

Acts

BE THE CHURCH

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Acts: Be the Church

INTRODUCTION

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

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

The book of Acts tells the story of how the early Church began. Here we discover the missionary journeys that the apostles went on to spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection. It is a fundamental book of the Bible that gives us key insights into what it means to be the Church.

Acts is a book about people. It's also a book about a loving, active and powerful God who made a way for the whole world to know Him through His son Jesus Christ. God uses people to spread the story of His love and forgiveness; thus we see the creation of the Church. Throughout this study, we will discover what it means for us to "be the Church," to be on mission with Christ, and we will explore how the power of the Holy Spirit is available to us today to do the work that the Lord has called us to.

Acts was written by Luke, a physician who traveled with the apostle Paul and who also wrote the Gospel of Luke. Throughout the book of Acts, Luke makes two main points. First, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is of utmost importance, and everything hinges on the truth that Jesus died for the sins of the world and rose again so that all who believe in Him will be saved. Second, the Holy Spirit is God's promised gift to believers and He empowers and equips followers of Jesus to share the good news among both Jews and Gentiles.

Acts tells us about God's plan A to save the world: His Church. There is no plan B when it comes to sharing the good news of Jesus. This means then, that if you are a follower of Jesus, you are part of His plan and you have a role to play in declaring the Gospel message to the world. As Christ followers, we can trust that the Holy Spirit lives in us and will empower us to share the good news just as He empowered and equipped the apostles throughout Acts. If you are not yet a Christ follower, we are glad you're here and want you to know that the good news of Jesus Christ is available to you today.

The book of Acts also teaches us what it means to cross lines of cultural, ethnic, religious and political differences to focus on the most important thing: Jesus Christ. Whether we meet in-person or online, we are still the same Church that's commissioned to make disciples and share the good news of Jesus with the world around us.

Before you begin this study, would you pray? Prayer is simply a conversation with God.

If you are a follower of Jesus, consider praying something like this:

God, teach me how to be the Church. I pray that You would fill me with Your Holy Spirit and equip and empower me to share the good news with the world. Challenge me, speak to me, encourage me – and show me how You want to use me to be the Church in this time and place. In Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

If you are not yet a Christ follower, consider praying something like this:

God, teach me who You are and open my eyes to the truth of Jesus Christ through this study. If the good news is really good news, then help me to know, experience and trust the good news of Jesus Christ. Speak to me. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

How to Use This Study Guide

We are excited that you have chosen to dig deeper into God’s Word this season with our study in the book of Acts. Below you will find an overview of the study guide and how to make the most of it.

STUDY GUIDE LAYOUT

Each week there will be a series of sections that you can move through at your own pace. You can spend time in a different section each day, or dive into it all in one sitting. Whatever works best for you and your schedule, we invite you to do that. This guide is a tool to help you dig deeper into the book of Acts, and our hope is that you would be reading and engaging with God’s Word consistently.

If you plan to use the study guide, you’ll want to complete it prior to the week your group meets. For instance, you will do the “Week 1” study guide prior to your “Week 1” group meeting. We also encourage you to do the study guide prior to watching the weekly video teaching.

The study guide for each week will include the following sections:

SCRIPTURE

Each week you will see the full text we’re using from Acts printed in your book. Our hope is that you will interact with this text and mark it up as much as you’d like. Underline, circle, make notes, put questions in the margins, etc. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active,” so we invite you to interact with the Scripture as much as possible. It is alive! For your reference, this guide uses the New Living Translation (NLT) version of the Bible, unless noted otherwise.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After you read the Scripture for the week, you will find reflection questions related to the passage. These questions are designed to help you pull key information out of the text and to assist in your observation and understanding of what you just read.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES

Here is where we remember that the Bible is ultimately One-Great-Story: God’s love letter to the world. You will find Scriptures from other books of the Bible to help better frame and give insight into the passage we are reading each week. Our hope is that seeing the big picture will help you to better comprehend and apply what you’re studying each week.

LISTENING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

This section is meant to give you space to pause and hear from the Holy Spirit. When we say “hear”, it might include a nudge, feeling, sense, thought or image or even an audible voice. We believe that God wants to speak to us and that He does that in a variety of ways. Each week, this section will give you the opportunity to be still before God and practice listening to and hearing from the Holy Spirit. You may not feel anything, or you may question if what you heard was

from God. We encourage you to write down anything you hear/feel/sense, and then as the apostle Paul says, “test the spirits” (1 Thes. 5:12). We are always learning how to discern God’s voice, and the best way to know if we’re hearing from God is to compare what we hear to the Word of God and see if it matches God’s heart, character and mission. If you hear anything that contradicts the Bible, then you can be certain it is not from the Holy Spirit. We encourage you to take time to pause and enjoy this section. Don’t rush through it, but allow yourself space to be still and to listen to God and write down whatever impressions you receive.

APPLICATION

This section allows you to reflect on how God’s Word applies to your own life. There will be reflection questions that will challenge you to integrate what you have learned from the Word into your own daily life experiences. This is a place for honesty, and we invite you to be real and authentic with your answers. This is between you and God. There is no shame here!

PRAYER

Each week we will invite you to spend time in prayer. Prayer is simply a conversation with God. Sometimes there will be prompts or fill-in-the-blanks, and other times there will be questions which you can reflect on and talk to God about. This section is designed for you to talk with God and grow in your intimacy and knowledge of who He is. We believe prayer changes things and it changes us.

WORSHIP

Each week there is a worship song that corresponds with the lesson. We invite you to listen to the song and worship God in light of everything you have learned about Him that week. You can search for the song title/musician online and should be able to listen for free.

WEEKLY TEACHING NOTES

Each week someone will give a video teaching on the topic we are studying. We encourage you to take notes during this time and write down anything that stands out to you or catches your attention. We also encourage you to watch the video teaching before your group meets. All the teachings can be found at www.wbsla.org, and they will correspond with the week of study you are in.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These are the questions that you will discuss each week in your WBS group. If you want to think through your answers before you join your discussion group, feel free, but there is no obligation to do that.

We pray that the power of the Holy Spirit is with you and that He empowers you as you study what it means to be the Church.

Blessings,
The Women’s Ministry Team

Week One

Jesus: The Sequel

Luke 24:50-53 II Acts 1:1-2

The book of Acts, written by Luke (who wrote the gospel that bears his name), is the continuing story of Jesus and His Kingdom. There is a seamless flow between the two accounts in the book of Luke and Acts. It's as though Luke-Acts is one book. Why does this matter? Because the unfolding action in the book of Acts is rooted in all that Jesus did, taught and promised. Keep that in mind as you read this week's scripture passages.

Luke 24:50-53

⁵⁰Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. ⁵²So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. ⁵³And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

Acts 1:1-2

¹In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 1
Jesus: The Sequel

Discussion Questions | Week 1

1. Why did you decide to join Women's Bible Study this fall?
2. What stood out to you from this week's teaching?
3. What has your experience with the church been?
4. What do you think it means to "be the Church"?

Week Two

Can I Get a Witness?

Acts 1

This week we will explore the importance of being a witness. Notice in this passage that Jesus is spending time with the apostles during a 40-day period after His resurrection. As you read, pay attention to what happens during those 40 days including what Jesus is asking of His disciples, and how they respond to Him. Underline any commands or instructions Jesus gives.

Acts 1

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

¹In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. ³During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

The Ascension of Jesus

⁶So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here

staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Matthias Replaces Judas

¹²Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. ¹³When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.

Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James). ¹⁴They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

¹⁵During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. ¹⁶“Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. ¹⁷Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us.”

¹⁸(Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. ¹⁹The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name *Akeldama*, which means “Field of Blood.”)

²⁰Peter continued, “This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.’ It also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’

²¹“So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—²²from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.”

²³So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they all prayed, “O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen ²⁵as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.” ²⁶Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

Reflection Questions

1. What was the purpose of Jesus appearing to the disciples during the 40 days? Why was it so important for the disciples to see that Jesus was alive?
2. Reread verses 6-8. The disciples thought that Jesus would be restoring Israel, meaning that Israel would gain independence from Rome and be a sovereign nation again. How might the gift of the Holy Spirit given to His disciples be different than what they were expecting God to do to bring His Kingdom?
3. What did the disciples do as they awaited the promised gift of the Holy Spirit? (v.14) How do you usually spend your time when you are waiting on God for something?
4. At the end of the chapter, the apostles chose a replacement for Judas. What had to be true of the person to become an apostle? Why do you think that qualification was important?

Supporting Scriptures

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.”
– Isaiah 43:10 (NIV)

- *In this passage, who does the Lord tell us we are, and what does that require us to do?*

“I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.”
– Psalm 27:13-14 (NIV)

- *What does it look like to remain confident in the Lord, and how can that help in a waiting period?*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

The disciples were witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Sit quietly with your eyes closed. Invite the Holy Spirit to be present with you. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of a specific situation where you have seen Jesus at work in your life. Write/draw whatever you see/feel/hear.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a person who needs to be encouraged today. How can you encourage that person?

Prayer

As you pray in response to this lesson, fill in the blanks of this prayer.

God, this is what I know is true of You: _____

Because I know this is true, I want to tell: (person)

In this current season I am waiting for: _____

Please help me to wait well with you and for you. Amen.

Worship

Listen to "Trust in You" by Lauren Daigle

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 2

Can I Get A Witness?

Discussion Questions | Week 2

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
2. What does it make you think or feel to see yourself as one of God's witnesses?
3. What is one way you have seen God show up in your life in the past three months?
4. What's an area in your life where you've been waiting, and how do you need to grow in trusting God with that area?

Week Three

The True Superpower!

Acts 2

In our world today this is a lot of talk about superpowers, whether with Marvel movie characters, celebrity couples or international politics. This week we will explore who the true, ultimate and real superpower is. As you read this passage, circle, underline and note the words and phrases that pique your interest or stir up questions for you. Highlight anything that looks like a SUPERPOWER to you.

Acts 2

The Holy Spirit Comes

¹On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. ²Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. ³Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

⁵At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. ⁶When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

⁷They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, ⁸and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! ⁹Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" ¹²They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. ¹³But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!"

Peter Preaches to the Crowd

¹⁴Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o’clock in the morning is much too early for that. ¹⁶No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷‘In the last days,’ God says,
‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy.

Your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸In those days I will pour out my Spirit
even on my servants—men and women alike—
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹And I will cause wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below—
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

²⁰The sun will become dark,
and the moon will turn blood red
before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.

²¹But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.’

²²“People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. ²³But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. ²⁴But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. ²⁵King David said this about him:

‘I see that the LORD is always with me.
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

²⁶No wonder my heart is glad,
and my tongue shouts his praises!

My body rests in hope.

²⁷For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.

²⁸You have shown me the way of life,
and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.'

²⁹"Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. ³⁰But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on his throne. ³¹David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave.

³²"God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. ³³Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. ³⁴For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,

'The LORD said to my Lord,
"Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
³⁵until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.'"

³⁶"So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!"

³⁷Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

³⁸Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God." ⁴⁰Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!"

⁴¹Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

The Believers Form a Community

⁴²All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

⁴³A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Supporting Scriptures

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” –Genesis 1:2 (NIV)

- *How does this passage at the very beginning of the Bible inform or reframe the way you experience and understand the Holy Spirit?*

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” – John 14:16-17 (NIV)

- *The Holy Spirit is referred to as the “advocate” and “Spirit of truth.” What is the significance of those names, and how do they inform your understanding of the Holy Spirit?*

⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” –John 16:7-11 (NIV)

- *What do you see as the role of the Holy Spirit according to these verses? In light of Acts 2, why is this important?*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

Sit quietly for a few minutes and consider the role of the Holy Spirit in your life. What does it mean to you that the Holy Spirit comes in power as your advocate and the Spirit of Truth? Allow God to speak to your heart and mind through His Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where He is your advocate today. Record below any thoughts or questions you want to remember.

Application

1. The promise of God to the first church is available to us today. All of us can say yes to Jesus, gain new life, and receive the promised Holy Spirit who comes with power. Have you committed your life to Jesus? If not, what is holding you back? And would you like to say yes to Jesus now? If so, it is as simple and as profound as praying, “Jesus, I need you. I am a sinner in need of your forgiveness and grace. I believe in You, Jesus Christ, as my Lord and Savior who died for my sin and rose to new life three days later. I give you my life and commit to following you. Show me your ways. Amen.” (If you prayed that prayer for the first time, please let us know by emailing women@cachurch.com and we will celebrate with you and give you next steps on your spiritual journey. If you weren’t ready to pray that prayer and want to talk with a pastor about any questions you might have, please email us and we’d love to talk with you.)
2. If you are a Christ follower, are you living with an awareness of the Holy Spirit in your life? Do you give Him the freedom to speak, guide and use you? Is there an area in your life today where you need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit? Talk with God about that area, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you up with His power and His guidance.
3. Write out your personal needs and desires regarding the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how you write it, this can be your prayer to the God who makes all things new and gives us the power to live. (For example, *“God, teach me more about Your Holy Spirit, would you speak to me through Your Holy Spirit,”* etc.)

Worship

Listen to “Holy Spirit” (Live) by Kari Jobe featuring Cody Carnes

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 3

The True Superpower

Discussion Questions | Week 3

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is our advocate and Spirit of Truth?
3. Have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your own life, and how? In this week's guide, there was an opportunity for you to give your life to Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit – if anyone prayed that prayer, we'd love for you to share with us as well.

Week Four

Boldness Redefined

Acts 3:1 – 4:31

This week we will see the power of the Holy Spirit working through Peter and John as they witness to others about the Truth of who Jesus Christ is. Read the following passage and highlight all the places where you see BOLDNESS in the actions of the disciples.

Acts 3

Peter Heals a Crippled Beggar

¹Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. ²As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

⁴Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. ⁶But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"

⁷Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. ⁸He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

⁹All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. ¹⁰When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely (weird formatting issue here, "astounded" should be on upper line) astounded! ¹¹They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John.

Peter Preaches in the Temple

¹²Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? ¹³For it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same

Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. ¹⁴You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!

¹⁶"Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed—and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes.

¹⁷"Friends, I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. ¹⁸But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things. ¹⁹Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. ²⁰Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. ²¹For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²²Moses said, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' ²³Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God's people.'

²⁴"Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. ²⁵You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.' ²⁶When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways."

Acts 4:1-31

Peter and John before the Council

¹While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. ²These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead. ³They arrested them and, since it was already evening, put them in jail until morning. ⁴But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men who believed now totaled about 5,000.

⁵The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. ⁷They brought in the two disciples and demanded, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of our people, ⁹are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled

man? Do you want to know how he was healed? ¹⁰Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, (weird formatting in two lines below, they are too far to left in margin)

‘The stone that you builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.’

¹²There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”

¹³The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say. ¹⁵So they ordered Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves.

¹⁶“What should we do with these men?” they asked each other. “We can’t deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. ¹⁷But to keep them from spreading their propaganda any further, we must warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus’ name again.” ¹⁸So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? ²⁰We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

²¹The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go because they didn’t know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God ²²for this miraculous sign—the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years.

The Believers Pray for Courage

²³As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. ²⁴When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—²⁵you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, (again weird formatting below, sticking into left margin)

‘Why were the nations so angry?

Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

²⁶The kings of the earth prepared for battle;
the rulers gathered together
against the LORD
and against his Messiah.'

²⁷"In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. ²⁸But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. ²⁹And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. ³⁰Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

Reflection Questions

1. What was the lame man that Peter and John encountered hoping for? What did he get instead? Have you ever received more than you asked for, and if so, what did that feel like?
2. Reread Acts 3:6 and Acts 4:10. What is the significance of Peter's statement in Acts 3:6, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!" Why is the name of Jesus so important?
3. List the results of repentance that Peter talks about in Acts 3:17-26. Have you experienced any of these results in your own life, and how?
4. Write down where you saw boldness in this passage. What classified something as "bold" to you?

Supporting Scriptures

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

-2 Corinthians 3:12-18 (NIV)

- *Why are we able to be bold in a way that Moses wasn't? What do you think the hope is that Paul is referring to in this passage?*

"The wicked flee though no one pursues,
but the righteous are as bold as a lion."

-Proverbs 28:1 (NIV)

- *What is the correlation between righteousness and boldness? Do you ever feel more bold when you know you are right?*

“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.”

-1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)

- *According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word justified mean, “having or shown to have a just, right, or reasonable basis.” What do you think it means to be “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”?*

“9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”

-Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV)

- *In your own words, describe what “the name that is above every name” means to you.*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

Close your eyes and sit quietly. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what BOLDNESS looks like for you today. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal a specific situation, circumstance, relationship or community where you need to be bold in the name of Jesus. Talk to the Holy Spirit about any fears that you might have, and ask Him to give you what you need to overcome your fears. Be encouraged that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18), so where the Holy Spirit is, there is love, not fear.

Write down or draw what you hear/see/feel/sense.

Application

Peter's boldness came from his own humility in knowing that nothing he did was because of his own power. Nothing Peter said or did was about him, but it was all about Jesus and done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. What are some areas of your life where you are tempted to be bold for the sake of yourself? Some common areas that we may be tempted to live for ourselves include living for attention, success, popularity, selfishness, ambition, ego-boost, security, etc. Will you confess and repent of any boldness that seeks for you to be the object of glory? (This is a safe space between just you and God, and there is no shame in Christ.)

2. The name of Jesus is what gives us access to His power. What is one area of your life where you want greater boldness in the name of Jesus, and what obstacles or concerns keep you from being bold in that area?

Prayer

When the early church experienced persecution they didn't pray for God to make it stop, but rather they prayed for the Lord to enable them to preach God's Word with more boldness (4:29). How will you pray for more boldness to share the Gospel and be used for God's kingdom purposes instead of simply asking for a change in your circumstances? Write out your prayer below.

Worship

Listen to the worship song "Break Every Chain" by Will Reagan

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 4
Boldness Redefined

Discussion Questions | Week 4

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
2. What do you think boldness looks like for a Christ follower?
3. What obstacles, fears or concerns keep you from being more bold for Jesus?
4. What is an area of your life where you want greater boldness to share the Gospel and glorify Christ?

Week Five

The Beautiful Hot Mess

Acts 4:32 – 5:42

This week we will be exploring both the beauty and the mess of God's bride: the Church. As you read this week's Scripture, consider all the good and the bad that you see in the early church, and consider how this compares with your experience of the Church today.

Acts 4:32-37

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³²All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. ³³The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. ³⁴There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them ³⁵and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

³⁶For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. ³⁷He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

Acts 5:1 - 42

Ananias and Sapphira

¹But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. ²He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.

³Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. ⁴The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

⁵As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. ⁶Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

⁷About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸Peter asked her, “Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?”

“Yes,” she replied, “that was the price.”

⁹And Peter said, “How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too.”

¹⁰Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

The Apostles Heal Many

¹²The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹³But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. ¹⁴Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. ¹⁵As a result of the apostles’ work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. ¹⁶Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

The Apostles Meet Opposition

¹⁷The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, ²⁰“Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!”

²¹So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial. ²²But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, ²³“The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!”

²⁴When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. ²⁵Then someone arrived with startling news: "The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!"

²⁶The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. ²⁷Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. ²⁸"We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name!" he said. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

²⁹But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. ³¹Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. ³²We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him."

³³When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. ³⁴But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. ³⁵Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! ³⁶Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. ³⁷After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

³⁸"So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!"

⁴⁰The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

⁴¹The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. ⁴²And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah."

Reflection Questions

1. Record below where you see both the beauty of the first church and the incredible messiness/challenges that come from it.

| Beauty | Messiness |
|--------|-----------|
| | |

Supporting Scriptures

“When Jesus had called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ⁶So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.”

-Luke 9:1-2,6 (NIV)

- *Jesus gave the disciples _____ and _____. What were they empowered to do?*

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

-James 1:2-5 (NIV)

- *Following Jesus can be both beautiful and challenging. What do you see as the beauty, and what might be difficult about following Jesus?*

“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

-1 Peter 1:6-7 (NIV)

- *Think about suffering or trials in your own life, and how do the above verses speak to you or challenge you?*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

The ongoing story of the first church reflects the devotion and obedience of the apostles to the person and work of Jesus. Because of their devotion and commitment, God chose to do amazing work through them.

Sit quietly for a few minutes asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the places in your life where your devotion to God is bearing good fruit. Then ask Him to show you where your commitment is weak or underdeveloped. Record these thoughts for your own reflection and as a matter of prayer and surrender.

Prayer

For prayer today we invite you to write out two different prayers:

- 1) A prayer of gratitude for all the beauty you see in the Church and the ways the Church has blessed you:

- 2) A prayer for healing for all the ways the Church has caused hurt, pain or more brokenness in our world

Worship

Listen to “Build Your Kingdom Here” by Rend Collective

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 5
The Beautiful Hot Mess

Discussion Questions | Week 5

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
2. Share about your experience with church. What's been beautiful and what's been messy?
3. Have you ever experienced persecution for your faith in Jesus? If so, share about that experience as you feel comfortable.
4. The apostles were obedient and committed to Jesus - how are you doing personally with your obedience and commitment to Christ?

Week Six

Time to Shine

Acts 6:1 – 7:59

This week we will be reading about Stephen and his courage to spread the Gospel. Read the following passage and underline, circle, or note anything that stands out to you about who Stephen was and how he lived out his faith. As you read, consider how you might have responded in a debate similar to the one Stephen was in.

Acts 6

Seven Men Chosen to Serve

¹But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

²So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. ³And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. ⁴Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

⁵Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). ⁶These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

⁷So God’s message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

Stephen Is Arrested

⁸Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. ⁹But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. ¹⁰None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

¹¹So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, “We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God.” ¹²This roused the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.

¹³The lying witnesses said, “This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. ¹⁴We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

¹⁵At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel’s.

Acts 7:1-59

Stephen Addresses the Council

¹Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these accusations true?”

²This was Stephen’s reply: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran. ³God told him, ‘Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.’ ⁴So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live.

⁵“But God gave him no inheritance here, not even one square foot of land. God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants—even though he had no children yet. ⁶God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign land, where they would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. ⁷“But I will punish the nation that enslaves them,’ God said, ‘and in the end they will come out and worship me here in this place.’

⁸“God also gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision at that time. So when Abraham became the father of Isaac, he circumcised him on the eighth day. And the practice was continued when Isaac became the father of Jacob, and when Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs of the Israelite nation.

⁹“These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰and rescued him from all his troubles. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace.

¹¹“But a famine came upon Egypt and Canaan. There was great misery, and our ancestors ran out of food. ¹²Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt, so he sent his sons—our ancestors—to buy some. ¹³The second time they went, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and they were introduced to Pharaoh. ¹⁴Then Joseph sent for his

father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. ¹⁵So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did our ancestors. ¹⁶Their bodies were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb Abraham had bought for a certain price from Hamor's sons in Shechem.

¹⁷"As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. ¹⁸But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. ¹⁹This king exploited our people and oppressed them, forcing parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.

²⁰"At that time Moses was born—a beautiful child in God's eyes. His parents cared for him at home for three months. ²¹When they had to abandon him, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and raised him as her own son. ²²Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action.

²³"One day when Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the people of Israel. ²⁴He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. So Moses came to the man's defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. ²⁵Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn't.

²⁶"The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker. 'Men,' he said, 'you are brothers. Why are you fighting each other?'

²⁷"But the man in the wrong pushed Moses aside. 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' he asked. ²⁸'Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian. There his two sons were born.

³⁰"Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. As he went to take a closer look, the voice of the LORD called out to him, ³²'I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' Moses shook with terror and did not dare to look.

³³"Then the LORD said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. ³⁴I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groans and have come down to rescue them. Now go, for I am sending you back to Egypt.'

³⁵"So God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected when they demanded, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush, God sent Moses to be their ruler and savior. ³⁶And by means of many wonders and miraculous signs, he led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness for forty years.

³⁷“Moses himself told the people of Israel, ‘God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people.’ ³⁸Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us.

³⁹“But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt. ⁴⁰They told Aaron, ‘Make us some gods who can lead us, for we don’t know what has become of this Moses, who brought us out of Egypt.’ ⁴¹So they made an idol shaped like a calf, and they sacrificed to it and celebrated over this thing they had made. ⁴²Then God turned away from them and abandoned them to serve the stars of heaven as their gods! In the book of the prophets it is written,

‘Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings
during those forty years in the wilderness, Israel?

⁴³No, you carried your pagan gods—
the shrine of Molech,
the star of your god Rephan,
and the images you made to worship them.

So I will send you into exile
as far away as Babylon.’

⁴⁴“Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. ⁴⁵Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

⁴⁶“David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷But it was Solomon who actually built it. ⁴⁸However, the Most High doesn’t live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says,

⁴⁹‘Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Could you build me a temple as good as that?’
asks the LORD.

‘Could you build me such a resting place?

⁵⁰‘Didn’t my hands make both heaven and earth?’

⁵¹“You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That’s what your ancestors did, and so do you! ⁵²Name one prophet your ancestors didn’t persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. ⁵³You deliberately disobeyed God’s law, even though you received it from the hands of angels.”

⁵⁴The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen’s accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand. ⁵⁶And he told them, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand!”

⁵⁷Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Reflection Questions

1. What do we learn about who Stephen is in Acts 6 (i.e. his character, faith, physical appearance)?
2. List all of the people in Israel's history that Stephen mentions, along with the specific attributes he says about them.
3. What does Stephen accuse the crowd of? (Acts 7:51-52)
4. Stephen was the first recorded martyr of the early church. What surprises you or stands out to you about his death in this passage?

Supporting Scriptures

⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹ In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

-1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NIV)

- *According to the requirements listed to be a deacon (or leader in the church) assess your own ability to become one. Why do you think the early church put these requirements on leadership?*

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

-1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)

- *How prepared do you feel to talk about your faith in Jesus?*

¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

-Esther 4:14 (NIV)

- *How was Stephen’s own story used “for such a time as this” in the history of the Church?*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

Close your eyes and sit with the Holy Spirit. Imagine you are with Jesus. Where are you? What are you wearing? How do you feel? What are you and Jesus doing? As you sit with Jesus, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you have been uniquely created to minister to others and to tell His story that never ends. Ask Him to show you, based on your life experiences, what it looks like for you to tell His story through yours. Write down anything you hear or see.

Application

The story of Stephen shows us the power of testimony, as well as the Holy Spirit's ability to empower and give us courage to speak the truth about who God is.

1. How comfortable do you feel telling God's story? What would it take to make you feel more ready to share your faith in Jesus with others and to give an answer for the hope you have?
2. Discipleship is costly. We are called to lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel, the same way that Stephen did. Although the culture and climate today are much different than Stephen's time, what makes you most afraid of sharing your faith with others?

Prayer

Spend time talking with God about any fears you might have when it comes to sharing your faith or telling God's story. Write your fears down and lay them at the foot of the cross. After each fear, put a line through it to remind you that at the cross Jesus died to set you free from that fear.

Now ask God to give you courage and boldness to share your faith and tell His story. Ask God to bring to mind the name of someone you can share your faith with. Pray for that person and for an opportunity to share faith with them. Record it below.

Worship

Listen to "Letting Go" by Steffany Gretzinger

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 6
Time to Shine

Discussion Questions | Week 6

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
2. What challenges or inspires you from the life of Stephen?
3. How comfortable do you feel sharing your faith in Jesus with others, and why?
4. What is one next step you can take to grow in your ability to tell God's story and share faith with others?

Week Seven

Skitter Scatter

Acts 8

This week we will explore how persecution helped to spread the good news of the Gospel in the early church. Read the following passage and underline any place you see persecution, then highlight anything positive outcomes that you see happen afterwards.

Acts 8

¹Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

Persecution Scatters the Believers

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. ²(Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) ³But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

Philip Preaches in Samaria

⁴But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. ⁵Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. ⁶Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. ⁷Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

⁹A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. ¹⁰Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One—the Power of God.” ¹¹They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.

¹²But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. ¹³Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. ¹⁵As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. ¹⁹"Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!"

²⁰But Peter replied, "May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! ²¹You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. ²²Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, ²³for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin."

²⁴"Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things you've said won't happen to me!"

²⁵After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

²⁶As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."

³⁰Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

³²The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,

he did not open his mouth.

³³He was humiliated and received no justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” ³⁵So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

³⁶As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” ³⁸He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you see as the correlation between the church being persecuted, the disciples being scattered and the Gospel being preached?
2. When the disciples encounter Simon, what is his profession and how is it in contradiction with what the disciples are doing? Why do you think Simon is so captivated by what Peter is doing?
3. What warning does Peter give to Simon? Do you see anywhere this warning is needed in the Church today?
4. How does the eunuch respond after Philip shares the good news of the Gospel? What do we learn about the power of the Holy Spirit in this interaction?

Supporting Scriptures

¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

-2 Timothy 3:12-13 (NIV)

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

-Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV)

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

-1 Peter 4:12-14 (NIV)

- *What do we learn about persecution in the three passages above? What are we called to do in the midst of suffering?*

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
-Luke 11:13 (NIV)

“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”
-Mark 13:11 (NIV)

- *According to the two verses above, how is the Holy Spirit described, and how does He help us in times of need?*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

Invite the Holy Spirit to sit with you now. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wants to teach you in the midst of this season. Remember God's promise that He works all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

Application

1. The early church grew through persecution. Have you experienced suffering in your life that God ultimately used for good? If so, write down the areas that come to mind and give thanks to God. Where are you experiencing hardship as a Christ follower today, and how might the Lord be using that for good? (It's okay if you don't have an answer to this last question. We often can't see what God is doing for our good behind the scenes, but we know He is always working on our behalf!)
2. Simon the sorcerer saw the power of the Holy Spirit and wanted it for himself and his own gain. Have you ever wanted power from God for your own privilege or position, and if so, how? Spend a few minutes reflecting on this and pray to the Lord.
3. Philip listens to the Holy Spirit and follows the call to hop in the Ethiopian's chariot to tell him the good news. Where might you be called to "hop into the chariot" with someone in your life who needs to learn more about Jesus? What is holding you back?
4. What did you read in Acts 8 that makes you excited about seeing the Holy Spirit at work in such life changing ways?

Prayer

Do you want to see the Holy Spirit more at work in and through your life? If so, spend some time in prayer asking God to move in the difficulties, the unknowns and frustrations of your life right now.

Worship

Listen to “Waiting Here for You” by Jesus Culture on their *Live from New York* album

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 7
Skitter Scatter

Discussion Questions | Week 7

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
1. Have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in and through your life, and if so, how?
2. Philip shared the good news of Jesus with the eunuch. Who is the “eunuch” in your own life, and who do you need to share the good news of Jesus with? What holds you back?
3. What is an area of persecution, suffering, or hardship in your life and how can we pray for you?

Week Eight

A Walk to Remember

Acts 9:1-31

Today we will read about Saul's life-changing encounter with God. Notice how drastically different his actions are after he comes to know Jesus. Read the following passage and underline all places where Saul acts for the good of the Church.

Acts 9:1-31

Saul's Conversion

¹Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. ²He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

³As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

⁵"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! ⁶Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! ⁸Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. ⁹He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

¹⁰Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

¹¹The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. ¹²I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

¹³“But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! ¹⁴And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. ¹⁶And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

¹⁷So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. ²⁰And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!”

²¹All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?” they asked. “And didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?”

²²Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn’t refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. ²³After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. ²⁴They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. ²⁵So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

²⁶When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! ²⁷Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

²⁸So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him. ³⁰When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

³¹The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.

Peter Heals Aeneas and Raises Dorcas

³²Meanwhile, Peter traveled from place to place, and he came down to visit the believers in the town of Lydda. ³³There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. ³⁴Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up, and roll up your sleeping mat!" And he was healed instantly. ³⁵Then the whole population of Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas walking around, and they turned to the Lord.

³⁶There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. ³⁷About this time she became ill and died. Her body was washed for burial and laid in an upstairs room. ³⁸But the believers had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to beg him, "Please come as soon as possible!"

³⁹So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other clothes Dorcas had made for them. ⁴⁰But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, "Get up, Tabitha." And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up! ⁴¹He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the widows and all the believers, and he presented her to them alive.

⁴²The news spread through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a tanner of hides.

Reflection Questions

1. If a friend were to ask you to describe Saul before he walked on the road to Damascus and afterwards, what would you say?
2. What do you find most shocking about the events that occur in verses 3-9?
3. What is daunting about the task that is assigned to Ananias in verses 10-19? How do you think you would have responded to this job?
4. List the things Saul does after being baptized. How might you have responded to Saul if you'd seen how different he was after his baptism?

Supporting Scriptures

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

-Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

- *How do we see Saul's change of heart through his actions in Acts 9:1-31?*

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

-2 Cor. 5:16-21 (NIV)

- *Where do you see Saul's journey in 2 Cor. 5:16-21?*

Listening to the Holy Spirit

We are going to do our own walk to Damascus today. Close your eyes and invite the Holy Spirit to be with you and to speak to you.

Imagine you are walking on a desert road. What does the road look like? Do you smell any scents? What do you see around you on the way? How do you feel in this setting?

As you walk down this road, ask the Lord what He wants to show you today. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see Jesus there with you, the way Saul's eyes were opened to see Jesus. Where is Jesus in this picture? What is He doing? Is there anything you would like to say to Jesus or ask Him? Do so now, and record what you see/hear/sense/feel.

Application

1. Saul formerly killed Christians before he became a disciple of Jesus, but when he decided to follow Christ his life was changed and he received God's forgiveness. If you are not a Christ follower, is there any sin or past mistakes in your life that you think God can't forgive? If so, write those down, and hear the truth that God will forgive those sins if you call on the name of Jesus. You can say yes to Him right now and accept Him as your Lord and Savior. If you are a Christ follower, how does your life with Christ look different than your life before knowing Christ?
2. Are there any ways you are potentially persecuting God today with your actions? Will you ask Him to reveal any area of sin in your life? There is no shame here; we all have areas of sin and Jesus offers us the freedom to live differently- to repent, or turn away, from ways that hurt us and that do not honor God.
3. Once Saul sees the truth, he starts out on a very different course of action. Instead of persecution there is preaching. The same old aggressive Saul is still there, but now he is striving for a different cause. In what ways can your areas of weakness turn towards a better/different cause? (i.e. You like to talk and have been known to gossip, but now you want to speak life and encouragement to people instead of bad things about people behind their backs.)

Prayer

Where do you desire transformation in your life? Write down your current struggles and invite Jesus to meet you there and transform you today. Just like He did with Saul, God has good plans for you, to give you a new hope and future (Jeremiah 29:11), and to use you for His kingdom. Ask God what His plans for you today are.

Worship

Listen to “You Won’t Relent” by Misty Edwards

Weekly Teaching Notes | Week 8
A Walk to Remember

Discussion Questions | Week 8

1. What stood out to you from the talk this week or from the WBS guide?
2. What inspires or challenges you from the life and faith journey of Saul?
3. If you are a Christ follower, what is one way your life looks different after saying yes to Jesus than before? If you are not a Christ follower, what keeps you from saying yes to Jesus?
4. What is an area of your life that God has been wanting to transform but you've been resisting Him or struggling to say yes? What would it look like for you to repent of your sin and say yes to God's transforming work in your life?