

## Diving into Acts

### Learning

#### Introducing the Book of Acts (some content you can engage to prep and/or use as a group)

- \*This week we will be jumping around a bit to set the stage
- Read - Luke 1:1-4 | Luke 24:44-53 | Acts 1:1-8 | Acts 28:28-31
- **Context:** From a literary perspective, Luke and Acts are written as a two part continuous book. Part I is “What Jesus began to do and teach,” implying that part II is what he continued to do and teach through his followers who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke provides natural summary statements in his book breaking it into 6 parts. Have people note or mark -> Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; and 19:20. In each of these passages Luke references the Word of God or Faith growing and spreading. We will approach the larger story of Acts by dwelling in these 6 smaller mini-stories separated by these verses.
- **Interesting Words:** The word “instructed” in Luke 1:4 is *katecheo* and where the word catechism comes from. The word for “witness” in Acts 1:8 is *martoos* and simply implies one who can testify to something they have seen or experienced.
- **Culture:** Historically, the book was written decades after Jesus probably between 55-75 CE. This is important because Luke is writing to an audience that is experiencing great cultural challenge, conflict, and, at times, hostility.
- **Themes:** The Holy Spirit is the main character of the story. Luke is interested in following the Spirit’s movements over any one main character. The movement is from Israel outward to all people. Very little interest in standardizing or making normative structure, practices, or formulas, things are always changing and happening in different ways/order/forms.
- **Quote for expanding the discussion:**

“Acts offers a unique problem in application. Unlike the Gospels or Epistles there are few commands given. This leaves readers wondering, ‘What is to be normative?’ ‘What should we follow or avoid?’ ‘Are certain events just historical fact or being highlighted for a reason?’ One tip is to look for patterns and values that do repeat in various contexts throughout the book and elsewhere in the NT. Another tip is to watch for conclusions Luke draws himself, for example God’s blessing in response to certain events.”

#### Dialogue Questions (some example questions for this content above)

- Read - Luke 1:1-4 | Luke 24:44-53 | Acts 1:1-8 | Acts 28:28-31
- What themes stand out from these opening and closing passages of his books? What connections do you see between these passages?
- Can you together agree upon Luke’s sense of agenda and purpose in writing? How does this agenda sit with you given our current cultural context?

#### Implication Questions (some example questions/challenges that engage real life now)

- Try reading the quote above and give space for reflection on it. What good or bad experiences have you had with making Acts normative? What do you think of these tips?
- Did any of you experience *catechism* or instruction in your faith story? What is your memory of it? What do you think the process of catechism should look like for followers of Jesus? Try to approach your reading of Acts in this season as an exercise in catechism together.
- **Response:** Consider ending in prayer that Luke’s purposes would be fulfilled in your community.
- **During the Week:** Be reading Acts 1:1-6:7

## Scriptures

### Luke 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

### Luke 24:44-49

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

### Acts 1:1-8

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

### Acts 28:28-30

"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

## Literary divisions

**Act 6:7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

**Act 9:31** Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

**Act 12:24** But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

**Act 16:5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

**Act 19:20** In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power