

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

LEADERS'S GUIDE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 - So, Now What?

Acts 1:1-11

2 - The Arrival

Acts 1:12- 2:13

3 - Peter Cuts to the Heart

Acts 2:12-41

4 - An Attractive Community

Acts 2:42-47

5 - Boldness, an Indicator of Spirit Work

Acts 3:1-4:31

6 - The Early Church in Unity and Conflict

Acts 4:32-5:11

7 - Fear Rightly Placed

Acts 5:12-5:42

8 - God and His People on the Move

Acts 6:1-7:53

9 - Stoning of Stephen and the Beautiful Aftermath

Acts 7:54-8:40

10 - From Persecutor to Follower

Acts 9:1-31

PRAY FOR FIVE

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

ATTENTIVE: God hears and responds to the needs of His children.

COMPASSIONATE: God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR: God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER: God rescues and saves His children.

ETERNAL: God is not limited by and exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL: God always keeps His promises.

GENEROUS: God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS: God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD: God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY: God is perfect, pure and without sin

INCOMPREHENSIBLE: God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE: God has no limits in His person or on His power.

IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING: God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

JEALOUS: God will not share His glory with another. All glory rightfully belongs to Him.

JUST: God is fair in all his actions and judgments. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING: God feels and displays infinite unconditional affection toward His children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response or merit.

MERCIFUL: God does not give His children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY: God holds all power. Nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

OMNIPRESENT: God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT: God knows everything, past, present and future, all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING: God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER: God meets the needs of His children.

REFUGE: God is a place of safety and protection for His children.

RIGHTEOUS: God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT: God depends on nothing and no one to give Him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT: God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN: God does everything according to His plan and pleasure. He controls all things.

TRANSCENDENT: God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL: Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WRATHFUL: God hates all unrighteousness.

WISE: God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY: God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

Definitions from Jen Wilkin study of Matthew and “The ABCs of God” by Children Desiring God



WEEK ONE

*“IT IS NOT FOR YOU
TO KNOW TIMES OR
SEASONS THAT THE
FATHER HAS FIXED BY
HIS OWN AUTHORITY.
BUT YOU WILL RE-
CEIVE POWER WHEN
THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS
COME UPON YOU, AND
YOU WILL BE MY WIT-
NESSES IN JERUSALEM
AND IN ALL JUDEA AND
SAMARIA, AND TO THE
END OF THE EARTH.”*

ACTS 1:7+8

STUDY ALONE:

So, Now What? Acts 1:1-11

- 1) Verse 1 clues us in to the fact that Acts is the second half of a larger story. What makes up the first half (check out Luke 1:1-4)? Given that clue, what might this second half attempt to tell us?
- 2) What is the “promise of the Father” mentioned in v.4? Explore Genesis 1:1-2, Genesis 41:25-41, Exodus 31:1-5, Luke 3:21-23 to uncover truths about this promise and what it might mean for the disciples.
- 3) What do you think the disciples mean by their question in v.6? How is the question they are asking beyond their understanding?
- 4) Verse 8 is a powerful point in the story, and one that many of us know. In light of your brief study of the Spirit, how does His presence change the way the church was to go forth in the world? How does it change how we go about carrying the gospel today?
- 5) The ascension of Jesus was so crucial to Luke’s story that he wrote it twice, once in Luke 24:50-53 and here in the first chapter of Acts. Why do you think this is the case?
- 6) Staring up into the sky, the disciples are interrupted by men in white robes asking, basically, ‘what are you doing?’ They explain that Jesus is coming in the same way he left. In light of Jesus’ ministry and what we learn in Acts 1:3, what might these men be implying?

SUMMARY:

Write in your own words what is being said in Acts 1:1-11

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

In Everyday Church, read the sections “Rediscovering the Culture” and “Loving the Culture” in Chapter 2, p.42-46. Complete the “Where? When? What?” exercise for UNC and also list 10 things you love about campus/your neighborhood. Finally, ask God to reveal to you 5 people who do not know Jesus on campus that you will pray for this semester and write their names on the sheet provided.

WEEK 1 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

Welcome to a study of the book of Acts. Our goal is to come together as a community to gain deep understanding of scripture and gain tools for our mission as witnesses here on campus and in our daily lives.

Jesus sent his disciples out only after equipping them with truth and power. He did this equipping in the context of community. The disciples did not grow into their “sentness” alone, and we do not believe that is your call either. It is our intention and prayer that this community will challenge you and grow you in your “sentness” alongside others, and that the study of the word and the encouragement of others would spur you on to great faithfulness and service in the call to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Notice in your workbooks that each week includes a question that looks like this:

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

This is an opportunity for you to identify who God is and who you are in light of the scripture. We encourage you to use the list of God's characteristics also in the workbook. An example might be “Knowing that God is faithful shows me that I am able to trust him.” If anyone took a stab at that question this week, we would love to hear it!

QUESTION 1: What emotions or thoughts does realizing your role as a witness to the gospel surface in you? Why?

Read together Acts 1:1-11.

Read together Luke 1:1-4 and discuss what you learn about Luke-Acts as a work – namely that Luke is about the work of Jesus on earth and Acts is about the work of Jesus through the Spirit in the church. Luke sets up the telling of Acts by recapping the last acts of Jesus before his ascension. He talks of the promised Holy Spirit.

QUESTION 2: Share what people found - consider having different people read the different passages.

QUESTION 3: The disciples reveal that they still do not understand the nature of the Kingdom of God. Though they've been taught by Jesus, they continue to anticipate an earthly rule. They also don't see that in many ways, the kingdom HAS come in Jesus and in their ministry and the church they they are about to found in the power of the Holy Spirit. The restoration of the kingdom of Israel is a hope that Jews continued to hold. Their hope, as we have seen, was in many ways misguided. Here is a video explaining this breakdown in understanding and how the truth is actually far more beautiful and worth hoping for. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmFPSof-kzs>)

QUESTION 4: Discuss your answers. Since the Spirit has come upon us in power, which is true of all believers, what does that mean for our calling? How might life change if we took this calling, and the reality of this power in us, seriously? Challenge them to consider how and if they are conscious of the Spirit at work in and through them. Maybe even take a minute here to pray that the Spirit would fill and empower you to do ministry on campus this semester.

QUESTIONS 5 + 6: Jesus' ascension is crucial because it means that he did the work here that he needed to do and now he is at the right hand of the Father. Stop and consider the fact that there is a human at the right hand of the Father, who knows what it is like to walk on earth, and he intercedes for us. The ascension also means we move to a new wave of ministry, where men and women, filled with the Spirit, will carry forth the gospel. Jesus paved the way as a man and now passes the torch to his brothers and sisters here. The angels' question is essentially telling them to get moving! The disciples had just had 40 days of ministry training and it was clear that this was “go time.” Consider together how it might have felt to be the disciples at that exact moment. What holds you back from going?

EVERYDAY CHURCH

Share with one another one or two interesting findings in your “decoding” of campus. Also spend some time sharing what you love about campus and where you live here. Pray thanking God for these things and these insights and asking that He would grow your hearts for the community on campus. Pray that as your love for the people at UNC grows, that you would be compelled and empowered to “go.”

STUDY ALONE:

The Arrival. Acts 1:12-2:13

WEEK TWO

1) It may be tempting to skim through the first business meeting of the disciples found in Acts 1:12-26, but try to imagine you've just spent 40 days in intensive ministry training with the risen Jesus and you are waiting for something big he's promised and you just saw him ascend up into the sky. Now what do you do? Observe what the disciples thought necessary to do, how they did it. What do you learn?

SUMMARY:

Acts 2:1-12 describes the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Write in your own words here what is happening.

2) Read Acts 2:1-4 and compare it with Acts 4:31; 7:55; 13:9; Luke 1:41, 67; 3:21-22, 4:1. How do these uncover ways Pentecost was unique, in what ways can we expect to see the Spirit work similarly?

3) Explore Genesis 11:1-9. How might Pentecost serve as a reversal? Why do you think God chose to move in many different languages in this pivotal act of power?

4) Notice what the people were speaking of in many languages. What were the different reactions to this communal act of worship?

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

SPIRITUAL BREATHING - BILL BRIGHT

The moment you invited Christ into your life as Savior and Lord, you experienced a spiritual birth. You became a child of God and you were filled with the Holy Spirit. God forgave your sins – past, present and future - making you righteous, holy and acceptable in His sight because of Christ's sacrifice for you on the cross. You were given the power to live a holy life and to be a fruitful witness for God.

But the average Christian does not understand this concept of Spiritual Breathing as an exercise of faith and, as a result, lives on a spiritual roller coaster. He goes from one emotional experience to another living most of his life as a worldly Christian, controlling his own life – frustrated and fruitless.

If this is your experience, Spiritual Breathing will enable you to get off this emotional roller coaster and enjoy the Christian life that the Lord Jesus promised to you when He said, "I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly." As an exercise in faith, Spiritual Breathing will make it possible for you to continue to experience God's love, forgiveness, and the power and control of the Holy Spirit as a way of life.

If you sin by committing a deliberate act of disobedience, breathe spiritually. Exhale by confession. God's Word promises in John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word "confess" (homologeō) means to "agree with" or to "say along with." Such agreement involves at least three considerations.

First, you acknowledge that your sin or sins – which should be named to God specifically – are wrong and are therefore grievous to Him. Second, you acknowledge that God has already forgiven you through Christ's death on the cross for your sins. Third, you repent, which means that you change your attitude toward your sin. The power of the Holy Spirit will enable you to change both your attitude and conduct. Instead of doing what your old sinful nature – your flesh – wants to do, you can do what God wants you to do.

Now inhale by appropriating the fullness of God's Spirit by faith. Trust him to control and empower you according to his command to "be filled with the Spirit" which actually means to be constantly and continually controlled and empowered with the Holy Spirit.

According to His promise, God hears you and grants your request because you pray according to His will. I encourage you to continue to claim his love, forgiveness and power by faith and continue to have fellowship with Him moment by moment.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

QUESTION 3: Discuss how God's action at Babel in Genesis was an effort to separate man. This was clearly to save them from their own pride. Here in Acts, Pentecost seems to be an act of God to bring about unity. What does that tell us about God and the nature of his church that it began in many ways as a drawing together of all types of people from all races and backgrounds? Take a moment to praise God together in prayer for this reality and ask that we would see it more clearly in the church and in our lives today.

Ask what things stood out to the members of your study from the Spiritual Breathing excerpt. Discuss the difference in being born into the Spirit and in being filled by the Spirit and walking in the Spirit daily. Invite them to turn in pairs and practice spiritual breathing together. If they feel uncomfortable, of course they can do this in silent prayer.

WEEK THREE

AND PETER SAID TO
THEM, “REPENT AND
BE BAPTIZED EVERY
ONE OF YOU IN THE
NAME OF JESUS
CHRIST FOR THE FOR-
GIVENESS OF YOUR
SINS, AND YOU WILL
RECEIVE THE GIFT OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT.

ACTS 2:38

STUDY ALONE:

Peter Cuts to the Heart. Acts 2:12-41

1) The crowds are reacting to the great coming of the Holy Spirit, and Peter stands to respond with a sermon. Find the references and look up the passages of scripture he references here.

SUMMARY:

Outline Peter’s argument, noting how the scriptures he references contribute.

2) Peter boldly accuses the crowds of crucifying Jesus. What is the effect of his argument and accusation?

3) Note the order of events. The crowds first see the power of God in the falling of the Spirit and observe his people worshiping Him. They then hear an explanation of who Jesus is (using Scripture, a context they would already understand), and then they learn of their guilt and are charged to repent. What might we learn about evangelism from this order?

4) What two things are promised in Acts 2:38? How are both of these crucial to salvation?

5) Verse 40 states that he continued to encourage and witness to some in the crowd, calling them to repent. We also see that about 3,000 did repent. What comfort and what encouragement can we get from observing this result?

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Peter, filled with the Spirit, responded with clarity to the questions the people had. As we practice walking in the Spirit, we must also ready our mind with a clear presentation of the gospel. Write down a brief and clear description of the gospel you could give in 2 minutes, on a bus or before class starts. This will certainly not be comprehensive, but try to present the clear basics in hopes of further conversation.

WEEK 3 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

Using our actual words to share the gospel is something we are clearly called to. It is also something most of us say we are nervous about. What fears hold you back from presenting the gospel?

Read Acts 2:12-41

What connections can you make between last week's lesson and the content this week?

The sermon that follows Pentecost is in response to the crowd's reaction. The people are curious about what is happening with these people because of their joyful and incredible worship. They'd never seen anything like it, and their curiosity opened the door for proclamation of the gospel.

QUESTIONS 1-3: Have a few people share their summaries of Peter's message. You might start by sharing yours so people feel more comfortable.

Peter starts by answering the questions that the people have. They have observed the falling of the Spirit and they wanted to know what was going on. Peter used those questions to create a platform for the gospel.

He begins his argument in Joel 2:28-32. Read together and discuss why this would have been useful. Peter knows his crowd! Those gathered for Pentecost would have been Jews, so referencing Old Testament prophets would have made sense without much explanation. He uses the words of the prophets to show how this moment in history, and the coming of Jesus, had all been a part of what the prophets foretold hundreds of years before. This passage also serves to begin the invitation to salvation.

Peter then accuses the crowd of killing Jesus. He is simultaneously showing them that Jesus was the hope they had been waiting for and the guilt that they all had in his death.

Psalm 16:8-11 is Peter's next reference. What was its function? Peter compares Jesus to the ultimate Israelite King figure, David. He says, David, as far as he knows, is still dead. Jesus is alive! He uses this passage to show that David himself anticipated a Lord who was greater than himself and who would rule forever. Peter is making the argument here and in the following verses that Jesus is the one. He states that they are witnesses of his resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit, which the crowd had all witnessed, was also proof of his ongoing life.

Psalm 110:1 continues this argument, saying that David didn't ascend to the throne, but the "Lord" he speaks of here is Jesus and he is at the right hand of the Father.

Peter wraps up by saying Jesus is King and Messiah, and reminds them that they had crucified him. They respond with grief (obvious work of the Spirit here) and ask what they should do in light of their guilt. Peter calls them to repent and be baptized. He doesn't shy away from calling out their sin, and is equally as willing to present the forgiveness and gift of the Holy Spirit available if they repent. He says that this gift is for everyone.

QUESTION 4: Discuss the two promised things in verse 28 – forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Why are both so important, both for those hearers of Peter and for us today?

Forgiveness is important because of God's holiness and our sinfulness. Because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), we cannot escape death unless there is a payment for our sin.

The Holy Spirit turns our heart of stone into a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). The power of the Spirit living in us actually makes us able to obey God and love him. Without the work of the Spirit in us, we remain sinful and dead.

Transition into a time of gospel presentation training. Use Napkin Theology and/or the 4 Spiritual Laws to provide sample outlines and help members of your group be sure they have covered the important aspects of the gospel. Spend 20 minutes allowing people to partner up and share their 2 minute gospel presentation with one another. Close by asking the Lord to give you clarity to share the gospel and opportunities to do so.

STUDY ALONE:

An Attractive Community. Acts 2:41-47

“Obedience to Jesus- dying to self, doing whatever he wants in spite of the cravings of our flesh- renders liberty, with arms open wide, with bread and fish to give away, with a shocking recognition for the outcast and despised, remembering that we were once her. This was true when Jesus walked the earth, and it is true today, in our post-Christian world, where the Christian faith is dismissed or despised and where Christian values are seen as the enemy of compassion, care and diversity.

Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home [or dorm or space] in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God. It brings glory to God, serves others, and lives out the gospel in word and deed... The purpose of radically ordinary hospitality is to build, focus, deepen, and strengthen the family of God, pointing others to the Bible-believing local church, and being earthly and spiritual good to everyone we know.”

ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD

“THE GOSPEL COMES WITH A HOUSE KEY”

- 1) Identify and describe the four things that the early church devoted itself to. How might we mirror these in this small group study?
- 2) How was the early church a ministry of learning? How is it a critical part of this small group?
- 3) How was the early church a ministry of fellowship? How is it a critical part of this small group?
- 4) Tim Keller describes these vital signs of a spirit-filled community found in Acts 2 – theological depth, intimate relationships, joyous worship, relentless evangelism, and sacrificial service. In what ways is our community displaying these? In what ways is it not?
- 5) Is the church today attractive in this way? Dream about what it might be like for the body of Christ to live in this appealing way on campus at UNC.

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Read the section “From Attractional Events to Attractional Communities” on p.27-28 in Everyday Church. How might your understanding of the state of Christendom on our campus inform the way you execute Jesus’ call to make disciples? How might this shift encourage us to behave more like the early church?

WEEK 4 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER’S NOTES

The description of the church found in Chapter 2 is striking. Share what elements you found most compelling or beautiful. Can you think of a time you’ve experienced the church this way or having some of these qualities?

Read Acts 2:41-47

QUESTION 1-3: Discuss the four things that the early church devoted itself to:

- The teaching of the apostles. The early church studied with diligence the teaching of the apostles. They understood their mind and the way they thought to be a significant part of their faith. It was important for them to understand and meditate on the things that the apostles were teaching, so that they could live in the truth.

-They dedicated themselves to fellowship – this is a pretty intense idea. This means that they didn't just hang out when it was convenient, but they carved out specific time for one another, not just to time study the word, but to be together as a community. This was a sacrifice of time and slots in the schedule that they were willing to make. If you notice, the early church in many ways looked like a family. Is that the way you've experienced the church? Why or why not?

-Breaking of bread refers to observing the Lord's supper and remembering the sacrifice of Jesus together. This idea, along with other descriptions of the church, implied that they also just ate together frequently. This contributed to a feeling of family. Consider how you might use meals as a way to deepen fellowship as a small group, or even within your house.

-Prayer. They were dedicated to praying. They knew the power of the Holy Spirit and they were acquainted with the needs of the community because they lived in such close fellowship. These two awarenesses lead them into a consistent and persistent prayer life.

QUESTION 4: Discuss the vital signs of a spirit-filled community. How do you all think that you as a small group and Cru as a whole measures up?

Define an attractional community over and attractional event. In what ways was the church an attractional community?

Tim Keller in his study of Acts outlines “Oikos” (or household) evangelism this way:

Definition. In Manhattan, there are not so many oikos's which consist of large extended families. Nonetheless, everyone has an “oikos”. Notice that Levi (Matthew) the tax collector had a household that consisted mainly of business associates rather than relatives. An “oikos” is a web of common kinship affinity (relatives), geographical affinity (neighbors), vocational affinity (co-workers), associational affinities (special interest colleagues), and plain friends.

Advantages. “Oikos” evangelism is the most personally demanding of all the methods of evangelism, because it requires primarily that YOU be a changed person, transformed by the gospel. Your life is the main attractor and the main evidence for the truth of the faith. In “oikos” evangelism, your life is under observation by those who don't believe. You can't run and you can't hid! If your character is flawed (or even unexceptional), you won't be effective. “Oikos” evangelism is therefore very non-manipulative. The person outside the faith is, in a sense, “in the driver's seat”. He or she gets to raise questions and determines at what speed the process proceeds. There is no canned presentation. He or she also has a personal knowledge of the evangelist, and thus gets a very good and fair view of what Christianity is all about and how it works in someone's life. In short, all the “advantages” of oikos evangelism are for the unbeliever, not the believer. No wonder it is so effective!

Prerequisites. Essentially, the prerequisite is that the gospel change us. Until that happens, we will be ineffective witnesses. First the joyful effects of the gospel in our own lives must give us an enormous energy for witness. How can we keep our mouths closed about such a wonder? If that energy is not there, we must repent and seek God until it flows. But second, the humbling nature of the gospel must lead us to approach non-believers without superiority and with lots of respect. Since we are saved only by God's grace and not our goodness, we expect to often find wisdom and compassion in non-Christians which at many points may exceed ours. Is that humility and respect there? If not, we will be ineffective. Third, the love experience of the gospel must remove from us the fear of others' disapproval. Is this boldness increasing? If not, we must repent and reflect on the gospel and God's acceptance with us until this fear diminishes. These three character qualities are absolutely necessary. Put another way, if you are not effective in reaching others for Christ, it is because of a lack of joy, a lack of humility and gentleness, or a lack of boldness. Which is it? If the gospel fills us with joy, humility, and confidence, then we will not treat non-Christians as “evangelism cases” - people that we relate to, talk to, and care for only in order to win them over to our side. That is to objectify and dehumanize them, and, ironically, it is unwinsome. We should not love people in order to evangelize them. Rather, we should evangelize them in order to love them. The more these dynamics are present in our lives the more we will draw in new people like a magnet (Acts 2:47).

Reflect on Acts, these ideas, what you read in Everyday Church. Share some of the dreams you wrote down for being an attractional community, or some that have come to you during the study. As you dream, take down 3 goals for the semester that would help you move in the direction of being an attractional community - dream big, be creative!

Pray that God would create in you all joy, humility, gentleness and boldness, and that He would use your group to draw others to himself.

WEEK FIVE

STUDY ALONE:

Boldness, an Indicator of Spirit Work. Acts 3:1-4:31

- 1) Why do you think this lame man was healed? What did this healing require of him, of Peter and John, and of God?
- 2) Peter says in verse 15 that they (he and John) are witnesses to their killing of the Author of life. He continues many times in Acts to mention that they are witnesses to the gospel they are preaching. Why might this be frequently repeated?
- 3) These two chapters recount many words and deeds of boldness on the part of the church. Note here all of the ones you see.
- 4) When Peter and John are released from custody, they gather with their friends and relay what had been said to them. The church is then moved to pray. Look carefully at their prayer – what do they actually pray for? What do they notably NOT pray for?

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

In Everyday Church read “Prayer as a Missionary Activity” in Chapter 6. Read pages 147-149 and complete the short assessment on the last pages of this chapter. For this assessment, consider the small group that you are doing this study with. Some questions may not apply directly, and that’s okay.

*REPENT THEREFORE, AND TURN BACK, THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE
BLOTTED OUT, THAT TIMES OF REFRESHING MAY COME FROM THE
PRESENCE OF THE LORD, AND THAT HE MAY SEND THE CHRIST AP-
POINTED FOR YOU, JESUS, WHOM HEAVEN MUST RECEIVE UNTIL
THE TIME FOR RESTORING ALL THE THINGS ABOUT WHICH GOD
SPOKE BY THE MOUTH OF HIS HOLY PROPHETS LONG AGO.*

WEEK 5 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

Name a time in your life when you've been called upon to be bold. What was the situation and what did that feel like?

Read Acts 3:1-4:31

QUESTION 1: Discuss how boldness is a mark of the Holy Spirit, as stated in Acts 4:31. Why do you think that is so? Read Romans 8:15-16. The Spirit's work is to oppose the spirit of fear. Romans 8 we are assured of our position as children of God. Similarly, Jesus is encouraged and empowered by the Spirit at his baptism by being reminded that he is God's Son and God is pleased with him. From this deep assurance of the Father's love for us through the Son, we are bold in the Spirit as well.

QUESTION 2 + 3: Have some share the bold things they saw. Note the boldness of the apostles as uneducated men to engage with the most educated men of the time. Note the boldness to keep teaching though they had been threatened.

QUESTION 4: Turn to the prayer of the believers. Have some share what the people prayed for. They prayed God's character and promises. They started by acknowledging their weaknesses and who God was even in light of those weaknesses and needs. They called back the promises of God to him. They prayed for boldness to keep teaching and sharing the gospel. In the middle of persecution, they asked to be made more bold to meet the situation. They did not pray for the persecution to end. This is not to say praying for this would have been wrong, but to point out that this was not their focus. They were instead focused on the task of preaching the gospel and on the true identity and promises of God.

Share your "Knowing that God is ____" statements.

Move into a time of discussion on the section in Everyday Church – Share notable findings (good and bad) from the assessment.

Have some share what they wrote in the study alone portion for who God is and who they are in light of it. Turn to the page in the notes that lists characteristics of God and spend time together praising God for who he is. Also lift up the names of those you've listed on your cards.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

WEEK SIX

STUDY ALONE:

The Early Church in Unity and Conflict. Acts 4:32-5:11

- 1) Acts 4:32-37 gives a beautiful picture of the early church, much like we observed in Chapter 2. Note the characteristics you see and what stands out to you.
- 2) By contrast, Acts 5:1-11 shares a tragic story of sin. Describe in your own words what happened with Ananias and Sapphira.
- 3) What was the actual sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Consider heart-level motivations.
- 4) What about this particular sin could be so poisonous to the church that God deals with it this strongly? What might this indicate about the importance of protecting the church from ongoing sin?
- 5) How might we fall in to similar temptation? How might we avoid it?

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Read the section “Everyday Pastoral Care” in Chapter 3, pages 65-75. Respond to the idea that “change is a community project.” What about this seems most challenging? Most encouraging and motivating? How might a community rightly reflecting this idea be more attractive to outsiders?

WEEK 6 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

Share what you wrote in the “God is ____ shows me I am ____” question and why that stood out to you this week.

Read together Acts 4:32-5:11

QUESTION 1: Acts 4:32-37 gives another glimpse of the beauty of the early church and the way they lived together. Note particularly that “There was not a needy person among them.” verse 34. Does the church look like that today? Do we, as the body of Christ at UNC look like that today? How might we take these principles and apply them here in this small group? Consider many expressions of “needy”.

QUESTION 2: Have a couple people share the summaries they wrote of the situation.

QUESTION 3: Contrast the generosity of Barnabas with the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. Highlight how the beauty that we just discussed in verses 32-37 is created through the generosity of people like Barnabas. This was the picture of the Kingdom of God that Jesus was describing. Alternately, Ananias and Sapphira are not grasping after the Kingdom, but after their own glory. They are selfishly keeping money for themselves while claiming they had not.

Ask what their first reaction was to this story. Some may be wondering why God handled this situation with such intensity.

Discuss what the actual sin of Ananias and Sapphira was - have people share the thoughts they wrote down. Read Acts 5:4 - lying about the money amount was clearly part of it. It couldn't be, though, that the money should have all gone to the church. Peter explains that it all belonged to them, so the expectation was not that they HAD to give it all. The lying actions of Ananias and Sapphira indicate a spirit of hypocrisy – of claiming to be one thing and being another. They are looking to be important and have renown because of their religiosity.

QUESTION 4: Discuss how hypocrisy had the potential to damage the church. How have you seen this happen in real life? How does that affect the function and witness of the church?

What does it say about God that his reaction to hypocrisy is as stern as what is described here with Ananias and Sapphira? In what ways is that scary and in what ways is that hopeful?

QUESTION 5: It is important to remember that we are not beyond the sin of hypocrisy. In what ways are we tempted to make ourselves look more important or better than we are for our own glory?

Finally, turn to the questions from Everyday Church and allow members to share their thoughts and reactions. Share with hope ways you can be a group where “change is a community project.” Close by giving them each a note card and 5 minutes to silently pray and reflect. Ask them to write something specific that the group could pray for them to grow in. Have them share and write them down to message to the group.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

NOTES:

WEEK SEVEN

STUDY ALONE:

Fear Rightly Placed. Acts 5:12-5:42

- 1) List the characteristics you see in this passage of a healthy body of Christ.
- 2) Look for instances of fear here. Who is afraid of what? Also look for the word “obey” which indicates a reverential fear.
- 3) Imagine what it might have been like to be the apostles who were arrested, set free by the angel of the Lord and then told to go speak of Life in the temple. What would that have been like? What might you feel?
- 4) How does the choice of the apostles to fear God and not man affect their ministry?
- 5) Verse 41 is simply foolishness outside of the gospel. Respond to this reality. How does it manifest itself in your life and ministry?

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Read the section in Chapter 6 entitled “The Hope of Glory” from p.134-137 in Everyday Church and consider the question “The challenge to us is this: when were you last asked to account for your hope? Are we living a life that makes no sense without the gospel?”

*THEN THEY LEFT THE PRESENCE OF THE COUNCIL, REJOICING THAT THEY
WERE COUNTED WORTHY TO SUFFER DISHONOR FOR THE NAME.*

ACTS 5:41

WEEK 7 STUDY TOGETHER:
LEADER’S NOTES

What fears hold you back from obedience to God, in sharing your faith and in other areas of life?

Read Acts 5:12-42

QUESTION 1: **This might be a good moment to note that some things in Acts are descriptive and some are prescriptive. It seems, in my opinion, a waste to spend much time convincing people not to expect great miracles from God in his church, but here you may just note that there are some things that God seems to do mainly at certain points in history, like during the ministry of the “big A Apostles.” That’s not to say God CAN’T, but more to say that we have no cause for alarm if we do not see all of these types of miracles in our ministry today.

Notice the great faith that is displayed in verses 12-16. The number of believers continued to grow and great signs were being done by the apostles. The people had faith in a God of power. Notice also the boldness and incredible obedience of the apostles to walk right back into the temple after being imprisoned, to proclaim the good news, and again their joy to be counted worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus after being warned and beaten. They didn’t stop. This church was tenacious!

QUESTIONS 2 AND 3: Discuss the instances of fear that you see in this passage. Note that the officials seem to be afraid of the crowds. The temple leaders are afraid of the power of the apostles. The apostles are afraid of God alone. Verse 29 states that they “must obey God rather than men.” Consider together what it might have been like to experience what the apostles experienced. In what ways might you have been inclined to fear?

QUESTION 4: Discuss what fear rightly placed only in God looks like. How did that affect the early church? They were fearless to proclaim the truth and as a result many came to faith. They could even face death and persecution with joy. How might rightly placing our fear in God and not man change the way we do ministry?

QUESTION 5: Have people share their answers for question 5. The simple truth of this passage is that suffering for the name of Christ is our joy. This becomes true as we begin to place our fear in the right places.

Read together Acts 5:41 and then also Luke 14:25-33.

What place does suffering have in the life of a believer? Do we expect and embrace it? If not, what must change?

Pray together, considering the things you have discussed here as well as the things people thought about in the Everyday Church section. Ask God to help you embrace suffering with joy and to live a life that makes no sense outside of the gospel.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

NOTES:

WEEK EIGHT

STUDY ALONE:

God and His People on the Move. Acts 6:1-7:53

- 1) Acts 6:1-7 show us the body of the church functioning in healthy ways, working to fix problems that are part of living in a broken world. What do you observe about how they function?

- 2) What is the accusation that is brought against Stephen? What was the actual question Stephen responded to? What do you think it means that “his face was like the face of an angel.”?

- 3) Write a brief outline of Stephen’s speech. Note any frequently used words or themes. How do you think his response answers the question asked of him?

- 4) How does the gospel change the way we look at the temple and the law?

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Read the section “Exiles” until the end of Chapter 1 in Everyday Church (p.32-35) Stephen’s speech repeatedly notes that both the presence of God and God’s people do not have a home here on earth. What does our exile status mean about us today?

*AND THE WORD OF GOD CONTINUED TO INCREASE, AND THE NUMBER OF
THE DISCIPLES MULTIPLIED GREATLY IN JERUSALEM, AND A GREAT MANY
OF THE PRIESTS BECAME OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH.*

ACTS 6:7

WEEK 8 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

Share a time when you felt misunderstood, could be funny or serious.

Read Acts 6:1- 7:53

QUESTION 1: The first section shows the church responding to both a physical need and a racial/cultural issue. Some Christians in need hadn't been cared for as well because they spoke a different language or were of a different culture. The church responds by – acknowledging and seeing the issue, seeing that one group of leaders couldn't do it all, all members taking roles and responsibilities, appointing leaders of all represented ethnic groups (notice both Hebrew and Greek names).

QUESTIONS 2: Discuss together how Stephen found himself in this situation. What exactly are people saying about him and what is the question that he has to respond to? Basically they are accusing him of undermining the faith of the Jews and turning to another. They are accusing him of speaking against Moses and God. They say that he claims Jesus will change the customs that Moses gave them. There is a distinct focus on Moses, who is seen as the bringer of the law and one of the most important humans of their faith tradition. It was a big deal to speak against Moses. They basically ask him if this is true - is he undermining the teaching of Moses in order to preach Jesus?

The WILD thing about Stephen's face being like an angel is that this likely means it was bright and glowing in some way. This is a characteristic that the accusers would have recognized from another instance in the scriptures - Moses. When Moses was with God in Exodus 34:29-35 and received the law, "his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord." Speculation, but it isn't a far jump to make this connection that God, in a supernatural way, was showing that Stephen was as much a mouthpiece for Yahweh as Moses and that Stephens words were in no way contrary to the words of Moses, but in fact were intimately connected.

QUESTION 3 AND 4: Take time for many to share their outlines of Stephen's speech. What things stood out to them? A few key themes to point out – Stephen tells them an entire history of Israel, something all of the hearers would be familiar with. He highlights in his telling the many ways and places that Yahweh had worked and communicated throughout history. He is saying that God cannot be contained in one place and scripture illustrates that. God has moved and worked in Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in the middle of nowhere Midian. Stephen is saying that this temple is a dwelling place of God, but then God has been and is at work in so many other places. His central point is that this temple, though precious and a significant dwelling place of God, cannot be all there is - it must point to something greater.

That "greater" is the ridiculous reality that in Jesus the dwelling place of God is with man and IN man. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, the Spirit of God now dwells in all who believe. He answers their question by simply saying, yes Jesus does change the way we relate to the laws and the temple because they always pointed to Him, and now something better is here!

Something also to note is that God's people throughout Stephens speech are in exile or on the move. God doesn't intend for his people to get comfortable and established here. This promised land is not the ultimate one. Discuss how the idea of exile marked the Israelites and how it should mark us as Christ followers today. In fact, comfort may be the single greatest hindrance in carrying out the great commission!

*Something interesting to note here as well is that this whole speech was heard by Paul. It greatly affected Paul's ministry. Stephen, though his ministry on earth was short, it had wide-reaching effects.

Close by discussing the idea of exiles you read about in Chapter 1 of Everyday Church. Pray together, having a few people pray, that God would open your eyes to the reality of your exile here on campus. Pray that you would be comforted by the presence of the Spirit and that the reality of the new dwelling place of God, in us, would fill you with joy and power.

WEEK NINE

STUDY ALONE:

Stoning of Stephen and the Beautiful Aftermath. Acts 7:54-8:40

- 1) Stephen's last words sound eerily familiar. What does this tell us about Stephen?
- 2) Two authorities are at work here in Acts 7:54-60. Identify them, their actions and Stephen's relationship to them.
- 3) In Acts 8 we see a domino effect of ministry and persecution following Stephen's death. How does God use a disastrous event to His glory and the flourishing of his Kingdom?
- 4) Philip's ministry in Samaria was effective and shocking. What do you know about the relationship of Israelites and Samaritans? What elements made up this successful ministry of Philip?
- 5) The story of Simon the magician is intriguing. What is his sin? Do you think he repents?
- 6) God seems to go out of his way to bring this Ethiopian Eunuch into the family, why do you think that is? What does this say about the Kingdom of God?

- 7) What can we learn about sharing the gospel from Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian? Observe particularly how he begins the conversation.

FILL IN THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Use the exercise on p.18 with a friend. Use thoughtful questions to identify the "Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration" story in their life.

*BUT HE, FULL OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT, GAZED
INTO HEAVEN AND SAW
THE GLORY OF GOD,
AND JESUS STANDING
AT THE RIGHT HAND
OF GOD. AND HE SAID,
"BEHOLD, I SEE THE
HEAVENS OPENED, AND
THE SON OF MAN
STANDING AT THE
RIGHT HAND OF GOD."*

ACTS 7:54-56

WEEK 9 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

Have you ever experienced something that felt like a failure that God turned into something victorious? Share.

Read Acts 7:54-8:40

QUESTION 1 AND 2: Discuss the authorities at work in the stoning of Stephen. Stephen dies with God's approval in sight. Though the council of men condemned him, Jesus stood at the throne of the Father approving of him and speaking for him. Stephen's ability to see the reality of God in that moment flooded him with peace, boldness and even forgiveness, as we also saw in the death of Jesus. It is clear that Stephen had been changed and grown to be more like Christ in life, so much that in his on martyrdom he also looked like Christ.

QUESTION 3: God uses the disaster of the death of Stephen to set off a chain reaction of ministry. It starts, though with persecution. Immediately a great persecution began, and the people (except for the apostles) were scattered. Allow some to share how it might have felt to be alive in this time of persecution. What would you be thinking? And all of these people, lay people, were scattered and began to preach the gospel everywhere they went. Thinking back to Acts 1:8, this is what they were supposed to be doing all along! We do not easily or naturally spread out and toward the world, but this is our calling.

On a broad scope, the story of Acts is told in a general direction from Jerusalem to Rome. Rome is the center of the opposing empire – the scariest place possible, where the people we think have no chance of joining the faith may be, the powerful and the elite. Where is “Rome” for us? Where does the gospel want to go that we are scared to carry it?

QUESTION 4: Philip's ministry to Samaria is wild because Israel saw Samaritans as half-breeds and heretics. They were a people who were descended from the intermarriage of Assyrians and Israelites after Assyria conquered the northern tribes. They then mixed the worship of Yahweh with the worship of idols, creating a culture that Israelites found revolting (2 Kings 17:24-28). These people would have been way down the list for an Israelite when it comes to who they should go to with the gospel.

Philip came with words and deeds. He first proclaimed Jesus, then he healed the sick and cast out demons. Verse 6 shows that his deeds caused people to pay attention to his words.

*Acts 8:14-17 is very confusing, but it seems that this is a very irregular occurrence – that the Spirit did not come following the baptism in the name of Christ. It could be that this happened to show that this ministry to a different people not through Apostles was legitimate and part of the same movement. In any event, this is a singular moment where baptism/repentance doesn't go immediately hand-in-hand with the Spirit. We should not conclude from this story that the baptism of the Spirit is a separate event.

QUESTION 5: Simon the magician simply wanted power. It is not clear if he repents, though he seems to be more concerned with his power and welfare instead of the power and name of God. It is easy to see in 8:19 that his concern was focused on his own ability and power. It seems that this story was set to show that even though seemed to repent, the power that was evident in the gospel attracted even those who were not repentant at heart.

QUESTIONS 6 AND 7: Share what you learned about the Kingdom of God from this passage. Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian shows God's love for all people and his desire that all would be welcome into the family of God. This man was a seeker, a black man, and a eunuch – and as a eunuch Deut 23:1 forbids him going into the presence of God. This man was the definition of outsider, and yet God sent Philip out of his way to share the good news with him. God doesn't frequently work in such a way that he physically moves a person supernaturally from place to place - it seems that reaching this African man was worth such an act of power and we should take note of that. We should celebrate God's great love for all people.

We also should note how Philip enters into conversation with questions and by explaining answers to the questions the man was already asking. Philip came ready to talk to him where he was and enter into the conversation at the level of interest he had. What damage might it cause to start answering questions that people are not asking?

We also learn that God sets up appointments for us to minister to others and that we should not be prejudiced or shrink back from having conversations with people who are different from us.

Close by sharing experiences from mapping “Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration” with a friend. Share your experience. If people haven't yet and have been intimidated by the idea, encourage them to try it first with a believing friend. Pray for the friends you had these conversations with (or the ones that you will).

Week 1

1) Pause a moment and put yourself in the shoes of Saul. Imagine the light and the sound, not being able to see, the potential emotions. Think about the experience of v.9. Write your reflections here.

2) Now do the same for Ananias. What might his experience of Saul been up to this point? What emotions might he be feeling? Take down your thoughts.

3) Acts 9:20 says Saul proclaimed Jesus in what manner? What do you observe?

4) Compare Saul's worldly circumstances before and after following Jesus.

After:

5) Saul is saved from multiple occasions of opponents' attempts to kill him, and the brothers send him home for his safety. At this time the church experiences peace, as Saul, a key opponent of the gospel, has become a brother himself. Describe this time. How might this inform how we live in a culture where we can freely practice our faith?

AND IMMEDIATELY HE
PROCLAIMED JESUS IN
THE SYNAGOGUES,
SAYING, "HE IS THE
SON OF GOD."

Knowing that God is _____ shows me that I am _____.

Read from the beginning of Chapter 2 until the end of the section “We Cannot Expect the World to be Like Us” in *Everyday Church*. As we live day to day in a culture that doesn’t expel us or accept us, how do we fight to both love those outside the faith and remain a distinct people for God?

ACTS 9:20

WEEK 10 STUDY TOGETHER: LEADER'S NOTES

QUESTION 1: Open by sharing your thoughts for question 1 in the study alone section. What did you imagine that experience would have been like?

Read Acts 9:1-31

QUESTION 2: Now discuss what it would have been like for Annanias. Highlight the extreme obedience that it would have taken for Annanias to do this. He may have known people killed by Saul. He knew for a fact that people would be imprisoned by him for speaking of Jesus.

QUESTIONS 3 AND 4: The conversion and early ministry of Saul/Paul shows us God's choice to use the least likely candidates to display his power. God had been calling God to himself over time (see Acts 26:13-14), even using the stoning of Stephen and the message Stephen spoke before his death. These 'goads' – sticks used to move and guide livestock – eventually brought this persecutor of the church into the family and used him mightily in the kingdom. As you walk through the questions, note how Saul was probably continuing to wrestle, or even feeling great guilt for his persecution of the church. The immediacy and boldness with which Saul begins to proclaim the message of Jesus is shocking. Have them observe this reality and the cost of it. Saul goes from a prestigious and respected position in society to being the recipient of threats and murder attempts. Saul's conversion from worldly power to the power of the Spirit is striking. He risks his life for it. He doesn't hesitate.

QUESTION 5: Discuss how that might inform the way that we live today – do we have the same kind of responsibility to the message and willingness to walk into persecution? If not, why and what must change?

Finally, discuss the Everyday Church question - As we live day to day in a culture that doesn't expel us or accept us, how do we fight to both love those outside the faith and remain a distinct people for God?

Read again the last sentence of Acts 9:31 "And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied" Dream together what it would look like for the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit to abound in your life and in the life of your group. Pray that God would do just that, and multiply you.

RESOURCES:

EVANGELISM: STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS - TIM KELLER

THE GOSPEL COMES WITH A HOUSE KEY - ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD

A STUDY OF MATTHEW - THE VILLAGE INSTITUTE

LETTERS TO THE CHURCH - FRANCIS CHAN

NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY - CARSON, FRANCE, MOTYER, WENHAM

**A RESOURCE OF CRU AT UNC
WRITTEN BY LAUREN KUELL. DESIGNED BY SARAH HOEHN.**