

The Book of Acts

Get On Board!

Studies on Acts 1-5

Before You Begin...

Read the introduction pages at the start of your first study together. That way we will all be on the same page! Then do the study. Ensure there is enough time to dig into the ramifications of all the questions. If people in your group prepare it will make light work of these parts. Make sure there's still plenty of time to pray at the end! Sounds like a lot of work... don't worry—it's a great thing to be spending our time on!

Here are a few tips to help your small group grow together;

Pray... prayer is the place to start for our groups and we should do it even when we are not meeting together. We should pray that under God's strength our group would grow in its love for God and each other. Pray for the relationships within the group and the witness of the group to the church family and to those outside the church.

Participate... it's so great when people feel comfortable discussing their faith with other believers. Don't feel like you don't know enough to say something – all input is great for group life and the group is a great place to get your questions answered. Likewise, make sure you allow space for other people to participate in the group, especially quieter members! Sometimes silence feels painful and we feel like we need to fill it—but maybe if the more talkative among us wait—somebody might fill that silence for us.

Prioritise... it's really important to meet together with other Christians regularly, listening to God's word, praying together and sharing our lives. Not only is it the sort of thing we want to prioritise to ensure we're standing firm in our faith—but turning up each week is a huge encouragement to others too.

Prepare... this will make the study a more fruitful experience for everyone. You'll know the questions you need answered and you might be able to share some new insight you've had with the group. It doesn't take long—but it can make a big difference to the life of the group.

Introduction to Acts

Luke wrote the book of Acts. At first glance Acts appears to be a simple chronological account of the events that took place in the church after Jesus' ascension and Paul's arrival in Rome thirty years later. It shows the Christian missionary movement from Jerusalem to the other parts of the Roman Empire. Many people have searched Acts to find answers about things like baptism, or church order, but Luke doesn't seem to be answering those questions.

The book of Acts is the sequel to the gospel of Luke (compare Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1-2). Luke and Acts are about the same length, about the most you could fit on one scroll each. Each covers about 30 years of history. Luke wrote to a man named Theophilus, who probably paid Luke to write Luke-Acts. Theophilus had some knowledge of the gospel already. His name means 'one who loves God'. As people who love God, Acts shows us what it means to be a part of God's salvation. It informs us that Jesus, through his obedience in life and death in Luke's gospel, enables us humans to become part of God's plan of salvation for the world in Acts (Luke 2:32 and 36 are not fulfilled until Acts).

Acts is a 'historiography'—Luke has written a document that tells about recent events that are changing history. Ancient historians mostly wrote about great changes that were happening in society. Most of them longed for the 'good old days' before things changed. But Luke looked forward with expectation of great things, not backwards with longing and disappointment! Luke thought something incredible had happened. He thought that God's plan of salvation had been acted out in front of their eyes. He saw that this was just the beginning. God had come and done mighty deeds on earth that would change the course of history. God's plan of salvation for the world had been fulfilled in Jesus. God had initiated earth-shattering social change, and Luke wrote to Theophilus to show him what it meant to part of this incredible phenomenon. The book of Acts informs us of really important events in history. But they aren't just history. Luke wanted to show Theophilus, and he wants to show us, that we're was part of the same drama, we're part of the great plan of salvation for the world. So what now? Who are we, and what are we here for? How are we part of this salvation? By getting on board with what the Holy Spirit is doing—being Jesus' witnesses, to the ends of the earth.

Study 1; Acts 1

The Big Idea

Jesus is alive, and he's building up the kingdom of God throughout the world. We're part of this as we tell others about Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 1:1-26

1. What reason does Luke give for writing the book of Acts (hint: check out Luke 1:1-4)?
2. What's the significance of the word *began* in verse 1?
3. Theophilus already knew about Jesus' life, teaching, death, and resurrection. Why was it important he knew more? Why do we need to know any more?
4. What was Jesus speaking about during the forty days before he left to heaven (verses 3-4)?
5. How is Jesus going to build his kingdom?

6. What does it mean for us, that Jesus is still alive and active, and speaking about and building the kingdom of God today?

7. What was the disciples' wrong assumption about Jesus' kingdom (verses 6-11)? How did Jesus correct them?

8. What's the significance of what the angels said to the disciples?

9. If we're lovers of God like Theophilus was (*Theophilus* means 'one who loves God'), what will it mean for us to get on board with what Jesus is doing in the world?

10. Who are we, as people who have heard and believed the gospel?

Pray

What can we pray in response to what we have learnt?

What can we pray for each other?

What can we pray for our community?

What can we pray for our world?

Study 2; Acts 2

The Big Idea

Jesus' Holy Spirit has the power to bring the gospel to the whole world. The Spirit and the gospel are a potent combination—together they cut to the heart! This is the combination we need as we witness to the world about Jesus.

Read Acts 2:1-47

1. What are the results of the Spirit's presence (in verses 1-13)?
2. How does Acts 2:1-13 compare to Genesis 11:1-9?
3. What reactions do we see to the gospel today? Why?
4. Take a minute to summarise Peter's speech in verses 14-21 and 22-36 in a sentence each. What do the quotations from Joel and the two Psalms contribute to Peter's argument?
5. What was the result of Peter's speech?

6. Why would Luke think this was important for Theophilus to know? Why is it important for us to know?

7. What was happening in the early gatherings of Christians (verses 42-47)?

8. In what ways do these things remind us of Jesus?

9. What do you think this is telling us we should do as we gather as a church?

10. What are we like if we're part of God's history-changing plan of salvation?

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Study 3; Acts 3

The Big Idea

Despite the author of life, Jesus, being killed by the Jews, he brings life and restoration to them and to the whole world. This was God's plan all along, and we live in this era of restoration before Christ returns again.

Read Acts 3:1-26

1. What did the lame beggar ask for? What did Peter and John offer him?

2. What did the lame beggar get?

3. What does this tell us about how the 'social gospel' works?

4. What was the reaction of the crowd to what Peter and John had done?

5. What do Peter and John think their reaction *should* have been?

6. What does it mean that Peter and John (or we) are 'witnesses of this'?

7. What was God's plan (verses 17-26)?

8. What are 'these days' spoken of in verse 24?

9. What should we be doing in these days?

10. How do you feel you're going at telling people the gospel of restoration?

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Study 4; Acts 4:1-31

Big Idea:

Jesus is the cornerstone of salvation, the final authority. We must align ourselves with Jesus, praying for courage to keep on speaking the gospel, even in the face of persecution.

Read Acts 4:1-31

1. What were the priests and the captain of the temple guard greatly disturbed about?

2. What did the rulers, elders teachers of the law, captain of the temple, and the priests question Peter and John about? What was Peter and John's answer to them?

3. A capstone (or cornerstone) sets the alignment for an entire building. What does it mean that Jesus is the cornerstone of salvation?

4. How did the rulers, elders, teachers, & co. see Peter and John (verses 13-18)?

5. What did it mean for Peter and John to be aligned with Jesus (verse 19-20)?

6. What will it mean for you to fully align yourself with Jesus?

7. What do the disciples pray for (verses 23-31)?

8. How is their prayer answered?

9. What persecution do we face? How can the Spirit help us in these situations?

10. What will it mean for us to align ourselves with Jesus when we're being persecuted?

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Study 5; Acts 4:32-5:11

Big Idea:

The community that is on board with the Spirit cares for each other as they tell others about Jesus. They value the Spirit's work more than anything. Those who aren't on board with the Spirit don't have any part in the community.

Read Acts 4:32-5:11

1. How would you summarise the vibe of the Christian community in 4:32-37?

2. What's the central activity of the Christian community?

3. Why is this kind of behaviour so alien to the world we live in?

4. Peter states plainly that Ananias and Sapphira could do whatever they wanted with their money, so what were they guilty of?

5. What's the consequence of testing (lying to) the Spirit?

6. In what ways can we undermine the Spirit's work in our church?

7. How much do you value the Spirit's work as he works in and through our church community?
What parts of your life could you re-evaluate in order to support our church?

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Study 6; Acts 5:12-42

Big Idea:

The more the good news of Jesus is crushed, the more God makes it successful. It's too penetrating to hold back! Experiencing dishonour for a gospel like this is actually an honour!

Read Acts 5:12-42

1. Is the apostles' ministry in verses 12-16 successful?

2. Is the apostles' ministry in verses 17-21 successful?

3. When it comes to telling people about Jesus, how might God transform failure in your life into success?

4. When confronted by the very people responsible for killing Jesus, what is the heart of the apostles' response (verses 27-32)?

5. What's so ironic about verse 28 (verse 28 literally says; “you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” cf. Matthew 27:24-25)?

6. What does this tell us about the gospel?

7. Who is Gamaliel and what did he do? Does his wisdom apply today?

8. Was being beaten something that the apostles should really be rejoicing over?

9. How are the apostles an example for us?

10. What tough situations do you face when telling people the good news of Jesus? How can the very nature of the gospel itself help you as you speak it?

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