of the events earlier in Chapters 3 and 4, why are these requests remarkable?

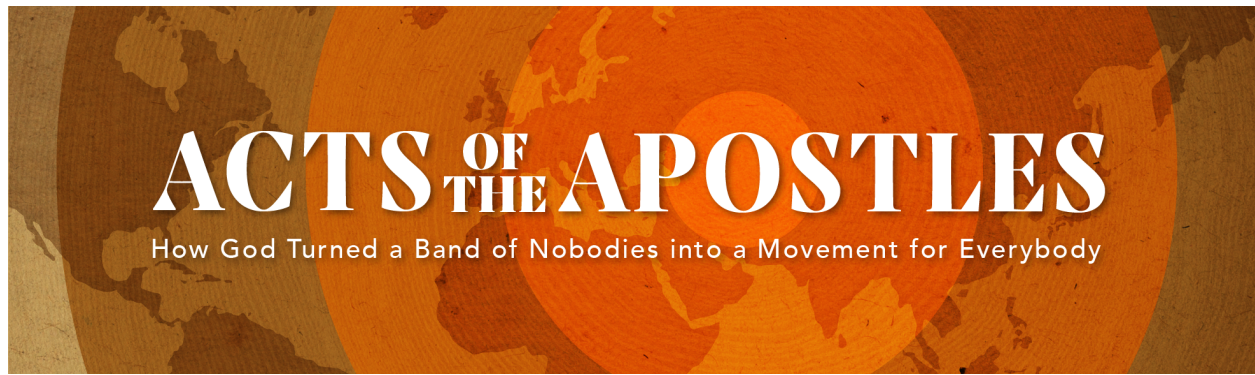
The disciples were arrested for boldness and performing miracles. Now, they are praying for the exact same thing that got them persecuted and put them in harms way! Most of us would already say Peter and John were bold enough. Why ask for more?

If we were arrested for our faith we would probably pray for safety, a hedge of protection, or a way out. The disciples' prayer was remarkable because it sought God's glory over their own comfort and safety.

This passage raises three questions

1. Are Christians still being persecuted today?

Globally - yes. Persecution of Christians went up in 2022. More than 5000 Christians were killed for their faith last year, on average that's 15 a day. We may not see it in America, but in places like Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and North Korea being a believer in Jesus is dangerous.



Do you think Christians are pressured to hide their faith here in America today?

The authorities are not coming for our heads or burning down our places of worship, but we are still pressured to be silent or to compromise our convictions. People are okay if we are polite and religious, but they are not okay with bold convictions that counter the world's narratives. Our lives may not be in danger, but our name, reputation, or social standing could be. The world is pushing for syncretism, they may not kill you, but they want to silence you.

2. What's the purpose of prayer?

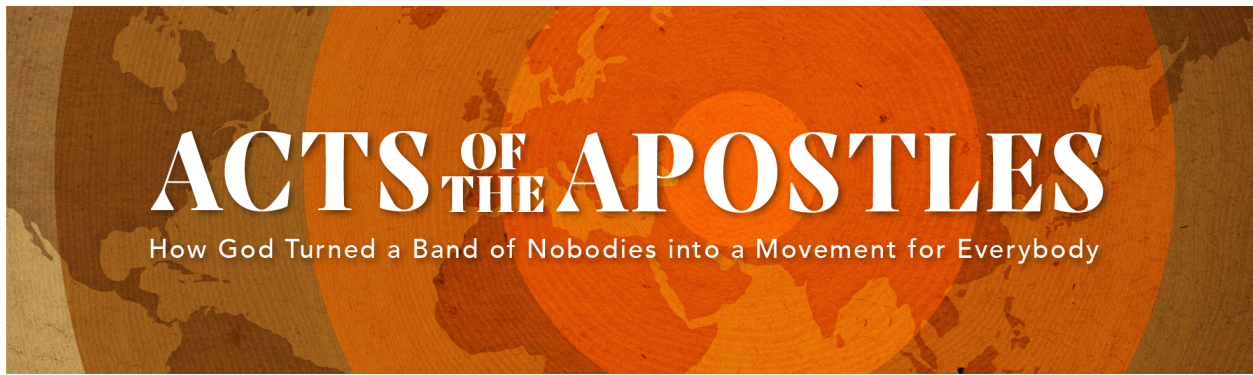
Reread the disciples' prayer in verses 24-30, they don't ask God for anything till the very end. How did the believers structure their prayer, and how could their example influence our prayer lives today?

When the disciples prayed the ask wasn't first, it was last. Most of their prayer was praise and exaltation. They quoted Scripture, and the entire prayer revolved around God, not really their situation. Instead of asking for things, they praised God for who He is. Are your prayers mainly you asking God for things? If so, how can you reshape your prayer life and make praise a priority?

How does praying together with other believers help us tell a better story about ourselves and God?

Prayer is powerful. Prayer is an action. Prayer is the most powerful action we can take. When we plead before an almighty God He will act or empower us to act for him. Prayer is even more powerful when we do it in the community.

When we pray with other believers we also gain perspective and reframe the narrative. We all have accepted false narratives, and lies about us, our situation, or the world, and when we take these to God He can remind us of the Truth.



In other words - prayer resets the cast and plot. We are not the star, God is. The plot does not revolve around us, but God's plan of redemption. We need this reminder daily.

3. What is the difference between being bold and being a bully?

In 2 Corinthians 3:12 Paul says, "Therefore, since we have such a hope we are very bold". What does Boldness in faith look like?

The word "bold" in the Bible is the same as confidence. We have confidence, not in our own power, accomplishments, or skills, but in God. Being bold in faith means having full confidence in God.

How is boldness different from arrogance?

Boldness in Christ requires humility. It's not brash, but self-aware and generous.

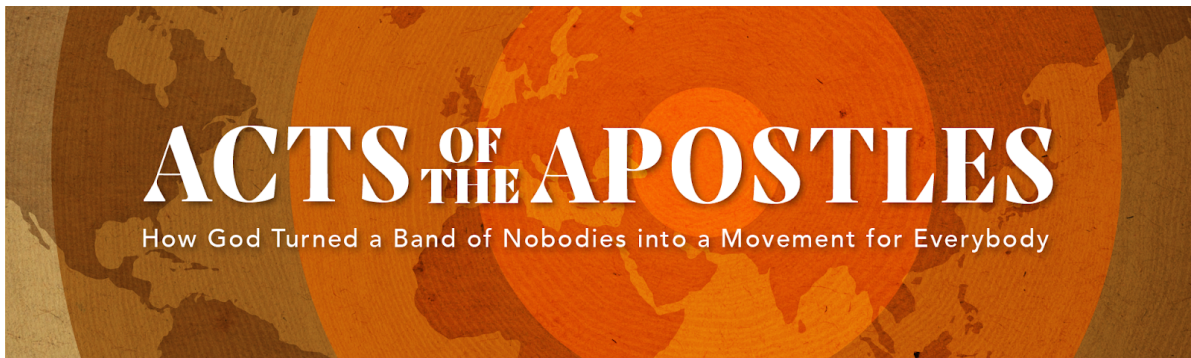
Reflection Questions

1. If you are not facing any sort of persecution or pressure in your life, do you think it is because of a lack of boldness in your convictions?

Maybe the most important question in this lesson. You can have a really honest discussion on this one!

2. How can prayer reset the narrative and correct some of the lies you believe? How does it remind us who the main character really is?

Another great discussion question. Talk about how prayer can help us correct the lies we believe. Share these false narratives with one another, and pray that God would reveal His Truth about your identity in Christ.



Leader Guide: Week 9

Opening Question

What's the closest thing to heaven you have ever experienced? What about this experience (the location, people, the event) made it so significant for you?

Personal Answer

Read Acts 4:32-37 as a Group

What words would you use to describe the Church in this passage? Why?

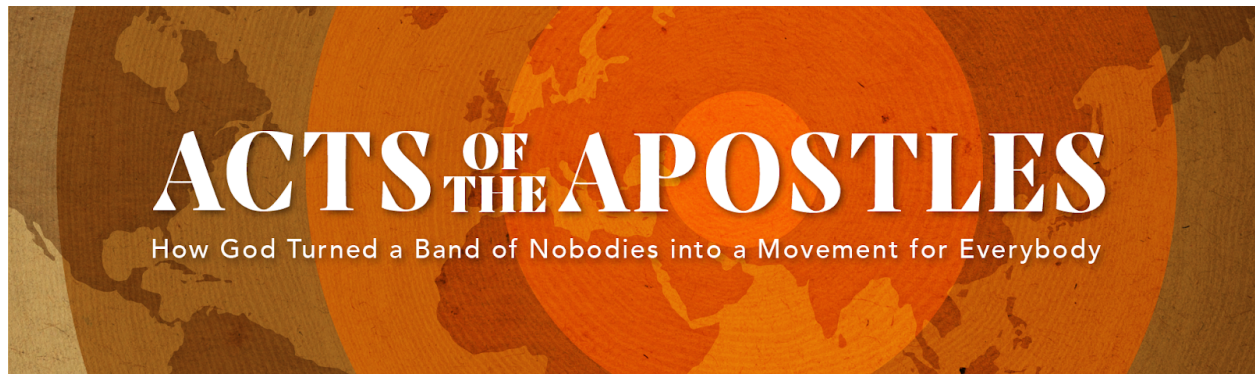
Some options - pure, selfless, authentic, caring, powerful, loving, distinct, spirit-led

This was the "Garden of Eden" phase of the church. Human sin hadn't yet entered the equation and the church was in its purest form just a few weeks after its birth. The church was powerful and distinct due to their selfless giving and sharing of resources. This radical sharing was not required by the apostles, but the people freely gave because of the movement of the Holy Spirit among them.

Read Acts 5:1-11 as a Group

What is so challenging about this passage? When you read it does it sound more like a passage from the Gospels or the Old Testament?

This definitely feels like an Old Testament passage. It actually is very similar to Joshua 7. You can check it out, but in this passage Joshua and the Israelites stoned Achan and his family for stealing items from the plunder of Jericho when they were prohibited from taking anything. Achan and his family didn't steal from other people, but from God and because of that died. The death of Ananias and Sapphira can be troubling for those who are new to the faith, and even seasoned believers. Where is the grace you might ask? We will get to that, but in this question let's leave room for people to share the parts of this passage that they struggle with.



What is the difference between Barnabas' actions and what Ananias and Sapphira did? What motivations drove their actions?

Everyone guy wants a cool nickname! Joseph of Cyprus gave freely and generously to the church, and because of that was given the name Barnabas "Son of Encouragement". He didn't give to be seen, acknowledged, honored, or to add to his own image. Joseph gave because he was led by the Holy Spirit to do so. He realized everything was God's in the first place, so it was his duty to give it to Jesus' church. Barnabas' motivations were selfless.

You have to read between the lines a bit, but it seems A&S's motivation were to be honored just like Barnabas was. They sold their possession and gave because they wanted to be recognized and make themselves look better in the eyes of others. A&S's motivation was selfish. They wanted to look like they were all in, while they were secretly holding some back for security or provision.

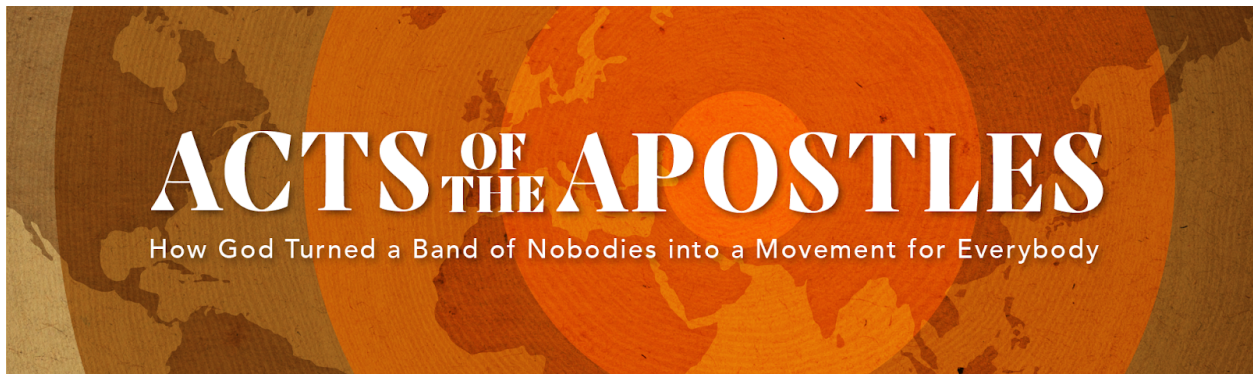
What does Peter accuse Ananias of? Why do you think that this is such a grievous sin?

Peter accuses them of lying to the Holy Spirit. This is a serious sin. It's not just that they were greedy, but they sought to deceive God and His Church. The word "Kept Back" in verse 2 in the Greek has a much more devious meaning, you could read it as misappropriated or even stolen. They were lying and stealing from God.

The reason this incident was so serious is because it is the "first sin of the church". Like Adam and Eve eating the apple, this was the first time sin entered into the pure body of believers. The church still struggles with this same sin to this day.

Why did Ananias and Sapphira die? Was it just because they didn't give all of their money, or something deeper? Is that fair?

They did not die due to their greed. While this is a sin the church still struggles with today, the real issue both for A&S and us today is hypocrisy. We all want to be a Christian without being like Christ. To talk the talk, but not walk the walk. To wear a cross on our neck, but not carry it daily. To appear like a Christian when we are



around people we want to impress but act differently behind closed doors. Sure holding back the money was a problem, but the more sinister sin was within their hearts. They were being hypocrites.

Is their death fair? It may not feel like it, but we all deserve the death that A&S received. We have all sinned and sin leads to death. The good news about A&S is their death wasn't the end of their story. Since they were part of the early Church and chapter 4 says they were all full of the Spirit we will probably see A&S in heaven one day. A&S did receive grace, they were saved and are with the Father for eternity.

This passage is really a warning to church folk. We are like A&S. We might be saved and part of Christianity community, but we must still go to war against sin and protect the purity of the Church and the Gospel. Our sin has real, dangerous affects on not only us, but our community as well.

How do we try to look "Christian" today on the outside without being transformed by Christ on the inside?

Confessional Answer, but a really important question! Areas Pastor Eric and I Identified that our Church might struggle with are gossip, drunkenness, anger, and gluttony.

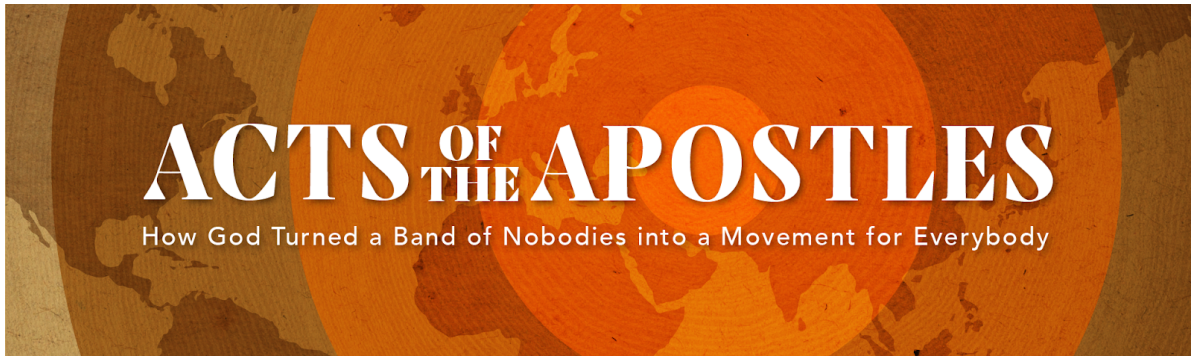
Reflection Questions

What does this message teach us about the importance of purity within the Church?

It is paramount that we protect the purity of the Church. This is the point of church discipline, we are called to hold our brothers and sisters accountable within the church. We should be less worried about policing the world, but instead make sure the people within our community are living lives worthy of Christ. Peter

When Peter was confronted with sin he acted boldly. How and where can you confront the sin among the believers within our community with the same boldness?

Personal Reflection. Don't let this question become gossip, but a call to boldness.



Leader Guide: Week 11

Acts 6:1-8:1

Opening Question

What is the boldest decision you have ever made? It could be a faith decision or a situation from your career or family. Why did you choose to make it?

Personal Answer

Acts 6

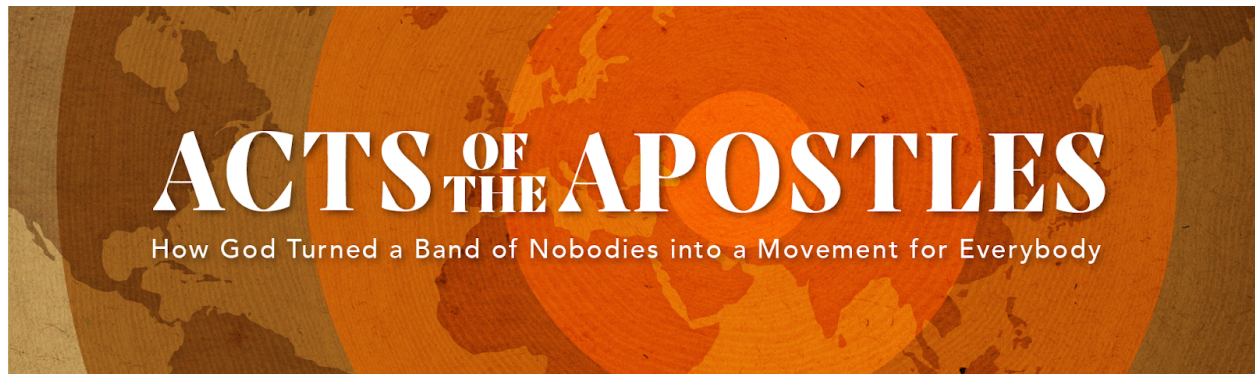
What issue was Stephen initially selected to address? Why do you think this was becoming a problem in the early church?

The church was growing so quickly that the Hellenistic Jewish widows were not being given the same food as everyone else. Hellenistic Jews are not gentiles, but Diaspora Jews who had adopted the Greek language and customs after the exile, but remained faithful to Judaism. There does seem to be some animosity between the more traditional Herbaic Jews and the Hellanists that could have contributed to these widows being overlooked. Stephen was selected among 7 men to become the first deacons in the church and care for these widows. All these men have Greek names, so the Apostles wisely selected from the afflicted group to fix the problem.

Another reason this was a problem was due to the dramatic growth of the church! At the beginning of Acts 1, there are 120 believers. By the time we get to Acts 4, the number of believers grew to 5,000 men. Most scholars believe that if you add women and children, the church was roughly 15,000 strong at this point. Can you imagine the work it took to feed, organize, and lead worship for this many people? The church's leadership and resources were stretched as it grew. The honeymoon phase of the church was over, they had to now deal with conflict and division.

Have you ever received a role at Church or work that you felt was beneath you? How did that make you feel, and how did you respond?

Personal answer



What was Stephen charged with? How does his trial echo Jesus'?

The Jews are so angry they started to rile up both the leaders and people and arranged for false testimonies against Stephen. He was charged with speaking against the Temple and the Law of Moses. These are both charges leveled against Jesus in his trial against the very same Sanhedrin. The council even attacks Stephen for apparently saying Jesus is coming to destroy the temple and their traditions. Our enemy might be effective at times, but he is rarely original. Both Jesus and Stephen don't answer the charges directly, but flip the tables on their accusers.

Acts 7:1-50

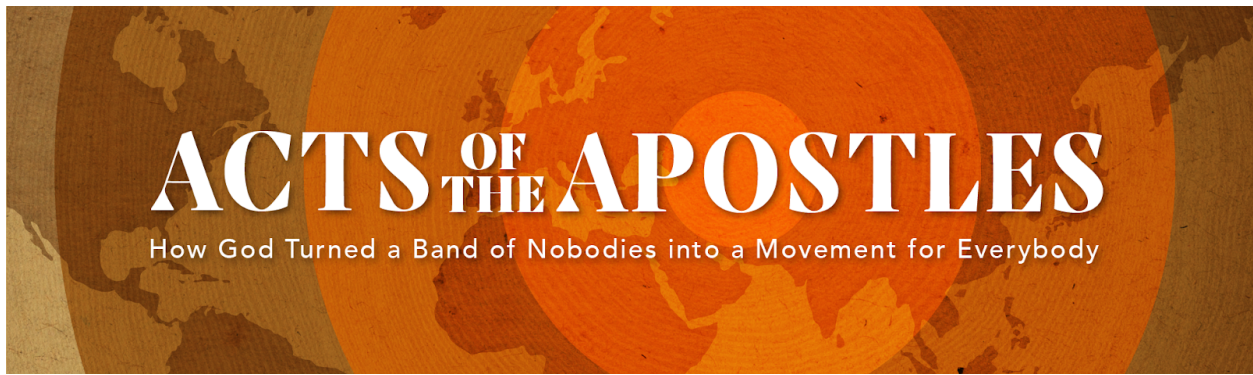
Why does Stephen go through Israel's history and why does he specifically highlight Abraham, Joseph, and Moses?

Stephen is seeking to establish some common ground with the council. He wants to prove that Jesus is not a new God or a new tradition sprouting from nowhere. Jesus is a fulfillment of everything promised in the Old Testament! Jesus is not destroying the temple or law, the real problem is Israel has misunderstood both, and Jesus has come to set things right. Jesus reveals to us the true purpose of both the law and temple!

Abraham is the father of Israel. Everyone traces their lineage back to him as the patriarch of Israel. Abram received the covenant, which is being fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Joseph is talked about to introduce the theme of rejection. Joseph was one of the first prophets who interpreted dreams and these revelations made his brothers, the patriarchs of all the 12 tribes, jealous to the point of rejecting their own brother and selling him into slavery. Israel has since then rejected all of Israel's prophets from Joseph all the way to Jesus.

How does Stephen specifically respond to the accusations of speaking against the law and temple?

They accuse Stephen of rejecting the law, but Stephen accuses Israel, and all of us, of rejecting the law. The day the law was delivered by Moses on Mount Sinai the people had already rejected Moses and God in their hearts by building an idol of a golden calf. We have all followed suit, all



have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. We often do this by following our hearts rather than God's law.

Jeremiah 17:9 says - The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? If our hearts are our compass they will often lead us to follow fleshly, sinful, and selfish desires. While following your heart, might sound like good advice, it can lead to death. Stephen convicts the council and of us for rejecting God's law for what we feel is right in our hearts.

They accuse Stephen of speaking against the temple, but Stephen flips the tables once again and says you have missed the whole point. God does not NEED a temple to live in, He is the creator of the universe. God's presence isn't confined to the temple, but after the death and resurrection of Christ and pouring out of His Holy Spirit all of us can be Temples of God. (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**) We don't go to church, we are the church. Stephen says they have idolized the temple, and once again missed the point. The church isn't a building we go to, or one that God is trapped in, but we become the church when we embrace christian community and be the hands and feet of Jesus wherever He has placed us.

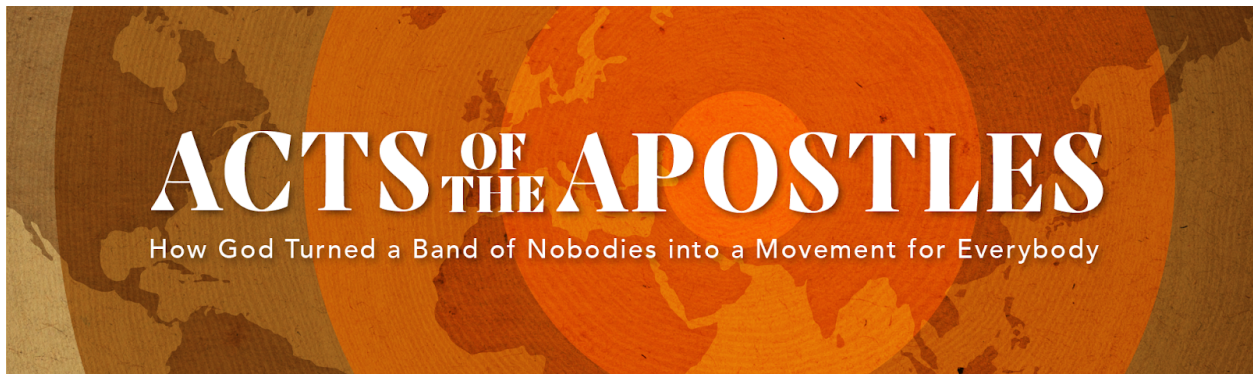
Acts 7:51-8:1

Why does the accusation of being stiff-necked and uncircumcised rile up the Jews?

God calls Israel stiff-necked around 20 times in OT. God uses this term to describe Israel's rebellion and headstrong pursuit of things other than God. To be called uncircumcised is a major diss. Jews were proud of the circumcision because it set them apart and was a sign they were part of God's people. Stephen is saying true circumcision is not of the flesh, but of the heart. (**Romans 2:29**). All of this along with critiquing the two pillars of Jewish life - the temple and law - seal Stephen's fate. The mob didn't wait for the trial to be over or for an official verdict, they attacked.

What is the significance of Jesus standing to greet Stephen?

Jesus is usually described as seated at the right hand of the father. This is the only time in the Bible we see him standing. What does his stance mean? Jesus' standing shows him receiving Stephen in his role as the one true judge, the Human Council didn't render a judgment, but Jesus did. In the same way it doesn't matter what the world says about us.



They can try to convict or cancel us, but the only judgment that matters is Christ's and if we have made Jesus the Lord of our life he deems us innocent! We need to seek the approval of one, our father in heaven, not that of man.

Reflection Questions

Stephen's boldness and power doesn't come from himself, but instead the Holy Spirit. Have you ever experienced boldness or power from the Spirit? If not, what do you think is holding you back?

Personal answer. Maybe following your heart instead of God? Maybe it is because you view the church as just a place to go and be fed, and you are not putting in the work outside of Church on Sunday to be filled with His Spirit.

The Jews were stiff-necked because they refused to change their minds about the Temple and the law. In what ways is the modern church being stiff-necked or holding our hands over our ears so we cannot hear the truth?

Personal answer. Maybe we are holding too tightly to tradition, pleasantries, or being nice rather than bold?



ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

How God Turned a Band of Nobodies into a Movement for Everybody

How did a handful of ordinary people become ten thousand followers of Jesus in the year following his public execution? How did his movement gain so much momentum, especially as ten of the eleven charter members were crucified, burned, or stoned to death? How did ten thousand Christians become one million by the second century, and 3.3 billion today? Written in the middle of the first century, The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of how Christianity spread like wildfire across the Roman Empire and beyond. For 25 weeks we will journey through Acts in pursuit of the truth behind history's most consequential movement.

Discussion Guide: Week 12

Opening Question

Name one group, club, or organization you are a part of. What does it mean to belong? What steps did you have to go through to become a member, and what would you have to do to be removed?

Personal Answer

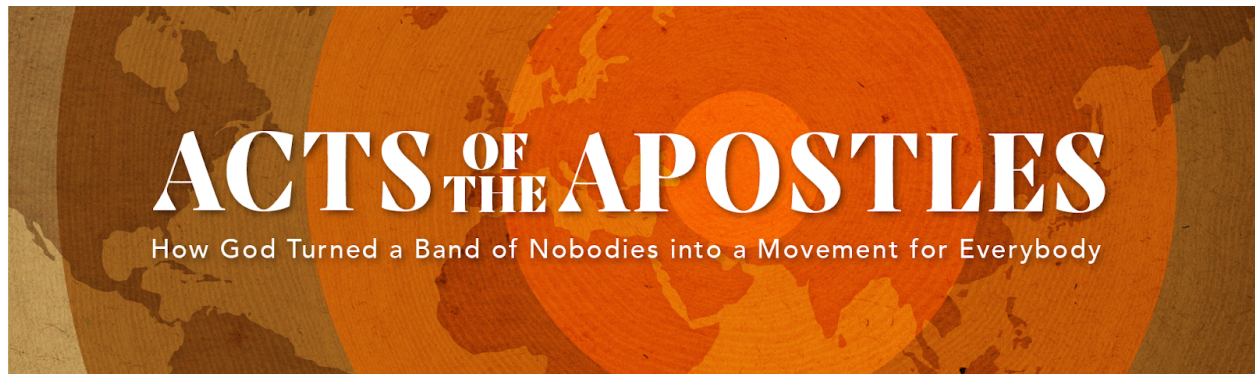
Acts 8:26-40

Who belonged to the first church in Jerusalem that we have read about in Acts 1-7?

Jews, mainly Jews from Jerusalem who shared the same culture and language. Even though travelers came in for Pentecost the Church at this point looked pretty homogeneous. In Acts 6 we saw a hellenistic jews enter the fold and that immediately caused issues with the Hellanistsic widows not getting as much food as the Hebraic ones. At this point there are still no gentiles in the church.

Who was Philip? (See Acts 6:5 and Acts 8:4-25)

Philip, along with Stephen, was one of the first deacons of the early church. They were made deacons to help with the distribution of food, but it is clear their authority was much wider as both Stephen and Phillip began preaching, performing miracles, and sharing the good news! Philip was likely a Greek Diaspora Jew meaning - his family left Israel after the exile and settled in Greek speaking land, even adjusting to some of their customs.



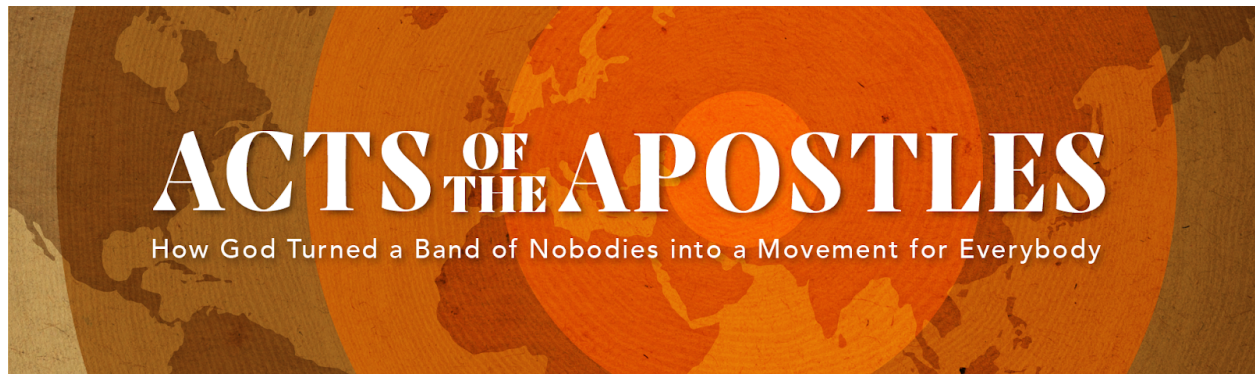
In the first part of Chapter 8 Philip preached and performed miracles in Samaria (a region traditionally looked down upon by the Jews). The message of Jesus was so well received that Peter and John were sent there so that the believers in Samaria would receive the power of the Holy Spirit! If you have time in your group you can read this whole story in Acts 8:4-25 to see Philip's ministry and a fascinating story about the magician named Simon who tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. Spoiler alert It did not go well. God's power cannot be bought or sold, or wielded like a tool of power, it is given freely to believers for the edification of the church

What can we assume about the Ethiopian man in this story?

Church Father Irenaeus wrote this in 180 AD regarding the Ethiopian eunuch, "This man (Simeon Bachos the Eunuch) was also sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed, that there was one God preached by the prophets, but that the Son of this (God) had already made (His) appearance in human flesh, and had been led as a sheep to the slaughter; and all the other statements which the prophets made regarding Him." Because of this people often connect the Eunuch in Acts 8 with the man named Simeon that was called Niger, or "the black one" in Acts 13:1. This man went back to Africa as one of the first Christian missionaries.

As a black, African, Gentile, Eunuch this man was an outsider in almost every way possible! No one looked like him in the Church, he would stick out like a sore thumb. He had some wealth due to his role as treasurer, but he presided over it as a slave. Eunuchs in this time were often enslaved and put over important projects in their masters house because it was believed that they could be trusted. Most boys were made eunuchs around puberty, in a very dangerous procedure that led to a crazy high death rate due to infection.

This man was likely visiting Jerusalem on a diplomatic trip, where he visited the temple, then came across the reading from Isaiah on the way home.



Why might the idea of spending time with the Ethiopian eunuch have been complicated for Philip?

Read Deuteronomy 23:1 or Lev 21:18-20, these passages make it abundantly clear that someone who has been emasculated cannot be among God's people. The most important Jewish religious act was circumcision, and even that would be possibly impossible for this man. Everyone who saw the Eunuch would know he didn't fit in either due to his skin color or sexual status. Just being seen sitting next to this man, would cost Philip socially. Spending time with a man like this would make people have question and doubts about Philip.

What was the Ethiopian reading? Why was it especially significant to him?

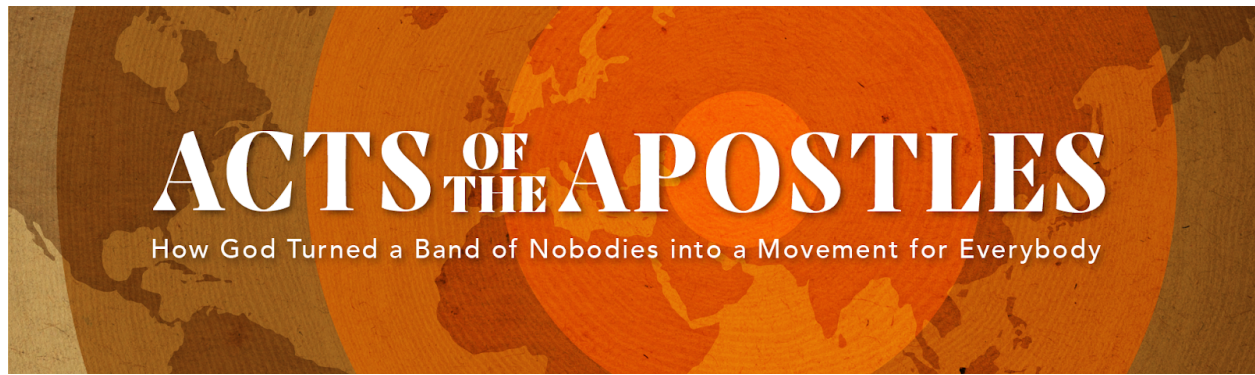
Isaiah 53:7-8. We immediately and correctly think of Jesus as we read this passage, but can you imagine how this passage directly spoke to the Ethiopian Eunuch? A sheep led to slaughter, silent before shearer, humiliated, denied justice, with no descendants? Opening to this passage was no coincidence, the Lord let him to it for a reason. It spoke to His situation, but spoke more powerfully about God's plan of redemption for both the world and this man.

What did the Ethiopian man ask Philip? What made his request so extraordinary?

What is to prevent me from being baptized? I think it was less of a passive question, and more like a rhetorical question. He knew his ethnicity, curse, and sins that others had done to him could not disqualify him from Baptism. He understood the Gospel and was ready to take that next step of faith! He boldly confessed and was ready to follow Jesus.

What was Philip's response? What made his quick response so extraordinary?

Nothing. He could have said let me pray about it, or form a committee, or talk to the council. Instead Philip simply acted. There are some things that God calls us to do that are Scriptural and simple, yet we complicate them.



If you feel led to do something that is in line with Scripture sometimes you don't need to spend time praying about it, just do it!

How many non-Jewish, African Christians were there before this Ethiopian man was baptized by Philip? How many African Christians are there today? What does that say to you about this man's legacy?

0. Now there are 718 million Christians in Africa, which will be 756 million by 2025, and projected 1.3 Billion by 2050! The Ethiopian Eunuch was the pioneer behind the Gospel movement to the entire continent, which has and will continue to serve as the center of Christianity for generations to come.

Reflection Questions

The difference that Jesus made in the Ethiopian man's life was unmistakable. How would you describe the difference that Jesus has made in your life to this point?

Personal

The Ethiopian man demanded they stop the chariot and asked "what is to prevent me from being baptized?" What is preventing you from taking that next step of faith? How can you stop the chariot and do it today?

Personal