



The Book of Acts
GOD'S MISSION - OUR RESPONSE
Study Guide

Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to 2023: FREE TO BE. Our focus this year will be DISCIPLES OF OUR LORD JESUS. God has a mission, and God's mission has a church. In Scripture, we encounter the Triune God working to restore and renew all things. The Bible begins with creation and ends with the promise of a new creation. The Triune God is working to free everyone from sin and death and invites us to participate in His mission. We will seek to:

- 1. discern the God's Mission through prayer, the Bible, conversation, and action;**
- 2. align our Congregation's mission with the Mission of God;**
- 3. participate actively in reaching out to our community and world**

One of my favorite Bible verses related to the Mission of God is recorded at the end of the Gospel of John, when the crucified and risen Jesus appears to His followers. The Bible verse is *John 20:21*,

***Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
 As the Father has sent me, so I send you"***

This powerful verse reminds us that Jesus did not call us to be settled, but a church sent to participate in God's mission! What follows is a Bible study on the Book of Acts. Open your Bible, gather with a group of friends, get outside the four walls of the church building, and learn what God desires to teach you. Because God's Word has the power to transform people and communities from who we are into the people and communities that God longs for us to be.

Tips for Group Members

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

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, the crucified and risen Jesus commissions His followers to be “witnesses” (1:8b). Jesus charges His followers to participate fully in God’s mission by making disciples (Matthew 28:19), preaching the good news (Mark 16:15), proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47), following Jesus (John 21:22), and witnessing “... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). One of the best ways to discern God’s mission is to gather in prayer, study, and conversation.

These studies are intended to last around 45 minutes.
Below are some suggestions to assist us.

Before the Study

1. Pray. Pray that God would guide you to learn and participate faithfully. Pray for your Bible study leader and the participants who will gather for conversation and discussion. Ask God to open your hearts and minds to hear God’s Word that it may motivate you to a new way of thinking and being.
2. Come to the study prepared. Read and then slowly re-read the assigned Bible passage. Write down particular and peculiar words and phrases you have questions about. Bring those questions to the group gathering.
3. Carefully work through the lesson. Take time to meditate and reflect on each question. Write your responses in the space provided. Please set aside 60 minutes for personal study time each week.
4. Consider ways to apply the assigned Bible passage to your life.

Tips for Group Members: During the Study

1. Bring the necessary materials to your study: Bible, student guide, pen, or pencil.
2. Be willing to participate. The leader will not be lecturing, but leading a conversation. Join the conversation.
3. Stick to the topic being discussed. Try to avoid drifting off on tangents.
4. Be attentive to other participants. Listen to what they are sharing. You may be surprised by their insights. Also, be affirming. This will encourage some of the more hesitant participants to share.
5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. Do participate, but allow others to also participate.
6. Fully expect that God will teach you something through this study and through the other members in your group. Pray that you may apply God’s teaching to your daily life.
7. We will consider all conversation within our group to be confidential. We will not share confidential conversation without specific permission.
8. We will make space for each participant to share / speak as they are comfortable doing so.
9. We will listen attentively to one another.
10. We will practice Martin Luther’s guide to “put the best construction on everything.”

Book of Acts:

A Brief Introduction

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written by the same author. Both works are dedicated to a man named Theophilus and share a common writing style. Each book bears witness to God's mission to restore and renew creation, first through the crucified and risen Jesus, and then through His followers. In both works the same Holy Spirit that anoints Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22), empowers the followers of Jesus to boldly share the Gospel in all the world. Some Bible scholars refer to these two corresponding works as "Luke-Acts".

Luke, the physician, and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul has traditionally been identified as the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. In other New Testament writings, Paul refers to Luke as a beloved colleague (Colossians 4:14) and fellow worker (Philemon 24). Within the Book of Acts, the author occasionally writes in the first-person plural. These passages are identified as the "we" passages, which provide Luke's firsthand account of the early church participating in God's mission. The Book of Acts begins forty days after the resurrection of Jesus, and records what happens to His followers after the Ascension (1:9-11). In Acts 1:8, the crucified and risen Jesus commissions His followers,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

These well-known words of Jesus are both the general outline and central theme of the Book of Acts.

On Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit arrives in spectacular fashion, and descends on the gathered community of Jesus followers. The Holy Spirit empowers this community to boldly and courageously proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, these "witnesses" are led to share the Gospel in sequential and ever widening circles. This spread of the Gospel is both geographic (from Jerusalem to Rome) and ethnic (from Jews to Gentiles).

As Jesus stated in Acts 1:8, the Gospel will first be shared in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), through the witness of Peter, John, and Stephen, the first Christian martyr. From Jerusalem, the Gospel will spread into all Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), through the witness of Philip, Peter, and a newly converted Saul. The third and final phase of the Book of Acts will trace the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28), through three "witness trips" (mission trips) of the Apostle Paul and his traveling companions. The Book of Acts concludes in the capital city of the Roman Empire, with the Apostle Paul preaching and teaching "... with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31b).

Book of Acts:

An Outline

A Sent Church

“You Will Be My Witnesses...”

(1:1-2:47)

Prologue

(1:1-5)

The Ascension and Apostolic Commission of Jesus (1:6-11)

A New Witness is Chosen

(1:12-26)

Pentecost (2:1-47) Witness of the Holy Spirit (2:1-13) Peter’s Witness (2:14-41) Witness of the Community (2:42-47)

Stage One

“...in Jeruslaem...”

(3:1-8:1a)

Peter and John’s Witness

(3:1-4:31)

The Witness of the Community

(4:32-5:42)

The Witness of the Deacons

(6:1-7)

Stage Two

“...in all Judea and Samaria...”

(8:1b-12:25)

The Witnesses are Scattered in Judea and Samaria

Stephen’s Witness

(6:8-8:1a)

Philip’s Witness

(8:4-40)

Saul’s Conversion and Early Witness

(9:1-31)

Peter’s Witness

(9:32-11:18)

The Witness of the Community in Antioch

(11:19-30)

Peter and James’ Witness

(12:1-25)

Stage Three

“...and to the ends of the earth”.

(13:1-28:31)

Paul’s First Witness Trip

(13:1-14:28)

The Witness of the Community (The Jerusalem Council) (15:1-35)

Paul’s Second Witness Trip

(15:36-18:22)

Paul’s Third Witness Trip

(18:23-21:16)

Paul's Fourth Witness Trip

(21:17-28:31)

Some Possible Memory Verses

Study 1

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

Study 2

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2:42

Study 3

"They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them."

Acts 6:6

Study 4

"But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

Acts 15:40-41

Study 5

"Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.'"

Romans 15:20-21

Study 6

"Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

Acts 28:30-31

Student Study #1 - Sent, But Never Settled

1. Opening scripture verses: Acts 1:8 2. Opening prayer

3. Welcome and introductions

4. Announcements

5. Introduction to the study

In the Brief Introduction to the Book of Acts we learn that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written by the same author, Luke the Physician. Both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts open with a formal dedication to a man named Theophilus. Theophilus is a second-generation Christian, and Luke writes the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to help Theophilus grow as a disciple of Jesus. Some Bible scholars argue that Theophilus may have been a patron of Luke's, who provides the financial

backing to allow Luke the time to write both a Gospel (Luke) and an early Church History (Acts).

Following the formal dedication (1:1-5), Luke turns to the Ascension of Jesus (1:6-11), which takes place forty days after the Resurrection of Jesus (1:3b). Right before He ascends, Jesus issues both a promise and a charge. The promise is that the Holy Spirit will come upon the disciples (1:8a). The charge is that His followers will become the “sent” people of God. “...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8b).

As stated in the Brief Introduction, Act 1:8, serves as both a general outline and the central theme of the Book of Acts. The charge to be “witnesses” are the last words the crucified and risen Jesus speaks to His followers before ascending into heaven (1:9-11). Ten days after the Ascension of Jesus, on Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit descends upon the gathered community, just as Jesus promised (1:8a). One of the first gifts of the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in many and diverse languages. Folks from far away places like Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Asia, Egypt, and Rome, are amazed to hear a group of Galileans speaking to them in their native language about God’s deeds of great power. Though there were some gathered on Pentecost Day who doubted (2:13).

Study #1

Reflection Questions

Sent, But Never Settled

A. What navigation devices do you use to take a trip. Compass? Road Atlas? AAA? Google Maps? Other? _____

B. From the earliest days, the Christian Church has been marked by various peoples (see Acts 2:5-11). What can be challenging about how different people can be in the church?

C. The Sent (not settled) People of God. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, we read in each of the four Gospels that the Risen Jesus spent time with His followers. During that time, he charged the disciples with a mission to be the “sent people of God”. Take a look at the end of each of the four Gospels and the beginning of the Book of Acts to see if you can identify a specific charge that Jesus gives to this new “church-community” a “charge” or a “commission” is an act of granting certain powers or the authority to carry out a particular task or duty.

D. Find the “charge” that Jesus gives to the gathered community.
Matthew 28:

Mark 16:

Luke 24:

John 20:

Acts 1:

E. For discussion: What is the difference between a sent church and a settled church? Why do you think we have settled to be a settled church? How might we rehear the charge of Jesus to be a sent church?

F. Read Acts 1:6-11

1. Can you recall a time when you were eager to start something, but had to wait? Was the waiting helpful or a hindrance? Please share with the group.

2. For what are the apostles eager and impatient? See Acts 1:6

3. How does Jesus respond to the apostles' eagerness and impatience? See Acts 1:7-8
Acts 1:7

Acts 1:8

G. The apostles don't have to wait too long for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Read Acts 2:1-13.

1. Picture yourself as one of the followers of Jesus gathered on Pentecost Day. Try to describe what you see and hear. _____

2. What words quickly come to mind when you think of the Holy Spirit?

3. One of the first gifts of the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in many and various languages. If you could learn to speak a second (or third) language what would that language be? Why? _____

Closing Question: Homework:

What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

- Read the Book of Acts chapter 1-5
- Memory Verse (Acts 1:8)
- Read through Study #2

Closing Prayer:

Almighty and ever living God, you fulfilled the promise of Easter by sending the gift of your Holy Spirit. Look upon your people gathered in prayer, open to receive the Spirit's flame. May it come to rest in our hearts and heal the divisions of word and tongue, that with one voice and one song we may praise your name in joy and thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.