

*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**

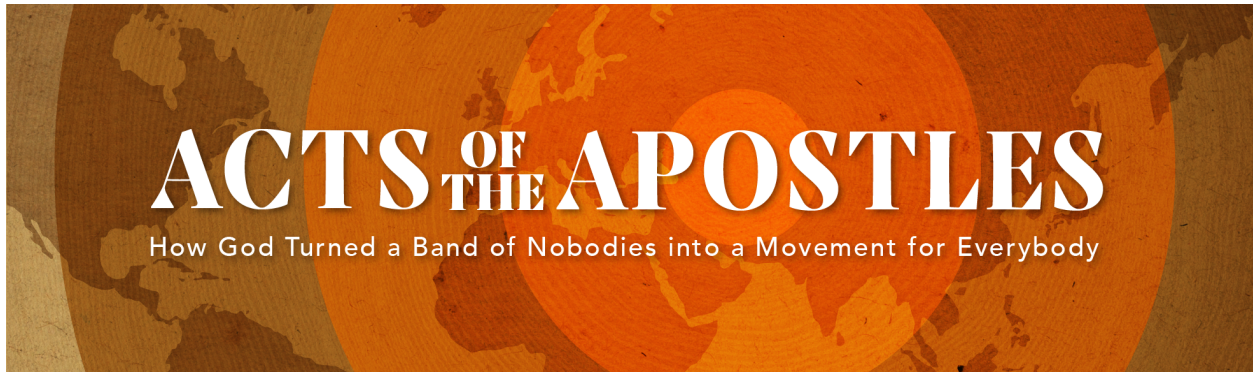
Who is Luke, and how does his upbringing, career, and relationships with the apostles influence his work in Luke and Acts of the Apostles?

- [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.

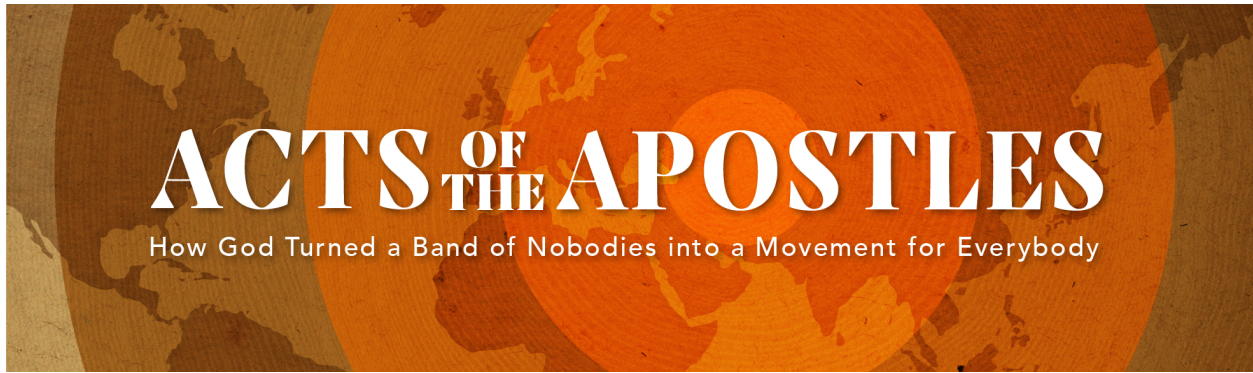
Why were the disciples confused about the Kingdom Jesus was inaugurating?

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

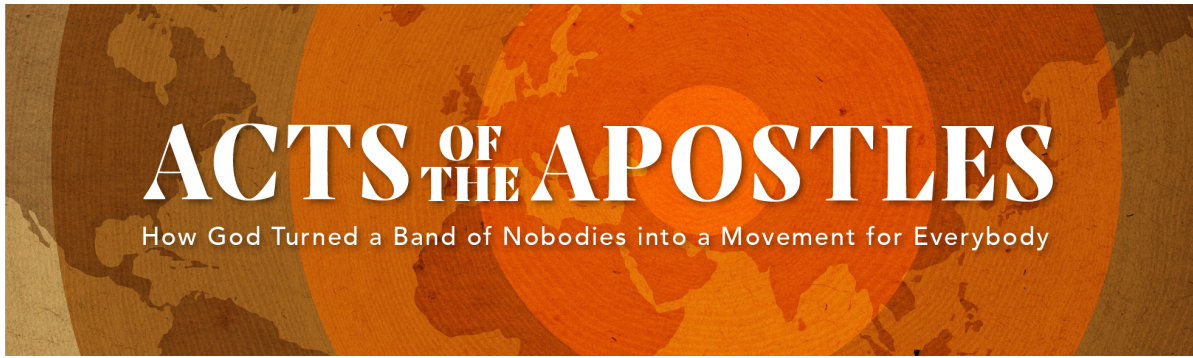
**We are citizens of God's Kingdom, empowered by God's Spirit, to do God's work in the world.**

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**

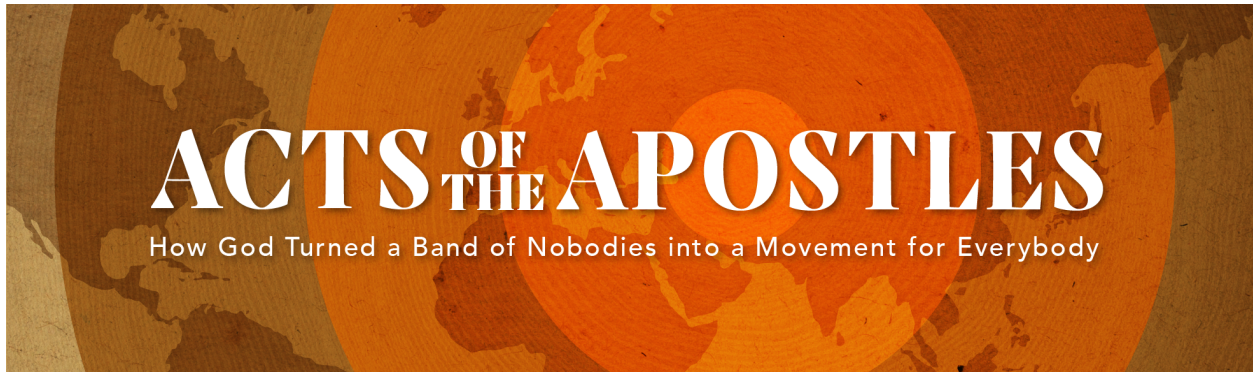
### **Acts 2:1-13**

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.

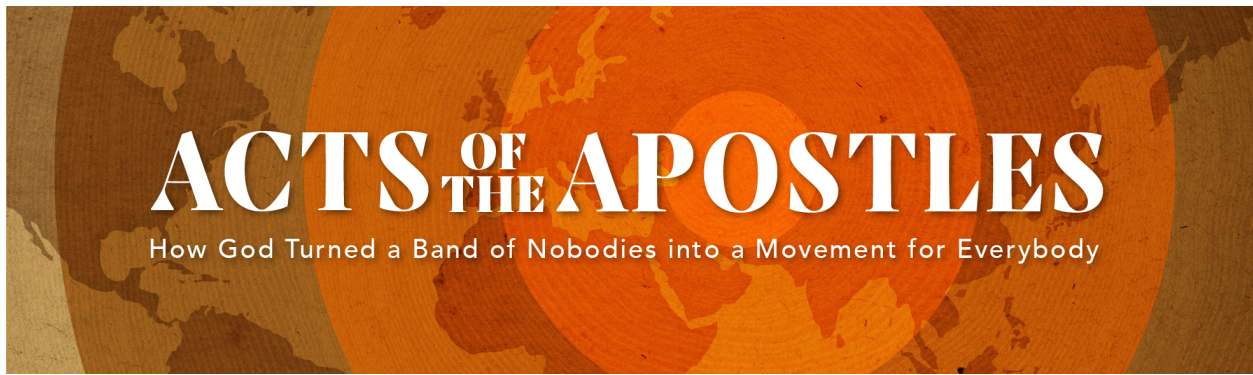
### **The Holy Spirit Comes in Power**

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

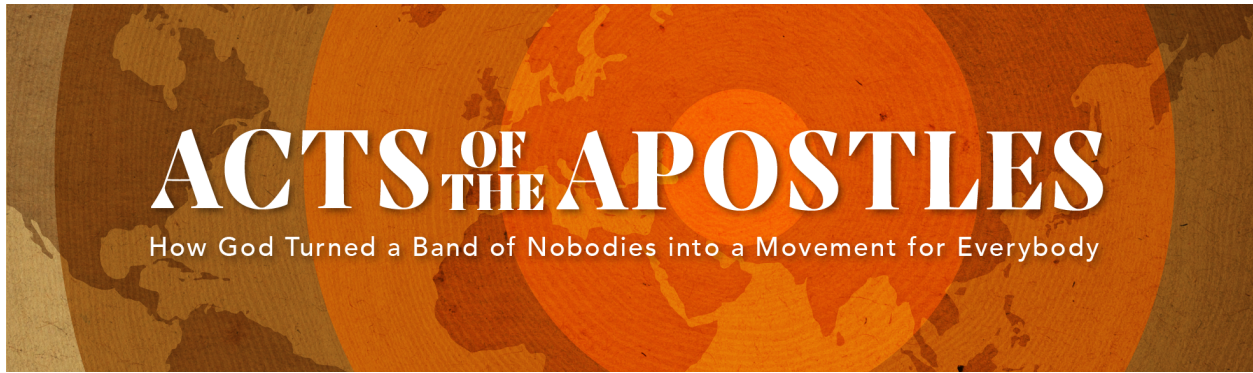
### **The Holy Spirit Unites**

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](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?

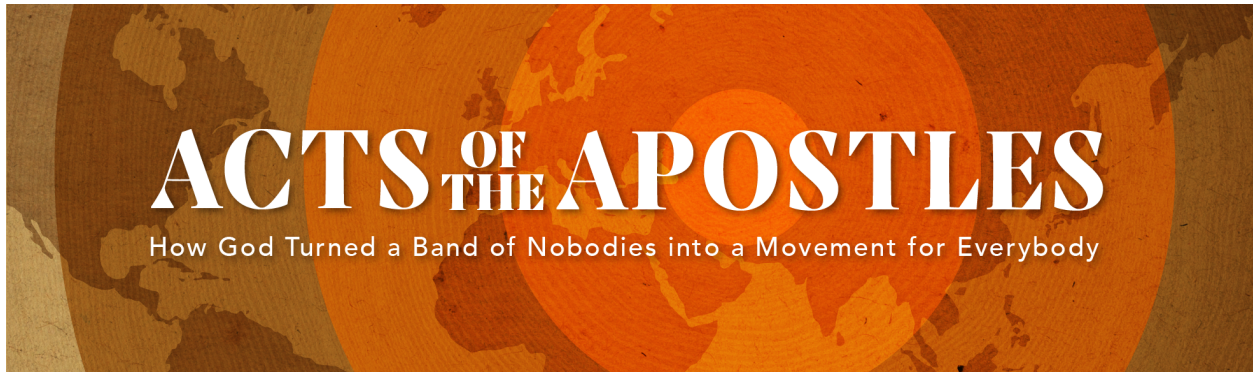
Today we can find syncretism everywhere we go. This is the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. The world is trying to force everyone to look, believe, or behave the same. This is manufactured uniformity.

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.

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### **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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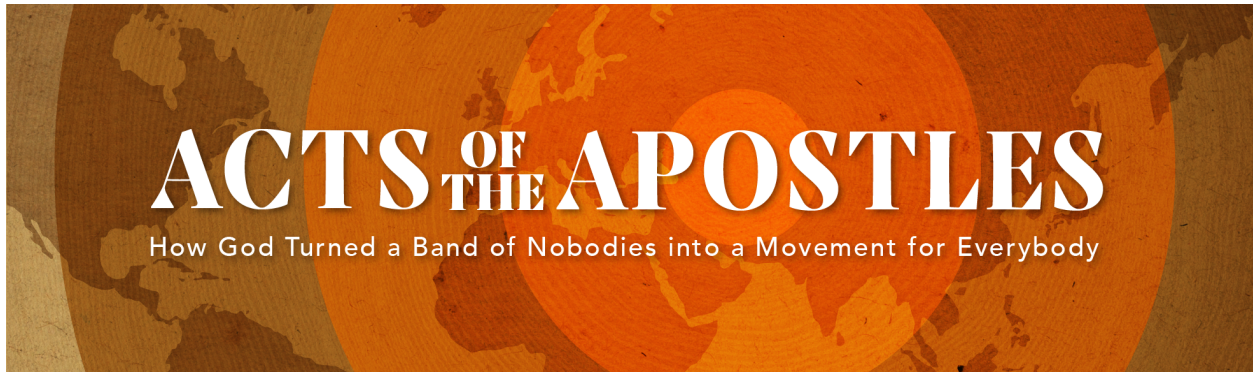
## **Discussion Guide: Week 4**

### **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.

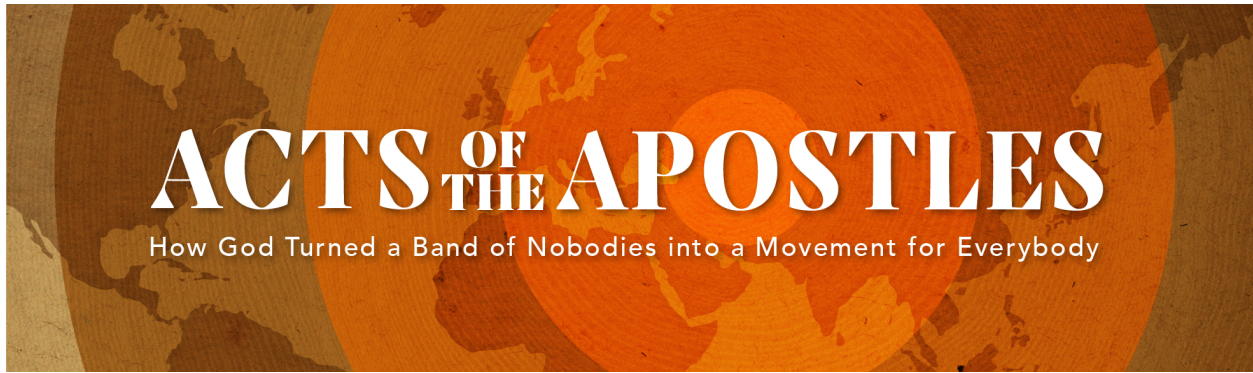
How does Psalm 110 point to Jesus? What does Jesus say about this passage in Matthew 22:43-46?

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.

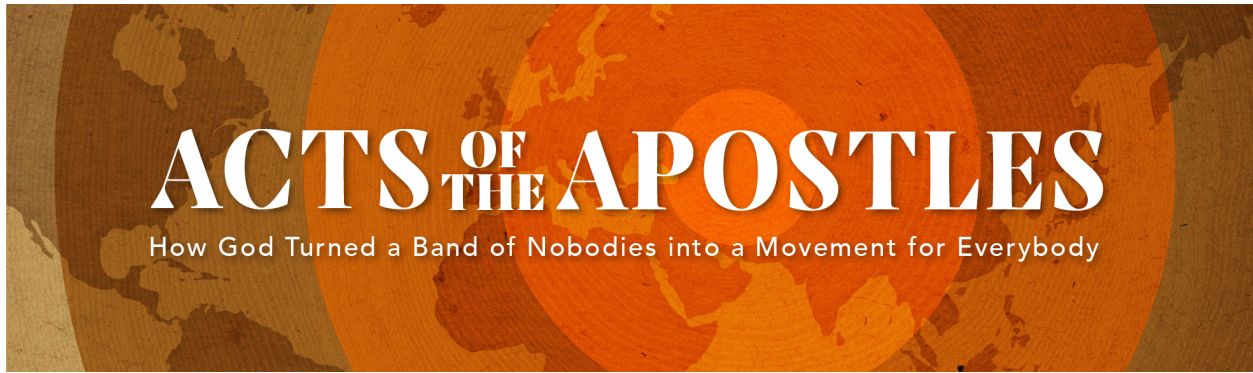
The good news is God is in the business of redeeming human wickedness for His glory. It is actually in Jesus’ death, which was due to our sin, that we find grace and forgiveness!

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...”**

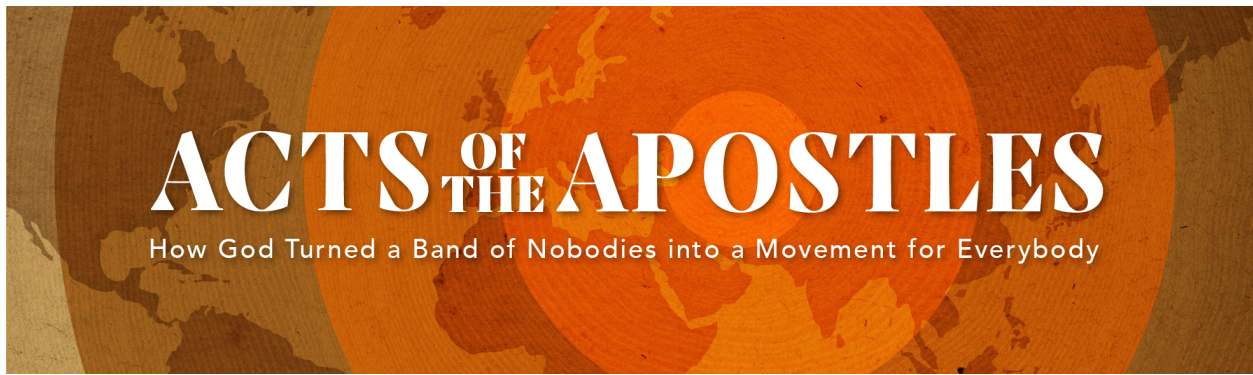
Based on what we know about Peter’s first sermon (2:14-41), what were the apostles teaching the first Christians and where did they receive this information from?

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?

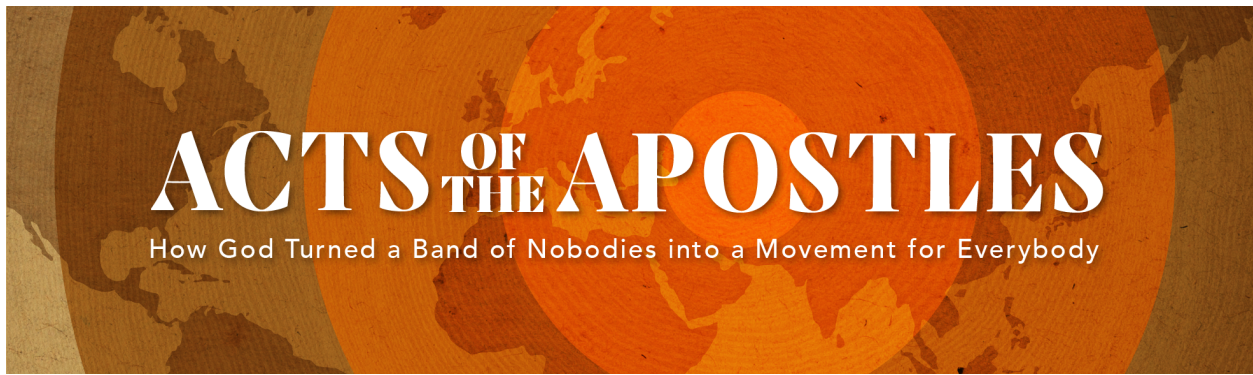
Christians can get in the habit of adding “fellowship” to anything to make it sound more spiritual. Fellowship is more than just Christians casually getting together to eat tacos, it requires us to intentionally gather in pursuit of Christ.

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 11:120-26. 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.”**

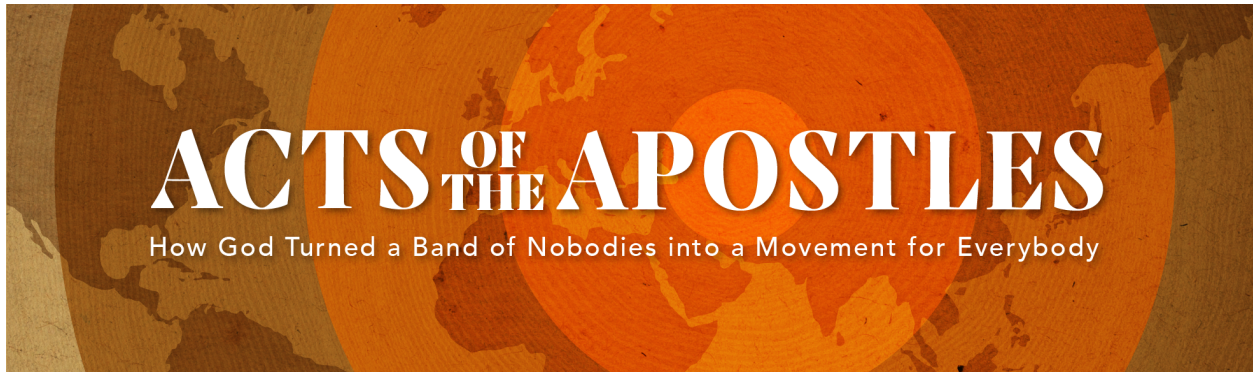
How would you rate your current prayer life on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being non-existent and 10 being constant? Why did you give yourself that score?

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.

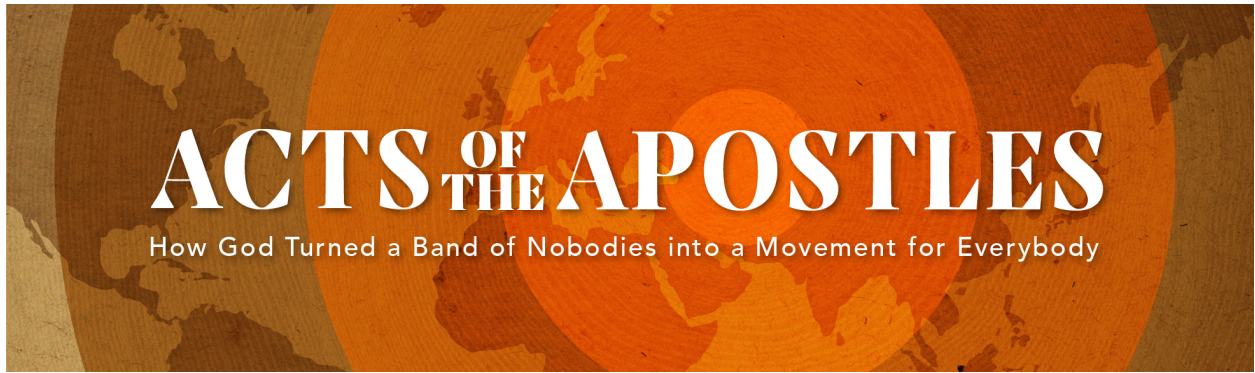
Acts 4:34-35 confirms this model of giving

*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



# 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? 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.*

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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?

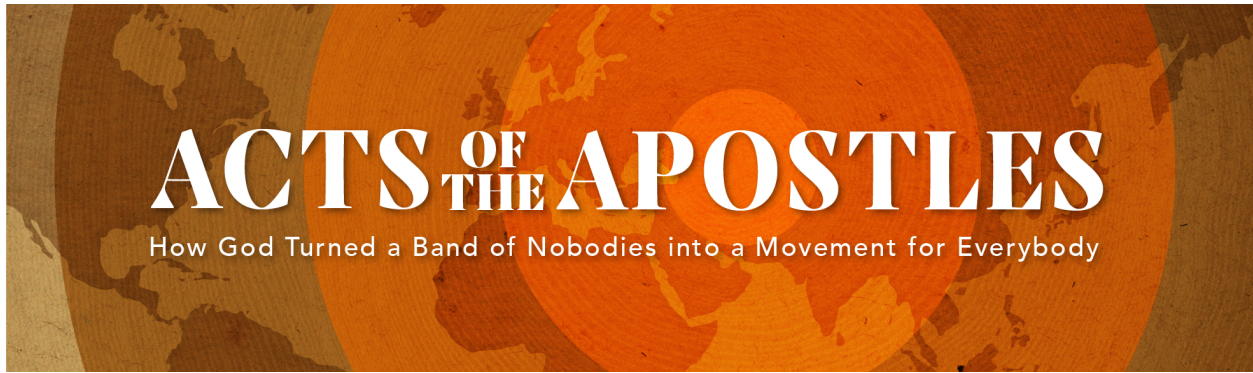
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:7) There are many ways church people violate this command today.

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"

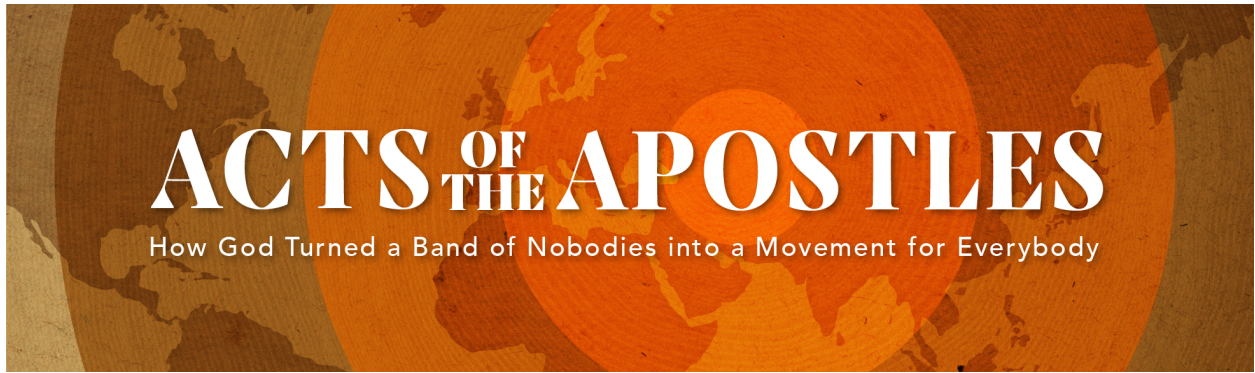
The Jewish people treated the name of God with deep reverence, a practice they still follow to this day. What can we learn from the way they treat the name of God?

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.

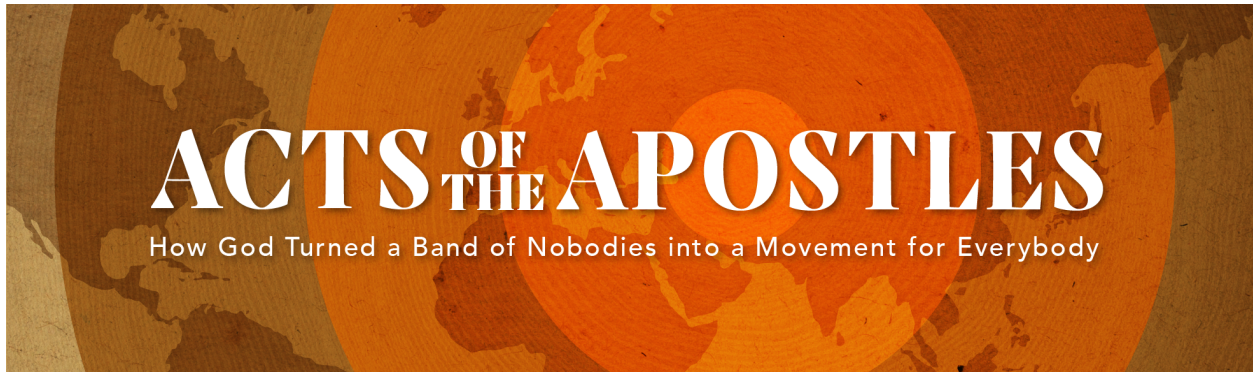
John 14:6

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?

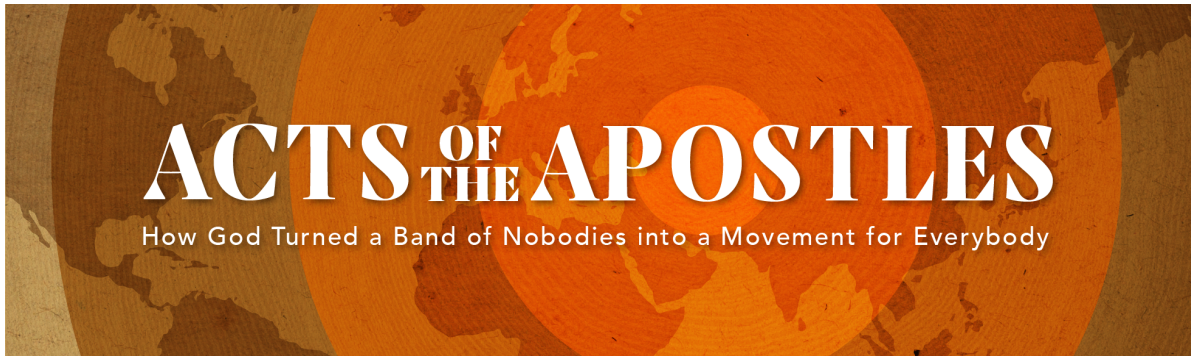
Personal reflection. Ask people to think of their conversations, their social media posts, and prayer life. We shouldn't be scared to use the name of Jesus but we cannot use it flippantly.

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?

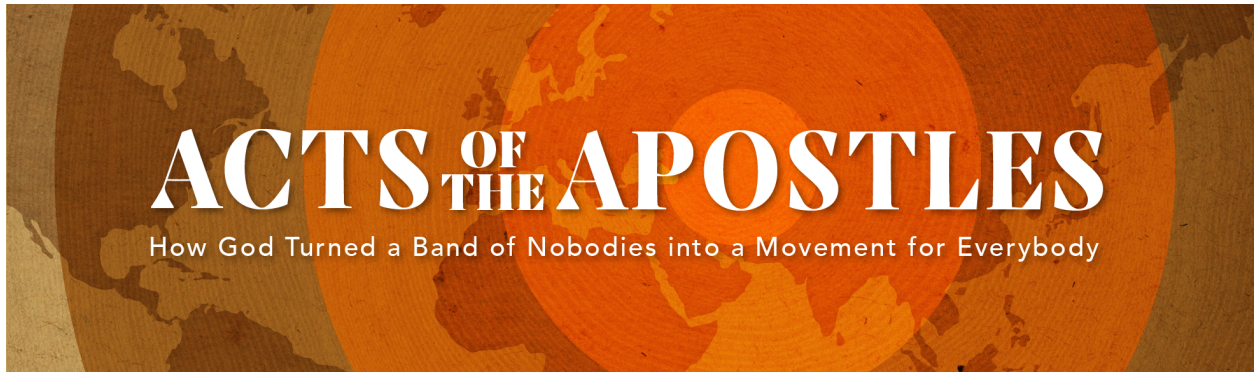
To some this seems old school, exclusive, or even combative. Allow people to answer this question honestly and vulnerably. I know as leaders we all accept this statement and understand that Jesus said as much Himself, but for skeptics or those with doubts they might be less sure. Many of our secular 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.

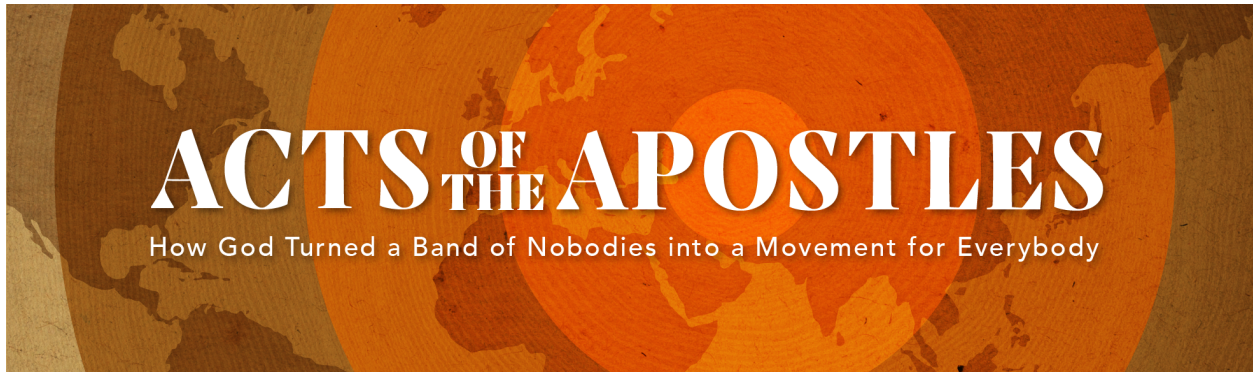
Today there are also many who stumble upon the fact that a Jewish man who died 2000 years ago can bring us salvation. It sounds too much like a fairytale or some sort of wild unproven event. Their intellect won't let them accept this truth.

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?*

*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.*

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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?

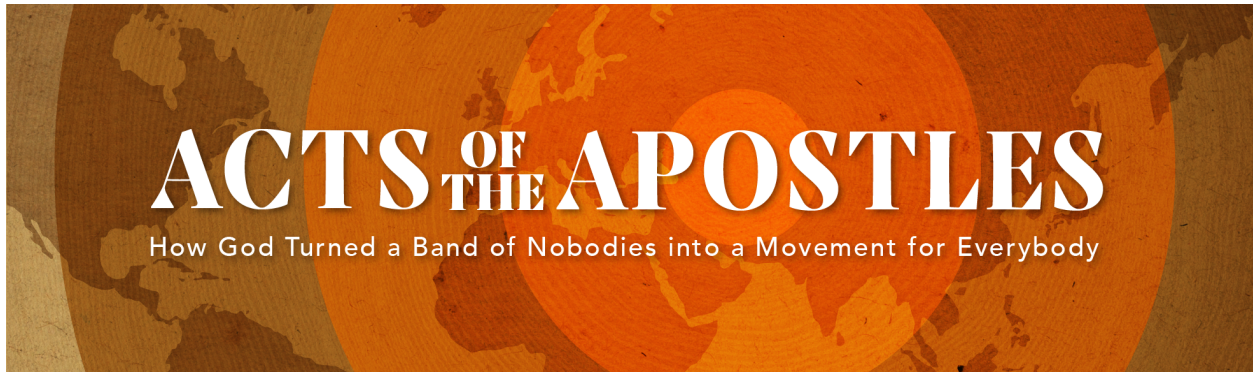
### Personal Answer

#### **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?

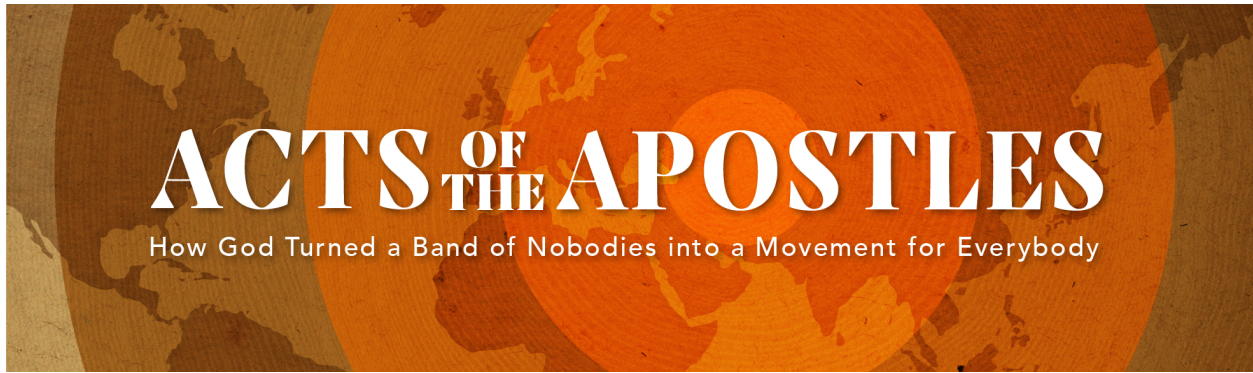
If you were starting a new initiative or launching a company you probably wouldn't pick the guys Jesus selected to be his disciples. Jesus picked tax collectors and fisherman, people who had no business preaching to the masses. He didn't chose them based on their qualifications, but because they were 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.

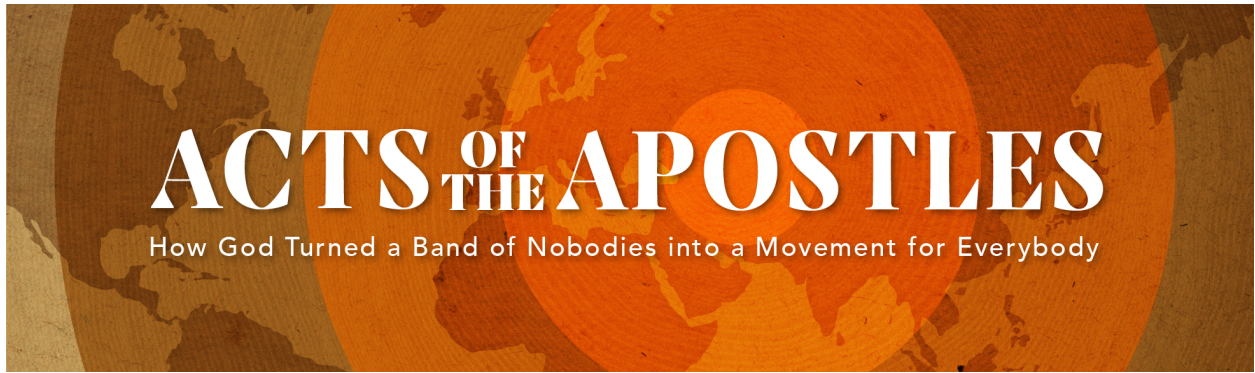
Our primary struggle in America is not yet political persecution, instead our allegiances are challenged in much more subtle ways. We prioritize our kids' success and happiness in such a way that compromises our fidelity to Christ and His Church. We prioritize our jobs in a way that goes against our 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.



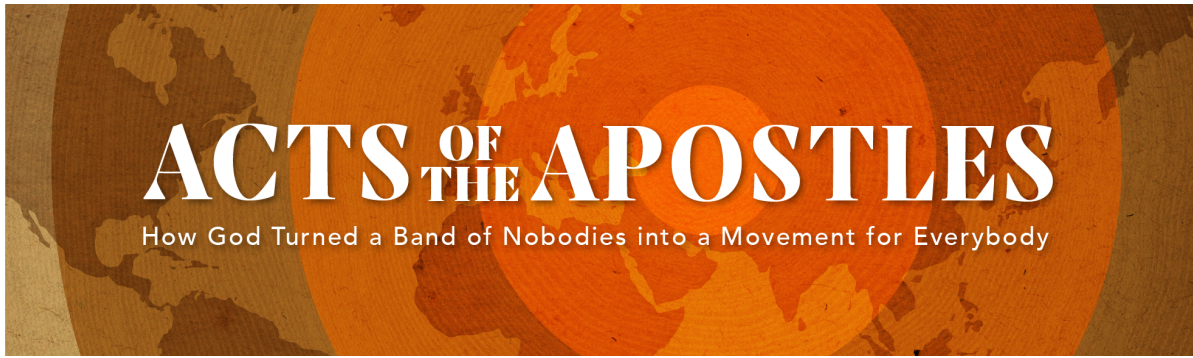
### Reflection questions

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**



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## 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?

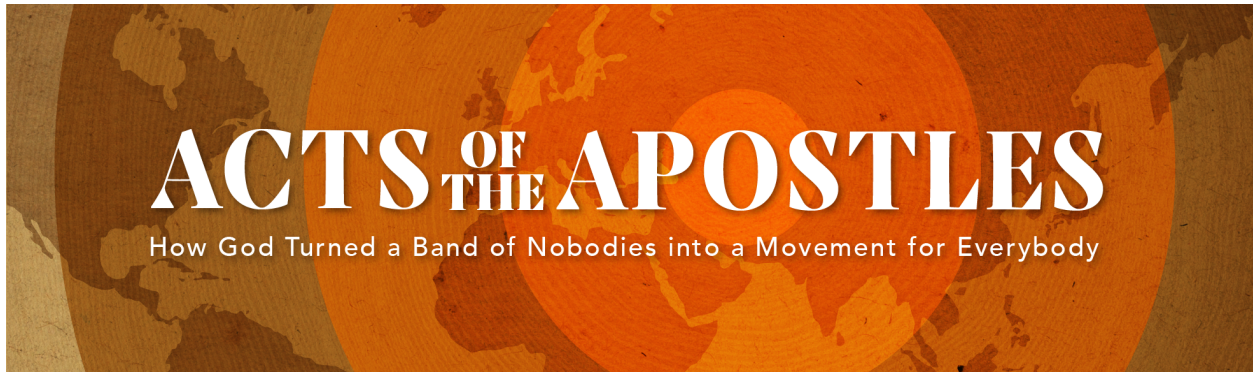
The disciples were arrested for boldness and performing miracles. Now, they are praying for the exact same thing that got them persecuted and put them in harms way! Most of us would already say Peter and John were bold enough. Why ask for more?

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?**

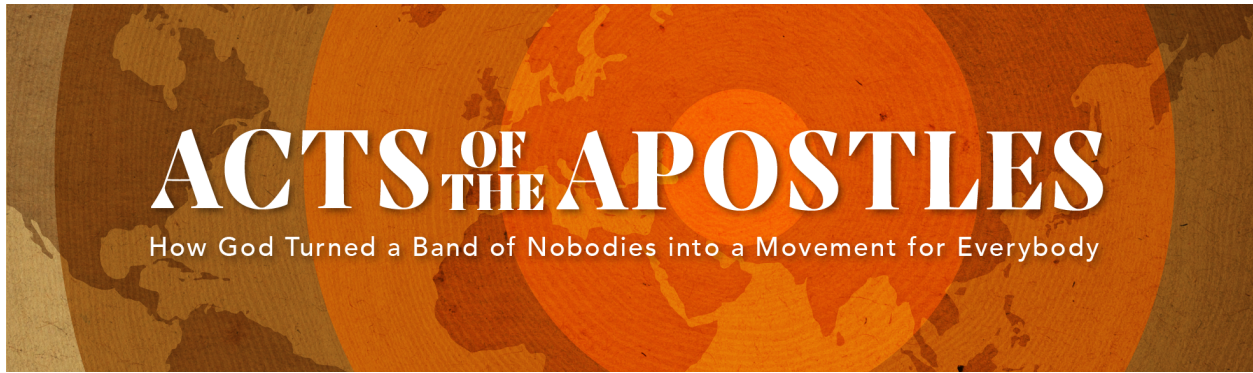
Reread the disciples' prayer in verses 24-30, they don't ask God for anything till the very end. How did the believers structure their prayer, and how could their example influence our prayer lives today?

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.

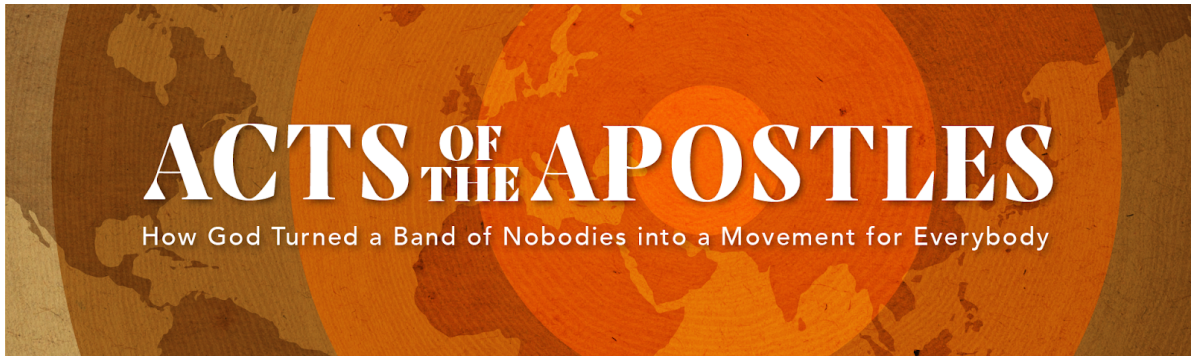
#### Reflection Questions

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

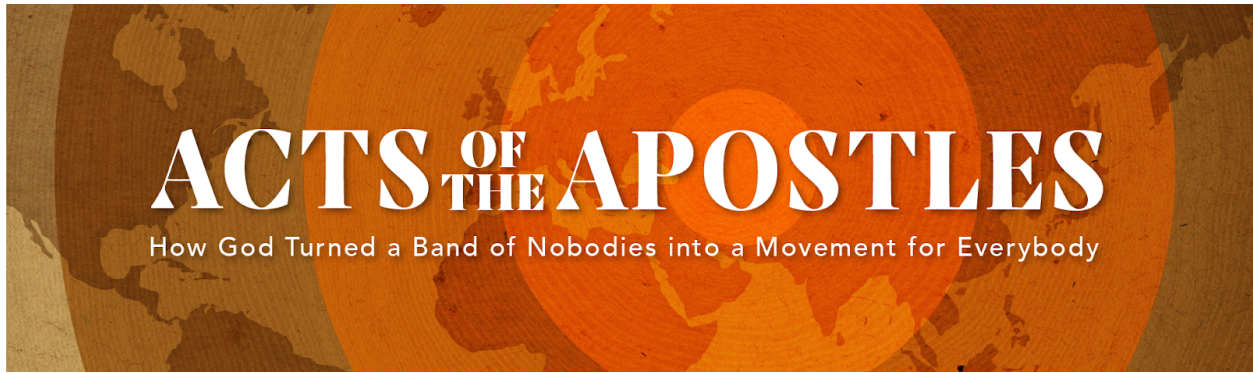
This was the "Garden of Eden" phase of the church. Human sin hadn't yet entered the equation and the church was in its purest form just a few weeks after its birth. The church was powerful and distinct due to their selfless giving and sharing of resources. This radical sharing was not required by the 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.

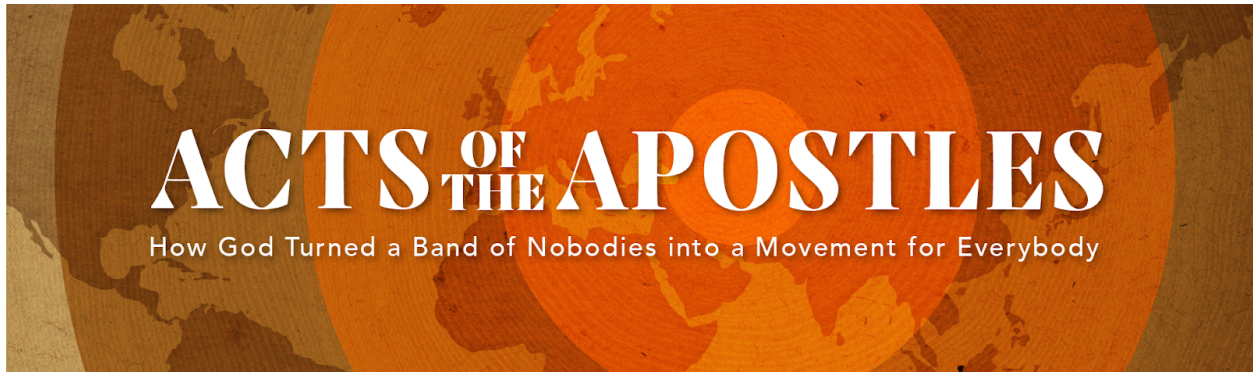
What does Peter accuse Ananias of? Why do you think that this is such a grievous sin?

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.

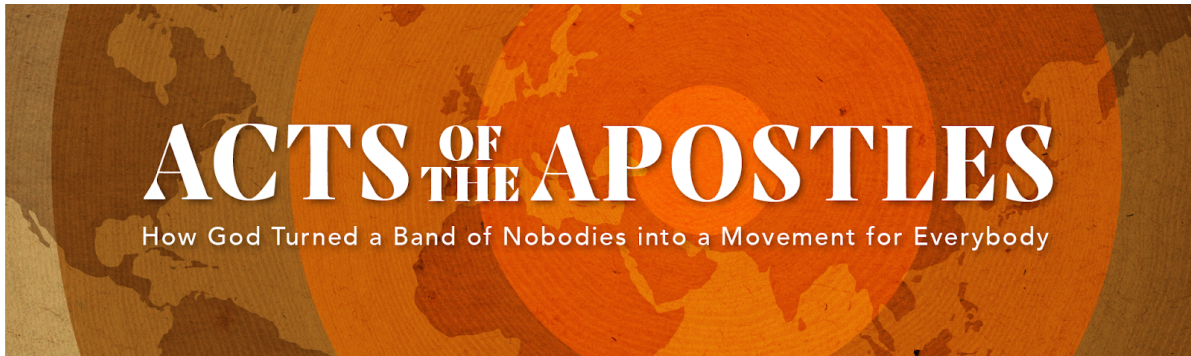
### Reflection Questions

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

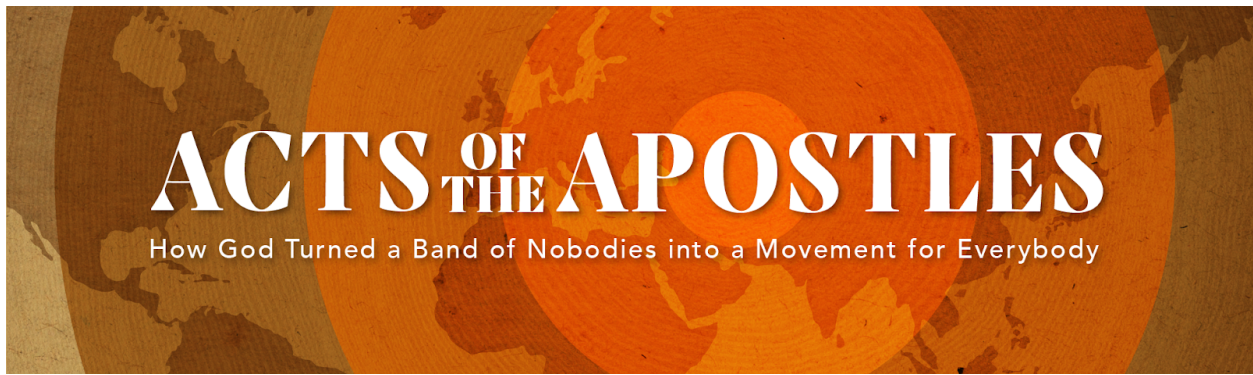
What issue was Stephen initially selected to address? Why do you think this was becoming a problem in the early church?

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 Sanherdrin. The council even attacks Stephen for apparently saying Jesus is coming to destroy the temple and their traditions. Our enemy might be effective at time, but he is rarely original. Both Jesus and Stepehn don't answer the charges directly, but flip the tables on their accusers.

### **Acts 7:1-50**

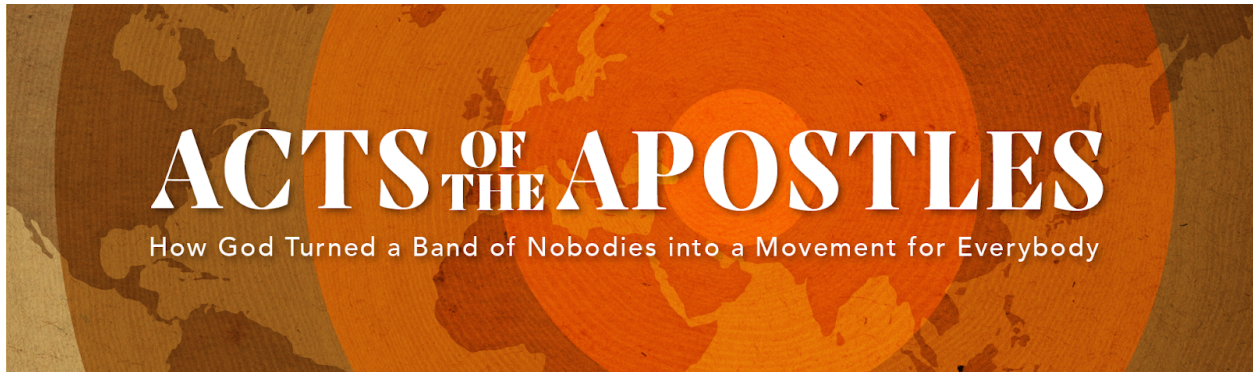
Why does Stephen go through Israel's history and why does he specifically highlight Abraham, Joseph, and Moses?

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 Ireal, 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.

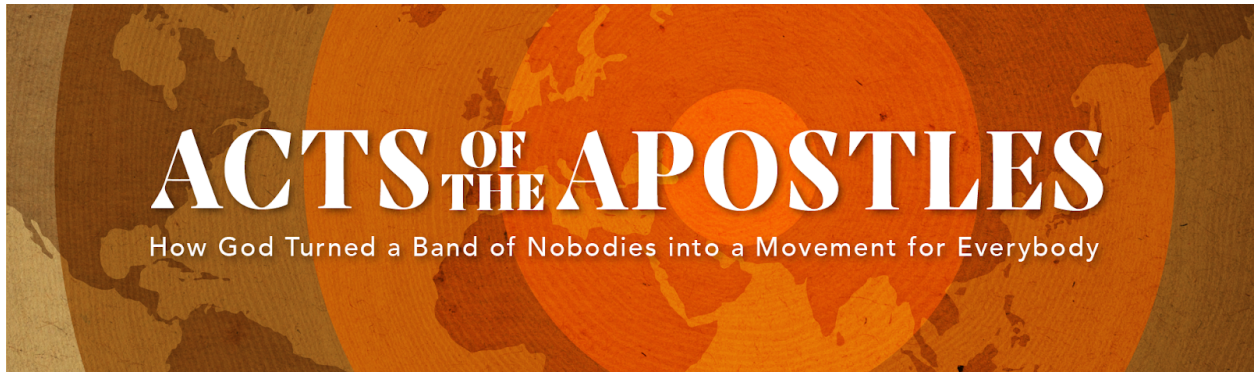
### **Acts 7:51-8:1**

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.*

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## 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

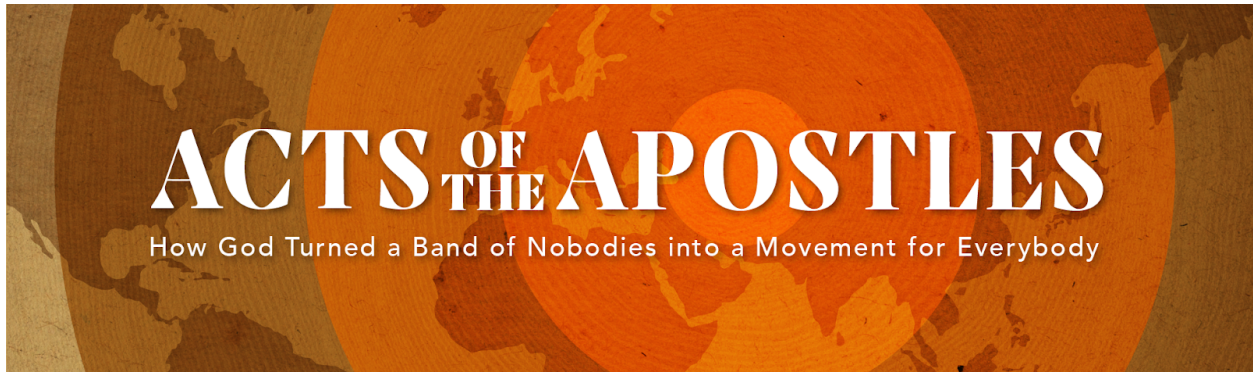
### **Acts 8:26-40**

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 Hellanistic 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

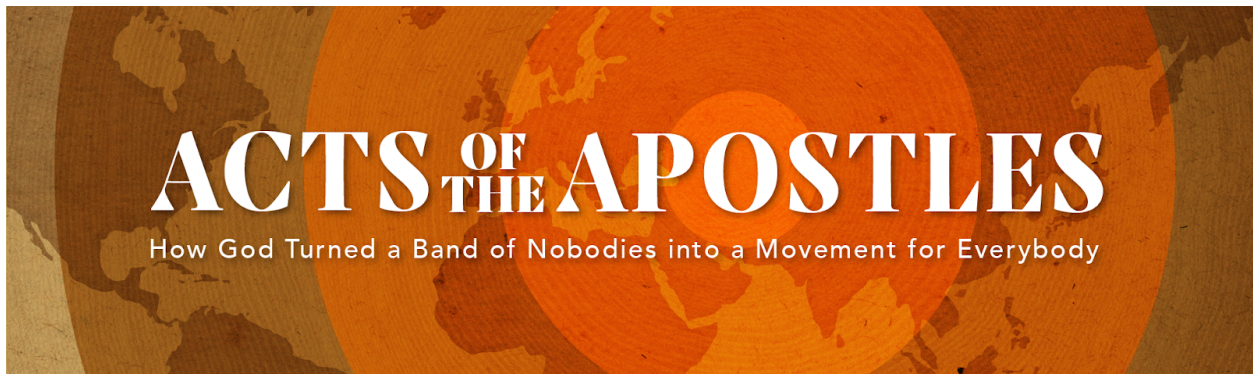
What can we assume about the Ethiopian man in this story?

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?

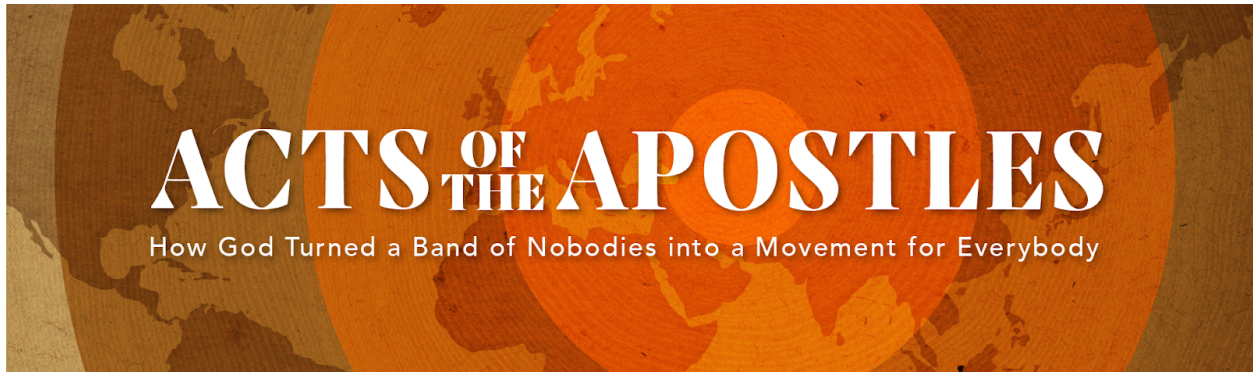
Isaiah 53:7-8. We immediately and correctly think of Jesus as we read this passage, but can you imagine how this passage directly spoke to the Ethiopian Eunuch? A sheep led to slaughter, silent before shearer, humiliated, denied justice, with no descendants? Opening to this passage was no coincidence, 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.

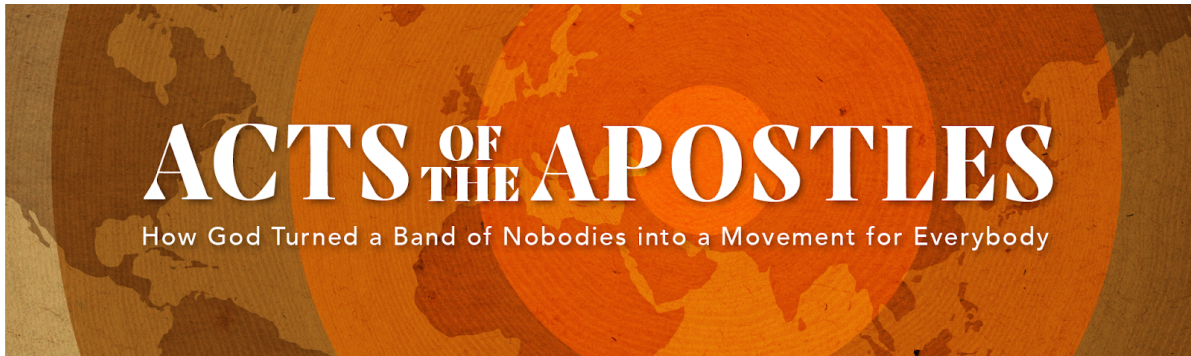
### Reflection Questions

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



## Leader Guide: Week 17

### Conversation Starter

Think of a time in your life when you were courageous. What happened? How did you show courage? Where did your courage come from? - [Personal Answer](#)

### **Courage to Stir Up Trouble**

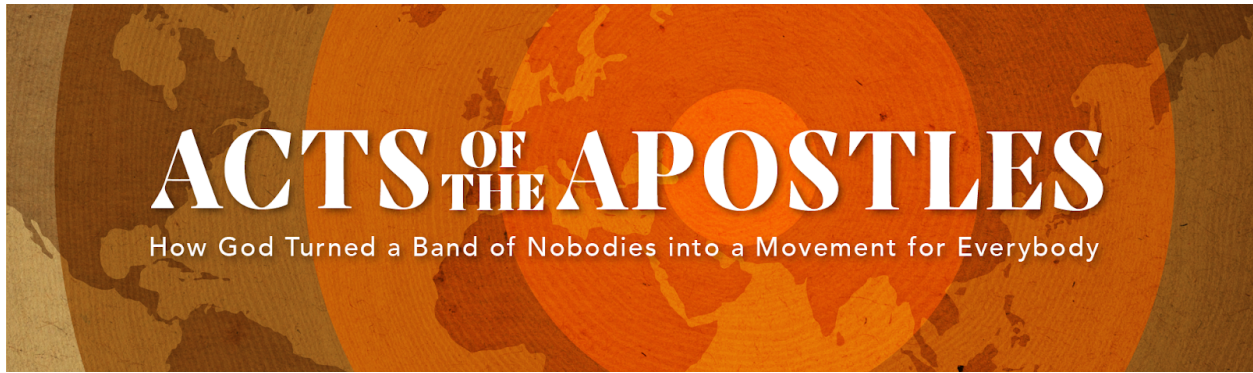
First, read Acts 16:16-18. Who was the slave girl, and what did she do to make her owners rich? Where do we see this kind of evil today?

Phillipi is a Gentile, Secular, and bustling city. Since there was no synagogue in the town it meant there were less than 10 Jewish Males present. Phillippi was an “unchurched” city and Paul and Silas were firmly in foreign territory where Judaism was the minority.

This young slave girl could see the future, and because of this “talent” older men were using her for profit. She was basically being trafficked, and her ability was used by these men to make a quick buck. These men were like pimps and her situation resembles modern-day human trafficking. This poor girl was not only possessed by an unclean spirit, but what was worse was the people around her didn’t want her to be healed or made whole - if that happened they would lose their fortune teller.

Why did Paul find it necessary to silence her (even though she was telling the truth)?

What the girl was yelling was technically correct. Paul and Silas were “servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” The problem was her words, even though they were true, were distracting people from encountering Jesus. Sometimes the enemy can use good things, true things, to distract the Church from its mission, specifically evangelism. Paul had a mission in this city, and he was annoyed that this girl was getting in the way so he cast out the Spirit. It sounds unusual but evil spirits often acknowledge Jesus, and they all must submit to his word.



What keeps you from having the courage to stir up trouble when it's called for?

Personal Answer - try to get people to think of areas that need to be disrupted for the Gospel. The key is we are not talking about disruption that leads to disorder or chaos, but disruption that aids in the sharing of the Gospel.

### **Courage to Suffer**

Read Acts 16:19-24. How did Paul and Silas disrupt the peace? What happened next?

They knew that casting out this spirit would cut off the businessmen's revenue stream. We can all deal with some disruption, but when you attack people's wallets they really get angry! By casting out this Spirit Paul and Silas challenged the establishment and economic interests of the town. Interesting note - the word "Come out" used for casting out the Spirit in 6:18 is the same word as "gone" in 16:19. The profits were expelled with the demon.

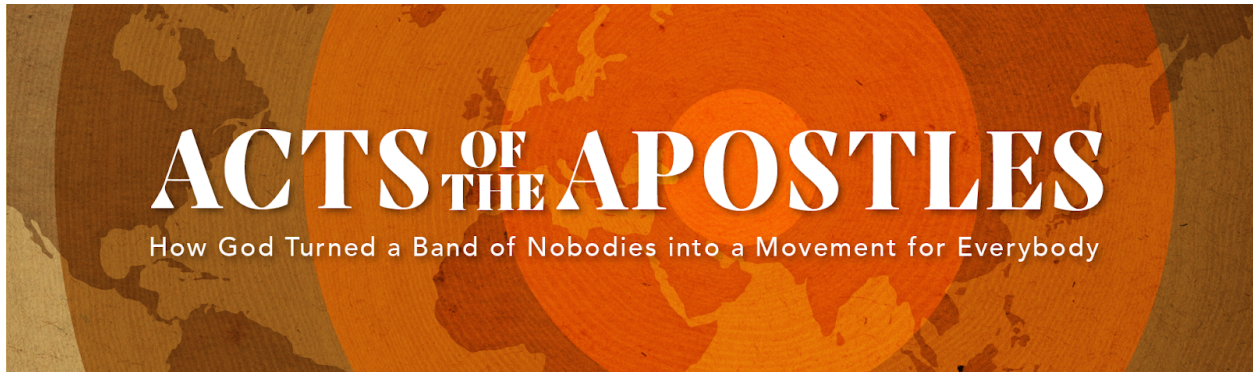
Paul and Silas are charged with throwing the city into an uproar and challenging the local customs. There are tones of racism in these accusations, with the Gentiles being upset that Jewish customs and religion were being introduced to their town. Due to these charges, Paul and Silas are stripped, beaten, flogged, and thrown into prison. The magistrates did not know Paul was a Roman citizen, if so he would not have been treated this way. Roman citizens have special privileges and are given a trial, but Paul does not use his status for his own benefit.

Paul and Silas were courageous enough to suffer for Christ. Have you ever suffered for Christ? If so, how? - [Personal Answer](#)

### **Courage to Sing**

Read Acts 16:25. What were Paul and Silas doing in their prison cell, and why was that so extraordinary?

They were singing hymns to God and praying.



Despite their suffering - specifically being unfairly arrested, beaten, and imprisoned they sang praises to God. These guys were just beaten to a pulp and were still covered in untreated painful wounds, but they still sang.

The only possible explanation for singing songs of praise at this moment was their being filled with the Joy of the Lord. They knew that this pain was temporary, it had a purpose, and most importantly knew God's will would be done. If God intervened and freed them, great. If God was putting them here to reach the other inmates and jailors, they would do it.

What were the other prisoners doing, and why does our posture while suffering for Jesus matter?

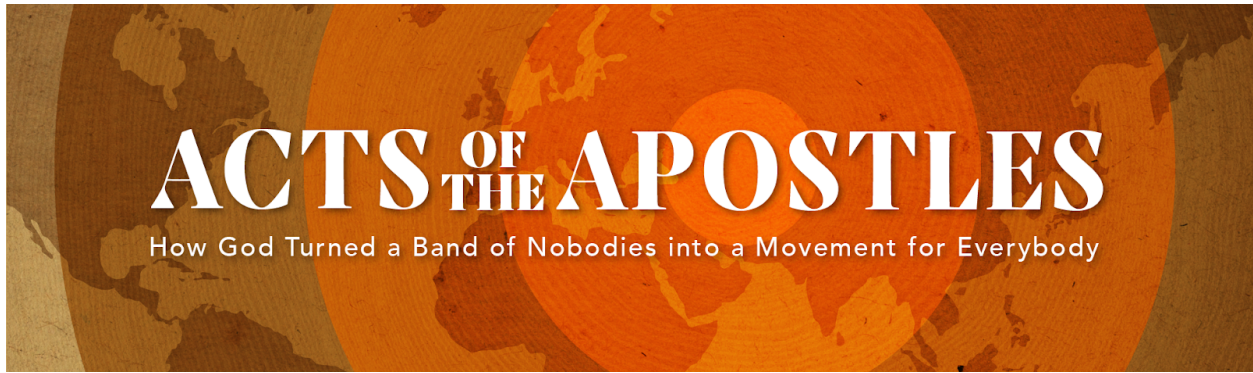
The prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas singing in prison. This should remind us that people are always watching us. They notice how Christians talk, hold themselves, engage in business, and post online. Whether we are going through good or bad times, people are always watching.

As Christians, we are all bound to face suffering to some degree. When we do suffer for Christ it is essential we don't play the victim card, for Christ never did. As we will see Paul had many opportunities to get out of suffering or play the victim card, but he chose faithfulness over comfort. Our world is obsessed with claiming victimhood because in it you can receive power over others. Paul and Silas though did not take their suffering personally and always saw it through the lens of the Gospel. They didn't see themselves as victims, they were ambassadors for Christ.

### **Courage to Stay**

Read Acts 16:26-39. Two times, Paul and Silas stayed when they could have left. In the first instance, they stayed in jail when they could have escaped. Why did they stay?

When the earthquake hit Paul and Silas had a get-out-of-jail-free card. God provided an opening, an answer to prayer, a way out, but they chose to stay. If I was in their shoes I would have booked it out of there!



Paul and Silas realized the earthquake was not for them, it was for the Jailor. They did not see this as an opportunity to run, but as an opportunity to stay and transform someone's life. In the end, it wasn't just the jailor that was saved, but his entire household received the Gospel because these men were selfless and decided to stay,

In what areas of your life is God calling you to have "the courage to stay" right now? - Personal Answer - could be a job, relationship, or a committee.

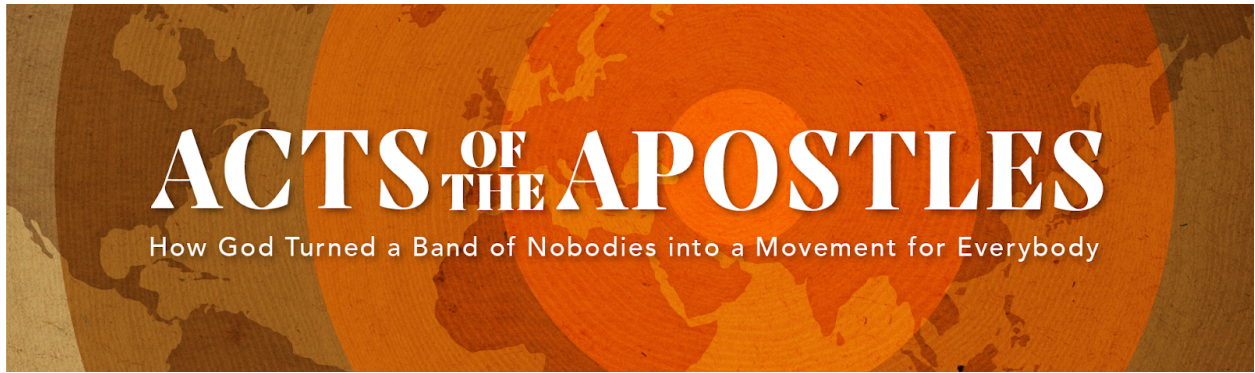
### **Courage to Strengthen Others**

Read Acts 16:40. What did Paul and Silas do after the magistrates escorted them out of prison? Why was that an act of courage under the circumstances?

Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house, the home of the new church in Philippi, giving their protection and blessing to this new church. Now the magistrates would not give Lydia and these new believers trouble because they were already embarrassed for wrongfully detaining Roman citizens without trial. Paul and Silas used their power, to help protect this future church. A church that Paul would keep up with and lovingly write to in Philippians.

This first house church in Philippi could have consisted of the jailor's family, a formerly possessed girl, and a wealthy merchant named Lydia (Acts 16:11-15). What does this ragamuffin crew tell us about the nature of the Gospel and the Church?

If you were planting a church in an unreached city today I doubt this is the launch team you would pick. These people come from all walks of life some being orphans, others families, and all with varying levels of wealth and respect. These people had no earthly reason to be together, the only thing that could bring them together was Jesus. The Gospel is for all, and brings all types of people together into the church. It doesn't matter what you have in common with the person in the seat next to you, what matters is you both have met Jesus and been filled with His Spirit and are now on Mission together. Finally, the church doesn't need the most skilled or accomplished people in the world, it just needs those who are fully committed to Jesus.



Read *Isaiah* 43:2–3. In a world that feels like it's on fire and changing by the day, what reason do we have for being courageous? Where does our courage come from?

Our boldness doesn't come from within, it is from the confidence that God is with us always.



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## Group Leader Guide: Week 18

### Conversation Starter

According to recent surveys, 47% of all American adults belong to a Christian church (down from 70% in 1999). What factors do you think have contributed to this decline?

Popular answers might be - Polarization, Covid adjusting patterns and rhythms, church losing saltiness, ect...

### More Stats

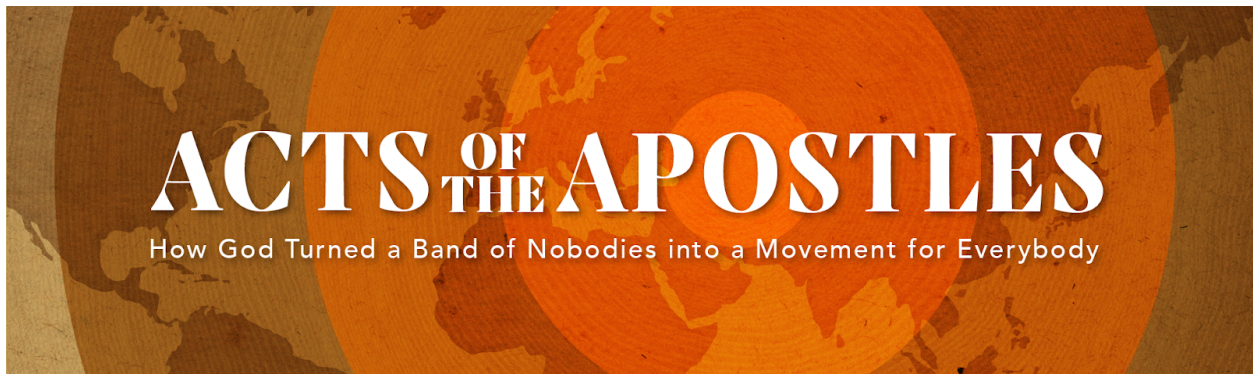
- *Less than half of young adults (18-29) believe in the God of the Bible*
- *Two-thirds of young adults who were active Christians in their childhood have entirely withdrawn from church involvement.*

George Barna, a prominent Christian researcher and pollster, believes that the spiritual crisis in America has to do with our culture's predominant **worldview**. Everyone has a worldview. It is simply the lens we use to see, interpret, and make sense of the world around us. Your beliefs, decisions, actions, and reactions can all be traced back to the lens you're looking through. For Christians, that lens should be the gospel (although it may also be "tinted" by your personal experiences, when and where you live, your economic status, etc).

If you would like, ask your group - **How would you describe your personal worldview? What is the lens through which you see, interpret, and make sense of the world around you?**

It's important we all are aware of the worldview we are using, because it influences how we interpret and react to everything around us.





## Paul's Concern

Read Acts 17:16-18. What did the Apostle Paul find so troubling about the predominant Athenian worldview? Why was it so discouraging to him?

He was troubled by their idolatry. Athens was a Polytheistic Pagan culture where people would usually rely on their own power until they couldn't. Then they would choose to worship the god that would best fit their particular need. Their worldview allowed them to trust themselves and then use God only when needed. This is opposite of Paul's view which was - trust God at all times, and let God use you for His Kingdom. Paul was ultimately discouraged because the Athenians were turning to worship of themselves and man made statues.

Once Paul saw the pervasive idolatry of Athens, he couldn't unsee it. When you look around the world today, what do you see that you can't unsee? What are the idols and false gods people are chasing these days?

Personal Answer - Money, success, fame, comfort, themselves....

## Paul's Response

Read Acts 17:19-23. What was the Areopagus, and what went on there every day?

This was the place where people would go to chat about the latest news, rumors, or philosophies. It was a place of great debate and rambling - pretty much like Twitter/X or the coffee shop that your grandfather goes to on Saturday Mornings. It's still there in modern Athens and you can visit this very rock Paul preached from.

How did Paul begin his address to the Athenians? Why is it important for Christians to first carefully observe the context we're in *before* speaking out?

Sometimes Christians assume that sharing the gospel starts with speaking, arguing, and persuasion, but Paul began with seeing, acknowledging, and paying attention to the worldview of the Athenian people. This approach has been called *contextualization*. Instead of immediately imposing his own worldview on the Athenian people he first sought to understand theirs. He found common ground, and would tailor his message to what they needed to hear. Note - he would never change the truth, but Paul would adapt his approach based on the context. You will notice this sermon is way different than one he would share with the Jews in the Synagogue.



# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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

Read Acts 17:24-28. Why do you think Paul began his presentation with the universe, the earth, the creation of all things, and the origin of life - rather than opening with a more religious or biblical worldview?

This is a great example of contextualization. Paul starts with the common ground that they all believe in a creator instead of jumping into Isaiah, Ezekial, or the prophets he would usually quote to the Jews. This is a wise approach. Many Christians today take a different path and the first thing they do when they meet a non-believer is throw a Bible verse at them. While this is Truth, it's not an efficient way to reach someone who doesn't respect or even understand the Bible.

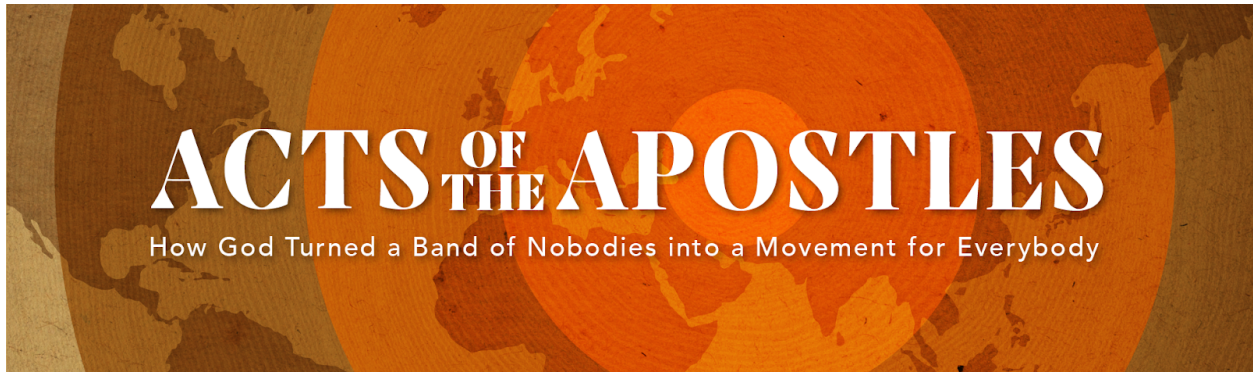
In this brief talk, Paul referenced popular Greek poets (v. 28). Why would Paul quote non-Christian poets while attempting to explain the Christian gospel?

Paul is once again establishing a common ground. Three core principles at the Story are - Challenging Comfort, Inspiring deeper conversation, and Pursuing Truth. In this passage Paul teaches us what it looks like to inspire deeper conversations. It begins with establishing common ground, actually flattering his listeners, and finding the divine spark within all of them. These popular poets Paul quoted were not perfect or on the same level as Scripture, but in their teaching are kernels of truth that point to the truth that we are ALL made in the image of God,

Read 17:29-31. Having paid homage to Athenian religiosity and values, Paul made a more aggressive appeal here. What might his audience have found challenging or offensive about the claims Paul made in these verses?

God doesn't live in all of these temples made by human hands. Also God doesn't need us, he doesn't need to be served by mere humans. God is outside of creation and made all of it for His Glory. Ultimately Paul doesn't believe in a Pantheon of Gods, but one. This would ruffle some feathers in a pagan culture where they were obsessed with building temples and offering sacrifices to all of the different gods.

Paul talks about THE ONE who is to come to judge and reconcile all to him. But did you notice he never mentions the name of Jesus? He isn't scared, he has been imprisoned many times for sharing Jesus. Instead, he realizes that the Greeks aren't ready for Jesus yet, they would have no idea who He is! Paul was content to slowly bring them along at a pace they could understand and be saved.



Read 17:32-34. Paul's Athenian audience responded to his appeal in three distinct ways. What were the three different responses found in this passage?

Some laughed at the truth of Jesus and resurrection of the dead. Others were interested and wanted to hear more, but were not fully convinced. You could say they politely rejected him, but were willing to listen. Lastly some were truly seeking, they followed Paul and believed. We will encounter all three of these responses when we share the gospel today.

### Reflection Questions

When you observe the world around you today, as fallen as it may be, where do you see signs of God's Truth in modern, secular culture?

*(Note: If you struggle to feel compassion for those who are pursuing false gods today, ask God to break your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) that loves others the way God loves us all.)*

Why is it important for Christians to be both gracious (in our assessment of secular contexts and worldviews) **and** truthful (about the gospel of Jesus Christ) - and not just one or the other?

Paul did both, and shows us a path to sharing the Gospel in an attractive way. To start better conversations about the most important questions. People are talking about God more than ever, and it's time we jump in and engage in these conversations in an attractive manor, even if they do not start in the most typical ways. We can be gracious with our tact and understanding, but at the end of the day when the rubber meets the road we need to be Truthful about God's Judgment and Redemption of the world - no matter their response.

If you've ever tried to tell unbelievers about Jesus, you've probably seen people react in each of these three ways discussed above. Spend a few moments reflecting and sharing about a time when you shared the gospel (even if it was only inviting someone to church). How was your message received? How did their response affect or change your enthusiasm for sharing the gospel with others?

Personal Answer



# 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? Acts of the Apostles tells the story of how Christianity spread like wildfire across the Roman Empire and beyond. We will journey through Acts in pursuit of the truth behind history's most consequential movement.*

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## **Group Discussion Guide: Week 19**

### Conversation Starter

How would you describe the City of Houston? What are the things we live for, and what are some of the sins we harbor? How could we relate to Corinth in the 1st century?

Houston - port city, full of trade and business, hard working, melting pot, full of greed, hiding a lot of sexual sin (Human trafficking, clubs, adultery) Pastor Eric said Houston would be just like Corinth if all of our secret sins were exposed.

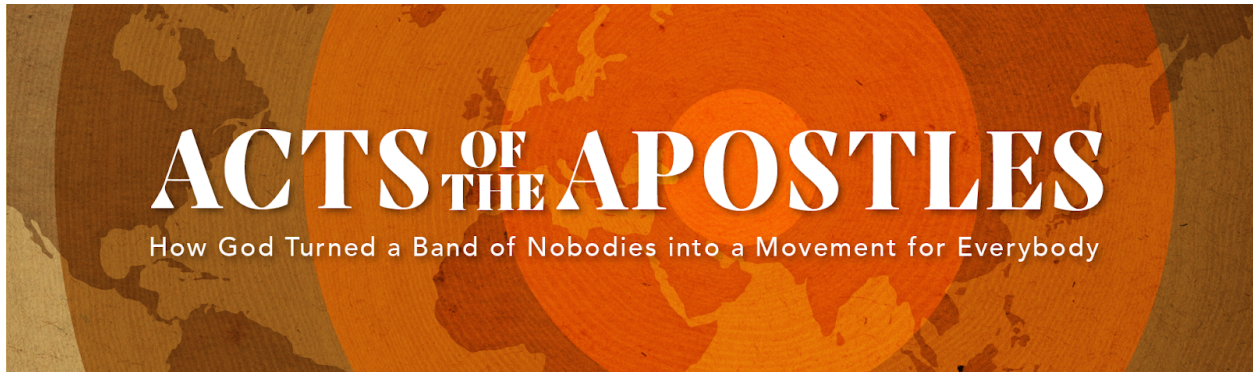
Corinth - port city, full of trade and business, major temple of Aphrodite - god of sex, famous for temple prostitution, to be called a Corinthian meant one lived for pleasure and the Corinthian in a play would always be the drunkard, [check out this website for more information about Paul's time in Corinth.](#)

### **Rejection and Revival**

*Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.* How does Paul describe the kinds of people who joined the church in Corinth, and more broadly, what does it say about the purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ?

*The sexually immoral, idolaters, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers ...* Not the most refined or moral crew. I don't think Paul is overexaggerating to make a point, this was the reputation of Corinth. Before Paul got there these people were fully living for the pleasure of the flesh.

What's so remarkable is these are the people Paul went after. "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17) Paul went to the place with the worst moral decay and invited those people to the church.



*Read Acts 18:1-4.* Who were Priscilla and Aquila? What do we learn about them from this passage and other passages in the New Testament (see Romans 16:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 16:19)? How did they partner with Paul?

Priscilla and Aquila were Paul's coworkers - not just in tent making, but also the Gospel! Paul mentions this couple multiple times in his letters and even takes them on his missionary journey where they preach (even correcting Apollos) and help start churches in Corinth and Ephesus! Their original trade were tent or leather makers, and it appears they were believers before they met Paul. So their partnership might have started out as a business venture, but it quickly evolved into a Kingdom, Disciple Making movement. They are as important as Timothy - [For further reading on this remarkable missionary couple go here.](#)

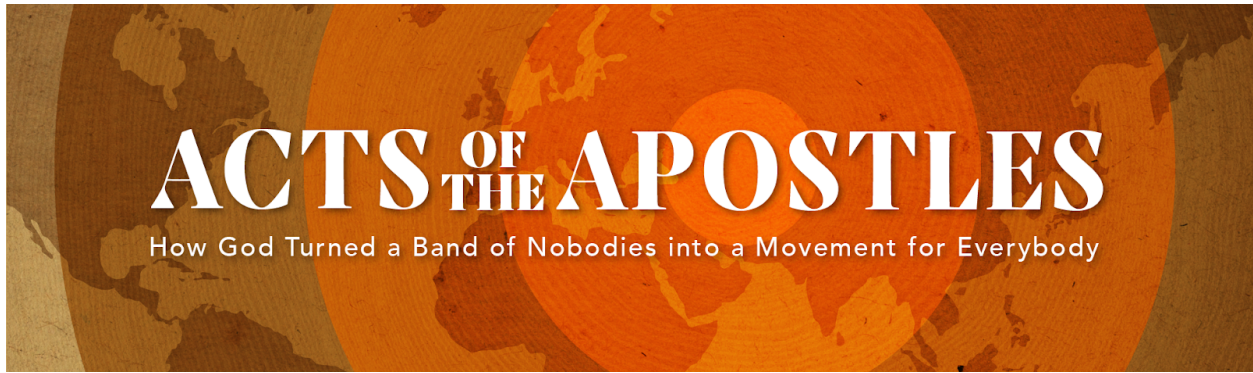
*Read Acts 18:5.* What did Silas and Timothy bring Paul, and what did that allow Paul to do? (See also 2 Corinthians 11:8-9 and Philippians 4:14-15.)

Up to this point in Paul's ministry he was bi-vocational meaning he was working a 9-5 during the week and would preach in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Paul made this arrangement work, but his job limited his effectiveness. When Timothy and Silas visit they bring a gift of money that enables him to go full time into evangelism which leads to a revival in Corinth. Now Paul did not live a lavish lifestyle so this likely wasn't a ton of money, but it allowed him to focus all of his efforts on preaching the Gospel.

*Read Acts 18:6-8.* What happened after Paul began preaching the Gospel full-time, and how did the apostle respond? What does this show us about the CONNECTIONAL nature of the Church?

The gift allowed Paul to help start a revival in the city! He has "draw a line in the sand" type of moments and leaves the Synagogue, due to their rejection, and focuses on Gentiles. In this dramatic act the Synagogue leader, Crispus and his entire family convert. This conversion of a former Jewish leader likely gave the Christian movement a big bump in the city!

The gift we talked about in verse 5 is paramount in making all of this possible. The churches in Macedonia's support of Paul enabled his missionary work in Corinth. It is essential that churches today work together in sending and empowering preachers and missionaries for Gospel work around the globe. We are all in this together. It's not one church versus another, we need to always be looking at ways to support other congregations and leaders.



## **Rejection and Revival... and more Rejection**

What typically happens whenever revival breaks out in a city (see Acts 16:19-24, 17:5-8, 17:13-14, 18:12-13, 19:23-29)?

Revival is usually followed by a riot and further rejection. Read through these passages shared above, almost every time there is a huge step forward for the Gospel movement, the world responds harshly. We all love to experience revival, but whenever we see revival we should be prepared for more rejection. The Devil does not want to see the Gospel flourish, so we see this pattern of attack whenever the Gospel begins to make inroads in a community, family, or even individual.

*Read Acts 18:9-11.* Given Paul's recent successes in ministry and the apparent revival unfolding in Corinth, why do you think Paul would have been afraid and reluctant to continue? How did the LORD respond to Paul v. 9?

Paul knew what was coming. He has read this story a couple of times now and it sounds like he was a little tired, weary, and weak. He didn't want another beating, imprisonment, or even the struggle of just packing up and leaving to a new place. Paul was an amazing man, but he wasn't perfect or immune to suffering. That's what makes God's threefold promise of presence, protection, and provision so important.

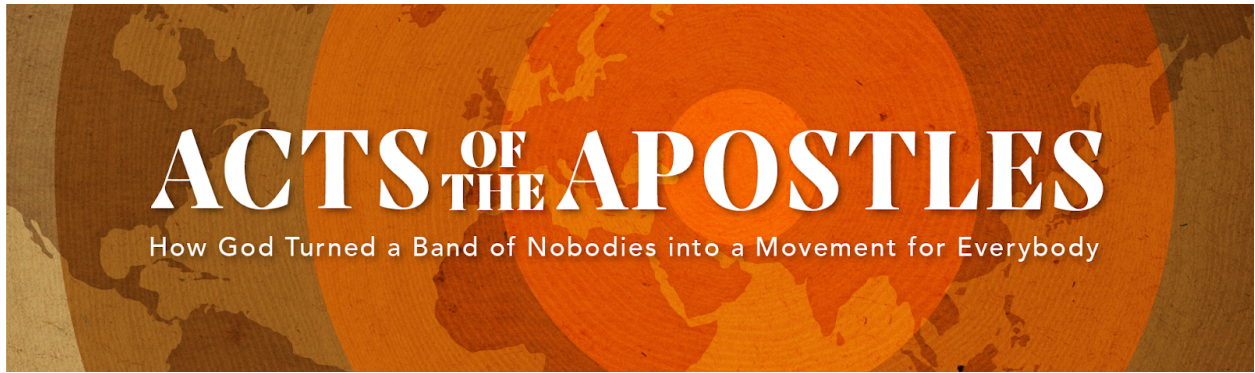
### Reflection Questions

Using the Lord's words to Paul in Acts 18:9-11 as a template, how can we prepare ourselves not only for the revival, but also for the resistance?

GOD'S PRESENCE - How has the Lord been with you? - [Personal Answer](#)

GOD'S PROTECTION - How has the Lord protected you from evil? - [Personal Answer](#)

GOD'S PROVISION - How has He provided for you? - [Personal Answer](#)



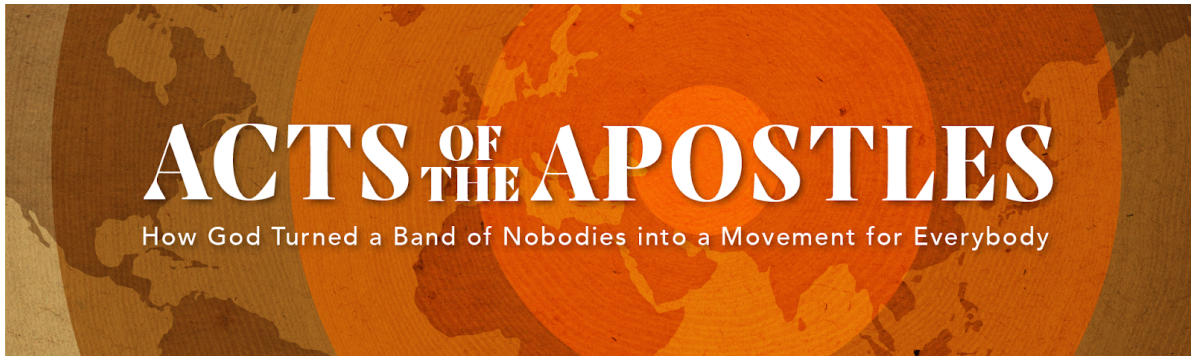
Despite what many believe about the supposed decline of Christianity in America, many churches and cities (including ours) are witnessing a revival. What should we expect as this revival unfolds?

We as believers should not be surprised when we experience riots or rejection. This is the pattern we see all throughout Acts. Yet the surprising thing is Peter and Paul never play the victim card. They embrace the struggle, dust the dirt off their feet, and move to the next place God is calling them to.

Earlier we discussed the sorts of unsavory people who made up the Corinthian congregation according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. But in the very next verse, we find that their sins no longer defined them (**read 6:11**). How is this encouragement to us today? What sins do we need to be cleansed of?

*11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Personal Answer



*How did a handful of ordinary people become ten thousand followers of Jesus in the year following his public execution? Acts of the Apostles tells the story of how Christianity spread like wildfire across the Roman Empire and beyond. We will journey through Acts in pursuit of the truth behind history's most consequential movement.*

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## **Group Discussion Guide: Week 19.5**

### Conversation Starter

If you were there Sunday morning what did you think of John Burke's Sermon on Near Death Experiences (NDE's) and the character of God? What was most surprising to you from his talk?

### Personal Answer

We all subconsciously put boxes around who God is and how we experience Him. What part of God's character do you struggle with or where are you still growing in your understanding of him?

Personal Answer - (His sovereignty, His protection, His love, His humor...)

### **Moving by the Will of God**

*Read Acts 18:18-23.* Paul's Missionary journeys moved him all across the mediterranean. What served as Paul's rudder and sails during his travels, and how did he decide how long to stay and when to go? What was his goal wherever he visited?

Paul followed God's Will whenever it led him. He listened to the Holy Spirit on how long to stay and when to go. Paul did not rely on tactics, logic, or even taking the most direct paths to each location. For example it would of made sense to stay in Ephesus longer. Ephesus was a major city, probably the 3rd of 4th most significant in the Roman empire. It would have been sensible, even strategic to stay there and preach, but the Lord was leading him somewhere different. He knew that when he left Ephesus the spirit of God would not leave, and he had equipped Priscilla and Aquila with the knowledge necessary to cary on. Everywhere Paul went his mission was to preach to those who have not heard the Gospel and strengthen all the disciples. He listened to God and was willing to pick up and go when led.



# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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

*Read James 4:13-17.* James, the half-brother of Jesus, in his pastoral letter wrote something very similar to Paul about moving as God leads. How does James describe our lives and what it means to follow God?

Our lives are mist, they are here for a moment and then gone. This is not meant to devalue human life or say that we do not matter, but it does help us reshape our view of our plans and legacy. If we live for our own reputation or to amass possessions then when we die it's all gone. Sure people may remember you for a generation or so, but in the grand scheme of time it's insignificant. Boasting in our own human plans is silly and can be sinful. On the other hand if we invest our time and effort into Kingdom work that aligns with God's will we are enabled to make a kingdom impact that lives on into eternity. There is nothing wrong with making plans, but if our plans shut out God or refuse to be obedient to where he is leading we run into trouble.

Why is it so difficult for us to surrender to the will of God?

Surrendering our lives wholly and completely to God is difficult because we are all driven by arrogance or pride at least to a degree. We love making our plans and achieving our goals. Following God means we have to hold our plans loosely, and be willing to experience divine interruptions. It's hard to be fully obedient to God's will and let him transform our dreams, but when you do God multiplies your efforts for His glory.

## **Kingdom work is Communal**

*Read Acts 18:24-26.* Apollos was a smart guy who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, but needed some extra teaching from Priscilla and Aquila. What was he lacking?

Apollos is from Alexandria, the empire's second most significant city that was renowned for its education. It had a massive Jewish population and was known for its rhetorical training. With all this in mind Apollos seems like the perfect messenger of the Gospel. The issue was he understood John's baptism of repentance and only basic knowledge of "the way". He was a Christian, but he didn't have the full picture of baptism, Jesus, and Paul's other teachings.

Notice that Priscilla and Aquila pulled him aside and shared what they had learned. P & A didn't call Apollos out or correct him there on the spot in front of everyone, they put time into the relationship and found space to bring him along. They shared about the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and grace. When we encounter people who are fervent, yet lacking in their knowledge of Christ we would be wise to take the same approach. Instead of acting superior and arrogantly informing them of how they are all wrong, we should joyfully share what we have already been blessed to learn.

# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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

*Read Acts 18:27-28.* After he gained much needed teaching and discipleship Apollos hit the road and began powerfully preaching. How does this entire passage show us the importance of teaching, mentoring, and the passing down of truth?

All believers should always both be discipled and discipling. Throughout our entire faith journey we should be learning under wiser men/women and pouring into those who are newer to the faith. There never comes a point where we no longer need a mentor or we are too busy to find a mentee. Part of leaving a legacy is passing down truth from generation to generation. All believers have the job of dispersing what God has graciously given us.

The other time we hear about Apollos in the Bible is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. *Read 1 Corinthians 3:4-9.* Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos were all faithful co-workers in God's service. What do they teach us about the communal nature of Kingdom work?

Evangelism and discipleship takes a team. We need all hands on deck and we never know which part of someone's salvation process we are at. You might be the one to just introduce them to Jesus and allow them to begin to ask deeper questions, or you might be the person who asks them if they want to receive Christ and be baptized. We are all on the same team, and believers and churches must work together for fruitful ministry.

## Reflection Questions

Has God ever challenged YOUR plans for YOUR life? How did you respond? What does it look like to hold on to our plans loosely, and follow God's will for us?- [Personal Answer](#)

Priscilla and Aquila were able to meet with Apollos and fill in his gaps. Has there ever been a time when your understanding of God was incomplete and someone had to help explain the ways of God more adequately? Who was it, what did they show you, and how did you respond?- [Personal Answer](#)

We are all called to mentor and disciple other believers. Who is God leading you to mentor? - [Personal Answer](#)

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## Group Discussion Guide: Week 20

### Conversation Starter

How (if at all) has following Jesus disrupted the way you used to live?

### Personal Answer

### Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

It's important to see that, before the events in today's reading, things were going well for Paul and the Christians of Ephesus. *Read Acts 19:17-22*. What do you notice?

"The Way" was powerfully moving in Ephesus. So much so that people were bringing out their sorcery scrolls and burning them as an act of submission to God! These scrolls represented an old way of life where people were into all kinds of pagan worship and idolatry. Ephesus was an extremely religious town, and the act of burning these scrolls was marked as proof of their transformation to both themselves and their neighbors. Ephesians viewed Artemis as their savior so this act was a direct rejection of the prevailing culture.

Notice that this mass burning was not a command by church leaders or an unlawful search and seizure, the believers voluntarily brought out their scrolls and destroyed them. This wasn't just a religious sacrifice, but an economic one. The cost of all these scrolls ended up being 50,000 days' wages for the average worker! After becoming new believers they immediately saw that being saved was free, by grace through faith, but following Jesus is always costly.

Just three verses later, we find that there was already an angry uprising in response to the Gospel's influence in Ephesus. *Read Acts 19:23-27*. Who was Artemis (a.k.a. "Diana") of the Ephesians? What do we know about her and her temple in Ephesus?

The most important structure in Ephesus was the temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (known in Rome as Diana), which was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. It was 425 feet, long and 220 feet wide, with white marble columns 62 feet high and just 4 feet apart. This is four times bigger than the Parthenon in Athens! The temple was likely founded at the spot where a meteor fell from heaven that looked somewhat like the god. They saw this as sacred ground and built temple after temple to honor her.

In Greek and Roman mythology Artemis was the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. She was the goddess of the hunt and wild animals, as well as fertility. Worship and statues of Artemis in Ephesus took on their own flavor. In Ephesus, she was covered in breasts or eggs and had a necklace of acorns and a high crown. Her skirt was decorated with rows of animals, symbolic of her fertility. A eunuch priest served Artemis, assisted by virgin priestesses. This women-dominated religion may be part of the reason why Paul insists so much on women keeping their proper place in the church and on men rising up to play their proper role in worship.

As a fertility goddess, ritual prostitution played an important part in the worship of Artemis. So, from a Christian point of view, the temple was exceedingly immoral. Worship also included many secret rituals or 'mysteries', which explains Paul's repeated use of the word 'mystery' in his letter (Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19). The worship of Artemis was a 'mystery' that was hidden and secret, revealed only to the special few, but on the other hand Paul says that God's 'mystery' has now been made fully known through Jesus for all!

**[Go here for more info and pictures](#)**

**What is the relationship between modern-day idols and economic prosperity today?  
What typically happens to people who reject and speak against these idols?**

The temple to Artemis wasn't just about religion; it was also economic! There was a guild of silversmiths who made shrines and copies of the stone that fell from heaven. Clearly, they made a good living out of it; because when Paul began to preach about Jesus and people started responding to the gospel, they were afraid that it might affect business and so stirred up a riot (Acts 19:23-41). The world can often tolerate when we critique their beliefs, but when you attack their bottom line they get really angry!

Artemis affected more than the livelihood of a guild of silversmiths. Her worship affected every facet of city life. Her temple served as the city's main bank, and thousands of temple servants were entrusted with looking after the fortunes that people entrusted to them. Artemis' image was also on their coins, and festivals and games were held in her honor. So to challenge Artemis, like Paul did, was to challenge the whole social and economic order. But that is what the gospel is meant to do!

**Read Acts 19:28-41. What do you notice about the mob and the chaos that ensued?  
What unique role did the city clerk play in this passage?**

My favorite part of this reading is verse 32 - *"The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there."* Doesn't this describe our culture right now? We often have a few people who create chaos and confusion among the masses. People are often mad and they don't even know why - other than the fact that someone told them to be angry.

Demetrius, the city clerk, has an interesting role in this passage. He is a metal worker and is not part of the church in Ephesus. The town clerk held one of the highest positions in 1st-century Roman cities, and in Ephesus, this role was even more dominant. In the first part of his speech, he acknowledges how great Artemis is and establishes how Paul, and no other man, can discredit her power. In the second half he argues for peace and to follow the proper channels by taking Paul and his associates to court rather than rioting. Demetrius' role was to maintain peace and make sure Rome did not have to come in and enforce it. He was not protecting Paul because he was sympathetic to the gospel, he protected Paul to save the city, maintain order, and get business back to normal as quickly as possible!

Despite the mob, Paul and the other Christians established a Church in Ephesus and we can see Paul's special affection for this community in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15-23). Paul prayed a very specific prayer for them found in *Ephesians 3:16-19*. Take a moment to read this prayer and then copy it on a note where you will see it this week. Use this as your prayer this week, even memorize it if you can.

Challenge your groups to do this together this week!

### Reflection Questions

Under what types of circumstances do you think Christianity should reject the values and disrupt the economy of a society? Can you think of any examples in your lifetime or in recent history when Christians have been righteously disruptive?

Personal Answer. Possible examples civil rights, pro-life movement, and asylum seekers.

**Note** - if you have an overly politically charged group that will get carried away with this question you will want to make sure to keep a tight hold on the reins or skip over this question entirely.

As Christians who are living in a riotous world in which the mob mentality is a daily reality, how can we follow Jesus faithfully, by not only persevering through the pushback, but also joyfully clinging to "the love we had at first"?

When Paul left Ephesus he left a vibrant church. Yes, they faced their fair share of trials, but their faith was evident. We see this in Paul's letter to them ten years later, one full of thanksgiving and teaching. If we fast-forward another 30 or 40 years to the final book in the NT an Angel writes a letter to the church in Ephesus with a much harsher take on the church. The angel says "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." (Rev 2:4-5)

Somewhere along the way, the once-thriving church in Ephesus lost their first love and abandoned their strong convictions from earlier. We don't know exactly how this happened, but we can assume it was the never-ending pushback, persecution, and hostility they faced from the culture around them. The love was strong at first, but it slowly faded.

Have you ever witnessed (or personally known) a reasonable unbeliever who rejected the mob mentality and chose to make peace? How does God use such people? (See Gamaliel in Acts 5:33-39, Nicodemus in John 2:13-3:2, and Jesus' words in Luke 10:5-7).

[Personal Answer](#)

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## **Upcoming Events:**



### **Ash Wednesday Worship Service**

Save the date to join us on Wednesday, February 14 at 7pm as we mark the beginning of the season of Lent with a special time of worship and teaching. Childcare available for ages 16 months up to 4.



### **Special Serve Day for Loaves & Fishes**

Join us for a special serve day with our partner organization, Loaves & Fishes Soup Kitchen! On Monday, February 19, a team of 20 volunteers is needed to help deep clean their kitchen area. Sign up: [thestory.church/serveday](http://thestory.church/serveday)



### **Summer Trip with GO Ministries**

We have limited spots available for this year's trip to the Dominican Republic with our partner GO Ministries, June 4-11. Visit [thestory.church/gomin](http://thestory.church/gomin) to learn more about the trip and submit your deposit to secure your spot.

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## Group Discussion Guide: Week 21

### Conversation Starter

If your life was a sport, what sport would it be and why?

Personal Answer(Fun question, don't spend too much time on this)

### Paul's Race

*Read Acts 20:7-11. What does this passage tell us about Paul's character and commitment level? Given what we know about Paul's life and background, why do you think he was so intensely focused on sharing the gospel?*

Paul was a man on a mission, and from the moment that he gave his life to Jesus, he believed that he was running the race of his life. Paul was planning on leaving Troas that next day, but instead of calling it early that night, packing up, and getting rested for his trip he stayed and preached till midnight! Even when the boy fell from the roof and died, he didn't let that stop him! Paul raised Eutychus from the dead and then kept on preaching till the morning.

In everything Paul did he was intense and committed. His original zeal for Judaism was transformed to a passion for sharing the Gospel after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus

Here are a couple examples of Paul' Zeal

- *For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.." Galatians 1:14*
- *"Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" 1 Corinthians 9:27-28*
- *If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless Philippians 3:4-6*

Read Acts 20:17-25 and Acts 20:36-38. What was Paul's reason for speaking to the Ephesian church leaders in this way? What did he hope to accomplish?

Paul wanted to encourage and equip the leaders, and to say goodbye. The weeping, kissing, and embracing proves to us how deep Paul's love and affection was for this community. Paul's statement that he would never see them again points to the fact that Paul anticipated trouble and persecution in his future travels. He understood the path he was on, and the potential danger that lay ahead. Paul was going to fulfill his calling regardless of the cost, even in the face of death.

This isn't the only time that Paul analogized the Christian life to a footrace (see 1 Cor. 9:24, Gal. 2:2, and Phil. 3:13-14. See also Hebrews 12:1-2, which most likely wasn't written by Paul). What do you think it is about running in particular that makes it such a good analogy for Christians who are trying to follow Jesus?

Personal Answer. Some scholars assume that Paul picked running as a metaphor because he was a runner himself. We cannot be sure of that, but as we will see in further questions, running really does apply to our journey as Christians!

When did the "race" begin for Paul? Approximately how old was he, and for how many years did he live before he began the race of following Jesus?

Paul's race began at his conversion when he was around 30. He lived to be about 60, so for about the first half of his life, Paul was not running the Christian race. Paul lived the first half of his life running an entirely different race for himself.

## **Your Race**

When does the race begin for believers, and when will it end? Why is this so important to understand?

The race begins the moment you become a Christian, and ends the day that you die. It's an important point because some people avoid running the race because they feel like they're too late, they've already been left behind, they're playing catch-up. This is encouragement to many of us who also chased idols, careers, or other vain pursuits earlier in life. When we start the journey really is not important. What is much more important is how hard we run the race once we get going! It's never too late to begin.

## **Who are we running against?**

Some Christians - especially new believers - often falsely assume they are "running" against other Christians. What's wrong with that assumption?



*By doing this you'll either be discouraged or deceived. Discouraged because the Christians you're comparing yourself to have been training for years and you can't keep up with them... Or deceived because the Christians you're comparing yourself to are nominal Christians at best and the truth is they're spiritually out of shape. This assumption has us looking at and comparing ourselves to fallen humans, rather than our perfect model and savior - Jesus.*

**Other Christians run the race as though they're in competition with the world, or with our spiritual enemy, Satan. What's wrong with this assumption?**

*It's not you against the world, even though there will be plenty of forces in this world that will oppose you as you run your race. Paul referred to his religious "opponents" obstructing and standing in his way. But they were just obstacles along the course, not fellow runners of the race.*

*You're not running against Satan either... The devil isn't running the same race that you are. He's nothing but a heckler and a hater. His mission isn't to run a better race than you; it's just to get you to quit, slow down, lose heart. These assumptions give the Devil too much power or influence over you. Yes the Enemy and world will try to get in the way, but we are called to put on blinders and keep our focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.*

**So, against whom ARE you running your race? (see Ephesians 4:20-22)**

*You're running this race against yourself - the old you - who you would have been without Jesus, and where you would be today but for the grace of God. It's all about your personal best. Being faithful where Jesus has called you today.*

## **What is the Goal?**

**Some believers assume that the goal we're chasing is some kind of success and comfort in this life. Is this the goal? ( See James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-5) If it's not, what is our endgame in the race we're running?**

*Success and comfort are not the goals we are racing towards. Look at the lives of both Jesus and the Apostle Paul as proof. *Suffering and hardship are part of the journey for every Christian.**

*Paul's self described end goal to the leaders in Ephesus was - " I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.*

*The goal is full surrender. To live for Jesus. To be like Jesus. To be with Jesus. It's a goal we will never perfectly reach in this life, but will pursue till our last breath.*

Just before he died, Paul wrote one last time about the race he was running (see 2 Timothy 4:6-7). What was Paul's ultimate goal in the race? How did he know that he'd achieved it?

*"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

*Paul's goal was to finish strong by clinging to his faith in Christ. We know he achieved this goal because he died for his faith when he was killed by the Emperor Nero in 67 AD. There are a few different Christian traditions in regards to how Paul died, but the most commonly accepted one comes from the writings of Eusebius, an early church historian. Eusebius claimed that Paul was beheaded at the order of the Roman emperor Nero.. Paul's martyrdom occurred shortly after much of Rome burned in a fire—an event that Nero blamed on the Christians. Paul died for his faith in Christ. In his death he completed his race and when he arrived in heaven received the trophy he was chasing. Paul would be the 1st to admit that he didn't earn his crown due to his sufferings, but it was all by God's grace and Jesus' death on the cross.*

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## **Upcoming Events:**



### **Special Serve Day for Loaves & Fishes**

Join us for a special serve day with our partner organization, Loaves & Fishes Soup Kitchen! On Monday, February 19, a team of 20 volunteers is needed to help deep clean their kitchen area. Sign up: [thestory.church/serveday](http://thestory.church/serveday)



### **Summer Trip with GO Ministries**

We have limited spots available for this year's trip to the Dominican Republic with our partner GO Ministries, June 4-11. Visit [thestory.church/gomin](http://thestory.church/gomin) to learn more about the trip and submit your deposit to secure your spot.

# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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

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## Leader Guide: Week 22

### Conversation Starter

Think about a time when you felt *judged*, whether someone judged you fairly or you faced unfair judgment. Who judged you, why did they, and how did it affect you?

### Personal Answer

#### Paul's Trial in Caesarea

Read all of Acts 24. What stands out to you about these events? Who were Ananias, Tertullus, and Felix? What were the charges against Paul?

- **Ananias** - There are 3 different Ananias in Acts so don't get confused! This is not the member of the early church who died in Acts 5 because he lied about giving all of the money from a sale of land. This is also not the believer who prayed over and taught the newly converted Paul in Acts 9. This Ananias was the Jewish high priest. He was not pious, but known as a cruel and corrupt leader. He is a historical figure that historian Josephus says was appointed by Herod Agrippa II in approximately AD 48. He was in charge for most of Paul's ministry. Many of the Jews hated Ananias because of his ruthlessness and corruption, but he was protected by Rome even after he was deposed as high priest. In AD 66, at the start of the first great Jewish Revolt, Ananias was assassinated by an angry mob of anti-Roman revolutionaries.
- **Tertullus** - He was the lawyer or prosecutor. This joke about lawyers pretty much describes his case and strategy. "If you have the facts on your side, pound the facts; if you have the law on your side, pound the law; if you have neither the facts nor the law, pound the table." Tertullus has nothing going for him so he pounded the table and created chaos and confusion.
- **Felix** - Another historical figure we find in the book of Acts! Felix was the governor of Judea and Samaria when the apostle Paul. This is the same position Pontius Pilate held during the ministry of Jesus. Felix was formerly a slave but was promoted by Claudius Caesar to the office of governor. The Roman historian Tacitus described Felix as "cruel, licentious, and base." Felix had multiple wives and was a low character individual.

The charges against Paul were being a troublemaker/ insurrectionist, claiming authority by leading a Jewish sect, and desecrating the temple. This final charge was the most serious for the Jews.

How was Paul's approach before Felix different from Tertullus'? How did Paul respond to the charges? What, precisely, did Paul say was the issue? (see v. 21)?

Tertullus uses flowery rhetoric to puff up Felix and get him on the prosecutors side. His speech lacks facts, testimony, and really any evidence to the charges leveled against Paul. Tertullus tried to win the case by flattery.

Paul on the other hand presented proof by explaining his itinerary and stating that many witnesses could confirm his testimony. (v 11-13) Paul rejects these charges and says the real reason he is here is "concerning the resurrection of the dead". None of the other charges were true or worth being in chains for, but the question of the resurrection is something Paul would die for. The validity of the resurrection troubled Ananias because if it was true, if Jesus really did rise from the dead, he would lose his power and authority.

As the Roman-appointed governor (or procurator) of Judea, Felix held the same position as Pontius Pilate, who famously asked Jesus, "What is truth?" ( John 18:38) What did you notice about Felix in this chapter? What kind of man or leader was he?

Felix is a corrupt coward. At first you might think Felix is sympathetic to the Gospel because he listened to Paul a few times, but as we see later he was only listening in hope of receiving a bribe. (v. 26) Felix also failed to come to a verdict on the case. He toed the line by putting Paul in a very relaxed form of house arrest. By doing so he neither convicted Paul of any serious crimes, but also didn't release him. Felix cowardly kept Paul close as a political bargaining chip. He clearly knew Paul was not guilty, he could have easily killed him if he was.

The three things Paul preached on in front of Felix were Righteousness, self-control, and Judgment. After learning a little bit about Felix we can see all three are things the man clearly struggled with! Whenever Paul preached and pronounced judgment it made Felix afraid.

Christianity and cowardice are mutually exclusive terms:

1. Cowards **SUCCUMB** to fear. Christ **OVERCOMES** it.
2. Cowards **COMPLICATE** the truth. Christ **Clarifies** it.
3. Cowards **DREAD** the judgment to come. Christians **WELCOME** it.

### **The Judgment to Come**

*Read Matthew 12:36.* Who did Jesus say will be judged on the coming "Day of Judgment" - just the unbelievers, or believers as well? Does that surprise you?

Personal Answer - many assume that Christians will not face any judgment (that's why many people convert) but this is not the picture painted in Scripture.

Why is the concept of God's righteous *judgment* so unpopular these days?

People don't like to talk about judgment for many reasons. One is just the postmodern world we live in. Through this lens there is "no truth", and everything is subjective. If everything is about perspective, then the idea of judgment based on objective truth is blasphemous to our culture. Our world hates making things black and white so everything is slowly becoming gray. [If you are interested here is a short 3 min video that is helpful in unpacking postmodernism.](#)

Another reason we avoid the concept of God's Judgment could be that some people don't think it is the best tool we have for evangelism. I hear this concern, but I disagree. When judgment is rightly understood, I believe it is one of the best pitches we have for the Gospel, hope for the future, and what makes Jesus different!

The Bible is clear that both believers and unbelievers will face the Lord on Judgment Day, but not before the same throne. *Read Revelation 20:11-15.* What kind of throne, and by what books, will unbelievers face judgment?

All unbelievers will be judged before the Great White Throne. For those who do not believe they face punishment based on the book of works. This means each person was judged according to what they had done in their life - which is bad news since none of us can be saved by our works. When they are condemned for their works they are thrown into the lake of fire.

According to that same passage (*as well as Romans 14:10-12*) believers will also be judged. Before what throne will we stand, and by what book will we be judged?

Believers are judged before the seat of Christ according to the Book of Life. This is the set of names of those who will live with God forever in heaven, a roll of those who have given their lives to Jesus. The same book is also called the Lamb's Book of Life because it contains the names of those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus ([Revelation 13:8; 21:27](#)).

Based on the state of your life and your faith today, how prepared would you say you are for the judgment to come? If you have hesitations or anxieties about it, what do you plan to do this week to address or assuage them?

Personal Answer

\*We want this message to strike fear and bring conviction, but at the end of the day it should be hopeful! Through the blood of Jesus we can be forgiven and our names added to the book of life! We can have blessed assurance in our salvation through Christ!

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## Group Discussion Guide: Week 23

### Conversation Starter

Share about the worst storm you have ever witnessed. What happened, were you able to prepare, how did you survive, and what was the aftermath?

Personal Answer - focus here on literal storms, then get into figurative ones

### **How can we survive - and even thrive - through the storms of life?**

#### **1. FORECAST the storms that are coming.**

Read Acts 27:3-12. How did Paul know that sailing the Mediterranean Sea during mid-to-late autumn would be dangerous?

Paul was originally from Tarsus which was 12 miles inland from the coast in modern day Turkey. Living so close to the sea he likely had personal maritime experience, or at the very least had loads of friends and family who did. These weather patterns affected Tarsus' trade, visitors, and crops.

Sea travel was very dangerous in the 1st century with some historians suggesting one-fifth of sea travelers could experience extreme danger! There are thousands of ancient shipwrecks located in the mediterranean. The danger and intrigue of the sea led to shipwrecks being popular stories in both myth and historical accounts. In other sources from this time it is understood that May - September was the best time to travel the mediterranean, April and October were risky, and November - March was reckless. In 59 AD the Day of Atonement fell on October 5th, so leaving at this time would be dangerous for anyone who was familiar with the sea.

Paul's knowledge of weather patterns, past experiences, and stories he likely heard from other sailors gave him the ability to forecast when storms were most likely. The captain chose to sail anyway because Rome needed supplies in the winter months, so Roman leadership incentivised captains to take the more perilous journey. It was a calculated gamble by the captain who prioritized profits from an extra trip, rather than the safety of his crew.

Read Acts 27:13-17. How did Paul (and Luke, apparently) know that the particular type of storm they were in was a “Northeaster”?

Cyclones come like clockwork every year in the mediterranean. Even though the boat was sheltered in a lee and saw favorable winds for a time, Paul knew that this weather was deceiving. It was well known by locals that south winds can shift suddenly to dangerous Northeasters.

How can we learn to forecast the coming storms before they arrive?

Common sense is God given, but in our time it is now very uncommon! Proverbs 16:22 says *Prudence is a fountain of life to the prudent, but folly brings punishment to fools.*

A huge part of forecasting storms is simply remembering the past and being aware of patterns of sin and toxic behavior in your own life or those around you. Many times the signs of a storm are much more pronounced than we think in the moment. This is why it is critical we surround ourselves with brothers and sisters in Christ who can see these signs even when we are blinded.

## 2. **IDENTIFY** the storm you're in.

Why is it critical to identify, define, and determine the source of the particular storm you're in?

- We can discover the severity of the situation, how long it will last, and how to prepare
- If we fail to identify the situation it leads to more anxiety, despair, and confusion
- Usually when we ] look closer we will realize the problem does not start with others, but within ourselves

How can we learn to identify the type of storm we're in?

- Prayer, ask for God's eyes to see, wisdom to understand, and guidance to respond
- Communication - with our family, spouse, coworkers
- Find mentors - especially older people! We can glean so much wisdom through people who have gone through similar situations in their lives.

## 3. **LEAD** through the storm.

What signs of leadership do you see in Paul's words and actions? How does Paul's ability to lead *even while in chains* tell you about the power of God?

Read Acts 27:27-38, Here are just a few examples you can find more!

- Spoke with authority in a situation where he had no voice, power or position to do so
- Told the soldiers to cut the lifeboats so the sailors had to stay with everyone else (they had to stick together to survive and the ship would be doomed if all the sailors left)
- Had the vision to pause in the middle of the storm and make everyone eat so they could survive the coming wreck.

Have you ever personally witnessed someone leading courageously through a particular storm in their life? What was special about their leadership? How did others benefit from their leadership?

Personal answer - remember Eric's definition, leadership = influence over people

How can you prepare yourself now to lead through the next storm you're in?

- We are always either in a storm, recovering from one, or preparing for another
- Build your house on the solid rock, firm foundation of faith
- Find your true identity in God and not the circumstances you find yourself in
- Memorize Scripture so you can stand on God's promises and Truth

What storms are you currently navigating in your life, and how can your group come alongside you and support you?

Personal answer

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## **News & Events:**



### **Serve on Sunday Teams**

Stop by the courtyard after service to learn how you can start serving on one of our awesome Sunday Teams! Leaders will be available to answer your questions. You can also sign up for teams online: [thestory.church/teams](https://thestory.church/teams)



### **Save the Dates: Easter Weekend at The Story Church**

Good Friday: March 29 @ 7pm (Stations of the Cross opens at 6pm)  
Egg Hunt: March 30 @ 10am  
Easter Worship: 7 & 8am outdoor sunrise; 8:30, 10 & 11:30am  
Learn more about these events, sign up to volunteer, or pre-register for childcare: [thestory.church/easter](https://thestory.church/easter)



### **Registration OPEN for Summer Camps**

Parents - save the dates for our summer camps for kids and students! VBS (Ages 3 - Grade 5): June 24-28 Apologetics Camp (Middle & High School): July 8-11 Lake Retreat (Middle School): Friday, July 12. Register today: [thestory.church/events](https://thestory.church/events)



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## Group Discussion Guide: Week 24

### Conversation Starter

Share about a time when you thought you completed a task or season of life, but right after you finished you soon found out that you were just getting started.

Personal Answer - Dilan's from Sunday were school/learning and Marriage/Dating

### **“AND SO WE CAME TO ROME”**

Thinking back through our series, what perils and persecutions did Paul have to overcome in order to finally arrive in Rome?

Rejection, imprisonments, beatings, attacks by mobs, murder attempts, unfair trials, shipwrecks, snake bites, and abandonment from close friends.

What made Rome such a consequential destination for Paul to reach?

Strategic spot for the Gospel to spread - Rome was affluent, powerful, and the largest city in the world, by a large margin. Historians estimate 1-2 million people lived in the city, which was roughly 1% of the world's population. Rome wasn't just big, it was influential. Imagine DC, New York, and Las Vegas all rolled together. This was the place where the empire was ruled from, the center of business, and also the home of vices and pleasure.

It was also personal - Paul was a Roman citizen and in his letter to the Romans he yearned to visit them. Rome seemed to be the location that kept on getting away from Paul even though he tried to get there many times (Romans 1:10-13)

*Read Acts 28:30-31. How does the ending of Acts of the Apostles sit with you? Why do you think Luke chose to end such a powerful book in this way?*

It might feel a little underwhelming or like a cliffhanger. Paul ends the book in chains in Rome around 62 AD. We know from Church history that Paul had around 3-5 more years of ministry before he returned to Rome and was killed for his faith. Why are those other stories not presented in Acts? Did Luke run out of paper or get bored? No!

There was a purpose of ending the narrative here. Paul's journey ended, but his witness would not. Paul is not the main character of this book, Jesus is. The Gospel would spread with or without him, but we are invited to join Paul in spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The ending is an invitation.

## **SPIRIT LED WITNESS**

### **1. A WELCOMING WITNESS**

*Read Acts 28:14-16. Who welcomed Paul, and how did they go out of their way?*

Paul was welcomed by the brothers and sisters from the church in Rome. They traveled 30-40 miles on the Appian Road to go out and meet him at various stops. After Paul's last few years of ministry he needed this welcome and time of encouragement and refreshment. Paul prayed for mutual encouragement back in Romans 1, and God answered his prayers here.

*Who did Paul share with and how does this influence who we witness to today?*

Paul first shared with the Jewish leaders, but then he set up camp at a home he rented and welcomed anyone who came to visit. It's interesting because at this point his ministry pivoted and he wasn't going out to the synagogue or preaching in the city street or markets. Instead people came to visit him. Paul is modeling a welcoming witness. It didn't require sidewalk preaching or necessarily going out far and wide. Paul could reach the ends of the earth right where God had placed him.

In the same way we should have an open door policy with our witness. Believers need to be ready to welcome those around us who have genuine questions about faith, God, or spirituality. We can't answer everyone's questions, but we are called to minister to the people God has placed in our lives. We should be prepared to invite neighbors, coworkers, and friends to the table. Where we can listen to their questions, boldly share the hope we have found, and love them like Jesus.

What could Radically Ordinary Hospitality look like in your home or office?

Personal Answer

## 2. A BOLD WITNESS

*Read Acts 28:23-27.* Paul faced a lot of rejection in his ministry. How did Paul respond to people rejecting the Truth? How does this compare to your response?

What makes Paul unique is not that he faced rejection, but how he responded to it. He kept on boldly preaching in the face of rejection and died because of it. He knew that some people would never understand the message, they wouldn't have the ears to hear or eyes to see.

It feels like the world is getting more and more bold in what they believe, and Christians seem to be getting a little more timid. I am not blaming you, because both in Paul's time and today, boldness comes with a cost. People won't like it when we don't fit into the boxes or take on the identities they want you to. Living out an identity rooted in Christ is counter-cultural, and it costs something whether its relationships, a promotion, or your identity.

What could boldness in your identity in Christ look like? What would it cost you?

Personal Answer

## 3. A UNHINDERED WITNESS

How did Paul use his circumstances as an opportunity to witness?

It's ironic that Luke's final words are unhindered when Paul was literally in chains! Paul witnessed for two years in Rome and the entire time he was under house arrest awaiting trial before Caesar. This means for two years Paul had a soldier literally chained to his hand while he was preaching, but he didn't let that stop him. He saw his imprisonment as an opportunity!

Paul's close contact with soldiers really paid off. In Philippians 1:12-13 Paul writes his imprisonment has "actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. "

Paul's time in prison led to the Gospel being proclaimed through the Roman ranks, all the way up the palace guard. So much so that within the 1st century soldiers made up a large percentage of the early church and they became major benefactors.

What circumstances are you facing in your life that feel like chains? How could you break free and transform them into opportunities to witness?

Personal Answer

How do all three of these principles work together to present a well rounded witness? Which one do you feel like you are most lacking in?

Personal Answer

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## **News & Events:**



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### **High School Ministry Survey**

As The Story Church continues to grow in our new home, we believe it is important to develop a High School specific ministry for our students. If you're the parent of a high schooler, we'd love your input on this survey: [thestory.church/hs](https://thestory.church/hs)

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## Group Discussion Guide: Week 25

As we wrap up this 25-part series on the Acts of the Apostles, let's look back on our journey together: Reflecting on Acts, what have you learned about God and the Church through this series? How has this series changed you personally?

### Personal Answer

To finish this series on Acts, we return to the beginning of the story. **Read Acts 1:3-8.** What is the "thesis statement" of the entire book (see v. 8), and how have we seen it unfold throughout the rest of Acts?

Read Acts 1:8. The story of Acts is the story of the Gospel being spread to the ends of the earth, but not immediately, it would start small. First the Gospel was shared in Jerusalem, then Samaria and Judea, and finally to the ends of the earth. The 12 disciples got it started in Jerusalem, then along with men like Stephen and Philip they spread the good news to neighboring regions, and finally Paul and his companions went as far as Rome. The apostles didn't do this alone, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit!



This mission of sharing the Gospel to the ends of the earth isn't over. We are invited to join today. Just like God sent a Helper to His apostles, God also empowers His followers today to spread the Gospel wherever it needs to go!

So it all began in *Jerusalem*, which is often called "the city of God" in the Bible. But how and when did Jesus get to Jerusalem before issuing his marching orders in Acts 1? That story is found in the "Palm Sunday" story from Luke 19.

**Read Luke 19:28-36.** How did Jesus' march into Jerusalem set the stage for the events that unfolded in Acts?

In Acts 1 Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the Good News, but we see the Good News in action in Jerusalem. The entire Christian movement started here, and Jesus brought everyone together in this special city so they could see it with their own eyes. This was a season of preparation for his followers.

In Jerusalem Jesus was rejected, nailed to the cross, died for our sins, and rose from the grave three days later. All of the events of Holy Week had to happen so that the disciples could be sent out in Acts 1. Jesus' march into the city on Palm Sunday was the welcome parade for a new Kingdom that was to come. We will see Jesus is a different kind of King and His kingdom is different from the world's.

The optics of riding on "horseback" into Jerusalem were meant to convey a point that Jesus and his followers believed he was a king. With that in mind, and considering the unexpected way in which Jesus arrived (ie, on a *donkey* instead of a warhorse), let's spend some time thinking about what sort of king that Jesus is.

### **What kind of king is Jesus?**

#### **1. He is a Humble king.**

What was it about his arrival in Jerusalem that demonstrated Jesus' humility? What is so shocking or unexpected about a king who is as humble as Christ?

Donkeys are awkward, small, and honestly a little ridiculous. Jesus didn't ride into Jerusalem on a chariot or a war horse, he chose to inaugurate His Kingdom on the back of a donkey. Many in the city saw both Jesus and donkeys as a laughing stock, so while some praised his entry, the religious leaders mocked him. A King's power is often secured through optics, but Jesus didn't need to project an image of power or superiority. He had all the power in the world, yet He came humbly, as an example to us. *For further reading check out Philipians 2:5-11*

**Read 1 Cor. 1:25-27.** How was Jesus' entry into Jerusalem a good example of the "foolishness" and "weakness" of God being wiser and stronger than human wisdom and strength?

Jesus' entry would be seen as weak by his enemies. Hundreds of years earlier David came into Jerusalem with the ark of the covenant and with a whole parade filled with soldiers and religious establishment. When the Romans took the city they came with power and might.

When Jesus rode in on Palm Sunday he was on a donkey, supported by commoners and average folk.

Jesus' entry would also be seen as foolish. Stumbling along the road on a donkey does not install confidence or dread. How could one man on a donkey and 12 rag tag disciples overthrow the kingdom of Rome? What we need to remember is when Jesus looks "foolish" it is by design. His ways are always greater than ours.

## 2. He is a **Holy king**.

**Read Luke 19:37-40.** How do these verses show that Jesus is a king who is holy and worthy of worship?

We cannot help but praise Jesus. If we don't praise Him then the rocks, and all of creation will praise His great name! Jesus is worthy of our worship. We should be just like Peter and John in Acts 4:20 and say "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." If you don't feel the passion or desire to worship Jesus then you might need to check your heart.

Is He really your King, or is He just an advisor, helper, or one of many? If Jesus isn't your one true King then He is nothing.

**Check out Zechariah 9:9-10.** What does this Old Testament prophecy say about the Messiah to come, and how does it corroborate both Jesus' identity *and* the mission of the church in Acts 1:8?

This passage is very cool for a couple of reasons! First off we see the incredible prophecy that the King of Jerusalem will ride in on a donkey! Not the war horses and chariots of neighboring kingdoms, but righteous and victories on a lowly donkey.

Secondly, at the end the prophet says "He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River **to the ends of the earth.**" This passage not only prophesies about Palm Sunday, but also Jesus' command in Acts 1:8 that we have been following for the last 26 weeks!

Take a second with your group to marvel at the accuracy of OT prophecy, and how connected both the OT and NT truly are.

Would you say that you merely *appreciate, respect, and/or admire Jesus*, or that you *worship* him? What is the difference, and why does it matter?

Personal Answer

### 3. He is a **Merciful king.**

**Read Luke 19:41-42.** Where do you see an example of Christ the King's mercy in this passage?

Jesus cried over the city of Jerusalem. Jesus doesn't cry often in Scripture, but this is one example. Jesus cried because His heart broke for the sin in the city, and the knowledge that the very people He came to save would reject him. Jesus was not angry or bitter at their rejection, but he grieved it. His tears over the city are a sign of His mercy. People often mistakenly view God as gladly sending people to Hell, but this is opposite of what we see here in Jesus. Our sins don't just make Him angry, but they break His heart.

Why is it so important for an almighty king to be merciful toward his subjects?

Without mercy God could wipe us out. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and without mercy we would be in trouble. When Jesus sees our sins his heart breaks for us, and His desire is that all would be saved through Him.

### 4. He is a **Truthful king.**

**Read Luke 19:43-44.** He is merciful, of course, but without truthfulness, his mercy would be empty. What is the truth that Jesus shared with the people of Jerusalem in this passage?

Jesus is full of mercy, but also truth. While he cried over the city, he also pronounced judgment upon them. There would be consequences for their sin. While we all can be forgiven of our sins, that does not mean we will get out of the consequences. Jesus wants us to understand the ugly nature of our sin, and see that it not only separates us from God in eternity, but can also have very detrimental effects here and now.

What is an example of the kind of hard truth that you and/or people you know tend to explain away or avoid altogether? Why is it loving to be truthful with ourselves and others - even if it means acknowledging hard realities?

Personal Answer

What would change if Jesus became more than just your friend, your guide, or your savior - what if he became your king?

Personal Answer