

# Acts Discussion Guide

## Basics

Written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, probably around A.D. 62, when Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial before Caesar.

## Key Verse

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (NLT)

## Outline

- I. Preparation for Witness (1:1-2:13)
- II. The Witness in Jerusalem (2:14-5:42)
- III. The Witness beyond Jerusalem (6:1-12:25)
- IV. The Witness in Cyprus and Southern Galatia (13:1-14:28)
- V. The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)
- VI. The Witness in Greece (15:36-18:22)
- VII. The Witness in Ephesus (18:23-21:16)
- VIII. The Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17-23:35)
- IX. The Witness in Caesarea (24:1-26:32)
- X. The Witness in Rome (27:1-28:31)

## Introduction Video



### **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

Let your group members know ahead of time what to read.

Send your group members the questions each week so they can be thinking about their responses.

Read the passages, questions, and Leader Notes before your group meeting

The Leader Notes and any additional notes are designed to give biblical and theological guidance as you have your group discussion. Most of these notes are directly from notes in the Life Application Bible.

## Acts 1

1. What evidence is given in Acts chapter 1<sup>1</sup> that Jesus was resurrected and how does that evidence give you confidence that your faith is based on fact?
2. How does the disciple's question about the Kingdom of God in Acts 1:6 contrast with what Jesus had taught them about the Kingdom of God (i.e. Luke 17:21<sup>2</sup>)?
3. What has been your personal experience with the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?
4. Read Acts 1:14. What would it take for your brother to convince you he was the son of God? What changed for Jesus' brothers (see John 7:5)? How does this affect your faith?
5. Read Acts 1:16-17<sup>3</sup>. What is the difference between being close to the truth and being committed to the truth? How have you experienced this contrast in your own life? Where would you say you are right now? What are you doing to intentionally stay committed to the truth?

### **LEADER NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>*Evidence: He appeared, He proved that he was alive, He talked (1:3)*

<sup>2</sup>*In Luke 17:20-21 Jesus spoke about his kingdom being a spiritual kingdom established in the hearts and lives of believers.*

<sup>3</sup>*Judas had received the same calling and teaching as everyone else, but he had chosen to reject Christ. Although Jesus predicted this would happen, it was Judas's choice. Those privileged to be close to the truth are not necessarily committed to the truth.*

## Acts 2

1. Put yourself in the shoes of a visitor to Jerusalem at this time. You've come to fulfill your duty to come to the temple for the Festival of the Harvest<sup>1</sup>. What do you think and feel during the events of verses 5-6?
2. Read verse 12. What is different about your life? What supernatural evidence would cause someone to stop and say, "what can this mean?"
3. Read verse 23<sup>2</sup>. How does this make you feel? Does it stir up more hope or more doubt for you?
4. What further evidence is there in verse 24 that Jesus had risen from the dead and that you can be confident in your faith<sup>3</sup>?
5. How have you actively responded with your life to the question asked in verse 37?
6. Read verses 41-43. What do these verses teach us about how spiritual growth happens for believers<sup>4</sup>?
7. What are you doing to make your church the kind of place that will attract others to Christ?

### LEADER NOTES

- *Note: Verse 3...fulfillment of John the Baptist's words in Luke 3:16 and Joel's words in Joel 2:28-29*
- *Note: Three parts to Peter's sermon...*
  - *They should listen because OT prophecy had been fulfilled that very morning (Acts 2:16-21)*
  - *Jesus has shown himself to be both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:25-36)*
  - *The risen Christ could change their lives (Acts 2:37-40)*

<sup>1</sup>*There were three major Jewish Festivals (Deut. 16:16)...1) Unleavened Bread, or Passover (Jesus was crucified during the Passover Festival); 2) First Harvest, or Pentecost-was a time of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. The Holy Spirit came during Pentecost...Peter's speech to an international audience in Jerusalem who were there for Pentecost resulted in a worldwide harvest of new believers (the first Christians). 3) Festival of Shelters*

<sup>2</sup>*(Verse 23) Everything that happened to Jesus was under God's control. This was especially comforting to those facing oppression during the time of the early Christian church.*

<sup>3</sup>*Jesus' death and resurrection had happened less than two months before the events in Acts 2. His execution has been carried out in public before many witnesses. His empty tomb was available for inspection just a short distance away. If Christ had not truly died, Peter's message would have been laughed at or ignored. If Christ had not been resurrected, authorities could have produced his body and put an end to this new faith.*

<sup>4</sup>*New believers need to be in groups where they can learn God's Word, pray, and mature in the faith.*

## Acts 3-4

1. Read Acts 3:1. What “systems” do you have in place to consistently practice spiritual habits and disciplines<sup>1</sup>?
2. How would you describe the faith required to ask something in the name of Jesus (see Acts 3:6)?
3. Read Acts 3:19-20. What does “spiritual refreshment” mean to you? When was the last time you felt refreshed spiritually?
4. Read Acts 4:12. What is the typical response of the world to this statement? How do you respond or react to the world’s response?
5. Read Acts 4:13. What has changed in you as a result of being with Jesus?
6. What would you pray for if threatened with possible imprisonment for talking about Jesus? Compare your prayer with the prayer of the believers in Acts 4:29<sup>2</sup>.
7. Describe what you think it means for the believers in Acts 4:32 to be united in heart and mind. What steps (attitudes, thoughts, behaviors, etc.) do you need to consider taking in order to contribute to unity?

### LEADER NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Systems should not be confused with legalistic rituals or traditions. Instead, think of “systems” as consistent habits or disciplines in your life that you’ve intentionally pursued so that you can know God more intimately and become more like Jesus. In Acts 3:1 the system, or habit, that Peter and John had in place was participation in an afternoon prayer service. Another great example of a person in the Bible who consistently practiced spiritual habits is Daniel (see Daniel 6:10). Jesus also practiced spiritual habits (see Luke 5:16).*

<sup>2</sup>*The believers prayed for boldness and courage.*

## Acts 5-6:7

1. Read Acts 5:1-11. What is your response to this event? What was Ananias and Sapphira's sin<sup>1</sup>? What do we do with this narrative...what does it change for us?
2. What did all the miraculous healings do for the early church (see Acts 5:14)? Why do you think we don't see miraculous healing like this as much now?
3. Why do you think the Sadducees were jealous of the apostles in Acts 5:17?
4. Read Acts 5:19-20. What is a biblical command that, if obeyed, might result in discomfort for you today?
5. How did Gamaliel's instruction to the high council backfire on them<sup>2</sup>? (Acts 5:36-39)
6. Read Acts 6:1. Why do you think there were so many conflicts within the church? Have you ever thought it would be cool to be a part of a perfect church<sup>3</sup>?
7. What is your response to the apostle's response in verse 2?
8. What are your spiritual gifts and how can you use them to serve others<sup>4</sup>?

### LEADER NOTES

- 5:21 (remember 4:13)
- Notice the summary of the Gospel in 5:30-32
- Remember the name Gamaliel in 5:34 (see 22:3)
- Remember the name Stephen in 6:5

<sup>1</sup>The sin Ananias and Sapphira committed was not stinginess or holding back part of the money—it was their choice whether or not to sell the land and how much to give. Their sin was lying to God and God's people, saying they gave the whole amount but holding back some for themselves and trying to make themselves appear more generous than they really were.

<sup>2</sup>Gamaliel probably did not support the teachings of the apostles. His real intentions were more likely to prevent a division in the council and to avoid arousing the Romans. However his advice to the council gave the apostles some breathing room to continue their work. And as the council hoped that this all would fade away quickly, the apostles (and later Paul...who had been one of Gamaliel's students) worked to spread the Gospel all around the world.

<sup>3</sup>The reality is that there is no perfect church. There have been conflicts and problems in churches since the church began in the first century. Acts 6:1-7 gives a beautiful picture of how to handle problems in the church and is an awesome reminder of how faithful God is.

<sup>4</sup>All Christians have gifts, experiences, and passions that God wants us to use to serve others.

## Acts 6:8-8:1a

1. Did you notice the way Luke described Stephen in Acts 6:5 and 6:8<sup>1</sup>? Describe what you think this type of person would look like, talk like, act like, and think like.
2. In Acts 7:2-47 Stephen gives an accurate and concise history of the Israelite nation. In verse 17 he says, “As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise...” Even though over and over the Israelites rebelled against him and other nations and circumstances seemed to constantly be fighting against God’s plan. Which of the following truths/principles that Stephen clearly believed is easiest for you to believe? Which is most difficult for you to believe?
  - God is in control—nothing surprises him
  - This world is not all there is—it will pass away but God is eternal
  - God is just, and he will make things right—punishing the wicked and rewarding the faithful
  - God wants to use you to make a difference in the world
3. Read Acts 7:48<sup>2</sup>. What is your response to Stephen’s statement? How did the religious leaders respond<sup>3</sup>? Why do you think they responded with so much anger and violence?
4. Read Acts 7:57. Have you ever known someone who refused to hear the truth about God? How did you respond?

### **LEADER NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>In 6:5 - “full of faith and the Holy Spirit;” in 6:8 - “full of God’s grace and power”

<sup>2</sup>Solomon knew this when he prayed at the dedication of the Temple (see 2 Chronicles 6:18)

<sup>3</sup>See Acts 7:54-58

## Acts 8

1. Read Acts 8:1. What's the most uncomfortable or painful experience you have ever gone through? How did you respond?
2. Read Acts 8:4. The discomfort of persecution forced the believers out of their homes in Jerusalem, and along with them went the Good News. How could God have been using (or perhaps how is he currently using) the painful experiences in your life to help you grow, to increase your faith, or to prepare you for a specific task?
3. Read Acts 8:18-23. Have you ever been corrected or rebuked for a serious mistake? How did you respond? What can you learn from Simon's response in verse 24? For you personally, what makes it the most difficult to admit when you've done wrong, repent (or turn from) that wrong, and ask someone else to pray for you?
4. Philip was having a very successful preaching ministry in Samaria when he was told to leave Samaria and go to a desert road (8:26). That must have seemed like a demotion, but he went obediently anyway. Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something or go somewhere that you didn't understand...maybe it felt like a demotion? What did you do? What did you discover along the way?
5. Read Acts 8:30-35. Philip started where the Ethiopian Eunuch was and told him about Jesus. Why do you think it's important to meet somebody where they are when sharing Jesus, instead of where you think they ought to be or where you are? Do you feel equipped to be able to turn any conversation about the Bible into a conversation about Jesus<sup>1</sup>?

### LEADER NOTES

- *Note the beginning of the fulfillment of what Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1:8 as you read 8:1.*
- *Philip in verse 5 is the Philip from Acts 6:5 (not the apostle Philip)*
- *Lots of questions could come up about receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17). We've included a helpful explanation on the following page. This explanation comes directly from a site the Brazos Fellowship pastoral staff trusts and recommends from time to time when people have questions: [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org)*

<sup>1</sup>Helpful tool for learning to do this - *BF Talks: The Bible*  
<http://groupleaders.brazosfellowship.com/bf-talks/>

## Why had the believers in Samaria not received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8)?

\*In [Acts 8:12](#) we read of a group of Samaritans who “believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, [and] they were baptized, both men and women.” However, when we get to [Acts 8:16](#), we find that “the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” We understand, based on passages such as [1 Corinthians 12:13](#), that Christians receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. How was it that the Samaritans whom Philip evangelized did not receive the Holy Spirit?

First, it is good to remember the book of Acts is a history of how God started the church. It is the record of the *transition* between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and much of what we see in Acts relates to that transition. The Samaritans’ manner of receiving the Spirit should be taken for what it is—an accurate account of what happened in their case. It should not be construed as normative in every case. The believing Samaritans had been baptized in water, but, for God’s own reasons, they had not yet been baptized in the Spirit.

Second, we should note that the Spirit *did* come upon the Samaritans ([Acts 8:14–17](#)), but not until the apostles Peter and John were present. There are some good reasons why God waited until Peter and John were present before He sent the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans:

1) Jesus had given Peter the “keys to the kingdom” ([Matthew 16:19](#)). Peter was present—and was the main spokesman—at Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)), when the Spirit was given to the Jews. Peter was present in [Samaria \(Acts 8\)](#), when the Spirit was given to the Samaritans. And Peter was present in Cornelius’s house ([Acts 10](#)), when the Spirit was given to the Gentiles. Jesus used Peter to “open the door” to each of these people groups.

2) The church was to be “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” ([Ephesians 2:20](#)). [Philip the evangelist](#) had been a deacon in the Jerusalem church, but he was not one of the twelve apostles. Peter and John needed to be in Samaria for the “official” start of the Samaritan church, just as they had been in Jerusalem for the start of the Jewish church.

3) The presence of Peter and John kept the early church unified. Remember, there was great animosity between Jews and Samaritans ([John 4:9](#)). If the church in Samaria had begun on its own, with no connection to the “Jewish” church, the church in Jerusalem would never have accepted it. The Samaritans were known historically as corruptors of Judaism ([John 4:20](#)). So God made sure that Peter and John, apostles and Jews from Jerusalem, were present to witness the gift of the Spirit given to the Samaritans. God’s message: the church in Samaria was no heretical start-up. The Samaritans were part of the same church that had been started in Jerusalem, and they were filled with the same Spirit (see [Galatians 3:28](#)). Peter and John were eyewitnesses. Their testimony was clear: what happened in Samaria was not a separate religious movement. In this way, God prevented the early church from immediately dividing into different sects.

The Lord took pains to ensure the unity of the early church. Jesus had commanded the gospel to be preached in Samaria ([Acts 1:8](#)). Philip the evangelist obeyed that command, and God blessed. Whatever animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans was overcome by the unity of the Spirit. The church today should continue to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” ([Ephesians 4:3](#)).

\*From: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Acts-8-receive-Holy-Spirit.html>



## Acts 9:1-31

1. Read Acts 9:3-6. Sometimes God breaks into a person's life in a spectacular way and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience. If you are a follower of Jesus, describe your conversion experience. Have you ever felt like your experience was not as "grand" or as big of a deal as others<sup>1</sup>?
2. Read Acts 9:10. Ananias' first response to God was "Yes Lord!" What have you said "Yes, Lord!" to?
3. Read Acts 9:13. Ananias' next response was "But Lord!" What things has God told you to do that your response was also "But Lord!" or maybe you just downright said "no?"
4. Read Acts 9:27. New Christians need people who will come alongside them, encourage them, teach them, and introduce them to other believers. How can you become a Barnabas to new believers<sup>2</sup>?
5. Read Acts 9:31. How would you describe what it means for the church to grow stronger? How are you contributing or distracting from this happening?

### **LEADER NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>*Truth: The right way to come to faith in Jesus is whatever way God brings you.*

<sup>2</sup>*One possibility is to consider being a Build Coach at Brazos Fellowship. Build Coaches meet one on one with new believers (or believers who feel stuck in their faith) four times walking through a guide that will help them discover and take their best next steps towards Jesus. The qualifications and requirements for Build Coaches include:*

- *Have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ for at least five years*
- *Attend Brazos Fellowship regularly either online or in person*
- *Be a part of a small community of believers that you meet with regularly for encouragement, prayer, and accountability*
- *Support the purpose, leadership, and vision of Brazos Fellowship both publicly and privately*
- *Go through Build Coaches training*

## Acts 9:32-11:30

1. How was Tabitha described in 9:36? How do you want to be remembered when you die? What are you doing right now to build that type of legacy?
2. Read Acts 9:43. A tanner makes leather out of animal hides. This profession involves contact with dead animals. The Jewish law considered this an “unclean” profession. What thoughts do you think Peter had in considering the decision to stay with Simon<sup>1</sup>? Has God ever led you to take one step outside of your comfort zone in order to prepare you for the next step he wants you to take?
3. Read Acts 10:2. If this was all you heard about this person, how would you picture them?
4. Why was Peter’s vision in Acts 10:11-16 significant<sup>2</sup>?
5. Have you ever challenged what God has said or argued with God over a point that he has made clear? What should be our proper response to God when he speaks?
6. Describe a time when you’ve found it difficult to obey God when you can’t see his entire plan.
7. Read Acts 10:34. Peter must have already known that it’s true that God shows no favoritism, but now he’s seen it. What difference does it make to see something in real life happen that you know to be true? Has this ever happened to you?
8. What was missing in Cornelius’ life<sup>3</sup>? Why was fearing God, giving to the poor, and praying not enough? Who do you know who is a good person, doing good things, but is missing Jesus?
9. Can you summarize Peter’s message in Acts 10:37-43<sup>4</sup>?
10. Read Acts 10:48. Why did Cornelius ask Peter to stay<sup>5</sup>? Do you have a desire to spend time learning from more mature Christians? How can you pursue this?
11. Read Acts 11:2-18. How should believers handle disagreements and conflict with each other<sup>6</sup>?

### LEADER NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Peter still struggled with what God would reveal to him in Acts 10. Paul’s writes about Peter’s unwillingness to associate with anybody that could be considered unclean, mostly because he was afraid of what others would think about him, in Galatians 2:11-13

<sup>2</sup>Before having the vision, Peter would have thought that a Gentile Roman officer could not become a follower of Christ. Afterward he understood that it was his responsibility to go and tell Cornelius the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. See Acts 10:28

<sup>3</sup>See Acts 10:36. Cornelius was a good person, doing good things, but he was missing Jesus.

<sup>4</sup>The key to telling somebody about Jesus isn’t having a long message to share, it’s having a spirit-led message that centers on Jesus.

<sup>5</sup>He was a new believer and realized his need for teaching and fellowship.

<sup>6</sup>Before judging fellow believers, it is important to hear them out. The Holy Spirit may have something important to teach us through them.

## Acts 11:19-13:3

1. Why is it significant that believers were called Christians in Antioch in Acts 11:26<sup>1</sup>?
2. Why do you think God allowed James to die, but miraculously saved Peter<sup>2</sup>?
3. Read Acts 12:15. When the answer to their prayers arrived at the door they didn't believe it. Do you honestly believe that God will answer your prayers? How do you respond when he does?
4. What was Herod Agrippa's greatest downfall<sup>3</sup>? How have you seen the same problem creep up in your own life?
5. Read Acts 13:1-2. What was the top priority for the believers in Antioch<sup>4</sup>?
6. Have you ever felt like you were dedicated, or set apart, for a special work that God has called you to? How did you respond?

### **LEADER NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>The young church in Antioch was a mixture of Jews (who spoke Greek or Aramaic) and Gentiles. It's significant that this is the first place where the believers were called Christians (or "Christ-ones") because all they had in common was Christ—not race, culture, or even language.

<sup>2</sup>This is a challenging question, and will be especially difficult for some people. We cannot possibly answer questions like this in this life because we do not see all that God sees. He has chosen to allow evil in this world for a time. But we can trust God's leading because he has promised to destroy all evil eventually. In the meantime, we know that God will help us use our suffering to strengthen us and glorify him.

<sup>3</sup>In Acts 12:23 we see that Herod "accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God." His greatest downfall was pride.

<sup>4</sup>The focus of the church was worship. They were committed to keeping God central and prioritizing God over everything.

## Acts 13:4-14:28

1. Why do you think Bar-Jesus (or Elymas) wanted to keep the governor from believing in Jesus in Acts 13:8? What are some reasons people now would want to keep others from believing in Jesus?
2. One thing Paul was really good at was starting where the individual or group was—starting with their personal context—and turning the conversation towards Jesus<sup>1</sup>. Think about 1 or 2 people in your life that you don't know if they follow Jesus. How can you have a conversation with them that starts with their context and turn it into a conversation about Jesus?
3. The Jewish leaders refused to listen to the truth that Paul and Barnabas were sharing. Instead they stirred up opposition. What is a truth from God's Word that you have been resistant to listen to and apply?
4. In both Antioch of Pisidia and in Iconium Paul and Barnabas were rejected by many and had to relocate. Why do you think they didn't just give up? What would you have done? What do you do when you're discouraged by people rejecting the good news about Jesus today?
5. Read Acts 14:17. What evidence do you see around you of God and his goodness?
6. Read Acts 14:21-22. Why do you think Paul and Barnabas' encouragement here would have been so powerful and compelling<sup>2</sup>?

### **LEADER NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>In Acts 13:23 and following Paul was speaking predominately to devout Jews, so he began by reminding them about the covenant, Abraham, David, and other familiar themes, but then centered his message around Christ and emphasized his resurrection.

<sup>2</sup>Paul and Barnabas had been threatened and physically attacked in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. They knew the dangers they faced, yet they returned because they believed the message of the Gospel was more powerful and more urgent than avoiding suffering, and they knew that they had a responsibility to encourage the new believers who lived in these towns and faced suffering every day.

## Acts 15

1. Read Acts 15:1. What add-on rules for salvation have you ever heard?
2. Read Acts 15:5. There is something of a “Pharisee” in each one of us. We might unintentionally, or without even knowing, use our past experiences, hurts, biases, or opinions to mistakenly uphold tradition, structure, policies, or rules for following and obeying Jesus. As you take an honest assessment of yourself, where does (or has) your inner “Pharisee” come out?
3. In Acts 15:6-18 we see several things that happened at this meeting: Long discussion, Peter’s testimony, Paul and Barnabas’ testimony, and James’ address. What was the ultimate and decisive factor in their final decision<sup>1</sup>?
4. What do you think would have happened with the church in the first century if they had gone along with the teaching from Acts 15:1 “Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved?”
5. How can you equip yourself to discern what is right and wrong in times of controversy or disagreement?
6. Read Acts 15:19. How do we (as the church and as individuals) make it difficult for those who are turning to God?
7. What things do you think are worth getting right and being unified about? What things can we disagree about and still be ok with each other<sup>2</sup>?

### LEADER NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Despite the compelling experiences of Peter, Barnabas, and Paul, James (the brother of Jesus) turned to God’s Word as the ultimate test of truth. This should be the way we evaluate events. We all have beliefs (some of them fervent), we all have experiences, and our tendency is to want to measure others by our yardstick. It is common for believers to think that their experiences and convictions are true and should be the norm. Ultimately what matters is what God’s Word says. The more we know God’s Word—the more we read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate on it—the better able we will be to discern what is right and best in times of controversy or doctrinal disagreement.

<sup>2</sup>There is a great one session group study available for free called CORE VS PERIPHERY available on the Anthology App and website. This study guides people to identify their core beliefs and think through why they would label a belief as core. **For Brazos Fellowship, our core beliefs center on Jesus—his sinless life as the son of God (being both 100% human and 100% divine), his death (for the forgiveness of our sins), and his resurrection (defeating death once and for all so we can have eternal life).** Additional information about our core beliefs is available here: <https://www.brazosfellowship.com/about-us/beliefs/>



CORE VS PERIPHERY

## Acts 16

1. Read Acts 16:3. How do you reconcile Paul arranging to have Timothy circumcised with the decision that had just been made at the Jerusalem council in chapter 15<sup>1</sup>? Have you ever felt the need to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to further the Kingdom of God? How did you respond?
2. Read Acts 16:6. It's not clear exactly how the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and Silas from going to Asia, but it is clear that God revealed his will to them and they obeyed. In what ways does God reveal his will to us?
3. In Acts 16 we are introduced to the first 3 members of the church Paul planted in Philippi. Who were they<sup>2</sup>? What is surprising to you about this core group?
4. Read Acts 16:15. Lydia urges Paul and Silas to stay at her home while they are in Philippi even though it would probably be a disruption of her family and business. How would you define biblical hospitality<sup>3</sup>? How can you leave people physically, spiritually, and emotionally healthier than when they come to you?
5. Read Acts 16:17. Why do you think the demon announced the truth about Paul? Why did it annoy Paul<sup>4</sup>?
6. Read Acts 16:27. If you had been a prisoner what would you have done?
7. How would you respond to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"
8. With Lydia and the slave girl Paul used his words to communicate the gospel. With the jailer he used his actions. Do you default more towards words or actions? Why are both important?

### LEADER NOTES

- v. 13 and 16... *The place of prayer, not the Synagogue. Just outside the city of Philippi was posted an inscription stating a prohibition against any unrecognized religion in the city, so they met beside the river outside the city for prayer.*

<sup>1</sup>*Timothy and his mother, Eunice, were from Lystra. Eunice had probably heard Paul's preaching when he was there during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-18). Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father—to the Jews he would be considered a half-breed, like a Samaritan. So Paul asked Timothy to be circumcised to remove some of the stigma he may have had with Jewish believers. Timothy was not required to be circumcised, but he voluntarily did this to overcome any barriers to his witness for Christ.*

<sup>2</sup>*The first 3 members of the church in Philippi were Lydia (a wealthy business woman), the demon-possessed slave girl, and the jailer*

<sup>3</sup>*In hospitality, we nurture, strengthen, and serve. The result is that others find physical, spiritual, and emotional help. When they leave us, they are healthier and more whole than when they came.*

<sup>4</sup>*If Paul accepted the demon's words, he would appear to be linking the Good News with demon-related activities. This would damage his message about Christ. Truth and evil do not mix.*

## Acts 17-18

1. How do you evaluate any spiritual teaching? What can we learn from the people of Berea<sup>1</sup>?
2. Read Acts 17:16. What, when you see it, troubles you the most or makes you angry? What standard should you use to determine what you allow to trouble you or make you angry<sup>2</sup>?
3. What stands out the most to you about Paul's description of God in Acts 17:24-31? Why?
4. Why did Priscilla and Aquila take Apollos aside and correct his teaching in Acts 18:26<sup>3</sup>? Why is it so crucial to practice right teaching? What do you think are the core components (or the irreducible minimum) of right teaching about the Gospel?

### LEADER NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Acts 17:11. *The people of Berea searched the Scriptures for themselves to verify the message they heard. Always compare what you hear with what the Bible says.*

<sup>2</sup>Paul was filled with a combination of anger and grief by all the idols he saw in the city. Seeing people spiritually lost, blinded by Satan, and trapped in a pagan culture caused Paul to be in a state of emotional upheaval. It's interesting to note that Paul turned his internal turmoil into positive action: He looked for opportunities to share the truth about Jesus.

<sup>3</sup>Apollos had heard only what John the Baptist had said about Jesus (see Luke 3:1-18), so his message was not the complete story. John focused on repentance from sin, the first step. But the whole message is to repent from sin and then believe in Christ. Apollos did not know about Jesus' life, crucifixion, and resurrection. Nor did he know about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of salvation to him.

## Acts 19-20

1. Read Acts 19:2. Why hadn't these believers in Ephesus heard of the Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup>? (see Acts 18:24-25)
2. How would somebody know by observing your life that you have received the Holy Spirit? (see Luke 6:43-45 and Galatians 5:22-23)
3. Read Acts 19:13-16. Why were the sons of Sceva unsuccessful<sup>2</sup>? What lesson is there here for us?
4. What was Demetrius' top priority in Acts 19:24-26? What did he convince his fellow workmen to mask his top priority behind in Acts 19:27<sup>3</sup>? How is this strategy still alive today in churches, politics, business, or even in your own life?
5. Read Acts 20:1-2. What encouragement do you think Paul gave to the believers? What is the most encouraging thing somebody can do or say for you as it relates to your faith?
6. Read Acts 20:4. It seems like Paul always had traveling companions. Why do you think it was important for Paul to have others with him?
7. Read Acts 20:24. How did Paul define the value of his life? What standard do you use in defining the value of your life?
8. Read Acts 20:31-38. Paul's relationship with the believers in Ephesus is a beautiful example of Christian community. What specific things can we learn here about authentic Christian community?

### LEADER NOTES

- Notice first person "us" and "we" in Acts 20:5-6. Luke rejoins Paul here.

<sup>1</sup>These believers had heard Apollos message before Priscilla and Aquila explained the full message of Jesus to him. They had repented and believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but they did not understand the significance of the work of the Holy Spirit. Becoming a Christian involves turning from sin (repentance) and turning to Christ (faith). These believers were incomplete. **For more notes on the role of the Holy Spirit in Acts see the following page.**

<sup>2</sup>These men were calling on the name of Jesus without knowing him personally. The power to change people comes from Christ. It cannot be tapped by reciting his name like a magic charm. There is a difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus.

<sup>3</sup>Demetrius' top priority was monetary profit from selling silver idols. He convinced his fellow workmen to hide their greed behind the mask of patriotism and religious loyalty.



## The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts

\*In the book of Acts, believers received the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. Usually the Holy Spirit would fill a person upon profession of faith in Christ. Sometimes (as in Acts 19:1-6) that filling happened later because the believer's knowledge was incomplete. God was confirming to these believers, who did not initially know about the Holy Spirit, that they were a part of the church. The Holy Spirit's filling endorsed them as believers.

Pentecost was the formal outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church. The other outpourings in the book of Acts were God's way of uniting new believers to the church. The mark of the true church is not merely right doctrine, but right actions, the true evidence of the Holy Spirit's work.

When Paul laid his hands on the disciples in Acts 19:6, they received the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples had at Pentecost, resulting in outward, visible signs of the Holy Spirit's presence. This also had happened when the Holy Spirit had come on the Gentiles (see Acts 10:45-47). Much has been made about this passage and others in Acts that depict believers speaking in tongues. Some have uncomfortably downplayed or dismissed these historical events. Others have tried to duplicate them. Few issues have prompted more argument and confusion or split more churches.

We should remember that tongues-speaking is not the central theme of the book of Acts. The point of Luke's history is the faithful communication of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. If we want to be doers of the Word (James 1:22), we will faithfully be involved in the same process of evangelism. Seek to share your faith in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and leave it up to God to give you whatever experiences he thinks you need.

*\*From notes in The Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale, 1986. New Living Translation*

## Acts 21-23:11

1. Read Acts 21:4. Did Paul disobey the Holy Spirit by going to Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>? Who do you think was in the wrong here?
2. When is it hardest for you to say, “The Lord’s will be done,” like the believers said in Acts 21:14?
3. Read Acts 21:21. What were the rumors that had been spread among the Jews in Jerusalem about Paul<sup>2</sup>?
4. Did Paul compromise his integrity or the truth of the gospel by participating in the purification ceremony and the vows with the four men in Acts 21<sup>3</sup>?
5. When it comes to your beliefs and convictions, what are you willing to compromise on for the sake of unity and peace? What are you not willing to compromise on?
6. Read Acts 21:28. What’s the danger in reacting to someone based on rumors and assumptions? Describe a time when you’ve done this? How about a time when it’s been directed towards you?
7. In what ways did Paul establish a connection with the Roman soldiers (Acts 21:37) and with the angry crowd (Acts 21:40)<sup>4</sup>?
8. Read Acts 22:21-22. What word, phrase, idea, or statement stirs negative emotions inside you and potentially causes you to get angry, make assumptions or accusations, or react negatively towards another person?
9. Read Acts 23:5. Why do you think Paul didn’t recognize that Ananias was the high priest<sup>5</sup>? What was his response when he realized Ananias was the high priest?
10. How are you doing at representing Christ to people around you (2 Corinthians 5:20)? Could somebody possibly say, “I didn’t know you were a Christian” about you? What do you need to change (internally and externally) to prevent this from happening?

## **LEADER NOTES**

- *Acts 21:38...The historian Josephus wrote of an Egyptian who had led a revolt of 4000 people in Jerusalem in A.D. 54 and then had disappeared.*
- *Acts 22:28...Roman citizenship could be bought or inherited at birth. Bought citizenship was considered inferior to citizenship by birth.*

<sup>1</sup>*Paul did not disobey the Holy Spirit. More likely, the Holy Spirit warned these believers about the suffering that Paul would face in Jerusalem and they drew the conclusion that he should not go there because of the danger. Acts 21:10-12 supports this.*

<sup>2</sup>*The rumor was that Paul had turned his back on the Law of Moses and had forbidden the Jews to circumcise their children.*

<sup>3</sup>*Paul did not compromise his integrity, but he was willing to compromise on nonessential points, becoming all things to all people so that he might save some (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Like Paul, we should remain firm on Christian essentials but flexible on nonessentials. Of course, no one should violate a true conviction, but sometimes we need to honor Christ by mutual submission for the sake of the Good News.*

<sup>4</sup>*By speaking Greek, Paul was able to capture the commander's attention, which gave him protection and the opportunity to give his defense. By speaking Aramaic, he was able to connect with the crowd by showing that he was a devout Jew and had respect for the Jewish laws and customs.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ananias had violated Jewish law by assuming that Paul was guilty without a trial and ordering his punishment (see Deut. 19:15). Paul didn't recognize Ananias as the high priest, probably because Ananias' command broke the law he was pledged to represent.*

## Acts 23:12-26:32

1. Read Acts 23:23-24<sup>1</sup>. Have you ever questioned why God has allowed certain things to happen, or maybe even worked in specific ways in your life that you don't understand or that you would prefer to go a different way? How did you respond? Looking back, can you see how God used that circumstance (or can still use that circumstance) for your good and for his glory?
2. What three accusations did Tertullus make against Paul in Acts 24:5-6<sup>2</sup>? What was the basis for these accusations?
3. Read Acts 24:24-25. What changed in the conversation between Paul and Felix that moved Felix from being willing to listen to being afraid and sending Paul away<sup>3</sup>? How has the Gospel effectively become a life-changing catalyst in your life and not just a principle or doctrine?
4. Read Acts 24:27. What do you do or how do you respond when it comes to waiting on God?
5. What terms do you use to describe the mission Jesus gave you, as his follower, to make disciples? How does that compare with the sense of urgency Paul uses in Acts 26:18?
6. According to Paul in Acts 26:20, what's the evidence of salvation<sup>4</sup>? How does this align with the rest of Scripture?
7. Why do you think Festus would call Paul insane in Acts 26:24<sup>5</sup>? How does this compare with responses we might hear from people in the world today? What can we learn from Paul's response?

### LEADER NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Roman commander ordered Paul sent to Caesarea. Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish government, but Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for the area. God works in amazing and amusing ways. God could have used any number of ways to get Paul to Caesarea, but he chose to use the Roman army to deliver Paul from his enemies. God's ways are not our ways.

<sup>2</sup>Tertullus accused Paul of stirring up riots among Jews all over the world, being the ringleader for the cult known as the Nazarenes, and trying to desecrate the temple. These were all vague accusations based on rumors.

<sup>3</sup>Paul's talk with Felix became personal. Felix had taken another man's wife. Paul's words had been interesting until they focused on "righteousness and self control and the coming day of judgement." Many people will be glad to discuss the Good News with you as long as it doesn't touch their lives too personally. When it does, some will resist or run. But this is what the Good News is all about—God's power to change lives.

<sup>4</sup>The evidence of salvation is a changed life, which results in changed behavior. Changing behavior without a changed life is simply moralism. See Eph. 2:10, James 1:22, John 13:35

<sup>5</sup>To a worldly, materialistic mind, it seems insane to risk so much to gain what seems to be so little. Paul was risking his life for a message that was offensive to the Jews and unbelievable to the Gentiles. Jesus received the same response to his message (Mark 3:21, John 10:20)

## Acts 27-28

1. In terms of a weather report, how would you describe your life right now?
2. Read Acts 27:24. After being in Caesarea for at least two years and now this harrowing journey, why would Paul need to hear the promise of Acts 23:11 repeated? What promises from God do you need to be reminded of and how can you be intentional about making sure you don't forget those promises?
3. In a crisis, Paul reacted with urgent forewarnings (27:10, 27:26), maintaining hope (27:22), counseling (27:25, 27:31), common sense (27:33-34), giving thanks (27:35), and remaining calm. How do you react in a crisis?
4. Read Acts 27:27-29<sup>1</sup>. What is your part and what is God's part in the calming of your storm? Do you tend to rely more on your wisdom and skills or do you tend to do nothing and wait for God to intervene? What do you think is the appropriate response in a crisis or storm?
5. Read Acts 28:3-6. The people of Malta concluded that Paul must be either a murderer or a god. Why the extremes? What extremes do we assume on people today?
6. Why do you think Acts ends so abruptly<sup>2</sup>? What story is Luke telling and why would we possibly be bothered by the way Acts ends (in other words, what story would we tend to prefer Luke tell)?
7. How can you participate in this incredible story of the spread of the Good News as it continues still today?

### LEADER NOTES

*<sup>1</sup>In the middle of a midnight squall, the passengers and crew (led by Paul) did all they could possibly do—they dropped some anchors to try to stop the runaway ship. They they prayed. This is a good reminder that we must never rely solely on our own wisdom or skills. But it is equally wrong to sit and do nothing when there are still actions we can take to overcome certain problems. Do all that you can to fix problems. And at the same time, trust God to do his part.*

*<sup>2</sup>The book of Acts is not about the life of Paul, but about the spread of the Good News, and that had been clearly presented. Now that the Good News has been preached and established at the center of trade and government, it would spread across the world. Many unsung heroes of faith continued the work, through the Holy Spirit, in succeeding generations, changing the world with a changeless message: Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord of all who call on him. Today we can be the unsung heroes in the continuing story of the spread of the Good News.*