

UNFINISHED

ACTS OF THE SPIRIT

Week 1 Group Guide Devoted to God's Word

Open With Prayer

Use Psalm 119:41-48 as your prayer. Go around the group and have each person read one verse after the other. Do this prayerfully and with great expectation.

Icebreaker

What is your favorite book of the Bible and why do you like it so much?

Scripture Study

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching . . . Acts 2:42

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Acts 17:11

We have just launched our 2-month study of the Book of Acts. On March 31, you will know this book deeply and, hopefully, in a way of personal transformation. There will be a total of eight sermons on the most important passages. We have daily devotionals that will help you read and reflect through every chapter in Acts. There is also the weekly group study guide, where you will consider a major theme in Acts. Texts and themes. Reading and reflection. Prayer and practice. Put them together and you will have a great learning experience.

Look again at Acts 2:42 and 17:11. Look at the mindset of engaging with God's Word. Devoted, great eagerness, daily examination of the scriptures. The power of God's Word to save, heal, and transform is everywhere in the Book of Acts.

Group Discussion

What spoke to you in the sermon that covered Acts 1 and 2 and the most essential themes of Acts?

What spoke to you as you did the daily devotional this week?

Group Discussion

Come up with a list of words that add more definition and description to devotion, eagerness, and examination.

What words would you use to describe your current mindset and practice about the Bible?

Why is Acts important? Acts shows the difference that Jesus makes—the crucified, resurrected, ascended Jesus who is Savior, Lord, and God. Jesus is Lord. Caesar is NOT Lord. The Holy Spirit has been poured forth and everyone who is filled with the Spirit is transformed and empowered for missional witness. The Church is formed. It is a new kind of community where all the hierarchies and barriers of the ancient world are shattered. There is a new way of life (moral, spiritual, relational, and cultural). This new way is the Way of Jesus, and the first followers are sometimes known as the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22; and John 14:6). Jesus the Word of God is Jesus the Way of God. The Word is the Way.

The mission of Jesus is advanced through the Church and its core leaders. And the Church must navigate its relationship with and in the world. The Church must be in the world but not of the world. The Church must figure out how to live and witness to the reality that Christ is Lord and Caesar is NOT Lord. That is a radically subversive proclamation. There is a King and there is a Kingdom, and Rome is NOT the Kingdom of God. Today's theme is the Gospel of Jesus, the Word/Way of God, and the apostolic teaching about Jesus.

ONE: What was the Word of God they had available to them? The early Church was devoted to the apostles' teaching and to the scriptures. The early Church did not have a New Testament. Nothing was written yet. They didn't have the written gospels. They had the eyewitness accounts of the apostles. They had the Old Testament scripture. And they had the apostolic reframing of the entire Old Testament, now fulfilled in the person of Jesus. All the promises and tensions are fulfilled and resolved in Jesus. Think about that for a minute. They had the Old Testament and they had the apostles telling stories of what Jesus did and taught. They had the apostles teaching them how their Old Testament faith was SUPER UPGRADED in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke calls it "gospel" or "Good News." It is the Good News of King Jesus and the Kingdom of Jesus now bursting into the world and making all things new. That's it! That is what changed their lives!

Group Discussion

What is a recent part of scripture that has been life changing for you?

If the Bible has not been so transformative lately, why do you think that is your recent experience?

TWO: Why is the Word of God so important that they were devoted to it and examined the scriptures eagerly and daily? Read the following passages and see how the Bible (literally, *book*) is described: Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Matthew 5:17-19. God's Word is described as light, life, truth, wisdom, instruction, statutes, law, commandments. The Bible has law, poetry, proverbs, prophecy, history, parables, stories, and more. A great Old Testament passage to read (sometime soon) is Psalm 119. It is the longest psalm, and every verse lifts up the importance of scripture. It is for good reason that Christians have been called "people of the Book." Because the Bible is so important, we spend months and months at Living Word teaching and studying the Bible.

Group Discussion

Why is it so hard for Christians to spend more time really studying and applying the Bible to their lives?

How about your own situation? What makes it hard for you to invest more time in learning the Bible? What would help you spend more time in the Bible?

THREE: How DEVOTED are you to studying the Bible eagerly? First, there is no room for guilt or excuses. Don't worry about what your past practices have been, especially if they have been inadequate. Today is a new day and a fresh start for a new beginning of devotion to scripture. Our entire Acts series is designed to help you be devoted to study. Do an honest evaluation and have a conversation about your own commitment to learning and living the Bible.

FOUR: Here is a four-step approach to Bible study. If your group has time, practice this approach using Acts 2:36-37.

1) Listen carefully to God's Word. Read it several times. Read it slowly. Ask for your ears to be open. LISTEN is one of the most frequent commands in the Bible. Ask Jesus to speak to you, to nudge you, to stir something inside you that is his Word for you.

2) Reflect and meditate (2 Timothy 2:7). Now you prayerfully consider what you have read and what you have heard. This is when the eyes of your heart are enlightened, so you understand in a personal way the Word of God for you.

3) Engage in conversation for discernment. Here is where study groups become important. The people in our groups are spiritual friends. We seek the Lord together. We study the Bible together. We learn from one another. And together, we ask, "Jesus, what are you saying to us as a group? Jesus is there an important word you have for all of us?"

4) Put it into practice and apply it to real life. See Jesus (Matthew 7:24-27) and James 1:22-25 on the importance of being "doers of God's Word." Use it or lose it. This is where transformation happens—not at the time of reading, reflection, or even conversation. All of that is the preparation for transformation. That happens when you DO God's Word. "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) is the question you should ask every time you read God's Word. Do that right now. What is God asking you to do ABOUT his Word?

Closing Prayer

You will do the same thing you did with the opening prayer. Now use Psalm 119:97-104. Take turns and slowly, prayerfully, read out loud each verse, one at a time. Pause for a moment before moving on to the next verse.

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Week 2 Group Guide It's All About Jesus

Open With Prayer

Jesus, may you become supremely important in our lives and in our church. Jesus, may you be followed, worshipped, loved, honored, praised, and served in our lives and in our church. Jesus, may we know in full faith that you and you alone are Savior, Lord, and God. Amen.

Icebreaker

This icebreaker is a “group think” exercise that should take just a few minutes. How would you know if someone or something is important to you? **What are the signs or evidence that a person or thing is important?** You should be able to come up with a list of at least five signs that demonstrate importance. Jot down the signs or evidence you come up with. As a follow-up question, what are the indicators that someone or something is NOT important to you?

Scripture Study

To be a Christian is to live in a Jesus-shaped reality.

In him we live and move and have our being. Acts 17:28

For in him all things were created. . . all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16-17

To live rightly in a Jesus-shaped reality involves knowing who Jesus is and then fully aligning your life with Jesus. To ignore the Jesus-shaped reality and to live as if that is not true, is to miss the whole point of the Bible. One way to describe the Book of Acts and the mission that moves through Acts is taking the Good News of a Jesus-shaped reality to all the world. So, who is Jesus? There are four key insights in Acts.

ONE: Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament scripture. Jesus is also the way to understand the Old Testament, and Jesus is a massive upgrade and expansion of God’s missional purposes in the Old Testament (see Matthew 5:17-20; John 1:1-5; and Hebrews 1:1-4). There are at least 12-13 major sermons in the Book of Acts. In every one of them, Jesus is explained in light of the Old Testament scriptures on the Messiah of God.

TWO: Jesus is the crucified Savior-Messiah. Read Acts 2:23, 3:15, 4:10, and 5:30 to see examples. It is the cross of Jesus where the power of God’s sacrificial love conquered sin, Satan, death, and evil. The cross is the victory of God. And the way of Jesus and those who follow Jesus is ALWAYS the way of the cross. We are, after all, told to take up our cross, deny self, and follow Jesus (Mark 8:34). Throughout Acts, you will see the Church and its leaders walking the way of suffering, sacrifice, and love. As they do this, they know they are following in the footsteps of Jesus. But remember, as hard as it may be, it is in sacrificial love that the power of God is displayed. Paul gives a lengthy explanation of this in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5.



Discussion Question: How much does your life have the indicators that Jesus is supremely important to you? In what ways does your life align (or not) with a Jesus-shaped reality? What are some ways Jesus is asking you to “take up a cross”?

THREE: Jesus is risen from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the game changer. You probably noticed in the verses about the crucifixion of Jesus, that the resurrection was included as well: “You crucified Jesus . . . but God raised him from the dead.” While the cross is the victory of God over sin and evil, the resurrection is the proof of that victory. The Apostle Peter is the primary leadership focus for Acts 1-12. By Acts 13, the focus shifts to Paul, who is the center of all the missional activity for the rest of Acts. In Acts 9:1-31, Paul has his Damascus conversion. Paul meets the risen Jesus. That encounter with the living Christ was the

game changer for Paul. He was changed from a hater of Jesus and persecutor of the Church, to one who loved Jesus above all else and became the leading missionary and founder of the Church. In most of his later sermons, Paul speaks of his encounter with the resurrected Christ. Keep in mind that in this time in religious history, life after death was very “sketchy.” There were hopes and ideas, but no clarity or certainty about life after death. The resurrection of Jesus changed everything. Life before death now takes on a whole new meaning because there is now confidence about life after death. Jesus said, “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of” (John 10:10, MSG). Real, more, and better life is possible now because of eternal life. And soon, that new Way of Life was being taught everywhere.



Discussion Question: How is the resurrection of Jesus and eternal life making life better for you here and now?

FOUR: Jesus is King Jesus. Jesus is Christ the Lord. This was one of the MOST RADICAL proclamations made by the apostles and the Church. Not only was it radical, it was also subversive of all other powers that claimed to be Lord (especially Caesar and the Roman Empire). Therefore, it was a dangerous statement. For to say Jesus is Lord is to say Caesar is NOT Lord. To say Jesus is Lord is always radical, subversive, and dangerous.

The title LORD is used over 100 times in the Book of Acts. It is striking that the title is used of God the Father, of the Holy Spirit, and of Jesus. When Jesus is called Lord, it is also a statement that Jesus is God.

It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved. Acts 15:11

Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. Acts 2:36

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. Acts 10:36



Discussion Question: What do these verses tell you about the Lordship of Jesus? Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ (Matthew 16:15). Who is Jesus for you? Who do you say Jesus is?

He (Paul in Roman house arrest) proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance!

The Book of Acts has a unified message from beginning to end. Jesus is unique. Jesus is not one option among the gods. Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled those promises in ways no one expected. He did it as the suffering and crucified Savior, who then became the resurrected Lord of ALL. And the grace of God that forgives, saves, and brings one into the Kingdom of God is open to EVERYONE. Acts is the story of that good news going to the ends of the earth. Now, how about you?

Think about this long quote from C. S. Lewis:

*I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make YOUR choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 52; also known as the Liar-Lunatic-Lord choice)*



Discussion Question: Lewis does not want you to see Jesus as “only” a good moral person or a wise teacher. He claims to be SO MUCH more. Do you believe this? The claim to be Lord is a far greater claim. “If Christ is not Lord OF all that is in your life, then he is not Lord AT all.” Versions of this quote are attributed to different church leaders of the past. What does it mean? Do you agree with this insight? Why or why not?

Closing Prayer

Read Psalm 8 out loud and in unison. It is a celebration of the Lordship of God. It is a prayer of praise and declaration. As you read this psalm, realize it is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made all things and has made you.

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Week 3 Group Guide

The Missional Spirit

Open With Prayer

Sit in silence for a moment. Then quietly invite the Spirit to be with your group. Pray: *Spirit enlighten our hearts. Spirit fill us right now. Spirit of God be our teacher. Come again Holy Spirit and fill us for your missional purposes. Amen.*

This lesson will give you the big picture of the Holy Spirit in Acts. You will go wide, then focus on the main purpose of the Spirit in Acts, and finish with a look at the most important chapter on the Spirit.

Scripture Study

The WORD, JESUS, SPIRIT, CHURCH, WORLD, and MISSION. These six themes are so constant and so linked together in the Book of Acts, it was difficult to know what order was best for your group to study them. Today is on the SPIRIT. We are studying the Book of Acts. It is also known as the Acts of the Apostles (especially Peter and Paul). It would be appropriate to title the book, The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles. Even better, The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles to Build the Church. But perhaps best of all, **The Acts of the Holy Spirit Through the Apostles to Build the Missional Church That Reaches the World with the Gospel.** That title summarizes every story Luke included in his Book of Acts.

The phrase “the Holy Spirit” is found 96 times in the New Testament. Forty-two of those times are in Acts! Think about that. That is how central the Spirit is in Acts. “The Spirit” is used another 14 times. You’ll also find “spirit” used 11 times, with the majority of those times describing evil spirits or demons. There are several mistakes to avoid about the Holy Spirit. Acts helps us avoid those mistakes and instructs us in the way Jesus wants us to experience the Holy Spirit.

Mistake #1: To minimize the Holy Spirit and attempt to live the Christian life without a daily dependence on the Spirit.

In Acts 19:1-7, Paul comes across disciples of John who are waiting for the Messiah. They are living a devoted religious life

but do not yet know Jesus or have the Spirit. You cannot live the Christian life on your own. It is too hard. You NEED to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day.

Mistake #2: To think the Holy Spirit is a power to be used (even manipulated) for one’s own personal benefit. This mistake is one of the most common mistakes you will see in parts of the Church. There are people who use or want to use the Spirit to do great things that have a great deal of show and appeal, but this seems to have a lot to do with their own status. In Acts 8:4-24, Philip encounters a local sorcerer named Simon who wants the power of the Spirit to do the work the apostles are doing. He wants the power to manipulate the Spirit for his own purposes. The Spirit never glorifies a person. The Spirit always glorifies Jesus.

Mistake #3: To think the Holy Spirit is mainly given for you to have personal spiritual experiences that help you feel close to God. Some people approach speaking in tongues mainly as a personal spiritual exercise for prayer and worship. The Spirit will give you spiritual experiences that create intimacy with God, but that is NEVER the goal or the point of any story Luke tells about the work of the Spirit in Acts. Tongues and prophecy in Acts are always for the purpose of the missional expansion of the Church.



Group Discussion: How have you experienced any of these mistakes, or seen others fall into them? Is there a mistake you are more prone toward?

What does the Holy Spirit do in the Book of Acts? For this section, your group will read a selection of key passages in Acts to see what the Spirit is all about. Skim through each passage and then identify the MAIN teaching about the Spirit. Fill that in on the chart below. Don’t spend time in discussion about these passages, just note the primary action of the Holy Spirit. You’ll get a wide perspective on the Spirit’s work. We will skip Acts 2:1-21 and return to that later in the lesson.

Acts 1:2, 5, 6	Acts 4:7-12	Acts 4:31	Acts 6:5; 7:55	Acts 9:31	Acts 10:37-38
Acts 13:1-5	Acts 15:28	Acts 16:6	Acts 20:22-24	Acts 20:28	Acts 21:4, 11



Group Discussion: While we have more to explore in this lesson about the Spirit, as you look back over the chart you just filled in, what are your big observations about the work of the Spirit?

There is one main insight that is crucial to understanding the work of the Spirit in the Acts. Jesus is going to build a multinational community that extends far beyond the Jewish people of Israel. That new community will be known as the Church. It will start with the Jewish people. First the Hebraic Jews (Jews living in Israel) and then the Hellenistic Jews (Jews living in the Greek-Gentile world who are shaped by those customs but still religiously Jewish). There will be some tension between those two groups. Then the good news of Jesus and the emerging Church is going to Samaria, which is a place of mixed ethnicity and hybrid religion. The Jews and Samaritans did not get along, and yet Jesus wants to build a new community. Then the gospel and the Church are going to emerge all throughout the Roman Empire, with both synagogue Jews and Gentile “God-fearers” who are a part of the synagogue becoming Christians. There will be many Gentiles who worship many different gods becoming Christians as well. EVERY TIME the gospel goes to a group of people who are further away from the Jewish faith this creates tension. God will act to definitively show these new people are now HIS PEOPLE. This is the clear teaching of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 (also see 1 Peter 2:10). Just because it was clear did not make it easy! The missional Spirit always acts to build and expand the Church.

Therefore, every time there is a missional expansion of the gospel and the formation of the Church, God gives a Pentecost experience (of some sort) with the Spirit of God clearly in evidence in the new Christian believers.

- Acts 2:1-21. The first Pentecost experience for the Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews.
- Acts 8:14-17. The gospel goes to Samaria and there is a new Pentecost experience for the Samaritans.
- Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18. The gospel goes to a Roman centurion living in Israel. The gospel goes to his family and servants. They join the people of God! This is so important that it takes one and a half chapters in Acts. Be sure to read Acts 10:45 and 11:18.
- Acts 15. This is the Council at Jerusalem. It is convened to discuss the Gentile problem. What is that problem? Gentiles are coming into the Kingdom of Jesus. Really? How is this so? They are given the same Spirit and have experiences of signs and wonders (verses 6-12). Notice that the evidence of the Spirit is provided as the conclusive evidence that “even Gentiles” are being saved by GRACE.

These primary stories are organized around the geographical and ethnic expansion of Acts 1:8. The gospel of King Jesus is going to everyone. This is the work of the Spirit through the Church leadership. Churches are emerging everywhere. The Spirit is on the move because the Spirit is a missional Spirit that saves sinful people and gathers them together in new communities called the Church.

We’ll finish with a look at Acts 2:1-21. There are three sections. 1) Verses 1-4 describe the descent of the invisible Spirit and the visible signs of the Spirit, which includes speaking in tongues, which are full languages. The disciples are filled and empowered by the Spirit. 2) In verses 5-13 the scene shifts to the public arena where Jewish pilgrims from many nations of the Roman Empire HEAR the disciples speaking their different languages. The tongues are declaring the wonders of God. It is missional praise and proclamation to the gathered nations. Many are interested and want to know more. Others are skeptical. 3) In verses 14-21 Peter preaches his first sermon. Part one of his sermon is to explain the Holy Spirit’s work from the prophet Joel.

It is an amazing sermon. The Spirit is poured out on ALL PEOPLE. The Spirit is poured out on WOMEN as well as MEN. The Spirit is poured out on the YOUNG and not just the ELDERLY. While this audience is primarily JEWISH, soon the GENTILES will be included (all ethnic groups, all races). The Spirit will be poured out on SLAVE and FREE, on RICH and POOR. This is an incredible message. God is doing something new. Hierarchies and boundaries are coming down in the new age of the Spirit. The Church will be a Spirit-created community that displays a new unity, equality, and love. This new community will be a community of justice and shalom (peace).

This is not optional, it is essential. This is the true Church. This is a vision for Living Word that we must FULLY buy into. This is what Jesus wants for his Church.



GROUP DISCUSSION: It is so hard and so rare to buy into this vision. Why is that? What keeps this from happening?

Then Peter preaches Christ (2:22-36) and we see the response to the work of the missional, salvation-bringing, Church-creating Spirit (2:37-41). **Acts is SO EXCITING. And Acts is UNFINISHED.** The Spirit of God is on the move. Are you keeping in step with the Spirit, living by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, full of the Spirit, showing the fruit of the Spirit, sowing/working with the Spirit? This is Paul’s language and exhortation in his earliest letter to the Galatian church (Galatians 5:16-6:19).



GROUP DISCUSSION: The Spirit is still speaking to us. What has the Spirit of God been saying to you? Listen, discern, discuss, and join in with his Unfinished work.

Closing Prayer

Pray that Living Word would become the kind of church the Spirit is creating. Pray you would be that kind of Spirit-filled, missional follower of Jesus. Pray that you, and all of us, would have the Spirit experiences you have seen in the Book of Acts.

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ACTS OF THE SPIRIT

Week 4 Group Guide

The CHURCH of Jesus

Open With Prayer

Sit in silence for just a moment. Know that Father, Son, and Spirit are with you right now. Each person identify just ONE GIFT you want God to give your group and our church. Each person simply pray a one- or two-sentence prayer asking God to give that gift.

Icebreaker

This icebreaker has two parts. First, think of as many words as you can to describe the church (ex: people of God). See if you can come up with at least 10 words. Then, identify as many labels for different churches (ex: Catholic). Again, come up with at least 10 words.

Scripture Study

The strategic question in every chapter of Acts is: How does the church exist in, relate to, and engage with the world? Of

the six major themes in Acts, so far your group has studied the Word, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Today is the fourth major theme: Church. Your group study will have two parts. First, you will look at the two most important passages in Acts that describe the Church in action. The second half of your group time will be a discussion about the different phrases used to describe the first followers of Jesus. As you go through this time of discussion, you will explore the identity, nature, purpose, and life of the Church.

PART ONE: A Study of Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:31-37.

These are the two primary passages that describe the early Church as a new community formed around the message of Jesus the crucified Savior, resurrected God, and sovereign Lord. Read the first passage out loud and then identify the 12 to 15 features of the church. Then do the same with the Acts 4 passage. There will be some repeat qualities (be sure to notice them) and a few new ones.

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 4:31-37



GROUP DISCUSSION: As you look over the big list, talk about any of those features that speak to you. Which ones are a regular part of your group experience? Which ones can use more attention? Which ones seem really different from Church life today?

PART TWO: The New Community Described.

God is creating a brand new community. There are a variety of terms used to describe the Church. Work through the list on the next page and define/describe each word or phrase. A few basic ideas are provided but develop them with your own words. How does each label help shape the identity and the nature of your group (as well as all of Living Word)? As you work through these descriptions and passages, pay attention to how the Spirit is speaking to you.

Believers: Acts 1:15; 2:44; 4:32; 5:12
Brothers and Sisters: Acts 1:16; 6:3
Congregation (plethos): Acts 6:5; 15:12; 15:30
Church (ekklesia): Acts 5:11; 8:1, 3; 9:31 This word is used about 20 times in Acts.
Disciples (mathetes): Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1, 25, 26; 11:29 This term is used about 25 times in Acts. A disciple is one who learns, follows, adheres to, and belongs to a teacher.
The Way: Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14,22 Also see Acts 18:25-26 for the Way of the Lord and the Way of God.
Christian: Acts 11:26; 26:28 (also see 1 Peter 4:16) These are the only three occurrences of the word “Christian” in the Bible!
Acts 11:25-30 uses the words <i>church, great numbers of people, disciples (2x), Christians, brothers and sisters.</i>

Your time of thinking about the Church is just a beginning. The New Testament greatly expands on these descriptions in Acts. The Church is the people of God, the bride of Jesus, and the temple of the Spirit. The Church, as we are meant to be, is amazing. When we fall short, we have deep dissatisfaction and a holy longing for change. Be the change you want to see in your small group. May your small group be the change you want to see in our church.

Closing Prayer

Everyone write down one or two best thoughts about what you want our church to be. Take turns praying out loud for God to make that change in your life, in your small group, and in our church. When the group is done, the group leader will pray out loud the prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19 and then the group will pray out loud in unison verses 20-21. And everyone will say a very loud AMEN.

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Week 5 Group Guide

LEADERSHIP in Church and Mission

Open With Prayer

As a group, please take a moment to pray the prayer below for the people of Ukraine.

God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine today. We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow, that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them.

We pray for those with power over war or peace, For wisdom, discernment and compassion to guide their decisions.

Above all we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear, that you would hold and protect them.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

(Written by Archbishop Justin Welby and Archbishop Stephen Cottrell.)

Icebreaker

What kind of leader do you want to follow? What are the characteristics of a leader you will follow? That was the positive—now for the reverse question. What characteristics are among the biggest negatives for you when you see them in a leader?

Scripture Study

Leaders are the ones responsible for the flavor, feel, and direction of the local church. If the leaders aren't healthy, learning, dreaming, praying, and creative individuals, then how are we to expect the church to be any of those things? Leaders "do" based on who they "are." Doing flows from being. Out of the interior life of the leader flows a certain kind of aura, ethos, and culture – the "leadership leak." (Ron Martoia,

Morph!)

That is a great insight. Here are a few more:

- 1) Speed of the leader, speed of the team.
- 2) You can't take people to places where you have not been, and you won't create in people qualities you do not have.
- 3) Before people care about what you know, they need to know you care!

The Church in Acts is being shaped by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is on the move and the mission is advancing. There are threats, challenges, obstacles, opposition, and problems. They are a part of life. Jesus raises up and the Spirit empowers people for the work of leadership. You will find many roles or kinds of leadership in Acts. There are apostles, teachers, prophets, evangelists, and elders (see Ephesians 4:11-12). By the way, the English word deacon is not used in Acts and rarely in the New Testament. The Greek word is servant or minister. Deacons are those who serve or minister. The English word pastor is not used. The word shepherd is used once, not as a title but as a type of ministry. The word overseer is used once (Acts 20:28).

Peter and Paul are the most center-stage leaders in Acts, but others have major roles as well. Stephen, Philip, and Barnabas are three prominent leaders. Then in Acts 18 we meet a wife-husband team of Priscilla and Aquilla, where Priscilla is the primary leader-teacher of the two. More leaders are found throughout Acts.

There are two passages your group will study to discover some of the most important qualities needed for those who would be used for faithful and fruitful leadership in the Church. As you study these two passages, make a list of the qualifications for Christian leadership.

The story of Stephen is told in Acts 6 and 7. The most important qualifications are described in 6:1-10, 15 and 7:54-60. When your group has a good list, talk about any of the characteristics that get your attention.

The story of Paul's final farewell to the Church leadership in the city of Ephesus is told in Acts 20:17-37. This section is longer. Read it carefully and notice how Paul describes his ministry. What ideas emerge for Paul's self-assessment of his leadership? Depending on how much time you have, look at 1 Samuel 12:1-5. This is Samuel's self-assessment of his leadership. What ideas emerge from this passage that add to or reinforce what you learned about Paul's leadership?

The final reflection and discussion is to **prioritize and summarize** the most important qualifications of the kind of leader that Jesus wants his church to have and that you will want to follow. We'll provide the phrase. Your group will provide the summary explanation. And there is room for ONE more description if your group has one.

A Christ-like leader

A Spirit-filled leader

A devoted to worship, word, and prayer leader

A missional leader

A sacrificial-love-for-the-church kind of leader

Best Idea Take-Away

Have each person share ONE idea that has been most important to them in this lesson.

Closing Prayer

Pray for the leaders you know that they would be the kind of leader you have just studied. Pray for our church leadership that we would be this kind of leadership team. And, if you are a leader, pray that you would be this kind of leader. Remember, speed, heart, interior of the leader—that is what our church will be!

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ACTS OF THE SPIRIT

Week 6 Group Guide

BELIEF AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH

Open With Prayer

God, thank you for this group that has gathered together. Help us to find unity as a group. Help us to overcome any secondary arguments or disagreements that divide us. Help us to come together for the purpose of growing more and more like you, Jesus. Amen.

Icebreaker

Here are some fun questions to cause some silly disagreements in your group! Should toilet paper be hung over or under? Does the person flying in the middle seat get both armrests? Is a tomato a fruit? Should pineapple go on pizza?

Scripture Study

The Book of Acts is about the Kingdom of Jesus expanding through the known world. It is a kingdom of peace, righteousness, justice, holiness, flourishing, goodness, joy, love, and more. It is a kingdom where the presence and power of God are remaking the world. It is a kingdom where the powerful hierarchies that ruled the world are being dismantled; where the dividing walls of hostility are being demolished; and where beautiful new social equalities of mutual love, respect, and trust are developing. The Church in the Book of Acts is the new community that lives in that kingdom, represents that kingdom, and works to advance the kingdom of Jesus. Therefore, every description of God's kingdom mentioned above must characterize the church of Jesus.



Look at each description of the Kingdom of God. What do you think about that paragraph?

When we pray the Lord's prayer, "...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." we are praying the church would become more and more like the kingdom of Jesus—and that you would be a person who helps that become so. Is this the kind of church you want to help make?



Read John 17:20-23. This is Jesus praying to his Father that his followers, his Church, would be a place of oneness and complete unity ("perfect unity," NLT). WHAT REALLY SPEAKS TO YOU IN THIS PASSAGE?

This is the kind of Church the apostles (Paul in particular) were starting and then pastoring and teaching them toward maturity. But it is hard! Very hard! As we read in many of Paul's letters, these early churches were full of disagreements and division.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS FIND IT SO HARD TO BE IN UNITY, TO BE ONE, TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER? If you want to personalize the question: What are some of the reasons why you find it hard to get along with and love other Christians?

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS WE CAN DO TO BE IN UNITY, TO BE ONE, TO GET ALONG IN LOVE? What can we do so that Jesus' prayer in John 17 becomes true for our church?

If there is one thing that DIVIDES Christians most quickly, it is differences about what we believe. We can be quite passionate about our beliefs—ALL OF THEM. We then disagree and argue with Christians who have a different interpretation and position. We become critical, condemning, and separate from one another, and not just over theological-spiritual beliefs. In recent years, social problems, cultural issues, political tensions are all things on which we disagree most severely. These issues are the new dividing walls of hostility.

What are the essentials of Christianity? What are the biblical truths that must be believed if one wants to be a Christian?	What are secondary (even if important) biblical beliefs that do not determine whether you are a Christian or not? These are beliefs where diversity of thought is to be expected.	What are the “third area” beliefs about which we are easily divisive and angry?

The great theologian Augustine said, “In the essentials – unity. in secondary things – diversity. In all things – charity (love).” At Living Word, we are absolutely committed to and united around the essentials of faith. At Living Word, we allow great diversity about the secondary matters. Even if the teaching team of pastors has strong preferences on certain secondary matters, you do not have to share their views to be a part of Living Word. This is the only way any church will experience the oneness and complete unity for which Jesus prays. This approach will be how we can represent the kingdom of Jesus advancing and not be stuck on angry debates on secondary doctrines. This is what Paul and his missional team were doing in their churches.



Read Ephesians 4:1-6 and Philippians 2:1-5.
What are the characteristics we need if we are to make unity in Christ a priority?

Best Idea Take-Away

What is your one best idea to help us MAINTAIN THE UNITY AND PEACE OF CHRIST at Living Word?

Closing Prayer

God, we know that you desire for your church to be united. Help us to be people that unite, rather than divide. Help us to keep arguments from creating discord and division in our church. Help us to be people that bring you kingdom every nearer. Amen.

As a group, finish by saying the Lord’s Prayer together:

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.*

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ACTS OF THE SPIRIT

Week 7 Group Guide Living in the WORLD

Open With Prayer

God, your word tells us that you love the world. Help us to love it, too. Help us to love the things that are good, and work to improve the things around us that are marred by sin. Amen.

Icebreaker

This icebreaker is a group brainstorming time that will launch your time together.

What are some of the good things in the world? What can you enjoy in the world?	What is wrong with the world? What is bad in the world?

Scripture Study

When the Bible talks about the world (the Greek word is *cosmos*), it has a theological framework. First, God created the world and said it was very good (Genesis 1:31). God created systems and structures. The world was well ordered. It was a world of goodness, truth, and beauty, and a world of peace, justice, and flourishing. Second, sin entered human existence and corrupted and damaged (but not destroyed) all aspects of God's creation. Like the image of God in humanity, the world itself was marred and broken (Romans 8:19-22). Third, even though now sin-damaged, God continues to love the world and everything in it. It still belongs to him (Psalm 24:1). Therefore, God set about the work of redeeming and reconciling fallen people to himself, and healing and repairing a broken world. This same work has been entrusted to those who follow Jesus.

Sin damaged the systems and structures of the world. In the Bible, the word idolatry refers to the sinful tendency to make something in the world supreme, and then to worship that thing which is not the true God. While the Bible does not use the word ideology, it means a belief system in opposition to God. Idolatry and ideology go hand in hand. Both are manifest in empires. An empire is a way of organizing life in the world around geography, history, values, and goals. Every empire has an idolatry and ideology that sustains it. Every empire departs from the ways of the Kingdom of God. The Book of Acts takes place in the Roman Empire, the greatest empire in the known world. In that World Empire, the Church is on a Mission. This is the negative way the New Testament talks about the world. You see that in the following passages. What do you learn about this world gone wrong?

Romans 12:1-2

1 John 2:15-16

John 17:13-19

Matthew 4:8-10

Here is a very good way to understand the relationship of a Christian to the world, and of the church in the world. It summarizes the passages you just studied. It also explains the Book of Acts.

We are always IN the world, while not OF or LIKE the world, but always FOR the world.

What does that statement mean? And how do you actually live this way?

What is wrong with a Christian (and a church) withdrawing from the world, separating from the world, trying to be apart from the world?

The idea of a WAY is seen throughout Acts. Christians are walking in a new way, the way of Jesus. Not the way of a political party, not the way of a cultural preference, not the way

of the latest trend or fad, and not the way of a sinful heart. Like Jesus we can be tempted to walk in another way (see Matthew 7:13-14).

What is wrong when a Christian (and a church) choose to make a “way of the world” a normal way to live and even make a particular way a priority way to live? In other words, when we are too much LIKE and OF the world.

The church, as an alternative way, is light, leaven, and salt in the world. What is the meaning of each image? Talk about some ways you can be light, leaven, and salt in the world this week.

Closing Prayer

God, we want to be people who are different than the people around us. We want to represent you well. Help us to be salt, light, and leaven in the world around us. Amen.

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ACTS OF THE SPIRIT

Week 8 Group Guide

Acts: Unfinished and Unstoppable

Open With Prayer

Father God, thank you for the book of Acts! Thank you for the time that this group has taken to dive into your Word together. God, please guide our conversation as we look back over what we have learned and look ahead at the lessons you would have us take away from this study. Amen.

Introduction

This is the final group study in the 8-week series on the Book of Acts. There are six or seven main themes we have looked at throughout the last 8 months. Today's final group conversation will be a time of summing up what you have learned and experienced. It will also be a time of looking ahead to the still Unfinished Acts of the Spirit continuing in your life and our church. Your group can spend as much or as little time on each of the themes that follow, but you should make sure you personally have a substantial answer for each question as our series comes to an end.

JESUS Christ is the crucified Savior, the resurrected God, and the sovereign Lord over all the nations.

What is your next step to follow Jesus more fully?

The WORK of God is powerful. We are to be devoted to it, studying it eagerly and daily. We receive it and believe it.

Where has the Word of God been at work in your life during this time? What is God saying to you through his Word?

The SPIRIT of God is the power in the Christian life. We are to be filled with the Spirit. We are to expect the Spirit to do powerful things in and through us. Everywhere in Acts, Spirit-filled people are doing the work of God.

How has the Spirit of God been at work in your life? How are you hearing from the Spirit and keeping in step with the Spirit leading you?

The CHURCH is the new community of very different people coming together. Hierarchies are being dismantled, divisions are being healed, dividing walls are coming down, people who would never come together are coming together in mutual love and service. Living Word is a GREAT HALL where we keep the main thing the main thing.

How are you working for the love and unity of the church?

The WORLD is failing and falling apart. There are crises everywhere. God loves the world. God wants to heal and repair the broken world. God wants to do this through his people.

What are some of the things near to you that are most broken? Who are some of the people around you who are most hurting?

The Church is on a MISSION from God in the world God loves. The Church is in the world, not of or like the world, but always for the world. The Church can never withdraw or separate from the world around us.

Be very specific. God has a mission for you in the world. What is that mission? What are you doing about the mission? What is the one next best step you can take to be one of the missional friends of Jesus?

Acts is about **the KINGDOM OF GOD and KING JESUS**. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of beauty, goodness, holiness, justice, peace, reconciliation, and generosity. The Kingdom of God is the place and people where love, joy, and hope are to be our normal experience. The Kingdom of God needs **SERVANT LEADERS** who lead like Jesus.

This is what you pray and work for when you pray the Lord's Prayer. How are you being one of God's servant leaders working on behalf of his Kingdom coming? His Kingdom is still Unfinished and it is Unstoppable.

Final Group Discernment

What has Jesus been saying to your group tonight and, in fact, through the last 8 weeks? Listen to the Spirit, share some thoughts, and see what main ideas emerge.

Closing Prayer

Turn to Matthew 6:9-13. One person prayerfully read the Lord's Prayer out loud on behalf of the group. Now turn to Ephesians 3:14-21 and have a group member read this prayer aloud on behalf of the group. Finally, turn to Romans 16:25-27 and have one group member read this benediction aloud over the group. And at the end, everyone say AMEN.