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# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 1 ACTS 1:1–11

*“...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*  
–Acts 1:8b

### OVERVIEW

In the first chapter of the book of Acts, Jesus explains to his church how he will continue his mission to save lost people. His apostles will be witnesses of what Jesus accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection, now offered to all as a free gift.

Acts, written by Luke, is really the second half of a two-part box set on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In the first half, the Gospel According to Luke, we’re given a historical retelling of what Jesus taught and did, written to Theophilus, a Roman official. In the opening verses of Acts, Luke picks up where he left off at the ascension of Jesus. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples for 40 days, teaching them about the kingdom of God and the mission they will go on. But he doesn’t let them go just yet. Jesus tells his apostles to wait until they receive the Holy Spirit, which will empower them for their mission.

The task itself was simple yet, as we’ll find out, difficult. They are to be witnesses of what Jesus has done for sinners like you and me. In Luke 24, Jesus explains more fully what a “witness” does. They proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus to all nations, calling all peoples to repentance and faith.

The book of Acts teaches us a lot about the Holy Spirit and the church, but it’s Jesus who is the main concern of the book. In the Gospel of Luke, we read about what Jesus taught and did on earth. In the book of Acts, we read about what Jesus taught and did from heaven. This week’s passage ties them together, as Jesus’ ascension ends his earthly ministry and begins his heavenly ministry. In the end, the message of both books is the same: God saves lost sinners through his extravagant, one-way love—love that we have access to by grace through faith in Jesus.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 2 ACTS 2:1-13

*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*  
–Acts 2:4 NIV

### OVERVIEW

In Acts 2:1-13, the church is filled with the Holy Spirit in a way never before experienced. It's this moment on the day of Pentecost that officially begins the New Testament church, empowering them to make disciples out of all different types of people.

The passage begins on the day of Pentecost with the group of about 120 disciples (see 1:15) together in the same place. Pentecost was originally a feast in the Old Testament celebrating the harvest, which brought many Jews there. As the disciples were together, a sound like wind and a vision like fire came down on them, filling them with the Holy Spirit. As this occurred, each disciple then began speaking in different languages, through the Spirit's enablement.

This drew quite a crowd. Godly Jewish men from all different countries gathered around confused as they heard these Galilean men speaking in their own languages. People from Galilee tended to have an uneducated, "common-folk" accent that was easy to detect. The crowd couldn't believe how the disciples were speaking in all these different languages. Men from all over heard "the mighty works of God" in ways they could personally understand. They didn't quite know how to respond, though. As the passage ends, some were astonished, but others thought they had one too many White Zinfandels.

In the book of Acts, Luke is writing to show how Jesus will continue to save lost people, by his Spirit, through his church. In chapter 1, Jesus gives them the *plan* ("you will be my witnesses"). Now in chapter 2, Jesus gives them the *power* ("they were all filled with the Holy Spirit"). The Spirit of Christ was so vital to the mission of the Church that, in Luke 24, the risen Jesus commanded them not to go without it ("stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high"). In Acts 2, the church is given the *power* to execute the *plan*, and the power is Jesus' Spirit: the same Spirit that is alive in you and me today.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Can you share a time you felt powerless to get something done at work or home?

## Read Acts 2:1-13

*Questions:*

1. Imagine yourself in the crowd. What would it be like watching the disciples speaking in all these different languages?
2. What are the "mighty works of God" the disciples are declaring to everyone?
3. Describe your life when you're not living through the Spirit's power.
4. Read ahead in Acts 2:37-40. How do you and I receive the same Spirit as the disciples at Pentecost?
5. Has the Spirit been prompting you to share the gospel with someone in particular?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 3 ACTS 2:14–39

*“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” –Acts 2:36*

### OVERVIEW

In the previous passage, the church is filled with the Holy Spirit and begins telling the works of God in all different languages. But the crowd that formed is confused; some even think the disciples are drunk! So the Apostle Peter, in the midst of everyone, steps up to the mic and explains just what was happening; that this pouring out of the Spirit is validation that Jesus is “both Lord and Christ.”

Peter’s sermon explaining the pouring out of the Holy Spirit relies heavily on three Old Testament passages. He starts by quoting the Old Testament book of Joel. His understanding of the prophecy could best be summed up as “this is that.” In other words, what you’re seeing right now is what was prophesied by Joel. After quoting this prophecy, Peter moves right to the heart of the matter—Jesus.

In the following verses, Peter explains the story of Christ—his life, death, resurrection, exaltation, and salvation. Jesus was truly a man, who was vouched for by God through the miracles he did. This man, Peter says, was then given over to be murdered by them through God’s plan. Yet, “it was not possible for death to keep its hold on him” (2:24b NIV). Quoting Psalm 16, Peter explains the resurrection of Jesus, which was also part of God’s plan all along. And now, Jesus sits exalted at the right hand of the Father in fulfillment of Psalm 110.

But here’s the kicker for the crowd...Peter ends this gripping sermon on Jesus’ ministry by telling them that this Jesus whom God made Lord and Messiah, “you crucified.” The crowd is cut to pieces, and they ask Peter what to do. He responds, “repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Peter’s sermon here in Acts 2 is the first of many in the book, yet this sermon is particularly profound. After convicting these men of the greatest cosmic crime of all—killing the Lord and Messiah—he gives them a beautiful promise. If they repent and believe in Jesus, God will forgive all their sins and send his cleansing Spirit to be with them forever... You want to talk about grace?! There it is. And the same promise is for you and me today, no matter how far off you’ve wandered.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Describe a funny moment from your childhood when you got caught doing something you shouldn't.

## Read Acts 2:14-39

*Questions:*

1. What are all the different aspects of Jesus' life and ministry the Apostle Peter tells us about?
2. Read verse 36. How would you react if you were one of the members in the crowd?
3. Look at the diagram on the following page. How do you struggle to minimize or moralize your sin when convicted of it?
4. Read verses 38-39 & 1 John 1:9. What is the promise, and how is it good news for you today?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

## 2 Common Responses to Sin

### Minimize

*Fails to recognize the size of our sin*

We tend to:

- Find reasons to excuse our sin
- Think of things to blame our sin on
- Avoid the topic with God and others

### Moralize

*Fails to recognize the source of our sin*

We tend to:

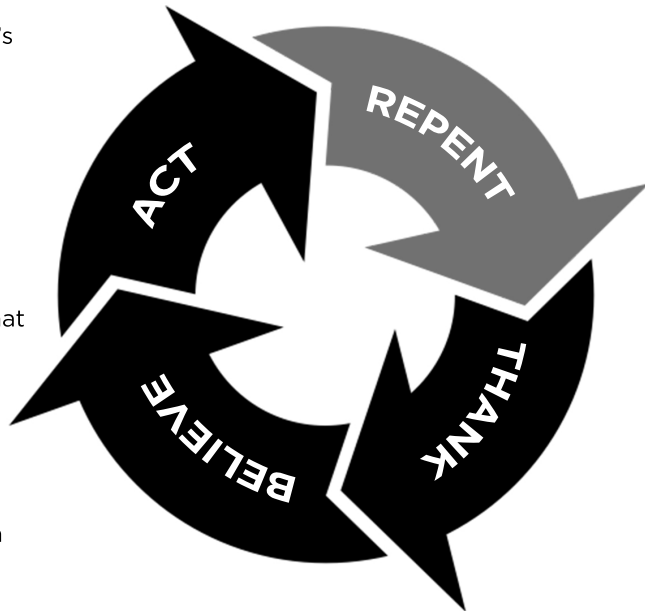
- Jump immediately to practical solutions
- Approach sin as merely a behavior issue
- Become focused on ourselves, not God

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## A Gospel Response to Sin

*Recognizes the size, source and savior from our sin*

- **REPENT:** Motivated by God's love to confess my sin, ask forgiveness and turn from it.
- **THANK:** Thanking God for using this struggle with sin to draw me closer to him.
- **BELIEVE:** Meditating on what I was searching for in my sin that I have completely in Christ. Asking for the faith to believe the gospel.
- **ACT:** Responding to the gospel to love God through living in holiness.







# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 4 ACTS 2:40-47

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. –Acts 2:42*

### OVERVIEW

Peter has just responded to the crowd's humble question of "Brothers, what shall we do?" with the beautiful truth that God's promises are for them—even those who are far off. They all have the opportunity to repent and be baptized. He then continues to bear witness "with many other words." Can you imagine being there, the eyes of your heart seeing clearly for the first time, as Peter connected promise after promise from scripture to fulfillment in Christ Jesus? Electric hope must have filled the air. He then exhorts them by saying "save yourselves from this crooked generation," and around 3,000 people are baptized and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, join the apostles in following and obeying Christ instead of the world.

Verses 42-47 offer a picture of what it looks like to live according to the Holy Spirit, following the example and teachings of Jesus. The lives of Christ's followers were marked by love, generosity, humility, and unity. They learned together, prayed together, and shared meals. The Holy Spirit living in them testified to the truth that Jesus was and is Christ the Lord, and signs and wonders were done through them. With humble boldness, they lived in a way that didn't follow the popular wisdom of the day, and it was contagious.

The followers of Jesus offered no promises of earthly wealth; in fact, they set an example of selling and giving away their possessions to anyone in need. No one could improve their status in society by joining them, yet they grew in number daily. People were attracted to them, because they spoke the truth of the gospel and were full of grace, compassion, generosity, power, and love. They were a reflection of the heart of God.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Have you ever joined a club because you thought it would look good on an application or résumé? Which experience stands out the most in your memory?

### Read Acts 2:40-47

1. List the descriptions of the disciples' lives found in verses 42-47.
2. What aspects of life in the early church most appeal to you?
3. What was the purpose of the signs and wonders that were done through the apostles?
4. How do you think awe of God and humility affected the church's desire and ability to learn scripture, love one another well, joyfully worship, and evangelize?
5. What do you think would change in your life and in the church if we daily humbled ourselves to the Spirit's authority and allowed him freedom?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 5 ACTS 3:1-16

*“And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.” —Acts 3:16*

### OVERVIEW

In Acts 3:1-16, we continue to see the Holy Spirit testifying in awesome ways, through the apostles, that Jesus was and is who he said he was. In John 14:12, after declaring that he is God, Jesus says “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

By healing the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate, Peter and John were continuing the ministry of Jesus. After leaving them and ascending to the right hand of the Father, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit, just as he had promised. They now had the power of God in them to teach them, guide them, and enable them to do the works of Jesus.

Just as the miracles Jesus performed were never simply for show, the disciples didn’t perform signs and wonders to show off, nor did they seek their own praise. Each miracle pointed to Jesus and gave glory to God by offering a glimmer of the complete healing and restoration that will one day be experienced when Jesus returns for his bride. Each miracle pointed to the promise fulfilled—that Jesus defeated death and brought salvation to all who believe.

The lame beggar’s response to being healed was to follow Peter and John into the temple “walking and leaping and praising God.” He knew that it was the power of God, the same power that raised Jesus from the grave, that made him well. And as the people in the temple gawked, Peter wasted no time explaining exactly what had happened: “...you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

What's the last thing you remember being excited about? How did you show your excitement?

### Read Acts 3:1-16

1. What do we learn about the lame beggar in verses 1-5?
2. Both the beggar and Peter and John had plans that changed very quickly once they interacted with each other. How do you think the beggar imagined his afternoon would go? What about Peter and John?
3. In what ways did the healing of the lame beggar spread truth about who Jesus was and is? (See also Isaiah 35:6)
4. How did Peter and John reflect Jesus with their actions? (See Luke 7:13-16; 8:54-55; 9:11)
5. In light of this story, read Ephesians 3:20-21. How does seeing what the Holy Spirit did through one interaction on a seemingly ordinary afternoon encourage you to live with the expectation that he will work wonders?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 6

### ACTS 4:1-22

*"This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* –Acts 4:11-12

### OVERVIEW

In Acts 4, we see the apostles filled with the Spirit, living out their mission in boldness. In this week's passage in particular, we first see a Spirit-led boldness in their *proclamation* of the gospel.

This story comes off the heels of Peter and John miraculously healing a lame man. The people who saw this were astonished, and Peter seized the opportunity to point them to the true source of it—Jesus. As Peter was speaking, the priests and captain of the temple, the temple security, grew annoyed by what Peter was teaching, interrupted him, and arrested Peter and John.

The next day, Peter and John are brought to the Sanhedrin, a group of 71 rulers, who question them about how they were able to heal this lame man. Peter's response is the same as with the crowd in the previous passage: "Jesus Christ of Nazareth...by him this man is standing before you well." Peter then goes on to say that there is no other name through which anyone can be saved than Christ. Luke tells us that when the elders and officials saw the apostles' "boldness" they were amazed. The Sanhedrin were stuck. They couldn't deny the miracle, since so many people had seen it, but they also didn't want the word to get out that a 40-year-old lame man just got up and walked in the name of Jesus. Their decision is to warn the disciples not to talk about the gospel anymore—a warning Peter says he can't obey.

Luke's goal in writing the book of Acts is to show how Jesus Christ is continuing his mission to save lost people by his Spirit, through his church. Jesus had earlier told the disciples that, when they're arrested, the Holy Spirit will give them the right words at the right time to defend themselves (Lk. 12:11; 21:14). Here in Acts 4, we see this promise being fulfilled. The same Peter, who during Jesus' trial was intimidated by a little girl, now stands up with boldness and *proclaims* Jesus to the 71-member Sanhedrin. What changed? Had he read a bunch of pop-therapy books on discovering his inner confidence? No. It was Jesus, through his Spirit, giving Peter the gift of boldness when he most needed it to proclaim Christ's heart for the world—"In me you can be saved."

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

If you had to give a speech in front of a large group of educated, respected, powerful people...with no preparation, how would you feel?

### Read Acts 4:1-22

1. List out some of the differences you see between the apostles and the rulers, elders, and scribes.
2. In verses 8-12, why do you think Peter immediately jumps from Jesus being the reason *this man* is healed to Jesus being the reason *any man* can be saved?
3. How does the miraculous healing of the lame man make Peter's message in verses 10-12 even more convicting?
4. In what ways do you feel inadequate for the mission God has called us to?
5. What in this week's passage encourages you that "God doesn't call the equipped but equips the called"?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 7

### ACTS 4:23–37

*And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. –Acts 4:31*

### OVERVIEW

In Acts chapter 4, we see the first church filled with the Holy Spirit, living out their mission in boldness. Last week, we saw the boldness of their proclamation; this week, we see their boldness in *prayer* and with their *possessions*.

After Peter and John are released from prison, they go back and tell the church what happened. Their response to this persecution is to turn to God in prayer. In their moment of vulnerability, they rely on the greatness of their “Sovereign Lord” to deliver them. The disciples begin to pray using Psalm 2 as their guide, praising God for his power and lamenting the fulfillment of this Psalm in the persecution and death of Jesus. They end their prayer asking God for power to continue their mission, which God affirms by shaking the ground and filling them with the Holy Spirit.

After seeing the church’s boldness in prayer, we read a separate story of their boldness with possessions. In verses 32–37, Luke gives us a summary statement of what life in the early church looked like. Two things should immediately shock us. First, they shared everything. This wasn’t some hippie commune or ancient communism; they gave voluntarily. Yet they viewed themselves not as owners, but as stewards of everything they had. The second thing is even more shocking: “There was not a needy person among them.” Voluntarily, they shared their possessions to the point that no one was in need. That’s a beautiful family. The passage ends with a picture of their boldness with possessions as Barnabas, a Levite who normally would not have inherited land, sells his field and gives the money to the apostles.

Chapter 4 of Acts gives us an inspiring vision of what the church can be. John Calvin writes on these verses, “we must have hearts that are harder than iron if we are not moved by the reading of this narrative.” And yet, if all we walk away from this chapter with is wishing we could be the 1<sup>st</sup> century church, we’ve missed something greater! It’s Jesus, God’s anointed, who was the heart of their prayer, and it’s Jesus, God’s resurrected, who was the heart of their generosity. If we walk away from this passage focused on the church, we’ll eventually be crushed. But if we walk away focused on Christ, we’ll be comforted and empowered to live a life of scandalous generosity.



# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## OPTION 1: PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Tell of a time when you were the recipient of someone else's generosity.

### Read Acts 4:23-37

1. Look at the two different scenes in verses 23-31 and 32-37. How does the church look different in them? What are the similarities?
2. Where in your life do you act like an "owner" rather than a "steward" of your possessions?
3. What are some excuses we make to avoid being generous?
4. How does Jesus' generosity on the cross motivate you to be generous?

## OPTION 2: GUIDED GROUP PRAYER

1. *Read Acts 4:23-24.* Reflecting on how these verses display God's control amidst chaos, spend some time praising him for his power, strength, and sovereignty in our lives and world.
2. *Read Acts 4:25-26.* We encounter many confusing moments in life and can even wonder where God is. Spend some time confessing to God our need for him in times chaos and confusion. He is our only hope.
3. *Read Acts 4:27-28.* In the chaos and confusion, God is working. His greatest plan of all was determined before the world even began, that his Son should die for our sins. Praise and thank God for his plan of redemption.
4. *Read Acts 4:29-31.* Jesus has sent his church on a mission, yet we desperately need him every step of the way. Pray for the Holy Spirit to empower us to be witnesses of the gospel in our relationships, workplaces, and communities.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 8 ACTS 5:1-11

*"While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." –Acts 5:4*

### OVERVIEW

The story of Ananias and Sapphira can be difficult to understand. We've just read about many believers, in an outpouring of generosity and compassion, selling property and possessions to give to any who had need, and then Ananias and Sapphira arrive with money to lay at the apostles' feet. They've sold a piece of property and decided to give some of the money to the church; the problem is that they choose to tell the apostles that they're giving them *all* of the proceeds.

The Holy Spirit reveals their deceit to Peter, who immediately confronts Ananias. Peter's words help us, as readers, to understand the severity of Ananias' actions. Satan filled Ananias' heart to lie to the Holy Spirit; he was not simply lying to the apostles. Additionally, Peter points out that Ananias and Sapphira were under no obligation to sell their property, nor were they under any obligation to give all of the proceeds away. Because they were seeking their own favor or glory, they chose to lie about their generosity.

As David Gooding explains in *True to the Faith: Charting the Course through the Acts of the Apostles*: "They had felt the power of the preaching, seen the miraculous signs, and known the voice of the Holy Spirit within their own hearts. They had heard the warnings of the coming day of the Lord, and they wanted to escape its judgments. So they joined the church and professed devotion to Christ. But it was bogus."

Both Ananias and Sapphira collapsed and died because they lied to God and to the believers. They had pretended to be holy but were self-seeking and had no fear of the Lord. This swift and severe punishment left no doubt that the Holy Spirit was present in the church and that he would not be mocked or deceived. We see many today who similarly practice self-seeking outward holiness and seem to go unpunished, but it's important to remember that we all must one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

What are your thoughts on "little white lies"? Is it acceptable to tell a minor untruth to avoid conflict or hurt feelings?

### Read Acts 5:1-11

1. What did Ananias and Sapphira do that was wrong? What questions do you have about this story?
2. What was the result of Ananias and Sapphira's punishment?
3. Even if punishment isn't always as immediate as it was with Ananias and Sapphira, what is the danger of living a life that's focused on serving yourself?
4. How does living in fear and awe of God free us from the desire to impress others?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 and 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1. What is the source of true holiness?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 9 ACTS 5:17–42

*But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." –Acts 5:29*

### OVERVIEW

At this time, the apostles were regarded highly among the people. They continually preached the gospel and would heal all the lame, sick, or demon-possessed people who were brought to them. Seeing this, the Sadducees were filled with jealousy and had the apostles arrested and put in prison. The Sadducees wanted the favor the apostles were receiving from the crowds but greatly underestimated the God the apostles served. During the night, an angel both instigated and enabled a jail break and instructed the apostles to go back to the temple to teach.

Seemingly without hesitation, the apostles did exactly that. And when the high priests again confronted them, they didn't waver. Their awe of God gave them wisdom to know that disobeying the Holy Spirit would be far more detrimental to them than disobeying the leaders of the day. Even when beaten, the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the glory of Jesus' name.

It's interesting to note the differences in the behaviors of the two groups of people who are at odds in this passage. The high priests and Sadducees are filled with jealousy and rage, they act in secret, and they imprison and beat men who never posed any physical threat to them. In short, they acted out of fear. On the other hand, the apostles seemed to have reason to be afraid; many powerful men with fragile egos were ready to kill them. But the apostles didn't flinch. They boldly preached of Jesus' power and grace and love, and they did not turn angry when met with violence. The contrast between the behaviors of the Sadducees and the apostles is the difference between fearing man and fearing God.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Are you afraid of spiders? How about dinosaurs? What's something that causes you to feel afraid or nervous even though it doesn't put you in any real danger?

### Read Acts 5:17-42

1. Read Galatians 2:11-14. Compare Peter's actions in this passage to his actions in Acts 5:17-42.
2. Imagine yourself in the position of the apostles in Acts 5:17-42. Where can you draw encouragement from in these verses? What does it tell us about fear of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit?
3. Look at the diagram on the following page. Where do you see yourself? Where do you want to grow in your fear of the Lord?
4. Read Acts 5:29-32. How would you like your life to better reflect this truth?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

<b>FEAR OF GOD</b>	<b>FEAR OF MAN</b>
God's approval matters above all others	The approval of others is important
Feels safe and secure	Feels trapped or at risk of harm
Lives in freedom and speaks truth	Prone to deceit and pretending
Knows that the world cannot harm the soul	Fears the harm the world can bring
Finds security in God's promises	Finds security in status
God's Word has greater influence than people's words	People's words and opinions have greater influence than God's Word
Able to respond kindly and honestly to requests and offers	Difficulty saying "no" to requests and offers
Takes the time to be still and seek answers from the Lord	Feels pressure from others and rushes ahead without seeking the Lord's wisdom
Quick to apologize and admit when wrong	Makes excuses when wrong and is slow to apologize
Able to listen well, not concerned with impressing others	More concerned with impressing others than listening to them
Teachable spirit	Concerned with seeming intelligent, knowledgeable, or correct
Humble	Proud
Able to love with whole heart, because there's nothing to prove	Self-focus prevents from truly loving others
Is not afraid to ask questions	Afraid to ask questions out of fear of judgment or fear of not receiving the desired response
Able to have self-control when trials come	Desire to protect can lead to harsh words or violence



# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 10

### ACTS 6:1-7

*And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. —Acts 6:7*

### OVERVIEW

As Luke continues in the book of Acts, the church is growing with more and more people coming to faith in Christ. With that growth comes conflict that serves as an opportunity for more people to use their God-given gifts to serve the gospel.

The chapter begins when the Greek-speaking disciples start complaining to the apostles that their widows aren't getting cared for every day as they should. The apostles have a decision to make: they could stop what they are doing and help the widows themselves, or they could delegate some other men to do it, letting the apostles stay focused on preaching and prayer. The Twelve call the church together and tell them to pick seven godly men who will make sure the poor widows are properly cared for, which the church agrees to. After the apostles prayed for and commissioned these men, the gospel continued to grow, and many more people came to faith in Jesus.

At first glance, this passage seems to paint the apostles as a group of prima donnas who are too good to "wait on tables" (6:2 NIV) because they have their nose in a book somewhere. Yet when we look more deeply at what is occurring in the book of Acts, we actually see Jesus using this situation to continue his mission of saving lost people by his Spirit, through his church.

In Chapter 6, Luke turns his focus from the *establishment* of the church to the *expansion* of the church. This rapid growth has come largely through the preaching of the apostles, whom Jesus called to this very job. Yet the need to organize the care of the widows threatens to distract the apostles from their calling, hindering the growth of the church. It's not that the apostles are too good for something as simple as caring for the widows, or that their calling to God's word is somehow more spiritual than practical service; it's simply that it's not *their* calling. In delegating the care of the widows, the apostles not only stay focused on their primary task but also give an opportunity for other people to use their gifts to serve the gospel. In the end, more people find new life in the gospel, and more disciples become engaged in a life of fruitful ministry serving Jesus.



# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

List out all the different roles that you have in your life right now.

### Read Acts 6:1-7

1. Compare and contrast "the Twelve" apostles and "the seven" men chosen to care for the widows. What are their roles? What is their character? Where does their calling come from?
2. Put yourselves in the apostles' shoes. How would you respond to the complaint of the Greek-speaking Jewish disciples?
3. What things distract you from living out your calling to Jesus? What can distract us as a church from living out our calling to Jesus?
4. Read John 15:1-4. In a culture of distraction, how is Jesus helping you abide in him and serve his calling?
5. Currently, where do you sense God calling you to serve the gospel?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 11

### ACTS 7:1–8:1

*“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” –Acts 7:52–53*

### OVERVIEW

In chapter 7 of the book of Acts, Stephen gives a powerful sermon, sweeping through the Old Testament to relay one central thought: Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s presence and his provision. To reject Jesus is to reject God.

When we first read Stephen’s sermon, it can seem like a fairly unconnected, long-winded speech to a group of people who already know everything he is talking about. But when we look deeper, Stephen is actually connecting Jesus to the Old Testament in a way that is incredibly insightful and convicting to the Sanhedrin who’ve arrested him.

The two central themes of Stephen’s sermon are God’s presence and God’s provision. Stephen begins by focusing on God’s presence, namely in the Tabernacle and the Temple. To the Jews listening, the Temple was the permanent dwelling place of God and the guarantee of his protection over them. Yet as Stephen points out, God’s presence was never meant to be confined to one place. The Tabernacle and the Temple were both pointing to God’s greater presence in Jesus. Next, Stephen takes aim at God’s provision through the Law, which the Sanhedrin accused Stephen of speaking out against in the previous chapter. He likens the Sanhedrin to God’s rebellious people in the Old Testament who were stubborn and deaf to the truth. By murdering Jesus, whom the Old Testament had promised, Stephen says these teachers of the Law had actually become criminals of the Law. The implication is clear to everyone listening: Rejecting Jesus is rejecting God.

Stephen’s speech is placed at an interesting turning point in Luke’s two-volume box set about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. As you’d expect, there’s no altar call after this sermon. Instead, the Sanhedrin drag Stephen out into the street and murder him in front of a man named Saul, whom we’ll read about later.... In the meantime, a great persecution breaks out against the church, scattering the apostles from Jerusalem, out to Judea and Samaria, just as Jesus had commissioned them in Acts 1:8. In a remarkable way, Jesus used the persecution that broke out in reaction to Stephen’s speech to further spread his message, saving more lost people by his Spirit, through his church. In his grace, God is always reversing what was meant for evil and using it for his glory.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Can you think of a book you read or a movie you saw when you were young that didn't make sense at the time but made sense to you later?

### Read Acts 7:1-8:1

1. As you read through Stephen's sermon, what's something from the Old Testament you hadn't considered before?
2. Read 7:51 again. Place yourself in the crowd of the Sanhedrin. How would you react? How do you react now when someone points out a sin in your life?
3. Do you view your sin as a rejection of Jesus? Why or why not?
4. Read Psalm 51:1-12. How does the gospel free us to embrace moments of conviction of sin?
5. Read Luke 23:34 and Acts 7:59-60. How is it that Stephen is able to pray for forgiveness as he's being murdered?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## STUDY 12

### ACTS 8:2-18

*Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. —Acts 8:4*

#### OVERVIEW

Stephen's martyrdom was a turning point for the church. Previously, those who opposed Jesus' followers worked quietly, because they feared the crowds of people who held the disciples in high esteem, but the death of Stephen emboldened them. We're specifically told about Saul, later to be known in scripture as Paul, dragging men and women out of their homes and sending them to prison for following Jesus. Because of this, many disciples left Jerusalem. Saul probably felt powerful at that point in time, but he didn't understand the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament story of Joseph, Joseph explains to his brothers who had sold him into slavery many years before: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." The same God who saved many through the trials of Joseph's life used the death of Stephen and persecution of Jesus' followers to spread the hope of salvation throughout Samaria and Judea.

Philip shared the gospel in Samaria, and many believed and were baptized. But an interesting thing happened; they didn't immediately receive the Holy Spirit upon their belief. It wasn't until Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them and prayed for them that they received the Holy Spirit. This was an act of humility and unity in Christ for both the apostles and the Samaritans, because Samaritans typically hated Jerusalem and all that it represented. The Holy Spirit falling on them in this way showed that the kingdom of God is greater than and can overcome any divisions created by man.

When Simon the Magician witnessed this moment, he asked if he could pay the apostles for the power to give people the Holy Spirit, but Peter immediately pointed out his prideful desires and wrong understanding of God. Simon was used to having power among the Samaritans, and he had just witnessed a power far greater than his own. He didn't understand that the power of God works through humility—laying down prejudices, admitting need, and rejoicing in what Christ has done and is doing.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## PASSAGE DISCUSSION

*Let's get talking... (Optional)*

Did you ever put on a cape as a child and think you might be able to fly? Share a story about a time when you thought having or achieving something in particular would make you more powerful.

### Read Acts 8:2-18

1. Why do you think Saul reacted the way he did to Stephen's murder? What was he afraid of?
2. Looking at the story of Simon the Magician, where does Simon get things wrong?
3. Read Luke 9:51-56 and Acts 8:14-17. What is the significance of Peter and John coming from Jerusalem to pray for and lay hands on the Samaritans? In what way is the Samaritans' receiving of the Holy Spirit in this way a display of the church's unity in Christ?
4. When in your life have you seen God's goodness in the midst of a bad situation? Is there anything currently troubling you that you would like to see used for his glory?
5. Read Genesis 50:15-21. How does this story relate to what's happening in Acts 8? Who has the ultimate power and authority in each of these stories?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

## **STUDY 13**

### **ACTS 8:26–40**

*Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*  
–Acts 8:35

#### **OVERVIEW**

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is an amazing account of Spirit-led evangelism. Philip displays no special abilities in this story, except maybe the ability to run fast enough to catch up with the Ethiopian’s chariot. It’s Philip’s heart for God and eager obedience that allow for the wonders that take place. He knows the power of the Holy Spirit and is tuned in to his voice—Philip is living in expectation that the Spirit is going to move in remarkable ways.

After his time in Samaria, an angel appeared to Philip and told him to travel south on the road toward Gaza, and Philip listened. Then the Spirit told him to join the chariot of an Ethiopian who was traveling on the same road having come from Jerusalem, and Philip listened. The Ethiopian was a court official of the queen and in charge of all her treasure, so he was probably traveling in style. It would have been understandable if Philip had been intimidated, but there’s no indication of hesitation on his part. On the contrary, he runs to meet the Ethiopian. At this point, we get to see that the Holy Spirit had prepared the Ethiopian to meet Philip, just as he had prepared Philip to meet the Ethiopian. Philip recognized that the man was reading the prophet Isaiah, so he asked if he understood it. The man hadn’t understood it but was eager to and invited Philip into his chariot to explain it.

Further proving that the Holy Spirit was the one at work, water appears in the desert so that the Ethiopian can be baptized. Then, we’re told that “the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.” Did Philip wander off at the Spirit’s leading? Did he disappear from the road to Gaza and reappear at Azotus, unsure of how he got there? All we know for sure is that the Holy Spirit was working wonders, and Philip was joyfully willing to go and preach wherever the Spirit led.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## OPTION 1: PASSAGE DISCUSSION

### Read Acts 8:26-40

1. The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53. What is Isaiah 53 about?
2. Imagine yourself in the position of Philip. How do you think you would have felt when prompted by the Holy Spirit to join the Ethiopian's chariot?
3. What made Philip prepared for the task of telling the Ethiopian about Jesus?
4. List the ways in which you see the Holy Spirit work in verses 26-40.
5. In what ways are you challenged by this story of Spirit-led evangelism?

## OPTION 2: GUIDED GROUP PRAYER

1. *Read Isaiah 53:1-3.* Thinking about how these verses describe Jesus, spend time giving praise to him. Declare his attributes – both those revealed in these verses and those revealed elsewhere in scripture.
2. *Read Isaiah 53:4-6.* To the God who understands your grief, sorrow, and temptation, spend time in confession. Lay your sins and struggles, as well as the sins and struggles of the Church (all believers) at the feet of the one who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.
3. *Read Isaiah 53:7-9.* Dwell on the way Jesus is portrayed in these verses, knowing that the punishment placed on him brought us peace and healing. Give thanks to him.
4. *Read Isaiah 53:10-12.* Knowing that Christ is interceding for you and with you, pray boldly that others will come to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit for the boldness and opportunity to share the gospel.

# WITNESSES

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

## NOTES



# WITNESSES

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