



**ACTS - SMALL GROUP SERIES  
LESSON 1**

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## **ACTS – SMALL GROUP SERIES**

### *Lesson 1*

*Bible: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*Acts 1:8 (NLT)*

*Bottom Line: Sharing the story of God’s work in our lives (being witnesses) is part of our everyday lives, wherever we go, and whatever we do.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Acts is the continuation of the story of Jesus 'disciples—the “what’s next” after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Acts is the story of the church—how the follows of Jesus gathered and how they lived by His spirit and continued His work.

Acts is our story—the story of Jesus 'followers today and how we are to continue God's work of redeeming all of creation.

As important as the four gospels are to understanding Jesus is the book of Acts to understanding the creation and mission of the church today.

The book of Acts is known as the sequel or companion to the Gospel of Luke. The language and structure of these two books indicate that both were written by the same person and to the same person: Theophilus.

There are different schools of thought about who Theophilus was. What we do know is this:

- His name means “loved by God.”
- Luke calls him “most excellent”-- a title that is often given to someone of honor or rank, such as a Roman official.
- Paul used the same term when addressing Felix (Acts 23:26; Acts 24:2) and Festus (Acts 26:25).

Further evidence to support that Luke is the author of Acts is how the book begins. Acts begins by stating, “In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

The “first book” refers to the gospel of Luke. Therefore, if Luke wrote the first book to Theophilus, he must be the author of the second book, Acts.

Luke wanted to continue the story he began when he wrote about the birth and life of Jesus Christ.

Like its companion, the exact date of when this book was written is unknown. However, some bible scholars have narrowed down a range between A.D. 63 and A.D. 70 based on other bible evidence.

We know that Acts was written after the Gospel of Luke. It is believed that Luke was written around A.D. 63.

Acts does not include the accounts of Paul’s martyrdom that occurred approximately around A.D. 67 or 68.

Another event not included in Acts was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem which is believed to have happened in A.D. 70.

Knowing how detailed he was in his writing from reading the Gospel of Luke and his purpose to give an accurate account of the spread of the gospel; it is not likely he would have excluded these events from Acts.

We know who wrote the Book of Acts. We have an idea of when Acts was written, and although we don’t know where it was written, the “why” is very clear.

The Book of Acts is known to be the only book in the Bible that outlines the history of the church from the time of Christ’s ascension.

Acts tells us how the church began to grow and spread the gospel according to the mission Jesus gave the disciples in Acts chapter one.

## **LESSON**

Throughout world history, there have been many great moments that have impacted or changed the course of the world.

The bombing at Hiroshima, the Vietnam War, man landing on the moon, the United States electing the first African American president, and the invention of the world wide web to name a few.

For Christ-followers, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the greatest of those moments.

Christ's work on the cross changed the eternal state of humanity forever. But He did not stop there.

God sent His Holy Spirit to empower believers to carry out the mission of Jesus throughout the world.

Luke writes the Book of Acts to outline the "spiritual virus" that spread throughout the world, beginning at its epicenter in Jerusalem.

Our world today is facing a global pandemic due to a virus that will without a doubt be added to the list of world-changing events.

However, unlike the spread of the virus our world is dealing with today, the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ is life-giving and not life-taking.

So, the greatest moment in the world created the greatest movement in the world; that is still going on today.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. When you think about an event that changed the world what comes to mind?

How would the world be different if that event had never occurred?

2. During the times of the early church, they did not have access to the various resources we have today to communicate information.

The good news was shared by apostles going from place-to-place preaching and by testimonies of believers.

Even though we have multiple ways to share and communicate news in the world today, why is word of mouth still one of the best methods we can use to share the gospel?

3. What hinders you from sharing your “God story” with others?

**Read Acts 1:1-5:**

*1 In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach*

*2 until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.*

*3 During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.*

*4 Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before.*

*5 John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

In the first two verses of Acts, Luke connects this book to the first, the Gospel of Luke. He is picking up where he left off in the previous book of Luke.

His purpose is to continue the story of Jesus his death his burial His resurrection and the events that occur until the time He ascended to heaven.

In verse 3, Luke tells Theophilus that Christ presented Himself to believers on multiple occasions to prove He was alive just as He said.

There were 40 days between the time Christ was resurrected and then ascended.

Christ’s appearance gave evidence and reassurance to the disciples that what He said was true. Luke gives that same reassurance to Theophilus in these verses.

As believers, we not only have these verses, but the entire bible to give us hope and reassurance that Jesus is alive, and the Holy Spirit is with us.

In verses 4 and 5, Jesus gives His instruction and promise to the disciples.

Jesus tells them that the gift God the Father will send is the Holy Spirit. They were to wait in Jerusalem until God sent the Holy Spirit to them.

Waiting is not always an easy process, but it is a necessary process. We can learn a lot from God and show a lot to God by the way we wait.

When the disciples waited in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus, they showed obedience and faith.

Their waiting showed they believed what Jesus told them and they demonstrated their belief by choosing not to act on their own, but to wait for God.

Can you imagine the damage they could have caused if they had moved without God?

Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we will not be effective for the Kingdom of God.

That message is still true for believers today. In our own strength, we are unable to carry out the mission Christ set before us.

Jesus goes on to tell the disciples the baptism by John was symbolic. It was an outward sign of the inward change that takes place once a believer has received salvation through Jesus.

But Jesus's baptism would be an indwelling of the Holy Spirit and empower the disciples to carry out their assignment.

In the coming verses, we will see the assignment that Jesus gives to His disciples and like those early believers, we will realize why it was necessary to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Whether it is praying for another person, talking to someone about Jesus, or leading someone to Christ, we need God to accomplish these tasks.

What damage can be done if we make decisions and move on our own without direction from God?

2. How could the growth of the early church have been impacted if the disciples had not waited but instead left Jerusalem?

3. How is the church—the body of Christ—impacted today when Christ-followers act on their own instead of waiting for guidance from the Holy Spirit?

**Read Acts 1:6-11:**

*6 So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”*

*7 He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.*

*8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*9 After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.*

*10 As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them.*

*11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”*

The question the disciples had was fair. Jesus came to reconcile people back to God.

He preached repentance and that the kingdom of God is at hand (see **Matthew 4:17**).

Now that He had fulfilled the promise of death and resurrection on the cross, the disciples could only wonder if restoring the kingdom was next.

During this time in biblical history, the Jewish people, God’s chosen ones, longed for the day that the kingdom of Israel would be restored.

They thought the Messiah would be the one to restore the kingdom.

However, when the Messiah came in the form of Christ, He was not the one they were seeking. They were seeking an earthly king—a warrior—and they missed the Savior.

The disciples knew that Jesus came to institute the New Covenant, and the restoration of Israel was part of that covenant.

Therefore, their question was honest, but Christ used it as a teachable moment to remind them of not only God's authority but to show them His submission to God's authority.

Verse 7 says, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times..."

Christ is fully human. He is also fully divine, so God's authority is also His authority.

However, He again shows His submission as God the Son to God the Father. He tells the disciples God's time is not for them to know, but God's authority alone.

God desires for us to trust Him and allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, which the disciples would need for the mission that Christ was about to give them in verse 8.

Jesus told the disciples they would receive power when the Holy Ghost came.

He then tells them their mission. They are to be witnesses for Him first in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria stretching out to the end of the earth.

Notice the order of verse 8. First, they would receive power from the Holy Spirit, then they were to go out and be witnesses.

This again reinforces the need for them to be dependent on God and why waiting in Jerusalem was so important.

That is a HUGE assignment the disciples were given and could only be accomplished through the power of God.

As disciples of Christ, we, too, have the same huge assignment to share God's word and how He works in our lives each day.

Verses 9-11 describe the scene as Jesus ascended to heaven.

Luke paints a detailed picture of what the disciples witnessed on the day of ascension.

His visible departure in front of the disciples made it clear that He was gone for good. This was not like the other occasions, where he appeared, went away, and reappeared.

Jesus's departure in the cloud was the fulfillment of the scriptures (see **John 7:33-34**) and it was final.

The cloud that took Jesus away was a reference to the presence of God in the Old Testament.

Christ was being received by God the Father so that the Helper, the Holy Spirit, could come.

As the disciples watched, two “men in white” (most likely angels) appeared and asked the disciples why they were staring up at heaven.

The angels’ question to the disciples was a gentle reminder that they had work to do.

There was no need to stand staring into heaven wondering about Jesus. He will return, but in the meantime, there is work to do.

That same message is true for believers today. Jesus promised He would return but left us with work to do.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What promises did Jesus give to the disciples in verse 4? What instructions were given to the disciples verse 5?

Explain the connection between the promises made and the instructions given.

2. The promises given to the disciples are also given to disciples today. When we have accepted Jesus Christ as savior, we also receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

What comfort does this give you when you think about the mission Christ gives us as His disciples?

3. Have you ever broken a promise or had a promise broken to you? How did that make you feel?

As Christ-followers, we have the assurance that He is a promise keeper, and He will do what He says. So, when He says He will return, He will.

How does this affect how we live our lives each day?