



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Part 2

Name:

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

FALL 2021



wentzville
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS
5	WEEK 5: PETER & JOHN [PART 1]
13	WEEK 6: PETER & JOHN [PART 2]
21	WEEK 7: ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA
29	WEEK 8: MIRACLES & WONDERS

LETTER FROM KURT

The book of Acts, in my opinion, is the most indispensable book of the New Testament. We have 4 Gospel accounts, 13 letters from Paul, and many letters from other writers which are all equally important. But Acts stands alone as a unique book which tells stories and teaches theology that are only found in this book. It describes what the early church looks like, and prescribes what all churches should aspire to.

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

It may surprise you that the leading role in Acts is not Paul. It's not Peter. It is not even Jesus. The main character in the book of Acts is the person of the Holy Spirit! You see his presence, power, and influence throughout every story and plot twist.

Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and then released his Spirit to God at the cross. Then he promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be unleashed upon them after he leaves [John 14:15-17; Acts 1:4-8]. We learn more about who the Holy Spirit is and how he operates in the book of Acts than any other book.

Luke's gospel account was the first episode in his biblical drama, which focused on all that Jesus began to do [Acts 1:1]. The book of Acts is the second episode which changes the focus to what Jesus' followers continue to do through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is my hope and prayer that throughout this Life Group season you not only learn about Jesus and his first followers...but that you receive, discern, and UNLEASH the Holy Spirit in your life!

Kurt Charlton

Discipleship Minister

[See the next page for an introduction to the book of Acts]

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

INTRODUCTION

Acts is written by Luke, the physician, who is the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Luke covertly includes himself into the narrative a few times by saying we/us. The Gospel of Luke is episode 1; Acts is episode 2. Acts follows the general flow of Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8. Jerusalem [Acts 1:1-8:1a]; Judea/Samaria [Acts 8:1b-12:25]; Ends of the world [Acts 13-28].

MAJOR THEMES:

-*HOLY SPIRIT [and his power]*

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

-*PERSECUTION [and its results]*

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

-*BAPTISM [and its importance]*

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

-*THE CHURCH [and its ups/downs]*

Luke gives church summary statements like a narrator who wants to inform the readers of what they missed in-between each scene. [2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; 5:42; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:19-20]

-*PRAYER [and its effects]*

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

DESCRIPTIVE VS. PRESCRIPTIVE

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

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

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

UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 5 - Peter & John [Part 1]

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 3:1 - 4:4

OPPOSITION BECOMES PERSECUTION

Opposition and persecution will gradually increase in frequency and severity throughout the next few chapters. In Acts 2, the Apostles were accused of being drunk when they spoke in tongues. In chapter 4, Peter and John are arrested, warned, and then released. In Chapter 5, all of the Apostles are arrested but then escape miraculously. They are arrested again, almost killed, publicly beaten, threatened, and then released again. In chapter 7 we see the first Christian martyr.

“A powerless church is easy to ignore. A church, however, that exercises the power of the Spirit soon encounters the powers of its surrounding society.” [Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 89]

ACTS 3:1-10

This is the first of many miraculous events initiated by the Apostles in the book of Acts. Luke does not just record miracles to merely impress his audience or give a historical record. Each miracle Luke records is weaved into the narrative that progresses the plot and advances the narrative.

Notice that the healing was instantaneous and permanent. There are many “faith healers” who claim to perform miracles today. Many of those “miracles” are minor, temporary, and are rarely as observable as this event. Luke emphasizes the reactions of the crowd in which no one could comprehend or explain what had happened other than it was a miracle.

Luke, a physician, gives a lot of detail for this healing. The man was “made strong” which meant his muscles, tendons, blood flow, and bone structure immediately became strong enough for the man to not just stand, but to run and jump! This was not psychosomatic “healing.”

ACTS 3:11-16

Peter and John make it very clear they did not heal the lame man by their own power.

Peter says they are “witnesses” which correlates with Acts 1:8; 2:32; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15; 26:16.

ACTS 3:17-21

Peter softens the blow a little by saying that they killed Jesus out of ignorance. But he does not use this as an excuse to let them off of the hook. They are still required to repent! See 3:19. Ignorance is not an excuse for sin [Romans 1:20; Micah 6:8; Acts 17:30; 1 Peter 1:4].

ACTS 3:18 AND 3:38

Acts 2:38 Repent + be baptized = forgiveness of sins AND receive the Holy Spirit

Acts 3:19 Repent + turn to God = sins will be wiped away AND times of refreshing

ACTS 3:22-26

“Jesus is not only the ‘greater David’, he is the ‘new Moses’ and the blessing of Abraham.” [Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 97]

ACTS 4:1-4

4:4 is the first sign of persecution in the book of Acts. Though it was uncomfortable and inconvenient, the imprisonment was relatively mild compared to what is about to happen to the Apostles and other Christians in the rest of the narrative.

ACTS 3:1 - 4:4 [NIV]

Peter Heals a Lame Beggar

³One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²²For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.’

²⁴“Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’[b] ²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

⁴The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

WEEK 5 - PETER & JOHN - PART 1 [ACTS 3:1 - 4:4]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. How do you typically respond to people asking for help on the street? Why?
2. Has God ever used someone to meet a need in your life in a powerful way? If so, share what happened.
3. Has God ever used you to meet someone else's need in a powerful way? If so, share what happened.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 3:1-10. Why do you think Luke includes so much detail about the lame man in verses 2 and 7-9?
2. How do you think this scene would have been different if they gave the man what he was asking for? What lesson can we learn from this?

- 3. Read Acts 3:11-16. Why was Peter surprised that the Israelites were surprised [vs. 12]? When have you been surprised by what God has done through a person?**

- 4. Peter never misses an opportunity to preach about Jesus. When have you been able to turn a conversation into a way to share your faith?**

- 5. Read Acts 3:17-26. How does Peter use guilt in the sermon? How does he offer hope? Why are both important?**

- 6. Read Acts 3:19 again. What does it mean to repent? What is promised to us, and what do you think this looks like?**

- 7. Read Acts 4:1-4. What happened to Peter and John since they gave credit to Jesus? What do you think would have happened if they took credit for themselves?**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How can you turn everyday interactions into opportunities to teach about Jesus?
2. What are some physical and spiritual needs of people in your life? How can you help?
3. Who can you help in order to turn the credit over to God?

PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]

PRAY FOR MISSION OF THE WEEK

Haitian Island Ministries: Steve & Terry Smith, WCC members

This organization operates medical programs providing free vitamins, medicine, and medical care and feeding programs which provide a daily meal for thousands of Haitian children each month. They also build schools and churches in some of the most remote areas of Haiti. Their medical program has served hundreds of thousands of Haitians. haitianislandministries.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”
Acts 3:8 [NIV]

- ▶ When have you been so excited about something that you jumped up and down and made a big scene?

- ▶ When have you been so thankful to God that you jumped up and down while praising Him?

DAY 2:

“When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”
[Acts 3:12, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been surprised because God did something good that you did not expect?

- ▶ When have you been surprised because God did something unexpected that you did not understand?

DAY 3:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”
[Acts 3:19, NIV]

- ▶ What places are refreshing for you? What activities? What people?

- ▶ What do you think it means to have times of refreshing from God? What do you need to repent of to receive these refreshing times

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’
[Acts 3:25, NIV]

- ▶ What are some heirlooms you have received? What are some heirlooms you plan to give to your descendants?

- ▶ What do you think it means to be an heir of the prophets and covenant of God? What do we get to receive as the offspring of Abraham and the New Covenant?

DAY 5:

“They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”
[Acts 4:2, NIV]

- ▶ What is the craziest thing you have heard someone teach or proclaim? What made you question their claim?

- ▶ The religious leaders were disturbed because Peter and John’s message went against what they believed. What truths about Jesus go against what many people believe today?

DAY 6:

“But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.”
[Acts 4:4, NIV]

- ▶ This happens just after Peter and John were arrested. When have you seen people react to a bad circumstance with a positive response?

- ▶ How can you be an example for others in the midst of poor circumstances so that they may become believers?

UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 6 - Peter & John [Part 2]

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 4:5-31

SANHEDRIN

The Sanhedrin was a group of 70 religious leaders composed of Pharisees and Sadducees, plus 1 High Priest. The power and influence of the Sanhedrin can not be overstated. There was no such thing as separation of powers or separation of Church and State. They were the legislative, executive, judicial, and religious branches of government all wrapped up into one body of leadership.

MIRACLES

Ancient Jews believed in miracles, but they also realized there was power in the dark spiritual world. Whenever an irrefutable miracle had taken place, the question was rarely “if” it had happened, but rather “whom” had made it happen. This is why the Sanhedrin asks Peter and John in 4:7 “By what power or what name did you do this?”

4:10-12 SALVATION

The section above regarding miracles sets up Peter’s response in 4:10-12. He clearly says this was through the name, power, and authority of Jesus Christ...whom they crucified but God raised from the dead. He quotes prophecy from Psalm 118, and then gets to his punch line. Salvation can only be found through Jesus Christ!

4:13 BOLD IDIOTS

Luke often records the feelings, reactions, and descriptions of everyone in a scene. The reactions of the Sanhedrin show the tremendous importance of who Peter and John were. They had no formal training, but they were acting as though they were educated rabbis. Obviously, this was because of the infilling power of the Holy Spirit [see Acts 4:8].

The word for “courage” is the same word for “boldness” and is used later in 4:29, 4:31, and the last verse of the narrative in Acts 28:31!

The word for “ordinary” is *idiótēs* which is where we get the word idiot, which means amateur, layman or ungifted person.

What does it mean that they had been with Jesus? Perhaps it has something to do with John 7:14-19! What an amazing parallel!

4:19 SOCRATES, DANIEL, AND A PHARISEE

This sounds like the beginning of a joke...no, they did not walk into a bar!

Peter and John say some very bold and profound words in their responses after being released and given a figurative slap on the wrist. Many would have taken this as a lucky break and left before the judges changed their mind. Their bold response was undoubtedly infuriating to the religious leaders.

Many commentators make a correlation between Peter & John’s response and a similar response of Socrates, over 300 years prior. Socrates was commanded to stop teaching and he said: “Men of Athens, I respect and love you, but I shall obey the god rather than you [Plato, *Apology* 29d].” This reference may have resonated with Theophilus, the Greek speaking benefactor to whom Acts is addressed to.

Others show how this story may have also resonated with a Jewish audience. It is very similar to the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:16-18. [Dean Pinter, *Acts*, pg 115] These words may have also inspired Gamaliel, a Pharisee, to spare the lives of the apostles in Acts 5:39!

ACTS 4:5-31 [NIV]

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

The Believers Pray

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one."

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

WEEK 6 - PETER & JOHN - PART 2 [ACTS 4:5-31]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What is a product or company you are in love with?
2. What is a product or company you do not like, but others keep trying to push on you?
3. When have you spoken well of a product or company only to find out you were wrong?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 4:1-12. Why did the religious leaders object to Peter and John's preaching? Why were the Apostles a threat?
2. Read Acts 4:13-22. How were the religious leaders put into a difficult situation? Why did they make the decision they did?
3. Read Acts 4:13 again. What was it about Peter and John that astonished the religious leaders?

- 4. In what ways do you think Christians should look different than non-Christians today? What would make someone realize they were interacting with a Christian?**
- 5. Read Acts 4:23-30. How did the Christians respond to the persecution? What did it lead them to do?**
- 6. Read Acts 4:31. How do you see the main topics in the book of Acts coming together in this verse? [Prayer, Holy Spirit, Power]**
- 7. The major themes and words in this chapter are the Holy Spirit, prayer, power, and boldness. What do these topics all have to do with each other?**
- 8. Where do you see the Holy Spirit in this chapter? How does he help to progress the narrative?**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. What could you do for the glory of God if you had more power and boldness?
2. Where do you see God at work in your unfavorable circumstances? What can you praise Him for today?
3. What ground needs to be shaken in your life? Where do you need to speak boldly?

PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]

PRAY FOR MISSION OF THE WEEK

LOVEtheLOU

LOVEtheLOU is a community development initiative that connects resources to the needs of St. Louis. During the constant process of growth and development, they strive to see St. Louis restored through transforming actions. LTL is proud of the progress in St. Louis and are excited about what will continue to happen as they grow and develop. lovethelou.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’”
[Acts 4:11, NIV]

▶ When have you thrown away something that you wish you had kept? Why did you throw it away?

▶ Have you ever felt like you were rejected? So did Jesus! How do you think he might use you to rebuild things in the Kingdom today?

DAY 2:

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”
[Acts 4:12, NIV]

▶ Where do people try to find salvation or security today? Why are these other places futile?

▶ Why is this statement so significant for us to understand today? Do you truly believe this? How does it change the way you should live your life?

DAY 3:

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”
[Acts 4:13, NIV]

▶ When have you been treated differently because you did not know as much as everyone else? How did you respond?

▶ How do you think people recognize Christians in the world today? How can you stand out as someone who has spent time with Jesus?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”
[Acts 4:20, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been around someone who can not stop talking about a place they have been or a thing they have experienced? How did you feel when they kept talking?

- ▶ What is it about Jesus that makes you want to talk to people about him? What do you think your friends/family need to hear from you?

DAY 5:

“²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”
[Acts 4:29-30, NIV]

- ▶ When have you shown boldness for Jesus? For something else? Why did you need to show boldness?

- ▶ When have you asked God to stretch out his healing hand? What should you ask him for today?

DAY 6:

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”
[Acts 4:31, NIV]

- ▶ If you have been in a plane, what feelings came over you when the plane began to violently shake?

- ▶ When have you felt the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? What would you do with that power if it suddenly came over you today?

UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 7 - Ananias and Sapphira

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 4:32 - 5:11

4:32-25 CHURCH SUMMARY STATEMENT

This is what is known as a “church summary statement” in that it gives a positive description of the state of the church. The first summary statement occurred in Acts 2:42-47, and this summary is very closely related to the first. The opening two verses are almost identical to Acts 2:43-44. The common themes in the twelve church summary statements in Acts are unity, growth, and health.

Acts 4:32 describes three aspects of unity that were shared within Christian community: heart, mind [literally “soul”], and possessions. These keywords should remind us, and the Jewish readers of Acts, of the famous Shemah in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 [NIV] “⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Some rabbis understood “strength” as one’s possessions or resources. [Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 107]

4:36-37 BARNABAS

Barnabas means “son of encouragement.” Every time he is mentioned in Scripture, it is positive [Acts 4:36–37; 11:19–20; Acts 13-14]. Even though many people gave gifts to the church, Luke records Barnabas’ sacrifice as an example above the rest. The selfless generosity of Barnabas is contrasted with the selfish actions of Ananias and Sapphira in the very next story. Generosity is an amazing way to show and give encouragement to others.

BLIND HANDS

Many people argue that all giving should be done in secret. However, this may be an overreaction to what Jesus says: Matthew 6:3-4 [NIV] “³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret.”

But notice what Jesus says just before this in Matthew 5:16 [NIV] “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” There are times when public generosity can be used to inspire and encourage others to be generous. Generosity breeds generosity and unity in the body.

Also notice that it seems Jesus is addressing extreme and selfish behavior in Matthew 6:1-18. Giving, praying, and fasting were the 3 main religious practices all Jews were expected to observe. Many took it to the extreme as a way to show off their piety, like the Pharisees. If one comes to the conclusion that all giving must be done in secret, then why do they not come to the conclusion that all prayer must be done in secret? See Matthew 6:6! No one takes this literally to mean that every single instance of prayer should take place in a closet. Likewise, not all giving should be secretive.

Humble, public recognition of generosity has given us amazing biblical examples of people like Joseph of Arimathea [Luke 23:50-54], Good Samaritan [Luke 10:25-37], Zacchaeus [Luke 19], Phoebe [Romans 16:1-2], Theophilus [Luke 1, Acts 1], and Barnabas [Acts 4:36-37].

STINKY FEET

Notice the wordplay that Luke shows in this story. He uses the word “feet” to connect and contrast these two stories.

4:35 “and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”

4:37 “sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

5:2 “but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

5:9 “The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door”

5:10 “At that moment she fell down at his feet and died”

ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA TODAY?

It is possible, but probably not likely, that we may observe a scene like this today. However, the severity of this punishment should still strike fear into the hearts of givers today. We should not be afraid to give, but we should be cautious and fearful in how we speak of our giving. It seems as though God is more upset by the lie than the action. Ananias and Sapphira are severely punished because they gave people the indication that they were more devout and more generous to the church than they really were.

ACTS 4:32 -5:11 [NIV]

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira

⁵ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

WEEK 7 - ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA [ACTS 4:32 - 5:11]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What are some causes you support with your time and money? Why?
2. When have you done a good thing but you had the wrong attitude?
3. When have you called out someone else for giving a half-truth?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. How can giving to the needy or to the church be a source of encouragement to others? How can it be a cause of contention?
2. Read Acts 4:32-35. How does vs. 32 relate to the success that happens in vs. 33-35?
3. Read Acts 4:36-37. How does this paragraph, and the one before it, set the stage for the next story that Luke records?

4. **Read Acts 5:1-11. What did Ananias and Sapphira do that was wrong? Why would they receive such a harsh punishment?**
5. **It seems like Ananias and Sapphira would have been better off not giving anything to the church. Why is this so confusing? What lesson should we take from this?**
6. **Peter does not necessarily take this as a personal attack. Instead, who does he say Ananias was hurting? How is this true?**
7. **Read Acts 5:5 and 11 again. Why does Luke want us to know that fear seized the whole church? How is this a good thing?**
8. **How does the story of Ananias and Sapphira compare with what Jesus says in Matthew 5:16? How should we reconcile these?**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. What is your motivation for giving to WCC? Other organizations?
2. What are some obstacles to generosity in your life? What are some catalysts for generosity?
3. What actions do you need to take to support God's Church? What attitudes do you need to change?

PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]

PRAY FOR MISSION OF THE WEEK

Outreach International - Mexico | Josh & Susan Sanchez

This mission, called Me & My House Ministries, is a church plant in Colima City. Their goal is to begin a church planting movement within the region. Their first church plant in Manzanillo is currently being led by a member of the church that stepped in to lead so Josh & Susan could plant the new church in Colima.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.”
[Acts 4:32, NIV]

- ▶ When have you seen and felt unity with a group, co-workers, or church? What was the cause for that unity?

- ▶ How can you be in one heart and mind with your church body? What possessions do you think you can share with others in need?

DAY 2:

“^{34b}For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”
[Acts 4:34b-35, NIV]

- ▶ When has someone helped you when you were in need? When have you helped someone else who was in need? Why did you do it?

- ▶ Why do you think it is significant that Luke says the people placed the money “at the apostles’ feet”? What do you need to distribute to those in need?

DAY 3:

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”
[Matthew 5:16, NIV]

- ▶ Why were Ananias and Sapphira a bad example of shining their light before others? What did they do wrong?

- ▶ When have your actions spurred others to do good things as well? How can you inspire others to glorify God today?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”
[1 Peter 2:2, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been falsely accused of doing wrong? How did you react?

- ▶ How can you let others see your good deeds, while still remaining humble and God-honoring?

DAY 5:

“^aBut when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ^aso that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”
[Matthew 6:3-4, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been secretive about your giving to God? Why did you do this?

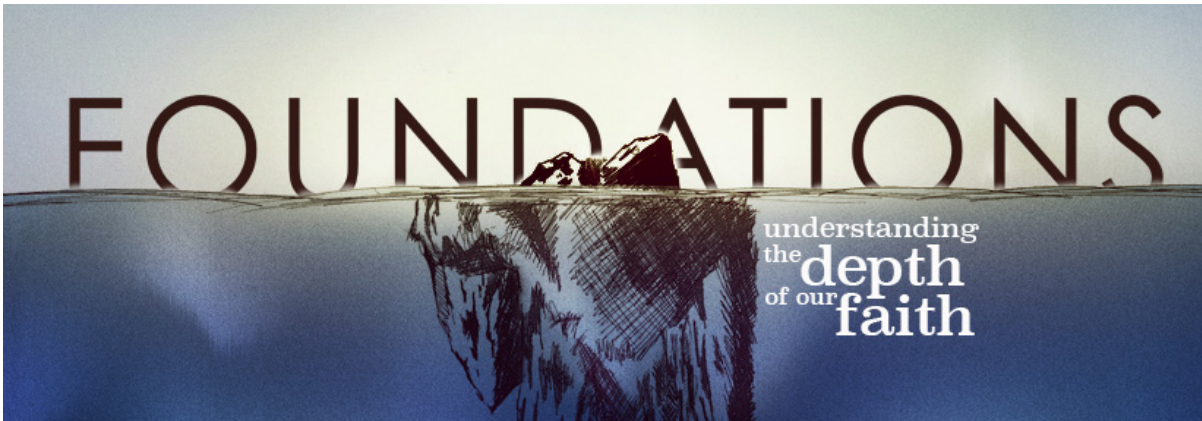
- ▶ How can you strike a balance between letting your light shine but also letting your giving be done in secret so you do not take the credit?

DAY 6:

“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”
[Proverbs 11:25, NIV]

- ▶ Why do you think generosity was so important for a healthy, united church in the book of Acts? What about churches today?

- ▶ What do you think it means to be refreshed by refreshing others? How can your generosity be refreshing for others and yourself today?



Week 8 - Miracles & Wonders

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 5:12-42

5:12-16 CHURCH SUMMARY STATEMENT

This section is the third church summary statement which perpetuates the common themes of miracles & wonders, awe & amazement, and unity & growth. The crowds continue to show awe, wonder, and fear as miraculous signs are displayed by the Apostles with empowerment by the Holy Spirit [Acts 2:43; 3:11; 4:13; 5:5; 5:11]. The fanfare that followed Peter is reminiscent of what we saw from the crowds who followed Jesus. Just as touching Jesus' cloak could heal someone [Luke 8:40-48], it seems as though Peter could heal through his shadow.

5:13 FEAR OR RESPECT?

Vs. 13 is a little confusing in that people respected the Apostles, but they did not join them. Perhaps this refers to other Christians who were still hesitant to worship Jesus in public and thus face persecution. Perhaps it refers to the Jewish leaders and general population in that they were afraid of the Apostles, especially after hearing about Ananias and Sapphira. It seems as though everyone gave proper respect to the Apostles, even if they did not agree with their doctrine.

5:14 WOMEN

"Verse 14 mentions women believing independently of men. This is a significant moment in salvation history. In an androcentric society such as ancient Israel a woman's faith was bound up with that of her husband or father. Here we find women mentioned individually as believers. If Sapphira can be punished apart from her husband, based on her own complicity, then conversely women of faith can be judged righteous apart from their husbands' rejection of the faith. This new pattern will be reflected consistently in the remainder of the book [Acts 8:3, 12; 9:2, 16:1, 13-14, 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2; 22:4]." [Mark Moore, *Acts*, pg. 115]

5:17-26 APPROVAL RATINGS

The religious leaders of the Sanhedrin, especially the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy because the apostles seemed to have better approval ratings with the populace. 5:26 shows that the arresting officers were afraid of what the crowd would do to them if they were harsh with the Apostles.

5:27-32 HE'S AN ANGRY PRIEST

Notice why the high priest is so upset. Not only have the Apostles directly disobeyed the instructions of the governing authority, but they have publicly humiliated the Sanhedrin by disobeying them in front of so many people. He says the Apostles "have filled Jerusalem" with their teaching! What a compliment! He is also angry because the Apostles are indicating to the public that the Sanhedrin/religious leaders are responsible for killing Jesus...which they were, especially the high priest [see Matthew 26:3-4 and Matthew 27:25]

5:33-40 GAMALIEL

Gamaliel is an extremely intriguing character in Luke's narrative. He was a famous, adored, and influential Pharisee who seems to have swayed the opinions of the entire Sanhedrin. Paul even brags about being his disciple [Acts 22:3].

In the Gospel of Luke there are no positive mentions of any Pharisees. In the book of Acts, there are three separate incidents where Pharisees are seen in a positive light [Acts 5:34; 15:5; 23:9]. Acts 15:5 indicates that some Pharisees were actually a part of the leadership in the early church!

It is very ironic that a Pharisee comes to the rescue of a Christian, when so many Pharisees plotted to kill Jesus and his followers. We do not know if Gamaliel was a secret believer, but it does seem he is sympathetic to the Christian cause. His conclusion in Acts 5:39 may have been a result of Peter & John's words in Acts 4:19!

ACTS 5:12-42 [NIV]

The Apostles Heal Many

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

The Apostles Persecuted

¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

²⁵ Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷ The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

WEEK 8 - MIRACLES & WONDERS [ACTS 5:12-42]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. When have you been put in a tough situation where you had to decide who you were going to obey?
2. When have you seen jealousy make people respond to a good thing in a bad way?
3. When have you seen maturity make people respond to a bad thing in a good way?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 5:12-16. How were the Apostles/believers regarded by the crowds? How did their reputation in the community affect their ministry?
2. Who is someone you disagree with, but still hold in high regard? What is it about them that makes you view them in this way?

3. **Read Acts 5:17-32. Retell a summary of these events. What stands out to you about the words and actions of the Apostles?**

4. **Read Acts 5:33-40. Who came to the rescue of the Apostles? Why is this so shocking? [See page 30]**

5. **Why do you think God sometimes delivers his followers out of hardships, yet at other times allows them to suffer?**

6. **Read Acts 5:41-42. What emotions and actions did the Apostles have after being arrested, almost killed, and beaten? How do you think you would respond? [See also Acts 5:29!]**

7. **How do you see Luke contrasting the motives and responses of the religious leaders vs. the Apostles in this chapter? [See questions 2-3 in the Connect section above.]**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. When do you struggle with obeying God vs. obeying men?
2. How can you respond with rejoicing when you are suffering?
3. What keeps you from teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah? [vs. 42]

PRAY FOR ONE-ANOTHER

[Spend some time praying with your Life Group. When asking for requests, try to keep the focus on personal praises/requests that relate to people in the group.]

PRAY FOR MISSION OF THE WEEK

High Hill Christian Camp

High Hill Christian Camp and Retreat Center's goal is to offer a fun, Christian atmosphere in a modern camp setting surrounded by God's wilderness — all designed so that children will leave with a closer relationship with Jesus. highhillcamp.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.” [Colossians 4:5, NIV]

▶ When have your actions driven people away from you? When have your actions been a good influence on others?

▶ How can you make the most of the opportunities you have with outsiders this week? How can you lead others to want to follow Jesus?

DAY 2:

“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.” [Acts 5:20, NIV]

▶ When have you had to stand in public and say something you did not want to say? What were your hesitations with doing this?

▶ The angel commanded the apostles to do this just after they were arrested. What do you think God is calling you to do which may be dangerous, counterintuitive, or bold?

DAY 3:

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings!’” [Acts 5:28, NIV]

▶ When have you disobeyed someone’s orders because you thought it was the right thing to do? Why did you do it?

▶ The Apostles refused to stop teaching about Jesus, regardless of the consequences. What can you learn from their bold example?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.”
[Proverbs 21:30, NIV]

► When have you thought that your way was better than God’s? How did that turn out for you?

► How can you seek God’s guidance and God’s direction in your life? What do you think he is calling you to do this week that may not match your plans?

DAY 5:

“But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”
[Acts 5:39, NIV]

► When have you fought against God because you thought your way was better? How have you grown since then?

► How can you know if something is from God or from men? What have you been fighting against God about? What do you need to do this week?

DAY 6:

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”
[Acts 5:42, NIV]

► What had just happened before the apostles did this? Why is it so amazing that they continued teaching?

► When have you been ashamed to tell others about Jesus? How can you publicly and personally proclaim the good news of Jesus this week?
