



EMPOWERED

The Acts of the Holy Spirit



PARTICIPANT GUIDE PART 3 - WINTER 2025



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LETTER FROM KURT

The book of Acts, in my opinion, is the most indispensable book of the New Testament. We have four Gospel accounts, 13 letters from Paul, and many letters from other writers which are all equally important. But Acts stands alone as a unique book unlike no other in our New Testament. It describes what the early church looks like, and prescribes what all churches should aspire to.

Acts is more than just a historical documentary...it is a personal narrative telling the story of God's followers. This narrative includes many scenes, acts (no pun intended), characters, and plot lines which lead us back to God. There is one person who ties everything together and is woven throughout the narrative as the main character with the leading role..and it may not be who you think it is.

Luke wrote the book of Acts, but he rarely mentions himself. Peter and John were the pillars of the early church, but they take a back seat in this story. Over half of the narrative follows the life and journey of the Apostle Paul, but he is still not the most important person in the book.

The main character in the book of Acts is the person of the Holy Spirit! You see his presence, power, and influence throughout every story and plot twist. Before Jesus left, he promised his followers something better was coming...the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).

We learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and how he operates in the book of Acts than any other book in the Bible. In this book, we see the power of the Holy Spirit and how he empowered followers of Jesus to accomplish the will of God (Acts1:8).

It is my hope and prayer throughout this LIFE Group season, you not only learn about Jesus and his first followers...but you receive, follow and EMPOWERED by the Holy Spirit!

May God bless,

Kurt Charlton



Lead Minister

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

The purpose of this guide is to help you dive deeper into the book of Acts and the works of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON NOTES:

Bring this workbook to church each Sunday. As you listen to the sermon, make a note when you hear something that surprises you, intrigues you, bothers you, challenges you, or encourages you. Use this as a starting point for your group discussion.

ACTS OVERVIEW:

Each week, we will provide extra insight into the background of the text as you begin your own study. These notes are meant to help the scriptures come alive for us. They will add a depth of meaning and help us see the continuity of the central themes throughout the book of Acts.

CONNECT QUESTIONS:

These questions will help you and your group members become more comfortable with talking and sharing with each other. Not only will you learn more about one another, the questions will help to steer the discussion in the direction of the topic.

DIGGING IN:

These questions are the “meat” of the discussion and will point back to the sermon each week. Feel free to read and answer the questions before your group meets. They will also help you dig deeper into the Scriptures during your group discussions.

CHANGE QUESTIONS:

Conviction leads people to significant actions. At the end of Jesus’ most famous sermon, he says if you do not put his words into practice, then you are a fool (Matthew 7:24-27). Life transformation is the ultimate goal of a follower of Christ. This happens through personal reflection and a genuine response to what you have heard from God. Feel free to answer the questions out loud when your leader reads them or you can quietly reflect and write a response in your workbook. This is the time to go deep and make it personal!

WRAP UP:

This section is a summary of that week's study.

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER:

Please focus this time on your own personal praises and requests instead of listing all of the bad things that happened to someone you know. We challenge you to get “deep” with one another relationally, which means becoming a little bit vulnerable as you are honest with one-another.

LEADER LEARNING:

This information may help you in preparing for the material you will be leading and anticipate some of the questions the group may ask. This section will not appear in the student’s workbook.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS:

INTRODUCTION

Acts is written by Luke, the physician, who is the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Luke covertly includes himself into the narrative a few times by saying we/us. The Gospel of Luke is episode one; Acts is episode two. The movement of the church in Acts follows the general flow of Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8; Jerusalem (Acts 1:1-8:1a); Judea/Samaria (Acts 8:1b-12:25); Ends of the world (Acts 13-28).

MAJOR THEMES

- HOLY SPIRIT (and his power)

Holy Spirit is mentioned 56 times, which is more per chapter than any other book of the Bible. He is responsible for every major turning point in the narrative. (1:2; 1:8; 2:1-4; 4:28-31; 5:32; 8:15-17; 10:44-46; 11:15; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6; 19:4-6; 20:22)

- PERSECUTION (and its results)

Early Christians suffered intense persecution, but Luke always records the positive attitudes and results. (4:3-4; 4:23-24; 5:40-42; 8:1-4; 11:19-21; 12:1-19; 14:1-7; 14:8-22; 16:25-34; 18:1-8; 21:11)

- BAPTISM (and its importance)

Baptism was clearly commanded as a response to faith in Jesus (2:38) and was the common practice for all new believers. (2:37-41; 8:5-13; 8:36-38; 9:10-12; 9:17-19; 10:47-48; 16:13-15; 16:27-34; 18:5-8; 19:1-5; 22:14-17)

- THE CHURCH (and its ups/downs)

Luke gives church summary statements like a narrator who wants to inform the readers of what they missed in-between each scene. (2:42-27; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 5:42; 6:7; 9:31; 12: 24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:19-20)

- PRAYER (and its effects)

Prayer is intentionally scattered throughout the entire narrative. It is almost like a supporting character beside the Holy Spirit. (1:14; 1:21; 4:31; 6:6; 9:40; 10:1-9; 12:12; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8)

DESCRIPTIVE VS. PRESCRIPTIVE

Be careful not to read the book of Acts as a prescription for how every single church should operate today. There are times when Luke is merely describing the events as they unfold. It is up to us to interpret and apply what these descriptions mean for us today. One way to do this is to seek the underlying principle that is described, and then turn that into a principle for life.

Should we cast lots or draw names out of a hat when choosing leaders for our church? Should we meet together every single day of the week? Should we sell all of our possessions and give our money to the poor? Should we speak in tongues when we accept the Holy Spirit? These are examples of descriptions not prescriptions for everyone, everywhere.

An example of turning a description into a principle can be found in Acts 2:42. Luke says the first converts devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship. The principle for our lives today is: we us in we should be devoted to God's Word and to living in community with other Christ followers. Acts 2:46 says they met daily in the temple courts and in homes. The principle for us is we should regularly gather corporately and privately with other believers.



*And they were
all filled with
the Holy Spirit
and spoke the
word of God boldly.*

Acts 4:31

WEEK 13 - CHANGED MOTIVES

TEXT

Acts 8:4-25 NIV

Philip in Samaria

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

Simon the Sorcerer

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” ¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

¹⁴ When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money ¹⁹ and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰ Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³ For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

²⁴ Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

²⁵ After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Acts Overview

WHICH PHILIP?

There are two main Philips in the New Testament: Philip the Disciple/Apostle, and Philip the Evangelist. Most likely, Acts 8 speaks of Philip the Evangelist, not Philip the Disciple/Apostle (Acts 1:13) Acts 6 names Philip the Evangelist as one of the seven deacons chosen to distribute food, which indicates Philip was not an Apostle. Also, Acts 8:14-17 indicates this Philip was not an Apostle since the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem and needed to send Peter and John to confirm the conversions of the Samaritans.

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

In the book of Acts, we see what is referred to as "Apostolic Authority." The first spread of the Gospel, the unleashing of the Holy Spirit, and the theology of early Christians were all tied to the 12 Apostles. This is why the Apostles had to confirm that the Samaritans could receive the Holy Spirit.

It seems odd to read that these early Samaritan believers were baptized, but they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. When the Apostles heard the Samaritans were accepting Jesus in large numbers, they sent Peter and John to confirm it and to unleash the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see authority decentralizing. The Apostles' authority comes to a climax in Acts 15 where the Jerusalem council (including the 12 Apostles) acknowledged the Holy Spirit and salvation were given to the Gentiles without prior conversion to Judaism. After this, the leadership structure of the church is decentralized and localized throughout the rest of Acts and the New Testament.

MAGIC, MYSTICISM, OCCULT

There are only two places supernatural power can come from: God and Satan. Many people argue occult practices and sorcery are mere tricks and scams. This may be true for many fortune-tellers, divinations, and spells. But at its core, there is the possibility of real power in these dark arts. Simon is proof of this.

Simon practiced sorcery and amazed all the people of Samaria (8:9). He even claimed his power was from God. But when he saw the real power of God, he was amazed and astonished (8:13). There is real power in dark magic, but there is greater power in the Holy Spirit. Christians should not be fearful of dark powers, but we should be very cautious with anything not directly from God.

From Harry Potter, to Star Wars, to ghost/demon movies, to almost any Disney story, we see magic, mysticism, or the occult being pushed all around us. Some view entertainment involving mystical powers as teaching opportunities, while others avoid it altogether. The caution is to be careful and aware. Innocent entertainment can lead to curiosity, which can lead to experimentation, which can lead to sinful acceptance and support of Satanic power. Today, there is even a Satanic Bible written by Anton LeVey, the founder of the church of Satan here in America.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. **When have you ever been amazed by a magic show or magician?**
2. **Do you believe that people today see any harm in witchcraft or the occult?**
3. **Have you ever been in the presence of dark powers?**

DIGGING IN

1. **Read Acts 8:4-8. Traditionally, why would going to Samaria have been difficult for Philip?**
2. **Why do you think the Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit when they were baptized? (See pg. 9 "Apostolic Authority")**

- 3. What do these scriptures tell us about sorcery, demons, dark magic, or the occult?**
- a. Acts 8:9-11 -

 - b. 1 Samuel 28:7-14 -

 - c. Mark 5:1-5 -

 - d. Acts 19:13-16 -
- 4. Consider Acts 8:18-25. What were Simon's motives for becoming a Christian? Why do you think he asked for the power of the Holy Spirit?**
- 5. What descriptions does Peter give about Simon after he asked to buy the power of the Holy Spirit? What instructions did he give to Simon?**

6. The story of Simon shows the need for continual spiritual growth, especially for new believers. What is a belief or attitude you have grown in since becoming a Christian?

CHANGE

1. When have you had the wrong motives in your actions as a Christian?
2. Are there areas of your life where you have allowed yourself to be too close to powers that are evil?
3. Where is your Samaria? Where do you know you need to talk about Jesus, but being there is not easy for you?

WRAP UP

When we come to Christ, not every part of us changes immediately. Simon's basic motivation in life had not changed. He still selfishly wanted attention and notoriety. He wanted to be able to demonstrate power over others. Our motives need to change once we come to Christ. Christ's ways must become preeminent, and our motives must fade. Peter reprimanded Simon for trying to follow an old way of life while pretending to be sold out to Jesus. We must substitute the new way of life for the old including our motives.

CARE

- **How can we pray for each other?**
- **How can we pray for our church?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES

WEEK 14 - CHANGED UNDERSTANDING

TEXT

Acts 8:26-40 NIV

Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ^[37] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Acts Overview

ISAIAH POINTS PEOPLE TO CHRIST:

There are 100 different prophecies about Jesus in the book of Isaiah. More than any other book in the Old Testament, Isaiah specifically predicts the coming of Christ. From the virgin birth to the suffering of the Savior on the cross, there is no better book than Isaiah to find fulfilled prophecies of Jesus.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SALVATION:

BELIEVE:

- John 3:16 NIV - *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- 1 Thessalonians 4:14 NLT - *For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.*

CONFESS:

- Matthew 10:32 KJV - *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*
- Romans 10:9 NLT - *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

REPENT:

- Acts 3:19-20 NLT - *Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord.*

BE BAPTIZED:

- Acts 2:38 NIV - *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
- Romans 6:4-5 NLT - *For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.*

REMAIN FAITHFUL:

- 1 Corinthians 15:2 NIV - *By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*
- Revelation 2:10 NLT - *Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.*

IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

We do not know everything Philip and the eunuch talked about, but since the eunuch spontaneously asked to be baptized, we see the importance of baptism. This story is iron-clad evidence that water-baptism by immersion was included in the Gospel message.

PREPARATION, NOT PRESENTATION

There is a fine line between being prepared to share the Gospel with someone and being over-prepared. Talking to someone about their faith in God is not a formula or code that can be entered into a computer and always result in the intended output. We should be prepared and know what we might say, but not over-rehearsed. Our conversation should be just that, a two-way conversation. It should not be a memorized presentation that comes off like a salesperson reading a script. See 1 Peter 3:15.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **What is your ideal way to travel?**
2. **What do you like to listen to on long road trips?**
3. **Are you a talker when you travel, or the silent companion type?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **Read Acts 8:26-29. How exact were the Holy Spirit's directions to Philip? Have you ever felt led by the Spirit to talk to someone?**

7. **What does vs. 39 show us about baptism? Why do you think Philip was taken away at this exact moment?**

CHANGE

1. **How can you prepare to share the Gospel with someone?**
2. **What Scriptures do you need to memorize so you are prepared to share the Gospel?**
3. **Do you pray for the Holy Spirit to make divine appointments for you to share with others?**

WRAP UP

The Ethiopian needed a change in understanding. He was a willing follower of God already, but he didn't know Jesus. Many of those that we encounter today may consider themselves believers in God, but they may not really know Jesus. Jesus is the best topic we have to share with people for presenting the gospel. Jesus displays all the attributes of God as he walked here on earth. The fact that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53 and a passage about Jesus made sharing Jesus easy. Philip began where the Ethiopian already was. Philip began with what his audience understood, and he added to that more understanding.

CARE

- **How can we pray for each other?**
- **How can we pray for our church?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES

WEEK 15 - CHANGED PASSION (ALLEGIANCE)

TEXT

Acts 9:1-19a

Saul's Conversion

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

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

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Acts Overview

SAUL TO PAUL

Paul did not have a “Saul to Paul” moment as many people like to think. His name was always Saul, and his name was always Paul. He would have been given both names at birth, which was common for Jews who were Roman citizens. His Hebrew name was Saul, and his Roman name was Paul. He would have only used Paul when dealing with the Romans. The transition to be solely known as Paul happened later in his life and would have been a conscious decision to, in a way, renounce his prestigious Jewish heritage.

Luke continues to call him “Saul” in Acts 11, 12, and 13. Acts 13:9 is a transition verse where Luke explains Paul went by both names. Paul is used for the rest of Acts and the rest of Paul’s life. (We will use his name interchangeably throughout these lessons.)

WHO WAS ANANIAS

The only other place we read about Ananias is in Acts 22:12 where Paul retells his conversion story. Paul says Ananias was *“a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.”* In Acts 22:16 we see it was Ananias who told Paul he needed to be baptized: *“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”* This is definitely not the same Ananias from Acts 5 who was married to Sapphira.

ROMAN CITIZEN

Saul was born as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28), which was very rare. It was even more rare for a devout Jew to be a Roman citizen. It is estimated that only 10% of those living under Roman occupation were citizens. Citizenship was either purchased at a high price or earned by serving in the Roman army for 25 years.

Roman citizens were given special rights and protections not afforded to others under Roman rule. Later in Acts, Paul invokes his rights just before he is beaten by a Roman guard (Acts 22:25-27). He also uses his citizenship to appeal his trial before Caesar, Emperor Nero (Acts 25:10-11). Paul’s dual status and cultural background makes him the perfect man to be God’s *“chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.”* (Acts 10:15)

SAUL'S COMMISSION (ACTS 9:15)

Saul was given a mission statement which he lived by for the rest of his life and ministry. It is interesting to note this came through a vision to Ananias, which was then delivered to Saul. It did not come directly from Jesus to Saul himself.

“What is important to notice in this is Saul’s commission to the Gentiles does not exclude or reject the Jews. In fact, as Paul the Apostle will assert in his letter to Christians in Rome, the Gospel is *‘first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.’*” (Dean Pinter, *Acts*, pg. 226)

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **Who do you personally know whose life has changed radically because of Jesus?**
2. **What view or opinion do you have now that is different from what you had 10 or more years ago?**
3. **Who or what influenced you to change your view or opinion?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **Read Acts 9:1-2. What was Saul's motivation for persecuting the Christians?**

7. How do Ananias's words in vs. 17 show his faith in God's ability to convert and restore people?

CHANGE

1. Have you been baptized? What are you waiting for?

2. How does Saul's conversion and Ananias's obedience inspire you to serve God?

3. Who is someone you can pray for and seek to speak to about Jesus?

WRAP UP

The gospel of Jesus calls us to change. It is more than just a matter of belief. There is a life we are called to live, and that life is different than the life we live on our own. Saul's life needed a practical transformation, first in allegiance. He needed to begin following Jesus instead of exterminating Jesus. But his life also needed to change in behavior: from defending a religion to speaking for Jesus, from violently pursuing and hurting those he viewed as wrong to compassionately pursuing those who were wrong by not knowing Christ. Every life can change: Saul is proof.

CARE

- **How can we pray for each other?**
- **How can we pray for our church?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES

WEEK 16 - CHANGED ACCEPTANCE

TEXT

Acts 9:19b-31

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

¹⁹ Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

²³ After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Acts Overview

REACTIONS TO SAUL

The emphasis of this section of Scripture is more about the reactions to Saul’s conversion and transformation than it is about his actual change. Jews and Christians alike were astonished and bewildered by Saul’s dramatic transformation. This shows human nature is skeptical of certain conversions, but it also shows the power of God to prove a genuine conversion has taken place.

EVANGELISM RESEARCH

Information taken from “Sharing Faith is Increasingly Optional to Christians” May 15, 2018, barna.com:

In 1993, 89% of Christians believed it was THEIR responsibility to share their faith with others. In 2018, that number dropped to 64%. The research goes on to say that people are much less likely to use Scripture when doing personal evangelism [59% down to 37%]. Christians today are also less likely to engage in discussion that challenges the beliefs of the person they are trying to reach [43% to 24%]. Christians today feel there are more social barriers when evangelizing.

On the other hand, non-Christians report they are unreceptive to hearing about someone’s faith, according to the Barna research group, because they find believers to be “disrespectful” or “judgmental.” The researchers conclude, “The unfortunate reality is that most adults don’t seem to connect their everyday experiences with their faith. Or, at least, they aren’t talking about it if they do.”

Perhaps the reason for a drop in the personal responsibility for evangelism is churchgoers believe it is the job of the church and the pastors to evangelize.

TIMELINE

Although it seems to happen quickly in Luke’s description, Acts 9 actually covers quite a few years of time. Saul’s conversion took place about 35AD, which was about five years after Jesus’ death. After Saul escapes from Damascus (Acts 9:25), Luke records Saul went to Jerusalem. This is true, but Luke skips over a large timeline in Saul’s life. Paul recounts his conversion and timeline afterwards in Galatians 1:13-24. According to his own account, there was a three-year gap between Acts 9:23 and Acts 9:24.

After Saul escaped from Damascus, he spent three years in the Arabian wilderness and THEN he went to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles Peter and James. After he was forced out of Jerusalem, Paul went back to his hometown of Tarsus until Barnabas came to find him (Acts 11:25-26). Paul did not return again to Jerusalem until 14 years after he was forced out.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **What is something you are passionate about which you could talk about for days?**
2. **What is something others are passionate about that bores you when the subject comes up?**
3. **Can you name a celebrity whom you have heard is a Christian, yet you are skeptical of their conversion?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **Last week we talked about Saul's conversion. This week was about his transformation. How are those words similar? Different?**
2. **Repentance means to stop living one way and to begin to live differently. What is the evidence of Saul's repentance?**

CHANGE

1. Does your life look drastically different than someone who has not been transformed by Christ?
2. Who can you be a “Barnabas” to and help them grow as a Christian?
3. Who is someone who can be a spiritual mentor for you?

WRAP UP

While Saul's conversion was immediate, his transformation was more gradual. Saul's fervor to speak out for what he believed did not change in him. He immediately began to preach about Jesus after his conversion to Jesus. However, the transformation of his life was not yet evident. Transformation takes time. Ultimately, transformation is the most powerful part of our testimony. Paul's effectiveness in sharing the gospel was not because of his grasp of the Law, but because of his grasp of the transformation God had done in his life. Ultimately, Paul was accepted because of his transformation. His life changed. Because of that change, he was accepted by the church. His message was accepted by the crowds. His ministry became accepted by the Gentiles.

CARE

- **How can we pray for each other?**
- **How can we pray for our church?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES

WEEK 17 - CHANGED LIVES

TEXT

Acts 9:32-43

Aeneas and Dorcas

³² As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Acts Overview

ONLY FEMALE DISCIPLE

Tabitha/Dorcas is the only female in the entire New Testament who is directly called a disciple. It is safe to assume there were other women who were disciples, but there was something special about Tabitha to be given this title. Luke boldly and unapologetically highlights the importance of women to the ministry of Jesus in his Gospel. He continues this trend in the book of Acts by including amazing women such as Mary-mother of Jesus (1:12-26), Tabitha (9:36-43), Mary-mother of John Mark (12:6-19), Rhoda (12:6-19), Lydia (16:11-40), Damaris (17:16-34), and Priscilla (18:1-28).

WHY INCLUDE THESE STORIES?

Excerpts from Dean Pinter, *Acts*, pg. 240:

This section serves as a bridge between the two most important conversion stories in the book of Acts, possibly the New Testament: Saul (9:1-31) and Cornelius (10:1-48). It reintroduces Peter into the narrative and establishes the connection between the mainline Christian church in Jerusalem and the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

These stories also provide a geographic, thematic, and theological preparation for what follows: Geographically, Peter has been visiting the homes of Jewish believers living in the coastal plain and prepares for the shift to converting the first Gentile in Caesarea.

Thematically, Luke uses similar wording, especially the words “get up” (9:34, 40) to weave common themes between these sections. The result is that others turn and believe the Lord (9:35, 42).

Theologically, a high emphasis is given to those who care for the weak, the outcast, and the downtrodden (2:17-21; 2:44-47; 4:11; 6:1-7). This sets the stage for Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (9:15-16) and the first Gentile conversion of Cornelius in the next chapter. (See also Luke 6:20-26.) Furthermore, both Tabitha and Cornelius are described as those who gave generously to the poor and those in need (9:36; 10:2, 4, 31).

SIGNS AND WONDERS

In these two stories, we see the miraculous powers of the apostles continuing. Up to this point, many of the healings have been performed on those without faith. But in this instance, we specifically see Tabitha was a disciple. She was already a believer. These miraculous signs and wonders were not reserved just for the unbelievers, but the news of these miracles affected the crowds regardless of the background of the person healed. For Aeneas, Peter healed him from paralysis, and all in Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord. Lydda was the town they were in; Sharon was the region around Lydda. After Tabitha’s resurrection, many in the city of Joppa believed in the Lord causing Peter to spend an extended amount of time there.

REFLECTING

- **Think back to the message on Sunday. What stood out to you? What did you discover that was a new thought for you?**

OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. **When have you heard a story so good you could not help but share it? (not gossip)**
2. **Have you ever experienced God's healing in your life?**

DIGGING IN:

1. **Turn back to Acts 9:31. How does this verse set the stage for Peter's ministry in the cities?**
2. **Look at Acts 9:32-35. What would you struggle with the most if you were bedridden for eight years?**

7. What effects did these miracles have on these cities?

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How are you drawn to the needs of others?

2. When has some deed you have done opened the door for you to speak about Jesus?

3. How can you be known for good in our community?

WRAP UP

The Spirit was evident in the work of Peter in these two cities. The Spirit was evident in his words as well. He was mostly evident in the changed lives we see in those communities. Sometimes the Holy Spirit brings about physical change in our lives. Sometimes the Spirit brings about a change of our allegiance as he turns us toward Christ. Sometimes the Spirit brings about a change of action in our lives as we begin to do good works. These stories demonstrate again the need for us to marry good works with good words.

CARE

- **How can we pray for each other?**
- **How can we pray for our church?**

ADDITIONAL NOTES

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