



WE
ARE

THE

CHURCH

Sermon Series Guide

THE CHURCH

Small Group Sermon Series October 6 – November 30, 2024

Join us for the next 8 weeks as we journey through the book of Acts learning about the birth of the early church. Acts may have been written two thousand years ago, but God is calling us to be a part of that story today. In a world that is unsure of where to find truth or purpose, the book of Acts stands apart. It reveals God's plan for global redemption, his purpose for our lives, and the power he has given us to accomplish his mission.

Week 1: Oct 6, 2024 - Purpose and Power

Week 2: Oct 13, 2024 - Strike the Match

Week 3: Oct 20, 2024 - Serve and Scatter

Week 4: Oct 27, 2024 - Breakthrough Miracle Power

Week 5: Nov 3, 2024 - Blocking & Tackling

Week 6: Nov 10, 2024 - The God Above It All

Week 7: Nov 17, 2024 - The Supreme Value of the Mission

Week 8: Nov 24, 2024 - Nothing Can Stop God's Plan

Small groups will review the sermon notes, watch a video by Pastor Louie Giglio and complete the study guide Pastor Giglio provided.

If you are doing this study on your own or with your family/friends the study guide is available for you to follow. Check out the last page of each weekly session for a weekly reading plan that allows you to learn more about the entire book of Acts.

® 2024 RightNow Ministries

Contact Pam Miller with any questions.
320.815.2325 or pam.miller@firstlutheranalexandria.com

Session 1: Purpose & Power

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

Jesus calls us to build his church to the ends of the earth through bold evangelism and by making disciples of all people.

Head Change

To know that we have a mission to make disciples until Jesus returns.

Heart Change

To feel excited about God's mission to be unfolded in our lives.

Life Change

To look for God's purpose in every circumstance, even when God calls us to patiently wait where we are.

OPEN

Do you believe that you have a purpose? If so, what is your purpose?

It can be easy to go through the motions—to get so caught up in the demands of our lives that we don't even think about what the purpose of those days might be. In the book of Acts, God shows us that he has a purpose for us in every moment, even when it seems like nothing much is going on.

In this series, pastor and founder of the Passion Movement Louie Giglio will take us through the book of Acts. This book tells the story of the early church and holds deep promises for our lives. But chapter 1 of Acts does not begin with a bang, but with a command to wait.

READ

Acts 1 (If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to Acts 1:1–11.)

Note: We have made a daily reading guide for the book of Acts so that you can read this whole chapter and understand the context of this letter from Luke. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What promises did Jesus give to his disciples?

What purpose did he give to his church?

Show Session 1: Purpose and Power (18 minutes).

DISCUSS

Acts 1 is the bridge between the Gospel of Luke and the foundation of the church. It is a brief pause before Jesus released his disciples to spread the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. As we read this chapter, we will discover the purpose and power Jesus promises to give his followers and his call to us to participate in his ongoing work.

Note: To learn more about the author and purpose of the Book of Acts, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Read Acts 1:1–8.

These opening verses set the stage for the entire book of Acts, giving us an overview of Jesus's work between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven. While Luke, the author of Acts, does not give us an exhaustive list of everything Jesus did, these brief verses make one thing clear: the church was founded on the resurrected, living, and active Son of God, Jesus Christ. **What was Jesus doing at the beginning of Acts? What sorts of things seemed important to Jesus after his resurrection?**

Jesus commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. His command gave them a place, a purpose, and a promise, but they had to wait a few days to receive that promise. **What makes waiting on a promise different than waiting on an uncertain hope?**

Verses 6–8 show us that the disciples still did not fully understand Jesus's purpose. Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, but they thought he came to throw out the Romans and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. Their hope for Jesus was far too small, focusing on temporary changes rather than his eternal kingdom. **What are you hoping Jesus will do in your life? In your city?**

In what ways might your hopes be too small, or too focused on your “kingdom” on earth?

What could it look like for you to refocus your hope on the kingdom of God?

Instead of telling his disciples exactly when things would happen, he pointed them to what they should be doing while they wait. In the video, Louie showed us the four truths that will guide our waiting and our work for Jesus.

The first is the authority of Jesus, the one who conquered sin and death. Louie quoted from Matthew 28:18–19, “Jesus came near and said to them, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . .’” to help us see that Jesus not only has authority over sin and death but authority over *everything*.

In what ways are you submitting to Jesus, the authority of heaven and earth, in your life? Are there any areas of your life you don't see him as the authority?

Jesus reminded the disciples of his authority before commanding them to make disciples. **What do you think it means to make disciples? How have you seen discipleship play out in your life?**

The second truth we can see in this verse is the promise of purpose. Jesus, the great author and authority, has given us a singular and clear purpose: to be his witnesses. But what does it mean to be a witness?

What have you seen Jesus do in your life? In what ways has he changed your life? What have you heard or been taught about Jesus through his Word?

What do people changed by Jesus say about him?

In a court, witnesses give testimony to what they have seen and heard so that the truth might be known and acted upon. As Christ's witnesses, we are to testify to what we have seen, heard, and learned about Jesus so that the truth of the gospel might be known.

What can you do to be a witness of Jesus in your spheres of influence?

Being a witness may make us fearful or anxious. But Jesus has not left us alone. The third truth of Acts 1 is that God has sent his Holy Spirit (a promise the disciples had not yet received in Acts 1) to us. The Holy Spirit gives us the power we need to follow Jesus and the confidence we need to live by faith.

What has God asked you to do that you feel inadequate for?

What additional resources or circumstances do you think you need to accomplish what God has asked you to do?

God has given you a purpose, his presence, and the power you need to fulfill his call. The final truth from Acts 1 is that we are living in God's greater story of grace. While each of us has a different experience, all of us are a part of God's greater story.

The book of Acts shows us how the church began in Jerusalem, spread through Judea and Samaria, and grew throughout the known world. We are still caught up in the story of the church today as the gospel continues to reach new people.

In what ways is God writing his story in your home, neighborhood, workplace, and church?

What might be your role in furthering his story?

Read Acts 1:9–11.

Note: To learn more about the second half of Acts 1, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

The disciples were stunned when Jesus left. They had spent the last few years following him across Judea, watching his miracles, obeying his commands, and listening to his teaching. And now, they had to wait without him. Like the disciples, we are waiting for Jesus to return. Sometimes, it can feel like we are looking at the sky, waiting, with no powerful purpose.

In what ways do you feel unsure of what God wants you to do next?

God has given you a mission and a purpose, so even if you don't know what is coming next, you can always know what you should be doing today.

Based on the truths from this chapter, what is your purpose for today?

We are a part of God's greater story. We have purpose and power. **In what ways will you live out God's mission for you this week?**

LAST WORD

The disciples were so stunned by Jesus's departure that two angels had to snap them out of their stupor to remind them of the commission they had just received. If you are unsure of what God wants you to do, don't wait around for a sign from heaven. God has told you what to do.

You are his witness, empowered by his Holy Spirit to make disciples. That is a mission worth giving your life to.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. The Author and Context of Acts

As Louie mentioned in the video, Acts is the direct follow-up to the Gospel of Luke. Some historians believe the two books used to be one unified work, making Luke–Acts the longest work in the New Testament. But why was it written?

Read Luke 1:1–4. **What does this passage tell you about the author, recipient of the letter, and why this long letter was written?**

Tradition tells us and Luke was a physician, from either Syrian Antioch or Philippi, who was a friend and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul (Col. 4:14). The early verses of Luke tell us that this Gospel was written for two reasons: 1) to compile all the first-hand accounts of Jesus's life in an orderly way and 2) so that the readers of his letter might be certain of what they were taught.

As you read Luke and Acts, you can't help but notice the detail Luke adds to his accounts. He tells us where things happened, when they happened, and who was there. Ancient Greek converts could read Luke and Acts and have an assurance that Jesus was who he claimed to be, not merely a legend, and that the church grew under the sovereign hand of God. If any still had doubts, they could visit the people Luke spoke to and verify the facts in these books.

Even though we are living a millennia after these books were written, Luke's purpose of writing them remains: to give us an orderly account of Jesus's life so that we might be certain of what we have been taught.

What questions do you have about the reliability of the accounts of Jesus's life?

While you read through Acts, how might you look for clues to the reliability of these accounts?

Sometimes, history can seem like a boring list of names and places. But Acts is more than history; it is the story of the church that is still being written and meant to give you assurance for your faith. **If you tend to get bored with history, how might you reframe this book in your mind to help you gain assurance and hope?**

2. Choosing Judas's Replacement

After the disciples returned to Jerusalem, they waited for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But they were not inactive as they waited.

Read Acts 1:12–14.

What is the first thing Jesus's followers did after returning to Jerusalem? Why do you think it was important for them to be "united in prayer"?

The apostles (a Greek word meaning "sent ones") and Jesus's family gathered in prayer together. To them, waiting was more than sitting around hoping for someone to knock on their door. Waiting on the promises of Jesus was a prayerful, unified, expectation of God's upcoming work.

What would it look like for you to prayerfully wait on the Lord in your current circumstances? How might you involve your community in your prayerful waiting?

As you read through Acts, you will see the apostles continually stopping to pray. When they did not know what to do, were waiting on uncertain outcomes, or simply had a moment to rest, they prayed together.

In what ways could you live like the apostles and incorporate prayer into your decision-making and downtime?

When they weren't praying, the apostles were actively preparing their community for God's coming promise.

Read Acts 1:15–26.

What were the requirements for Judas’s replacement, listed in verses 21–22?

While the broader community of the early church proposed two candidates to replace Judas, the apostles ultimately decided by casting lots, an ancient way of seeking guidance from the Lord (Prov. 16:33). When we pray, we are trusting God with our cares and concerns. But it can be difficult to trust God with our futures.

What can make it difficult to trust God with a big decision?

Matthias was chosen as Judas’s replacement, but we never hear about his life and ministry in Acts. We may wonder if he was the right choice. Even when we let God guide our decisions, it can be difficult to trust him with his chosen outcomes. We may sit in doubt of his answers until they prove themselves to be “good decisions.”

When have you doubted God’s reply to your prayers?

What could it look like to trust God with your prayers, even when he leads you in a way you didn’t expect to go?

3. Weekly Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Session 1 covers only one chapter of Acts, which gives you space to go back to the Gospel of Luke. This will help you build the connection between these two books and understand the fuller context of this passage.

Day 1: The Resurrection (Luke 24:1–12)

Day 2: The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35)

Day 3: Jesus’s Final Appearance in Luke (Luke 24:36–53)

Day 4: Jesus’s Final Appearance in Acts (Acts 1:1–11)

Day 5: Waiting for Pentecost (Acts 1:12–26)

Session 2: Strike the Match

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

Christians are a part of the same church that began on the day of Pentecost, called to spread the story of Jesus around the world.

Head Change

To know that we have a Holy Spirit-empowered role to play in building God’s church.

Heart Change

To feel emboldened in our faith and excited about being a part of God’s community.

Life Change

To live boldly as evangelists, enduring opposition and looking for opportunities to reach out to people who do not know Jesus.

OPEN

What is the scariest thing you have ever decided to do? Looking back, would you do it again?

Fear is our bodies' response to danger. There is nothing in our brains that thinks skydiving, bungee jumping, or even roller coasters are safe, so when we do those activities, we get rushes of adrenaline and the overwhelming relief of having survived.

Even though it does not threaten our lives like jumping out of a plane, evangelism terrifies many of us and keeps us from living in the purpose and power God has called us into. In today's session, Louie Giglio will examine the bold mission of God and our place in his story. Does the fire that burned in the early church still burn within us today?

READ

Acts 2:1–13, 37–47; 5:33–42. If you have time and would like to read more of this section to start your group time, add readings from Acts 3:1–10; 4:1–4, 23–31; 5:1–11, and 21–33.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 2–5 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

In what ways does the Holy Spirit equip the church to fulfill Acts 1:8 in these chapters?

What is the response of the Jewish leadership to Pentecost and the ongoing evangelism of the church?

What is the church's response to opposition, beatings, and being jailed?

Show Session 2: Strike the Match (22 minutes).

DISCUSS

In this session, we will examine the powerful beginning of the church and its growth under persecution. It was the first evangelism movement. God worked providentially through his people to fulfill the first part of Acts 1:8—they became his witnesses throughout Jerusalem.

Read Acts 2:1–13, 37–41.

Note: To learn more about the Festival of Weeks and its connection to Pentecost, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Before we examine this passage, what are your initial reactions and observations of Pentecost? What appears to be the purpose of the Holy Spirit empowering the apostles?

When the Holy Spirit descends, it is anything but serene. Luke describes the sound of wind as "violent," and flames spread throughout the room and rested on each person. The Holy Spirit's descent was so loud that it drew a crowd. Take a look at verses 6–11. **Who is in this crowd?**

In what ways does this gathering provide an opportunity for the disciples to fulfill Acts 1:8?

This scene might appear chaotic, but it did not devolve into ecstatic confusion. Instead, the disciples leaped into action, telling Jews who had gathered from all the corners of the known world about Jesus in every known language. This miracle not only foreshadows the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth but also confirms the truth of the disciples' message. Anyone can refute a message, but a message with power is hard to ignore.

What events in your life have confirmed the truth of the gospel?

In what ways is the Holy Spirit empowering you to share the gospel today?

What keeps you from sharing the gospel? Are there any boundaries that challenge the spread of the gospel where you live?

The same Spirit that empowered the disciples resides in every Christian. He empowers us to leap into the mission of God and spread the gospel to those who don't know Jesus. Some people may believe us and accept Jesus. Others may reject us out of hand. Regardless of the result of our evangelism, the Holy Spirit moves us to action.

What fears or hesitation in your own life do you need to let the Holy Spirit overcome for the sake of fulfilling Acts 1:8?

The courage and power we see on the Day of Pentecost lead the church to grow from one hundred twenty people to over three thousand in a matter of hours. This group quickly becomes a close-knit community.

Read Acts 2:42–47.

What qualities marked the early church? What habits were they committed to practicing?

There is a lot to admire about the early church. Their generosity and hospitality alone set a high bar for every church community today.

In what ways is your church community marked by the early church's heart and habits? What could it look like for you and your small group to practice imitate early church?

In the video, Louie described Acts 2 as the hinge of the book, the point where the people of God shifted from waiting to acting. The Holy Spirit lit a fire in the church that started in a small group and began to spread throughout the city of Jerusalem. But it did not spread without serious opposition.

Read Acts 3:1–10; 4:1–4, 23–31.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit used the gift of tongues to confirm the truth of the gospel. As we move through Acts, we will see many more confirming signs, often the same miracles Jesus used to confirm his identity as the Son of God. But these miracles are never meant to draw focus to the apostles. Instead, attention is always directed to God and his works.

What does the lame man want from Peter and John? In what ways is their offering better than he expected?

Peter and John, like Jesus, addressed the lame man's spiritual needs *and* physical needs. Even though they did not have any money, which the man asked for, they were able to help him in a way that changed his life and led to rejoicing.

Think of the people in need in your community. **In what ways can you serve their spiritual and physical needs so that they walk away from you rejoicing in Jesus, first and foremost?**

The Jewish authorities were threatened by Peter and John, jailing them for spreading the message of Jesus. It is important to note that they were opposed for their message, not their character. The authorities jailed Peter and John because they were teaching people about Jesus.

What is the cultural stereotype of Christians today? In what ways are these stereotypes earned?

Do you think Christians are more opposed because of our attitudes and judgments or because of our commitment to sharing the gospel? Why do you think that is?

After they were released from prison, Peter and John shared what happened with the church. Amazingly, the church's first reaction was to pray for more boldness, and they became more eager to share the gospel. Look at verses 29–30. **What would it look like for you and your small group to pray for boldness in living out your faith?**

Note: To learn more about living boldly by the power of the Holy Spirit, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Note: To study the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Read Acts 5:17–33.

In the early days of the church, the apostles were regularly arrested and jailed by the Jewish leaders. But prison could not hold them, and the message of Jesus continued to spread. **What authority compelled the disciples to disobey the authority of the Sanhedrin and High Priest, according to verse 29?**

If you are opposed because of the message of Jesus, you are presented with a decision: Whose authority will you obey—those who oppose the gospel or the God of heaven and earth?

What makes you afraid to share the gospel? What is the worst-case scenario for sharing the gospel in your context?

In what ways is God calling you to be obedient to his call and his mission to seek and save the lost?

LAST WORD

The fire God lit in the early church was fanned into a burning flame through the boldness, faithfulness, and resolute focus of the apostles. We have the opportunity to follow their lead, to live boldly for the name of Jesus in our own communities. Instead of letting fear stifle our role in the mission of God, imagine what God could do with your faithfulness.

God is on the move and is calling you to join him in purpose and power.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. The Festival of Weeks

The most important events in Christianity occurred during Jewish festivals. Jesus, the lamb of God, was crucified during Passover, and his resurrection occurred during the Feast of First Fruits as the "first fruits of those being raised from the dead" (1 Cor. 15:20). The day the Holy Spirit indwelt the church was no different.

The events of Acts 2 occurred during the Jewish festival Shavuot, exactly seven weeks or fifty days after Passover. This is why it was called the Feast of Weeks by the Jews and Pentecost, meaning "fifty," by the Greeks. It was the second of three "solemn feasts" that required every able-bodied Jewish male to celebrate and make offerings in Jerusalem. The feast also marked the time of the wheat harvest in Israel, which was a time of intense labor. Right after, or even during, the harvest, the men of Israel would gather some of their wheat as a "wave offering" and livestock and travel to Jerusalem.

Read Leviticus 23:15–22.

What was the purpose of each of the offerings during this festival?

This feast served two major purposes: to thank God for the harvest and to find peace with God through sacrifice.

Now, think back to the events in Acts 2. Jews from all corners of the known world had traveled to Jerusalem for Shavuot looking to thank God and have their sins forgiven. It is at this moment that the Holy Spirit moves through his people and gathers the first great harvest of the church—thousands of new Christians who were now forgiven of their sin and at peace with God.

Read Luke 10:2 and Romans 5:1–2.

The Day of Pentecost resulted in what Shavuot pointed toward: God's peace and provision. But Pentecost is more than a simple holiday in the past. God is still bringing people from all over the world to himself, reaping souls in a spiritual harvest.

In what ways can you tangibly thank God for his provision?

In what ways can you celebrate being forgiven by and at peace with God?

2. Boldly Living by the Spirit

Evangelism may seem scary—even talking about Jesus is intimidating for some of us. Some of us feel unequipped to talk about God and don't know what to say. Some of us are afraid of the reactions we might get if we talk about Jesus.

Think back to when God saved you. **What role did other people play in that event?**

Read Ephesians 1:11–14.

According to verse 13, what was your role in your salvation?

The Father predestined and claimed us, Jesus completed the work of salvation, and the Holy Spirit seals us for eternity. While it feels like our responsibility in evangelism is weighty, it is God who is doing all the heavy lifting. The only thing we did was hear the gospel and set our hope on Jesus. Evangelism is simply giving others the opportunity to hear the gospel and set their hope on Jesus. It is God who saves, not us.

Read Romans 8:9–11, 15.

These verses tell us that the Spirit is our life, he fills us with his power, and he gives us a new identity as God's children. He's the one working in and through us. Even so, it can be easy to feel ineffective as Christians.

What makes you feel ineffective or weak when it comes to spiritual conversations? What might be causing you to feel this way?

It is important to realize what is causing us to be afraid to share the gospel because it is not from God. To think that you cannot share the gospel is a demonic lie that is keeping you from accomplishing the work of God.

This week, memorize Romans 8:15. Pray this verse when you become afraid to share the good work that God has done in you. Commit to breaking past or ignoring your fears so that you might live boldly by the Spirit.

3. The Judgment of Ananias and Sapphira

Most of the stories in this session recount the victories of the church. But, at the beginning of Acts 5, we read an unusual and unsettling story of sin in the early church.

Read Acts 4:32–5:11.

In what ways are Ananias and Sapphira’s actions shocking and selfish?

What opportunities did Ananias and Sapphira have to tell the truth? What do you think was causing them to lie?

The early church was remarkable in her generosity. It appears to have been common for people to sell their largest assets so that the needy might be taken care of. In verse 5:4, Peter’s questions make clear that Christian landowners were not required to sell land or even donate all the proceeds of that sale to the church. This was a willful and selfless act.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted the reputation and praise that they believed came with this kind of radical generosity but had no intention of being the people they were pretending to be. They acted pridefully and selfishly behind a mask of generosity. Peter was rightly shocked by their deception and selfishness.

We don’t know why this judgment was as harsh or immediate as it was, but we do see that God expects his church to be holy and blameless. Disguising sin as a virtue for selfish gain is shocking, abhorrent, and worthy of judgment.

In what ways could someone build their reputation through selfishness in the church today?

In what ways are you tempted to do good deeds to be seen? Are there any “good” actions you need to repent of?

4. Acts 2–5 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 2–5. As you examine the earliest days of the church, prayerfully consider the ways you can live boldly for Jesus.

Day 1: The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–47)

Day 2: The First Days of the Church (Acts 3:1–4:22)

Day 3: The Courageous Faith of the Church (Acts 4:23–5:11)

Day 4: Growing Persecution Against the church (Acts 5:12–42)

Session 3: Serve & Scatter

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

Fear can silence Christians, but God calls us to boldly proclaim the gospel in every circumstance, no matter the outcome.

Head Change

To know that hardship is a part of following Jesus and God does not abandon us in our difficult circumstances.

Heart Change

To feel confident in our calling to follow Jesus when our faith is challenged.

Life Change

To serve the church and spread the gospel, regardless of the results of those actions.

OPEN

In what ways do you use your gifts to serve your church? What might cause you to stop using your gifts?

So far in Acts, the leaders of the church have been threatened, jailed, and beaten. In all these circumstances, they grew bolder and more eager to share the gospel. We rarely, if ever, experience that degree of opposition to our faith.

In this session, we meet the first Christian martyr, Stephen. While it may seem inconceivable to us, his tragic death caused the gospel to spread like wildfire in the region around Jerusalem and even among the people farthest from Jesus.

Difficult circumstances are not a divine mistake. God may even call us into a situation we never wanted. Are we willing to follow him wherever he might lead us?

READ

Acts 6:1–15; 7:51–8:1.

Note: If you have time to read all of Stephen's defense in front of the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1–50) in your small group, we encourage you to do so. If you do not and would like to read all of Acts 6–7 during the week, see our reading guide in **Go Deeper Section 5** at the end of this session.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is the benefit of unglamorous service in the church?

Who was Stephen? In what ways did he serve the church?

In what ways was Stephen's death a catalyst for fulfilling Acts 1:8?

Show Session 3: Serve and Scatter (18 minutes).

DISCUSS

The road to this point in the book of Acts has not been easy. As Louie said in the video, the incline of the early church's path was steep, and things did not improve in Acts 6–7. But these chapters give us a picture of service and a model of faith we should aspire to. Let's start our discussion by thinking through the spiritual high points in our lives.

When do you most enjoy following Jesus?

Are there any particular circumstances that make you feel most loved by him?

When do you feel God's presence the most?

For many of us, the most spiritually gratifying moments of our lives are in the good times with friends, family, in worship, or prayerful solitude with God. They are emboldening moments when our calling feels sure. Despite the difficult circumstances the church was experiencing in Acts 2–5, the people of God were seeing signs and wonders, witnessing miraculous movements of God's Spirit, and were increasing in number. Their lives weren't peaceful, but they were experiencing God's power.

As the church grew in spiritual power and boldness, God called more people to serve in church leadership. Read Acts 6:1–7.

What problem in the church required the apostles to appoint deacons?

What did the apostles need to focus their attention on?

What qualities were the disciples looking for?

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles appointed seven men to oversee the distribution of food. But this was not the first time these men served the church. Like the apostles, they were “full of the Spirit” and “men of good reputation.” In other words, they were visible figures of high character in the church and already active evangelists.

The men chosen to serve in Acts 6 were already serving God and his people before they were given special appointments by the disciples. In our culture, church can feel like a place we go to receive spiritual fulfillment. We want a service that gives us good music, good preaching, and good production quality. But the early church saw their church service differently. Instead of looking to receive, they searched for ways to give their lives to the church. **In what ways could a service mindset change the ways we interact with our church on Sundays and throughout the week?**

Note: To learn more about how Acts 6 relates to the office of deacons, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The men chosen to serve were the rock stars of the early church, yet they were asked to do a mundane job. But, as Louie taught in the video, even mundane jobs can change the world. **What are the practical, mundane needs in your church that you could meet? How might you sacrifice to serve your church?**

As these men became more visible fixtures in the church, they came under fire from those who opposed the church. Read Acts 6:8–15.

How do verses 8–10 characterize Stephen when he was preaching and when he was opposed?

It is rare to see someone act like Stephen did when people opposed him. **What is a common way people respond to opposition in our society?**

In what ways do you respond when someone contradicts or questions you?

Despite his grace and wisdom, Stephen did not persuade everyone. He didn't even make friends with everyone. Some people still rejected the gospel and stirred up false rumors and lies about Stephen.

What encouragement or discouragement does it give you knowing that even at your most Christlike, not everyone will like or agree with you?

Even so, what should our behavior look like towards those who actively oppose us?

Note: To learn more about how to behave when opposed, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Stephen's inability to win over his whole audience is a normal response to the gospel, and opposition is not persecution. But, when men stirred up lies and rumors to anger the Jewish leadership, he began to suffer for the mission of God.

Would you classify the hardships experienced by Christians in your community as opposition or persecution? Why or why not?

Being called to leadership was not a comfortable promotion in the early church. Those who served God's people became targets for persecution. Read Acts 7:51–8:1.

Stephen was accused of blasphemy and defended himself with a sermon, walking the Sanhedrin through the Old Testament and highlighting all the ways it points to Jesus. We do not need to have Stephen's knowledge of the Old Testament to tell people about Jesus, but we should want his boldness.

Note: To learn more about Stephen's defense in front of the Sanhedrin, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

What circumstances, if any, tend to make you want to downplay your faith in Jesus? When is it difficult to be an outspoken Christian?

What experiences in your own life tempt you to stop telling people about Jesus?

As Stephen's life ended, he looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing to welcome him into glory. For all Stephen knew, he had done little to change the church. He waited on tables and met the same opposition the apostles had, but instead of experiencing a sign or wonder, he died. But his death caused the church to spread and fulfill Acts 1:8.

What is Stephen's legacy? What was his reward?

What would it look like for you to look forward to God's reward in your current circumstances? What could it practically look like to trust God with today?

Note: To learn more about why Jesus stood to receive Stephen, go to **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.

LAST WORD

It is very unlikely that we will be persecuted like Stephen. We may never be persecuted for our faith at all. Even so, we quickly give into fear and close our mouths when opposed or even when we are afraid we *might* be opposed for talking about Jesus.

Opposition, persecution, and a brutal death did not stop Stephen from spreading the gospel. The only thing that could have stopped the gospel from being preached was if Stephen gave into fear and closed his mouth. No matter your circumstances, no matter who you are with, boldly proclaim Christ like Stephen. You never know how God might use your courage to change lives.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. The *deakonoi*

Your church most likely has deacons, but every denomination tends to view them differently. **If you have deacons, what does it mean to be a deacon in your congregation? What are their responsibilities?**

The seven men the apostles appointed in Acts 6:1–7 are typically thought of as the first deacons, a special office of servant leadership in the church. However, the designation of deacon—*diakonos*, meaning “servant”—is never used in this chapter. The office of deacon isn’t discussed in the book of Acts at all.

While these seven men are never called “deacons,” they were men called to *diakoneo*, or “to serve” in a specific way. Over time, Acts 6 became the model for meeting social needs within the church. The role of those appointed to serve the needs of the church became the office of “deacon.”

Read 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

What are the qualifications of a deacon? In what ways does this description compare to the qualifications of the seven in Acts 6:3?

The appointment of a deacon is not a way to gain power or social standing in the church. It is a call to specific service to meet the needs of their congregation. But instead of defining what work is worthy of a deacon, the Bible describes their character and commitment to God. While you may never be appointed as a deacon in your church, we can all aspire to have the character and faith required for the position.

In what ways can you grow to be like a deacon, even without the title?

What needs in your church are you uniquely qualified to meet?

You do not need a title to be a person of high character, good reputation, and wholly devoted to the Lord. You don’t need to be an employee of your church to serve the body of Christ. Spend some time today praying about the opportunities God has given you to be like a deacon, one who serves the church.

2. Responding to Opposition

In the video, Louie gave us a good framework for thinking about the common difficulties of life, those troubles that everyone goes through regardless of their faith. But the trouble the church was experiencing in Acts was not a common difficulty. Rather, they were suffering specifically because they chose to follow and proclaim Jesus.

In what ways have people in your life responded to you when you tell them you are a Christian?

What sort of responses do you get when you share the gospel with them?

Read 1 Peter 3:8–17.

What characteristics should we display at all times?

How do non-Christians typically describe Christians today? Do you think we deserve that description? Why or why not?

We are not typically known for our harmonious spirit, courtesy, affection, or humility. Like the rest of the world, we are often known for our loud, angry opposition to anyone who stands in our way. But, according to Peter, repaying those who oppose us with the same anger, insult, or disgust that we feel they give to us is evil. We are not called to repay “in kind” but to bless people even when they treat us poorly.

Verses 10–12 quote Psalm 34:12–16. **How must we behave at all times according to this passage? When do we have the freedom to use “evil” tactics?**

According to verse 17, we should always be respectful and courteous. **What circumstance should we prefer over being rude?**

What can you do to cultivate the qualities described in verses 8 and 16 of a person who always does good?

For many of us, choosing to suffer sounds crazy. Read 1 Peter 4:12–14.

Common trouble should not surprise us. Everyone has difficult seasons in life. Neither should we be surprised when we are reviled or suffer for following Jesus. Suffering isn't "strange" and for Christians, suffering for Jesus should not surprise us.

How should we respond to struggles and suffering according to verse 13? Do you think it is possible to rejoice in difficult times? Why or why not?

What could it look like to rejoice in your present or future suffering?

3. Stephen's Defense in Front of the Sanhedrin

When Stephen stood in front of the Sanhedrin, he was accused of blasphemy against Moses and God. These accusations were lies, stirred up by those who opposed him, but Stephen did not plead his innocence or blame others of wrongful accusation. Instead, he preached a sermon. **Read Acts 7:2–50, taking a note of every time:**

1. **God speaks or a person hears from God.**
2. **God prepares his people for a new covenant or prophet.**
3. **People reject God's appointed servant.**

What do you notice about God's persistence with his people?

Why do you think people are so quick to reject God's prophets and servants?

Stephen's speech gives a panoramic overview of the Old Testament, not to point out things the Sanhedrin did not know, but to highlight that God is frequently calling his people to walk in faith and that his appointed servants, including Moses, are frequently rejected when they do what God calls them to.

Read Acts 7:51–53.

Do you think Stephen was being too harsh towards the Sanhedrin? Why or why not?

Stephen associates the Sanhedrin with the "stiff-necked" people of the Old Testament who rejected God's great servants, like Joseph and Moses. He reminds them that "your fathers" rejected God's servants (Nehemiah 9:26; Luke 6:23, 11:49, 13:34), and like them, the Sanhedrin had rejected and killed Jesus, the Righteous One. Stephen's accusers were the real blasphemers. Stephen, with the appearance like that of an angel (see Acts 6:15), was acting like a prophet, calling out the sin of his people.

Today, prophetic truth is no more welcome than it was in ancient times. We often don't want to speak as bluntly as Stephen because it can be uncomfortable. But the truth is often uncomfortable. Accepting God's Word will force us to face our sin and change our lives. Our society is very willing to reject God's Word as bad news and his messengers as fools. But through his Word and people, God is continuing his long work of persistently calling us to him.

When is it difficult for you to trust God's Word? What could it look like to trust God's Word in those times?

What could it look like for you to be a messenger of God's Word to your sphere of influence?

4. Setting Our Eyes on Jesus

Before his death, Stephen received a vision into the heavenly throne room and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). This is interesting because Jesus is mostly depicted as *seated* at the right hand of God in the New Testament (Luke 22:69, Eph. 1:20, Col. 3:1). Read Hebrews 10:11–14.

What makes Jesus unique from other priests?

The fact that he is our sitting priest is a profound spiritual statement. Jesus's sacrifice fully forgives and washes away the stain of our sin. He does not need to stand because his work is completed. So why is he standing in Stephen's vision? In the video, Louie suggested Jesus was honoring Stephen's sacrifice. Some scholars suggest Jesus stood to welcome Stephen to his heavenly home and reward. Others have noted that standing was the posture of a witness or advocate in court. Though Stephen was accused in the court of the Sanhedrin, Jesus stood as his advocate in the heavenly court where he was fully vindicated and forgiven. Regardless of his posture, Stephen saw the resurrected Jesus in heaven, a confirming sign to all in the church who were suffering for Christ.

Read Hebrews 12:1–4.

What sin clings closely to you in your pursuit of Jesus?

What could you do to endure the path God has for you, as Stephen endured his?

Just as Stephen saw Jesus, we are also called to "set our eyes on Jesus." **What do you think that means? What can you do to practice this command?**

Stephen and Jesus suffered death for the message God had given to them. We, like the recipients of Hebrews, have not suffered physical injuries for our beliefs. But this admonition is not meant to discourage us or encourage us to seek out violence. Instead, it is meant to encourage us so that we won't give up the fight for our faith. If we aren't opposed with violence, then we still have incredible freedom to share the gospel.

In what ways does the life and death of Stephen encourage you?

What could you do in your daily relationship with Jesus to live with the boldness of Stephen?

5. Acts 6–7 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, the reading guide will take you through Acts 6–7, the story of the church's growth and scattering throughout Judea and Samaria.

Day 1: The Appointment of the First Deacons (Acts 6:1–7)

Day 2: Stephen's Service (Acts 6:8–15)

Day 3: Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1–53) *Because of the length of this passage, we encourage you to read it over two days.*

Day 4: Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1–53) *On the second day of reading Stephen's defense, notice the ways Stephen is proclaiming the gospel.*

Day 5: Stephen's Death (Acts 7:54–8:1)

Session 4: Breakthrough Miracle Power

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

The gospel is for all people, which means we should eagerly share the good news of Jesus Christ with everyone.

Head Change

To know that anyone can be saved; no one is too sinful to know Jesus.

Heart Change

To love the outcasts, enemies, and spiritually lost people in our lives the way God loves them.

Life Change

To freely share the gospel with all people and hope for God to work miracles in the most surprising moments.

OPEN

What is one of the best surprises you have ever had?

Some of our favorite surprises come out of the most unexpected circumstances. When we think we know what will happen, when we least expect change, when we are certain of what will happen tomorrow, we are set up for a surprise.

After the death of Stephen in Acts 7, we might expect things to go poorly for the church. We might even expect Christians to walk away from the faith under that intense persecution. But that's not what happens. Instead, God surprises us by building his church among the people we would least expect him to save.

READ

Acts 8:1–8, 14–17, 26–31; 9:10–20; 10:25–35, 44–48.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 8–10 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What groups of people does God save in Acts 8–10?

Who was Saul and what did Christians think of him?

What is the purpose of God's breakthrough miracle power?

Show Session 4: Breakthrough Miracle Power (24 Minutes).

DISCUSS

Up to this point in Acts, the church had never moved out of Jerusalem. The apostles and first members of the early church had been wholly focused on fulfilling the first part of Acts 1:8, to "be [Jesus's] witnesses in Jerusalem . . ." But after the death of Stephen, the church scattered. In the wake of tragedy, God worked a series of miraculous salvations, and the church began to flourish in all of Judea and Samaria. Read Acts 8:1–4.

What challenges was the church facing? What was the result?

This is the first time we meet Paul, the most prolific writer and evangelist in the New Testament. Before his conversion, he was called Saul and was known for his violent persecution of Christians. **What do you think it would take for someone like Saul to become a Christian?**

Even during a time of violent persecution, God was still sovereignly building his church. He worked through Philip, one of the deacons in the early church, to spread the gospel to the Samaritans. Read Acts 8:5–8, 14–17, 25.

God used the tragedy of Stephen's death to reach "unclean" people groups, those whom most Jews would never associate with. In the video, Louie pointed out the one place a faithful Jew would never have wanted to go was Samaria. Samaritans were outsiders, disliked, and looked down on. No one would have wanted to be where Philip was.

When has God taken you where you did not want to go? What was your reaction to that circumstance?

Jews disliked Samaritans because they were ethnically half-Jewish, but Philip saw them as people loved by God and became the first witness of Jesus in Samaria. **How does Philip show the Samaritans that they are loved by God?**

For the first time in Acts, the gospel is preached specifically to people who were not Jewish, to outsiders looked down on by society. **Are there any groups of people our society looks down on? Who are our modern-day outsiders?**

Who is a witness of Jesus to these people?

After seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the Samaritan church, Peter and John stopped at many small villages to preach the good news. Jesus broke down the barriers between Jew and Samaritans, making outsiders brothers and sisters in the church. **What would change if you looked at the outsiders in your community the way Peter and John did?**

What could you and your small group do to reach out to the outsiders in your community?

What barriers might there be to reaching these people with the gospel?

In what ways can you pray and trust God to overcome these barriers as he did with Philip and the Samaritans?

Note: To study Simon, the Samaritan magician, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The second group of people we see the gospel spread to are the searchers, those who are curious about Jesus and willing to ask Christians about him. Read Acts 8:26–31, 35–38.

The Ethiopian eunuch was in Jerusalem to worship God but was struggling to understand the Scriptures. **According to verse 31, what did this man need? How did Philip respond to this need in verse 35?**

Every Christian should be ready for encounters like the one Philip had with the Ethiopian. If someone asks us about Jesus, we should be both willing and able to proclaim Jesus to them.

How would you share the gospel with someone who does not know Jesus? To practice, share the good news of Jesus with someone in your group.

What makes you nervous about talking to someone who is asking questions about Jesus? How might you overcome your concerns and fears?

Philip's willingness to talk about Jesus with a searcher changed the Ethiopian's life. But not all evangelism is that easy. Sometimes God calls us to courageously be his witnesses to those who are adamantly opposed to Jesus. Read Acts 9:10–20.

Note: To study Saul's encounter with Jesus, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Saul was not only opposed to Christians—he was also infamous for zealously persecuting them. Ananias had good reason to be afraid of him. But, like Philip, he was willing to go to the people God called him to. **Who in your life is adamantly opposed to Christianity? What reasons do you have to believe they would reject you if you shared the gospel with them?**

God did not command Ananias to do something impossible. Jesus had done the hard work of converting and saving Saul. **In what ways can you pray for God to prepare the way for you as you share the work of Jesus with people who are opposed to him?**

Saul became a pillar of the church, spreading the gospel across the known world and writing most of the New Testament. But we often forget Ananias, who overcame fear to be faithful. Ananias simply showed up and was willing to serve God. **What could it look like to “show up” and love the people in your life who are opposed to Jesus?**

The final group of people who are converted in this section of Acts is the Gentiles. Like the Samaritans, they were disliked and rejected by the Jews. Like the seekers, they sometimes sought out and worshipped God. But more often than not, they were like Saul, opposed to the gospel. The Romans we meet in Acts 10 were oppressors and enemies. Read Acts 10:25–35, 44–48.

Note: To learn more about the Holy Spirit coming upon the Samaritans and Gentiles, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing Roman centurion. He was seeking God, much like the Ethiopian eunuch. A supernatural vision had told him to wait for Peter, much like Saul was waiting for Ananias. But it was unlawful for Peter to even be near him. **In what ways might our society erect barriers between the church and those seeking God?**

In verse 34, God has reoriented Peter's vision. **What realization has God given him?**

Sometimes, the people in the church need to have their views reoriented. We can be tempted to think we are better than others, more loved by God, or even that God does not love certain groups of people. **In what ways does the church today think that God shows favoritism?**

How might favoritism lead us to treat people differently or disregard certain people?

As Louie said in the video, there are no boundaries for the gospel. It is for everyone. The Holy Spirit fell upon Gentiles before the church in Jerusalem thought it was possible. It shocked Peter and the men he was with.

Is there anyone you have given up on or assume cannot be saved? How might the conversion stories in Acts 8–10 change your view of that person?

In what ways can you eagerly pray for and witness to that person this week?

LAST WORD

There is nothing that hems in the work of God. He is not stopped by unwanted situations, nor does he avoid unwanted people. The work and good news of Jesus is for everyone. But we can forget God loves *everyone*, fencing in our faithfulness according to the boundaries of society and our own prejudice.

We do not know whom God will save, but we do know that God can save anyone. All he asks of us is to be faithful to share the gospel with everyone, no matter whom he puts in our path.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. Simon the Magician

In this session, we saw God save all kinds of people, particularly those we think are farthest from God. One of these unlikely converts was Simon the magician, sometimes called Simon Magus in church tradition. Read Acts 8:9–17.

Simon wasn't like modern-day magicians; he was not an illusionist. Simon was promoting himself as the manifestation of God's power, working false miracles with satanic power. Where Philip preached Jesus, Simon promoted himself. **In what ways could Simon be seen as a rival of Philip? How were they similar and different?**

Simon, however, was not a rival of Philip. Instead, he became another unlikely convert. But Simon wasn't able to overcome his desire for personal power and glory. Read Acts 8:18–24.

When Simon saw the true power of God, he wanted it for himself and thought he could buy it from the apostles. His sin may seem distant from us today, but we, in many ways, also try to purchase the gifts and blessings of God. **Have you ever bargained with God in prayer? What were you wanting him to give to you? What did you promise him in return?**

When we are distressed, envious, or uncomfortable, we can use our action and resources as bargaining chips, trying to buy better gifts and blessings from God. But we forget everything we have is from God, including our salvation. **In what ways do you feel like God is holding out on you? What areas of your life do you feel are lacking?**

What does it look like to build a relationship with God that is not dependent on the kinds of gifts he gives to us?

Like Simon, we can come to God for his gifts rather than a relationship with him. Take some time to reflect on your own desires. Think about what you want from God, what you expect from him, and how you might be using him as a means to an end. If you need to repent of anything, take this time to do so.

2. Saul Meets Jesus

This session is full of conversion stories, but only one person in Acts came to know Jesus before meeting a Christian. Read the story of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:1–22.

When Christians scattered throughout Judea, Saul left Jerusalem to hunt and imprison them. **But, according to verse 5, who was Saul actually persecuting?**

Based on the way Ananias and the men in the synagogue talk, what was Saul's reputation?

Saul was completely forgiven in Christ, was baptized, and immediately began proclaiming Christ in the synagogues. Verse 22 shows us that he was an expert in evangelism, even as a new believer. But Saul, who was later known as Paul, never fully got over his past. Read 1 Corinthians 15:8–9 and Galatians 1:13.

Paul carried his past like an unhealed wound. He was painfully aware of the destruction he had caused. Some of us can relate to that pain. **In what ways might you be carrying shame leftover from your life before Jesus?**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17–20 and Galatians 2:20.

Despite Paul's awareness of his sin, he couldn't help but rejoice in salvation. The life we had before Jesus has been completely forgiven by God. He knows the worst of our actions and still loves us. We cannot beat ourselves up over a stain God has washed away. We must also imitate Paul in his view of a redeemed life.

What can you do to remind yourself that you are a new creation in Christ?

What could it look like for you to live as if Christ were living in you?

God has reconciled you completely to himself, wiping away all your sin. **In what ways can you extend this grace to others when they sin against you?**

In what ways can you be a “minister of reconciliation” to people who do not know Jesus, who are sitting in the shame of their sin not knowing the forgiveness of God?

3. Samaritans, Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit

There are three times the Holy Spirit comes upon groups of people. The first is when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples in Acts 2 during the day of Pentecost. Read Acts 2:1–11.

What were the defining characteristics of this miracle? Who was the gospel being preached to during this miracle?

Read Acts 2:32, 37–41. **What was the purpose of Peter speaking in tongues? What was the result of the Holy Spirit being expressed through tongues?**

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit moves through the apostles to build the church. The miraculous gift of tongues was given as proof that Peter was not drunk but speaking the truth as he ministered to Jews.

Read Acts 8:14–17, 25.

Who was Peter ministering to during this miracle? What was Peter and John's response to this miracle in verse 25?

Luke does not tell us how the power of the Holy Spirit manifests, but there must have been some sort of accompanying sign because Simon the Magician sought to purchase the power for himself in verse 18. As in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit moves to a new group of people, causing a new wave of ministry.

Read Acts 10:34–35, 44–48.

What are the defining characteristics of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

What did God teach Peter and the people who were with him through this miracle?

Peter's amazement at the salvation of the Gentiles shows us that he did not think they could be saved. In the next session of this study, we will see that some people in the church did not like that Peter baptized Gentiles (11:1–18). But after hearing that they had received the Holy Spirit in the same way the disciples had in Acts 2, the church rejoiced in the salvation of the Gentiles and began to send missionaries across the known world. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a sign to the skeptical Jews that all people could be saved.

The outpourings of the Holy Spirit show us, like the Jews of Acts, that all people can be saved. **Are there any people you doubt can be saved?**

What would it look like to trust God and evangelize to them despite your skepticism?

4. Acts 8–10 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 8–10, the stories of God's love for all people.

Day 1: Witnesses in Samaria (Acts 8:1–25)

Day 2: Witnesses throughout Judea (Acts 8:26–40; 9:32–43)

Day 3: The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–31)

Day 4: Two Visions (Acts 10:1–23)

Day 5: Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:24–48)

Session 5: The Church Is Built through Blocking & Tackling

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

The most powerful thing we can do to build the church is the ordinary, common work of discipleship and evangelism.

Head Change

To know that staying faithful to our calling is the most powerful way we can build God's church.

Heart Change

To feel boldness in the face of opposition to the gospel.

Life Change

To seek out ways we can be missionaries for Jesus, wherever God has placed us.

OPEN

What habits have you taken up in your adult life that have changed the way you live or work?

It is often the little things, the small habits, that make the biggest changes in our lives. Small habits—things like eating healthier, practicing an instrument, or reading one chapter of a book every night—reap big rewards over time.

In today's session, Louie Giglio will show us the fundamental habits that built God's church. They are so basic we might not think of them as revolutionary. But when we practice them, we will see incredible breakthroughs for the kingdom of God.

READ

Acts 11:19–26; 12:1–7, 13–17; 13:1–3, 14:8–20.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 11–14 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is the regular pattern of church growth?

What was new about the church in Antioch? Why was it important?

What was Paul's response to opposition?

When should we take opposition personally?

Show Session 5: The Church Is Built through Blocking and Tackling (22 minutes).

DISCUSS

These four chapters of Acts represent a radical change in the early church. For the first time, God established a predominantly Gentile church in Antioch. While most of the leaders of the church lived in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch began to lead the way in sending missionaries and establishing new churches.

Read Acts 11:19–21.

In the last session, we saw God sending his witnesses to people who had never heard about the work of Jesus. **In what ways did those who came to faith continue in evangelism without the apostles?**

We don't know the names of the men from Cyprus and Cyrene who proclaimed the good news of Jesus to the people of Antioch. But through them, God established one of the most influential churches in the ancient world. **How important is it to you to be recognized for your accomplishments? What do you want people to think when they hear your name?**

Our ambitions to make an impact or to be remembered aren't necessarily evil. But we get into trouble when we would rather be remembered for temporary success rather than eternal impact. **In what ways could your passions and ambitions be used to build God's church?**

Would you be okay if you, like the men of Cyprus and Cyrene, had an impact but were forgotten by history? Why or why not?

Louie spent a lot of time in this session talking about "the power of stay." In today's culture, many of us are drawn to the next fun thing and find it difficult to anchor ourselves in familiar work. But the familiar work God calls us to can change our workplaces, neighborhoods, and churches when we stick with it. Read Acts 11:22–26.

Saul was hidden away in Tarsus so that the Jewish authorities would not kill him (9:29–30). We don't know what Saul did in Tarsus, but it wasn't the influential ministry he would do later in life. Today, we want our work to be visible and appreciated and we tend to believe the most visible ministry leaders are the most influential and worthy of praise. But we forget that God protected Saul by hiding him. **In what ways can a quiet and small ministry be impactful? How might God be protecting you by not making you more visible?**

Saul and Barnabas spent a year actively ministering to the Gentiles, a group of people most followers of Jesus had dismissed as unsavable (see 11:1–18). But it was these unlikely converts who became so enraptured by Jesus that they were called Christians, meaning "those of Christ." **When do people realize you are "of Christ"? What actions, reputation, and attitudes in your life mark you as a person who follows Jesus?**

Note: To take a deeper look at the word "Christian," go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Saul and Barnabas nurtured the faith of the Antioch Christians for a year, which can feel like a long time. But their long commitment to these Gentiles established a church sold out to Jesus and his work. **What could you do to help establish the church in your community? How long would you be willing to do this work?**

While the church in Antioch was thriving, the church in Jerusalem was suffering from a famine (11:27–30) and ongoing persecution. Read Acts 12:1–5.

The persecution of the church in Jerusalem had escalated. King Herod, the political leader of the Jews, killed the disciple James and imprisoned Peter. We could ask: Where was God in all of this chaos? **When life gets difficult, what do you think God is up to?**

In what ways have you felt forgotten or punished by God in difficult circumstances?

In the midst of this trouble, the church in Jerusalem earnestly prayed. We often think of prayer as a nice thing to do but may not consider it the most important or powerful action we can take in times of distress. **What do you think prayer actually accomplishes? Do you think it changes anything?**

Note: To learn more about the power of prayer, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Peter was rescued from jail by an angel and delivered to the house of Christians who were praying for his release. However, the people praying did not believe that Peter had been rescued. Read Acts 12:13–17.

When you pray, do you believe that God can do what you are praying for? What causes you to doubt that your prayers can be answered?

Louie pointed out that we often have trouble noticing miracles, even when they present themselves to us like Peter at Mary's house. **What prayers have been answered in your life? Do you think of these answered prayers as miraculous? Why or why not?**

One way to remind ourselves of God's faithfulness is by reminding ourselves of our prayers and the way God has answered them. **What could you do to regularly recognize God's provision for your prayers?**

Acts cuts back to the church in Antioch just as Saul and Barnabas are being sent out on their first missionary journey. Read Acts 13:1–3.

Just as God sent Philip to the Samaritans and Peter to Cornelius, he sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles of the Mediterranean. Through Paul, God repeats the fundamental pattern of the church Louie talked about in the video: sending and establishing. Even if you are not a missionary or a pastor, you should still be involved in God's mission through sending missionaries and establishing God's church. **Where do you see God sending workers and establishing his church in the world today? In your own community?**

Note: To learn more about the elders in Antioch, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

During Paul's first missionary journey, he found both success and opposition wherever he went. It was on this journey that he was first called Paul (13:9), which Louie mentioned was his Greek name. Read Acts 14:8–20.

Paul and Barnabas were called by God to take the gospel to Gentiles. The church in Antioch had laid hands on them and prayerfully commissioned their missionary journey. Though they had every reason to believe that they would be successful on their journey, they were often met with opposition and misunderstanding. **When reading about Paul and Barnabas's experience in Lystra, would you call it a success or failure for their mission?**

In what ways did Paul and Barnabas do exactly what they were called and commissioned to do?

We often define spiritual success and failure by our results. We sometimes think opposition or struggle is a sign that we are moving in the wrong direction. But God had not called Paul and Barnabas to be universally successful. He had called them to be faithful. **In what ways is God calling you to be faithful to him and his mission? What could faithfulness to him look like as you go about your week?**

LAST WORD

We often confine the work of the church to Sunday mornings, but the basic work of the church is a week-long endeavor. Whether we are sending people to share the gospel or staying in a place to enrich the church, God has called all of us to participate in the good work of building his kingdom. The question we must answer is, “What are we doing to participate in the fundamental work of the church?”

Your faithfulness does not have to be flashy; it may be as simple as encouraging a friend to follow Jesus more deeply, praying for those who don’t know Jesus, or supporting a missionary or church planter as they bring the gospel to new places. Pray that God would show you opportunities to be faithful, then boldly follow him into the faithful work of building his church.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We’ve highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group’s study of the book of Acts.

1. Christian

The Greek word for Christian, *cristianos*, is an interesting title for people who follow Jesus. The term *christ* is the Greek word for messiah and the suffix -ian is Latin. In one simple word, we find Hebrew theology made accessible to the Greeks described in the language of Rome. It is a simple title, but one that all people of the Mediterranean world could have understood.

“Christ” is a common word today, even used as a personal name for Jesus. But in the Bible, it is a rare term and is only used three times. What’s more, followers of Christ never call themselves Christians. In Acts 11:26, people use the title to associate people with Jesus. The Christians there were so unique that they needed a name, and we can presume that they spoke so freely about Jesus Christ that he became their defining characteristic.

To what degree is belonging to Jesus a defining characteristic of your life?

Read the other two times the title “Christian” is used in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.

The second time we see the term *Christian* used in the Bible, it comes from the mouth of an unbelieving king named Agrippa, who became suspicious that Paul was trying to convert him. **What is the likelihood that you will tell people about Jesus, whether friends or strangers?**

What could it look like to be known for talking to people about Jesus?

In the third and final use of the title (1 Peter 4:16) we see that the name itself caused trouble. If a person was known as a “Christian” it could very well lead to their suffering. Today, we might not struggle for claiming to be Christians. For us, the struggle is often letting people know that we follow Jesus at all. We let our faith fly under the radar for fear of what people might think about us. **In what ways are you cautious about revealing to others that you follow Jesus? What reactions might you get if people knew you were a Christian?**

The name “Christian” was given to the church because they were most known by their similarity to Jesus, their eagerness to talk about Jesus, and their willingness to suffer for him. **In what ways are these characteristics similar or different to the characteristics of Christians today?**

What could we do to be more like the people who were first called Christians?

2. The Power of Prayer

In Acts, prayer led to incredible miracles. It often doesn't feel like praying is the most effective or meaningful thing we can do in times of trouble. But prayer does more than we often give it credit for. Read Luke 18:1–8.

According to Jesus, we should always pray and not lose heart. **In what ways is it easy to lose heart, even while we are praying?**

What, if anything, have you stopped praying about because you were discouraged?

In this parable, a widow is pestering a cruel judge. This judge does not even pretend to be just or caring. Even so, he gives the woman justice simply because she was persistent. If even an unrighteous judge does right by a person when they are persistent, how much more will God? He hates injustice, loves you, and hears you when you pray (Psalm 17:6; 34:17).

What would change in your prayer life if you prayed knowing that God hears you?

What would it look like for you to persistently pray for what is troubling you?

3. Saul to Paul

It was not unusual in the ancient world for people to have more than one name. Sometimes, names were changed after life-altering events (Jacob becoming Israel in Genesis 32:28), others when they assimilated into a new culture (Esther was also known as Hadassah, see Esther 2:7). We even see people changing their names to focus on their purpose in life (Simon becoming Peter in Matthew 16:16–18).

But Saul switches his name to Paul for no apparent reason. In Acts 13:9, we simply read that he was also called Paul while on his mission to Cyprus. So why did he change?

Paul is a Roman name. Since Rome was the unpopular ruling nation of Judea, we should not be surprised that Paul preferred to be called a Jewish name, Saul, while in Judea. But when Saul began to minister in Roman territories like Cyprus, he switched to his Roman name.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

Paul was a flexible and empathetic evangelist. He found ways to become relatable to others so that he might win more people to Christ. **Who are the people you are ministering to? What qualities and traits set them apart from others in your community?**

The gospel is always relevant—it is for all people in all times and in all cultures. Likewise, every culture is looking for things only God can give. Paul adjusted his gospel presentation to address his audience, focusing on their specific hopes and worldview. When we talk about Jesus, we should also think about how the gospel is good news for the people we are talking to.

What does your culture want out of life? What is the dream everyone is chasing?

In what ways will the culture's hope let people down?

How does God give people in your culture what they truly hope for (acceptance, meaning, purpose, value, etc.)?

In what ways could your gospel presentation adjust to better reach the people in your life?

4. Acts 11–14 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week's reading guide will walk you through Acts 11–14. There is a lot in this section of Acts, from the opposition of Peter's Gentile evangelism to Paul's first missionary journey throughout the known world. Note how quickly the church mobilizes to reach Gentiles and the variety of ways God uses Paul to reach cultures throughout the northern Mediterranean region.

Day 1: The Opposition to Gentile Salvation (Acts 11:1–18)

Day 2: The Church of Antioch (Acts 11:19–30)

Day 3: Herod Persecutes the Church (Acts 12)

Day 4: The First Missionary Journey pt. 1 (Acts 13:1–12)

Day 5: The First Missionary Journey pt. 2 (Acts 13:13–52)

Day 6: The First Missionary Journey pt. 3 (Acts 14)

Session 6: The God Above It All

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

In hopeless situations, our first response should always be to turn to God in worship.

Head Change

To know God does not change with our circumstances.

Heart Change

To feel peace, knowing that God is with you no matter what you are going through.

Life Change

To trust God in the midst of our difficulties, knowing that he is unchanging when our circumstances are unsure.

OPEN

Think of a time when you have overcome a big obstacle in your life. How did you get over that hurdle? Who helped you along the way?

In this session, the church faces a series of obstacles that threaten to derail God's mission. But when times of difficulty come against his church, God, who is above it all, sits sovereignly on his throne.

When Paul seems to have met his match, when conflict looks like it will tear God's people apart, and when evangelism seems impossible, God moves in incredible ways. No matter what you are facing, no matter how hard the road gets, our God is still on the throne.

READ

Acts 15:5–29, 36–41; 16:16–33; 17:16–31; 18:24–28.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 15–19 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What sorts of conflicts were in the early church?

Why should we worship God when life gets tough?

What common longing do all people share? How could this commonality help us reach more people with the gospel?

Show Session 6: The God Above It All (24 Minutes).

DISCUSS

In this session, we saw a series of difficult circumstances put in front of God's people: conflict, injustice, unwanted circumstances, and hostility towards evangelism. Each of these obstacles threatened the early church in different ways and could have caused Paul to stop the expansion of the mission. But through all the hurdles and troubles, Acts shows us the God who is above it all. Worshipping him is always the right way to move forward.

First, let's look at the conflicts in Acts 15–19 and examine how conflict continues to affect us today.

In what ways has conflict affected the relationships between you and the people in your church?

***Note:** Answering this question could draw you and your group into gossip. Guard the discussion by focusing on the ways conflict has affected you personally and the ways it can build walls between us and other Christians rather than on the specifics of a conflict or on other people.*

Has there been any resolution to this conflict? If so, how was conflict overcome? If not, in what ways does this conflict continue to affect your church?

Louie pointed out three different conflicts in this section of Acts: conflict with legalists, Paul's personal conflict with John Mark, and the division in Corinth. Briefly, we can categorize these as theological, interpersonal, and invented conflicts. Read Acts 15:5–29, 36–41; 18:24–28; and 1 Corinthians 3:2–7.

Think about each instance of division in the church. **In what ways were they justified? In what ways were they avoidable?**

What would you change about the way those conflicts were handled?

Think about the disagreements and divisions you have had with other Christians. **In what ways were those conflicts justified or avoidable? What, if anything, do you wish you had done differently?**

In the video, Louie talked about a better way to approach conflict in the church and encouraged us to seek reconciliation and unity as God's people. Read Romans 12:17–21.

Often, we do not want peace in an argument. We want to get even or get back at those who hurt us, even if they are our brothers or sisters in Christ. **What makes vengeance so appealing when we are in a disagreement?**

What makes it difficult to let go of getting even and choose to forgive instead?

Louie said that conflict tends to turn us inward, dividing us and slowing the spread of the gospel. Therefore, creating peace in the church is a way to obey God and expand his worship throughout the world. **What could you do to fulfill Romans 12:18 and create peace where there is conflict between you and other Christians?**

Note: To examine biblical ways to approach theological, interpersonal, and invented conflicts, go to **Go Deeper Sections 1–3** at the end of this study.

Second, Louie talked about how we should respond to the difficult circumstances in our lives that appear to derail us and what we are doing for God's mission. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were unjustly imprisoned, bringing their missionary journey to a screeching halt.

Read Acts 16:16–33.

What was Paul and Silas's response to difficult circumstances?

What is your typical response to difficult circumstances? Where do you think God is in those moments?

It seemed like things couldn't get any worse for Paul and Silas. But they knew that God had not changed, even though their situation had. Louie said, "The God of the mountaintops is the God of the valleys, and he is worthy of our praise today. It may not change your situation, but [worship] will change you in the midst of your situation." **What would it look like for you to praise God, even in your current circumstances?**

Paul and Silas's situation was a part of a much larger plan. Ultimately, it was used to introduce the prisoners and guards to Jesus. **What opportunities could your current circumstances give you to tell others about Jesus?**

At the end of the video, Louie explained why worship is always the right response to tough situations. **Do you agree with him? Why or why not?**

What might make it difficult for you to worship through pain and sorrow?

The final hurdle to God's mission in this session was the philosophical elite in Athens. These men were some of the brightest minds in the western world and they wanted to hear more about Jesus. That may not seem like a hurdle, but oftentimes evangelism is intimidating. Fear can keep us from sharing Jesus with people, especially when we do not understand their beliefs.

Read 17:19–32.

Paul usually visited the synagogues in a city first (17:1, 10, 17), reaching out to those who did not know Jesus using the common ground of the Old Testament. **What common ground do you use in your own evangelism? How can a shared interest or connection help pave the way for you to share Christ with those who do not know him?**

Paul was in a foreign place with foreign beliefs and was set in front of foreign rulers. There were many reasons for him to be intimidated. Evangelism can be intimidating on its own, but when we lose common ground with the people we are talking to, it can be terrifying. **Think of some people you work with or live nearby but have nothing in common with. What hurdles do you think would keep them from accepting Jesus?**

While it may seem like we have nothing in common with some people, we all share the same desire to know God. The Athenians were so desperate to please the gods that they made an altar to an unknown god. Today, people search for spirituality in various ways, seeking meaning, purpose, and identity. **In what ways do the people around you reveal their longing for God through their passions? What do they fill their lives with instead of God? Be as specific as you can.**

In what ways could you use our cultural expressions of our longing for God to point people to God?

Some of the men at the Aeropagus laughed at Paul, some wanted to know more, and some believed in Jesus and joined the church. Our evangelism very often has the same mixed results. **What could it look like for you to share Jesus in hope of the few that would believe instead of in fear of the few that might laugh?**

Often, people don't make immediate decisions about Jesus and want to learn more about him. Their curiosity can take us off guard if we are not prepared to walk with them as they investigate God. **In what ways could you prepare to introduce a curious person to Jesus beyond a single gospel presentation?**

LAST WORD

Life will not always be easy, even when we are focused on the mission of God. But the valleys of life often advance God's mission further than the mountaintop experiences. No matter where you are in life, no matter how things are going, God has not left you. Whether you are facing opposition, are in the middle of conflict, are at rock bottom, or feel you are the wrong person to witness to those around you, look to the God who is above it all.

He is worthy of your worship, obedience, and courageous faith. Trust him and see what he can do in your midnight moment.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. Finding Unity in Theological Conflict

Theology is a wonderful and beautiful thing, but when Christians argue about their theological convictions—no matter how small—it can lead to broken relationships, split churches, and a damaged public witness.

What do you think makes it so difficult for us to disagree civilly about theology?

What do you think non-Christians see when a church experiences internal conflict?

We cannot give up our convictions because we want to avoid an argument. But we also cannot beat down other Christians with arguments trying to prove we are right either. So how should Christians talk about theological differences? Read Ephesians 4:1–6.

What would it look like to make every effort to keep peace with those you disagree with?

Walking into a theological conversation can feel like going into battle. But Christians shouldn't try to wage war against each other. **What happens when we fail to be patient or bear with others in love?**

In what ways does the goal of Christian unity go against our battlefield mentality?

Theological conflict should not be about beating the other side or winning a debate. Instead, we should be lovingly focused on helping one another see God more clearly and serve him more faithfully. Read 2 Timothy 2:24–26. **What could you do to diffuse heated arguments so that you might have more productive discussions about theology?**

In what ways could your theological arguments change to be more kind, patient, and gentle?

Division can come easily in the church, but we are called to maintain peace despite our differences and point people to Jesus in all our conversations. **What could it look for you to argue in hope of reconciliation instead of in hope of winning the argument?**

2. Dealing with Personal Conflict

Conflict is unavoidable. Even Paul and his closest friends fell into disagreements. We will find it at work, at home, with our friends and spouses, and even with strangers at the grocery store. Because we cannot avoid conflict, we should think about the right way to respond to it. Read Romans 12:16–18.

We are called to live in harmony with everyone, not just people like us. **What groups does our society believe the church *should* be in conflict with?**

In what ways have Christians believed that it is okay to live in conflict with others?

Verse 18 demands more of us than we might initially think. We might assume this verse means “do what you can but if someone else is mad, that’s their problem.” But God does not allow us to tolerate unresolved conflict. Read Matthew 5:21–26.

According to Jesus, we should be as eager to be forgiven by the people we have wronged as we are to be forgiven by God. Instead of seeking to justify ourselves in conflict, we should look for ways we have wronged others and seek to be forgiven. **Are there any Christians in your life who have something against you? What would it look like for you to completely own your side of the conflict and ask for forgiveness?**

What might make owning your mistakes and seeking forgiveness difficult for you?

We not only need to seek to be forgiven but to also forgive those who wronged us. Read Matthew 6:9–15. **Why can it be hard to forgive a person who has wronged us?**

God forgave us while we were still sinning against him (Romans 5:8). He did not wait for us to clean up or fix our attitudes before he sent Jesus to rescue us. Our forgiveness should look like God’s forgiveness. But that kind of forgiveness is radical, feels unnatural, and is costly. **What could it look like to forgive someone who has hurt you in the way God has forgiven you?**

3. What to Do with Invented Drama

While every conflict might feel important, some arguments are wastes of time, only serving to divide God’s people. The invented rivalry between Paul and Apollos was one of those conflicts, and the way Paul handled it helps us learn how we should treat invented conflict in our own lives. Read Acts 18:24–28.

What was admirable about Apollos? In what ways was he a huge help to the church?

Apollos was a gifted and passionate evangelist, just like Paul. There is no evidence that Apollos’s gifts threatened Paul or that the two men had a rivalry, but their followers began to oppose one another. Read 1 Corinthians 3:1–8.

According to Paul, the jealousy and dissension between his followers and the followers of Apollos was a sign of spiritual immaturity. He goes as far as to call them infants. It was not just that they were pitting two leaders against one another, but they were also dividing the church based on the personality they followed. **Based on verses 5–8, what is the role of a spiritual leader like Paul or Apollos? Who had the Corinthians forgotten in their spiritual development?**

In what ways have you seen the church divided and pitted against one another in rivalries like the one in Corinth?

What effect did these conflicts have on the ministry of the church?

Infighting in the church comes easily, but God's people are called to disregard worthless and divisive conflict. If a conflict only serves to divide us over secondary or tertiary issues, we should reject the whole conversation and move toward maturity in Christ. Read 2 Timothy 2:22–23. **What conflicts, infighting, or drama in your life can you dismiss as a “foolish and stupid argument”?**

What could it look like to dismiss these divisions and strive for unity within your church?

4. Acts 15–19 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 15–19. These chapters cover conflict in the church and Paul's ongoing missionary journeys. Take time each day to note Paul's travels, the receptions he receives in each town or city, and how the gospel spreads in hostile situations.

Day 1: The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

Day 2: Paul's Second Missionary Journey: Derbe to Philippi (Acts 16)

Day 3: Paul's Second Missionary Journey: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens (Acts 17)

Day 4: Paul's Second Missionary Ends and the Third Mission Begins (Acts 18)

Day 5: Paul's Third Missionary Journey: Ephesus (Acts 19)

Session 7: The Supreme Value of the Mission

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

As Christians, the most important thing we can do is faithfully pursue God's mission so that others might come to know him.

Head Change

To know that our faithfulness to God, no matter how mundane, will result in fruitfulness.

Heart Change

To feel encouraged to keep serving God even when we don't feel influential.

Life Change

To apply God's mission to every area of our lives so that we might be a part of his work.

OPEN

What motivates you to get out of bed in the morning? What are you most passionate about?

Our passions not only give us purpose, but they also set the course of our futures. They establish our hope for our careers, our families, where we want to live, and what we want our legacies to be. Our values are extremely important. Therefore, we need to make sure we spend our lives chasing after the right passions. In this session, Louie will talk about our motivating mission and how serving God will be the greatest adventure we could ever agree to.

READ

Acts 20:17–24; 21:10–14, 26–36; 24:24–27; 26:12–26.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 20–26 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

In what ways can God's mission be applied to any person's passions?

What should we do if we think our story is boring or doesn't have any value?

What is the benefit of continual faithfulness?

Show Session 7: The Supreme Value of the Mission (17 minutes).

DISCUSS

This session is all about your primary motivation in life, what Louie called your "why." For Paul, his motivation was to carry the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth. That may seem like a broad motivation, but it gave him a specific purpose throughout his ministry.

As we examine Paul's ministry, think about your own "why." Start by thinking broadly. This mission should be applicable in every area of your life, not just in your work or on Sunday mornings. Louie challenged us to avoid the "wheres" and "whos"—where you are, who you are with, and where you would like to be—and simply to focus on your mission no matter where you are or who's around you. **What would you say is your primary purpose in life? What is your greatest goal?**

In the video, Louie talked about the four things that will help us live like Paul, sold out for the mission of Christ. First, we must have a new mindset understanding that "the greatest thing [we] can do with [our] li[ves] is to help someone else come to life."

Read Acts 20:17–24.

According to these verses, what is Paul's primary motivation? How much is he willing to endure to accomplish the mission God has given to him?

In what ways do your goals in life serve the mission of God?

As we learned in the video, Paul's specific mission was to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, but he did not wait until he got to Rome to serve Jesus. **In what ways are you serving God through your career, your free time, and in your social life?**

Following Jesus causes us to have a new mindset, giving us a new way to see everything we do, no matter where we are or who we are with. **How could you use the normal events of your life to help others find life in Jesus?**

Note: To learn more about Paul's motivation and values, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The second challenge Louie gave us in the video was to "keep your 'yes' on the table." It can be easy to follow Jesus at times, but following him will not always be easy. We have to be willing to follow him, even when the road ahead looks difficult. Read Acts 21:10–14, 26–36.

Paul knew exactly what God was calling him into and was still completely committed to God's plan. **How would you react if someone like Agabus told you about the difficulty in your future?**

What's unique about Paul's response to Agabus?

When Paul was attacked in Jerusalem, things went worse than expected. He was not only arrested, as Agabus had prophesied, but was also beaten by an angry mob. Despite these circumstances, God had not abandoned Paul. **When things go worse than you expect, where do you think God is? Are you ever tempted to think that God's plan has gone wrong?**

In the video, Louie said, “If I had seen all the twists and turns in my story, I would have had difficulty completely surrendering to God’s plan.” **In what ways has God been faithful to you in unexpected and difficult times?**

Louie’s advice to us was to commit to God’s plan before we know what life holds for us, to trust God with our future life as we have trusted him with our eternity. **What would it look like to trust God and to stay faithful to your “why” even when your life takes an unexpected turn?**

Note: To think more deeply about a right perspective of difficulty, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

The third encouragement Louie had for us was to keep telling our story, no matter where we are or who we are with. Every time we see Paul in these chapters, he is using his story to share the gospel.

Some of us have incredible stories of radical life change. Some of us grew up in the church and don’t think our stories are very impressive. **How would you characterize your story?**

We have to stop thinking that some stories of salvation are better than others. Whenever God redeems a sinner, it is a miracle. Louie said, “If you have a story of grace, you have a story to share.” Read Acts 26:12–29.

When Paul shared his story with Agrippa, he began by explaining who he was before he met Jesus. **In broad strokes, who were you like before you met Jesus? What motivated you? Where did you look for hope?**

Paul then described his personal conversion. **When did you come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ? What was it like?**

Finally, Paul described his life after meeting Jesus—his new motivation, his sure hope, and his new lifestyle. **What changed after you met Jesus? In what ways is God still changing you?**

Those three beats—life before Jesus, your conversion, and life after meeting Jesus—are your story of grace. **Who could you share that story with this week?**

The fourth and final encouragement Louie gave to us was to remain faithful to God because faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. There are some seasons of life that seem quiet, when it doesn’t seem like God is doing much in our lives. But even in those quiet moments, God’s call remains the same. Read Acts 24:24–27.

Paul was arrested and left in chains during the most prolific time in his ministry. This appeared to be the worst time to be inactive. Even so, Paul was left in prison for two years. Unlike when Peter was arrested or when Paul was imprisoned with Silas, there was no miracle that released him. **When has it felt like God has forgotten you?**

Remember, Paul’s primary goal was to travel to Rome to preach the gospel. Read Acts 25:9–12.

God had not forgotten Paul. Paul’s difficult circumstances had actually paved the way for his mission to Rome. Like Paul, our mission for God may take some unexpected paths. We must be committed to serving God no matter where we are, because he may change the road to get us to where he wants us to be. **What do you expect God will do in your future? What will you do if God does not meet your expectations?**

In what ways could God use your current circumstances to build his church?

What can you do to trust God with your path, even if it is not a path you would choose for yourself?

Think back to your “why.” **In what ways, if any, is it confined to a specific place or circumstance?**

In what ways can you refine that purpose statement to fit your life no matter where you are?

In every season and every place, God is working through us. Like Louie said, if we are alive, we are called to share our stories with the people in front of us. If we are faithful to God, regardless of where he takes us, there will eventually be incredible fruit.

What does it look like to be faithful to God where you are today? Whom has God put you in front of that you could help find life in Jesus?

LAST WORD

We tend to over-focus on where we want to be in life, but “where” is not an important issue for a Christian. God wants us to focus on his mission, the great “why” of our lives. No matter where God takes us, even if it is far from where we want to be, we can fulfill God’s purpose for us. That frees us to go anywhere and to be around anyone!

The most important question we can answer today is not “Where do I want to be?” Rather, it is “How can I be faithful to God, no matter where I am?”

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We’ve highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group’s study of the book of Acts.

1. Paul’s Motivation and Values

This session was all about our motivations and resetting our ambitions on Christ and his mission. But that is easier said than done. It can be difficult to break free of the worldly ways we define ourselves and our hope. Our culture likes to reduce people to blurbs in social media bio lines, telling us that the most important things about us are our accomplishments and social affiliations. Read Paul’s “bio” in Philippians 3:3–6.

What in your past gives you confidence? What about yourself do you want to define you?

What is your public reputation? What do people notice first about you?

Paul was the top dog in some of the most prestigious groups of his time. People wanted to be him and to be around him. But everything that would impress the masses was completely worthless compared to what he had in Jesus. Read Philippians 3:7–11.

Paul saw his accomplishments as losses and goes as far as to call them “garbage.” The Greek word *skubala* can also be translated “animal excrement.” In other words, he wanted his reputation to be so detached from his personal accomplishments that someone could not even catch a whiff of them.

What do you want people to notice or “smell” when they get close to you? What do you hope they notice first about you and your reputation?

How long do people need to be around you before they start to notice the influence of Jesus in your life?

Paul’s primary motivation was to know Jesus and to be like him. That was what he wanted people to know about him before they knew anything else. That was his “why” and his reputation.

What would it look like to make your Christ-focused motivation your reputation? What, if anything, would need to change?

2. Trusting God in Difficult Places

We will all have seasons in our lives that we neither expected nor wanted. We will know suffering and pain. But it is important to know that these times are not a sign of God's absence. Even in the darkest days, God is still with us. Read Psalm 23.

Read it again.

What stands out to you about God in this psalm?

Though David was in a "valley of shadow and death," God still led him to moments of peace and rest. In many ways, this psalm is a prayer of thankfulness.

What moments of peace and rest has God given you in the last month?

In what ways is God showing you goodness and mercy right now?

Take some time to meditate and pray over this psalm. Rewrite Psalm 23 as a prayer in your own words. Even though you might feel like you are in darkness, forgotten, surrounded by death, God has not left you and is caring for you like a shepherd cares for his sheep.

3. Acts 20–26 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 20–26. Paul's traveling ministry comes to an end and most of these chapters cover his repeated trials and appearances in front of Hebrew and Roman rulers. Take note of the way Paul engages with the rulers, what is most important to him, and the way he endures life in prison.

Day 1: Paul in Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20)

Day 2: Paul Travels to Jerusalem (Acts 21)

Day 3: Paul's Defense (Acts 22)

Day 4: The Assassination Plot Against Paul (23)

Day 5: Paul in Front of Felix (Acts 24)

Day 6: Paul Appeals to Caesar (Acts 25)

Day 7: Paul in Front of Agrippa (Acts 26)

Session 8: Nothing Can Stop God's Plan

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea

We can trust God with the detours of our lives, knowing that they will serve to accomplish his mission and make us more like Jesus.

Head Change

To know that God has a purpose for every circumstance in our lives.

Heart Change

To feel seen by the God who created us and sends us out to do his work.

Life Change

To use the unique gifts and circumstances God has given us to accomplish his mission for our lives.

OPEN

Think of a time when you were lost. What did it feel like? How did you find your way to where you needed to be?

There are times in our lives when we feel lost, like we have missed God's directions, or we aren't where we are supposed to be. Our discomfort can leave us scrambling, praying, searching for a way to change where we are in life. But God has not forgotten us; even when we feel lost, God is at work. In this session, we will see that detours are purposeful and can be some of the most impactful moments in our lives.

READ

Acts 27:21–26, 39–44; 28:16–31.

Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 27–28 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

How does God use Paul's difficult circumstances?

Why is it important that God sees and personally knows you?

In what ways is Acts "living history"?

Show Session 8: Nothing Can Stop God's Plan (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

A lot of us have expectations for how our lives will go, particularly when we are following Jesus. We think that if we are following God's plan, fulfilling his purpose for us, that life will be easy sailing. But in these last two chapters of Acts, when Paul was doing exactly what God called him to do, things continually went wrong. Read Acts 27:1–8, 21–26, and 28:1–3.

How would you describe Paul's road to Rome?

Paul wanted to go to Rome and Jesus had confirmed this goal in a dream (Acts 19:21; 23:11). By all accounts, Paul was going in the right direction, but his road was anything but easy. Slow travel, poor decision-making, and stormy seas turned his simple path into a winding, difficult journey. In the same way, following Jesus will not always be an easy road. At times, there will be roadblocks and hindrances to get where God wants us to go.

What challenges do you feel are keeping you from reaching your God-given potential?

Louie shared the story of his friends, Jay and Katherine Wolf, whose lives took a detour after Katherine suffered a stroke at a young age. But the Wolfs did not view the effects of the stroke on Katherine as a punishment or God failing them, rather they saw it as a God-given platform to fulfill his mission in their own lives. **In what ways could the detours in your own life be God's assignment to fulfill his mission through you?**

Louie said, "Your detour is for someone else's deliverance." The detours in our life can make us hyper-focused on ourselves and our own problems, but God might use your detour to bring more people to salvation. **What makes it hard to believe that your detour could help someone else believe in Jesus?**

Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, but his detour took him to Malta. God detoured Paul so that people could be healed and know the name of Jesus. **What new opportunities has a detour in your life given you to serve others or introduce someone to Jesus?**

God may change your path without changing your final destination. It may be more difficult or entirely different than you imagined. **What could it look like to hold your expectations for your path loosely?**

In what ways could you prepare your heart for the divine detours in your plan?

Note: To learn more about Paul's ultimate missionary goals, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Louie showed us a small detail in Acts that points to a much larger truth. In Acts 27:37, there is a quick note of the exact number of people on this ship. Through this we see that God is concerned with everyone, not just the heavy hitters like Paul. **In what ways have you compared your purpose to others'?**

Have you ever felt less important to God's mission than other Christians? What has made you feel that way?

In the video, Louie reminded us that God has a purpose for every one of us. "You are not insignificant. You are not incidental. You are not forgotten. God created you for a reason and he uniquely gifted you to be a part of the story of his church." **What is your role in your local church? In what ways are you using your gifts to serve the body of Christ?**

What is your role in building the church? Whom has God providentially placed you next to that do not know him?

It may be that you do not know what your role in God's story is yet. That is okay! Instead of trying to discover your life's grand purpose, think of the opportunities God has given you to be his witness in your sphere of influence. **In what ways could you serve God at work?**

In what ways could you serve God through your free time or hobbies?

What passions do you have that could be used to serve God?

Note: To work through an exercise in discovering what your purpose in God's story might be, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Things did not get easier for Paul when he arrived in Rome. When Paul finally got to where he wanted to be, he was rejected by the Roman Jews and put under house arrest. Read Acts 28:16–24, 30–31.

Would you say that Paul's mission to Rome was a success or a failure? Why?

In what ways was Paul doing exactly what God called him to do in Rome?

When we look at Paul's life and ministry, we realize that God's mission will often bring us into difficult circumstances. Paul was rejected by his countrymen, run out of cities, imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, snake-bitten, and attacked by angry mobs. **In what ways does Paul's example change the way you see the hurdles to God's mission in your own life?**

House arrest may have stopped Paul's missionary travels, but it did not stop the spread of the gospel. In the video, Louie pointed out that Paul penned the books known as the Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—while he was in the Roman prison. God can work through any circumstance. **In what ways is God working through your current circumstances?**

What could it look like to trust God, even when you don't understand where he is leading you?

Acts ends with Paul in a prison cell. But the story of the church did not end shackled in Rome. The living story of Acts is now being written through us. **Who handed you the baton of faith? Who might you hand that baton off to or welcome into the work you are already doing?**

Note: To examine Paul's final thoughts on his life and ministry, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

We have reached the end of The Acts of the Apostles. Take a moment to think back over the last eight sessions and your own time reading the book of Acts.

What have you learned about the mission of God and your place in it?

In what ways has your perspective of your current circumstances changed while reading Acts?

As you leave this study, what specific acts of faithfulness will you practice to help build and establish God's church?

LAST WORD

It may be easy to feel small or inconsequential. In the age of social media, we are told that only the people with hundreds of thousands of followers have any influence. But in God's view, every single person is important to the mission of God. You have a role to play in continuing the story of Acts in your office, your city, or even internationally.

Remember what you have learned in this study: God has a promise and a purpose for your life and there is no circumstance that can separate you from him and no detour that can derail his mission. At the end of the session, Louie reminded us, "The greatest thing you can do with your life is to bring someone else to life." When you take that step, Acts is not over; it is still being written through you.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Acts.

1. Paul's Ultimate Mission

Many of us have ambitions for our lives and goals we want to accomplish. Sometimes these goals align with God's plan for our lives; other times, they don't. So how do we hold our plans loosely while still aiming to reach our goals? Paul had a God-given goal to reach Rome, but he had his sights set on the ends of the known world. Read Romans 15:22–28.

What was Paul's hope for his life? Where was he hoping to go?

For Paul, Rome was a pitstop. His desire was to travel to the edge of the known world, Spain, where the Roman empire ended and the Atlantic Ocean stretched beyond sight and knowledge.

In what ways would Paul's goal fulfill the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20?

While there is some tradition from early church fathers (Jerome and Chrysostom) and the Catholic Church that Paul did reach Spain, there is no hard evidence that he ever did go to the ends of the earth before his death. We don't know if Paul ever got to where he wanted to go. If he did not reach Spain, there is no indication that he regretted it (see Go Deeper Section 3).

Now, think of the goals you have for your own life. You don't need to make every one of your goals focused on the mission of God, but you do need to examine and understand why those goals are important to you.

What do you want to accomplish in your life?

In what ways do your goals serve the mission of God?

What if God had a different plan for your life? What would you think or feel if you never accomplished your goals?

Whether our goals are personally fulfilling or aimed at furthering the mission of God, we may not reach our goals in the ways we expect. Read Psalm 16:1–3, 9.

What could it look like for you to hand over your plans to the Lord?

How could you be open to God's timing and direction as you seek to reach your goals?

2. Discovering Your Purpose

One of the most pressing questions in our lives is "What is my purpose?" We often find ourselves asking that question when we are at a crossroads or are dissatisfied with life. But trying to figure out our purpose is difficult because, in many ways, we are trying to understand the arc of our life's story while we are still in the middle of it. But you don't need to understand the full story before you know your next step.

What are you passionate about?

What unique gifts has God given you? Is there something that comes easy to you that is a struggle for other people?

What brings you joy or helps you recognize the beauty and brilliance of God in your own life?

In the video for this session, Louie reminded us that no one is inconsequential to God's plan. You don't have to be in ministry to minister to the world through your life. Review your answers to the questions above. **What is the intersection between your passion, your gifts, and your God-focused joy?**

It is shockingly easy to use our gifts in prideful ways, but God calls us to give our lives to others. Read Philippians 2:3–7. **In what ways could selfish ambition and vanity creep into your passion and gifts?**

What could it look like to use your gifts and passions to treat others as better than yourself?

In what ways could God work through your gifts and passions to further his mission?

It is helpful to think of your big dreams and goals, but instead of getting caught up in thinking about where you want to be in ten or fifteen years, think about your next step. **What can you do today or tomorrow to explore God's greater purpose for your life?**

3. Paul's Final Word

What is a successful life? That feels like an enormous question, especially in our culture, which is driven by the hope of personal success. No matter your stage of life or income level, every one of us has an image of what success looks like. **What do you think it takes to be successful? What would change in your life if you achieved your definition of success?**

Paul accomplished more in his life than most of us could dream to achieve. He was a leader of the church, gifted theologian, prolific evangelist, and he stood before kings and emperors. You couldn't count the lives he influenced across the dozens of cities he preached in. But in the end, none of his "success" mattered to him. Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8. **What seem to have mattered most to Paul when he looked back on his life?**

Paul was faithful to God, and in the end that was all that mattered. In 2 Timothy 2:3–6, Paul illustrates his faithfulness to the dedication of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Take a moment to examine each analogy.

In what ways was Paul faithful in his fight (like a soldier)?

In what ways was Paul faithful his race (like an athlete)?

In what ways did Paul keep his faith (like a farmer)?

Like a soldier, Paul served and suffered. Like an athlete, he trained and competed obediently in God's mission. Like a farmer, he sowed seeds of the gospel and waited in faith for a spiritual harvest.

Success for Christians is not wrapped up in our income, our achievements, our influence, or our individuality. Success in God's economy is all about faithfulness to Jesus and his mission. **What would change in your life if you defined "success" as faithfulness?**

If success is gauged by our faithfulness, your worth is not defined by the changing standards of our culture. You can be truly successful in any circumstance with any level of income or influence. You can be successful right now! **What would it look like for you to be faithful in your current circumstances, even if you aren't successful by our cultural standards?**

4. Acts 27–28 Reading Plan

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's word.

This week, use this reading guide to examine the final chapters of Acts.

Day 1: Paul Sets Sail (Acts 27:1–38)

Day 2: Shipwrecks and Snake Bites (Acts 27:39–28:10)

Day 3: Paul Reaches Rome (Acts 28:11–16)

Day 4: Paul's Evangelism in Rome (28:17–28)

Day 5: Paul's Life in Rome (Acts 28:30–31)