



= THE BOOK OF =

Acts

= SPIRIT AND MISSION =



The Book of Acts

|| Spirit & Mission ||

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About this Series

When we think of the book of Acts, we come to a question found in the very title of Luke's second book. "The Acts of who?" Whose great "acts" do we find in this story?

If you read the book through (a fairly easy task as it's definitely some of the best story telling in the whole bible!) you could imagine, at first glance that it's the "acts" of the early Church, the tenacious, courageous brand new followers of Jesus listening to his call in Chapter 1, Verse 8, taking on the task of being Jesus' witnesses throughout the world.

However, if you look for just a little longer you'll realise the story is absolutely, all about the acts of the Holy Spirit! In Jesus last words he first says WAIT! Don't do anything just yet! Don't move, don't leave, don't do anything rash (not that these fellas and ladies would at this point) but wait on the Holy Spirit, God's power given to his people!

The story leads on from there! The Holy Spirit arrives shortly after in Chapter 2 and then.... like a tidal wave the Spirit starts moving through the early Church and God's people hop on for the ride.

This series is all about understanding exactly just how the Spirit moves in and through us now as God's people. The story is all about two things, SPIRIT & MISSION. The SPIRIT that moves in and through God's people, leads and guides them, comforts and empowers them ... to a MISSION that they are called to of witness through word and action to anyone and everyone who they meet.

The story continues in us! We are God's people now and it's important we know and are reminded that this same tidal wave sweeps through us today. If it wasn't for this story, you would not be reading this right now!

So enjoy the ride as we explore the story of the Acts of the Spirit!

WEEK 1

The Work of the Spirit

Acts 1:1-11

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Jesus is risen! In our world today we find ourselves just as the first disciples did left with a task to accomplish as Jesus' followers. Today we are going to look back to the very first moments after Jesus ascended into heaven and look at what that task entails!

READ ACTS 1:1-11

1. Our adventure as the followers of Jesus begins right here in the beginning of Acts. After Jesus' resurrection from the dead & before he rose to heaven, he shares that before this adventure begins the disciples must wait on a gift from God called the Holy Spirit [v4]. As you follow Jesus what does it look like to wait on this gift? Do you ever feel like you're on your own in this adventure?

2. What do you think the disciples were expecting of Jesus after his resurrection and how does Jesus respond to their question? [v6-7] Why do you think he says this?

3. The Holy Spirit seems to be a very important part of everything that Jesus call the disciples to do. Does the Holy Spirit take this high a priority for you? Why or why not?

4. How do you approach serving Jesus and obeying his command to Go and make disciples of all nations. Does the Spirit play a part in how you witness Jesus to others?

5. Jesus ascends into heaven. Beyond the fact this would have been awesome to watch, the disciples it seems, wait and wait for Jesus to reappear. Do you ever see opportunity or problem arise but find yourself waiting for the easy route or someone else to come in and solve the problem?

6. Two men appear from nowhere and rebuke the disciples to get a move on. After everything that's happened for you in your adventure so far, what have you done in response? How can you take action this week to do all that Jesus calls you to?

PRAY

Why do you look up? We find in the beginning of this story that we are called to wait on the Spirit but not wait on Jesus. We have work to do and we don't do it alone. Pray this week that the Holy Spirit, the great gift from God can fill you and shape this adventure, that as you work for God you can recognize it is the Spirit that works through you.

The Community of the Spirit

Acts 2:1-47

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Locked away in a room in prayer. Quiet, afraid, unsure and uninformed. Something happened which turned these worriers into warriors for Jesus. When the Spirit comes, it calls the disciples to share - share both a message to the world but also to share life together. What can we learn about the Community that forms and what do we look like in comparison?

READ ACTS 2:1-6 & 2:17-21 & 2:38-41

[Re-read the whole passage this week!]

1. Peter and the disciples receive the Spirit and it completely changes them! At one moment they are unsure and afraid, the next they are challenging people, sharing awesome news and seeing many come to have relationship with Jesus. What was your first reactions and experiences when you became a Christian?

2. What can we learn about the Holy Spirit from this story?

3. How does this story make you feel? When you look at your own life as a Christian what's different?

READ ACTS 2:42-47

5. Draw what you see in this story below.

6. What is similar to how we gather as the Church now and what's different?

7. What can we learn from how the early Church gathered? What does it teach us about the Holy Spirit's impact on community?

PRAY

The early church had it right! The way they gathered in Community and shared faith with the world around them was incredible. Take some time this week to reflect on how you do Church today. What can you change to ensure your journey is as full and rich and exciting and warm and loving as the early church?

Persecution: Stephen's Story

Acts 6:8-7:1 & Acts 7:54-8:4

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Stephen is first mentioned in chapter 6 as a 'Man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.' His role in the church was to care practically for the widows and the needy, and make sure no one was overlooked or forgotten. It seems like a humble position but God still worked 'miracles and wonders' through him. And the Stephen's reliance on the Holy Spirit changed church history forever!

1. What did it mean to fully live like Jesus in Stephen's time? What does it mean in our time?

READ ACTS 6:8 - 7:1

2. Stephen is constantly looking for opportunities to show Jesus to people. Even in the Sanhedrin, the same place where Jesus himself was unfairly sentenced to death, he starts to give a history lesson to the smartest and most learned people of the day, to show them that God is not limited by buildings or structures or institutions. Are we also looking for opportunities like Stephen was?

READ ACTS 7:54 - 8:4

3. Stephen lived his whole and complete life for Jesus, from the time he became a believer to the time he was killed for it. What are his last words? Who else said words similar to those? Are we also able to forgive like that?

4. The fact that Stephen didn't give up even when it all seemed to be against him, inspired the rest of the church. Though they began to be persecuted and scattered, wherever they went they continued to live for God. Just like Stephen, they cared for the needy and were full of the Holy Spirit. Could we take a stand for Jesus like that? When is it difficult?

5. How can we have more courage and wisdom at those times? Who can we depend on?

PRAY

Pray that the Holy Spirit would transform us to be more like Jesus, and give us courage to take a stand for him by caring for the needy and speaking with wisdom.

In many parts of the world, like North Korea, Somalia, or even closer to home in parts of Indonesia and China, it is still very dangerous to be a Christian. But Christians in these places still continue living their full lives like Jesus did, and like Stephen did. Where we have the least power, the Spirit can work the most. God is not limited by persecution! Include these persecuted Christian communities in your prayers today and this week.

Power: Philip's Story

Acts 8:26-40

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Philip worked together with Stephen (from last week), caring for widows and needy and making sure no one was overlooked or forgotten by the early church. But when Stephen was martyred and the church scattered, he left Jerusalem and God told him where to go next. I'm sure a lot would have been going through his head at this point, but he continued to listen to and obey God's Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, God's vision was for the whole world, not just Jerusalem.

READ ACTS 8:26-40

1. Do we ever limit God or his word? To one space, time, or context? Do we ever think a challenge is too big for God?
2. When Philip hears the Spirit, he immediately obeys. How can we hear the Spirit? If we heard it, would we obey like Philip did? What sort of things would the Spirit be telling us to do?
3. Philip is able to explain the big story of the Bible; the Good News of Jesus, from a single passage. How well do we know the big story of the bible? If someone asked you, could you tell them the gospel in a couple of sentences? Have a try!

4. Philip has no doubts about including the Ethiopian into God's family. And the Ethiopian has no doubts about committing to Jesus. Once he gets it, he doesn't waste any time dedicating his life to God! Have we committed and given our full lives to Jesus or are we still considering it?

5. The Holy Spirit is a supernatural gift. If it can teleport Philip so that he can serve God, it can absolutely help us do what we need to live for God! When do we ask the Spirit for help? What is the purpose of the Spirit? Turn back to Acts 1:8 if you've forgotten.

PRAY

All this happened to help one man understand God's word. And it changed his life! God cares about you and wants to help you understand the bible as well. Pray that this week, the Spirit would help you to understand and obey God's word like Philip did.

4. Three whole days in darkness with no food or water. What other stories in Scripture does this experience remind you of?

5. If you were Annanias how would you feel being tasked with finding Saul? What gift does Annanias bring from God to Saul?

6. Reread V15-16. What do you make of Saul's task? Would you believe it? Does it sound fun? What does Saul's task teach us about our task as God's people?

7. From your own memory, what do you know about Saul's ministry after this time?

PRAY

This story is one of the most ludicrous and fantastic stories of how God can change people. So often when we are in a situation we don't know how to get out of all we feel we can do is wait for something to change. Very rarely do we feel it is us that can change! Saul, later known as Paul becomes a founding father of Christian faith and yet he was an enemy of God. Pray that God's spirit can transform you more and more to be like him.

READ ROMANS 12:1-2

The Spirit Of Acceptance: Peter's Story

Acts 10

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Peter is ministering in the town of Joppa, preaching about Jesus and healing in his name when he receives a vision from God. Meanwhile in the town of Caesarea there is a Roman man named Cornelius 'a God fearer' who receives a visit from an angel who tells him to go and find Peter! Watch how God changes the course of history in this story.

READ ACTS 10:9-23

1. In Peter's vision he sees all kinds of four footed animals, reptiles and birds, he is then told to go and kill. What do you think this vision means? What is surprising about this?
2. God spoke to Peter when he was praying. How often do you feel like God is speaking to you through prayer? How do you find God speaks most to you?
3. Why does God make things that used to be unclean clean? What has been cleansed? What happens immediately after the vision? How does Peter react to the newcomer's arrival?

Peter goes with the servants to meet Cornelius and find out what's going on.

READ ACTS 10:30-48

4. Up until now only Jew's were connected to God. What's happened in this story? How does this show that both Jew and Gentile are equal in Gods sight?

5. What is the Holy Spirit doing throughout this chapter with reference to specific events? How can we see it in our lives?

6. What is significant about Peter baptizing Romans who were uncircumcised? Read vs 28. What is so momentous about this moment? What is the first thing they do with the new Christians?

7. Do you accept others who are different to you? What does the Holy Spirit teach us about acceptance?

PRAY

In this chapter Peter is commanded by God to put aside prejudice of food in order to allow him to minister to Gentiles and go into their homes without fear of disobeying God. We often do similar things making up reasons why we cannot minister to others. Pray that God removes barriers preventing you from being able to go and talk to people about Jesus and what he has done. Ask for the Holy Spirit to invade peoples lives in the same way as happened for Cornelius' household!

The Spirit Of Adventure: Our Story

Acts 1:8 & Acts 29

We have only made it halfway! Though this series begins part of the story the first challenge for you all is to finish reading it! After Peter's encounter with Cornelius we begin a journey spanning years as Paul, Peter and the other followers of Jesus continue their journey, listening to Jesus' call from the very beginning in Chapter 1, Verse 8 to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, and doing all of this by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We've seen in these past weeks that this Spirit calls us to community, transforms, empowers and leads us also to suffering through persecution. It's a Spirit which accepts all, loves all, cares for the least and listens to the lowly.

Some questions for reflection:

1. How have you taken up the call to witness to Jesus?
2. Has your understanding of the Spirit changed?
3. Has your relationship with the Holy Spirit changed? Does he lead you? Do you listen to him?
4. What has been the most challenging part of exploring this story for you?

READ ACTS 29

Haha! Tricked you! The Book of Acts as you may have realised finishes at Chapter 28.

Take a moment to read through Chapter 28. You will notice it ends with Paul, imprisoned in Rome and awaiting a trial before Caesar. It's important to note just how significant Rome was at this time. Rome was the capital of the known world the centre of the Holy Roman Empire, the civilisation that oppressed and ruled over many countries including Judea.

Luke is a clever author. Jesus' challenge in Chapter 1 to "be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" was, you may have noticed expounded through this exciting story! Check it out:

Chapter 2: They wait in JERUSALEM until..... The Holy Spirit arrives.... They share the Gospel and numbers are added as more and more people believe. They live, love, share and enjoy the new life they have been given!

Chapters 3-6: They start discovering all that it means to be God's people, including the challenges that arrive as they seek to coexist!

Chapter 7: Stephen is stoned to death! Persecution begins and God's people scatter. They spread out through JUDEA and now with persecution all around God's people continue to faithfully share their revelation.

Chapter 8: Philip appears in SAMARIA before heading south and encountering the Ethiopian eunuch. God's people break the borders of their homeland continuing to spread the Good News.

Chapter 9: The persecutor becomes the protected! Saul becomes Paul and begins his own journey as a brand new follower of Jesus.

Chapter 10: The doors are flung open beyond the Jews to the Gentiles as Peter realises that God is all accepting, all loving.

Chapters 11-28: (Go finish the book if you haven't!) Slowly at first and then faster and faster Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Luke himself and countless others go with the Spirit to Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece and all throughout the known world finally ending in Rome, the Capital of the KNOWN WORLD!

From JERUSALEM, through JUDEA, SAMARIA and finally to the very centre of the KNOWN WORLD. Rome was for Luke "the ends of the earth." A fitting place to finish his story, however, the story continues.

We are that same people, that same Church, following the same Jesus and filled by the same Holy Spirit. We write ACTS 29 as many faithful followers have before us.

Will you join with them in writing the story?

Is your life shaped by the SPIRIT and by God's MISSION?