



The Book of Acts

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION



STUDENT'S GUIDE

Bishop Daniel Beaudoin
2020: The Year of Mission



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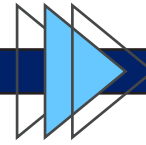


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Veronica Dimae, "Pentecost," 2010. Media acrylic on stretch canvas,
130 x 100cm. (Australia)





Welcome Letter



Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to 2020: *The Year of Mission*. Our focus this year will be on the Mission of God. God has a mission, and God's mission has a church. In Scripture, we encounter the Triune God working to restore and renew all things. The Bible begins with creation and ends with the promise of a new creation. The Triune God is working to renew everyone and everything and invites us to participate.

The mission of the Northwestern Ohio Synod is a participatory mission:

***Sent by the Crucified and Risen Jesus to
Make Disciples, Equip Leaders, Strengthen Parishes, and Launch New Communities
for the Renewal of Northwestern Ohio and the World.***

During 2020: *The Year of Mission*, we will aspire to grow as we participate in God's Mission through three distinct practices:

1. To **discern** the Mission of God through prayer, Scripture, and sacred conversation;
2. To **align** the identity and work of God's people and parishes with the Mission of God;
3. To **participate** in the Mission of God for the renewal of Northwest Ohio and the world.

One of my favorite Bible verses related to the Mission of God is recorded at the end of the Gospel of John, when the crucified and risen Jesus appears to His followers. The Bible verse is **John 20:21**, which will serve as our **2020 Year of Mission** memory verse.



**Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21).**



This powerful verse reminds us that Jesus did not call us to be a settled church, but a church sent to participate in God's mission!

What follows is a six session Bible study on the **Book of Acts**. Open your Bible, gather with a group of friends, get outside the four walls of the congregation, and learn what God desires to teach you. But, be careful. Be very, very careful. Because God's Word has the power to transform people and communities from who we are into the people and communities that God longs for us to be.

Let us pray, **O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship pg. 317)

Blessings,
Bishop Daniel Beaudoin
November 28, 2019 | Day of Thanksgiving



Tips for Group Members

“... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8b).

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, the crucified and risen Jesus commissions His followers to be “witnesses” (1:8b). Jesus charges His followers to participate fully in God's mission by

making disciples (Matthew 28:19), preaching the good news (Mark 16:15),
proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47),
following Jesus (John 21:22), and witnessing “... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8b).

One of the best ways to discern God's mission is to gather in community for prayer, Scripture, and conversation.

Thank you for your willingness to attend this Bible study. Now, you don't need to be a Bible scholar to attend a Bible study. You simply need to be open. Open to experiencing new thoughts, great discussion, and the potential for real growth. Think of a coffee shop conversation rather than a classroom lecture. These studies can be experienced in a variety of settings, though I would encourage you to follow the pattern of the original apostles and share these studies out in the “marketplace” (outside the four walls of the church building). You never know who might be watching, listening, and wondering. These studies are intended to last around 60 minutes.

Below are some suggestions to assist you.*

Before the Study

1. Pray. Pray that God would guide you to learn and participate faithfully. Pray for your Bible study leader and the participants who will gather for conversation and discussion. Ask God to open your hearts and minds to hear God's Word that it may motivate you to a new way of thinking and being.
2. Come to the study prepared. Read and then slowly re-read the assigned Bible passage. Write down particular and peculiar words and phrases you have questions about. Bring those questions to the group gathering.
3. Carefully work through the lesson. Take time to meditate and reflect on each question. Write your responses in the space provided. Please set aside 60-90 minutes for prep time each week.
4. Consider ways to apply the assigned Bible passage to your life.





Tips for Group Members

During the Study

1. Bring the necessary materials to your study: Bible, student guide, pen, or pencil.

2. Some tips for participating in discussion:

A. Be willing to participate. The leader will not be lecturing, but leading a conversation. Join the conversation.

B. Stick to the topic being discussed. Try to avoid drifting off on tangents.

C. Be attentive to other participants. Listen to what they are sharing. You may be surprised by their insights. Also, be affirming. This will encourage some of the more hesitant participants to share.

D. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. Do participate, but allow others to also participate.

E. Fully expect that God will teach you something through this study and through the other members in your group. Pray that you may apply God's teaching to your daily life.

3. Some general guidelines:

A. We will consider all conversation within our group to be confidential. We will not share confidential conversation without specific permission.

B. We will make space for each participant to share / speak as they are comfortable doing so.

C. We will listen attentively to one another.

D. We will be very cautious about fixing people and giving advice.

E. We will practice Martin Luther's explanation of the 8th Commandment: **"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"**.

"We are to fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light".



Study Bibles

Lutheran Study Bible - NRSV (2009) Published by Augsburg Fortress

Harper Collins Study Bible - NRSV (2006) Published by Harper One

NIV Zondervan Study Bible - NIV (2015) Published by Zondervan

Bible Dictionary/Handbook

Harper Collins Bible Dictionary (2011) Published by Harper One

Halley's Bible Handbook (2014) Published by Zondervan

Bible Atlases

The Student Bible Atlas (2015) Published by Augsburg Fortress

Zondervan Atlas of the Bible (2010) Published by Zondervan

Commentaries

Acts: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching by William H. Willimon (2010) Interpretation Series Published by Westminster John Knox Press

Acts: An Exegetical Commentary (4 Volumes) by Craig S. Keener (2012-2015) Published by Baker Academic

Acts: A Commentary by Richard Pervo (2009) Published by Fortress Press

The Acts of the Apostles by Luke Timothy Johnson (2006) Sacra Pagina #5 Published by The Liturgical Press

The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary by Ben Witherington III (1998) Published by William B. Eerdmans Company

Other

World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age by C. Kevin Rowe (2009) Published by Oxford University Press

Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, and Timelines (2015) Published by Rose



Book of Acts: A Brief Introduction

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written by the same author. Both works are dedicated to a man named Theophilus and share a common writing style. Each book bears witness to God's mission to restore and renew creation, first through the crucified and risen Jesus, and then through His followers. In both works the same Holy Spirit that anoints Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22), empowers the followers of Jesus to boldly share the Gospel in all the world. Some Bible scholars refer to these two corresponding works as "Luke-Acts".

Luke, the physician, and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul has traditionally been identified as the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. In other New Testament writings, Paul refers to Luke as a beloved colleague (Colossians 4:14) and fellow worker (Philemon 24). Within the Book of Acts, the author occasionally writes in the first-person plural. These passages are identified as the "we" passages, which provide Luke's firsthand account of the early church participating in God's mission.

The Book of Acts begins forty days after the resurrection of Jesus, and records what happens to His followers after the Ascension (1:9-11). In Acts 1:8, the crucified and risen Jesus commissions His followers,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

These well-known words of Jesus are both the general outline and central theme of the Book of Acts.


On Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit arrives in spectacular fashion, and descends on the gathered community of Jesus followers. The Holy Spirit empowers this community to boldly and courageously proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, these "witnesses" are led to share the Gospel in sequential and ever widening circles. This spread of the Gospel is both geographic (from Jerusalem to Rome) and ethnic (from Jews to Gentiles).

As Jesus stated in Acts 1:8, the Gospel will first be shared **in Jerusalem** (Acts 1-7), through the witness of Peter, John, and Stephen, the first Christian martyr. From Jerusalem, the Gospel will spread into **all Judea and Samaria** (Acts 8-12), through the witness of Philip, Peter, and a newly converted Saul. The third and final phase of the Book of Acts will trace the spread of the Gospel **to the ends of the earth** (Acts 13-28), through three "witness trips" (mission trips) of the Apostle Paul and his traveling companions. The Book of Acts concludes in the capital city of the Roman Empire, with the Apostle Paul preaching and teaching "... with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31b).






Book of Acts: An Outline



A Sent Church
“You Will Be My Witnesses...”
(1:1-2:47)




Prologue
(1:1-5)


**The Ascension and Apostolic
Commission of Jesus** (1:6-11)

A New Witness is Chosen
(1:12-26)

Pentecost (2:1-47)
Witness of the Holy Spirit (2:1-13)
Peter's Witness (2:14-41)
Witness of the Community (2:42-47)



Stage One
“...in Jeruslaem...”
(3:1-8:1a)



Peter and John's Witness
(3:1-4:31)

The Witness of the Community
(4:32-5:42)

The Witness of the Deacons
(6:1-7)

Stephen's Witness
(6:8-8:1a)



Stage Two
“...in all Judea and Samaria...”
(8:1b-12:25)



The Witnesses are Scattered in Judea and Samaria

Philip's Witness
(8:4-40)

Saul's Conversion and Early Witness
(9:1-31)

Peter's Witness
(9:32-11:18)

The Witness of the Community in Antioch
(11:19-30)

Peter and James' Witness
(12:1-25)



Stage Three
“...and to the ends of the earth”.
(13:1-28:31)



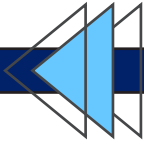
Paul's First Witness Trip
(13:1-14:28)

**The Witness of the Community
(The Jerusalem Council)** (15:1-35)

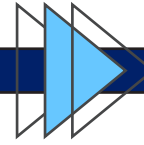
Paul's Second Witness Trip
(15:36-18:22)

Paul's Third Witness Trip
(18:23-21:16)

Paul's Fourth Witness Trip
(21:17-28:31)



Memory Verses



Study 1

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

Study 2

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 2:42

Study 3

“They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”

Acts 6:6

Study 4

“But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Acts 15:40-41

Study 5

“Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written,

‘Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.’”

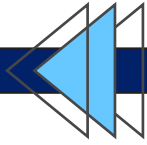
Romans 15:20-21

Study 6

“Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

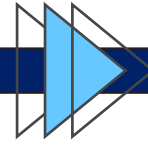
Acts 28:30-31





Student Study #1

Sent, But Never Settled



1. Opening scripture verses: Acts 1:8
2. Opening prayer
3. Welcome and introductions
4. Announcements
5. Introduction to the study

In the Brief Introduction to the Book of Acts we learn that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written by the same author, Luke the Physician. Both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts open with a formal dedication to a man named Theophilus. Theophilus is a second-generation Christian, and Luke writes the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to help Theophilus grow as a disciple of Jesus. Some Bible scholars argue that Theophilus may have been a patron of Luke's, who provides the financial backing to allow Luke the time to write both a Gospel (Luke) and an early Church History (Acts).

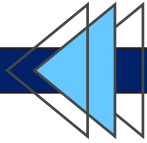
Following the formal dedication (1:1-5), Luke turns to the Ascension of Jesus (1:6-11), which takes place forty days after the Resurrection of Jesus (1:3b). Right before He ascends, Jesus issues both a promise and a charge. The promise is that the Holy Spirit will come upon the disciples (1:8a). The charge is that His followers will become the "sent" people of God.

**"...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8b).**

As stated in the Brief Introduction, Act 1:8, serves as both a general outline and the central theme of the Book of Acts. The charge to be "witnesses" are the last words the crucified and risen Jesus speaks to His followers before ascending into heaven (1:9-11).

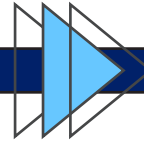
Ten days after the Ascension of Jesus, on Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit descends upon the gathered community, just as Jesus promised (1:8a). One of the first gifts of the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in many and diverse languages. Folks from far away places like Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Asia, Egypt, and Rome, are amazed to hear a group of Galileans speaking to them in their native language about God's deeds of great power. Though there were some gathered on Pentecost Day who doubted (2:13).





Student Study #1

Sent, But Never Settled



6. Opening Reflection Questions

A. What navigation devices do you use to take a trip. Compass? Road Atlas? AAA Triptiks? Google Maps? Other? _____

B. From the earliest days, the Christian Church has been marked by diversity (see Acts 2:5-11). What can be challenging about diversity in the church? What can be powerful about diversity in the church? _____

7. Study and Conversation

A. The Sent (not settled) People of God. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, we read in each of the four Gospels that the Risen Jesus spent time with His followers. During that time, he charged the disciples with a mission to be the “sent people of God”. Take a look at the end of each of the four Gospels and the beginning of the Book of Acts to see if you can identify a specific charge that Jesus gives to the gathered community. A “charge” or a “commission” is an act of granting certain powers or the authority to carry out a particular task or duty.

B. Find the “charge” that Jesus gives to the gathered community.

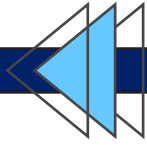
Matthew 28: _____

Mark 16: _____

Luke 24: _____

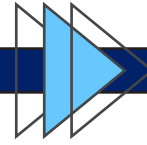
John 20: _____

Acts 1: _____



Student Study #1

Sent, But Never Settled



C. For discussion: What is the difference between a sent church and a settled church? Why do you think we have settled to be a settled church? How might we rehear the charge of Jesus to be a sent church?

D. Read Acts 1:6-11

1. Can you recall a time when you were eager to start something, but had to wait? Was the waiting helpful or a hindrance? Please share with the group.

2. For what are the apostles eager and impatient? See Acts 1:6

3. How does Jesus respond to the apostles' eagerness and impatience? See Acts 1:7-8

Acts 1:7 _____

Acts 1:8 _____

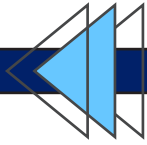
E. The apostles don't have to wait too long for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Read Acts 2:1-13.

1. Picture yourself as one of the followers of Jesus fathered on Pentecost Day. Try to describe what you see and hear. _____

2. What words quickly come to mind when you think of the Holy Spirit?

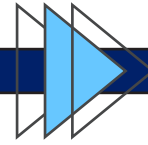
3. One of the first gifts of the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in many and various languages. If you could learn to speak a second (or third) language what would that language be? Why? _____





Student Study #1

Sent, But Never Settled



4. Re-read Acts 2:5-11. Try to identify all the nations and peoples mentioned in this reading (use a Bible Atlas or a map in a Study Bible). Diversity is important to God, who works through the Holy Spirit and the Church to overcome barriers and boundaries throughout the Book of Acts. Where do you notice barriers and boundaries that keep us from becoming the beloved community that God longs for us to be? How might we remove those boundaries and barriers?

8. Closing Question: What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

9. Homework:

- Read the Book of Acts chapter 1-5
 - Memory Verse (Acts 1:8)
 - Work through Study #2
 - Check out the Bible Project Video on the Book of Acts 1-7 (6:21)
- <https://bit.ly/2YOHKxK>**

10. Closing Prayer:

Almighty and ever living God, you fulfilled the promise of Easter by sending the gift of your Holy Spirit. Look upon your people gathered in prayer, open to receive the Spirit's flame. May it come to rest in our hearts and heal the divisions of word and tongue, that with one voice and one song we may praise your name in joy and thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Prayer for the Vigil of Pentecost, pg. 36 in ELW)





Student Study #2

Disciples of Jesus Practice What They Preach

1. Opening scripture verse: Acts 2:42
2. Opening prayer
3. Welcome and introductions
4. Announcements
5. Memory Verse: Acts 1:8
6. Introduction to the study

After the Holy Spirit descends upon the gathered community (2:1-13), the disciples speak in many and diverse language about God's deeds of great power. Peter preaches a fabulous sermon (2:14-36), that is grounded in the Hebrew Scriptures. His sermon strikes a deep chord, for many who hear it (three thousand people) repent and are baptized.

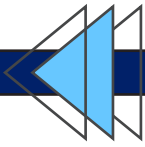
Luke describes the newly formed community of Jesus followers as a "practicing community". They devote themselves to instruction (apostles' teaching) and fellowship, to the breaking of bread (Eucharist), and prayer (2:42). They assist the poor, worship in the Temple, and share meals (2:45-46). They pray for evangelical boldness (4:29), share their possessions to help those in need (4:32-37), heal the sick and suffering (5:15-16); all while facing great persecution (5:40-41), for which they rejoice. The early Christian community was a dynamic fellowship of preachers and practitioners, and the more the community preaches and practices, the more the community grows. In five chapters the Jesus movement grows from 120 (1:15), to three thousand (2:41), to over five thousand disciples (4:4).

During the early days of the Jesus movement, Peter and John play significant roles. Peter heals a crippled beggar (3:1-10) and preaches another fabulous sermon in the Temple (3:11-26). Peter and John are arrested by the Temple authorities, threatened, and released (4:1-22). Emboldened by the prayers of the community (4:23-31), Peter and the apostles reenter the Temple to heal the sick and to preach the Gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus. They are arrested a second time, flogged and released, with strict orders to stop teaching and preaching "in the name of" Jesus (5:12-41). How does the Jesus movement respond?

**"And every day in the Temple and at home,
they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah" (5:42).**

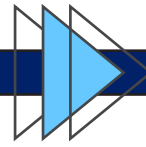
In Acts 4:36-37, we meet Barnabas who proves to be a disciple of great encouragement and generosity. Barnabas exemplifies the characteristics of a faithful follower of Jesus. The faith and generosity of Barnabas stands in stark contrast to the duplicitous actions of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). In the first five chapters of the Book of Acts, the preaching of the Gospel and the practices of the newly formed community set the stage for full participation in God's mission.





Student Study #2

Disciples of Jesus Practice What They Preach



7. Opening Reflection Questions

A. What are one or two spiritual practices that you participate in on a regular basis? For example: daily prayer, worship, scripture reflection and/or study, fellowship, service, witness. How do these faith practices help you to love God and others? Please share. _____

B. Think about a sermon that was particularly meaningful to you. Who preached the sermon? Where was it preached? When was it preached? What did you find meaningful about it? Please share. _____

8. Study and Conversation

A. Read Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; and 5:42

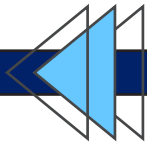
B. When I was young, I remember hearing this phrase about a family members, "He believes in God, but he's not a practicing Catholic." I remember wondering how you could be a "practicing Catholic", and how that might differ from practicing baseball, practicing piano, or practicing the "multiplication table" (some of you, though not all of you, will know what I mean by this. $12 \times 12 = 144$).

C. Acts 2:42-47 is one of the earliest indicators that the first followers of Jesus practiced a rhythm of faith and life. In Acts 2:42, we read about four early faith practices of the church (instruction [apostle's teaching] and fellowship, the breaking of bread [Eucharist] and prayer). These four practices go together and mark the lives of those who follow Jesus. Ponder each of the four. What happens to a faith community if one of these practices is absent or neglected?

1. Which of these four practices do you personally struggle with? How might you grow in your struggle? _____

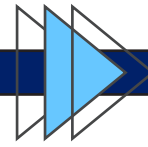
2. Which of these four practices does your faith community struggle with? How might that struggle be strengthened? _____





Student Study #2

Disciples of Jesus Practice What They Preach



D. Read Acts 5:42. For discussion: Despite persecution and suffering, the disciples remain committed to teaching, preaching, and practicing. How does the community of faith help an individual remain faithful? How has your community of faith helped you to practice your faith and to live the life of Jesus?

E. Read Acts 2:14-36 and 3:11-26

1. I am a bit embarrassed to say, that although I have heard sermons for most of my life, there are very few sermons that I can actually recall. I have been inspired by good preaching, and I think I know a good sermon when I hear one, but I can only count on one hand the number of sermons that I remember. What would you say are the necessary ingredients of a good sermon? Please discuss.

2. What two Old Testament passages does Peter use in his Pentecost sermon? See 2:16-21 and 2:25-28

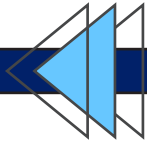
3. Why do you think Peter uses these two Old Testament passages?

4. In Acts 3:11-26, Peter preaches about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I was taught in seminary that every sermon should focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus. How does Peter describe Jesus? How does Peter describe the death and resurrection of Jesus? _____

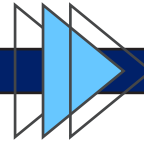
5. What are some of the titles Peter uses for Jesus in his Temple sermon (3:11-26)? See if you can find four.

6. Which of the two sermons did you find most meaningful? Peter's Pentecost sermon (2:14-36) or Peter's Temple Sermon (3:11-26)? Why?





Student Study #2



Disciples of Jesus Practice What They Preach

9. Closing Question: What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

10. Homework:

- Read the Book of Acts chapters 6-12
- Memory Verses Acts 2:42
- Work through Study #3
- Check out the Bible Project video on the Book of Acts 8-12 (5:59)

<https://bit.ly/2PdIVEG>

- Take a moment to listen to one of my favorite sermons entitled "That's My King" (3:18). It was preached by the Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in San Diego, Dr. Shadrach Meshach Lockridge (1913-2000).

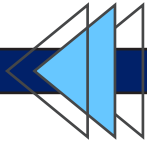
<https://bit.ly/2YGmPww>

11. Closing Prayer (A Traditional Preacher's Prayer):

**"Let the words of my mouth,
and the meditation of my heart,
be acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.
Amen".**

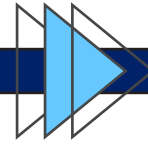
(Psalm 19:14 King James Version)





Student Study #3

Equipping Leaders for Mission



1. Opening scripture verse: Acts 6:6
2. Opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Memory Verse: Acts 2:42
6. Introduction to the study

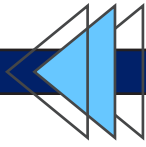
The Book of Acts chapter 6 opens with a growing church that is experiencing some growing pains along ethnic lines. The Hellenists (Jewish Christians from the diaspora whose native language and dominant culture are Greek) complained that the Hebrew leaders (local Jewish Christians whose native language is Aramaic / Hebrew) were neglecting the needs of the whole community. This crisis results in the twelve apostles calling upon the Greek speaking community to choose leaders to meet the needs of the growing church. The community selects seven leaders (notice all seven have Greek names 6:5), whom the apostles commission for ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands (6:6). These seven deacons (meaning servants) are called to serve the community, while the apostles will focus on prayer and preaching (6:4).

Stephen is one of the seven deacons called and commissioned to serve the community, but in Acts chapter 6, he witnesses by speaking in a local synagogue. Stephen is arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, where he gives a long speech reciting select portions of Israel's history. He ends his discourse by accusing the Jewish religious leaders of killing the prophets, resisting the Holy Spirit, and betraying and murdering Jesus. The religious leaders are enraged by Stephen's accusations. He is executed and becomes the first Christian martyr. It is at Stephen's death, that we meet Saul, who approves of Stephen's execution (8:1a). The death of Stephen ushers in a period of persecution against the church in Jerusalem, forcing many followers of Jesus to scatter into Judea and Samaria, recalling Jesus' commission of 1:8b.

After the death of Stephen, the spread of the Gospel is both geographic and ethnic. Philip witnesses to both the Samaritans (8:4-13) and to an Ethiopian official (8:26-40). Peter witnesses to the Samaritans (8:14-25), to those living on the coastal plain of Judea (9:32-42), and to a Gentile Roman soldier named Cornelius (10:1-11:18). When Peter reports back to Jerusalem, the leaders of the church praise God, and exclaim,

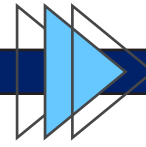
**“Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance
that leads to life” (11:18).**





Student Study #3

Equipping Leaders for Mission



As the Jesus movement spreads into Samaria, Judea, and beyond, the church in Antioch becomes an outpost for the Gentile mission (11:19-30). It is in Antioch where the disciples are first called Christians (11:26c). The disciples are joyfully fulfilling the commission of Jesus (1:8b), but all is not well. The Prophet Agabus predicts the coming of a severe famine (11:28), the Apostle James is executed, and Peter is arrested and imprisoned (12:1-5). Though Peter escapes from prison, he is forced to flee to Caesarea (12:6-19). And lest we forget about Saul, who was present at Stephen's death and led the persecution of the church (8:1-3). We will learn more about Saul in Lesson #4.

7. Opening Reflection Questions

A. Think about a great leader you know or have known, and then respond to the following questions: Are leaders born or framed? Is leadership a gift that is bestowed? Or is leadership a skill that may be learned? _____

B. "... and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians" (11.26). When people ask about your "faith designation", how do you respond? Do you respond, "I'm Lutheran" or "I'm Catholic" or "I'm Baptist"? What if you simply chose to respond, "I'm a Christian" or "I'm a disciple of Jesus"? What's the difference? Do you prefer one way of responding over the other? Why? _____

8. Study and Conversation

A. Read Acts 6:1-7

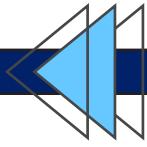
1. What problem does this passage present for the newly formed church?

2. What is the solution that the twelve apostles offer? Why didn't they volunteer to be the solution?

(6:2-4) _____

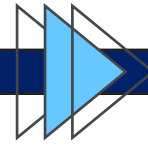
(6:4) _____





Student Study #3

Equipping Leaders for Mission



3. Can you think of current examples where communities are divided along ethnic lines? What do you consider some of the problems to be? Brainstorm with your study group two or three solutions to the problems you just considered.

4. How did the twelve apostles show good leadership in this passage?

5. What happens in an organization or community of faith when leaders fail to lead? Can you share an example when you or your organization experienced a "leadership failure"?

6. What might we learn from the early church leaders about resolving conflicts and differences?

7. The church is always in need of gifted and skilled spiritual leaders. Can you think of someone that you know who might make a good pastor or deacon? If yes, brainstorm with your study group about how you might encourage that person(s) to consider serving as a leader in the church.

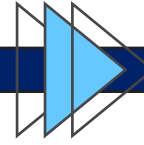
B. Read Acts 11:19-30. After Cornelius (a Gentile, Roman soldier) and his household receive the Holy Spirit and are baptized (10:44-48), Peter returns to Jerusalem to provide a report to the leaders of the church. The leaders are delighted to learn that God is doing a new thing by including Gentiles in the Jesus movement (11:18b). As the church grows beyond its geographic and ethnic borders, the city of Antioch (in the Roman province of Syria) begins to play a greater role in God's mission to reach "the ends of the earth".





Student Study #3

Equipping Leaders for Mission



1. What are a few key events that occurred in the city of Antioch during this time?

(11:20-21) _____

(11:22) _____

(11:25-26) _____

(11:26) _____

2. How do you think today's meaning of the term "Christian" differs from what the folks in Antioch meant by the term "Christian"?

10. Closing Question: What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

11. Homework

- Read the Book of Acts chapter 9 and 13-15
- Memory Verse Acts 6:6
- Work through Study #4
- Check out the Bible Project Video on the Book of Acts 13-20 (4:42)

<https://bit.ly/38IKVLH>

12. Closing Prayer:

O God, give us grace to set a good example to all among whom we live, to be just and true in all our dealings, to be strict and conscientious in the discharge of every duty; pure and temperate in all enjoyment, gracious and generous and courteous toward all; so that the mind of Jesus Christ may be formed in us and all may know that we are his disciples; in whose name we pray. Amen.

(Prayer for Vocation in Daily Life, pg. 82 in ELW).



Student Study #4

Strengthening Parishes

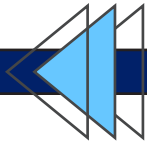
1. Opening scripture verse: Acts 15:40-41
2. Opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Memory Verse: Acts 6:6
6. Introduction to the study

After the death of Stephen (7:54-8:1a), Saul of Tarsus begins to persecute the early followers of Jesus. When he learns that there are Jesus followers in the synagogues of Damascus, Saul goes after them. His intention is to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. While making his way to Damascus, Saul is ambushed by the Crucified and Risen Jesus. He is struck blind by this divine encounter. Three days later, a disciple of Jesus named Ananias visits Saul and prays for his physical and spiritual healing. Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and receives his sight. He is baptized and begins his mission to bring the name of Jesus to Gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel (9:15).

In Acts chapters 13 and 14, we read about Barnabas and Saul's First Witness Trip. This trip begins the third major phase of outreach in the Book of Acts, as the followers of Jesus witness "to the ends of the earth" (1:8b). On this First Witness Trip, Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark are sent by the Holy Spirit out of Antioch, across the island of Cyprus, and into several provinces and cities in Asia Minor. In Pisidian Antioch, Saul (also called Paul) enters the synagogue and boldly proclaims that the crucified and risen Jesus is Israel's long-awaited Savior. Some take this message to heart, but others are enraged by Paul's preaching. In Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, Barnabas and Paul share the message of the Gospel with Jews and Gentiles. After a fruitful visit to Derbe, Barnabas and Paul retrace their route through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, to strengthen the newly planted parishes. When they return to their "home base" in Syrian Antioch, they report with great excitement how God "...opened a door of faith for the Gentiles" (14:27b).

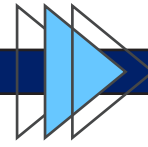
In Acts chapter 15, we read about the Jerusalem Council, which was called by the leaders of the early church to resolve the fundamental question of whether Gentiles were required to follow the ceremonial and cultural rules of Judaism. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas argue that demanding certain rules and regulations would undermine the church's witness to the Gentiles. The Jerusalem Council agrees and encourages the Gentile Christians to follow a number of guidelines that would allow Jewish and Gentile Christians to pray, worship, serve, and share table fellowship with one another.





Student Study #4

Strengthening Parishes



7. Opening Reflection Questions

A. As you think back on your life as a follower of Jesus, can you recall one or two events that seem most significant? Why do they stand out for you?

B. When have you witnessed a dispute among Christians handled poorly?
When have you witnessed a dispute among Christians settled in a Christlike manner?

8. Study and Conversation

A. Read Acts 9:1-9

1. Re-read 9:1-2. Take a walk in Saul's shoes as he makes his way to Damascus. What is your intention? What thoughts and emotions are you experiencing?

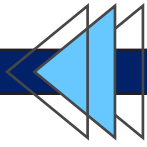
Saul's intention is to ... _____
Some thoughts may be ... _____
Some emotions may be ... _____

2. Re-read 9:3-6. Still walking in Saul's shoes, what shocking things do you hear and see? What thoughts and emotions are you now experiencing?

I hear... _____
I see... _____
Some thoughts may be... _____
Some emotions may be... _____

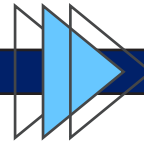
3. Re-read 9:3-6. Still walking in Saul's shoes, describe Saul's physical and spiritual shape over the next three days. If you were Saul, what thoughts and emotions are you now experiencing?

Saul is... _____
Some thoughts may be... _____
Some emotions may be... _____



Student Study #4

Strengthening Parishes



4. Re-read 9:10-19. What is daunting about the assignment that Ananias receives? What would you have done?

5. What will Saul's mission be and what will be the consequences of that mission? (see 9:15-16)

(9:15) _____

(9:16) _____

6. Can you think of a time when God overturned your expectations in a shocking way? Please share with your study group.

B. Acts 14:1-7

1. Where does Paul first go when he enters a new city? Why?

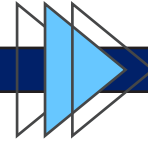
2. The ancient synagogue was a place of worship and learning. It also served as a Jewish community center. Where are the community centers of today? Where do people gather in your community for conversation, meals, and fellowship? _____

3. Share how your parish is present in the "community centers" mentioned above. If your parish is not present, why not? _____



Student Study #4

Strengthening Parishes



C. Read Acts 15:1-31

1. What is the main issue in Acts 15:1-31? What is the result?

2. What role do Barnabas and Paul play? See 15:4 and 15:12.

3. Can you think of some barriers (physical, social, spiritual) that may be in place in your community of faith that unknowingly keep others out?

10. Closing Question: What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

11. Homework

- Read the Book of Acts chapters 16-20
- Memory Verse Act 15:40-41
- Work through Study #5
- Rewatch the Bible Project video on the Book of Acts 13-20 (4:42)

<https://bit.ly/38IKVLH>

12. Closing Prayer:

Steer the ship of my life, good Lord, to your quiet harbor, where I can be safe from the storms of sin and conflict. Show me the course I should take. Renew in me the gift of discernment, so that I can always see the right direction in which I should go. And give me the strength and the courage to choose the right course, even when the sea is rough and the waves are high, knowing that through enduring hardship and danger in your name we shall find comfort and peace. Amen.

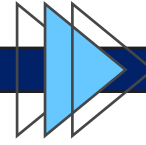
(A Prayer of St. Basil of Caesarea, d. 379).





Student Study #5

Launching New Communities



1. Opening scripture verse: Romans 15:20-21
2. Opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Memory Verse: Acts 15:40-41
6. Introduction to the study

In Acts 15:36-18:22, we read about Paul's Second Witness Trip. After a sharp disagreement with Barnabas, Paul invites Silas (and later Timothy), to accompany him back through the provinces and cities of Asia Minor and eventually into the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia (modern Greece). While Paul's original plan was to concentrate on the northwestern area of Asia Minor, a vision of a man from Macedonia appears to Paul, begging him to "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (16:9). It is also during the Second Witness Trip that the famous "we passages" begin (16:10). Many scholars believe that Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, joins Paul and his traveling companions as a fellow witness.

On this Second Witness Trip, Paul and his companions launch new communities in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Paul also gives his well-known address at the Areopagus in Athens. This address to the Athenians is recorded in 17:22-31. Here Paul begins his witness to the crucified and risen Jesus, not in a synagogue, or with the Hebrew Scriptures, but with the history, culture, and traditions of the Athenians. Paul even quotes two ancient poets: Epimenides and Aratus. Though the Athenians are interested in Paul's ideas, not many are moved to become followers of Jesus. Many New Testament scholars argue that Paul writes letters to the Galatians and the Thessalonians during the Second Witness Trip.

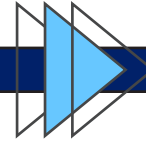
In Acts 18:23-21:17, we read about Paul's Third Witness Trip. On this trip, Paul and his traveling companions return through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. Major cities that Paul visits on this trip include: Tarsus, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth. Paul spends three years in the large, port city of Ephesus, which is his longest stay during any of his three journeys. During this Third Witness Trip, Paul pens letters to the Corinthians and the Romans. He also takes up a financial collection for those in need in Jerusalem. Paul's Third Witness Trip, which lasted nearly five years, ends when he bids farewell to the Ephesian Elders (20:17-38), and sets sail for Jerusalem. Paul's arrival in the City of Zion, sets the stage for his Fourth and Final Witness Trip.





Student Study #5

Launching New Communities



7. Opening Reflection Questions

A. Can you think of a disagreement you recently had with someone? What was the result of that disagreement? If reconciliation occurred, give thanks to God! If you are still at odds, what are some steps you might take to bring about reconciliation?

B. Why are farewells so painful? Consider a recent farewell that you experienced. Was it painful? Was it hopeful? What are some ways to make farewells more meaningful and memorable?

8. Study and Conversation

A. Read Acts 15:36-41

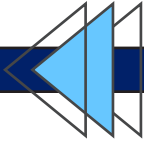
1. What do Barnabas and Paul have a disagreement about?

2. What is the result of their disagreement?

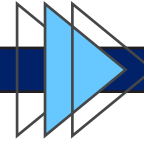
3. Do you see anything positive coming out of this difficult situation?

4. Can you think of a time when God took a difficult situation in your life and turned it into something positive? Please share. _____





Student Study #5



Launching New Communities

5. Do Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark ever reconcile?

B. Read Acts 17:16-34

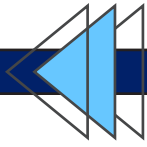
1. While in the marketplace in Athens what does Paul notice? How does Paul take what was integral to the spiritual and intellectual life of the Athenians and use it to try to reach them?

2. What differences does Paul make between the idols and God?

3. Paul's address to the Athenians did not take place in a synagogue or a church, but in the marketplace. Think about today's "marketplaces". Where are the "marketplaces" in your community? How is your parish actively witnessing in the marketplace? If not, why not? _____

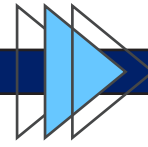
4. What are some things we might learn from Paul's method of sharing the Gospel with others to launch new communities?





Student Study #5

Launching New Communities



C. Read Acts 20:13-38

1. What is driving Paul to reach Jerusalem so quickly? See 20:16

2. For three years, Paul served as the shepherd of the Church in Ephesus. Now he is commending the elders (20:17) and overseers (20:28) to shepherd the church. One important aspect of launching new communities is to equip people to lead. How is your parish equipping people to serve as leaders?

3. As Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian elders and overseers, he commends these leaders to serve with courage and character. What two or three characteristics of Christian leadership do you believe are most important for those who are called by God to serve?

9. Closing Question: What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

10. Homework

- Read the Book of Acts chapters 21-28
- Memory Verse Romans 15:20-21
- Work through Study #6
- Check out the Bible Project video on the Book of Acts 21-28 (4:49)

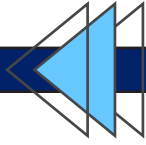
<https://bit.ly/2PKeuUs>

11. Closing Prayer:

By your word, eternal God, your creation sprang forth, and we were given the breath of life. By your word, eternal God, death is overcome, Christ is raised from the tomb, and we are given new life in the power of your Spirit. May we boldly proclaim this good news in our words and our deeds, rejoicing always in your powerful presence; through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. Amen.

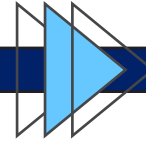
(Prayer for the Spread of the Gospel, pg. 75 in ELW)





Student Study #6

For the Renewal of the World



1. Opening scripture verse: Acts 28:30-31
2. Opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Memory Verse: Romans 15:20-21
6. Introduction to the study

Paul's Third Witness Trip ends with foreboding. On his way to Jerusalem, Paul meets with the Ephesian elders and overseers to encourage them, but also to let them know that they will never see him again (20:17-38). Paul travels to Caesarea, where the Prophet Agabus prophesies that Paul will be handed over to the Roman authorities (21:10-11). Paul's friends urge him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul responds that he is ready to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus (21:12-13).

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul's mission and ministry unfold with several striking parallels to the mission and ministry of Jesus. There is a confrontation in the Temple. Paul is arrested on trumped up charges of bringing Gentiles into sacred space. Jesus cleanses the Temple of the money changers. Later, he is accused of threatening to destroy the Temple. Paul is condemned to death and attacked by an angry crowd. Jesus is condemned to death by an angry crowd. Paul faces the Sanhedrin and is struck by the High Priest. Jesus also faces the Sanhedrin where is mocked and struck by the Temple guards. Paul faces a series of trials before Roman (Felix and Festus) and Jewish (King Herod Agrippa II and Bernice) leaders. Jesus is tried by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate and appears before King Herod Antipas. Paul finds strength in the passion of Jesus, and is encouraged by the presence of Jesus, who appears to him and says these words,

“Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome” (23:11).

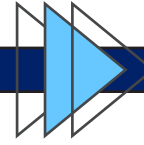
Through all his trials and tribulations, Paul remains steady and true. He remains faithful to his call to proclaim the new life that is found in the Crucified and Risen Jesus. Paul's faithful witness enrages the Jewish religious leaders and confounds the Romans authorities who keep Paul in custody from his arrival in Jerusalem until his two-year ministry in the heart of the Roman Empire. In Acts 28:30-31, we read, “He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance”.





Student Study #6

For the Renewal of the World



7. Opening Reflections Questions

A. While Paul is in custody, the Roman procurator, Felix, schemes to receive a bribe from Paul. Prisons are notorious places of corruption, violence, and injustice. What are your thoughts about those who are in custody today? Who are they? Why are they there? Is incarceration about punishment or rehabilitation?

B. Paul was persecuted for his Christian faith. Christians continue to be persecuted in many places around the world today. Please take ten minutes to browse through the Voice of the Martyrs website. Please share with your study group two things you learned about persecuted Christians while navigating the website: <https://www.persecution.com/>

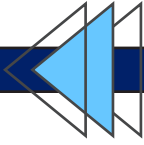
8. Study and Conversation

A. Read Acts 25:1-12

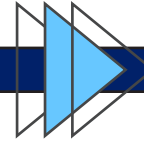
1. Soon after his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested. For his safety, he is transferred from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where he appears before Felix, the Roman procurator of Judea. Felix keeps Paul in custody for two years. Felix is succeeded by Festus. Festus wants Paul to stand trial in Jerusalem, but Paul (a Roman citizen) knows his rights, and he appeals to the emperor. Festus responds, "You have appealed to the emperor; to the emperor you will go" (25:12b). What do you think Paul hopes to accomplish by appealing to the emperor?

2. The Jewish religious leaders want Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem for trial. Why do they want Festus to do this?





Student Study #6



For the Renewal of the World

3. Paul is held in custody in Caesarea for over two years. Have you ever visited someone in jail or prison? Please share your experience with the study group. It is perfectly fine to keep your connection and the name of the person you visited confidential. _____

B. Read Acts 28:16-31

1. When Paul arrives in Rome a soldier is assigned to guard him. He rents a house where he freely teaches and preaches for two years. Describe what you think it was like for Paul to conduct his ministry while under "house arrest".

2. Do you prefer happy endings? Do you prefer stories that are neatly summed up at the end? How would you describe the ending of the Book of Acts? What might Luke be trying to do here?

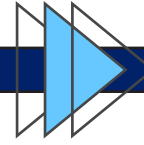
3. The Book of Acts ends with a powerful reminder: the Gospel of Jesus Christ is unstoppable. How does the end of Acts relate to the key verse 1:8?





Student Study #6

For the Renewal of the World



C. Summary

1. Has your Christian faith been reshaped or changed by this study of Acts? Please share your insights with your study group.

2. As you think back on this 6-week study of the Book of Acts, how has your understanding of God's mission grown? Have you discovered some new ways that you might participate in God's mission?

9. Closing Question: What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

10. Homework

- Memory Verse Acts 28:30-31
- Schedule a lunch/dinner/fun event to celebrate completing the Book of Acts Bible Study

11. Closing Prayer

Almighty God we praise you that your blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified you by their martyrdoms. Grant that your church throughout the world may always be instructed by their teaching and example, be knit together in unity by your Spirit, and ever stand firm upon the one foundation who is Jesus Christ our Lord, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Prayer for Peter and Paul, Apostles, pg. 56 in ELW)

