



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Part 3

Name:

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

FALL 2021



wentzville
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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LETTER FROM KURT

The book of Acts, in my opinion, is the most indispensable book of the New Testament. We have 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.



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Week 9 - Servants in the Early Church

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 6:1-7

HELLENISTIC JEWS

Hellenistic Jews are those who believed in God and followed the Scriptures, but they had been “hellenized.” This is a term for those who adopted the Greek language, culture, and way of life. In the 4th century BCE, Alexander the Great sought to spread Greek culture throughout the world through force. This was known as Hellenization. Hellen was a Greek mythical god, and his name became synonymous with a person of Greek descent, and then overall as relating to Greek culture.

HEBRAIC JEWS

These are ancestral Jewish people who kept the customs and rituals of the Jewish culture. Many held a sense of superiority over the Hellenistic Jews and converts to the faith. This tension in the Jewish religion carried over into the Christian church. Some of the problems with discrimination that was present in early Judaism has now reared its ugly head in Christianity.

WIDOWS

Widows in the ancient world were especially vulnerable since it was a patriarchal society. Since many families lived on a day to day income, there was not much in the terms of inheritance or savings for fatherless families. The communal structure of the Jewish culture paved the way for the continued care for widows in the early church. This included a formal distribution of food, which was being corrupted by discrimination.

DEACONS

The seven men who were chosen are not called “deacons” by name in this story, but their role and function is similar to what we see in the rest of the New Testament church. Deacons in the early church were faithful men who were chosen to be servant leaders and oversee various tasks in the church. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 gives the standards and expectations of what sort of men were chosen to be leaders. In the church today, the term “deacon” may not appear, but has been replaced with similar roles filled by Pastors and Ministry Team Leaders.

DISCIPLES

This is the first time Christians are referred to as “disciples” in the book of Acts, and the first time the word is used at all in the narrative. A disciple is a faithful follower of Jesus, and comes from the word for learner or pupil. In the Gospels, it is used to describe the 12 disciples/apostles, and generally for followers of Jesus.

DIVISION OF LABOR

As the early church grew, the Apostles realized they could not do everything and be everywhere. The leadership structure had to grow in order for the movement to keep growing. This is the first indication of division of labor or the decentralization of power in the early church. The Apostles knew their role was to focus on spiritual leadership, so they replicated their influence by appointing leaders who would focus on other tasks. See Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

ACTS 6:1-7 [NIV]

The Choosing of the Seven

⁶*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews[a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.* ⁷*So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.* ⁸*Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁹ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”*

¹⁰*This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.* ¹¹*They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

¹²*So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

WEEK 9 - SERVANTS IN THE EARLY CHURCH [ACTS 6:1-7]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. If your food order is not correct, do you send it back or deal with it?
2. When have you seen a company or church have to deal with new problems as they grow?
3. When have you seen a problem swept under the rug and then it grew into a larger problem?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 6:1-7. Most of the problems in the early church have been because of external persecution. Why do you think Luke includes this story?
2. What do you think was an underlying reason for the complaints about the food distribution? [See pg. 6 “Hellenistic Jews” and “Hebraic Jews”]
3. Read Acts 6:2-4 again. Does this sound harsh and uncaring? What leadership principle can we learn from the Apostle’s response here?

4. What do you think could have happened if the Apostles ignored this complaint or swept it under the rug? What leadership principles can we learn from their swift response?
 5. Read Acts 6:5-7 again. All of these names sound like Greek names. Why would this matter? What leadership principles can we learn from this?
 6. Read Ephesians 4:11-13. How does this passage relate to this story in Acts? What are some goals and results the church leadership has when they recruit and equip servants in the church?
 7. What are some essential tasks that people take part in each week to help our pastors/leaders focus on their main tasks?
 8. Read Acts 6:7 again. What was the result of addressing this problem head-on? How can you take on extra responsibilities at WCC to help lead to more disciples being made?

CHANGE QUESTIONS

- 1. What problems, complaints, or issues can you help to solve at WCC? At work? In your community?**

- 2. What are some things in your life that may be good things, but could distract you from focusing on what is most important?**

- 3. How can you grow to be a man/woman filled with faith, the Spirit, and wisdom?**

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 THE MISSION OF THE WEEK

CMF International: Eric & Cait Pitts - Kenya

Eric & Cait serve with the Kenya Church Catalyst Team among the Turkana in northern Kenya. Eric's focus is on developing church leaders and pastors as well as working with a group of local disciple makers to begin a Disciple Making Movement that spreads throughout Kenya and beyond. Cait's focus is on community Health Evangelism, mainly with girls and women throughout Turkana. You can find more information at cmfi.org/ecpitts.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

James 1:27 [NIV]

- ▶ What would you define as “religion” before reading this verse? How is the typical definition different from James’ definition?

- ▶ How can you live out your religion by looking after those who are vulnerable?

- ▶ Who is a wise person you know? Who is a spiritual person you know? How can you emulate them today?

- ▶ How can you serve others within the church this week? How can you serve others outside the church this week?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers”
[Ephesians 4:11, NIV]

- ▶ Why would Paul list different roles of servant leaders within the church? How are these roles similar or different to what we see today?

- ▶ How are servant leaders essential for a church to thrive? How can you support your church leaders?

DAY 5:

“to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”
[Ephesians 4:12, NIV]

- ▶ What is the main role of the servant leaders in a church? What do you think works of service practically looks like week-to-week?

- ▶ How does equipping the body of Christ lead to it being built up? How can you build up instead of tear down the body of Christ this week?

DAY 6:

“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
[Ephesians 4:13, NIV]

- ▶ What are the results of a church filled with servants and servant leaders? What does unity in the faith and knowledge of God look like?

- ▶ What keeps churches and individuals from becoming mature and attaining the fullness of Christ? How can you grow and grow others?



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Week 10 - Stephen

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 6:8 - 8:4

LUKE'S DESCRIPTIONS AND COMPARISONS [Acts 7:54-60]

- Religious Leaders:
 - Furious and gnashed their teeth [7:54]
 - Covered their ears, yelled at the top of their voices, rushed at him [7:57]
 - Dragged him out of the city, began to stone him [7:58]
- Stephen:
 - Full of the Holy Spirit, looks up to heaven, sees the glory of God and Jesus [7:55-56]
 - Prays for Jesus to receive his spirit [7:59]
 - Falls to his knees, prays for God to not hold it against them [7:60]

PROGRESSION OF PERSECUTION

- Persecution intensifies in severity for the church:
- Peter/John: Arrested and given a warning [4:21]
- Apostles: Arrested, flogged, and given a warning [5:40]
- Stephen: Arrested, falsely accused, stoned to death [7:60]
- Church: Ongoing persecution for all Christians and “the church”[8:1-3]

FACE OF AN ANGEL [Acts 6:15]

This is a Jewish idiom [common saying] that meant a person was calm, confident, and resolute in their demeanor. The comparison to the face of an angel is that they were in awe of Stephen's countenance, like they would be of an angel. There is no direct evidence that his face was literally glowing. His face was glowing [figuratively] from divine inspiration and supernatural confidence.

Some may make a connection to the face of Moses after he received the 10 commandments [Exodus 34:29-35]. Moses' face was shining because he had been in the presence of God. This is likely where the Jewish saying began. It is possible Stephen's face was literally shining, since he looked up and saw God/Jesus in Acts 7:55, but they noticed his face long before he looked up into heaven. It is not exactly clear if this was figurative or literal.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE DEATHS OF STEPHEN AND JESUS

- Falsely accused [Acts 6:11-15; Luke 23:1-25]
- Trial before the Sanhedrin [Acts 6:11-7:60 ;Luke 22:54-71]
- Looked up to heaven before dying [Acts 7:55-56; John 17:1]
- Killed outside of the city [Acts 7:58; Luke 23:26-33]
- Pile of clothes [Acts 7:58; Luke 23:34]
- “Receive my spirit” [Acts 7:59; Luke 23:46]
- Forgive the killers [Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34]
- Persecution broke out [Acts 8:1-3; John 20:19]

ACTS 8:1 AND ACTS 1:8

Though the chapters and verses are not inspired by God, it is quite ironic how much Acts 1:8 goes along with Acts 8:1. Jesus commanded his Apostles to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We see the inauguration of that prophecy in Acts 8:1. It is no accident that Luke specifically mentions Judea and Samaria. Stephen's speech led to his death and the persecution of all Christians in Jerusalem. But that persecution led to the scattering of God's people throughout the entire region, which is what God had commanded and orchestrated to its eventual fulfillment. God's Sovereignty can turn tragedy into victory.

ACTS 6:8 - 8:4 [NIV]

Stephen Seized

⁶ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁷ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ⁸ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

⁹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

¹⁰ So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹¹ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹² For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹³ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

⁷ Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

The rest of Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin is found in Acts 7:2-53

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

⁸ And Saul approved of their killing him.

The Church Persecuted and Scattered

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

WEEK 10 - STEPHEN [ACTS 6:8 - 8:4]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

- 1. What are some movies or stories where someone is falsely accused?**
- 2. When have you said something true but it was not received well?**
- 3. When have you been able to see a positive outcome from a bad situation?**

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

- 1. Read Acts 6:8-15. What do you think people saw in Stephen's face that led them to say he had the face of an angel? [See pg. 14 "Face of an Angel"]**
- 2. Why do you think no one was able to stand against Stephen's wisdom [Acts 6:10]? How do you think his wisdom led to his death?**
- 3. If Stephen was speaking through the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit, why did he still suffer and die?**

4. Read Acts 7:1-53 [optional]. Have someone summarize Stephen's 3 main points. How does Stephen relate these 3 points to the religious leaders today [Acts 7:51-53]?
 5. Read Acts 7:54-60. How is Stephen's trial and death similar to Jesus'? Why do you think Luke records these similarities? [See pg. 14 "Stephen and Jesus"]
 6. Read Acts 8:1-4. Why is it important to read this section along with the story of Stephen's execution? What does this teach us today when we suffer?
 7. How does Acts 8:1 relate to Acts 1:8?

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. Could you be described as a person who was full of grace, wisdom, and the Spirit?
2. Is there a belief about God that you struggle to accept?
3. How can you show boldness and unleash the Holy Spirit as you tell others about Jesus?

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 THE MISSIONS OF THE WEEK

Show-Me Christian Youth Home

This faith-based organization seeks to improve the lives of children struggling because of circumstances in their current home environment. showmehelpingkids.com

Shiloh Christian Children's Ranch

Located in Kahoka and Clarence, MO, Shiloh is a safe haven for abused and neglected children, and includes six homes for children, two relief homes, and an onsite school. shilohranch.org

Adopt-A-Family & Angel Tree

You can help both/either of these ministries through Adopt-A-Family and Angel Tree. Adopt-A-Family is happening right now. Pick up a tag in the lobby and help a child with Christmas gifts. Angel Tree starts next week and is a way to provide items needed throughout the year.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”
[Acts 7:51, NIV]

- ▶ What does it look like to resist the Holy Spirit? Have you ever been guilty of this?

- ▶ The Jews knew the Scriptures, but their hearts were not in the right place. Is your heart pure? Are your ears receptive to God’s truth...even if it is not what you want to hear?

DAY 2:

“Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.”
[Acts 7:52, NIV]

- ▶ Stephen preached a long sermon about the history of God’s people in the Old Testament. How well do you know the Old Testament?

- ▶ Stephen knew enough Scripture to relate it to his current situation. Do you? How can you use Scripture in your daily life?

DAY 3:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
[Romans 8:28, NIV]

- ▶ How did this verse work out for Stephen? Do you think he loved God and was called according to his purpose?

- ▶ This verse is not a promise that only good things will happen to us. Instead, what does “works for the good” mean?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? A person’s wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance.”

[Ecclesiastes 8:1, NIV]

DAY 5:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
[John 16:33, NIV]

DAY 6:

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”
[Acts 8:1b, 4, NIV]

- ▶ Stephen was described multiple times as a man full of wisdom. What about a person makes them appear wise to others?

- ▶ Jesus says this to reassure his disciples before his own death. How would this bring them comfort? How does it bring you comfort?

- ▶ How did persecution lead to positive results? Why was the scattering of the Christians a good thing?

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- ▶ Why does wisdom brighten someone’s face? Why would our appearance be important?

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- ▶ What do you think this trouble looks like? What do you think this peace looks like?

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- ▶ Where are the places you go throughout a week? How can you preach, teach, and influence others as you go places each day?



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Week 11 - Philip

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 8:4-25

WHICH PHILIP?

This is what is known as a “church summary statement” in that it gives a positive description of the There are two main Philips in the New Testament: Philip the Disciple/Apostle, and Philip the Evangelist. Most likely, Acts 8 speaks of Philip the Evangelist, not Philip the Disciple/Apostle [Acts 1:13]. The reason for this is that Acts 6 names Philip the Evangelist as one of the 7 deacons chosen to distribute food, which indicates that Philip was not an Apostle. Also, Acts 8:14-17 indicates that this Philip was not an Apostle since they stayed in Jerusalem and needed to send Peter and John to confirm the conversions of the Samaritans.

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

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

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

Throughout the book of Acts, we see the apostolic authority diminishing. It comes to a climax in Acts 15 where the Jerusalem council [including the 12 Apostles] had to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit and salvation was unleashed to the Gentiles, without prior conversion to Judaism. After this, the leadership structure of the church is decentralized and localized throughout the rest of Acts, and the New Testament.

MAGIC, MYSTICISM, OCCULT

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

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

From Harry Potter, to Star Wars, to ghost/demon movies, to almost any Disney story, we see dark magic, mysticism, and the occult being pushed all around us. Should Christians participate in these? It is debatable. Some view entertainment involving mystical powers as teaching opportunities, while others avoid it altogether. The caution is to be careful and aware because innocent entertainment can lead to curiosity, which leads to experimentation, which leads to sinful acceptance and support of Satanic power.

ACTS 8:4-25 [NIV]

Philip in Samaria

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

Simon the Sorcerer

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEEK 11 - PHILIP [ACTS 8:4-25]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. Can you perform any “magic” tricks or card tricks? What are they?
2. What magic tricks have you seen in which you cannot explain?
3. When have you joined a group or a cause for the wrong reasons?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 8:4-8. Why would it have been difficult for Philip to go to Samaria?
2. Read Acts 8:9-17. What does the description of Simon’s previous way of life tell us about the power behind sorcery and dark magic? [See pg. 22 “MAGIC, MYSTICISM, OCCULT”]
3. Why do you think the Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit when they were baptized? [See pg. 22 “Apostolic Authority”]

4. Read Acts 8:18-25. What were Simon's motives for becoming a Christian? Why do you think he asked for the power of the Holy Spirit?
 5. What descriptions does Peter give about Simon after he asked about buying the power of the Holy Spirit? What instructions did he give to Simon?
 6. Why do you think Peter was so harsh on Simon? What are some ways people may take advantage of ministry and the power of God today?
 7. The story of Simon shows the need for continual spiritual growth, especially for new believers. What is a belief or attitude you have grown in since you became a Christian?

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. When have you had the wrong motives for being a Christian?
2. How can you continue to grow in your knowledge and obedience of God's Word?
3. Where is your Samaria? Who is your Simon? How can you unleash the Holy Spirit in their lives?

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 THE MISSION OF THE WEEK

Jireh India Missions

This ministry in India shares the good news of Jesus with those who have never heard His name. They provide homes and education for orphans at House of Peace, teach widows to sew so they can provide for their children, provide bread for much of their community through Five Loaves Bakery, and work with a leper colony. They strive to fulfill Psalm 82:3 — *Defend the poor and orphans; do justice to the afflicted and needy.*

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

"Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great."
[Acts 8:9, NIV]

- ▶ When have you boasted about something you were good at? When have others boasted about you?

- ▶ Simon's pride gets him into trouble. How can you recognize your own pride and what helps you keep from letting it get out of control?

DAY 2:

"and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.'"
[Acts 8:10, NIV]

- ▶ When have you taken credit for something you should not have? How did you feel afterwards?

- ▶ What gifts and abilities do you need to give credit to God for instead of taking it all for yourself?

DAY 3:

"Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw."
[Acts 8:13, NIV]

- ▶ Why were you baptized? What do you know about Jesus and the Bible now that you did not know back then?

- ▶ Why do you continue to be a Christian today? When have you had poor motives?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money."
[Acts 8:18, NIV]

DAY 5:

"You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God."
[Acts 8:21, NIV]

DAY 6:

"²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."
[Acts 8:22-23, NIV]

- ▶ When have you tried to buy something that was not for sale? If you could buy something that was priceless, what would it be?

- ▶ When have you missed out on a wonderful opportunity because your heart or attitude was not in the right place?

- ▶ What makes you bitter? How can bitterness rob you from enjoying God's blessings?

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- ▶ When have you seen the power of God compared to the inferior power of this world? How can you tap into the real thing this week?

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- ▶ Where is your heart today toward the ministry of WCC? How can you get or keep your heart in the right place?

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- ▶ What sins are keeping you captive today? What wickedness do you need to pray about and repent of?



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 12 - Ethiopian Eunuch

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 8:26-40

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SALVATION:

- BELIEVE:
 - John 3:16 [NIV] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:14 [NLT] For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.
- CONFESS:
 - Acts 19:18 [NIV] Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.
 - Romans 10:9 [NLT] If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
- REPENT:
 - Acts 3:19-20 [NLT] 19Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. 20Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord.
- BE BAPTIZED:
 - Acts 2:38 [NIV] Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - Romans 6:4-5 [NLT] 4For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. 5Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.
- REMAIN FAITHFUL:
 - 1 Corinthians 15:2 [NIV] By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.
 - Revelation 2:10 [NLT] Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

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

PREPARATION, NOT PRESENTATION

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

ACTS 8:26-40 [NIV]

Philip and the Ethiopian

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEEK 12 - ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH [ACTS 8:26-40]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. Remember those “wanna get away” commercials? When have you felt this way?
2. What are some popular movies that deal with time travel or going to different dimensions?
3. If you could instantly travel anywhere in the world, where would you most often go?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 8:26-29. How would you describe Philip’s response to the Spirit’s directive? How would you respond?
2. What do we learn about the Ethiopian man in vs. 27-28? Why are these details helpful for us to know?
3. How did Philip begin the conversation? Why do you think he had such success with this tactic?

4. How is spontaneity and also having a plan important for evangelism?

5. How does the eunuch's question in Acts 8:36 show the importance of baptism?

6. What questions do you think people have today that they may need help with? God? Bible? Jesus?

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

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How can you get prepared to share the Gospel with someone?
2. What Scriptures do you need to memorize so you can be prepared to share the Gospel?
3. How can you be prepared for the divine appointments the Holy Spirit may be unleashing you to take?

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

Team Expansion: Tim & Amy Maxson

The Maxsons work at Fellowship Dubai church in the Middle East and are making disciples of migrant workers. Tim & their ministry are where we first learned of the 3-Circle Method of telling others about Jesus. He was our guest speaker this week for Missions Sunday. The Maxson family has five children. teamexpansion.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."
[Colossians 4:6, NIV]

- ▶ When has your conversation led to an awkward interaction where you ruined an opportunity?

- ▶ What does a graceful conversation look like? What do you need to learn in order to know how to answer people who have questions?

DAY 2:

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."
[1 Peter 3:15a, NIV]

- ▶ When are times you like to be prepared ahead of time? When are times you prefer to "wing it"?

- ▶ What specifically are we to have prepared in our answer to everyone? How would you explain the reason for your hope in Jesus to someone today?

DAY 3:

"But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

[1 Peter 3:15b-16, NIV]

- ▶ When has someone told you something that was true, but you were unreceptive because they were mean about it?

- ▶ How does our behavior relate to our words when we are talking to people about Jesus? Which do you need to work on today?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

"The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"
[Acts 8:34, NIV]

DAY 5:

"Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."
[Acts 8:35, NIV]

DAY 6:

"As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"
[Acts 8:36, NIV]

- ▶ What questions have people asked you about the Bible which you were not prepared to answer? When have you been able to answer accurately?

- ▶ Have you ever led someone to Christ? Would you be able to lead someone to Christ if they asked you questions?

- ▶ Why is baptism such an important part of becoming a follower of Jesus?

- ▶ How can you become a person that people in your life come to when they have questions about Jesus and the Bible?

- ▶ Do you know enough about the Bible to teach someone about the Good News of Jesus? What verses can you memorize?

- ▶ Who in your life needs to be baptized and accept Jesus as their Savior? Pray for opportunities to lead them!
