



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Part 4

Name:

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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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.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 9:1-19a

SAUL TO PAUL

Paul did not have a “Saul to Paul” moment as many people like to think. His name was always Saul...and his name was always Paul. He would have been given both names at birth, which was common for Jews who were Roman citizens. His Hebrew name was Saul and his Roman name was Paul. He would have only used Paul when dealing with the Romans. The transition to be solely known as Paul happened later in his life, and would have been a conscious decision to, in a way, renounce his prestigious Jewish heritage.

Luke continues to call him “Saul” in Acts 11, 12, and 13. Acts 13:9 is a transition verse where Luke explains that Paul went by both names. Paul was used for the rest of Acts and the rest of Paul’s life. [We will use his name interchangeably throughout these lessons.]

WHO WAS ANANIAS?

The only other place we hear about Ananias is in Acts 22:12 where Paul retells his conversion story. Paul says Ananias was “a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.” In Acts 22:16 we see it was Ananias who told Paul he needed to be baptized: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” This was definitely not the same Ananias from Acts 5 who was married to Sapphira.

ROMAN CITIZEN

Saul was born as a Roman citizen [Acts 22:28], which was very rare. It was even more rare for a devout Jew to be a Roman citizen. It is estimated that only 10% of those living under Roman occupation were citizens. Citizenship was either purchased at a high price, or it could be earned by serving in the Roman army for 25 years.

Roman citizens were given special rights and protections that were not afforded to anyone else who was under Roman rule. Later in Acts, Paul invokes his rights just before he is beaten by a Roman guard [Acts 22:25-27]. He also uses his citizenship to appeal his trial before Caesar, Emperor Nero [Acts 25:10-11]. Paul’s dual status and cultural background makes him the perfect man to be used as God’s “chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.” [Acts 10:15]

SAUL’S COMMISSION [ACTS 9:15]

Saul was given a mission statement which he lived by for the rest of his life and ministry. It is interesting to note that this came through a vision to Ananias, which was then delivered to Saul. It did not come directly from Jesus to Saul himself.

“What is important to notice in this is that Saul’s commission to the Gentiles does not exclude or reject the Jews. In fact, as Paul the Apostle will assert in his letter to Christians in Rome, the Gospel is ‘first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.’” [Dean Pinter, Acts, pg. 226]

ACTS 9:1-19a [NIV]

Saul's Conversion

9¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

WEEK 13 - SAUL'S CONVERSION [ACTS 9:1-19A]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. **When have you been so completely wrong about something or someone that it was embarrassing?**
2. **What view or opinion do you have now that is different from what you had 10 or more years ago?**
3. **Who or what influenced you to change your view or opinion?**

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. **Read Acts 9:1-2. What was Saul's motivation for persecuting the Christians?**
2. **Read Acts 9:3-9. What do Jesus' words in vs. 4-5 say about Jesus' relationship with the Christian Church?**
3. **How is the physical loss of Saul's sight a metaphor for those who need to be converted? Why do you think Saul's blindness lasted 3 days?**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. **Have you been baptized? Have your sins been washed away? Have you received the Holy Spirit? What are you waiting for?!**
2. **How does Saul's conversion and Ananias' obedience inspire you to serve God?**
3. **Who is someone you can pray for and seek to convert?**

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

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. We are planning a mission trip to visit and work with the Sanchez family in November 2022. If you are interested in joining this mission team, please email Randy@wentzvillecc.org.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.”

Acts 9:3 [NIV]

▶ If you could compare your spiritual journey to Saul’s experience, where are you right now?

On the road to Damascus

Starting to hear God call my name and wondering what He is saying

Experiencing blindness and confusion

Trying to sort out what my next steps are going to be

▶ When have you had a bright-light type of experience?

DAY 2:

“He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

[Acts 9:4, NIV]

▶ How did God first get your attention? Was it dramatic and sudden, or subtle and gradual?

▶ If God were to blind you and get your attention today, what do you think He would say to you?

DAY 3:

“‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.’”

[Acts 9:13, NIV]

▶ Have you been guilty of questioning God’s ability to transform someone’s heart? Who have you given up on before?

▶ When have you obeyed God’s Word even though you had doubts? What happened?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” [Acts 22:16, NIV]

- ▶ What sort of things do you tend to procrastinate with? Why do you put it off for so long?

- ▶ What imagery is given here alongside baptism? How are these related, and what does that have to do with you?

DAY 5:

“¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” [2 Corinthians 3:15-16, NIV]

- ▶ How does this talk about a veil relate to Saul’s conversion story and the scales on his eyes?

- ▶ What veils or scales may be over people’s eyes today? What is blinding you from seeing what God wants you to see?

DAY 6:

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” [John 1:12, NIV]

- ▶ What do you think it means to be a child of God? What is the best part about being in God’s family?

- ▶ When you received Jesus and believed in his name, what were you hoping to receive? What else have you received that you did not realize at the time?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 9:19b-31

REACTIONS TO SAUL

The emphasis of this section of Scripture is more about the reactions to Saul's conversion and transformation than it is about his actual actions. Jews and Christians alike were astonished and bewildered by Saul's dramatic transformation. This shows that human nature is skeptical of certain conversions, but it also shows the power of God to prove a genuine conversion has taken place.

EVANGELISM RESEARCH

In 1993, 89% of Christians believed it was THEIR responsibility to share their faith with others. In 2018, that number dropped to 64%. The research goes on to say that people are much less likely to use Scripture when doing personal evangelism [59% down to 37%]. Christians today are also less likely to engage in discussion that challenges the beliefs of the person they are trying to reach [43% to 24%].

Christians today feel there are more social barriers when evangelizing. The top reasons non-Christians say they are unreceptive to hearing about someone's faith is because they are "disrespectful or judgmental." "The unfortunate reality is that most adults don't seem to connect their everyday experiences with their faith. Or, at least, they aren't talking about it if they do."

Perhaps the reason for a drop in the personal responsibility for evangelism is because churchgoers believe it is the job of the church and the pastors to evangelize.

www.barna.com "Sharing Faith is Increasingly Optional to Christians" May 15, 2018]

TIMELINE

Although it seems to happen quickly in Luke's description, Acts 9 actually covers quite a few years of time. Saul's conversion took place around 35AD, which was around 5 years after Jesus' death. After Saul escapes from Damascus [Acts 9:25], Luke records that Saul went to Jerusalem. This is true, but Luke skips over a large timeline in Saul's life. Paul recounts his conversion and timeline in Galatians 1:13-24. According to his own account, there was a 3-year gap between Acts 9:23 and 9:24.

After Saul escaped from Damascus he spent 3 years in the Arabian wilderness and THEN he went to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles Peter and James. After he was forced out of Jerusalem he went back to his hometown of Tarsus until Barnabas came to find Paul [Acts 11:25-26]. Paul did not return to Jerusalem until 14 years after he was forced out.

ACTS 9:19b-31 [NIV]

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

6^{19b} *Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

²³ *After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

²⁶ *When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

³¹ *Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.*

WEEK 14 - SAUL'S TRANSFORMATION [ACTS 9:19B-31]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. **What is something you are passionate about which you could talk about for days?**
2. **What is something others are passionate about that bores you when the subject comes up?**
3. **Who is someone you grew up with who became completely different [for better or worse] now that they are grown up?**

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. **Last week we talked about Saul's conversion. This week was about transformation. How are those words similar? Different?**
2. **Read Acts 9:19b-22. Why do you think Luke includes the detail that Saul spent time with the disciples in Damascus just before he records that Saul went to the synagogues to preach?**

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. Does your life look drastically different than someone who has not been transformed by Christ?
2. Who can you be a “Barnabas” to and help them grow as a Christian?
3. Who is someone who can be a spiritual mentor for you?

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

Christian Prison Ministry of Mid-America

Missouri is home to 29 prisons and 2 county jails in 5 states. CPMM’s goal is to evangelize, encourage, and equip the believers in all of these prisons. To date, over 400 inmates have been baptized!

christianprisonministryofmissouri.org

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
[2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV]

- ▶ What does it mean to have an unveiled face, now that the veil of the temple has been torn after Jesus’ death?

- ▶ In what ways are you being transformed into the image of Jesus? What do you still need to work on?

DAY 2:

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”
[Philippians 1:6, NLT]

- ▶ Why do you think Paul wants us to know that the work of Jesus has only begun in us, but is not yet complete?

- ▶ How does Jesus continue to work in you each day? In what ways can you help?

DAY 3:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”
[2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV]

- ▶ If we are a new creation, how come we still need to continue in our work and in our transformation?

- ▶ What “old” in your life has been taken away? What “new” in your life has arrived?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

[Romans 12:2, NIV]

- ▶ When have you been guilty of conforming to the pattern of this world? What needs to be transformed in your mind?

- ▶ What is the result of being transformed by the renewing of your mind? What do you think this looks like?

DAY 5:

“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.”

[Romans 15:1, NIV]

- ▶ Saul needed other people to come alongside him when he was weak. Who has been there for you when you needed it?

- ▶ Who in your life could use your love and support as they deal with failings and weakness? How can you help them?

DAY 6:

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

[2 Corinthians 4:4, NIV]

- ▶ Who is the god of this age, and how has he blinded the minds of unbelievers?

- ▶ How can you help others to see the light of the Gospel and the glory of Christ?



UNLEASHED

A STUDY OF ACTS

Week 15 - Healing Power of the Holy Spirit

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 9:32-43

ONLY FEMALE DISCIPLE

Tabitha/Dorcas is the only female in the entire New Testament who is directly called a disciple. It is safe to assume there were other women who were disciples, but there was something special about Tabitha to be given this title. Luke boldly and unapologetically highlights the importance of women to the ministry of Jesus in his Gospel. He continues this trend in the book of Acts by including amazing women such as Mary-mother of Jesus [1:12-26], Tabitha [9:36-43], Mary-mother of John Mark [12:6-19], Rhoda [12:6-19], Lydia [16:11-40], Damaris [17:16-34], Priscilla [18:1-28].

WHY INCLUDE THESE STORIES?

This section serves as a bridge between the two most important conversion stories in the book of Acts, possibly the New Testament: Saul [9:1-31] and Cornelius [10:1-48]. It reintroduces Peter into the narrative and establishes the connection between the mainline Christian church in Jerusalem and the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Geographic Preparation: Peter visits homes of Jewish believers living in the coastal plain and prepares for the shift to converting the first Gentile in Caesarea.

Thematic Preparation: Luke uses similar wording to weave common themes throughout these sections. Aeneas and Tabitha are commanded to “get up” [9:34, 40] from their places of brokenness and death. The result is that others turn and believe the Lord [9:35, 42]. Also, Peter is commanded to “get up” [10:13, 20] and be “healed” of his closed-mindedness so that others may be converted [10:36].

Theological Preparation: A high emphasis is given to those who care for the weak, the outcast, and the downtrodden [2:17-21; 2:44-47; 4:11; 6:1-7]. This sets the stage for Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles [9:15-16] and the first Gentile conversion of Cornelius in the next chapter. [See also Luke 6:20-26.] Furthermore, both Tabitha and Cornelius are described as those who gave generously to the poor and those in need [9:36; 10:2, 4, 31].

[Dean Pinter, Acts, pg. 240]

SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

“With these two [stories] we have a physical illustration of how the Gospel message raises the spiritually dead and causes them to run free. Both stories play off Jesus’ healing of a paralytic [Luke 5:17-26] as well as his raising the dead [Luke 7:11-16; 8:49-56]. The latter, of course, conjures up memories of Elijah [1 Kings 17:17-24] and Elisha [2 Kings 4:32-37].

[Mark Moore, Acts, pg. 184]

ACTS 9:32-43 [NIV]

Aeneas and Dorcas

³² As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

WEEK 15 - HEALING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT [ACTS 9:32-43]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. When have you ever been incapable of completing a physical task because of an injury or illness?
2. What are some charities you support or have supported?
3. Why do you support those specific causes?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 9:32-35. What would you struggle with the most if you were bedridden for eight years?
2. Read Luke 5:22-26. What similarities do you see between these two stories?

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. How might you be able to contribute to a miracle in someone's life?
2. What are some things you hope to be known for by others?
3. How can you be known for good in our community? How can you help the poor and those in need?

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

Daniel & Kelsey H.

Daniel & Kelsey serve in a closed country in North Africa through Frontiers Missions, where they are leading others to Christ while helping to run skate parks as their reason for being in the country. They moved to North Africa in March with their 2-year-old son and 6-week-old daughter. Please pray that they are able to continue to change lives through the power of the Holy Spirit working through them and in the people around them.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.”
[Luke 6:33, NIV]

- ▶ When have you had poor motives for doing good for someone else? When have you had pure motives?

- ▶ What does it mean to “do good” to others? How can you selflessly help others this week like Tabitha?

DAY 2:

“But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”
[Luke 11:41, NIV]

- ▶ What do you think Jesus means that what is inside you should be clean?

- ▶ How can you be generous to the poor this week? How can you make this a habit?

DAY 3:

“Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others.”
[1 Timothy 6:18, NLT]

- ▶ When have you blown your money on something that was not good? How does it feel afterward?

- ▶ How can you be rich in good works? Are you always ready to share with others who are in need?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.”

[James 5:13, NIV]

- ▶ When do you usually pray? How does your mood affect your prayers?

- ▶ When you are in trouble, what kind of prayer do you offer to God?

DAY 5:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”

[James 5:14, NIV]

- ▶ Why would it be important for the leaders of the church to be involved in prayer when you are struggling?

- ▶ How does being anointed with oil in the name of the Lord relate to prayer and healing?

DAY 6:

“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”

[James 5:15, NIV]

- ▶ Which kind of healing do you think God is more concerned about? How does faith relate to healing?

- ▶ What does this verse show about the relationship between physical and spiritual healing? Why do you think Jesus often forgave sins along with healing people physically?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ACTS 10:1-48

WHO WAS CORNELIUS?

- Centurion - A career soldier in the Roman army and leader of at least 100 men. Centurions are always spoken well of in the New Testament [Luke 7:1-10; Luke 23:47; Acts 10; Acts 22; Acts 27]. They would have been excellent leaders, effective communicators, and well trusted.
- Italian Regiment - This was probably a special designation for those who would protect the Emperor, possibly as bodyguards. Similar to the Secret Service today.
- He and all his family - He was also a leader in his home, especially with spirituality.
- Devout and God-fearing - “God fearers” were Gentiles who somehow came to honor God, but could not bring themselves to commit to circumcision or the other required ceremonial rituals of the Jews.
- Gave generously to those in need, gifts to the poor - Giving to the poor, regular prayer, and fasting were the 3 key tenets of Jewish piety. See Matthew 6:1-8!
- Prayed to God regularly, 3 in the afternoon - Devout Jews would pray at regular times throughout the day. It was not commanded, but it was customary for this to happen in the morning, mid-day, and evening. Many would follow 3 hour blocks consisting of sunrise, 9am, noon, 3pm, and sundown.

[Mark Moore, Acts, pg. 189-190]

CLEAN AND UNCLEAR ANIMALS

Peter saw many different animals consisting of 3 main categories: land mammals, reptiles/creepy crawlies, and birds. These three categories come from Genesis 6:20. God clearly and authoritatively commanded Peter to kill and eat these creatures. Peter objected because he had remained “kosher” his entire life [See Leviticus 11:4-7, 13-19, and 29-30].

To obey this command would have been more than just trying something weird at a buffet. It would have been a personal, religious, legal, and cultural faux-paux. It would cause someone to become ceremonially unclean, and become ostracized from their family and friends [See Acts 11:1-18!]. Dietary laws, observing the Sabbath, and circumcision were the key markers of Judaism. Removing these would place Peter’s identity as a Jew in jeopardy.

[Mark Moore, Acts, pg. 189-190]

God may be calling you to branch out to follow him to uncomfortable places. He may ask you to go against your culture, tradition, religion, taste, etc. in order to reach people for Jesus!

GENTILE PENTECOST

This conversion story is sometimes referred to as the “Gentile Pentecost.” Its importance cannot be overstated. Luke sets the stage for this story to be the climax and turning point of his narrative. Just as Pentecost inaugurated the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Judaism, this event serves as the commencement of the Holy Spirit being UNLEASHED to the Gentile world. This conversion is told 3 times in Acts, as well as Saul’s conversion. This is a Jewish style of storytelling which places extreme emphasis on the event.

NOTE: Some may argue that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 was the first Gentile conversion. In a way this may be technically accurate, but for Luke, Cornelius is the first true Gentile conversion. The Ethiopian was most likely in the process of becoming a proselyte since he was on a pilgrimage to the temple and was reading from Isaiah. A proselyte was a Gentile who went through a ceremonial process in which they chose to fully follow all Jewish laws and customs. The Jewish religion had tiers of followers: Jewish birthright; Proselyte or Jewish Convert; and God-fearing Gentiles.

ACTS 10:1-48 [NIV]

Philip and the Ethiopian

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!” ⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked.

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Peter’s Vision

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

...

Peter at Cornelius’s House

²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

...

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

...

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

WEEK 16 - HOLY SPIRIT UNLEASHED TO THE GENTILES [ACTS 10:1-48]

CONNECT QUESTIONS

1. What places have you visited, or would like to visit, which have different cultural practices from what you are used to?
2. What are some weird or exotic foods you have eaten?
3. What are some weird or exotic foods you would never eat?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 10:1-8. What descriptions are given about who Cornelius was? Why do you think Luke includes these? [See “Who Was Cornelius” on pg. 30]
2. Read Acts 10:9-16. What does Peter’s vision have to do with Cornelius? Why would Luke record these mirror visions?
3. How does Acts 10:15 have multiple meanings? Why would this be considered a climax in this story, and the entire book of Acts? [See “Gentile Pentecost” and “Clean and Unclean Animals” on pg. 30]

CHANGE QUESTIONS

1. **When have you been guilty of thinking Christianity is exclusive to people who are just like you?**
2. **What habits, patterns, beliefs, or traditions do you need to let go of in order to lead other people to follow Jesus?**
3. **What are some practical ways you can reach out to people who are different from you? What is keeping you from taking these steps?**

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

HOPE Ministries Food Pantry

HOPE provides families in St. Charles county assistance with food and physical needs. You can donate non-perishable food items to this ministry by visiting the food cart in the WCC café. Take home a bag and bring it back with the items requested for the month.

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 1-3]

DAY 1:

“The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’”
[Acts 10:15, NIV]

- ▶ When have you treated something as impure when it really was not? Why did you think it was so bad?

- ▶ Anything and anyone can be made clean and used for good purposes. Do you believe that? Do you believe that about yourself?

DAY 2:

“What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”
[Matthew 15:11, NIV]

- ▶ When do you typically say things that are inappropriate? What leads you to these moments?

- ▶ Jesus wants us to know that we are defiled from the inside-out, not by what we eat. What do you think that means for you today?

DAY 3:

“He [Peter] said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.’”
[Acts 10:28, NIV]

- ▶ God did not say anything about people, he was talking about animals. How does this show Peter’s understanding of the vision?

- ▶ When have you broken a law or rule for a good reason? What social rules do you need to break in order to visit or associate with someone?

DAILY DEVOTION [DAYS 4-6]

DAY 4:

“³⁴Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.’”
[Acts 10:34-35, NIV]

- ▶ When have you come to a harsh realization that you were wrong? Did you admit it or try to hide it?

- ▶ How can you fear God and do what is right so you will be accepted?

DAY 5:

“¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
[Acts 2:17, 21, NIV]

- ▶ How does Peter’s quote from Joel 2 during Pentecost relate to this event with Cornelius and his family?

- ▶ How do the words “all” and “everyone” show God’s plan to always include the Gentiles in His family?

DAY 6:

“²⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
[Galatians 3:26-28, NIV]

- ▶ Why is the story of Cornelius so important for the theology of the early church? How is it important for the church today?

- ▶ How can you be inclusive and loving to those who want to be a part of the family of God?
