

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Evangelizing Like the Early Church



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ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Evangelizing Like the Early Church

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LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

The Big Picture

God's word is alive and it should be embodied in our lives.

St. Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuits and is one of the great saints of the Church. During his lifetime, thousands of men joined the Jesuits. As he would form them for their work to evangelize the world, he would end every meeting with one phrase: "Go, set the world on fire."

The fire that Ignatius is talking about is, of course, the fire of the Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples of all nations. Our Lord gave them the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to accomplish this mission. In the Acts of the Apostles, we get to see some amazing examples of how the Holy Spirit works through the apostles to reach people throughout the world.

The purpose of this study is to give an introduction to evangelization through the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. We have determined three areas of introduction that can be gathered from Acts:

First, evangelization requires some foundational principles. Specifically, we will cover the Church, the Holy Spirit, and prayer.

Second, evangelization is strategic in nature. The Acts of the Apostles reveals several gems of evangelistic strategy that we can apply today. Throughout this section, your group will actively strategize how you can evangelize on your campus.

Finally, the Acts of the Apostles reveals practical ways to evangelize that we can put to use in our own life. We do not want you to finish this study just knowing about evangelization; we want you to be able to evangelize. The practical section will give you tools to lead your group in developing evangelistic skills. As the leader, you will need to know how to perform these practical skills yourself so that you are able to teach them to your group.

These three sections are outlined below in the Table of Contents.

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Introduction

Blessed John Paul II once said, “The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church’s history.” The Acts of the Apostles Bible study is meant to provide examples of evangelization so that we are able to set the world on fire even in these difficult moments in Church history. We need the examples of the apostles and the saints to live out evangelization, and your campus needs your example of evangelization to live it out as well. If you need any help using this Bible study format, please see the article below.

How FOCUS Equip Studies Work

Each FOCUS Equip study highlights one particular passage of Scripture. As the leader, you guide a discussion about the passage, which allows participants to discover truths within the passage for themselves. This process is called self-discovered learning. Its format can help participants learn about Scripture and the way to discover Scripture on their own.

At the same time, you are not left alone to understand the Scriptures by yourself. Each chapter will contain a section titled “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” It will provide you with details about the passage, along with summaries about the passage’s big picture, how it applies to Jesus, and how it can apply to your group.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

The discussion guide supplies you with an opening question, some background information to share about the passage, and a set of example questions and answers on each passage to use with your group.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Prepare by studying “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” before the Bible study, and then use the discussion guide to direct the conversation with your group.

How to Prepare Your Study

With all of this information at your disposal, you are all set and ready to go. You just need to pass out the notes, ask each question as it is written, and read the answers to the questions, right? Well, not exactly. It would not make for a very engaging Bible study. This material is a Bible study in a can: It is meant to preserve good-quality Biblical content and allow for a broad distribution, but someone still needs to take the material out of the can, spice up the content, and serve it to your study. That person is you.

This is where the audience for your study is crucial; these are the people for whom you are “cooking.” Whether you have a group that has never heard the Gospel before or a group that attempts to live out the Gospel each day, you can adapt the Bible study to the group.

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The flexibility of this format is what can make it so effective.

Most likely, however, you will have a group with both kinds of people. Follow the example of my dance lesson: try to create a Bible study where beginners can learn the basics while the experts can be rejuvenated. Scripture is a great way to do this. St. Gregory the Great once said, "Holy Scripture is a stream in which the elephant may swim and the lamb may wade." Both groups should be able to discover something meaningful in the Scripture passage.

For more on How to Lead a Bible study, check out our resource on FOCUSEquip.org. As a review, FOCUS Bible study leaders have 3 roles and 3 goals in each study.

Your 3 Key Roles

With all of the above information in mind, remember that you have 3 key roles in this study. These 3 roles are your contribution to the study, and doing these 3 things well will make the study successful.

1. Prayer: Ultimately, it will be God Who changes the lives of the participants. By personal prayer and praying for your participants, you open the door for God to accomplish great things. Please take time to pray for your group, talking with God about each participant.
2. Hospitality: Effectively welcoming participants, getting to know them, meeting them outside of Bible study, and becoming real friends will be a great asset to the study. Create an environment that is open and personal, allowing

participants to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and experiences.

3. **Facilitator:** A good discussion really enhances the fruitfulness of a Bible study. Take the time to review the study and ask good, relevant questions to your group. Guide the discussion, allowing everyone to participate. Bring the discussion back if it gets too far astray.

Your 3 Key Goals

There will, no doubt, be many questions and discussions that come up throughout the study. You may even find yourself a bit lost here or there. However, the goals listed below are what you are ultimately trying to accomplish. Keeping these in mind throughout the study will help you stay on course.

1. **Deep Transformation:** Through interaction with God's word and one another, it is our hope that the lives of your Bible study members will be profoundly changed. The purpose of a Bible study is not to simply learn information or to be a part of a Bible study club, but allow the Lord to transform our lives. Specifically, we hope that students, through Scripture, are drawn more intimately to our Lord in the sacraments and liturgy of the Church where they can most fully receive the gift of God's grace in their lives.
2. **Intimate Fellowship:** If people are going to be deeply transformed, they will need others along the way, not only to help this transformation, but also to make sure they continue this transformation in the future. Your goal as a leader is to take a group of people with various backgrounds and

Introduction

personalities and help them form authentic relationships with one another.

3. **Spiritual Multiplication:** Another important dynamic of small groups is their ability to be reproduced. As you lead, pray that the Lord will raise up members of your small group to go on to disciple others and to lead Bible studies of their own.

Final Note

One of the best ways to learn how to lead a Bible Study is to learn from others. Consider observing someone else's Bible study to learn how they have been successful. Also, ask a missionary or your discipler to come to your study and give you feedback on how you are doing.

The Challenge

To properly lead this study, you will need to prepare in advance and apply God's word in your own life.



Chapter 1

Evangelization in the Context of the Church

Acts 1

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 12 - 17

DISCUSSION

Pages 18 - 24



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 1

The Big Picture

The opening of the Acts of the Apostles outlines the entire book while also showing that evangelization starts within the context of the authority of the Church.

The Acts of the Apostles is a historical narrative of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early Church. From the founding of the Church to the day of Pentecost to the preaching of the apostles, the Holy Spirit is working to spread the gospel message to the entire world. This historical genre or type of literature would have been known to its first audience. The ancient world had similar works such as the "Acts of Caesar," which praised the greatness of the caesars while providing moral lessons in the process. Acts of the Apostles follows a similar pattern as it recounts the greatness of the apostles and the power of Holy Spirit.

Who Wrote the Acts of the Apostles? (Acts 1:1-2)

Despite not directly referencing himself, St. Luke is normally proposed

as the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Several pieces of evidence help us know that this is true.

- Acts 1:1 addresses the letter to Theophilus and references the author's first book about what "Jesus began to do and teach." The Gospel of Luke is also addressed to Theophilus. Similar themes and vocabulary are used in each narrative.
- Historically, several early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus (180 AD), Clement of Alexandria (200 AD), and Eusebius (325 AD) all recognized St. Luke as the author.
- Through the book, we also learn that St. Luke is a companion of St. Paul during his missionary journeys. In the second half of Acts, the St. Luke uses the words "we," "us," and "our" in the narrative (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

Outside of the book of Acts, we know very little else about St. Luke. Colossians 4:14 tells us that St. Luke was a physician, and it is also believed that he was a Gentile and not a Jew.

Structure of the Book (Acts 1:3-11)

The Acts of the Apostles serves as a bridge between the Gospel and our lives today. The Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of Jesus' mission on earth, and at the same time, the book has no real conclusion. In an indirect way, this reinforces the message that Jesus' mission continues through us, the Church, today.

Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 set the scene for the entire book: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

This passage foretells the apostles' fate. The word "witness," in Greek, means martyr. This is where the English word martyr comes from. Ten out of the eleven apostles (all but John) would be killed for preaching the gospel.

Acts 1:8 also gives a geographical roadmap for how the rest of the book will unfold:

- Jerusalem (Chapters 1-7)
- Judea and Samaria (Chapters 8-12)
- The "ends of the Earth" (Roman Empire) (Chapters 13-28)

Application to Jesus

The Acts of the Apostles is not a separate story from the gospel but just another chapter, as the apostles continue the work and teachings of Jesus.

Major Themes in Acts 1

Ends of the Earth

Jesus gives His disciple a clear goal: Preach the message of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. But this wasn't a new idea; it was a fulfillment of the prophecies and covenants of the Old Testament.

The beginning of these covenants began in the book of Genesis when God established His covenant with all of mankind through Adam and Eve. As the result of sin in Adam and Noah, God re-establishes His covenant just with Abraham and his descendants (which includes the Israelites). It was always God's plan to re-establish His covenant with all of mankind once again. Isaiah 49:6 states, "You will be my

servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

In Acts, we see the fulfillment of this plan as Israel is restored (twelve apostles symbolizing the restored twelve tribes of Israel; see Luke 22:28-30) and told to preach salvation to the ends of the earth.

We see the apostles continue the restoration of Israel, as Acts first focuses on St. Peter’s preaching of the gospel to the Jews (Acts 1-12) and then St. Paul’s preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth with the Gentiles (Acts 13-28).

Passing of Authority (Acts 1:12-26)

Acts 1:12-26 is a great example of how authority passes on within the Church. Let’s look at some context from the Old Testament and Gospels to see where this originated and how it applies to bishops today.

This process was set in motion by Jesus, who instructed St. Peter to lead the Church during His absence (Matthew 16:13-20). In Matthew 16, St. Peter boldly declares that Jesus is the Messiah—the anointed one or king who would re-establish God’s kingdom on earth. In Jesus’ response, He appoints St. Peter to an office in His kingdom called *al-beyit* in Hebrew or (in English, “one over the household”). This office was found in many ancient kingdoms, including Israel’s (see Isaiah 22:15-25). The fact that the position was an office was also significant, because offices are passed on from one person to another. (For more on this, see the article “The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy” by Kevin Cotter that goes with this chapter.)

Some of this authority was also extended to the other apostles as well. In Matthew 18:18, Jesus grants the power to bind and loose to the apostles

(Note: Apostles and disciples are sometimes used interchangeably in Matthew; see Matthew 10:1-2). This model establishes the authority structure of the pope and bishops in the Church today and the way that this authority is passed on.

St. Clement, who was ordained a bishop by St. Peter himself, gives us a historical account of how authority passed from the apostles in the early Church in the year 96 AD:

Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers.... Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. (St. Clement, *Letter to the Corinthians* 42:4-5, 44:1-3)

With this passing of authority at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke makes it clear that evangelization and the movement of the Holy Spirit pour forth from the offices that Jesus established. This is why FOCUS always receives the support of the bishop of a diocese or archdiocese that we serve before our apostolate works at a campus. Evangelization within the context of the authority of the Church is the biblical model for evangelizing to the ends of the earth.

Application to Your Life

Acts has no definitive conclusion. The mission of the apostles continues to be the Church's mission today.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 1

STEP 1: OPENER

Why do you think Acts of the Apostles is important for us to study today?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

The Acts of the Apostles is a historical narrative of the work of the Holy Spirit in the early Church. From the founding of the Church to the day of Pentecost to the preaching of the apostles, the Holy Spirit is working to spread the gospel message to the entire world. Today, we are going to get at an overview of the Acts of the Apostles and take a look at its first chapter.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 1:1-26. Let's learn a little background about the book of Acts by reading Acts 1:1-2.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. The author begins the Acts of the Apostles with, “In the first book.” What is this first book?

Answer: The Gospel of Luke

2. Read Luke 1:1-4. Who is the author of the Acts of the Apostles?

Answer: St. Luke. Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus.

3. Read Acts 16:10-13 and Colossians 4:14. What do we learn about St. Luke? How do you think that changes the way he writes?

Answer: He is a companion of St. Paul for some of his missionary travels, and he is a physician. Being a companion, he has firsthand experience of stories or has talked to the people directly involved. Being a physician, he might write more about healings and be able to describe them well.

4. In verse 1, what do the words “all that Jesus began to do and teach” imply for the book of Acts?

Answer: Jesus continues to work and teach through the apostles and the Church.

Read Acts 1:3-11

5. What is Jesus' plan for the apostles in verses 5 and 8?

Answer: They are to wait for the Holy Spirit and then be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

6. Use the first paragraph of the section *Structure of the Book* in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" to show how Acts 1:8 is a thumbnail sketch of the entire book.

7. Read Luke 22:28-30 and Isaiah 49:6. How is Acts 1:8 a fulfillment of this prophecy about a restored Israel and a message for the nations?

Answer: See the passage "Ends of the Earth" in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage."

Read Acts 1:12-26

8. Read John 20:19. What changed between that event and what we see here in Acts 1:12-14?

Answer: They had a living encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

9. Despite their fears and failings, why do you think God still trusts the apostles to be the leaders of His Church?

Allow the group to discuss.

10. In verse 20, St. Peter refers to Judas' position as an office. From what you know about an office, why is this significant?

Answer: Offices are passed on from one person to another. Think of offices like a president or king; they don't end with the death of that person.

11. What background do we have regarding the passing of an office in God's kingdom for the Gospels and Old Testament?

Allow the group to discuss. Note to the Leader: Your group may have an expert understanding of papal and episcopal succession, or this might be their first time looking at this issue. This question can serve as a good gauge for where they are in their understanding. Use the section "Passing of Authority" from "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" and the accompanying article "The Kingdom, Authority, and the Papacy" to fill your group in on any gaps that might exist. The quote by St. Clement is particularly helpful in conveying how this process relates to our bishops today.

12. When most Christians think of the Acts of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit, they most likely don't first associate it with Church offices or authority. Why do you think St. Luke puts this section at the beginning of the Gospel?

Allow the group to discuss.

13. Why do you think that someone might believe that evangelization within a Church structure might reduce the effectiveness of evangelization?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Why do you think that evangelizing within the context of the Church's authority is important?

Allow the group to discuss.



Chapter 2

Evangelization and the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-21, 37-42

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 26 - 31

DISCUSSION

Page 32 - 38



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 2:1-21, 37-42

The Big Picture

The Holy Spirit is instrumental to our evangelization.

The Feast of Pentecost

When most Christians hear the word “Pentecost,” they immediately think of the coming of the Holy Spirit in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. But before this event, the Feast of Pentecost had a deep tradition within the Jewish culture.

The Feast of Pentecost was celebrated approximately 50 days after the Passover. In the Acts of the Apostles, this would have been 50 days after Jesus’ death. The feast of Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts that required Jewish men to travel to Jerusalem. It has agricultural roots, but theological significance was added over time. In particular, it evolved into a renewal of the Jews’ covenant with God and a celebration of the giving of the Torah, the Jewish law. It is during this Jewish feast that the Holy Spirit comes in a powerful way to the apostles.

Expectation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13)

The coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts can appear strange and almost random to the 21st-century reader. The Spirit comes suddenly, mightily, and with “tongues of fire.” The author is keen to mention not only that the preaching of the apostles was translated into several languages, but he also takes the pains to mention a long list of nationalities, some which we might not recognize.

Similar to the background of the Feast of Pentecost, the background of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament can help us understand the true significance of what is going on in the passage.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was tied up with a new age where a Messiah king would re-establish the Jewish kingdom. One such passage in the Old Testament comes from the prophet Ezekiel. Speaking of this new age, Ezekiel says,

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.... I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. (Ezekiel 36:24-26; 37:22)

In Acts 2, the author, Luke, is going out of his way to show that the prophecies of the Old Testament like this one from Ezekiel are being fulfilled.

Here are a few insights on how the Old Testament prophecies are being fulfilled.

The Nations

One of the biggest problems of restoring the kingdom of Israel is that her people had been taken into exile. Out of the twelve tribes of Israel, the ten northern tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and eventually most of these members of Israel married people from other nationalities. The Jewish covenant was based on marrying within Judaism and staying within the land.

But prophets like Ezekiel prophesied that God would still be able to gather these Jews from the nations through His Spirit (Ezekiel 36:24). Here in Acts, we get a foretaste of this saving action by God, as Israelites from all over are hearing the message of the New Covenant. At the same time, the roadmap found in Acts 1:8 (mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study) is beginning to be fulfilled.

New Law

The tradition of the Jewish Pentecost focused on the giving of the Torah or Jewish law. Here, God is placing a new law on the hearts of mankind through the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Tongues of Fire

Maybe the most odd and amazing part of this event is the crowd's ability to hear the apostles' preaching in their own language. This would have been particularly odd for the crowd to hear, because many of the apostles would have been from Galilee, a region not known for its intelligence or crafty speech. Maybe the best explanation for this incredible sign is the Old Testament account of the Tower of Babel. At the tower of Babel, God confused and scattered the builders by giving them different languages. Here, God gathers His people together through one language.

Application to Jesus

The coming of Jesus brings a new age of the Holy Spirit.

St. Peter's Presentation of the Gospel (Acts 2:14-21)

As the appointed shepherd of the apostles and the Church while Jesus is gone (Matthew 16:16-20), St. Peter steps up to explain to the crowd what is going on. He specifically notes a passage from the prophet Joel to explain how the Holy Spirit is coming at this time.

This passage from Joel 2:28-32 plays an important role in the Acts of the Apostles. Several of the quotes within the passage occur throughout the book of Acts.

Example Joel passages used in Acts:

- Your daughters shall prophesy (Acts 21:8-9)
- Young men shall see visions (Acts 9:10)
- Wonders and signs (Acts 2:22; 14:3; 15:12)
- Calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16)

St. Peter's testimony continues to recount the basic facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection while also showing how this fits into the prophecies of the Old Testament.

The Crowd's Reaction (Acts 2:37-42)

The crowd is cut to the heart after St. Peter's testimony about Jesus. They ask him, "What shall we do?" St. Peter instructs them to be baptized so that their sins may be forgiven, and through this Baptism they too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; for more on the Catholic Church's view on baptism and the Holy Spirit, see CCC 1213-1216).

Three thousand followers were added that day through the preaching of St. Peter. These people go on to live out the four characteristics of the early Church and our Church today: "the apostles' teaching [Scripture], fellowship, breaking of the bread [the Mass], and...the prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

There are several directions that your group could go as they begin to unravel the deep meaning found in these verses. While it is easy to get caught up in the historical background or prophesy surrounding this passage, be sure to make the verses apply to the lives of the participant. We are all called to be open to the Holy Spirit and deepen the Spirit's action in our lives. How do we open our hearts to allow the Spirit to move more deeply?

Application to Our Lives

How can we build the habit of being open to the Holy Spirit?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 2:1-21, 37-42

STEP 1: OPENER

Today, we are looking at Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. When you think of the Holy Spirit, what comes to mind?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

When most Christians hear the word “Pentecost,” they immediately think of the coming of the Holy Spirit in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. But before this event, the Feast of Pentecost had a deep tradition within the Jewish culture.

The Feast of Pentecost was celebrated approximately 50 days after the Passover. In the Acts of the Apostles, this would have been 50 days after Jesus’ death. The feast of Pentecost was one of three pilgrim feasts that required Jewish men to travel to Jerusalem. It has agricultural roots, but theological significance was added over time. In particular, it evolved into a renewal of the Jews’ covenant with God and a celebration of the giving of the Torah, the Jewish law. It is during this Jewish feast that the Holy Spirit comes in a powerful way to the apostles.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 2:1-21, 37-42. Start by reading Acts 2:1-14.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. Similar to the background to the Feast of Pentecost, the background of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament can help us understand the true significance of what is going on in the passage. Read Ezekiel 36:24-27 and Ezekiel 37:21-23. In these passages, Ezekiel is talking about a new age of restoration. What is included in this new age?

Answer: Some elements: Sprinkling of new water (Baptism), a new heart, God's spirit, gathering of His people from the nations, one nation under one king.

2. What elements found in Ezekiel are found here in Acts 2:1-14?

Answer: We see the foretaste of the Lord gathering the Jews from all the countries (Ezekiel 36:24; Acts 2:8-11). God is putting a new Spirit into His people (Ezekiel 36:27; Acts 2:1-4).

3. What do you think is the significance of the apostles' being able to speak in multiple languages?

Answer: It allows the Lord to gather up the Jews from every nation. See the Tongues of Fire paragraph in the "Expectation of the Holy Spirit" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" for more background.

4. Read Acts 2:1-4 closely. What does St. Luke emphasize regarding who receives the Holy Spirit?

Answer: He emphasizes that everyone receives the Holy Spirit who was gathered by using the words "each one of them" and "all filled."

5. Do you think that everyone is called to receive the Holy Spirit?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. Why do you think some people shy away from the Holy Spirit?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read Acts 2:14-21

Note to Leader: Feel free to share the paragraphs under "St. Peter's Presentation of the Gospel" on how this passage relates to the rest of the Acts of the Apostles.

7. Why do you think St. Peter uses the Old Testament as an explanation of the gospel?

Answer: His audience was Jewish so he tells them what was happening in a way that they would understand.

8. The prophecy from Joel is lived out throughout the Acts of the Apostles. Daughters prophesy in Acts 21:8-9, young men see visions in Acts 9:10, and wonders and signs happen throughout the book. What are some ways that we can show the Holy Spirit is working in our lives today?

Allow the group to discuss. Note to the Leader: Find out how the crowd reacts to St. Peter's speech by reading Acts 2:37-42.

9. Many respond positively to Peter's testimony and ask the apostles what they can do. What does St. Peter tell them?

Answer: Be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins so that they can receive the Holy Spirit.

10. After receiving the Holy Spirit, what four things do these first Christian do to live out this gift?

Answer: Apostles' teaching (Scripture), fellowship, breaking of the bread (the Mass), and to the prayers.

11. Which one of these do you need work on?

Allow the group to discuss.

12. Do you have a specific goal in mind? How will you reach this goal?

Allow the group to discuss.



Chapter 3

Prayer as the Heart of Evangelization

Acts 4:23-31

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 40 - 45

DISCUSSION

Pages 46 - 50



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 4:23-31

The Big Picture

God is the one who converts hearts and calls others to Himself. Prayer must be the foundation for our outreach.

Sometimes we can imagine two types of Christians in our minds: those who seek to be pious, holy, and prayerful and those who seek to be active and zealous to spread the Good News. In reality, having good habits of prayer and evangelization are tough work. The good news is that active evangelization should lead us to a deeper prayer life, and an active prayer life should lead us to a greater zeal for evangelization. In Acts 4:23-31, we get a glimpse of how this works.

Experience of the Resurrection

The scene begins with Sts. Peter and John being released from prison. In the previous sections of Acts (3:1-4:22), Sts. Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple and are summarily questioned by Jewish officials and thrown into prison.

Unlike Sts. Peter and John, we have not had the privilege of seeing a resurrected Jesus or the many signs and wonders they witnessed. However, we can have a profound experience of Jesus in prayer that can help create a longing within us to share this great joy with others. Our evangelization starts with our own experience of who God is in our own lives and a desire for others to experience Him as well.

A Bold Prayer (Acts 4:23-31)

As Sts. Peter and John return from prison and their preaching of the gospel, they immediately turn to prayer. Several aspects of their prayer stand out:

1. Sovereignty of God

Their prayer starts with the sovereignty of God. They are addressing the one who made heaven, earth, and the sea and everything in it. God is in control, and we pray to Him because we are not.

2. Scripture and Psalms 2

As we seek to encounter Jesus in our prayer, Scripture is a great place to start. God's word is a clear message about His character and His message for our lives. Here in Acts 4, a passage from Psalms 2 is used. The passage is about rulers who are gathered against the Lord and His anointed. In light of their previous persecution, the apostles believe that this applies to the Jewish rulers and officials as well. In Acts 4, only the beginning of Psalms 2 is quoted. The rest of the psalm notes how God laughs in the face of those against him and how He

will remove their opposition (Psalms 2:4-9). The apostles use God's character in the past in asking Him to work in the present. We can follow their example by using Scripture in our own prayer lives.

3. The Name of Jesus

In verse 30, the apostles specifically use the name of Jesus in their prayer. This is a pattern throughout the book of Acts: People are baptized in His name (Acts 2:38), the lame are healed in His name (Acts 3:6), the Jewish officials ask that the apostles not preach His name (Acts 5:40), and exorcisms are done in His name (Acts 16:18).

The Jewish people had a deep reverence for the name of God because of the power that it held—so much so that they would not write God's name (YHWH) directly. It was only uttered once each year by the high priest.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) has some great things to say about the significance of Jesus' name.

On the power of God's name: "Jesus' Resurrection glorifies the name of the Savior God, for from that time on it is the name of Jesus that fully manifests the supreme power of the 'name which is above every name.' The evil spirits fear his name; in his name his disciples perform miracles, for the Father grants all they ask in this name. The name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer" (CCC 434-435).

God's name invokes His presence: "He is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:20)" (CCC 1108).

Today, it is easy to lose sight of the power of Jesus' name. In fact, the name of Jesus is most normally used as a swear word today. This is what the Ten Commandments mean by using the Lord's name in vain—using God's name with no purpose and not realizing the power that the name holds. Just like the apostles, we should use God's name as a powerful weapon in our prayers.

Application to Jesus

The name of Jesus is a powerful tool for our prayer.

4. Boldness

While it is important to see what the apostles pray for, it is also interesting to see what they do not pray for. In light of potential punishment from the Jews, they don't pray that their lives would be more comfortable; they pray that God would increase their boldness despite the obstacles. Their proclamation of the gospel led them to prayer, while their prayer leads them to proclaim God's name with a greater boldness.

The passage ends with their prayers being answered: They are filled with the Spirit and a boldness to speak God's word (Acts 4:31). Sometimes it is too easy to skip over prayer in our evangelization work, but prayer is our first step and remains the heart of great evangelization.

Application to Our Lives

How can we allow our prayer lives to strengthen our evangelization and our evangelization to strengthen our prayer lives?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 4:23–31

STEP 1: OPENER

What comes to mind when you think of a person who is really pious and prayerful? Are they the type of person who preaches the gospel? Why or why not?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Today we are going to look at the relationship between prayer and evangelization through the story of Sts. Peter and John. In the previous sections of Acts (Acts 3:1-4:22), Sts. Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple and are summarily questioned by Jewish officials and thrown into prison. During this questioning, Sts. Peter and John give testimony to Jesus. The Jewish authorities threaten them and send them away. Following this episode, we get a unique view into the prayer lives of the apostles.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Acts 4:23-31

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. What stood out to you about the prayer of the Apostles?

Allow the group to discuss.

2. How do you hear and see God through prayer?

Allow the group to discuss.

3. What is difficult about hearing and seeing God through prayer?

Allow the group to discuss.

4. The apostles begin their prayer with the title “Sovereign Lord.” Why do you think God’s sovereignty is important to think about when we are praying?

Answer: It is important to realize who we are talking to. We can sometimes forget who is in charge of this world. Recognizing God’s sovereignty helps remind us that God is in control.

5. In the prayer, they quote Psalms 2. Read Psalms 2:1-9. What is this psalm all about?

Answer: The psalm is about the Gentile rulers standing in the way of God’s plans and God pushing them aside.

6. Given the content of the situation, why do you think the apostles use this Scripture passage?

Answer: They are being oppressed by rules who are standing in the way of God's plans.

7. Why do you think the use of Scripture is important for our prayer lives?

Answer: See "Scripture and Psalms 2" in the section "A Bold Prayer."

8. In this prayer, they mention "the name of Jesus." What significance does the name of Jesus have in Acts so far?

Answer: People are baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38), and the Jewish officials asked that the Apostles stop using the name of Jesus.

9. Read paragraphs 434-435 and 1108 in the Catechism. (If no one has a Catechism you can use the text in the "A Bold Prayer" section.) What is the significance of Jesus' name?

Answer: The name of Jesus has the power to bring His very presence (CCC 1108). Miracles and exorcisms are performed through His name (CCC 434). The name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer (CCC 435).

10. How can we use the name of Jesus in our own prayer lives?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. The apostles are in a very hostile situation. Jesus has just been killed by the Jewish authorities, and now these same authorities are threatening them. In light of this, what is interesting about what they don't pray for?

Answer: They don't pray to be comfortable. They pray to be bolder.

12. In light of the example of Sts. Peter and John, what would you change about your own personal prayer?

Allow the group to discuss.

Note to Leader: Consider closing the study by praying out loud as a group for your evangelization efforts as a way to live out the apostles' example.



Chapter 4

Preparing to Share the Faith

Acts 8:26–40

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 52 - 57

DISCUSSION

Pages 58 - 62



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 8:26–40

The Big Picture

Are we prepared to share the gospel with others? Are we thinking about which groups we can impact?

The last section of this Bible study focused on the foundations of evangelization—the Church, the Holy Spirit, and prayer. This chapter starts a new section that focuses on strategy. Most sessions will have a practical component where your study will strategize about evangelization on your campus.

Should we be strategic about our evangelization or just be led by the Spirit? Some find evangelistic strategies and techniques to be ungodly. But in Acts 8, we find that Philip is guided by the Holy Spirit and that he and uses strategies and preparation to share the Gospel with others.

Focus on Philip

The beginning of Acts focuses on the ministry of St. Peter. Here, the focus shifts to Philip. (Side note: This Philip is not the apostle Philip, but the Philip who is one of the first deacons in the early Church.) Acts 8:1-5 clues us in to why this is the case: After the martyrdom of St. Stephen, chronicled in Acts 6-8, “a great persecution arose against the Church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria.... Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria” (Acts 8:1, 4).

On the surface, the persecution appears to be a hindrance to evangelization. And yet, it is this very persecution that furthers God's plan outlined in Acts 1:8: “But you shall receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” The message is clear: Obstacles won't stop God's plan. In fact, God will use obstacles to further His plans.

St. Philip and the Eunuch

It is this situation that sets up St. Philip's evangelistic encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch. St. Philip models several effective characteristics of an evangelist during this encounter:

1. He is open to listening to God to guide him (Acts 8:36).
2. He looks for opportunities to share the Good News (Acts 8:29-30).
3. He desires to share the Good News. Note how he runs to the eunuch (Acts 8:30).
4. He is prepared to share the Good News (Acts 8:35).

Isaiah and the Eunuch

The eunuch held a high position in the court of the Ethiopian queen. In order to hold this position, he was castrated. The eunuch comes to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish temple. Because of his castration, he would not be allowed to worship within the temple (Deuteronomy 23:1). Wanting to worship fully but not being able to would most likely cause the eunuch to search for answers.

The eunuch reads aloud a passage from the prophet Isaiah that speaks of a figure commonly called the Suffering Servant. The passage foretells of the suffering, humiliation, and death that the Messiah would undergo (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). St. Philip interprets the passage in light of Jesus' life and death.

Just three chapters later in this same book, Isaiah 56 will foretell of a future time when eunuchs and foreigners will be able to enter into a covenant with God (Isaiah 56:3-7). It is possible that he read this section as well, or that St. Philip shared it with him. Because he was restricted from full worship under the old law, it is no surprise that the eunuch is so excited to enter into the kingdom that he asks for baptism right away (Acts 8:37)!

Application to Jesus

Jesus is asking us to reach everyone in the world. What is our plan to reach them?

Affinity Groups

The passage ends with the eunuch returning to Ethiopia. According to St. Irenaeus (180 AD), the eunuch returns to evangelize Ethiopia (*Against Heresies* 3:12.8-10).

The fact that the eunuch returns to evangelize his own countrymen brings up a great strategy for evangelization. Most of the time our evangelization will be relational—we share Jesus with those who we are in friendship with. It can be incredibly effective to find likeminded people with whom we can share the gospel. They can relate to who we are and how Jesus has influenced our lives.

In FOCUS, we use the title “affinity groups” to describe how this works. Affinity groups are groups of people who have similar interests or backgrounds. On any given campus, there are hundreds of affinity groups—for instance, those on the rowing team, those who are in a fraternity, those who are freshmen, etc.

Because of the relationships in these groups, evangelization can happen more quickly and powerfully within them. For instance, if the president of a fraternity has a life-changing experience with Jesus Christ, he can share this experience with his fraternity brothers. Because he already has a relationship with them and is similar to them, it is easier for him to share the gospel and perhaps for them to be receptive to it. It is also possible for some affinity groups to affect other affinity groups as well. There are numerous accounts from the saints (like the one here in Acts) where a key figure in a nation is converted, which causes the whole nation to convert.

Affinity Groups Exercise

To end your study, brainstorm about affinity groups on campus. After brainstorming, review these questions: Which ones are the most influential on campus? Which ones can make the most impact? How can you reach them? Is there anyone in your study that has connections to these affinity groups? All of these questions are provided in the study guide.

Application to Our Lives

What affinity group can you reach out to?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 8:26–40

STEP 1: OPENER

Should we be strategic about our evangelization or just be led by the Spirit? Why or why not?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Today's passage looks at the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. This passage teaches us how to prepare for sharing the Good News with others. Philip and the eunuch both demonstrate evangelization strategies that we can use in our lives today.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Acts 8:26-40. Before you read this, check out the first question.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. Previously, Acts focused on the ministry of St. Peter. Now, we see a shift to St. Philip. Read Acts 8:1-5 to find out why.

2. In light of God's plan in Acts, what is ironic about the obstacles that the Church faces in Acts 8:1-5?

Answer: The persecution forces Christians to go to Judea and Samaria. In doing so, this helps to fulfill Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

3. What does this say about God's plans?

Answer: Not only will obstacles not stop God's plan; He can use them to further it.

Read Acts 8:26-40

4. Look at Acts 8:26-35. What are some of the evangelistic characteristics that St. Philip demonstrates during this encounter?

Answer: See the passage "St. Philip and the Eunuch."

5. Which one of these characteristics do you struggle with the most?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. What could help you improve this area?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. The passage the eunuch reads in Isaiah is about the Suffering Servant, a messianic figure who would suffer and die. St. Philip interprets this passage in light of Jesus. Just three chapters later in Isaiah, there is a passage that would apply directly to the eunuch. Read Isaiah 56:3-7. Why is the eunuch so excited to be baptized?

Answer: He is excited because, if this prophecy has been fulfilled, then he is able to be in full covenant with God.

8. In this case, the eunuch is very willing to listen to St. Philip and invites him to share what the passage means. In our encounters, this might not be the case. What do we do with people who do not want to hear the gospel?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: Pray for them. Preach the gospel with our lives. Seek to act charitably towards them. Be watchful for opportunities to discuss how faith relates to their lives.

9. What happens at the end of the passage?

Answer: The eunuch is baptized and goes home rejoicing. St. Philip is caught up in a whirlwind and is taken to another town.

10. Most of us haven't seen many signs and wonders, let alone performed them like the apostles in Acts. Despite this, how do we continue to have faith that God is working in our world and working through us?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. According to St. Irenaeus (180 AD), the eunuch returns to evangelize Ethiopia. Why is it advantageous for the eunuch to evangelize his own people?

Answer: He knows them well. He has influence in that country. They can relate to his experience because they are similar to him.

12. Explain affinity groups to your group from the section "Affinity Groups". What are some affinity groups on our campus?

Answer: There are usually hundreds of affinity groups on any campus. Feel free to let your group answer this question as long as answers come to them fairly quickly.

13. What are some of the most influential affinity groups on campus? Sometimes the more influential the affinity group, the better the possibility of getting the message of Jesus out to as many people as possible.

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Which group of people has God put into your life for you to reach out to?

Allow the group to discuss.



Chapter 5

What's God's Mission for Your Life?

Acts 9:1-19

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 64 - 69

DISCUSSION

Pages 70 - 74



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 9:1-19

The Big Picture

God has a plan for our life. How are we called to serve?

What is God's plan for your life? In this chapter, we will look at the conversion of St. Paul to examine how God gave him a mission for his life. Then, your group will begin to outline their own personal mission statements to explore God's plan for their lives.

Saul the Pharisee, Saul the Persecutor

As we saw earlier, Saul (known later as St. Paul) consented to the death of the first martyr, St. Stephen (Acts 8:1). He also scattered the Christians to Judea and Samaria through his persecutions. Now he takes center stage as he goes to Damascus to persecute the Christians there.

We know a little bit about St. Paul's background from his own account in the New Testament. He tells us that he was a Jew from the tribe of

Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). He was a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, and studied under the greatest Pharisee of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was zealous for the law, meaning that he was willing to use violence even against his fellow Jews to protect the correct teaching of the law (see 1 Maccabees 3:23-26).

'Saul, Saul, Why Are You Persecuting Me?' (Acts 9:1-9)

Saul's zealousness for the law helps explain why he violently persecuted the Christians and why he is intent on traveling to Damascus. Damascus is about 130 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the commercial center of the Roman Empire and the intersection of many important trade routes. Saul wants to try to make sure Christianity doesn't spread to the many Jews who live in the Jewish diaspora along these trade routes, after seeing how quickly the Christian faith spread in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47; Acts 4:4).

On his way to Damascus, Saul sees a blinding light and hears a voice call out "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). In asking who is speaking, God responds, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Notice how Jesus equates Saul's persecution of the early Christians with Himself! The Church makes up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). Saul continues to be blind and is led into the city of Damascus. Saul traveled to Damascus to bind Christians and take them away; now he is taken captive by Christ and led away to Damascus.

Application to Jesus

Jesus' mission should remain at the heart of our mission no matter what we are called to do.

Ananias: Courageous Evangelization (Acts 9:10-19)

As Saul remains blind, God calls Ananias in a vision. Ananias quickly responds to the Lord's call in a manner similar to many Old Testament figures (1 Samuel 3:4, Genesis 22:1-2). Once Ananias hears that God wants him to heal a murderer of Christians, he shows a little more hesitation (Acts 9:13-14). Notice God doesn't tell Ananias that Saul has seen Jesus in a vision or has had a conversion; Ananias just has to trust that Saul won't arrest him. When Ananias prays over Saul, Saul regains his sight and is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is then baptized and has his first bite of food in three days, after which he immediately begins preaching about Jesus in Damascus. From Acts 13:9 and on, Saul will be known as Paul.

St. Paul, the Suffering Servant

In Acts 9:15-16, God tells Ananias His plan for St. Paul: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Earlier, we saw St. Philip explain to the eunuch that Jesus was the Suffering Servant from Isaiah. Here in Acts 9, St. Paul will take on the role and mission of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant.

Compare the following verses to the mission given to St. Paul in Acts 9:15-16. Isaiah 42:1-3 states, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights, I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations." Isaiah 49:6, 7 states, "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.... Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

St. Paul is given the mission of the Suffering Servant and then lives this mission out throughout the Acts of the Apostles. He is filled with God's Spirit (Acts 9:17). He preaches to the sons of Israel (Acts 9:19-22). He preaches before kings (Acts 13:7-12). He preaches to the nations (Acts 13:13-14; Acts 16:1; Acts 18:5-6). In the end, God's message that St. Paul will suffer for His name comes to pass as he faces trials throughout his life and ultimately martyrdom.

During all of this, St. Paul understands that he is taking on this mission of the Suffering Servant (see Acts 13:46-47; Galatians 1:11-17; Romans 15:20-21).

God's Plan for Our Lives

Hopefully, this passage from Acts will help us to reflect: What is God's plan for our lives?

If possible, have your group bring their laptops or tablets to the Bible study in order to make their own mission statement. As a group, go to www.franklincovey.com/msb. Build a personal mission statement. You will have to create a log-in in order to go through the exercise. Find time during the study or the next study to share your mission statements as a group.

Application to Our Lives

How will we figure our God's mission for our lives? Use patience, prayer, and the guidance of a spiritual director to discover what God is calling you to do.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 9:1-19

STEP 1: OPENER

Do you think God has a specific mission for your life? What is the best way to discover what that mission is?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

As we saw earlier, Saul (known later as St. Paul) consented to the death of the first martyr, St. Stephen (Acts 8:1). He also scattered the Christians to Judea and Samaria through his persecutions. Now he takes center stage as he goes to Damascus to persecute the Christians there.

Damascus is about 130 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the commercial center of the Roman Empire and the intersection of many important trade routes. Saul wants to try to make sure Christianity doesn't spread to the many Jews who live in the Jewish diaspora along these trade routes, after seeing how quickly the Christian faith spread in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47; Acts 4:4).

Let's look at the mission God gives Saul in Acts 9 during his conversion.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 9:1-19. Start by reading Acts 9:1-9.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. From the Acts of the Apostles and other places in the New Testament, what do we know about who Saul is before his conversion?

Answer: See the second paragraph in "Saul the Pharisee, Saul the Persecutor."

2. What is significant about Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Answer: Jesus equates Saul's persecution of the early Christians with Himself. The Church makes up the body of Christ.

3. Knowing that Saul was seeking to arrest Christians and lead them away, what is ironic about what happens to Saul?

Answer: Saul traveled to Damascus to bind Christians and take them away. Now, he is taken captive by Christ and led away to Damascus.

Read Acts 9:10-19

4. What is Ananias' reaction to God's initial call?

Answer: He is quick to respond—"Here I am, Lord" Acts 9:10.

5. What is Ananias' reaction to God's specific request?

Answer: He hesitates because he knows who St. Paul is.

6. If you were in this situation, how would you react?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. Who do you identify with more in this chapter, St. Paul or Ananias? Why?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. Think of the most outspoken critic of Christianity on your campus. What would be the impact if they had a conversion?

Allow the group to discuss.

9. In Acts 8:15-16, what is God's plan for St. Paul?

Answer: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

10. In the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, St., Philip showed how Jesus fulfilled God's plan for the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. Read Isaiah 42:1-7 and Isaiah 49:1-7. How is the mission God gives to St. Paul similar to the Suffering Servant?

Answer: St. Paul is chosen (Acts 9:15; Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 49:7). He receives God's Spirit (Acts 9:17; Isaiah 42:1). He is to go to the nations (Acts 9:15; Isaiah 42:1). He is to preach to Israel (Acts 8:15; Isaiah 49:5). He preaches to kings (Acts 8:14; Isaiah 49:7).

11. Do you think that God has given you a specific mission in your life?

Allow the group to discuss.

12. One of the best ways to discover your mission is by creating a personal mission statement.

(If possible, have your group bring their laptops or tablets to the Bible study in order to make their own mission statement. If not, you can make it a "homework" assignment to share next study). As a group, go to www.franklincovey.com/msb. Build a personal mission statement. You will have to create a log-in in order to go through the exercise. Find time during the study or the next study to share your mission statements as a group.



Chapter 6

'Win, Build, Send' Evangelization and the Spiritual Multiplication Depth Chart

Acts 14:1-28

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 76 - 79

DISCUSSION

Pages 80 - 84



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 14:1–28

The Big Picture

What's our strategy in the relationships we have with others?

'Win, Build, Send' Evangelization

Evangelization doesn't usually happen by accident. In reading through the Acts of the Apostles, it is so easy to get caught up in the signs, wonders, and supernatural happenings that we can fail to recognize that there is human strategy involved as well. The goal of this study is to examine St. Paul's evangelization strategy in Acts 14 and then begin to fill out a Spiritual Multiplication Depth Chart to strategize about the people God has put in our own lives.

Win: Sow Broadly (Acts 14:1-18)

In Acts 14:1, Sts. Paul and Barnabas arrive at Iconium and enter the Jewish synagogue. This was their normal custom after arriving in a city (see Acts 13:5, 13:14, 17:2). If there were a synagogue in the city,

St. Paul began by preaching there; if there were no synagogue, then he would preach at a Jewish place of prayer; if no place of prayer, he would find another advantageous place to preach.

Synagogues were great places to teach for a number of reasons. First, a large number of people would be gathered there. Second, those gathered would be aware of the need for a Messiah and familiar with the Old Testament. Third, they were used to having visiting rabbis (like St. Paul) come and speak to them. Even though St. Paul was often persecuted by the Jews, he felt an urgent call to announce the gospel to them and felt that it was a strategic place for evangelization.

The key takeaway here is for us to start broad in our evangelization attempts. If you think of a farmer sowing seed, the farmer is willing to sow seed broadly throughout his field. Some of the seed will take root and some will not, but he sows broadly before nurturing the seed that takes root.

Keeping this principle in mind, it is important for us to think through everyone we can reach before narrowing our attention to those in whom we will invest our time. The Spiritual Multiplication Depth Chart, which we will look at later in this chapter, will help us accomplish this task.

Application to Jesus

Jesus is calling each person to grow closer to Him in a way that makes sense for them. How are we helping this process?

Build: Strengthening the Disciples (Acts 14:19-28)

While Sts. Paul and Barnabas are on a mission to evangelize the world, this does not mean that they do not continue to care for their converts after they move on to another city. Check out the map of their missionary journey below. Notice that, by the time they reach Derby, they have almost completed a full loop back to where they started in Antioch. Instead of returning home or moving on to other cities, they retrace their footsteps and return to the cities where they made converts, “strengthening the disciples, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith” (Acts 14:22).

St. Paul shows the need to balance evangelization and discipleship: We can't have one without the other. In fact, it is important for us to be doing both at the same time. As we are building up others, we can give them the example of what evangelization looks like. At the end of Acts 14, St. Luke notes that he remains with the disciples for “no little time.” St. Paul was not afraid to stop and invest his time in believers to build up the body of Christ. His many letters are a great testament to his heart to build up others—so much so they continue to build us up today.

Send: Teaching Teachers to Teach

While not explicitly stated in this passage, we know that St. Paul would not only build up the disciples but also send them out as well. 2 Timothy 2:2 states, “And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” St. Paul's teaching and building up of the disciples was something to be passed on to others as they converted and built up people in their community.

Depth Chart: Keeping Track of 'Win, Build, Send' Evangelization

The Depth Chart is a simple tool to keep track of all of the people you are working with and how you can continue to help them move along in their Christian walk—from an initial conversion, to building them up in the faith, to equipping them to mentor others.

Use the resource that accompanies this Bible study to walk your group through the Depth Chart. Be sure to explain all of the categories and how a person moves through them. Also, have your group fill out their own Depth Chart to see who they are reaching out to and what they are doing.

Application to Our Lives

The Spiritual Multiplication Depth Chart can help us keep track of everyone we are working with and how we can help them in their walk with Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 14:1-28

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever heard the phrase, "if you plan to fail, you fail to plan." How does this apply to evangelization? How does it not?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Evangelization doesn't usually happen by accident. In reading through the Acts of the Apostles, it is so easy to get caught up in the signs, wonders, and supernatural happenings that we can fail to recognize that there is human strategy involved as well. Here in Acts 14, during the second half of St. Paul's first missionary journey, we get an up close look at St. Paul's methods for winning over converts, building them up in the faith, and then sending them out as disciples to reach others.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Acts 14:1-28

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. Reread Acts 14:1 and 17:1. What was St. Paul's custom upon arriving at a city?

Answer: He would preach in a synagogue.

2. Why would St. Paul begin by preaching there rather than going to a smaller venue?

Answer: Synagogues were great places to teach for a number of reasons. First, a large number of people would be gathered there. Second, these people would be aware of the need for a Messiah and be familiar with the Old Testament. Third, they were used to having visiting rabbis (like St. Paul) come and speak to them.

3. Read Acts 14:21-28 and look at the map of St. Paul's first missionary journey at the end of this study. Where are they by the end of their journey in relation to where they started?

Answer: They have almost completed a loop and are close to their starting point.

4. Why do you think that St. Paul doesn't just finish the loop and return home?

Answer: Verse 22 tells us that they returned to the cities where they made converts, "strengthening the disciples, and encouraging them to remain true to the faith" (Acts 14:22).

5. Do you feel that evangelization or discipleship is more important?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. How do we find a balance between the two?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. If you were building up a new convert, what topics would you consider giving them as they start their journey?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. Which do you personally prefer—evangelization or discipleship?

Allow the group to discuss.

9. What steps can you take to work on the area where you are weaker?

Allow the group to discuss.

10. Share the vision behind the Depth Chart and have you group fill it out. Everything you need should be included in the accompanying document. Seeing the vision for evangelization and discipleship is one of the first steps in helping them tackle the area they aren't as comfortable with.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL

ACTS 13:4-14:28

- City
- ← Paul's routes
- Via Sebaste





Chapter 7

Learning to Articulate the Faith

Acts 17

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 86 - 91

DISCUSSION

Pages 92 - 98



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 17

The Big Picture

St. Paul learned to speak to different crowds in different ways. We should follow his example and pay close attention to the kinds of people we are speaking to.

In Acts 17, St. Paul faces three very different situations where he uses three different styles of evangelistic conversations. The goal of this chapter is to explore how St. Paul talks to people about the faith and how we can use these strategies in our relationships with people today.

St. Paul and the Thessalonians (Acts 17:1-9)

Thessalonica was a major Roman city in northern Greece and was one of many stops that St. Paul made on his missionary journeys. We have two letters in the New Testament that St. Paul sent to this Church: 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

St. Paul's teaching causes jealousy among some of the Jews, and a small riot ensues. This isn't the first riot caused by St. Paul (Acts 16:19-24) and it won't be the last (Acts 19:21-41).

Is Jesus Lord or Is Caesar Lord?

The Jews make two accusations: first, that St. Paul and his companions are disturbing their city like they have disturbed others. Second, they are "acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7).

The question of kingship is a major theme in St. Paul's writings and in the early Church. It was of utmost importance that the citizens of the Roman Empire proclaimed Caesar as Lord. "Caesar is Lord" was a popular phrase by which people would greet one another in the street. When the Roman Empire conquered a new land, it would demand that all of the people confess that "Caesar is Lord." If not, the people were often tortured, crucified, and killed to show what happened to people who didn't recognize the lordship of Caesar. In light of this background, claiming that Jesus was king and Lord was a capital offense. This flew in the face of the cult that surrounded the caesars and the force with which they punished those who refused to claim their lordship.

The Bereans (Acts 17:10-15)

The Jews in Berea are one of the few groups in Acts that considers Paul's message calmly and rationally. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, they are very open to hearing the apostles' interpretation of the Scriptures. The only downfall is that Berea is close to Thessalonica, and the Jews there come over to Berea to chase St. Paul away.

St. Paul at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-21)

This may be St. Paul's most famous speech in Acts. Athens was a city of Greek philosophy and intellect; the Areopagus was a famous Athenian landmark known as Mars Hill. It was a low hill in the city where intellectuals gathered to discuss education, philosophy, and religion.

The story begins with St. Paul touring the city and seeing it filled with idols. As he shares the gospel with Jews and others in the town, he is approached by Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. The Stoics had a high regard for nature and believed in pantheism—god in nature. In general, they believed that, if there were a god, he was not involved in their lives. The Epicureans' goal was to avoid pain and discomfort and to pursue the sensual. Others in this group accuse St. Paul of being a babbler—someone who understood ideas but who lacked wisdom and sophistication (Acts 17:18). In response, they take him to the Aeropagus in front of the intellectuals of the city to hear his exact message.

Application to Jesus

Jesus speaks to each human heart where they are. How do we cooperate with God's will in conforming our message and speech to others?

St. Paul's Strategies with a Greek Audience

This speech is also famous because it displays the brilliance of St. Paul's preaching to other cultures. Some of the tactics Paul uses in his address include:

Very religious

St. Paul notes and encourages their search for religion (Acts 17:22). By pointing out their "unknown god," St. Paul is showing how his God can fit into their current religious system.

Not afraid to point out their differences

While encouraging their religiosity, St. Paul does not shy away from noting their differences. His God is not one made by hands. Contrary to the Stoics' belief, his something in creation, He is the one who created everything and everyone.

Using the logic of the culture

St. Paul is not afraid to use the logic of the culture to prove his point. In verse 28, he is most likely referring to the Greek poet Epimenides; while later in the verse, he quotes the Greek writer Aratus. He uses the language of the culture while pointing to something greater.

Urgency

St. Paul was talking to a group who, according to St. Luke, “spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). In this environment, St. Paul knows that the listeners need some urgency in responding to his message. He points out that everyone needs to repent because God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31).

Throughout this chapter, there are many lessons on how we can speak to others about the gospel.

Application to Our Lives

We can't speak to everyone the same. How do we learn how to speak to non-Christians or fallen-away Christians about what we believe?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 17

STEP 1: OPENER

When is the last time you had a discussion about the faith with someone who disagreed with you? How did it go?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

In Acts 17, St. Paul faces three very different situations where he uses three different styles of evangelistic conversations. In this chapter, we are going to look at what strategies he uses and how they can help us in our own evangelization.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 17. Start by reading Acts 17:1-9.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. St. Luke reports that it was St. Paul's custom to explain and prove Jesus Christ from the Scriptures. St. Paul is very intentional in using reason when he talks to others. What role does reason play in our conversations with others about Jesus?

Answer: We can use reason to speak to the truth that others see in their own lives and in the world.

2. What is the reaction of the people in Thessalonica?

Answer: They riot.

3. What are the apostles accused of?

Answer: Two things: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:7). "They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7).

4. What would it take for you to be accused of turning your campus upside down?

Allow the group to discuss.

5. Why would it be against the decrees of Caesar to claim Jesus as Lord?

Answer: See "Is Jesus Lord or Is Caesar Lord?"

6. What is the reaction today when we claim Jesus as Lord or stand by one of the Church's controversial teachings?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include accusations that Christianity makes us bigots or impairs our reason.

7. When people become hostile and emotional when talking about the faith, what is the best way to talk to them and act towards them?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read Acts 17:10-15

8. How are the Berean Jews different than the Jews in Thessalonica?

Answer: They are willing to reason from Scripture rather than being jealous and emotional.

9. What are some ways we can foster rational discussion about our faith rather than emotional arguments?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include articulating your respect for the other's group, seeking to understand before being understood, and focusing on one issue at a time.

Read Acts 17:16-34

10. In verse 18, St. Paul is disturbed to see that the city is full of idols. What are the idols in our culture today? What idols disturb you the most?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. What are some of the strategies that St. Paul uses in his speech at the Aeropagus?

Answer: See the section "St. Paul's Strategies with a Greek Audience."

12. St. Paul does a great job of building a bridge to their pre-established beliefs to show them that they are already seeking the God that he is speaking about. What are people seeking today?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: happiness, love, significance.

13. St. Paul appeals to the religion of those in the Aeropagus. Do you think people are religious today? Why or why not?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: Everyone worships something. While more and more people in America do not consider themselves "religious," they are turning to new-age philosophies and spiritualities to fill the void. Humans are religious by our very nature. We were made for God, and we will fill this hole with something else if God is not there.

14. G. K. Chesterton once said, "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God." How can we proclaim God in such a way that relates to what people are seeking?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: Help break down stereotypes about Christianity. For instance, Christianity isn't just about rules; it is about helping us come fully alive as human beings. God wants us to be happy even more than we do.



Chapter 8

How-to Share Your Testimony

Acts 26:1-32

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 100 - 103

DISCUSSION

Pages 104 - 114



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 26:1-32

The Big Picture

Knowing how to tell our story helps us tell others about God's story.

Catholic speaker Matthew Kelly once said, "What is the most powerful force in human in history? Story. Want to start a war? Tell a story. Want to end a war? Tell a story. Want to cause people to fall in love? Tell a story. Want to cause people to fall out of love? Tell a story. Want to inspire people? Tell a story. Want to degrade people? Tell a story. Want to motivate people? Tell a story. Want to discourage people? Tell a story. The most powerful force in history is story."

Stories are powerful. Catholic philosophy Alasdair MacIntyre said, "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.... I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'... There is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources."

When we tell our story, we allow others to help come in contact with their own story while at the same time opening up a larger story of Jesus Christ that they can enter into and live out.

Today we will look at St. Paul's testimony in Acts and have your group begin the process of writing down and practicing their own 3-5 minute testimony.

Application to Jesus

Jesus is the center of our story. How did we come to know and love a person who changed everything?

St. Paul's Testimony

St. Paul had an incredible story. He was a Jewish Pharisee who persecuted Christianity until Jesus appeared to him and asked him to stop persecuting Christ's body, the Church. St. Paul went from killing Christians to becoming a Christian, even to the point of dying for his faith. In Acts 26, St. Paul finds himself before the Jewish puppet king Agrippa. St. Paul witnesses to King Agrippa by telling his story in four parts:

1. Life before he knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1-11)
2. How he came to know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12-18)
3. His life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)
4. His challenge and invitation to the audience (Acts 26:27-29)

St. Paul's Life Before He Knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1-11)

Because of Agrippa's Jewish background, St. Paul is sure to make the connection to Judaism, such as in his belief in the resurrection and his understanding of Christianity as a response to the prophets. St. Paul is aware of his audience and tailors his message accordingly.

How St. Paul Came to Know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12-18)

Paul has an incredible story of his first encounter with Jesus. While our stories might not be this dramatic, hopefully everyone in your group has experienced a time when they encountered Jesus Christ in a deep way. For those who haven't, this is a great opportunity as a Bible study leader to help them fully understand how Jesus can change their entire life.

His Life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)

St. Paul backs up his story by recounting how he suffered and was willing to die for his faith. It can cause some pause in our lives to reflect on what we are willing to do for Jesus.

The Challenge and Invitation to the Audience (Acts 26:27-29)

St. Paul is standing before a governor and a king who have the power to kill him. And, at the same time, he refuses to miss the opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

The main goal of this chapter is to help the participants in your Bible study develop a 3-5 minute testimony. Print out a copy of the FOCUS Testimony Worksheet for every member of your group and follow the instructions. The participants should begin the process of developing their testimonies during the study. They should complete this process and have a testimony to share with the group during the following study. After they share with the group, they will be asked to share this testimony with two people.

Application to Our Lives

Forming a 3-5 minute testimony helps us witness to the power of God's presence in our lives.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 26:1–32

STEP 1: OPENER

What's the best story you have heard lately? Follow-up: Why are stories so powerful?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

After his third missionary journey, St. Paul heads to Jerusalem. Even though he knows that he will most likely be imprisoned, he goes anyway. While in the temple in Jerusalem, St. Paul is falsely accused of trying to destroy the temple. Before the enraged mob can kill him, the Roman authorities arrest him. After more than two years in prison, St. Paul is brought before Agrippa, a Jewish king under Roman authority. During this hearing, St. Paul gives his testimony.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Acts 26:1-32

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. Why do you think a testimony is important?

Answer: It gives a clear account of why someone chose to be a Christian. It shows that we are not just born into this faith but that we make a conscious decision to live it out.

Act 1: St. Paul's life before he knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1-11)

2. Why is someone's past an important part of their story?

Answer: Someone's history can build bridges and make connections with the audience. It gives the audience something to relate to.

3. How does St. Paul's past relate to his audience?

Answer: He knows that he is speaking to a Jewish audience, so he uses the Old Testament as part of his argument.

4. How do you think your testimony should change based on who your audience is?

Answer: While we shouldn't change our story, when possible, we should emphasize aspects that our audience might best relate to.

Act 2: How St. Paul came to know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12-18)

5. Do you remember having a conversion experience? What was it like?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. Why is it important for us to remember this experience and tell it to others?

Allow the group to discuss.

Act 3: St. Paul's life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)

7. How does St. Paul's life after his conversion help support his argument?

Answer: His life is a testament to the strength of his conviction. He is willing to suffer and die for Jesus.

8. How do our own lives prove the strength of our convictions?

Allow the group to discuss.

Act 4: The challenge and invitation to the audience (Acts 26:27-29)

9. How does St. Paul invite King Agrippa?

Answer: He appeals to Agrippa's belief in the prophets and his own wisdom.

10. Have you ever shared a testimony about Jesus or God's work in your life with others?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. What do you say in your testimony?

Allow the group to discuss.

Note to the Leader: Pass out copies of the FOCUS Testimony Worksheet for your participants to use.

12. The main goal of this chapter is to have you develop a 3-5 minute testimony. We will use the FOCUS Testimony Worksheet and explanation to write down our testimonies. Next study we will share our testimonies with each other and then share them with two people outside of our study.

Vision: Why Testimonies?

To start, share with one another about your best friend and the impact that person has had on your life.

Ultimately, this is exactly what you are doing in a testimony. Psalm 71:15 says, "My mouth will tell of your righteous acts; of your deeds of salvation all the day.... Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul." As Christians, it is imperative that we are able to tell others about Him. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you."

Every Christian should have a memorized and a written testimony. The testimony is a powerful yet simple tool. Your task, if you choose to accept it, is to prepare a testimony that is three to five minutes long. Practice it with a disciple, other Christians, and eventually non-Christians. Later on, you can find ways to give a longer testimony of 10 to 20 minutes, suitable for larger audiences, and even a 30-second testimony to use in shorter conversations.

Your Story in Four Acts (Acts 26)

Let's look at St. Paul's testimony in Acts 26 as a way to prepare for your own testimony. In Acts 26, Paul has four parts, or "acts," in his testimony:

1. Life before Jesus Christ
2. Coming to know Jesus Christ
3. Life in Jesus Christ
4. An invitation

Read Acts 26:1–29.

Discussion Question: How does St. Paul's testimony fit into the four acts?

The answer is outlined below, along with some questions to consider as you think about each act.

Act 1: My life before I knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1–11)

- What kind of a person was I socially, spiritually, and emotionally?

- Introduce a unifying theme to the testimony (for example, a familiarity with Christ but no personal knowledge of Him, loneliness in college, spiritual hunger, or the Fatherhood of God). Paul's unifying theme is his devotion to Judaism.

Act 2: How I came to know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12–18)

- What happened? Even if the conversion was gradual, the testimony should still have one concrete moment or turning point for the audience to grasp.
- If other people were involved in bringing about the conversion, take care to make sure this section is Christ-centered and not agent centered.
- Avoid any over-dramatization. God's work in our lives is not always easy to express. Consider how you can organize your story so that people will understand what you have been through and who God is.

Act 3: My life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19–23)

- What changes have occurred in my life? How am I living my relationship with Jesus?
- Be especially careful here about the language you choose. Avoid using loaded words and phrases that could separate you from people who are not familiar with them, such as "follow the Spirit," "indwelling of the Trinity," "vocation," "sacraments," and "dark night of the soul."
- Avoid extremes. Try hard not to come across as a perfected saint. At the same time, don't dwell on struggles and failures.

Act 4: The challenge and invitation to the audience (Acts 26:27–29)

- Ask the audience, implicitly or explicitly, “How will you respond to Jesus Christ?”

Elements of a Good Testimony (CAST)

When telling your story, keep these four important elements in mind:

CONCRETENESS: The audience is given “handles” to the testimony. Experiences, places, and persons are described accurately and unambiguously, yet without obsession over detail. The turning point (how one came to know Jesus Christ) is identifiable and specific, even if it is just one of many turning points. The person giving the testimony comes across as real and ordinary.

ACCESSIBILITY: The experiences are described in such a way that the audience can relate to or understand them. The language chosen is free from religious terms and dense terminology that could separate the speaker from the audience, like “sin,” “tabernacle,” and “Eucharistic adoration.”

SIMPLICITY: The “plot” or “thread” of the testimony is clear and easy to follow, without confusing tangents and elaborate details. Jesus Christ is at the center of this testimony. He is its hinge.

THEMATIC STRUCTURE: There is one overarching theme or analogy. Every point of the testimony should in some way be related to this single theme.

Practice

Fill out the Testimony Worksheet below to develop your story. After you write your testimony out, share it with others.

Summary

During this time, you should have:

- Read and prayed through St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.
- Reviewed the vision and the "why" behind testimonies.
- Reviewed the four parts of St. Paul's testimony from Acts 26.
- Reviewed the four elements of a good testimony.
- Written out your testimony.
- Practiced your testimony with one another.

Conclusion

Testimonies are crucial, not only for telling others about God, but also for reminding yourself of what the Lord has done in your own life. Memorizing your testimony and being able to share it with others will reaffirm your own experience and provide an easy way to introduce others to Christ.

TESTIMONY WORKSHEET

Goal: Create a three to five-minute testimony that you can share with others.

Instructions: Take some time to reflect on the different sections, or “acts,” of your life below. Begin by thinking about a theme and brainstorm thoughts for each section. Make an outline here of each section that you can eventually develop into a completed three to five-minute presentation.

Act 1: My life before I knew Jesus Christ

Act 2: How I came to know Jesus Christ

Act 3: My life in Jesus Christ

Act 4: The invitation

NOTES



Chapter 9

How-to Give a Gospel Presentation

Acts 4:1-22

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 116 - 119

DISCUSSION

Pages 120 - 124



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 4:1-22

Everyone is made for relationship with Jesus Christ. Why is it that so many people have not made a commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church? Some will say it is because no one has ever clearly explained to them the simple message of the gospel and asked them if they would commit their lives to it.

As St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). In this chapter, we will look at an example of a gospel presentation made by the apostles and then learn how to give one today.

Arrested for the Gospel

Right after St. Peter’s address at Pentecost, Sts. Peter and John go to the Jewish temple. There St. Peter heals a man who had been lame since birth. After this, the people in the temple are astonished and run to Sts. Peter and John to find out how this happened. While they are telling the people the gospel, they are arrested by the Jewish authorities. Today we will examine how they present the gospel to the Jewish authorities.

Live a Life Worth Explaining

Sts. Peter and John's actions in the temple prompt the Jewish officials to bring them into custody for questioning. We have the opportunity to live in a unique way that causes others to wonder, "Why do you live like that?" But first, we must live differently than the world does.

We can do this in so many ways, but one essential way is through joy. Pope Benedict XVI, in his address at World Youth Day 2012, stated, "Dear friends....be missionaries of joy. We cannot be happy if others are not. Joy has to be shared. Go and tell other young people about your joy at finding the precious treasure which is Jesus himself." Blessed Teresa of Calcutta once said, "Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls." Sts. Peter and John exhibit this joy while they preach the gospel and when they are questioned by the Jewish authorities.

Why Do We Speak Out?

In Acts 4:18, the Jewish officials ask Sts. Peter and John to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. They give a remarkable response for why they must continue to do so: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Sts. Peter and John have had such a deep encounter with Jesus that they cannot help but speak about it.

How Do We Speak Out?

The gospel message that St. Peter preaches to the Jewish authorities has a few simple components: Jesus was crucified (v. 10); Jesus rose from the dead (v. 10); Jesus is the only way to salvation (v. 12); and Jesus makes this offer to all men (v. 12).

This presentation is given within a historical context to a specific group of people. Let's look at one model that can be used with audiences today.

The Ultimate Relationship

As we see in Acts, the gospel can be presented in many ways. FOCUS uses one method called "The Ultimate Relationship." To find out how to use "The Ultimate Relationship" booklet, please see the article that accompanies this chapter.

"The Ultimate Relationship" has four main components:

1. God created us for a relationship with Him.
2. Our relationship is broken through sin.
3. Jesus restores our relationship with the Father.
4. We have the choice to accept or reject this offer.

To prepare for this Bible study, please be ready to present "The Ultimate Relationship" booklet to your group. Even if you haven't used the book before, it is simple enough that you can read the text directly from the booklet.

Next, use the article on "The Ultimate Relationship" that accompanies this chapter to walk your group through the various steps of the booklet.

At the end of the study, everyone should be equipped to go home and practice "The Ultimate Relationship" on their own. During the next

Bible study, you will practice presenting “The Ultimate Relationship” to one another. Afterwards, members of your group will be assigned to present “The Ultimate Relationship” to two people who need to hear the gospel.

Don't Make Assumptions

Too often we assume that certain people have already given their life to Christ or that they have actually heard the gospel before. We must never make this assumption. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the papal household, says, “I can see from my own experience that even if I speak of many beautiful concepts, nothing seems to happen. We must proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior, helping people to grasp what it means to have Jesus as their Savior—not in a theoretical way, but that every day they have a Savior, someone who will lift them from their fatigue of the day, of their sin, and their mistakes, and who renews them. He saves us. When you proclaim this living, crucified and risen Jesus something always happens.”

Something always happens when we present the gospel. Be willing to step out of your comfort zone to give a gift that lasts forever.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 4:1-22

STEP 1: OPENER

What prevents you from sharing the message of Jesus with others?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Right after St. Peter's address at Pentecost, Sts. Peter and John go to the Jewish temple. There St. Peter heals a man who had been lame since birth. After this, the people in the temple are astonished and run to Sts. Peter and John to find out how this happened. While they are telling the people the Gospel, they are arrested by the Jewish authorities. Today we will examine how they present the Gospel to the Jewish authorities.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read Acts 4:1-22

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

Read Acts 4:1-22

1. The Jewish authorities see the actions of Sts. Peter and John in the temple and ask, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" How do we live in such a way that people ask how we are able to live the way we do?

Allow the group to discuss. Feel free to use the example of joy found in "Live a Life Worth Explaining."

2. If you were put in the same situation as Sts. Peter and John, what would you be thinking and feeling?

Allow the group to discuss.

3. In light of this, what makes the example of Sts. Peter and John so impressive?

Allow the group to discuss.

4. What causes them to continue to preach the gospel?

Answer: Their conviction in the truth of the gospel message: "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

5. When have you seen and heard God in your own life?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. What prevents us from telling others how we have experienced God in our own lives?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. In Acts 4:8-12, what are the steps that St. Peter takes in his explanation of the gospel to the Jewish authorities?

Answer: Try to hone in on the four basic steps found in the section "How Do We Speak Out?"

8. Why it is important to tell others about Jesus in addition to demonstrating our conviction by how we live?

Allow the group to discuss.

9. Who do you think needs to hear the gospel?

Answer: Everyone who we haven't discussed it with. Feel free to read the quote by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa found in the section "Don't Make Assumptions."

10. Introduce your group to “The Ultimate Relationship” booklet and explain that it is a method for clearly articulating the basic message of the gospel. Use the article on “The Ultimate Relationship” that accompanies this chapter for your explanation.

- *Demonstrate to them how you would walk someone through “The Ultimate Relationship.”*
- *After demonstration, explain the purpose of each step.*
- *Tell your group that they will be practicing this as a group and then eventually sharing it with two people outside the group.*



Chapter 10

Sharing the Gospel and Fear of Suffering

Acts 5:27–42

UNDERSTANDING

Pages 126 - 129

DISCUSSION

Pages 130 - 137



UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 5:27-42

The Big Picture

God gives us suffering as an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with Him.

Learning to Suffer

For many committed Christians, there comes a point early on in their journey when they actively seek out suffering. They are excited about making sacrifices; they dream about being martyred for the faith. They think that any day now they will have stigmata!

But then suffering actually *does* come, and most Christians struggle. The obstacle might not be the one they imagined, or it might be unclear why God would allow it. Perhaps the obstacle proves much bigger and harder to carry than they wanted. Despite the initial desire to suffer, we become perplexed in the face of hardships and obstacles.

The first step in preparing ourselves for obstacles is to not be surprised by them. St. Peter writes in his first letter, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12).

The second step is to work on the virtue of perseverance so that we can learn the habit of working through and overcoming obstacles in our life. One of the best ways to do this is to follow the example of the saints. The Acts of the Apostles offers several examples of persevering through many trials. In this last chapter, the hope is to look at the apostles one last time for inspiration to confront the obstacles your group will face as they attempt to evangelize.

Suffering in Action: St. Peter and the Apostles

In Acts, we see several examples of suffering, particularly in Acts 5:27-42. Earlier in chapter 5, the apostles' fame is spreading in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns. They are working signs and wonders, and many believers were being added. In response, the Jewish authorities arrest the apostles—but when they are called up for questioning, they are not to be found in their cells. Instead, they are back in the temple, teaching the people. With this context in mind, let's look at how the Jewish authorities question the apostles.

Application to Jesus

We can look to Jesus as we unite our sufferings to the foot of the cross

Obeying God Rather than Men (Acts 5:27-32)

Sometimes it is easy to forget that the apostles are real human beings. They have fears and doubts just like us. They have already been sent to prison before, and now they are being questioned about their actions. Their response is not only that they will “obey God rather than men” (5:29), but they then go on to preach the gospel in verses 30-33.

Predictions and Beatings (Acts 5:33-39)

Apparently, the gospel presentation given to the Jewish authorities doesn't go over too well; they are hoping to kill the apostles. The Pharisee Gamaliel (who also happens to be Paul's former teacher, before Paul converted to Christianity) stands up to offer his wisdom on the situation. Gamaliel tells the group that if the apostles are working against God, they will not succeed; but if they are working with God, no one will be able to overthrow them.

This is a great reminder for us to depend on God in our evangelization—especially amidst difficulties. Early on in the history of FOCUS, there were some significant difficulties. Curtis Martin, President and Founder of FOCUS, gathered in prayer with some of the first FOCUS missionaries and prayed that if FOCUS was not doing God's will that God would crush the work of FOCUS and not allow it to continue. In the end, we have to remember that God is the source of conversion.

Joy in Suffering (Acts 5:40-42)

It is one thing to be able to suffer for the sake of the gospel; it is another to suffer with joy. The apostles' reaction to being beaten as punishment was to leave "the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."

This rejoicing helps us rethink our vision of suffering. Suffering, setbacks, and obstacles are often seen as failures in the secular world, but in the eyes of the saints, they are cause for rejoicing. It is, in fact, when our way is most difficult that we have a profound opportunity to deny ourselves and fully give our will over to God.

St. Therese of Lisieux once said, "My God, I choose all! I do not want to be a saint by halves, I'm not afraid to suffer for You, I fear only one thing: to keep my own will; so take it, for I choose all that You will!"

This is by no means an easy transition. It is only done through allowing God to change our hearts and minds during prayer and in actively working to build up this virtue in our daily lives.

Application to Our Lives

To be a Christian, means to carry our cross. Our goal is to accept suffering, persevere through it and eventually rejoice in it.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 5:27–42

STEP 1: OPENER

Begin by passing out the “Evangelization and Fear” handout that accompanies this chapter. Have each member rank their fears, and have them share their number one fear with the group.

Split up your study into groups of four. Have each group take one of the fears and come up with reasons why this fear would be irrational. Give them several minutes to come up with a couple of solid arguments. Then have them come back and share with the group. (Note: It might be a good idea to ask your group to bring a notebook to this study or for you to bring some scratch paper for them.)

STEP 2: BACKDROP

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see several examples of suffering. One of the best examples is found in Acts 5:27-42. Previously in chapter 5, the apostles’ fame is spreading in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns. They are working signs and wonders, and many believers were being added. In response, the Jewish authorities arrest the apostles—but when they are called up for questioning, they are not to be found in their cells. Instead, they are back in the temple, teaching the people. With this context in mind, let’s look at how the Jewish authorities question the apostles.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is Acts 5:27-42. Start by reading Acts 5:27-32.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. In the face of questioning from the Jewish authorities, how do the apostles respond?

Answer: They don't back down. Instead, they go on to preach the gospel to the Jewish authorities.

2. It is easy to forget that these figures in Acts are humans just like us. They had feelings, fears, and doubts just like we do. If you were them, how would you have responded?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read Acts 5:33-42

3. What does Gamaliel say about the mission of the apostles?

Answer: Gamaliel tells the group that if the apostles are working against God, they will not succeed; but if they are working with God, no one will be able to overthrow them.

4. What do Gamaliel's words remind us about evangelization?

Answer: God is the source of conversion.

5. What do the Jewish authorities do to the apostles before they leave?

Answer: They are beaten and told not to preach the gospel.

6. What do the apostles do?

Answer: They rejoice and continue to preach that Jesus is the Messiah.

7. Why it is hard to rejoice in our suffering?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. St. Paul goes through a great deal of suffering as he preached the gospel. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. Whether it is St. Paul or other saints, it seems that the life of a saint is usually filled with suffering. Why do you think this is?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: God is seeking to purify the person. God is allowing the person to rely completely on Him. God is allowing them to give witness of faithfulness despite the obstacles that they faced.

9. In an earlier chapter, you developed a mission statement. In the mission that God has given you or will give you, what suffering do you think you will have to endure?

Allow the group to discuss.

10. St. Therese once said, “My God, I choose all! I do not want to be a saint by halves, I’m not afraid to suffer for You, I fear only one thing: to keep my own will; so take it, for I choose all that You will!” How do we develop this attitude of not being “saints by halves,” especially when we are in the midst of suffering?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: building up the virtue of perseverance, keeping a consistent prayer life, receiving the sacraments frequently.

11. If you could choose one thing you want to take away from this entire study, what would it be and why?

Allow the group to discuss.

EVANGELIZATION AND FEAR HANDOUT

By Jeremy Rivera

Consider the following list and rank them in order from 1-5, one being the greatest fear or hesitation to sharing your faith. Please be as honest with yourself as possible in ranking which fears are the greatest for you:

- _____ Afraid I will be asked a question I do not know
- _____ Afraid they will ask about a moral issue I may not be equipped to answer (e.g., same sex marriage), in which my response could turn them off from Christ and the Catholic Church
- _____ Afraid of what their perception of me will be if I do share with them
- _____ Afraid it will cost me my friendship or relationship with them
- _____ Afraid I will offend them in some way

After you rank these fears, split up into group of 2-3 and take 6 minutes to brainstorm answers about how to respond to these fears. Afterwards, share your best 1-2 ideas.

ANSWERS TO THE VARIOUS FEARS

#1 I'm afraid I will be asked a question I don't know or that I will misrepresent God or the Church.

Suggestion #1: Not knowing an answer to a question is okay. While we strive to be prepared to give a reason for our hope, in no way does this make us responsible to respond perfectly to people's often challenging and complex questions about Christianity or the Catholic Church. Give yourself permission to say, "I don't know, but I can find out and get back to you." Sometimes we make the opposite mistake of coming across as a 'know it all' and it's refreshing for a non-Believer to meet a Christian who is still seeking and has the honesty to say, "I don't know."

Suggestion #2: Tell your story. No one can argue with the power of a changed life. God has called us to be faithful witnesses, people who confess Christ before men. This can be very effective by learning how to share your personal story of how your life has been touched and transformed by the Risen Christ.

#2 Afraid they will ask about a moral issue I may not be equipped to answer (i.e., same sex marriage or contraception), which could turn them off from Christ and the Catholic Church.

Suggestion: Often, moral issues like these serve as smoke screens to the real issues going on in their lives. Instead of surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we often want to look for excuses to justify our lifestyle or behavior that is in contradiction to the Christian faith; such as problems with the organized Church hierarchy or moral teachings. We cannot let these smoke screens prevent us from

engaging in dialogue about Jesus Christ, his life, his teachings and his death and resurrection. There is often a question behind the question and it is there at the root that we bring the light and love of Christ.

#3 I'm afraid of what their perception of me will be if I do share with them.

Suggestion #1: Though funny, the saying also tends to be true that "you wouldn't care so much about what people think about you if you realized how little they did." Often times, our concern with our image is an issue of unhealthy pride and vanity. Sometimes, the greatest way to get over our fear of rejection is to be rejected. Everyone will not always like us, especially if it means remaining faithful to our loyalty and devotion to Christ as Lord.

Suggestion #2: While their perception of you may change, how do you know it will not change for the better? In the relativistic culture of our time, it is rare to meet people who live with conviction and stand for something they believe in. Speaking the truth in love or refusing to go along with the crowd is also a form of evangelization.

#4 I'm afraid it will cost me my friendship or relationship with them.

Suggestion: While we hope and pray that sharing Christ with a friend or family member would strengthen the relationship, being a Christian (as we learned previously) doesn't come without its cost. However, since we are called to continually reach out and love non-believers, ending a friendship or relationship except for extreme circumstances, is never what we would hope for. God is all about relationship, therefore, we shouldn't allow someone's rejection of

Christ keep us from remaining involved in his or her life. God never gives up on people and it is often this slow kind of patient love that penetrates the hardened heart. If someone does not want to be in friendship with you because of your faith or your attempts to share Christ with him or her, continue to pray for them and for grace to bear the rejection for His sake.

#5 I am afraid I will offend them in some way.

Suggestion: Even though the Gospel, which by itself can at times offend one's sense of independence and worldliness; as the messenger, you do not have to be. For example, declaring certain truths to be absolute can irritate someone who believes all truth is relative, but the manner and tone in which you share your beliefs and convictions (when coupled with compelling reasons) can say even more.

FOCUS Equip

'FOCUS Equip' is based on Ephesians 4:12 "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ." These materials seek to equip you for lifelong Catholic mission. We would love to hear your feedback at: focusequip@focus.org

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

