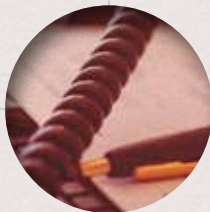
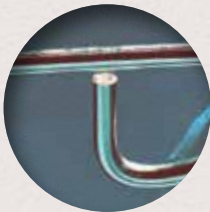


Leader Guide | Acts 1-12



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Summer 2024 • CSB

THE REST OF THE STORY

For decades, radio listeners could hear the familiar voice of commentator Paul Harvey giving them “the rest of the story” every afternoon. Each short feature would start with a story. Sometimes, it was tied to a familiar historical event. Other times, it related to what seemed like an everyday, ordinary occurrence. But the payoff was always a surprise ending, a “big reveal” that proved that there was more to the narrative than originally met the eye.

So often in our lives it feels like there’s more to the story than we realize. We get the sense that something is missing, that we don’t have all the facts. It takes a little time and a little digging before we can really understand how all the pieces fit into the larger puzzle.

For example, in the Gospel of Luke, we get a detailed account of what went on during Jesus’s earthly ministry. We read about His birth. We hear His sermons and see His miracles. We watch Him die on a cross and rise again three days later. With meticulous research, Luke laid it all out for us.

But even Luke knew his Gospel was only part of the story. So, he penned a sequel: the book of Acts. In Acts, we get “the rest of the story.” We see what happened after Jesus went back to heaven. We find out how the church was started and how it began to spread from Jerusalem to Judea and even Samaria. Eventually, we discover how the story of Jesus reached the ends of the known world in just a few short years.

Most important, we see that the early church was made of imperfect people. Peter, John, Paul, and the other heroes of the faith in Acts weren’t perfect. They were just forgiven. They messed up just like everyone else; but they all recognized their need for a Savior, and they allowed Jesus to be their Savior.

The Bible makes it clear that none of us are perfect (Rom. 3:23), which means all of us need a Savior too. Thankfully, the Bible also makes it clear that Jesus died so we could find forgiveness. Thanks to Him, we have hope. There’s more to our story! If you’re ready to accept the salvation that only He can provide, here’s what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

Meet the Writers	4
A Word from the Team Leader	5
Leadership Training	6
Word Wise	8
Bible Reading Plan	9
Using This Guide	10
Biblical Background	12
Outline	14
Leader Pack Ideas	151
Coming Next Quarter	154



SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

June 2	Session 1: Commissioned (Acts 1:4-11,23-26)	15
June 9	Session 2: Empowered (Acts 2:5-6,36-38)	25
	Article: Pentecost Celebration in the First Century	35
June 16	Session 3: United (Acts 2:41-47)	37
June 23	Session 4: Placed (Acts 3:12-26)	47
June 30	Session 5: Emboldened (Acts 4:8-21)	57
July 7	Session 6: Accountable (Acts 4:36-5:11)	67
July 14	Session 7: Worthy (Acts 5:29-42)	77
July 21	Session 8: Serving (Acts 6:1-15)	87
	Article: Who Were the Hellenistic Jews?	97
July 28	Session 9: Baptizing* (Acts 8:26-39)	99
Aug. 4	Session 10: Calling (Acts 9:3-16)	109
	Article: Paul Before His Conversion	119
Aug. 11	Session 11: Healing (Acts 9:32-43)	121
Aug. 18	Session 12: Including (Acts 10:34-48)	131
Aug. 25	Session 13: Praying (Acts 12:6-18)	141

*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS

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Kima Jude wrote the group plans for these studies on Acts 1–12. Kima is a member of The Oaks Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Texas, where she leads the women’s ministry and her husband, Barry, serves as pastor. She also has worked for several years in higher education. Kima has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Marshall University and has written January Bible Studies in addition to Explore the Bible group plans. She and Barry have four adult children and three young grandchildren.

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway’s doctrinal guideline, please visit Lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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A WORD FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

People are drawn to stories. We don't have to look far to see evidence of this truth. Great movies become blockbuster hits, interesting TV series get the green light for an additional season, and outstanding books camp out on the *New York Times* bestseller list for months.

The book of Acts tells the story of the early church. Unlike works of fiction, this narrative offers a factual, historical account. This quarter we're examining Acts 1–12. These chapters chronicle the beginnings of the church and the incredible growth that resulted. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, these early believers took the gospel to new lands and new people groups. God worked through His people to accomplish His purpose in His timing.

Just as He did long ago, God continues to work in and through His people today. As His church, we are charged with the same task the early believers received: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Believers are equipped and empowered to share the gospel message. When we allow God to use us, we get a front-row seat to watch His kingdom grow.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

amber.vaden@lifeway.com



*Tell us about your experience
with this leader guide.*



Four Essentials for Starting New Groups

Ken Braddy

I am a group leader just like you. Over the last few years, my wife and I have started two new groups. As a former full-time discipleship pastor, I led the churches I served to start new groups regularly. Two of the three churches I served became the fastest-growing group ministries in two different states because of this emphasis. Starting new groups is important—even vital—to the overall health of our churches. Sadly, most of our churches are not starting enough new groups.

Let's change that.

I cannot assume that you are on board with the idea of starting new groups. In every church I've served, I've had group leaders say things like, "Don't split my group!" or "Don't ask us to start a new group—you'll ruin the fellowship we've worked hard to create." I hope this is not your attitude when it comes to starting new groups.

Somehow the idea of "permanence" has crept into many groups. We wrongly believe that our goal is to stay together until Jesus comes back. It's not. Nor is my group "my group." Every group and every group member belong to Jesus. It's His church. It's His group. You and I are simply shepherd-teachers, stewards of God's most precious possessions—His people. The room we meet in isn't ours, nor are the people in our group. They are God's sheep.

Here is what I know: Healthy things grow, and growing things change. If you are leading your Bible study group well, part of that leadership will be to guide the people to embrace the mission of reaching people for Christ. That mission will result in the planting of new groups out of your current groups.



Every new group that is properly planted will reach ten new people on average. What would happen to your church if you and other group leaders planted three new groups this year? You'd reach at least thirty new people who are not currently connected to a group like yours. Five new groups would reach fifty new people. God would be pleased as you obey the Great Commission.

In my experience over these past thirty years, there are four essentials when it comes to starting new groups. See if you can identify with these.

ESSENTIAL 1: AN APPRENTICE WHO WANTS TO PLANT A NEW GROUP

Almost every Bible study group has a substitute teacher. What the group needs is an apprentice teacher! Subs step in and teach when the group leader is not available; a sub sees the immediate short-term need. On the other hand, an apprentice leader has volunteered to be trained and to ultimately lead a group. An apprentice sees the long-term need for new groups and has embraced that mission. If you don't have an apprentice, you're not going to start a new group. This person is essential.

ESSENTIAL 2: A GROUP THAT UNDERSTANDS AND SUPPORTS THE STRATEGY

Every group ultimately turns inward. It's a fact of group life. Effective group leaders make certain that the mission of reaching people for Christ and for church membership stays at the forefront of the group's mission. The longer a group has been together, the greater the intensity that is required on the leader's part to keep the group excited about the planting of new groups.

Many groups believe they exist for the group members, and that's half true. They also exist to connect with people who are far from God. Understanding and supporting the strategy of starting new groups rests with the group leader. It must be prayed for, talked about, and celebrated when it happens. One sour group leader can torpedo an entire group of people who support the starting of a new group.

ESSENTIAL 3: A CULTURE OF CELEBRATION AND NAVIGATION

It's true that we repeat what is rewarded. As we lead our groups to start new ones, we must take time to stop and celebrate the birth of a new group. Celebrating the good work of starting a new group sends a powerful message to the people that they are perfectly on mission with God and are doing kingdom work.

But at the same time, we must navigate. As your group starts new ones, your people will feel a sense of loss. One author of change management calls this "the neutral zone"—the place of transition between what the people have known to the new reality that

some of their friends are no longer in the group because they've launched the new one. Effective group leaders help their people navigate their feelings of sadness and loss, while simultaneously helping them accept the new normal.

ESSENTIAL 4: THE RIGHT TIMING

There is an axiom that says timing is everything. That's certainly true when it comes to starting new groups. If any of the following circumstances are being experienced in your Bible study group, it is time to plant another one.

- **When a group has been together for two years or more.** It's really hard for guests to break into groups that have been together longer than twenty-four months because relationships have formed among the members. To a guest, that can feel "cliquish." When a group approaches its second birthday, it's time to think "start a new group."
- **When a group fills the meeting space to over eighty percent of capacity.** When a group exceeds eighty percent of its seating capacity, the room begins to feel crowded. Overcrowding becomes an excuse for people to skip.
- **When there is an age span of group members that exceeds ten years.** The author of the book *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur* stated that the "homogeneity principle" is always in effect in group ministry: People who are similar must be placed together. The wider the age span, the less in common the people will have with one another.

Group Leader, let's lead well by guiding our groups to start new ones. Hold your people with a loose grip. Encourage them, release them, and bless them as they become "missionaries to adults" in your community through the strategy of starting new groups.

Ken Braddy is Lifeway's Director of Sunday School and host of the Disciple-making in Community Podcast. Check out his latest book *Breakthrough: Creating a New Scorecard for Group Ministry Success* at lifeway.com.

WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Aeneas [ih NEE uhs]—name of a paralyzed man Peter healed at Lydda (Acts 9:33)

Ananias [an uh NIGH uhs]—three men by this name appear in Acts: (1) husband of Sapphira, who was struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:1-6); (2) the disciple who visited Paul after the Damascus road experience (9:10); (3) a Jewish high priest (23:2; 24:1)

Barnabas [BAHR nuh buhs]—disciple who sold his property and gave the proceeds to the Jerusalem church (4:36-37); introduced Saul to the Jerusalem church (9:26-27); traveled with Paul on missionary journeys (chs. 13-14)

Dorcas [DAWR kuhs]—Christian woman of Joppa who was known for her charitable works (Acts 9:36), also called Tabitha; restored to life after becoming sick and dying

Gamaliel [guh MAY lih uhl]—highly regarded Pharisee who was a member of the Sanhedrin (5:34)

Matthias [muh THIGH uhs]—disciple who was chosen by lot and prayer to succeed Judas as an apostle (1:23-26)

Nicanor [nigh KAY nawr]—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5)

Nicolaus [nik uh LAY uhs]—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5)

Parmenas [PAHR mih nuhs]—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5)

Philip—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5); took the gospel to Samaria and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-38); not to be confused with Philip the apostle (John 1:43-51)

Prochorus [PRAHK uh ruhs]—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5)

Sapphira [suh FIGH ruh]—wife of Ananias who was also struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:7-11)

Stephen—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5); the first Christian martyr (7:54-60)

Tabitha [TAB ih thuh]—the Aramaic name of Dorcas (9:36)

Timon [TIGH mahn]—one of the seven men chosen to distribute food to the Greek-speaking widows of the Jerusalem church (6:5)

BIBLE READING **PLAN**

JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Acts 1:1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Acts 4:21-22	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Acts 7:54-60
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Acts 1:4-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Acts 4:23-26	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Acts 8:1-3
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Acts 1:9-11	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Acts 4:27-31	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Acts 8:4-8
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Acts 1:12-14	<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Acts 4:32-33	<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Acts 8:9-13
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<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Acts 2:1-4	<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Acts 5:7-11	<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Acts 8:26-33
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Acts 2:5-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Acts 5:12-16	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Acts 8:34-40
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<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Acts 2:37-38	<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Acts 6:1-4	<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Acts 9:36-43
<input type="checkbox"/> 16. Acts 2:39-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 16. Acts 6:5-7	<input type="checkbox"/> 16. Acts 10:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> 17. Acts 2:41-42	<input type="checkbox"/> 17. Acts 6:8-10	<input type="checkbox"/> 17. Acts 10:9-16
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<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Acts 3:9-10	<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Acts 7:9-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Acts 10:44-48
<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Acts 3:11-16	<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Acts 7:13-16	<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Acts 11:1-9
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<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Acts 4:8-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Acts 7:37-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Acts 12:6-10
<input type="checkbox"/> 29. Acts 4:13-18	<input type="checkbox"/> 29. Acts 7:41-43	<input type="checkbox"/> 29. Acts 12:11-16
<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Acts 4:19-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Acts 7:44-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Acts 12:17-19
	<input type="checkbox"/> 31. Acts 7:51-53	<input type="checkbox"/> 31. Acts 12:20-25

USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. CREATE A GROUP TIME PLAN.

Craft a group plan that helps adults discover and respond to the main idea. Consult the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan you created, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at [goExploreTheBible.com](https://www.goExploreTheBible.com)

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

The book of Acts is one of the most action-packed books in the entire Bible. It includes stories about healing, speaking in tongues, people being raised from the dead, persecution, missionary adventures, and the gospel advancing to the ends of the earth! It has served as an inspiration for countless missionaries and church planters to trust in the Holy Spirit to empower them to proclaim the gospel boldly.

AUTHORSHIP

Acts is the second volume in Luke-Acts. Taken together, Luke and Acts comprise more than one quarter of the entire New Testament. The human author of these two volumes was Luke. A physician by trade, Luke was a Gentile Christian, making him the only known Gentile author in the entire Bible.

As noted, Luke was a physician (Col. 4:14). As a physician, Luke was an educated man, and both Luke and Acts demonstrate this level of education. Also, Luke demonstrated a knack for historical research and writing. In the introduction to the Gospel that bears his name, he wrote that his goal was to ensure that he had the best information about Jesus's life and ministry available. As a result, he "carefully investigated everything from the very first" (Luke 1:3).

Luke was not only an educated physician and careful scholar. He was also a faithful companion of the apostle Paul. The "we" passages in Acts indicate times when Luke was traveling with Paul. This means that Luke was an eyewitness to many things that are recorded in Acts. For other events, he could rely on Paul's testimony, as well as the recollections of other prominent church leaders who crossed his path.

Each of the "we" passages mentioned above occur in the latter part of the book, but they are not the only evidence that Luke was a regular traveling partner of Paul. As the great apostle neared the end of his life, he was saddened that he had been abandoned by many

of his friends and supporters. One exception was Luke, who apparently stayed by Paul's side, even during his imprisonment: "Make every effort to come to me soon, because Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:9-11).

All in all, we can have confidence that the book of Acts was written by someone with direct knowledge of many of the events in the book and by someone who did meticulous research for the rest of the information.

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

The original audience for Acts was an individual named Theophilus (Acts 1:1). In Greek, this name means "God lover." Some commentators have suggested that Theophilus was a Gentile believer who lived in Antioch, where the church was made up of mostly (but not exclusively) Gentile believers. Under the Holy Spirit's leadership, the members of this congregation commissioned Barnabas and Paul for missionary service.

Of course, while Theophilus was the addressee of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, Luke likely understood that these accounts would have a larger audience during that era. So, as one commentator has noted, Luke followed the example of Paul's letters by writing for mixed audiences. He focused Christian communities in both the Jewish and Gentile contexts.

OCCASION

Since Luke's Gospel and Acts are so closely connected, it makes sense to believe that Luke's purpose in writing one was the same as the other. In general, both books were composed so Christ followers would have "certainty of the things about which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:4).



In other words, Luke and Acts were written to give believers assurance about the faith that they had embraced. He also wanted to share with them the message they were charged to carry to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The book of Acts continues to be a primary source for understanding God's heart and plan for taking the gospel to unreached people groups and places.

MAJOR THEMES

God the Father. God the Father is the One who sovereignly guided all the activity in the book of Acts. In fact, we can even say that He is the primary Actor in each narrative. All the events, from the ascension of Jesus to the activity of Paul, are coordinated by the sovereign love and purposes of God the Father.

Jesus the Son. Jesus is only physically present in the first few verses of Acts. By the ninth verse of the first chapter, He had ascended bodily to be enthroned in heaven next to the Father. This event, however, did not signal the end of His activity in Acts. Through the remainder of the book, Jesus does speak occasionally. However, His presence and work are demonstrated most powerfully through the activities of His followers as they speak on His behalf. In faithfully fulfilling His commands, the believers in the early church spread the gospel across the Roman Empire.

The Holy Spirit. The longer name of the book is usually "the Acts of the Apostles." However, many believe the title "Acts of the Holy Spirit" would be more accurate due to the central role He plays in the book. Acts 1:8 serves as an outline to the entire book, and the Holy Spirit is the primary mover in that verse. All activity began once the Spirit descended in Acts 2. From there, His activity is clearly present in empowering believers, calling believers, and guiding believers.

The Word. Approximately one-third of Acts is made up of speeches and sermons. The primary task of the early church was to spread the Word of God. That same activity continues in churches throughout the world today. Contemporary Christ followers understand Christ's message and rely on the Spirit's power because of what God reveals through Luke's scholarly research.

Salvation. Luke did not clearly define what "salvation" means in Acts. That was left to apostles like Paul and Peter to explain in their letters to individuals and churches. However, he did make it clear that Jesus is the Savior of the world and that salvation is found in Him alone. Acts teaches that salvation is available right now to all who are willing to trust in the finished work of Christ, regardless of background or ethnicity. It also affirms that our salvation will be completed when Christ one day returns to earth.

The Church. The arrival of the Spirit and the expansion of the gospel established the church. Since that foundation, the church has served as God's tool for spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. In sum, God the Father and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to empower the church (made up of individual believers) to accomplish the mission of God in the world.

Evangelism/Missions. The book of Acts describes how the early church reached every corner of the known world. From relatively humble roots in Jerusalem, the message of Jesus reached the limits of the known world in a relatively brief period of time thanks to the Spirit's power. Acts also provides a time-tested blueprint for how churches today can take the gospel to peoples and places where Christ has not been named. May we be found faithful in this task!

OUTLINE

- I. The Church Empowered (Acts 1:1–2:47)
 - II. The Church's Early Days (Acts 3:1–12:25)
 - III. Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1–14:28)
 - IV. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35)
 - V. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)
 - VI. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23–21:16)
 - VII. Paul's Arrest and Journey to Rome (Acts 21:17–28:31)
-

Commissioned

SESSION 1

Acts 1:4-11, 23-26

Memory Verse: Acts 1:8

Jesus commissions His followers for kingdom work.

The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation is filled with the idea that God's people should be a part of God's mission to reach the whole world. The call to be His commissioned people in the Old Testament becomes more explicit in the Gospels and finally culminates with the Great Commission. The book of Acts brings together the idea of God's people being sent on God's mission by recounting the history of the earliest days of the church as it spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

As you prepare to lead this session, reflect on how you first heard the gospel and why you responded to it. Evaluate how well you are fulfilling the mission and purpose God has given you as His follower. Ask Him to increase your boldness and to guide you as you share these truths with the adults in your Bible study.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

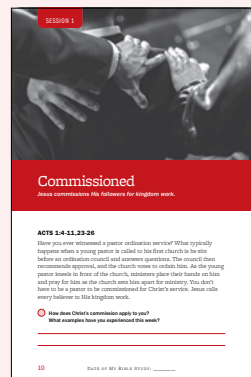
Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



Have you ever witnessed a pastor ordination service? What typically happens when a young pastor is called to his first church is he sits before an ordination council and answers questions. The council then recommends approval, and the church votes to ordain him. As the young pastor kneels in front of the church, area ministers one by one place their hands on his head and pray for him as the church sets him aside for the gospel ministry. You don't have to be a pastor to be commissioned for Christ's service. Jesus calls and commissions every believer for His kingdom work. (PSG, p. 10)

How does Christ's commission apply to you?

What examples have you experienced this week?



Understand the Context (Acts 1:1-26)

The book of Acts is the second part of a two-volume work that we can think of as Luke-Acts. In the first part, the Gospel of Luke, the human author tells his primary reader (a man named Theophilus) that he was writing to provide “an orderly sequence” of the life and ministry of Jesus (Luke 1:3). The second part, the book of Acts, continued to unpack Luke’s mission and message.

In Acts, Luke wrote that the first narrative covered what Jesus “began” to do and teach. By implication, Acts explains how the work Jesus started continued through His people, even as He returned to heaven. Instead of Jesus doing and teaching by being physically present on earth, Acts recounts how the body of Christ, the church, continued the ministry that He began.

Reading the book of Acts can be a challenge in more than one way. For example, Acts can be cognitively challenging. For example, it’s not always easy to know which parts of the book are prescriptive and which are purely descriptive. Readers sometimes feel a tension between what is applicable for us today and what is simply a record of how the Spirit moved in the first century. Of course, we joyfully affirm that the entire Bible is relevant to all peoples in all generations, and we can learn from all of it. However, some of the stories recorded in Acts are one-time events that are not meant to be repeated.

In reading Acts descriptively, we can recognize that Acts 1:8 provides a “table of contents” for the entire book. Starting with Jerusalem, Jesus’s followers were able to witness His movement and experience great early success in Jerusalem. Over time, as they obeyed His leading, similar results were seen in Judea and even in the “sketchy” regions of Samaria. Ultimately, the gospel of Christ reached Rome, considered by many at the time to represent the ends of the earth.

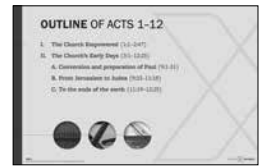
A second way that reading the book of Acts can be a challenge is volitionally. Some sections of Acts are clearly prescriptive for us today. Beyond that, God provided timeless principles that we can glean for advancing His kingdom through missions and evangelism efforts. As we read the stories of the early church as recorded by Luke in Acts, we are challenged to be both bolder and wiser in how we share the gospel in whatever context the Lord places us.

However, despite the difficulties, Acts provides a blueprint for our lives today. The Great Commission is just as relevant for modern Christ followers as it was in the first century. We are still called to be His witnesses, whether that’s in our Jerusalem or He leads us to the ends of the earth.

Read Acts 1:1-26. How does Luke’s repeated emphasis on the Holy Spirit encourage you to serve in the Spirit’s power? (PSG, p. 11)



PREPARE: Prior to the session, print several labels or name tags that say “Commissioned.” Create enough for each adult to have one. Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Acts 1–12*) and make copies of **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Background of Acts*), **Pack Item 10** (Handout: *Luke: Historian and Theologian*), and **Pack Item 11** (Handout: *Your Great Commission*).



GREET: Welcome each person who attends the session and give them a Commissioned name tag. Call on a volunteer to read the introductory paragraph on page 10 of the PSG.

ASK: **Have you attended an ordination ceremony?**

EXPLAIN: Comment that ordinations are typically formal exercises conducted with solemnity to illustrate the importance of being set aside for sacred roles in the church. Share that we are commissioned by God to be His witnesses in the world.

ASK: **How does Christ’s commission apply to you? What examples have you experienced this week?** (PSG, p. 10)

TRANSITION: *Today’s session launches a study of the first half of the book of Acts. In these sessions, we’ll trace the birth and growth of the early church, beginning with Jesus’s commission to the church’s earliest members.*



NOTES



Group Activity Option

Music

Play Casting Crowns’ song “Until the Whole World Hears.” Ask: **What is the main theme of this song?** Emphasize God’s call to share the gospel around the world. Encourage adults to share ways they share the gospel in their lives. Challenge adults to use today’s session to learn more about what Jesus expects from them and to identify ways they can fulfill their commission from Him.

Stay Focused (Acts 1:4-8)

4 While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days." **6** So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" **7** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

(v. 4) Father's promise: The **promise** related to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Spirit's arrival on the night before His crucifixion (John 14:15-17). However, the Father is the One who sent the Spirit, so each member of the Trinity was involved in the promise's fulfillment.

(v. 5) Baptized with the Holy Spirit: To this point, **the Holy Spirit** had come upon specific individuals at specific times for specific tasks (Ex. 35:31; Num. 27:18-21; Judg. 3:10). When the job was accomplished, the Spirit often would depart.

Now, instead of coming on one individual for a limited time, God's Spirit now comes on all believers, filling their lives so they can advance His work. This baptism is never about drawing attention to any individual, but about bringing glory to God through the Spirit's work.

(v. 6) Kingdom: Jesus's followers still expected Jesus to build a **kingdom**. Of course, He did introduce the kingdom of heaven (or the kingdom of God) through His life, death, and resurrection. However, the disciples were looking for a physical kingdom that would overthrow Rome.

(v. 8) Power: Just as Jesus initiated a kingdom, He also endowed His followers with **power**. And just as they failed to recognize the nature of His kingdom, they struggled to understand the significance of His power. Jesus's power brings spiritually dead people back to life (Eph. 2:4-5) and frees individuals held captive by sin (1 Cor. 1:18).

The disciples would finally understand when the Spirit arrived on Pentecost. Then, for the remainder of Acts, they demonstrated this power of God in their lives and words.

(v. 8) Witnesses: In Matthew, Jesus told His followers to make disciples. In Acts, He told them to be His **witnesses**. Being a witness for Christ

simply means testifying to what He has done. Anyone who has been saved by Christ can testify about His saving work.

The word translated "witness" is related to our English word "martyr." Church tradition tells us that all of the apostles, except John, died as martyrs while being Jesus's witnesses to the ends of the earth. Brothers and sisters around the world continue to experience persecution for their faith.

(v. 8) Jerusalem . . . Judea and Samaria . . . the ends of the earth: We often think about the four settings in verse 8 geographically, and it is true that the early church's witness began close to home before eventually spreading across the world. However, these locations are not just geographical. They are cultural, as well.

The apostles found themselves sharing the good news with people they did not like (the Samaritans) and people they knew little or nothing about (the ends of the earth). In each context, they shared the love and power of God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, we are expected to focus on telling others about Jesus today, whether they are across the street or across the globe.

Key Doctrine

Evangelism and Missions

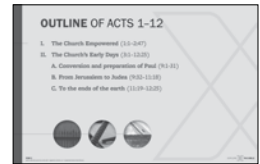
It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ. (See Matthew 9:37-38; Romans 10:13-15.)

EXPLORE Acts 1:4-8



APPLICATION POINT: Believers are expected to remain focused on telling others about Jesus.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Share the context by drawing attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Acts 1–12*) and by reviewing Understand the Context (PSG, p. 11). Share **Pack Item 8** (Handout: *Background of Acts*) and **Pack Item 10** (Handout: *Luke: Historian and Theologian*) to complement the discussion.



READ: Call on a volunteer to read Acts 1:4-8 aloud as the group discerns the mood of the disciples. Share that Acts 1:8 is the memory verse and encourage adults to memorize it during the week.



ASK: What were the disciples' expectations of Jesus? How does that differ from Jesus's expectations of them?

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize the gift of the Holy Spirit. Affirm the Spirit's role in sharing the gospel and our need as believers to rely on Him to accomplish the Great Commission.

DISCUSS: Refer to content for verse 6-8 (PSG, pp. 12-13). Lead a brief discussion on the significance of the areas Jesus mentioned. Note that these regions provide a basic outline for the Spirit's work in the book of Acts.



QUESTION: How can our unanswered questions become distractions that shift our focus off telling others about Jesus? (PSG, p. 13)

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Mapping

Guide the group to break up into an even number of teams, giving each team a sheet of paper and markers. Direct the groups to read Acts 1:8. Instruct half the teams to create a map that reflects Jesus's instructions geographically within present-day context. Instruct the other teams to create a concentric circle chart that identifies contemporary equivalents to the groups Jesus mentioned. Invite the groups to share their work.

With Urgency (Acts 1:9-11)

9 After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. **11** They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven.”

Key Background

The Ascension of Christ

After commissioning the apostles in verse 8, Jesus ascended into heaven as they watched (v. 9). The idea of Jesus going “into heaven” occurs four times in three verses (including three times in v. 11). By ascending into heaven, Jesus declared that His earthly ministry had accomplished everything the Father had planned. He had conquered sin and death; and, in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, He had crushed the head of the serpent.

Since His ascension, Jesus has taken His place at the Father’s right hand, interceding for believers and preparing for His return. The promise of Jesus’s second coming should give us a sense of both urgency and patience. We should be urgent because millions of people have never heard the name of Jesus. But we should also be patient because discipleship is not microwavable. It requires care, attention, and a focus on the gradual maturation of faith. The urgency of the task is exactly why it is too important to rush.

(v. 10) Two men: These men were angels, heavenly messengers sent to communicate God’s will and plans to humans. The Old Testament frequently describes angels as “men” who come to share God’s message with God’s people.

In this case, the angels asked the disciples why they were gazing into heaven since Jesus would one day return in the same way. The implication was that the disciples had work to do after receiving the Great Commission from the Lord.

(v. 11) Men of Galilee: All of Jesus’s apostles (except Judas Iscariot) were from Galilee. Jesus’s choice of Galileans might have seemed like a surprise. It was not a place of great renown, and

the men He selected were not biblical scholars. Aside from James and John, the Bible gives no indication that they came from influential and important families.

In short, they were not the sort of men with whom someone would start a movement. Yet, these are precisely the men Jesus entrusted with the task of world evangelization. This should encourage believers today. We don’t have to be perfect or even popular. We just have to be willing.

(v. 11) This same Jesus: Jesus was, is, and always will be fully human, just as He is fully God. That is why the Bible says **this same Jesus** would return in the same way they saw Him leave. When Jesus returns to consummate the kingdom of God and usher in the new heaven and new earth, He will still be fully human and fully God.

Jesus’s humanity is important for a couple of reasons. First, it affirms what the rest of the Bible teaches to be true. In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul refers to Jesus as “the man Christ Jesus.” As we see in the Gospels, Jesus’s resurrection body was both in continuity with his pre-resurrection body and distinct from it. He bore the scars of His crucifixion (Luke 24:39), and yet He could appear inside a locked room (John 20:19). Jesus’s body is now a “glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

Second, Jesus’s humanity is important because He is the only One who can show us what it means to be genuinely human. He is the only person to live the way God created all humans to live. In fact, Jesus is still more fully human now than we are because He is all that we were designed to be—untainted by sin and its disastrous results.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must urgently carry out their witnessing commission.

READ: **Call on a volunteer to read Acts 1:9-11.** Encourage another adult to recount these verses as a storyteller, narrating with dramatic flair.

EXPLAIN: Comment that while the first few verses of Acts 1 emphasized the need for strategic, focused patience and preparation, verses 9-11 switch gears and call the disciples to action.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to share situations when they have been left speechless. Briefly talk about those situations and what made them so amazing or startling. Point out that disciples needed a pair of angels to snap them back into reality.

EXAMINE: Encourage adults to read through the information for verses 10-11 on pages 14-15 of the PSG. Highlight the twin messages of the angels: Jesus was coming back, and the disciples had work to do.

ASK: **How does the promised return of Jesus add to the urgency we should feel in sharing with others?** (PSG, p. 15)

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Place adults into teams of two or three. (*For smaller groups, an individual can be a team.*) Encourage the teams to complete the Bible Skill assignment (PSG, p. 17). Encourage them to look for key words in the passages listed and to identify comparisons and contrasts. After a few minutes, allow the teams to report. Emphasize the urgency in fulfilling the task we have been given.

Through Prayer (Acts 1:23-26)

23 So they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. **24** Then they prayed, “You, Lord, know everyone’s hearts; show which of these two you have chosen **25** to take the place in this apostolic ministry that Judas left to go where he belongs.” **26** Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles.

(v. 24) Prayed: The prayer in verse 24 is a continuation of the congregation being “continually united in prayer” in verse 14. Having returned to Jerusalem, the early church began the process of finding a replacement for Judas. In choosing a new apostle, the disciples were following Jesus’s example of starting out any task with prayer (Luke 6:12-16). Believers should pray when filling roles of service, seeking God’s will for both individuals and groups.

(v. 24) Know everyone’s hearts: Part of the apostles’ prayer was a confession that God knows the hearts of men. At the same time, they were acknowledging that they could not discern the hearts of people on their own, so they wanted God to make the choice. They were not equipped to know who would best serve as Judas’s replacement. Humans are easily deceived, which is why plugging into God’s will is so important.

(v. 24) These two: Judas had killed himself, and the remaining apostles interpreted Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 (see v. 20) as a call to replace him from the group who had followed Jesus regularly during His time on earth (v. 21). Like the apostles, Matthias and Joseph had seen Jesus’s miracles, heard His teaching, and participated in ministry. They also would have spent time with the resurrected Savior. This is the only time when Scripture suggests a replacement was named for an apostle. Despite what is taught by some today, this office was limited to a particular group of first-century Christ followers.

(v. 25) Where he belongs: Joseph and Matthias were being considered to fill a gap in the apostolic number. The gap was created by the suicide of Judas after he betrayed Jesus. The Greek wording for **where he belongs** suggests “a place of his choosing.” While Luke did not elaborate on where that place might be, the entirety of Scripture indicates Judas suffered eternal punishment for his sin (Matt. 26:23-24; Mark 14:20-21).

Key Phrase

Cast lots

After more prayer for God’s discernment, they **cast lots** to make the final choice. It is not clear what lots were or how they were interpreted. While it might seem like this was leaving the decision to chance, the apostles were actually relying on God to reveal His plan by determining the outcome: **The lot fell to •Matthias.**

Casting lots is not an activity that we should commend today. While there is Old Testament precedent (1 Chron. 26:13ff), this took place before the coming of the Spirit and the completion of God’s Word. Today, believers have the Spirit, prayer, and the Bible to discern God’s will.

(v. 26) Apostles: In Greek, the term used here refers to one sent on a mission. It could also describe an ambassador or delegate. The original **apostles** were the twelve disciples. As noted, Judas was replaced by Matthias.

Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James (Gal. 1:19) were also called apostles. The term indicates a special role these leaders had in establishing the early church and spreading the gospel to the ends of the world. They provided teaching and guidance in a world before the New Testament was codified. In Hebrews 3:1, Jesus is identified as an Apostle. Having been sent by God to earth and fulfilling His mission perfectly, He set the example for the other apostles to follow.



How to Pray Scripture

Strengthen your prayer life by learning how to pray Scripture.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers should pray when filling roles of service.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Briefly summarize verses 12-22. Note that with the promise of the Holy Spirit and a commitment to prayer, the disciples were strategically prepared to continue their mission. Their first task was choosing someone to replace Judas.

READ: **Direct the group to read Acts 1:23-26 silently.** Invite volunteers to share words or ideas that stand out to them.

OUTLINE: Encourage adults to work in pairs to create a process list based on the apostles' actions. After a few minutes, allow some volunteers to share their lists. Note that the apostles followed these steps: 1) prayer (v. 14); 2) nominations (v. 23); 3) more prayer (v. 24); and 4) casting lots (v. 26). Point out that a larger circle of believers numbering 120 was involved in this process.

ASK: **What role should corporate prayer play when a group of believers are making a decision?** (PSG, p. 17)

HIGHLIGHT: Use information from pages 16-17 of the PSG and the "Key Phrase" on page 22 of the Leader Guide to explain "lots." Emphasize this was an act of faith, as demonstrated by the apostles' admission that they could not make a wise choice on their own.

SHARE: *Matthias was chosen after much prayer and consideration. This is a good model for us to follow in our churches today.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Straws

Gather a set of straws of varying lengths. Note that such straws are often used when people select someone for a task. Compare drawing straws to the apostles casting lots in verses 23-26. Explain that an all-powerful God can use any method He wants to make His will known, even drawing straws. Clarify that the key is trusting Him to guide us. Refer the group to James 1:5-6 for guidelines on how to pray about decisions.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers are expected to remain focused on telling others about Jesus.*
- *Believers must urgently carry out their witnessing commission.*
- *Believers should pray when filling roles of service.*

APPLY: Encourage the group to think about their personal spiritual focus, the urgency they feel to be a witness for Christ. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Your Great Commission*). Encourage them to jot down a few names in each column and to add names prayerfully to the list in the coming week. Challenge the group to memorize Acts 1:8 as they learn to stay focused on their commission for Jesus.

PRAY: Close the session by praying for the group to stay focused on God's urgent call to be His witnesses. Remind adults about the importance of remaining alert to God's work around them and to cover everything they do in prayer.

After the Session

Send the group a text or email during the week with the Acts 1:8 memory verse and a reminder to complete the Your Commission activity. Encourage them to evaluate how they feel about witnessing and to identify any obstacles that might keep them from sharing the gospel. Add a brief prayer, asking God to remind the group of His great gift, the Holy Spirit.

LEADER EXTRAS



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