



Acts
Community Group Study Guide
and
Inductive Bible Study

Week 1

Acts 1:1-11

Read Acts 1:1-11

Jesus is alive! The Bible teaches this, showing it to be true on every page, and it promises he will return. Much like the apostles, we too have our own ideas about what we'd like Jesus to do for us (e.g., "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"), but Jesus graciously keeps the apostles-and us-on track. In the meantime, for those who are in Christ Jesus, God the Holy Spirit will come in power, enabling them to witness to others the powerful work of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

Community Group Questions

1. Do you believe Jesus Christ is alive?
2. Is the Holy Spirit living inside of you?
3. Who are you witnessing to about what Jesus did and taught?
4. Which proofs of Jesus' resurrection mean the most to you?

WEEK 1 INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In some ways, the story surrounding Jesus Christ can be difficult to believe. We seek answers to our many questions about the gospel--from Jesus' miraculous conception to his perfect sinless life. If he was God, how could he die? And if he

had died, how could he rise? These questions have been asked by countless numbers of people for more than two thousand years.

Can you imagine experiencing these events in person? Hearing rumors about a man who truly believes he is God? Luke, author of the Gospel of Luke, was an educated doctor who was on a mission to find out the facts and record the truth about Jesus. With information proliferating by letter and word of mouth, the stories of these unbelievable experiences needed to be recorded and heard by God's people.

Originally, Luke's Gospel and Acts were one piece of writing; eventually, they were divided into two books at an unknown period of time. The gospel set the stage for how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus would prepare the apostles, the people chosen by Jesus to start the early church, the spread his message to the ends of the earth.

Written in approximately AD 70, the book of Acts most distinctively consists of speeches or sermons (i.e., about one-third of the total text) and provides journey narratives of the Christian missionaries who preached the gospel under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Acts gives us a picture of evangelism, persecution, community, miracles, and conversion. It presents stories of the unbelievable and the unplanned--a true representation of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of the apostles and in our lives today.

OBSERVATION

1. What was Luke referring to in verse 1 when he said "the first book"?
2. Who was this letter written to? What relationship did he have with the author?
3. Read Luke 1:1-4. What was Luke's writing style? What was his intent? How does it compare with other genres in the Bible?
4. What places and major events were referenced throughout Acts 1:1-11?

INTERPRETATION

As Luke introduced the book of Acts, he referenced Jesus' actions and the events that happened to him, providing a significant foundation upon which the rest of Acts is based. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he continued preparing the apostles for the work they would do once he was gone. They had already spent years by his side witnessing his teaching and miracles, and later in the book the Holy Spirit was sent to further help them in their missionary journeys.

1. How did Jesus prepare the disciples for life without him? Why would this have been so difficult for the apostles to understand?
2. Read about the resurrection of Jesus in Luke 24:13-49. The truths of Jesus' resurrection and ascension are pivotal to the entire foundation of Christianity. Why is this? What are some of the "many proofs" (Acts 1:3) that demonstrated he was truly alive?
3. In Acts 1:6, the apostles asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Why do you think they wanted to ask this particular question?
4. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles spent time "gazing into heaven" (v.10). Luke also uses the word *worshiped* to describe their reaction in Luke 24:52. Why do you think they had this response? As they stood looking into the sky, why do you think they were questioned by the two men in white robes?

APPLICATION

Recently, a dear friend lost her husband to cancer. Crying out to God, she wanted to know and understand his plan. Why do young men die? What is God's plan when disaster strikes? All of us are seeking answers. And yet Jesus reminds us in this passage that sometimes it is not for us to know the plan, but to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit today (vv.7-8).

Like the hurting, suffering people in our lives, we may not always know God's exact plan, but similar to the apostles, Jesus has given a directive to worship him and be comforted by the direction he has given through his Word. We may not see the end game, but we know that he is in charge, that he is good and that he has given us everything we need through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

1. When you think about the future, what plans are you desperate to know about? Do you ask God for his plan or insist on your own?
2. Instead of being faithful with what God has given us, we can look to the future for promised comfort, relief, security and provision. In what ways has the Holy Spirit asked you to be faithful with what he's given now? What things are you overlooking or ignoring?
3. God gives some people specific callings for their lives, but in general, he calls all Christians to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, regardless of their circumstances. One example from this passage is being his "witnesses" (v. 8). How can you grow as a witness to Jesus' work?

4. Since Scripture tells us of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, we know he is alive today. Why is this comforting? Do you live in relationship with Jesus as if he is alive? How would that look different?
5. The apostles demonstrate many questions and doubts as they process all they see and hear about Jesus and his plan to restore all things. They have ideas about what the coming kingdom should look like, but Jesus has other plans. What false kingdom are you putting your hopes in? How does that false kingdom get in the way of what Jesus is calling you to?

Week 2

Acts 1:12-26

Read Acts 1:12-26

How do you manage to respond to the difficult issues of life? We don't often have to face outright betrayal in a small group context, as reflected in this week's reading. But we can learn from how the early believers faced the problem. We must gather as a community to pray for guidance when God is calling his people to mission.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Does your group pray together?
2. Are you praying for your leaders and asking God to put the right leaders in place where there are needs?
3. What inhibits you from praying together?
4. What encourages you to pray together?
5. As leaders in the church leave, who steps up to the lead? Have you been called to serve?

WEEK 2 INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Love and loyalty. Faithfulness and devotion. Treachery and betrayal. Murder and suicide. Hope, expectation and restoration. Such are the elements permeating Luke's account of Jesus' death and resurrection and the beginning of the early church. The tension-filled drama draws us in, then reveals a new beginning. Luke's Gospel tells a real story, and it continues in Acts 1:12-26.

The early church was in its infancy, and Luke faithfully recorded the events following Jesus' ascension into heaven. Peter, the disciple who had once denied Jesus, whom Jesus exhorted to feed his sheep, now took leadership. The young church was facing a vacancy in leadership and was still reeling from the grievous recognition that one of their closest companions had betrayed Jesus. Peter pastorally guided them in understanding the circumstances and what had to take place in response. It's no accident that some of the first challenges facing the church were leadership decisions and dealing with the results of sin. God, who loves the church that Jesus died for, was preparing believers for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the future of his mission on earth.

OBSERVATION

1. Where had the disciples been in verse 12? What had they witnessed while there?
2. Name the men who were in the upper room in Jerusalem. What names are familiar to you? Who else was with them?
3. What were the people doing in the upper room?
4. How many were in the "company of persons" that Peter addressed?
5. What two observations does Peter make to introduce his comments about Judas?
6. How does Peter describe the story of Judas's betrayal in verses 17 and 18?
7. What criteria were applied to determine who would qualify as the twelfth apostle? Who was considered?
8. What two methods were employed to determine the chosen apostle? Who was chosen? Why?

INTERPRETATION

The Holy Spirit inspires Scripture, and as we study it, he reveals details that enhance and enrich our understanding of his intent. A close look at these questions helps us uncover some of the finer points of this passage that we might otherwise overlook.

1. The short Sabbath-day walk that Luke recorded suggests the disciples might have stayed in an upper room not far from the temple. Review Luke 24:50-53. What were the disciples doing in verse 53? How does this complement Acts 1:14? In what two activities were the people engaged? What does this tell us about the community of believers? What were they praying for? (See Acts 1:4,5,8) What can we learn from their example?
2. Read Acts 1:14, 4:24, and 5:25. The early church functioned as a community, not only sharing food and possessions but also oneness of agreement and purpose. The Greek word *homothumadon* is translated “with one accord.” Luke uses this word ten times, and it occurs only once elsewhere in the New Testament. What do these verses signify about the Christian community in Acts?
3. Read Luke 24:25-27, 32, and 45-49. What do these verses tell us? To whom do the Scriptures point? Now read Acts 1:15-17. Peter laid the foundation for replacing Judas by pointing to the authority of the Scripture. What truths do these three verses affirm about Scripture? What does this tell us about the character of God?
4. Jesus taught the disciples that Old Testament Scripture confirms God’s plan. Read Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 and compare these verses with Acts 1:20. What Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled in this situation? What does this tell us about God’s intentions for the church?
5. Review Acts 1:21-26. Following Judas’ treachery, the Twelve needed to be restored. Why? Why was it important that the specifications for an apostle were fulfilled? This is the last instance in Scripture of casting lots. Why did they cast lots? Why was the casting of lots no longer needed after this?

APPLICATION

1. The early church has much to teach us about perseverance in prayer. What are you bringing before God in persevering prayer? What gives you the confidence to continue?
2. How do you discover God’s will? It’s not likely that you cast lots! This passage shows us that the guidance of Scripture, prayer and common sense are three reliable ways through which we can discern God’s direction in our lives. Have you ever heard someone justify sinful actions by saying “God told me...”? How does Scripture reveal right action to us? (See 2 Timothy 3:16.) Do you consult the wisdom of godly counselors? (see Proverbs 11:14, 27:9) How do you pray to discern God’s will?
3. Judas hardened his heart in the face of God’s grace. Despite walking with Jesus, witnessing miracles, and seeing God’s redemptive plan unfold before

his very eyes, he was complicit in Jesus' murder. Reformer John Calvin says, "Judas may not be excused on the ground that what befell him was prophesied, since he fell away not through the compulsion of the prophecy but through the wickedness of his own heart."* What have you hardened your heart to, and how have you resisted God's grace? How will you repent? What lies do you believe? What truths will replace these lies?

4. All of the apostles named in this passage were witnesses to Jesus' ministry on earth and the amazing events of the early church. Many of them are never heard from again. Yet we believe they were faithful to the task given them. Most of us are not famous or renowned in any way. What is God calling you to be faithful to, even though it may not be remembered?

John R. W. Stott quoting John Calvin. *The Message of Acts*

Week 3

Acts 2:1-13

Read Acts 2:1-13

This week's Scripture passage depicts the wonderful scene at Pentecost: the Spirit's presence is experienced as a rushing wind and fire. Simple fishermen begin speaking in foreign languages about the mighty works of God while onlooking crowds are confused by what they see and hear.

No doubt this is a strange scene. But even more strange are the measures people take to avoid the truth that Jesus is God and that he came to save sinners. The crowd's version of making sense of the situation here is to believe that all those preaching in their own languages are drunk! That seems like a pretty unlikely explanation. Who's heard of a party where people drank too much wine and began speaking in languages they didn't previously know? Maybe this "new wine" was pretty special.

Those who have eyes to see will realize that the striking thing about this scene is God's desire for all people of every nation and tongue to hear the good news of Jesus. God will go to great lengths – including gifting believers with the miraculous ability to speak unknown languages – so that the good news of Jesus is proclaimed to all people.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

1. The Holy Spirit is associated with "rushing wind" and "fire." We don't often see God working in these kinds of ways, but even when we don't, the Spirit is definitely still at work. How have you seen God the Spirit move powerfully in your life and community?
2. How would you like to see him move?
3. Take time to pray for this in group.
4. What gifts has God given you, and how are they benefitting the church as you use them to proclaim the kingdom?
5. How do you specifically need power from the Holy Spirit to do what he's called you to do? Take some time to pray for one another in group?

WEEK 3 INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Have you ever attended a sporting event and watched a team or an athlete make a dramatic entrance onto the field or toward the ring? The Holy Spirit made quite an entrance in the second chapter of Acts. Imagine yourself waiting in Jerusalem with the other believers, wondering to yourself, *Who is this Holy Spirit of which Jesus spoke?*

Yet in the midst of pondering these things, they knew they had to get to work and choose a new disciple to replace Judas Iscariot. As they were gathered on the day of Pentecost, a sound like a rushing wind came from heaven, and individual tongues of fire came to rest on each person. The Holy Spirit entered the scene! In Acts 1:8, Jesus had declared that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, giving them power to be his witnesses. Events of this week's Scripture passage confirmed this very promise.

Now imagine how this event would have boosted their morale. The prophesied coming of the Spirit was happening in their midst. At last this small, defeated, ragtag, down-and-out group of believers were receiving the empowering of the Holy Spirit and would have everything they'd need for the mission Jesus had called them to.

While the Holy Spirit has been present up to this point throughout Scripture, it is here at Pentecost that his presence began to be poured out in an ongoing way rather than as a limited allowance for specific moments of ministry. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit was sent into the world to empower believers to live righteous lives and proclaim the gospel (John 14:16-17; Acts 1:1-8; Luke 24:49). He counsels and comforts believers (John 14:16; Acts 9:31). He teaches and guides believers (John 14:26; Act 8:29) He convicts of sin and leads them toward holiness (John 16:8-11; Galatians 5:16-25) He prays on behalf of others (Romans 8:26-27). And he empowers Christians to do the work they have been called to (Luke 4:18-19; 1 Corinthians 12:11). Pray that the Holy Spirit will be active in your life and that you will open your heart to his guidance.

OBSERVATION

This section of Acts is pivotal to the rest of the book as well as the rest of the New Testament. The disciples received direction for accomplishing the mission God had laid out for them as he blessed his people with the Holy Spirit, filling them with his presence and enabling them to witness his power to others.

Read Acts 2:1-4

1. When and where does this event take place?
2. Who is there?
3. What signs accompany the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Read Acts 2:4-13

1. Where are the devout men from?
2. Describe the two responses to hearing the disciples speak in other tongues.

INTERPRETATION

Some may correlate the “other tongues” spoken by the 120 believers at Pentecost to the passages on tongues in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. But the narratives in Acts and 1 Corinthians are divergent in their expression and purpose. At Pentecost, there was no need for an interpreter because the Holy Spirit enabled the speakers to communicate in the diverse languages of the hearers. The 1 Corinthians passages, however, specify that tongues need interpretation and are largely for personal edification and enhancing one’s connection with God (1 Corinthians 14:2).

1. Leviticus 23:15-16 commands the Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (a transliteration of the Greek word *pentikosti*, which means “fiftieth”), on the fiftieth day after Passover. Within Jewish history, this date is also known as the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1) Why do you think God filled the believers with the Holy Spirit on this same day? (For further study, see Matthew 5:17-20; Luke 24:36-49; Romans 8:1-11.)
2. Acts 2 has a mission-oriented thrust. In addition, it also presents a picture of the reversal of what happened in Genesis 11, where God used different languages to divide the people who are building the Tower of Babel. Acts 2 recounts these people groups and their varying languages being drawn together. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commissioned the disciples to go into all the earth and make disciples of all nations. (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). How does the believer’s sudden ability to speak in other tongues fit with these verses?

APPLICATION

There are various ways people respond to the biblical account of the giving of the Holy Spirit. Some are completely confused about the idea of a mystical spirit, while others can identify because they have felt his presence. At times, our lack of understanding regarding the roll of the Spirit, and sometimes poor teaching, can lead us to believe the work of the spirit is baffling or scary. We can be tempted to mock others experiences or safely try to figure it out on our own. Regardless, it's clear that as the Spirit worked in Acts, he provoked a response and drew a crowd.

1. Thinking back on your personal history, what is your experience with the Holy Spirit? How does your past history color your view of this passage?
2. What is your gut response to this text? Share it with the group.
3. When we trust in Christ for salvation, he gives the Holy Spirit to help us and bless us. (See the introduction to this week's study.) Do you trust in Jesus and his life, death and resurrection for salvation? If not, and you would like more information, please talk to your table leader.
4. In what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit work in you or in people around you?
5. This section of Acts often causes debates about the miraculous gifts. While it's true that God the Holy Spirit is at work in our present time, we can still miss the point of this passage. God has been at work throughout history, drawing all people to himself and making his redemptive plan known through fulfilling the prophecy in Joel 2:28. In short, God was ushering in a new era and gifting the early church with the empowering of the Holy Spirit. First, the Spirit brought Jesus' good news to the disciples, then to 120 Jews, then to Samaritans, to Gentiles in the surrounding area, and finally to the entire world. We are a part of the continuation of the Spirit's work in the twenty-first century. How have you seen the Spirit's work evidenced in your life? In your church community? In what ways has the Holy Spirit empowered you to help advance the proclamation of the gospel?

Week 4

Acts 2:14-41

Read Acts 2:14-41

Hundreds of years prior to the day of Pentecost, through the prophet Joel, God the Father promised to pour out his Spirit. The miraculous still occurs in our day, and some people are specifically gifted by the Spirit to see visions, dream dreams and prophesy. But don't miss the big idea: God's plan is to use these things not as ends in themselves but as the fulfillment of prophecy and as signs pointing to Jesus. The point is that Jesus Christ saves everyone who calls upon his name. Jesus died for our sins, was raised up by God, and has freed us from death. He now rules as King at the right hand of the Father. This wonderful truth cut its listeners to the heart back then, even as it does today. How should we now respond? What should we now do? The same as then: repent and be baptized. Obey God's call. The church grew from 120 souls to 3,120 souls in one single day! To see the Spirit moving in our churches like this is something we should pray for and joyfully expect until that "great and magnificent day" when the Lord returns.

Questions

1. Have you called upon the name of Jesus to be saved? If so, what is next? If not, what holds you back from him?
2. Those of you who have come to Christ, have you been baptized? If not, when is the next baptism service at your church?
3. Who, by name, are you praying will be added to our number?

WEEK 4

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The apostle Peter is a great example of someone who is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Having been a coward, Peter, full of the Spirit, was transformed into a

courageous man who gave some of the most memorable sermons in Acts. Peter had previously been an uneducated fisherman who internally battled his own doubt and failures. (Matthew 14:22-33; 16:22-23; 26:69-75). In Acts, however, we see a new man who unflinchingly confronted a group of Jews, directly accusing them of crucifying the Son of God, their Messiah (Acts 2:36). The Holy Spirit granted Peter the words to speak powerfully yet eloquently, piercing the hearts of the hearers, so they were convinced of their need to believe in Christ and be baptized.

OBSERVATION

This section comprises Peter's response to those who had just witnessed the believers speaking in other tongues when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers gathered for Pentecost. The astonished observers asked, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). Peter explained how receiving the Holy Spirit points to and proves Jesus as Lord and Christ.

Read Acts 2:14-21

1. Where, and with whom, did Peter stand?
2. Messianic passages are those that point to the coming of a Messiah. Use the cross-reference listed in your Bible to determine which Messianic passage Peter said was fulfilled through the presence of the wind, tongues of flame, and various spoken tongues that occur at Pentecost. In Acts 2:17-8, who were affected by the Spirit being poured out?
3. What wonders does God perform in the last days? Some commentators have noted that Peter was not just referencing the wonders of Pentecost, but also those depicted by the Crucifixion and in the book of Revelation.
4. Who will be saved when they call upon the name of the Lord?

Read Acts 2:22-26

5. To whom does the presence of the Holy Spirit point?
6. Whose plan was it that Jesus be crucified? Who crucified and killed Jesus?
7. Who raised Jesus up from death?
8. What Messianic prophecy of David did Peter connect to Christ's resurrection? See the cross-reference for Acts 2:25-28. In Acts 2:29-35, Peter made this connection real by comparing David's status to Jesus'. Where is David now? Where is Jesus now?
9. What verb was used in Acts 2:17, 18 and 33 for how God sends forth his Spirit? What does this imply about who God is?

10. What final Messianic psalm did Peter use to declare Jesus as Lord? See the cross-reference for Acts 2:34-35.
11. Who did mighty works, signs and wonders through Jesus? Who promised David that he would set one of his descendants on his throne? Who promised the Holy Spirit and poured out the Holy Spirit? Who has made Jesus both Lord and Christ?

Read Acts 2:37-41

1. How did Peter's audience respond to his message?
2. What did Peter call them to do, and what did Peter promise them?

INTERPRETATION

Peter addressed his sermon to an audience who had just witnessed the miraculous sights and sounds that occurred when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers gathered for Pentecost. He used this opportunity to point to Jesus as Lord and Christ because it fulfilled the promise that God would send the Holy Spirit after Jesus' resurrection. Peter focused on the fact that God would send the Holy Spirit after Jesus' resurrection. Peter focused on the fact that these miraculous signs were evidence of a good God who has a plan for his people and draws them to repentance.

1. Acts 2:17-21, if compared with Joel 2:28-32, uses a few words that are slightly different. Instead of beginning the citation with "and it shall come to pass afterward," it begins with "and in the last days it shall be," thereby implying the last days had begun. Describe the actions which initiated these last days. (See Acts 2:23-24, 32-33.) The view that we are in the last days is shared by the apostles throughout the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:11; Heb. 1:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18). How does living in the last days affect how we live?
2. While God planned and knew that Jesus would die and be raised, Peter attested that the Jews had crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men. How does God's plan and foreknowledge work together with people's actions?
3. Peter said this message is for "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Who works salvation in the believer? According to this text, what role does the believer have in his or her salvation?

APPLICATION

1. In his sermon, Peter declared they are all witnesses to God raising up Jesus and fulfilling his promise to send the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). Peter also showed that through the fulfillment of these three Messianic texts, "all the

house of Israel know[s] for certain that God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Christ” (v.36). Do you know for certain that Jesus is both your Lord and Christ? If you have any questions about what this means, or how it applies to your life, please talk to your table leader. We would love to talk with you more about it.

2. After his sermon, Peter continued to bear witness to Christ and implore the people to repent. Is any part of you resisting this message? How is God calling you to respond right now?
3. After receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter’s life was changed, and he boldly preached the gospel to all who listened. Do you share the gospel with those who will listen? If not, what prevents you from doing so? Pair up around your table and take turns sharing the Good News. Who will you share this Good News with next--a friend, coworker, or neighbor?

Week 5

Acts 2:42-4

Read Acts 2:42-4

This Scripture passage portrays the best picture of a small group—ever. As the early church grew, they devoted themselves to the Word, prayer, and fellowship, sharing meal after meal as they gave generously and watched God do amazing things in their community. These were not religious duties they were obligated to fulfill; these were things they longed to do, things they were *privileged* to do. The early church's example paints a clear picture of what today's believers should be devoted to (i.e., the Word and prayer) and demonstrates how we can practically love and care for one another.

Community Group Questions

1. This section of Acts isn't necessarily a prescription for Christian community, but it does illustrate what a Spirit-filled community values and how they care for one another.
2. Does your small group resemble the early church? How would you like your group to grow in light of this week's text?
3. What keeps you from experiencing community as the early church did?
4. Do you have any needs that could be met by other members of the group, or do you know of others in the group who had needs you can help with?
5. Have you seen someone saved by Jesus recently? Share this with your group and celebrate together.

WEEK 5 INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION In small group ministries, we meet not only for Bible study or to reflect on weekly sermons but also to come together as the people of God. The book of Acts reminds Christians of their roots as a church that gathers in “undivided devotion to prayer, to its missionary fervor, its fellowship and sharing, its mutual trust and unity.”

Acts 2:42-47 occurs in the shadow of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on those whom God called, adding three thousand believers to the church in one day. The people witnessed the love of God the Father through the grace of Jesus and experienced fellowship with one another through the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14). This week’s text shows us what the Triune God does next.

OBSERVATION

Verse 42 says the believers were “devoted to,” or “steadfastly attentive to,” the teaching of the apostles. They were hungry to learn about Jesus and to worship him. When the apostles, full of the Holy Spirit, preached Christ crucified, God worked with wondrous signs and miracles, and the people stood in awe of God’s greatness. These believers—the church, or the unified body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4)—could not stand having plenty while their new brothers and sisters were in need, so they sold their possessions and lovingly gave to one another.

In verses 42 and 46, the “breaking of bread” may be a reference to the Lord’s Supper (Communion), or it may just be a shared meal. Either way, they were experiencing life together—in large groups in the temple and in small groups in home—by eating, worshipping and praying together. Their fellowship flowed from a shared awe of God. Through their unity, the Holy Spirit was also drawing others and growing his church every day.

1. What was the “fuel” for the believers’ devotion to the apostles’ teaching? Why?
2. What response did teaching about Jesus, along with signs and wonders done through the Holy Spirit, produce in them?
3. How did having great awe for God change how they treated one another?
4. When the believers experienced this fellowship, what was the Holy Spirit doing to their numbers?

INTERPRETATION

The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, which comes from the root word meaning “common, having in common, sharing.” Acts 2:42, 44-45 describe what this fellowship looked like. We catch another glimpse in Acts 4:32-37. Here

the believers spontaneously responded to specific needs among them. It was not forced. As they experienced all that God was doing, they were filled with glad and generous hearts and responded by welcoming others into their homes and sharing all they had.

1. Read Colossians 3:12-17. Why do you think Paul told us to “put on” these qualities? What does love do to a community? Where does this love come from?
2. This perfect fellowship did not last forever. Read Acts 4:32-5:11. Sin ruined this unity and fellowship with God and others. How do you respond to conflict in community?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. *Koinonia* is translated here as breaking bread. How does taking communion reflect fellowship with Christ and corporate identity with the body of Christ?
4. In John 4:48, Jesus reprimanded an official for wanting signs and wonders. In Acts, however the believers witnessed signs and wonders as evidence of god’s work. What response did signs and wonders provoke in them? Was it sinful to base their faith on these? What else drew people to the early church?

APPLICATION

Abiding in Christ leads us to love biblical teaching, witness the Spirit’s work in our lives, and live worshipfully and prayerfully with other believers. Closeness with our Savior leads us to do things we never thought possible.

1. What prevents you from being hospitable? Is there something else you’re more devoted to that would keep you from hospitality?
2. The young church daily saw the deliverance and healing of sinners. Is this your experience? How does the busyness of life hinder seeing this?
3. What “blindness” are preventing you from seeing the needs of others? How does your love for possessions keep you from loving Jesus and others?
4. How is pride inhibiting your full enjoyment of Christ and your fellowship with other believers? Are you waiting for signs and wonders?
5. Are you tempted to believe you need the next bigger and better thing instead of recognizing God’s generous blessings in your life? Do you gratefully recognize his blessings in your life and respond by sharing them with others?

Week 6

Acts 3:1-10

Read Acts 3:1-10

In the Gospels we see Jesus having compassion for the sick and inform. Through the Spirit, the early church was also given this same power and authority to heal in the name of Jesus. Jesus continues to heal the sick even today, and he does it through his people.

This text also gives us a picture of an appropriate response to Jesus' miraculous healing power. A social outcast—a beggar lame since birth—is welcomed into God's family when Jesus instantly heals him. The formerly disabled man leaps up and down for the first time, praising God with joyful worship. Not only had his physical body been healed; his eternal soul had also been saved. This man asked for one thing—money—but God surprised him abundantly above and beyond his request.

God loves to give good gifts to his people. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, it's not that our desires are too strong, it's that they're too weak. We're like little kids in the slums who are content to make mud pies when we're offered a vacation at the ocean. Have you played it safe when it comes to asking God for the desires of your heart? Why?

Community Group Questions

1. We are not much different from the lame beggar. Though our experiences may not include miraculous physical healing, we all were in a state of desperate need prior to being saved by Jesus. If you have a story of healing (physical or otherwise), share it and celebrate with the group.
 2. Do you need prayer for healing? Have you asked your church elders to anoint you with oil (James 5:14)?
 3. Have you seen anyone healed before? Share with the group.
 4. This text gives us a clear picture of Peter's and John's intentionality with the lame man (v.4: "Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.')
- Is God calling you to this kind of focused pursuit—one where you clearly explain to someone the saving power of Jesus Christ?

WEEK 6

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

As Peter and John approached the temple gate to pray, they encountered a beggar asking for money. Peter wasn't able to meet the man's specific request, but instead he stressed the much greater value of God's healing and salvation over the value of money.

God's healing isn't just better; he also gives abundantly more than we ask for. The beggar didn't ask to be healed, since he believed he was incurable; he only thought to ask for what he needed to survive. But Peter and John's initiative demonstrate God's sovereign grace, acting through Jesus Christ, to rescue and restore those powerless to save themselves.

OBSERVATION

A multitude of miracles were performed after Pentecost, yet Luke singled out this one. Because the beggar had been lame since birth, it uniquely demonstrates the immeasurable greatness of Jesus' healing power and highlights the people's amazement at God's goodness.

1. What is the big idea of this passage?
2. What specifically is the lame man asking for?
3. What active words catch your attention in this passage? Take time to write them down.
4. What does this passage say about the authority given to Peter and John?
5. How does the lame man respond to Peter and John and to God?

INTERPRETION

Should we expect such miracles today? It may not be Pentecost, but Jesus' power is still evident in the church today. We should not be surprised if we hear reports of miracles. We serve a God who made all of creation and who raises the dead. What a mighty God we serve! Jesus' healing comes in many forms: he

takes away sin, shame, brokenness, and disease; he heals marriages and restores families; and the list goes on.

1. In verses 3-5, there is an exchange between Peter, John and the lame man. Four different verbs linked with seeing were used. What were they?
2. Through what name did they heal the lame man? Why is this significant?
3. How do verses 9 and 10 describe the people's response to the lame man's new condition?

APPLICATION

This miracle story is similar in style and structure to many in the Gospels, particularly Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-26. A dire need is identified and met in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through Peter and John.

The same power that was given to Peter and John works through us today. God invites us to be part of what he's doing by playing an active role in the lives of those who are suffering and in need of healing.

1. Read James 5:13-16. What do these verses say about (1) our role in the church toward those who are suffering, and (2) how the Lord responds?
2. We can't all identify with the physical needs of the lame man. But we can all relate to his feelings of helplessness. In what areas of your life do you hope for healing? Is it healing from the past? Is it physical in nature? Or perhaps you desire freedom from a deep sense of shame. Spend some time praying specific prayers with one another, bringing your requests to Jesus.
3. God used Peter and John to heal the lame man. Peter showed both great boldness and genuine care in how he approached the man (Acts 3:4) You too can be an agent of grace and healing in the lives of others. Who is God calling you to love boldly today?

For Further Study

Read Luke 15:17-26, as mentioned above, and write down the similarities you see between this miracle and the healing of the paralytic.

Week 7

ACTS 3:11-26

Read Acts 3:11-26

It's tempting to take credit for God's work in your life, isn't it? Once Peter had the crowd's attention, he could have easily basked in glory for the heroic act of healing this man's broken body. Instead, he clearly redirected the praise and gave center stage to Jesus. What a wonderful example for us!

Peter took the opportunity offered by this miracle to address the utterly astounded people, proclaiming to them their own unrighteousness and promising that their sins would be blotted out when they came to Jesus. Yes, God's gift of healing is amazing. But even more amazing is God's graciousness to turn us from our sins (v. 26) amid our ignorance of him (v. 17) and our outright rebellion.

Community Group Questions

1. Jesus was appointed for your salvation. Do you have faith in his name?
2. Peter was very bold in naming sin. What sins in your life need to be named, confessed, and repented of? What would keep you from walking in the light with your small group?
3. Verses 19-20 connect repentance with refreshing that comes from the presence of the Lord. In what ways have you experienced times of refreshing as you have repented?

WEEK 7

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The apostle Peter, with John next to him, had just healed a lame man who was lying in front of the temple. Immediately an astonished crowd gathered around

them. Peter took this opportunity to preach and proclaim Christ and attribute the power of the healing to Jesus, not to himself. This is Peter's second recorded speech, the first being at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36). Peter emphasized repentance and turning toward God instead of remaining in the ignorance of unbelief—the same ignorance that gave the Jewish leaders an explicit hand in putting Jesus to death.

OBSERVATION

1. Read Acts 3:11-26. Circle any unfamiliar words or names. Who are these unfamiliar people? What do the unfamiliar words mean?
2. Imagine the physical scene of what was taking place here. List some of the sights, sounds and emotions.
3. What tone did Peter take in his speech? What did he accuse the people of doing?
4. What did he exhort the people to do as a response to what had been done against Jesus?

INTERPRETATION

As part of his appeal to the Jews, Luke made a reference here in Acts to the story of Jesus being handed over for death—a story he also wrote about in the Gospel of Luke. Read Luke 23:13-25 to see the connection here.

1. How many different ways is Jesus referenced in Acts 3:11-26? Circle all of them. Why did Peter use different ways to address the same person?
2. According to Peter, what would be results of repentance? How would they differ from what typically follows a guilty verdict?
3. In verses 22-26, Peter referenced Old Testament prophets to further his appeal to the Jews. Why would this have made an impact on these first-century Jews? What big idea was he trying to help them see and understand?
4. In verse 16, a distinction is made between “his name” and “faith in his name”. What significance does this have?

APPLICATION

Those who witnessed the healing of the lame man saw a miracle happen right before their eyes. Yet they could not see the true power behind the miracle of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection. Peter spoke strong words to help them see the power of Jesus, the depth of their sin, and the ultimate forgiveness that comes from Jesus alone.

The truth is, all of us are blind to the power of God's work at one time or another. Instead of attributing power to the Holy and Righteous One, we seek the words, affirmation, and power of people to bring about the specific kind of healing or miraculous signs we have in mind for ourselves. Like the Jews in Acts, we are often ignorant regarding the responsibility we bear for killing Jesus with our sin, and ignorant of the joy found in turning from our ways and trusting in Jesus for forgiveness.

1. It is not always a sin to be astonished or surprised when something unbelievable happens in your life. However, the Jews in this passage responded in a way that proved they were not putting their faith in Jesus. Where do you turn in moments of disbelief or shock? Do you run toward God, or do you try figuring these out on your own, numbing out or turning to others for answers?
2. Have there been any people in your life who, like Peter, have spoken strong words that led you to repentance? What was that like for you? Have you been able to specifically acknowledge and thank them for allowing God to use them in this way?
3. Peter showed boldness, passion and conviction in calling the Jews to trust in Jesus and repent from their sin. He did not shy away from difficult words, but he also instilled hope through what he was calling them to. Are there people in your life God has called you to be bold with? Who can you pray for? Name those whom you are trusting Jesus to bring to repentance.

Week 8

Acts 4:1-22

Read Acts 4:1-22

Peter had miraculously healed the lame beggar by the name of Jesus Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, who is the sole source of salvation, the only name under heaven by which we must be saved. What sweet and encouraging words to hear from Peter. Jesus, born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, lived a perfect life on this earth, doing what we could not and dying the death we should have, providing salvation for unworthy souls. But like the Sadducees, some may not share the joy we have in Christ.

Community Group Questions

1. Before you heard the Word and believed, what deterred you from those who were teaching and proclaiming Jesus? If you're not yet a believer, share with the group what deters you.

2. Have you ever been in a situation where you tried speaking to others about what God had put on your heart, but instead you were asked to hold your tongue? What was your response? Why did you respond the way you did?

Witness

Take time this week to witness to others about Jesus' saving work in your life.

WEEK 8 INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Earlier in Acts chapter 1, prior to his ascension to heaven, Jesus told the disciple that in just a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem....and to the end of the earth: (Acts 1:8).

In Acts chapter 4, Peter and John, apostles of Jesus Christ, were taking their call very seriously. They traveled around Jerusalem, boldly healing the sick in the name of Jesus. They passionately and fearlessly preached Jesus’ resurrection to very large crowds, and many were converted. How could they possibly have the courage and boldness to proclaim these things to the very same group of religious leaders who had killed Jesus only a few short weeks before? It seems they could expect to meet a similar fate. The only answer is that the promised Holy Spirit had filled them with power and courage. Even in the face of real and present danger, they received boldness from the Holy Spirit, personifying the faithful witnesses Jesus spoke of in Acts 1:8.

As followers of Jesus, faith is the key to allowing the Holy Spirit to speak through us. This faith in itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The very same Spirit who empowered Peter and John to powerfully proclaim the gospel of Christ is given to followers of Jesus today. We are “baptized” in the Holy Spirit in the same way the early church was baptized, though we will likely never face the danger and adversity they experienced unless we travel to areas where believing in Jesus is a crime.

OBSERVATION

Reread Acts 4:1-22 and make a list of who is mentioned in this section of Scripture.

1. Who were the main characters portrayed in Acts 4:1-22? Indicate their role if it is provided in the text.
2. Which religious sect was prominent?
3. Who was the high priest at the time?
4. What appeared to be the main theme(s) of this text?
5. What did Peter proclaim in verse 12?

Now make note of the obvious facts that are stated, such as gatherings, actions, and key statements made in the text.

INTERPRETATION

Let's shift our focus and try to understand the significance of the events noted in this section of Scripture---why the people responded as they did and what impact this had on furthering the gospel of Christ.

1. Who were Peter and John speaking to when the religious leaders came upon them, and why were they speaking with this crowd?
2. Why were the leaders so annoyed? What wrong did Peter and John do in the eyes of the religious leaders?
3. What did this religious sect believe, as stated in the text?
4. What did Peter accuse these leaders of doing?
5. What action did the leaders determine to take with Peter and John, and why?

APPLICATION

1. Prior to receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter was timid, even cowardly, about his faith in Jesus. In what ways have you responded out of fear, like Peter did, regarding your convictions about Jesus? When have you declined opportunities to proclaim the name of Jesus by sharing him with another person, out of a desire for your own comfort? Does knowing how the Holy Spirit faithfully empowered the apostles give you new courage to face these conversations more confidently in the future?
2. How has your desire to be accepted, liked, and wanted by others influenced your witness for Jesus?
3. Peter and John were common, uneducated men. Unlike the Sadducees and Pharisees, they had not been given any kind of scholarly training. They were just everyday fishermen, but what a wealth of insight and understanding they gained as they walked and served with Jesus! Surely this kind of preparation was the best they could ever receive.
4. Have you ever kept silent in conversations because you felt you lacked sufficient education or Bible knowledge? Did you effectively discount the role of the Holy Spirit in these conversations by believing your contribution could not be of value? Was it difficult to believe the Spirit would give you insight, wisdom and understanding as promised?
5. Like the rulers, elders and priests who confronted Peter and John, we occasionally encounter those who intimidate us. Do you willingly give them

that power because you are committed to your own comfort and safety, or because you have made them out to be spiritual giants in your eyes? Have you ever asked yourself, *What could I possibly contribute to this relationship?* All people, even Spirit-filled believers, are still prone to sin and need the body of Christ to faithfully yield to the Holy Spirit's direction and influence on their behalf—for their own good as well as the good of God's kingdom and the furthering of the gospel. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict your heart if you are guilty of doing this; if he does, then ask for forgiveness. Trust that the Holy Spirit will meet you in that place of fear, just as he met the apostles.

Week 9

ACTS 4:32-31

Read Acts 4:23-31

Group prayer time can often seem predictable. Someone requests prayer for a sick loved one, another prays for financial needs, another for guidance in dealing with a difficult teenager at home. These kinds of prayers are totally acceptable, but consider the prayer said by the apostles in this week's Scripture reading. Certainly they could have prayed for all kinds of needs. But they are about to enter into a time of persecution; they see it coming. What's striking is that they don't pray for comfort or ease, and they don't complain about their persecution. Instead, they pray for boldness in their proclamation of Jesus! They also take comfort in God's sovereignty over all things (v. 24), knowing that the opposition they face isn't outside of God's control. God answers their prayers by filling them with the Holy Spirit and empowering them to continue their mission in the face of opposition.

Community Group Questions

1. Life can be complicated, difficult, and painful. Despite the scandal of Jesus' crucifixion, the believers acknowledge in prayer that all things are within God's plan and "predestined to take place." What is happening in your life right now that seems out of God's control?
- 2.
3. Do you ask God for boldness? If so, how does he answer your request?
4. Have you faced opposition in your witness to family, coworkers, or friends? How do you need God's help in this?
5. Are there people in your life with whom God is calling you to boldly share the gospel?

WEEK 9

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Sometimes it can feel like the whole world is against us; unfortunately, sometimes it really is! After the Holy Spirit had come to the early church as a virtual hurricane, sweeping in thousands of new believers, the believers were faced with their first source of opposition—the Sanhedrin Jewish religious council telling Peter and John to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. The apostles however, were compelled to continue witnessing to what they had seen and heard. With this threat looming large, Peter and John went to their friends and prayed with fervor that God would continue granting them boldness to speak in his name, with signs and wonders following. And God responded with shattering cosmic might.

This was only the beginning of persecution directed at Jesus' church; it intensified greatly in the coming decades. In spite of this, how did the book of Acts close? With a picture of Paul, late in life, serving, preaching and teaching “with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31)—that is, with the same boldness in the power of the Holy Spirit given to these early church followers.

OBSERVATION

1. Who did Peter and John go to when they were released from the Sanhedrin's custody (v. 23)?
2. What was their friends' first instinct when Peter and John told them what had happened (v. 24)?
3. What specific titles are used to refer to God and Jesus in the believers' prayer (vv. 24, 26, 27, 30)?
4. What psalm do the believers invoke in their prayer (vv. 25-26)?
5. What do the believers ask for boldness to do (v. 29)?
6. Count how many statements in the believers' prayer are about God. Then compare it to the number of petitions included in their prayer (vv. 24-30).

INTERPRETATION

Sometimes Scripture presents just the facts about what happened or what was said, with little or no explanation. Piece by piece, the attentive and earnest reader begins to see patterns that testify to an eternal, faithful God. Be exceedingly prayerful when you approach Scripture, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your interpretation.

1. Why was it so important that the believers preface this particular prayer by acknowledging God's sovereignty? (v. 24)? What, if anything, would be different if they opened with another attribute—say, “loving”/

2. Before the early church went to testify about Jesus, they testified to God himself about who they knew him to be and what he was like. Why was this important? Why not just start with a prayer for boldness?
3. Why do you think the believers quoted David's psalm in their prayer? What is their intent in doing so (vv.25-26)?
4. "Whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (v. 28) was a mammoth phrase. What past, present, and future events were the believers including in this "whatever"?
5. Were they asking for general boldness or a specific boldness (v. 29)? What is the different?
6. Why did they ask God to perform healings and "signs and wonders" (v. 30)? What did this have to do with the opposition (See Acts 4:14,16.) How was this different from the situation in which some of the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign, which Jesus rebuked (Matthew 12:38-40)?
7. What do you think God was communicating to the believers when he shook the room?

APPLICATION

Persecution, the need for boldness, the power of the Holy Spirit—none of these are exclusive to the early church. This astounding story in Acts is also a model for us today.

1. When Peter and John went to tell their friends about this big thing that had happened, three points stand out regarding their friends' response: (1) they listen, (2) they lift their voices to God, and (3) they do so together. It's a remarkable demonstration of empathy and intercession. How can we be more empathetic when our friends come to us? What kinds of things are helpful to do? What isn't helpful? How can we do this in unity?
2. On one hand, we know these early church believers demonstrated immense faith—they prayed, and God responded mightily. On the other hand, they weren't apostles and had no special rights and privileges. How are you stepping out in faith with expectation that God will show up in big ways?
3. We know cognitively that God is sovereign over the whole world, but what about practically in your life, in your own world? Can you ask God to do "whatever" he has predestined to take place in your life, your home, your job, your family? How are persecution and opposition not outside the realm of God's guiding hand?
4. In verses 29 and 31, the Greek word translated "boldness", *parrhesia*, is important and has a different meaning from its colloquial use. Specifically, it

implies an easy and open forthrightness, fearless confidence, and cheerful courage—like there’s nothing to hide. What impression do you think a non-Christian has when he or she hears about a “bold Christian”? How might this understanding of *parrhesia* better inform our witness to non-Christians?

5. This boldness to speak the word of Jesus isn’t derived from any special position or personal aptitude; it’s something given by God and is derived from his sovereignty—we stand only in his authority. In what situations have you had an opportunity to speak the Word of God boldly—i.e., plainly and openly? What enabled you to speak? What prevented you from speaking at other times? Are there aspects of your life and faith where this kind of boldness may not apply? What happens if we’re never bold to speak?

Week 10

ACTS 4:32-5:11

Read Acts 4:32-5:11

This week's reading offers a wonderful account of the early church's unity and love. But it also presents a stark contrast reflecting the deep stain of sin—sin so serious that it results in death. All sin leads to death, but for Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, the consequence of their lies and break with unity was immediate. Imagine the hospitality team's unique task during services that week—removing two corpses from the gathering place before kids ministry lets out!

Jesus died for his bride, the church, so that its members would be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:11). In this passage from Acts, we clearly see the early believers walking out this unity in Jesus. When this couple lied and risked dismantling the unity of the church, it was no trivial matter. And it is no surprise to see the Holy Spirit responding so swiftly to protect the church in its infancy.

Community Group Questions

1. How have you broken unity in the church?
2. If you have broken unity, what specific steps of repentance is God calling you to?
3. How do you trivialize or minimize your sin?

WEEK 10

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

What motivates your actions? Are you generous because you should be, or because others are watching? “For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). If we're honest, we'd have to admit we're all motivated by self-interest at one time

or another. But praise God that he gives Christians an undivided heart and a new spirit (Ezekial 11:19). As we're empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can serve others for God's glory.

As the Holy Spirit filled the early believers, he unified them in heart, mind, and deed. They demonstrated radical generosity with their belongings, and Barnabas is introduced as a model of Spirit-filled generosity. But just as Satan entered the Garden to tempt Adam and Eve, he entered the early church through the duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira. God's response to this sin is shocking, but he will not tolerate anything that threatens to tear down Christ's bride, the church.

The Holy Spirit used the resulting fear of the Lord, along with more signs and wonders, to add even more believers to the church. People from surrounding cities gathered in Jerusalem and were changed by the gospel, and like a river overflowing its banks, Jesus' name and glory would soon spill over the walls of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8).

OBSERVATION

As Peter and John defended the faith and the believers prayed for boldness, Luke wrote specifically about how the community was unified in everyday life.

Read Acts 4:32-37

1. In Acts 4:32-33, what four descriptions are used for the community of believers?
2. What were the apostles doing, and how were they doing it (v.33)?
3. How were the needs of the community being met (vv.34-35)?

Read Acts 5:1-11

1. Who are the characters in this section, both physical and spiritual?
2. Specifically, what wrong actions did Ananias and Sapphira commit? What sin did Peter expose?
3. How is the Holy Spirit at work within the accounts described in this passage (vv. 3,5,10-11)?

INTERPRETATION

1. Unity appealed to ancient Greek sensibilities. The Pythagoreans and Plato championed no private ownership, and Aristotle wrote of a friend as "one

soul dwelling in two bodies” This depth of unity is apparent in the early church. How do they display the fruit of Jesus’ high priestly prayer (John 17)?

2. In Acts 4:36, we are introduced to Barnabas, who will later play a major role as the Acts narrative unfolds. How was Barnabas described, and why was it important at this point in the story of the early church?
3. In Acts 5:3, Peter described the impetus for Ananias’ actions. What specific words were used to describe Satan’s strategy both then and now?
4. In Acts 4:35, 4:37, and 5:2, we see the repetition of what phrase? What does this description mean, both literally and figuratively? Why does Luke emphasize this phrase? Ananias and Sapphira withheld money, and because of their deception, where did their lives end (Acts 5:5,10)?
5. Peter described the sins of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:3 and 5:9, respectively. How did their sins differ?
6. There are several important concepts mentioned for the first time in this passage. Who did Peter say Ananias lied to, and what does this tell us about the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4)?
7. How were the growing numbers of believers described in Acts 5:11, and in what context?

APPLICATION

1. Barnabas is offered as an example of a person who displays deep generosity. Are generous people encouraging to you? Or do you compare yourself to them in order to stroke your ego, defend your actions, enforce your brokenness, or all of the above? Is God calling you to repent of comparing yourself to other believers?
2. What keeps you from giving financially in such a way that there is “not a needy person” among those in your church? How can you make practical changes so that you can be even more generous? In what ways are you resisting the Holy Spirit’s call to generosity?
3. In some ways, we are all an Ananias or Sapphira because we say one thing but think or do another. How are you faking it with other Christians? How are you faking it with Jesus?
4. Just as in the early church, God longs for unity among contemporary Christians, both within individual churches and across churches. What can you do to help unify your church? Do you need to repent of anything you may be doing that promotes disunity in the church?

Week 11

Acts 5:12-42

Read Acts 5:12-42

The miracles portrayed in Scripture could be called the fireworks of the Bible. And praise God for the amazing things he does in the lives of the saints! But if we're not careful, we end up missing the point of these passages. The gospel is never the sideshow to miracles. Rather, in Acts, miracles accompany the forward progress of the mission of proclaiming Jesus. When God does wonderful things in and among his people, it's no surprise that Satan shows up to harass, criticize and beat down. The fact is, the Christian life has both super-encouraging highs and deeply discouraging lows. God loves us, but Satan hates us. The more God shows his love, the more Satan spews his hatred. But remember that despite violent opposition, the same Holy Spirit who works these miracles is also empowering the church to continue in bold proclamation of the good news of Jesus.

We often cease teaching and preaching in the midst of far less opposition than the apostles ever encountered. What kind of opposition has kept you from sharing the gospel? Christians usually have no problem grasping that Jesus is their Savior. But we would do well to also remember that Jesus is king and leader, meaning his agenda for spreading the good news trumps anyone else's agenda to stop it. Certainly Christians ought to tend to their own affairs and live peaceable lives (1 Thessalonians 4:11), but there are times when God calls us to speak up and proclaim Jesus as King, regardless of the backlash.

Questions

1. When you witness, do you do so in the name of Jesus?
2. Have you ever suffered, in big or small ways, for being a witness to Jesus' greatness?
3. What joy have you found in suffering dishonor for the name of Jesus?
4. Have there been times when you ceased preaching Jesus because of opposition?
5. As we speak the truth, we will face demonic opposition to the gospel. Pray for one another, that the Spirit will give strength and continued boldness.

WEEK 11

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

This inductive Bible study is NOT intended for the community group. But it is a great opportunity for you to do some discipleship with a few friends in your community group.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

According to the World Watch List (www.WorldWatchLife.us), there are twenty-three countries in the world today where Christians experience “severe” to “extreme” persecution. Most of us in the western world have never experienced opposition of this magnitude, but being challenged for speaking the truth of the gospel is hardly uncommon, even for those of us who enjoy laws protecting our religious freedom. Whether it’s workplace policies that prohibit talk of Jesus, ridicule from friends and family for expressing our faith, or opposition to church involvement in local affairs, Christians are still often asked to remain silent when it comes to sharing the gospel of grace through faith in Jesus.

Up to this point in the book of Acts, life has been fairly peaceful for the early church. They were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, enabling them to spontaneously communicate with people from other nations. They witnessed supernatural healing of all the sick who were brought to their community. The church was growing in leaps and bounds with new believers being added every day. Other than Peter and John’s brief imprisonment and the subsequent warning to stop spreading the gospel, we have no indication that any physical opposition to their teaching had yet come. Miracle after miracle continued to characterize the apostles’ ministry.

Imagine seeing these amazing signs and wonders day in and day out....but suddenly something changes. The apostles were introduced to persecution at the hands of the religious and political leaders (i.e. the high priest and the Sadducees) for publicly preaching the gospel. It’s really no surprise that when God moves powerfully, Satan was there to oppose the church in every turn, using whatever means necessary to bring discouragement. The apostles were imprisoned; when that didn’t hold them back, they were again retained, and this time beaten. But their firm belief in the message of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins was stronger than their desire for physical comfort and safety. Even in the face of difficulty, the apostles pressed on, through the power of the Spirit, and continued speaking boldly.

OBSERVATION

Read this week's Scripture passage and make some observations about the apostles' message, the resistance it received, and how they were ultimately undeterred.

1. What message were the apostles teaching?
2. Why were the high priest and Sadducees so opposed to their message? Where were the apostles teaching, and why was this a threat to the council?
3. For what purpose did the angel of the Lord release the apostles from jail?
4. What kept the apostles from being killed, thus enabling them to continue teaching about Jesus? Why was this an unlikely way for them to be spared from death? (Read Matthew 12:1-13 and John 18:1-12.)

INTERPRETATION

From the beginning of time, God had a plan for the salvation of his people. While we can glean much from this section on its own, it is really part of a greater story---one that started long before the apostles arrived on the scene, and one that involves us today.

1. Read Psalms 65 and Isaiah 46:6. What has God's plan been for his people, both Jews and Gentiles, all along?
2. Read Acts 1:8. According to this verse, for what purpose was the power of the Spirit given?
3. What does this week's passage tell us about God's dedication to this plan? In what ways do you see the Holy Spirit actively working to ensure that the gospel was preached?
4. What assurance does this give us for our ministries today?
5. According to the *ESV Study Bible*, the beating described in verse 40 would have likely included up to thirty-nine lashings, with a whip made of calf's hide, on each of the apostles' bare backs and chests. Why do you think the apostles walked away from being scourged like this "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name"?

APPLICATION

Like the apostles, we too have the privilege of participating in God's plan to expand his church through proclamation of the gospel. And while it's unlikely

that most of us will experience the severe opposition the apostles did, we still expect to face resistance.

1. The same Holy Spirit who worked miracles through the apostles (vv.12-16) is the same Spirit who empowers Jesus' mission of bold gospel proclamation (Acts 1:8). How can you specifically ask the Holy Spirit to come upon you so you are the kind of witness Jesus is calling you to be?
2. Have you experienced hostility of any kind toward your belief in the gospel? How does your own salvation and conviction that Jesus is "exalted...at [God's] right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31) give you confidence to press on?
3. In what ways have you been fearful of sharing the gospel? Does the knowledge that the Holy Spirit actively works to bring salvation to God's people affect this?
4. In what ways do you relate or not relate to the apostles' rejoicing in the face of resistance?
5. When the church is on mission and the gospel is proclaimed, the church *will* experience difficulty. Our enemy is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Have you experienced opposition to the gospel? Personal difficulty or trials? Be mindful of the schemes of the enemy, and take time to pray for strength and endurance for one another.

Works Cited

Driscoll, Mark . *ACTS Study Guide 1-5*. Seattle: Resurgence, 2013. Print.