

SCATTERED
TOGETHER

Book of Acts

Introduction

*Northreach has a long-standing vision to be a North Reaching Church. Therefore, as we launch into these studies through the book of Acts, we should do knowing that we are all encouraged to develop a Missional lifestyle. I want to also introduce a strategic way of thinking in view of how we work towards a genuine missional lifestyle, to include the opportunity to develop missional communities as part of Northreach Life Groups and our wider Northreach community. A **missional community** is a family of missionary servants who make disciples who make disciples.*

Family

A missional community is a group of believers who live and experience life together like a family. They see God as their Father because of their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the new regeneration brought about by the Holy Spirit. This means they have and know of a divine love that leads them to love one another as brothers and sisters. They treat one another as children of God deeply loved by the Father in everything — sharing together in a loving, caring community including their money, time, resources, needs, hurts, successes, etc. They know each other well. This knowledge includes knowing each other's stories and having familiarity with one another's strengths and struggles, in regard to a belief in the gospel and its application to all of life (John 1:11-13; Romans 12:10-16; Ephesians 5:1-2).

Missionaries

God's family is also sent, like the Son by the Spirit to proclaim the good news of the kingdom — the gospel — and fulfil the commission of Jesus. A missional community is more than a bible study or a small group that cares for other believers. A missional community is made up of Spirit-led and Spirit-filled people who radically reorient their lives together for the mission of making disciples, of a particular people and place, where there is a gospel gap (no consistent gospel witness). This means people's schedule, resources and decisions are now collectively built around reaching people together (Matthew 3:16-4:1; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; 13:2).

Servants

Jesus is Lord and we are His Servants. A missional community serves those around them as though they are serving Jesus. In doing so, they give a foretaste of what life will be like under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Living as servants to the King, who serve others as He served, presents a tangible witness to Jesus' kingdom and the power of the gospel to change lives. A missional community serves in such a way that it demands a Gospel explanation — lives that cannot be explained in any other way than by the Gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus (Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 2:16).

Disciples

We are all learners of Jesus our teacher who has given us His Spirit to teach us all that is true about Jesus and enable us to live out His commands. Jesus commanded us to make disciples who believe the gospel, are established in a new identity and are able to obey all of His commands (Matthew 28:19-20). The missional community is a healthy context in which this can happen. Disciples are made and developed:

1. Through life on life, where there is visibility and accessibility
2. In community, where they can practice the "one another's", and
3. On mission where they learn how to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

BIBLE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

These bible study notes are meant to assist Life Groups to discover truth from the book of Acts. Please use them to support your learning experience. They are not meant to be exhaustive and cover all that can be learnt from studying Acts. There is also no expectation that you read and study everything which is suggested. Rather a healthy balance will suit most people and the study/discussion questions will enable you to discover together some of the rich gems of learning that Acts presents to us.

HAVE FUN AND ENJOY YOUR DISCUSSIONS.

REFERENCES

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Week #1

The Power to Witness • The Holy Spirit

Read Acts 1:1-8

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In this passage Luke shows Jesus' call to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and He specifies the power by which we must do this. The Holy Spirit is the source of that power, and in fact, is so indispensable that Jesus tells the disciples NOT to go tell people about Him until they are filled with the Spirit. We also need to be sure we are empowered by the Spirit, and then go tell people how they can begin a relationship with God through Christ.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit we have no capacity to influence people for Christ. All our efforts are in vain if He is not enabling us.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The book of Acts is the sequel to Luke. It opens with a greeting to Theophilus, who was also the intended recipient of Luke's gospel. In Acts 1:1 Luke references his "former book" and picks up where he left off. In this passage, Luke is restating the Great Commission challenge Jesus gave in Luke 24. Throughout the rest of the book, Luke shows how that command was being carried out, as the news of the gospel spread throughout "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

According to Jesus, the power that the Spirit provides is critical to the success of the mission. Without the Spirit and His power, the disciples were to do nothing. We are given that power so that we can tell people about Jesus, enabling them to know Him, too. There is no point to having the power of the Holy Spirit, if we aren't sharing the gospel. And there is no point in sharing the gospel, if we don't have the Spirit's power.

SHARE

If I were to tell you we are going to cancel Bible study and go sharing right now, how would you feel? Excited, frightened, intimidated? Why?

EXPLORE

1. In Matthew 28, the command given is: "Go, and make disciples...." Here, Jesus says, "Do not leave, but wait...." Why weren't the disciples supposed to go and go quickly?
2. Where had the disciples heard Jesus speak about this gift before? Read John 14:25-15:8 and 15:26-16:16.
5. What was the gift?
3. What is Jesus' main point in John 15:1-8?
4. List all the times Jesus mentions the Spirit in reference to our knowing and communicating the truth. Read Acts 1:5-8 9. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?
5. What will the Holy Spirit give them? For what purpose?
6. What will they be able to do before the Spirit comes?
7. How does the Spirit empower us to witness?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. Have you ever felt powerless while talking to people about Jesus?
- b. Jesus speaks of this power as a gift. Sometimes it may feel like a gift we'd like to exchange. Do you want this power? What is attractive or repulsive to you about the gift?
- c. How are you experiencing His power in your life right now?
- d. When was the last conversation you had with a non-Christian concerning Jesus?
- e. What does that suggest to you about the reality of the Spirit's power in your life?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

Week #2

A Powerful Witness • Evangelism

Read Acts 4:1-22

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Acts 1:8 promises that God will give power to believers so that they can speak about Jesus in a supernatural way. This is an encouragement to us so that we would rely on the Holy Spirit and experience the thrill of being His witnesses.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

There are many things that can keep us from sharing the gospel, including fear or our own disinterest. Without the Spirit of God living in and empowering us we're unable to overcome the hindrances.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Look for opportunities to be put in a position where radical faith and great power is required. Could it be that you never experience the thrill of the Holy Spirit's courage because you never do anything frightening? Determine to share your faith in a way that will require you to depend on the

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

This passage is one of several great examples of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled. There, Luke recorded Jesus' promise: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses..." In Acts 4, he records one of the many times it was fulfilled. Over and over again in the book of Acts, and throughout the history of the church, this promise is lived out. The same is true today in the lives of Spirit-filled believers all over the world. When we yield our lives to Christ, confess our sins, and trust the Spirit of God to fill us, He empowers us to do great things for Him.


As Peter and John testify of the gospel, the leaders of the day, are astonished by their courage. They can't make sense of their bold, powerful witness. Notice that it isn't only the influence of the Spirit that gives them boldness. What they believe and are convinced of also compels them. In 4:12 Peter declares, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." That kind of courage, and the compulsion to tell people about Jesus, is precisely what the Holy Spirit produces. He can do the same for your Life Group.

SHARE

What is the most frightening thing you have ever attempted for Jesus? What happened?

EXPLORE

1. Why are the religious leaders so threatened by the apostles' preaching?
2. When the religious leaders arrested and tried to intimidate Peter and John how did they respond? Why?
3. How do you think you would feel if a professor challenged you about your faith in front of your class? What would you say?
4. In verse 12, Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." How do you think this belief affected his message to the rulers?

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5. How would you respond to the question, "How can you say Jesus is the only way to God? What about other religions, or those who haven't heard of Christ?"
 6. What is the key to experiencing boldness and effectiveness in talking about Jesus?
 7. Is courage something God gives us, or something He requires us to have?

Holy Spirit's power. Trust Him to fill you as He promised.

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. The religious leaders couldn't refute that a miracle had occurred. What is the evidence of the lifechanging power of Jesus in your ministry? What steps of faith have you taken that would astonish those around you?
- b. unable to intimidate, the leaders vainly order Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. They refuse saying, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." How closely does that parallel your own desire to talk about Jesus?
- c. What would it take to get you to stop talking about Jesus?
- d. What does that tell you about what you really believe about Jesus? What does it suggest to you about the reality of the Holy Spirit's power in your life?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

Week #3

A Powerful Prayer • Prayer

Read Acts 4:23-37

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In the crucible of radical and risky ministry, prayer becomes spontaneous, dynamic and joyful. The key to experiencing great prayer is committing great acts of faith.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

When we aren't engaged in the radical edge of our faith, prayer deteriorates into a boring monotonous discipline.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Evaluate the sorts of things you pray about. Determine to undertake efforts for which you will be desperate for God's assistance. Pray in faith that He will meet you there. Think about how to escalate the intensity and participation of Life group prayer. How can you fuel what is happening, or start something if it does not exist?

WHAT DO WE KNOW?


Prayer is one of the hardest disciplines in the Christian life – unless you are scared and desperate for help. Then, it is the easiest thing in the world. Peter and John have just been through the whirlwind. They've been arrested, jailed and threatened, but they stood strong. The Holy Spirit gave them courage to stand before the religious rulers and testify of His grace. They were bold witnesses for Christ. In verse 23, they are released from prison and returned to the fellowship of believers where they report all that has happened. Immediately, they join their voices in prayer to God. Their hearts are full of thanks for God's deliverance, and they are earnest in their hope for His continued grace. It's clear from the text of their prayer that they knew that God could do anything and that, in fact, nothing happens outside of His sovereign will.

SHARE

Let's play a word association game. What are the first three adjective that come to mind when I say, "Prayer Meeting." Why do you think those terms came to mind?

EXPLORE

1. How do you think Peter and John were feeling? How were the rest of the believers feeling as they waited for their release from prison?
2. When Peter and John were released, they went back and reported all that had happened. Luke says that in response, they raised their voices in prayer. This doesn't sound like a boring prayer meeting they went to because it was expected of them, but rather it seems that they couldn't help but pray. What is different here from our common experience? The prayer contains a quote from Psalm 2.
3. Read Psalm 2. How does this Psalm relate to their current situation?
4. What assurances and hope would this Psalm provide the believers?
5. In addition to praising God for His power, they make two requests. What are they?
6. These men and woman were obviously already indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. What is in view when it says that they were "filled" with the Holy Spirit?



7. How is radical evangelism connected to powerful, passionate prayer?
Can they be separated?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. When has prayer been easiest and most natural for you?
- b. Why do you think we find prayer so difficult?
- c. Is there currently a time when believers gather to pray for the community? what do you see that is currently lacking in this time – in contrast to what you observe in this passage?
- d. In what way can you contribute to bringing about this kind of prayer in your mission field?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

Week #4

A Powerful Persecution • Persecution

Read Acts 5:17:42

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

This study is about persecution and bearing up under it joyfully. Despite the myriad of things against them, the apostles preached the gospel unflinchingly. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do the same.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We often have a wrong perspective on suffering, seeing it as the judgment of God and a thing to be avoided at all costs. When we yield to this, we miss out on a measure of joy that can only come by suffering for Christ.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Please help your Life Group identify the forms of persecution you seek to avoid. Pray for boldness and grace to face them and be a courageous witness for Christ.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?


In Acts 5, the intensity of the opposition to the gospel continues to grow. Even as more and more people believe the gospel, there is a parallel growth of hatred toward Jesus' followers. The persecution began in the last chapter with Peter and John's first imprisonment, and here continues with another imprisonment and the first beating of Jesus' followers. The story of the first martyr begins in the next chapter. The extraordinary thing is that Jesus' followers aren't hindered in the least by the persecution. Rather, filled with the Spirit, they continue to boldly preach the gospel with no regard for the wrath of their opposition. Clearly, God knew their circumstances and could do absolutely anything He wished. The believers were willing to suffer, knowing that a sovereign God oversaw everything.

EXPLORE


1. What has been going on to arouse the jealousy of the Jewish leaders?
2. Their jealousy leads them to arrest and imprison the apostles. Then, in verse 19, Luke says something totally bizarre. Do you think it really happened?
3. What would you do if you escaped from jail? What did they do? Why?
4. When the Jewish leaders discovered the apostles were preaching again right in the temple courts, the passage says that, "they were puzzled, wondering what would come of this." Were they puzzled because the apostles escaped, or because they were preaching again?
5. From the study of Acts thus far, as the disciples' preaching grew in intensity, what other things intensified? How are they all related?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. Why do you think God intervened in their imprisonment, but allowed the beating to happen? Would you question God's goodness in that? Why didn't the apostles?
- b. What have you experienced from Christ that would motivate joy in persecution?
- c. What hinders you from sharing the gospel?

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- d. What are you missing out on when you yield to that pressure?
 - e. What would it take for your joy in the gospel to more closely match the apostles'?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE



Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-1

Week #5

Opportunities Abound • Divine Appointments

Read Acts 8:26-40

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." There are divine opportunities all around us. God has set up appointments for us to walk into, if we just have the eyes to see and the will to obey.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

If we are not looking for and open to the opportunities God gives us every day to be His ambassadors, we miss out on the opportunity to love and serve people for Christ.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Encourage your Life Group to look for divine appointments this week. Train yourselves to believe that God is setting up such appointments around you. You'll be amazed at what you see. Walk by faith into those situations, trusting

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Philip is an apostle who is introduced to the book of Acts earlier in this chapter. He is the second of the three great P's in Acts (Peter, Philip and Paul). The first seven chapters have largely concerned the church in and around Jerusalem, led by Peter. But, in the opening verses of chapter 8, a great persecution breaks out in Jerusalem and the church is scattered. God, however, uses this persecution to spread the gospel wherever the believers have fled. Philip is one who takes the gospel outside Jerusalem fulfilling, Jesus' call to expand beyond Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The rest of the book of Acts records that expansion under the leadership of Paul. According to Ephesians 2:10, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Those "good works" are divine appointments – opportunities He has set up for you.

We need to learn to see these opportunities and be obedient when they arise. What a privilege we have to be used by God. He ordains the circumstances, works in people's lives, and lets us communicate the gospel to ready hearts. What great fun to be a messenger of the gospel! Keep your eyes open for opportunities he has prepared and walk obediently into them.

SHARE

Have you ever been substituted out on a sports team? What was it like? How did it feel if and when the coach finally put you back in the game?

EXPLORE

1. A new character is introduced in Acts 8: Philip. Who is he?
2. Up until this point, the main character has been Peter. What happened to change this?
3. In verse 27, Philip leaves Jerusalem heading south for a Philistine city. Whose idea was this?
4. Philip's eyes were open, looking for an opportunity to share Christ. When he hears the official reading Isaiah, he recognizes the divine appointment. Would you have? What would you say?

God to use you.

5. What can you do to find opportunities like this, and be ready for them?
6. The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah 53 and wonders about whom the author is talking. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. What in this description corresponds to what you know about Jesus?
7. If all you had to draw from was Isaiah 53 how would you communicate the gospel message to someone?
8. In verse 38, the official believes the gospel, is baptized, and goes away rejoicing. What did God do to bring this about? What did Philip do?
9. Did God need Philip's help? Why did He use him?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. Do you think God still directs our steps like this? How would you know if He was?
- b. When was a time you felt particularly led by God to share your faith? What were the circumstances?
- c. Why do you think God doesn't lead this way all of the time?
- d. Have you gotten the impression from this series in Acts that sharing the gospel ought to be central in the lives of believers? Lifestyle! How is our ministry doing in this regard? How are you doing?
- e. Do you think if we threw a little teleportation into the mix, you'd be more motivated to share your faith?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

Week #6

Unlimited Patience • Paul's Conversion

Read Acts 9:1-30

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

This passage is about an extraordinary and unexpected conversion. Saul, enemy of the gospel, came to faith and began preaching the gospel himself. No one is beyond the reach of the gospel. We should look for opportunities to lead people to Christ, even if we think they would never believe.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We tend to shrink back from sharing the gospel. Either because of our own fear or our lack of faith that the message will produce life change in those with whom we share it.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Are we like Ananias, fearful and needing prompting to obey? Or are we like Saul, forgiven a great debt, and therefore compelled to share the gospel with all who will listen. We are encouraged to take steps of faith to make the gospel known in the world. Identify someone in

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

In Acts 9, we pick up the story of Saul, who was briefly introduced at the end of chapter 7, where Stephen was martyred. He was one of the great opponents of the gospel, who travelled around threatening the believers and seeking to have them imprisoned. This passage is the dramatic account of his conversion to faith. Later known as Paul, he became one of Christianity's first missionaries and its chief apologist, writing 13 New Testament books. God, in His amazing grace, loved him, opened his heart to believe, and forgave him. In verse 3, Paul is on his way to Damascus to arrest any Christians he can find.

On the way he met Jesus, in all His blinding glory. Jesus asks him, "Why do you persecute Me?" Jesus took as an affront to Himself all the grief that was done to His followers. He suffered when they were hurt. Paul never answers the question, but immediately obeys Jesus' command to go into the city. Meanwhile, a Christian named Ananias has a vision from God in which he is told to go meet Saul. He knows who Saul is and what his errand is, and so is afraid to go. But God assures him that He, too, knows all about Saul, and has a plan for his life that no one would ever expect. Believing God, Ananias ignores the risk, and goes to meet with Saul. He greets him as, "Brother Saul," identifying him as a believer, and restores his sight. Then Saul, signifying his new faith in Christ, is baptized.

As if that wasn't extraordinary enough, in verse 20, Saul begins to preach the gospel. The Jewish leaders are astonished, baffled, and angered. It's absolutely inconceivable to them that Saul could turn like this, and they try several times to kill him, but fail. Undeterred, Saul continues to preach, and debate, proving that Jesus is the Christ. The bulk of the remainder of Acts is the record of Saul taking the gospel throughout the known world.

SHARE

Who is the most outspoken critic of Christianity that you know? What would it take for you to believe that they might believe the gospel?

**your community,
or friend, whom you believe
is beyond the reach of the
gospel. As a Life group, pray
for them, and ask God to
show you how you could
lead them to faith.**

EXPLORE

1. Christianity at this time was known as “the way.” What do you think is the origin of this name?
2. Why do you think Saul hated Christianity so much?
3. What is the first question Jesus asks Saul? Why did He phrase His question this way?
4. In verse 10, the focus shifts to Ananias. What does God want him to do? How does he feel about this?
5. How would you feel if God wanted you to meet with someone known for killing Christians? Would you do it?
6. What motivated Ananias to obey?
7. How did the Jewish leaders react to Saul’s conversion?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. With whom do you identify more in this study? Saul or Ananias? Why?
- b. Saul’s behaviour in verse 20 is totally unexpected. He immediately begins to preach the very faith he once tried to destroy, and people were astonished. Discuss and think of the most outspoken critic of Christianity known to the Life group. What would be the impact if they came to faith?
- c. What would be the impact in your community if you became an evangelist like Saul?
- d. Why do you think Luke talks so much about evangelism?
- e. How are his descriptions of the early church like or unlike our own community?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Week #7

Paul's Strategy – Part 1 • Broad Sowing and Multiplication

Read Acts 13

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In this passage, Paul and Barnabas begin their first missionary journey. Two strategies can be observed here: broad sowing – taking the gospel to every person they could; and spiritual multiplication – new believers becoming messengers of the gospel. Both of these strategies can be used to help fulfil the Great Commission.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

There are massive numbers of unreached people in our City and in the world. Since the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time, unwise and nonstrategic approaches leave millions at grave risk.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

With your Life Group, evaluate your current ministry. Are you sowing the gospel broadly, or only to a limited number of people?

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Acts 13 records the first half of Paul's first missionary journey. The Holy Spirit has called Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel outside of the confines of Israel and Samaria. Obediently, they travel across the Mediterranean and through several cities in what is now Turkey. A close look at their actions, and the results that were produced, will reveal strategies we can employ in our own community.

The first thing to notice is the diversity and number of places in which they communicate the gospel. In verses 4-5, they share the gospel in a synagogue in Salamis, Cyprus, then continue throughout the whole island. In Paphos, Cyprus they lead a Roman proconsul to Christ (verse 12). Leaving the island, they teach in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (verse 14), and later they teach the Gentiles in the same city (verse 46). At the end of the chapter, they leave Antioch to go to Iconium (verse 51), then Lystra and Derbe. In all the places they go, they offer the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. In every place they go, people become believers. In the same way, we need to sow the gospel broadly. Because we don't know who will respond in faith, we need to communicate to everyone we can, and trust God to work in people's hearts. We need to go after every person God leads us to.

Paul directs in II Timothy 2:2. "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." That is how the gospel spreads. New Christians become messengers and carry the gospel to unbelievers, who come to faith and themselves become messengers to yet more unbelievers. Our obligation is not only to share the gospel, but also to equip new Christians to share the gospel. Our church Vision statement is "Following Jesus – Reaching people" The essence of this vision statement is spiritual multiplication.

SHARE

Think of your favourite product – it might be a movie, computer, brand of shoes, anything. How did you hear about it? From how many sources and how many times? Was it through professional ads or word of mouth? What implications can you draw about

effectively communicating the gospel based on that company's ability to get news to you about their product?

EXPLORE

1. How would you have felt if you were with Paul and Barnabas, leaving the fellowship of Antioch, and going out to make Christ known? Scared? energized? Disappointed?
2. What were some of the barriers they overcame to make the gospel known?
3. What areas of our community would you say are virtually unreached with the gospel?
4. Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogues first. What was the strategy in doing this?
Read verses 42-45.
5. Why did Paul and Barnabas get invited back to the synagogue?
6. In verse 44, the whole city shows up. Why did they come? How did they know Paul and Barnabas would be speaking?
7. As the Jewish leaders stirred up trouble, Paul and Barnabas went to the Gentiles and many believed. Verse 49 says, "The word of the Lord spread through the whole region." How was this accomplished?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

Include in your discussion the idea of a missional community and how that might look

- a. Let's say God has set you apart like Paul and Barnabas to reach an area of your community. Where would you start? What would you do? What would be your strategy?
- b. Come to think of it maybe He has set you apart for that very purpose. What would keep you from doing this?
- c. What practical strategy could you implement to expose your entire region to the gospel?
- d. Another strategy for exposing many to the gospel is found in 2 Timothy 2:2. Read the passage and explain how this approach would help spread the gospel.
- e. Try to avoid a Sunday school answer here, but for you, why is it even worth it? What is it about Jesus that motivates you to put in the effort to tell people about Him?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. 2 Timothy 2:2

Choose a people group who aren't being reached and make a plan to share the gospel with them. Think through a strategy. Are you practicing spiritual multiplication? Seek out one reliable person to whom you can entrust the gospel. Teach them how to share their faith.

Week #8

Paul's Strategy – Part 2 • Starting Points and Discipleship

Read Acts 14

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In this study, you want to continue to help your Life group think strategically about ministry. Specifically, this passage shows how Paul was intentional about choosing a starting point for outreach, and how he valued discipleship in addition to evangelism.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The enormous task of reaching everyone on the planet with the good news about Jesus' life, death and resurrection cannot be accomplished without giving careful thought to the best ways to proceed.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

As a Life Group, evaluate how strategic your ministry is. Seek to reach out to the people who can best help you reach into your community. Evaluate the balance between evangelism and discipleship in your

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Acts 14 gives us the second half of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. Here they continue into Galatia as far as Derbe, and then retrace their steps all the way to Antioch. As in the previous study, there is much to learn from their model. Take a look at verses 1-7. This chapter begins by saying, "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue." If you look back through chapter 13, you'll see that was their pattern. In Acts 13:5, they went to the synagogue in Salamis, and in 13:14 they taught in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Paul maintains this preference in all of his journeys. Whenever there was a synagogue in a city, he would begin to preach there. If a city didn't have a large enough Jewish population to support a synagogue, he would go to a place of prayer. If there was no place of prayer, he would find another gathering where he could teach. There are several reasons why a synagogue was an ideal place to begin preaching. There, the people would be aware of the Old Testament promises, and they would have some notion of the coming Messiah. They were accustomed to having visiting rabbis teach and were obviously open to spiritual things.

Despite the constant persecution Paul also found in synagogues, he continued to visit them because they were the best possible place for the gospel to establish a foothold in a new community. In our culture, there are also "synagogues" or natural places to begin an outreach. One of them is a University or school, or amongst colleagues. Pray to locate a collection of people who are at critical crossroads in their lives, where they are evaluating decisions and beliefs, and are determining courses for their lives. They are often the most open to new relationships and new ideas. For these, and other reasons, seekers are an incredibly strategic "synagogue" to reach.

SHARE

Divide your group in half and have them debate this proposition: "Strategic thinking is ungodly. If we were actually empowered by the Spirit, we wouldn't have to depend on strategy."

ministry. Adjust as needed.

EXPLORE

1. Where did Paul usually begin preaching the gospel when he would enter a new city?
2. Why would Paul begin by preaching there?
3. Where are the places in our culture that are natural starting places for outreach?
4. Where or with whom are the starting points for your mission field?
5. What makes them strategic?
6. read 14:21-27. Look at a map in your Bible or online of Paul's missionary journeys. Where were they in relation to the Antioch where they started?
7. We know from Paul's second journey that there was an overland route to connect those two points. Why do you think they didn't just finish the loop and go home?
8. Which is more important: evangelism or discipleship? What should the balance be?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. If you were visiting a city where you had just preached the gospel, what are some of the follow-up topics and issues you would teach? Write down what you would consider to be the 1 or 2 most important issues.
- b. Who do you know in the ministry who could use some "follow-up"?
- c. How would you initiate this relationship and process?
- d. Few of us are naturally balanced in evangelism and discipleship but we prefer one over the other. Which are you inclined to neglect in favour of your natural preference? What steps could you take to let your strength aid your weakness?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

...We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. Acts 14:15

Week #9

An Unknown God • Connecting with the Culture

Read Acts 17:16-34

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In this passage, Paul shares the gospel with a group of pluralistic philosophers, whose worldview was very similar to that of society today. His message is a study in how to tactfully, and effectively, create a thirst among unbelieving people to hear the gospel.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

In a pluralistic culture the gospel message may get no traction in the minds of unbelievers. We need to be careful to speak in terms that are acceptable and meaningful to our audience or we won't be heard and will have little influence.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

There are so many good application points to choose from in this passage. Help the members of your group think through the next step in their personal attempts to reach out to people.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

This passage is one of the most relevant in all of Acts. Here, Luke gives us a record of Paul's interaction with a group of philosophers in Athens. His tact and skill at communicating the gospel to this group of pluralists is fantastic. There is much here that we can model as we explore a missional lifestyle.

In verse 16, Paul is waiting in Athens for his travel companions, Silas and Timothy. He was sent ahead alone because of the risk of violence from an unruly mob in the cities in which he had been. Although he is supposed to wait for them, Paul isn't one for inactivity. He sees that the city is full of idols and is greatly distressed and moved to action. God alone is great. Mute idols of stone, gold, or silver ought not steal praise from God. So, Paul begins to preach, both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. Some of the philosopher's debate with him and invite him to come address the Areopagus, a society of philosophers. Luke, in this account, derides those philosophers for doing nothing but sitting around talking about the latest ideas. Their laziness may have been a character flaw, but it provided a great opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel. In verse 22, Paul begins an extraordinary speech.

The next nine verses are absolutely packed with wisdom about how to share the gospel in a critical and pluralistic setting. Take several minutes to read and observe what Paul does and says. Then, brainstorm together the principles that you can model together. Below are several observations to get you started. There are undoubtedly more that you and your group may see.

- Verse 22: Paul commends the philosophers for the slightest good. Though they were idolaters, he begins by approving their religiousness. When persuading people, it is useful to start out with approbation, rather than accusation.
- Verse 23: Paul studied their culture. We, too, need to know the culture of the people we seek to reach. By what are they entertained? What are their political views? How do they view spirituality, morality, and philosophy?
- Verse 23: Because he studied the culture, Paul also found a launching point for the gospel within their circle of knowledge. What are the

There should be at least one principal from Paul's methodology that can help us to develop our style of mission.

movies, TV Shows, beliefs or issues already in people's consciousness that can be a bridge to talking about Jesus?

- Verse 24: Though Paul commends their religiousness, he does not commend their idolatry, but immediately affirms that the real God is not an idol. He avoids the temptation to point out that their sinful behaviour is wrong.
- Verses 24-26: Paul affirms the majesty and sovereignty of God. This is particularly important, given the lifeless rocks they were presently worshipping. God is superior to everything people seek to fill His place in their lives. Show them that He is better and can better meet their deepest longings!
- Verse 27: He observes that God is personal and wants a relationship with us. Again, see the point above.
- Verse 28: Paul quotes their poets. He was well read and was able to make a point by drawing from sources with which they were likely to agree. Sometimes, a quote from a movie or "TV Show" may be more persuasive than anything we would have to say.
- Verses 29-30: He condemns idolatry in general, without pointing a finger specifically. He's incredibly gracious, even as he critiques their behaviour honestly.
- Verses 30-31: He calls them to repent and warns them that a judgment is coming. He is not so concerned about being culturally relevant that he removes essential parts of the message. Though he is drawing on Biblical knowledge throughout, he never directly quotes the Bible. As it would not be perceived as authoritative, or even accurate, it was better not to source it. With a Jewish audience, he quoted the Bible constantly.
- Verse 32: Paul earns another hearing, where he can continue to tell them about Christ, probably in more complete terms. There is so much here from which to learn. Our task is so crucial, that it is imperative we learn to be effective, not merely faithful. Connecting with the culture, as Paul did, can help us share the gospel of life in such a way that more will believe and be saved.

SHARE

As our culture shifts rapidly toward a pluralistic, post-modern worldview some have observed with frustration that ministry is slower and harder than it used to be. How would you compare the difficulty of ministry today in our culture to ministry in the Roman Empire during the first century (which Acts records)?

EXPLORE

1. Why was Paul waiting in Athens?
2. Why was he distressed to see the city full of idols?
3. What does he do about it?
4. Paul communicates in such a way that the people want to hear more. They invite him to speak at the Areopagus, a society of philosophers. In verse 22, Paul begins an extraordinary speech to that group. The next nine verses are absolutely packed with wisdom about how to share the gospel in a critical and pluralistic setting. Take several minutes to read and observe some of the principles you see in Paul's communication of the gospel (see notes above).
5. Athens, like our local communities, sporting organisations and schools, was a place of diverse ideas and philosophies. How does Paul adapt his message to be effective in this setting?
6. What are some of the points of common ground that Paul tries to establish with his audience?
7. How is he able to demonstrate that with all of their beliefs and ideas, that "deep down" they know they are still missing something?
8. The danger of accommodating the gospel to an audience is that, if you aren't careful, you can compromise on some of the truths of the gospel message or avoid the more confrontational elements. Do you think Paul does this, or do you think he maintains a good balance?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. Which of these ministry principals that we've gleaned from Paul can apply to your ministry?
- b. What are some specific ways you would explain the gospel differently to a person without any church or religious background?
- c. Paul's speech earned him another hearing. What can you do to arouse people's thirst to know more about Jesus?
- d. How did Paul's message arouse your thirst?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

...I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22

Week #10

God's Powerful Presence • God's Will

Read Acts (Overview)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

This study looks at the means by which God leads His people. It surveys the Book of Acts to see how the Holy Spirit gave wisdom and direction to the first disciples.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The will of God is not often plainly revealed to us which leaves us open to missing it entirely or wrongly leaning on uncertain indicators as we try to figure it out.

WHAT'S OUR RESPONSE?

Here are a few things that would make great application points in this study.

1. Help the people in your group understand that God does desire to lead us and give us direction.

2. Help them understand what the basic tools are we are to use to discern God's will. They are: wisdom, Scripture, Godly council, our emotions, our mind, direct

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Background

One of the chief signs that God's presence is in and among His people is the powerful sense that He is leading and giving direction. We see this clearly in God's manifestation of His presence to the Israelites in their exodus out of Egypt.

So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea...By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (Exodus 13:18,21-22).

The Jews had longed for such a day to return and believed it would come when their Messiah came and ruled from the Temple in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, when He came, Israel as a nation did not recognize Him. Jesus had promised that though He, Himself, would return to heaven, His presence would remain in the person of the Holy Spirit.

When the promised Holy Spirit arrives in Acts 2, immediately we begin to notice a new dynamic: God is once again leading His people. We continually read that the Spirit said to, "go here" or "do this" or "say that." For the disciples it would have been clear that the powerful abiding presence of God had returned. It would have also dawned on them, quite shockingly, that His leading was, in fact, coming from the Temple as anticipated – the believers themselves comprising the new Temple where God's Spirit dwells.

A Contrast - Acts 1:23-26

The last thing we see the disciples doing before the Holy Spirit comes upon them is trying to discern God's will over who should replace Judas as the twelfth Apostle. As they sought God, they prayed and cast lots. Casting lots was a fairly common method of discerning God's will in biblical times. Lots were usually made out of small stones, and the method of using them was similar to drawing straws or flipping a coin – yet with a component of faith in God's providence to decide a matter. It is clear from the Old Testament, that God did, at times, give Israel direction through casting lots.

revelation, and circumstances. Discerning God's will require us to be good detectives looking for alignment among these various senses.

3. Most critically, encourage them to have a heart that desires to do God's will above all else (Rom 12:1-3).

WHAT ARE OUR SPIRITUAL SENSES?

WISDOM - Accumulated knowledge of how God has worked in your life thus far.

SCRIPTURE - Unlike the period of Acts, where more direct revelation was needed, we now have the New Testament, as well as the Old, to give us insight into God's will.

GODLY COUNCIL - Discerning God's will requires detective work. God leads us through the council of others who have greater experience discerning God's ways, and who are experienced detectives.

What is interesting to note is that this is the last time the use of "lots" is recorded in the Scripture, and it is literally the very last event recorded before the coming of the Holy Spirit. From this moment on, in the book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit is very directly leading and speaking to the people of God. It could very well be that Luke has included this story to show the contrast.

How Does God Make His Will Known?

How do you find where you are going when you are lost? You use your senses. You might look for familiar things or try to hear a local highway. In a similar way, we are to use our spiritual senses to attempt to bring in as much information as we can, in order to discern God's leading. A basic list of those senses appears below.

Looking For Alignment

What we are looking for is alignment among these senses: that our hearts would be telling us the same things as our circumstances, and godly, mature believers. There are many decisions we can make by wisdom and a knowledge of the Scripture; but often the decisions that have the most gravity are not as clearly spelled out and need some detective work. As we mature as Christians, we become increasingly better detectives.

Tell Me Now!

So why doesn't God just make it immediately clear to us what we should do? Because God has other objectives than simply having you carry out His will. He wants you to know Him better, and rely on Him. He wants to bring out heart issues you are unaware of. God uses major decisions to accomplish many purposes, purposes which could not be realized by immediate disclosure of His will.

SHARE

How have you tried to discern God's will in the past? How confident have you been that you were figuring out what he wanted you to do?

EXPLORE

Read Acts 1:23-26.

1. This passage gives us a picture of the disciples trying to discern God's will before they had received the Holy Spirit. What did they do and why?

2. The following passages describe God's leading after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Read the passages and describe how God gave direction and what He was leading them to do.

Acts 6:1-7; Acts 5:17-20; Acts 8:26-40; Acts 9:10-16; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 16:6-10

EMOTIONS - The Holy Spirit does lead through our emotions. Our emotions can be a "mixed bag," and often requires sorting out. However, we will often find we have a desire to do what God is calling us to.

MIND - Prayerfully considering what would be the wisest stewardship of our time, gifting, and lives, can be a reliable way to discern the Spirit's leading.

REVELATION - As in the Book of Acts, sometimes God leads through mental impressions, and even dreams, as we are prayerful over His direction.

CIRCUMSTANCES - Operating from the assumption that God is already at work in our circumstances, we can get a sense of where He might be leading us.

3. What differences do you notice between how God led in acts 1:23-26, and these passages?

4. In Acts 20:22-23, Paul says, "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem...I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." How do you think Paul experienced the Spirit's compelling/warnings?

5. Do you think God leads believers the same way today?
Read Romans 12:1-2.

6. What is the essential ingredient in receiving God's direction? Why is this so important?

Discuss with your group the "Spiritual Senses" above.

7. Is there anything else you would add to this list?

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

- a. With which of the senses we talked about earlier have you experienced God's leading in your life? Describe how it happened.
- b. What would you do if circumstances, as well as your emotions, were leading you to do something that seemed to go against a biblical principal?
- c. What is the biggest issue in which you are currently trying to discern God's will? In what ways are you seeing His leading?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1-2