

# ACTS

ARE YOU STILL WATCHING?

Every year Pastor Carl takes us verse by verse through the book of Acts. This is a special time every year as we learn about the early church and disciples together. We recognize though that not everyone has been a part of this journey, or we might have forgotten the details of previous years. We've written short recaps and devotionals for you to help you catch up so you're ready for our new season of Acts!

We've laid out the devotionals so you can recap a season (year) of Acts one day at a time. Here's what each will have:

**Chapter Recaps-** *We recapped the main ideas or stories from each chapter covered by Pastor Carl.*

**Chapter devotionals-** *A staff member has written a short devotional for each chapter.*

Here's what you need before you start:

**Bible**

**Journal**

**Pen**

## Acts: Season One (2014) - Chapters 1 & 2

### DAY ONE

**Chapter 1 Plot Summary:** Before ascending to Heaven, Jesus leaves final instructions for the disciples. He promises the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit to assist them on their mission to spread the Gospel to the whole world, starting with those closest to them. While waiting for the Holy Spirit, the disciples regroup to pray, fellowship, plan, and choose someone to replace Judas the betrayer of Jesus.

The first chapter of Acts sets the stage for the events that unfold in the New Testament Church. While the disciples might feel nervous that the Messiah is leaving, Jesus promises something important about the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, from which we get the word “dynamite.” Jesus will not leave them powerless in the mission. The Holy Spirit will enable the message of Jesus and the Church to explode into the world.

This promise of power through the Holy Spirit brings particular encouragement, because Jesus also says they would be his witnesses. The word he uses is *martyr*. If His own life and death did not convince them how perilous the journey could be, he says they will be martyrs. If they remembered, Jesus previously promised that the world would react with hostility to those who proclaim His message (Matthew 10:16-22).

With the Great Commandment in place, the disciples return to Jerusalem to pray, fellowship, plan, and wait for the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

**Chapter 2 Plot Summary:** The Holy Spirit fills the disciples at Pentecost and gives them the ability to speak in many languages to proclaim the message of Jesus. Peter boldly preaches the Gospel to a large gathering. 3,000 people believe that day and join them. The believers gather regularly to focus on teaching, fellowship, prayer, giving, worship, and growth. Through their witness and lives, their numbers grew daily with new believers.

At the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrives just as Jesus promised - with power! The disciples begin to speak in languages not known by them. Gathered from many different regions, those in attendance can not believe they understand these men. In Acts 2:11, the miraculous tongues of fire enable the people to hear the mighty works of God, each in their own language! While all believers receive the Holy Spirit in salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13), there are moments of increased outpouring that enable believers to testify of the power and authenticity of the Gospel and presence of God as we see later in Acts 10:44-48 and Acts 18:12-21.

As Peter preaches, he outlines from Scripture exactly what everyone is seeing - the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the expansion of the Kingdom of God through Jesus as the promised King. This moment at Pentecost marks a new era in the Kingdom of God. No longer will the Holy Spirit move just in select individuals, but He will rush upon “all people” yielding dreams, visions, and prophecy (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28).

Chapter 2:42-47 closes with a description of the believer’s habits. This description forms the model for our own lives as Jesus followers. **Teaching** (we love going deep in the Word of God), **Fellowship** (we love gathering with one another), **Prayer** (we love hearing from God and taking petitions to Him), **Giving** (we love caring for others through God’s blessing on us),

**Worship** (we love praising and honoring God), **Growth** (we love seeing new faces in the Kingdom of God).

As believers, the same Great Commission exists, to proclaim the message of Jesus to the world. The same Holy Spirit empowers us for that mission. The same spiritual habits must be ours. Do you need to dive deeper into the Scriptures? Do you give to the needs of others? Do you need to gather with other believers more often? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal an area He's calling you to lean into more.

## **Acts: Season Two (2015) - Chapters 3 - 5**

### **DAY TWO**

**Chapter 3 Plot Summary:** Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples begin to fulfill the Great Commission. On their way to the Temple, Peter and John heal a crippled man begging for alms. As a crowd gathers in amazement, Peter preaches the message that Jesus was the promised Messiah, sent to turn people's hearts back to God.

Just like the crippled man begging for charity, we often don't know what we need. Peter and John carried no money, but they possessed something much greater - the power of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel. In this chapter, we see a major function of miracles in the New Testament to testify of the disciples' authority in continuing the work of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Miraculous healing exists to not only alleviate suffering but to create an opportunity to proclaim the greatest miracle of all - that Jesus forgives sin and raises dead souls to eternal life.

When we pray in faith, God still heals today in accordance with his will (1 John 5:14; James 5:15). Yet even Paul, who performed many miracles, had a friend he left sick (2 Tim 4:20). Scripture promises our dying physical bodies will be transformed when Christ returns (1 Cor 13:35-58). No more sickness and disease. No more death!

This promise stands far greater than mere physical healing. If God heals a body wracked with cancer, the person eventually dies. Yet for followers of Jesus, the promise of an eternally whole body brings immense hope. This beautiful promise allows Christians to pray in faith and rest assured that God still heals!

**Chapter 4 Plot Summary:** The commotion caused by the miracle and teaching by Peter and John leads them to be arrested and questioned by the religious leaders. When the elders, scribes and rulers see the healed man and the crowd praising God, they release the apostles with a threatening command to speak no further the message of Jesus. Though Peter and John were "uneducated, common men," the Holy Spirit speaks through them and astonishes the authorities. When the other disciples hear the account of Peter and John, they pray for boldness to continue sharing the Gospel. The mission binds their hearts in unity, and they give to each other's needs by selling lands and houses.

During their arrest, the words of Jesus became reality for the disciples, "*When they deliver you over, do not be anxious about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you,*" (Matt 10:19-20). The life of a Christ follower is guaranteed to meet hardship. From the common pains of life in a broken world to outright persecution, suffering is inevitable. Yet even faced with threats, the early believers prayed for boldness rather than the removal of persecution.

The Church in Acts Chapter 4 demonstrates incredible commitment to not only the spreading of the Gospel, but also to one another. As believers today, we must pursue boldness and unity in the mission and generous love toward one another. During trials or hardship, we run to God in prayer *together* to ask for boldness and strengthened faith.

**Chapter 5 Plot Summary:** While selfless, generous giving meets needs within the early church, another couple seeks to become known for their generosity. Ananias and Sapphira sell some land, keep some for themselves, then donate the remainder under the pretense of giving the whole value of the sale. Peter, through the Holy Spirit's discernment, immediately calls them out and both are struck dead. The disciples continue to preach the Gospel accompanied by signs and wonders, and their numbers continue to grow. Filled with jealousy, the religious leaders arrest and imprison the apostles. However, an angel frees them to preach again. The enraged Pharisees' plot to kill the freed apostles stops at the words of a fellow Pharisee - "... If this plan (the church) is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God."

When we talk about giving, we must remember a critical truth - God sees the heart behind the gift. In his earthly ministry, Jesus praised the meager gift of a widow and minimized the larger gifts. God told the Prophet Samuel, "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart," (1 Sam 16:7). Ananias and Sapphira were not struck down because they held onto part of the proceeds but because they misrepresented their gift. Perhaps they wanted to be highly esteemed like Barnabas, who gave the whole amount of the sale. Our offerings and gifts should flow from a heart of generosity, rather than an attempt to gain the praise of people.

The arrest, rescue, obedience, and faith of the apostles demonstrates the sincerity of their faith. When the religious leaders confront them again, they are tortured, threatened, and finally released. Acts 5:41 makes the most startling statement - "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name (of Jesus)." After being flogged, the apostles REJOICED! The path of Jesus eventually led to the cross. Rather than hide in fear, the disciples knew their persecution meant they were closely following his example.

As we follow Christ, we must keep in mind that God sees our hearts. If we worship, give, or serve with selfish ambition, we waste our lives. Yet if we sincerely follow Jesus, we must not be surprised when we face opposition. In the words of martyred mission Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

## **ACTS: SEASON THREE (2016)- CHAPTERS 6-8**

### **DAY THREE**

**Chapter 6 Plot Summary:** *We see the disciples face a good problem: the church is growing! They need help. The disciples spend time praying and fasting before they pick their new members: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus. After these men are selected they are sent out. Stephen faced opposition and was arrested shortly after he began teaching.*

**“...and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit...” Acts 6:5 ESV**  
**“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.” Acts 6:8 ESV**

When we’re introduced to the new teachers of the church, the reason for choosing Stephen is listed. He was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Stephen’s love for Jesus was evident. His life was completely changed by the Gospel. The words used to describe Stephen’s ministry remind us of Jesus. Their ministries were full of grace, power, truth, and miracles.

The life of a Christ follower should remind others of Jesus. Following Jesus means we’ve surrendered every part of our life to the Gospel. We’re allowing Him to change us from the inside out. There are changes that will happen immediately but others will take time. The hope is we begin to look, sound, and act more like Jesus.

**Chapter 7 Plot Summary:** *After Stephen is arrested by the leaders of the Synagogue, he testifies before the High Priest. Stephen recounts the story of God’s people honestly. They’ve gone in and out of seasons of trusting God and rejecting God. The High Priest and crowd do not appreciate Stephen’s testimony. They took him out of the city and stoned him.*

Israel’s history with God is one full of ups and downs. Over time they had gone through seasons of faithfully serving God and seasons where they worshipped false gods. The constant in their story was God. Even in unfaithful seasons, God was faithful. He remained the same. He kept His promise.

Our stories with God may be similar to the Israelites. Seasons of faithfulness and wholeheartedly pursuing him, and seasons where other things took His place. It may be uncomfortable to acknowledge the seasons where we’ve neglected God, but we have hope. He has *always* been faithful. He hasn’t changed. Take a moment and ask God to show you things that may have taken His place temporarily, repent, then take a moment to thank God for His faithfulness.

**Chapter 8 Plot Summary:** *We're briefly introduced to Saul then we skip back to the stories of the disciples. Like previous chapters the disciples are being used by God in miraculous ways! Philip teaches in Samaria and many believe. Peter, Philip, and the other disciples encounter Simon the Magician. He watches what the disciples are doing and decides he wants to be able to perform those miracles, too. However, he wants to use it for his glory, not God's. After Peter rebukes Simon, we jump to one of the most unique stories in the Bible. Philip is transported to another place to share the Gospel and baptize an Ethiopian Eunuch. The Gospel continues to spread!*

Philip was going about his daily life when the Lord asked him to travel a different road. Philip's response was obedience. On that road he encounters the Ethiopian Eunuch. We don't know his name, we just know where he's from and what he does. The Ethiopian Eunuch is reading Scripture when Philip walks up to him. This man is curious and hungry for more. In Acts we see people are attracted to the Gospel. They can't always put into words why but they know they need what the Gospel has to offer them. Philip shares the Gospel with him and baptizes him. The eunuch's life is changed forever because of the Gospel and Philip's obedience.

In our day to day lives we will encounter people who are searching for more than what the world offers. These people are wanting answers to their questions. As Christ followers we have the answer to the world's questions, but we have to be willing to share it.

Just like Philip in our day to day lives, God will ask us to do something that doesn't always make sense. Everyday we get to choose if we're going to be obedient when He asks. It can look as simple as sending a text to a friend that has been on your mind or buying coffee for the person behind you in line. Those moments of obedience make way for the Gospel to be shared. We won't always know where obedience takes us but we can trust the one who is asking us.

## **ACTS: SEASON 4 (2017)- CHAPTERS 9-12**

### **DAY FOUR**

**Chapter 9 Plot Summary:** *This chapter contains one of the most famous stories from the Bible. We were introduced to Saul of Tarsus in chapter 8, but here he becomes one of the main characters of our cast. On the road to Damascus, Saul has an encounter with Jesus. His life and name are changed forever. He is blinded and told to go to Damascus and meet Ananias. There he is prayed, discipled, and begins teaching. Christians are nervous to welcome Paul because he was the leading persecutor of the church. Not only are Christians unsure, the leaders in the Synagogue are not happy Paul is now preaching the Gospel. Paul must escape Damascus. Once he gets to Jerusalem, Baranbas takes him in and brings him before the disciples. He's accepted and sent out to preach and teach. Chapter 9 ends with two miraculous healings.*

Prior to his encounter on the road to Damascus, Paul was known for murdering Christians. Paul even calls himself the chief of sinners. He didn't let his past stop him from receiving the Gospel and moving forward.

We all have choices we're not proud of, things we wish weren't true about us. The amazing thing about the Gospel is that it says God's love is greater than our past.

**“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV**

The enemy would love for us to focus on our past, but when we surrender our hearts to Jesus we're made new. Paul's words remind us of the hope found in the Gospel. We're no longer defined by our choices but by forgiveness. God's forgiveness is greater than our past. We have to remember that truth when it doesn't feel like that.

Grab a piece of paper, pen, and find somewhere quiet. Ask God what He says about you. Write down the things you hear Him say. Put that piece of paper in your Bible, wallet, take a picture with your phone. In the moments where it feels like your past is creeping up on you, stop and look at this paper. Remember God's forgiveness is greater than your past.

**Chapter 10 Plot Summary:** *Our story bounces back to Peter. He is traveling and sharing the Gospel. Peter receives a perplexing vision from God about animals, bird, and reptiles. When Peter asks God for more clarity, God simply says, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” The vision is brought to life when Peter meets Cornelius. Peter was an answer to Cornelius's prayers. The Gospel is for all who believe, not just Jews! Our chapter closes with the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles.*

We see another story of obedience and how it impacts other people. Peter wasn't sure what the vision from God meant but he paid attention to what God was saying. When Peter meets Cornelius the vision makes sense. God wanted to use Peter to speak to this culturally relevant issue. Could Gentiles receive the Gospel? Some leaders of the church believed Gentiles could only be believers if they first began to follow Jewish customs.



In Peter's vision God clearly states, "What God has made clean, do not call common." God is sharing His heart for all to hear the Gospel and come to Him. This is what makes the good news so good! We don't have to jump through hoops to follow God, we simply have to surrender our lives to him.

When sharing the Gospel we need to keep it simple. We don't want to create hoops for others to jump through before they're a part of the family. We simply need to extend the invitation.

## DAY FIVE

**Chapter 11 Plot Summary:** *Peter reports back to the church about his ministry. He details his vision and God's heart for the Gentiles to experience the Gospel. God's Kingdom would make no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The church rejoices when they hear Peter's report. The church continues to grow miraculously as apostles are traveling to teach. Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch so he can preach and teach. The first mention of the word Christian is Antioch.*

The church was growing throughout the region. Ministry teams are being sent all over to share the Gospel. The reputation of Christ followers is growing. Their lives were beginning to look so different from those around them. They were modeling the life that Jesus laid out for his disciples. Their dedication to Jesus marked them. This is what causes others to call them Christians.

When others look at our lives they should see Jesus. They should see men and women who give, talk, and treat others the way He did. This is not always easy. Living the way Jesus did can be uncomfortable. It causes us to sacrifice what might feel good for what is right. As we live like Him though, others are drawn to us. They want to know more about the why behind our lives. What do people see when they look at your life?

**Chapter 12 Plot Summary:** *As the church grows so does persecution. King Herod desperately tried to prevent the gospel from spreading. He kills James, the brother of John, and arrests Peter. In prison, an angel appears to Peter and leads him to freedom. Peter goes into hiding. Herod dies on the throne because he would not worship God.*

The church faced great persecution in its early days. Religious and political leaders were fearful of losing what power they had. Most in power did not agree with the message of the Gospel. This was not the kind of disagreement you find in comments on Facebook, but the kind that costs people their lives.

**11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12 ESV**

Jesus warns his followers from the beginning that they will face persecution. Following Jesus will cost you. Daily we have to make the decision if we're willing to pay the price to follow Him.

## **ACTS: SEASON 5 (2018)- CHAPTERS 13-15**

### **DAY SIX**

**Chapter 13 Plot Summary:** *We begin to hear more about Paul and his ministry. He is traveling all over to build churches and teach the gospel. In Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas face opposition from false prophets and magicians. Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit, blinds the magician, Elymas, causing those in power to believe the Gospel. In Pisidia, Paul and his ministry team teach in the synagogues. They're met with opposition when they share that the Gospel is for Jew and Gentile.*

**Chapter 14 Plot Summary:** *Paul and Barnabas continue to travel. They are opposed by Jews who do not believe that Gentiles can come to faith. Division among believers is growing around the issue of Gentile converts. Paul is seized in Lystra and dragged to the center of the city. The people intended to stone him, but he began to teach. Paul proclaims the Gospel and many believe.*

**Chapter 15 Plot Summary:** *We see the Jerusalem Council meet to discuss different issues in the growing church. The leading issues were about Gentiles coming to the faith. Some believed they needed to be circumcised others did not. This led to confusion among Gentile converts and division among leaders. After much discussion, the council agrees that there should be no extra steps needed for Gentiles to be Christians. We see Paul and his ministry team part ways to continue to spread the Good News.*

In chapters 13-15, we see a common theme: can the Gentiles receive the Gospel? This issue had begun to divide the early church. We even see different ministry teams being kicked out of cities because of their teachings. The church leaders gathered together in Jerusalem to come into agreement.

There is a famous quote from an early church Father, Saint Augustine, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." This quote is still relevant today. It's a simple truth we all need to be reminded of. Our world today struggles with practicing unity when we disagree. We even see this in the church!

As Christians we will disagree with one another. You might believe pineapple belongs on pizza while your neighbor whole-heartedly disagrees with you. Your worship song preference might be the complete opposite of your spouse. Disagreement doesn't mean we end relationships. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can live with each other's differences as long as there is agreement about the essentials.

## **ACTS: SEASON 6 (2019)- CHAPTERS 16-17**

### **DAY SEVEN**

**Chapter 16 Plot Summary:** *Paul adds a new member, Timothy, to his ministry team. His team continues to travel throughout the region. Paul's ministry continues to be miraculous as the Lord speaks to him and uses his gifts to grow the church. The ministry team faces persecution and are thrown in prison. Paul and Silas choose to praise God even in prison. Their praise brings freedom! The prison is shaken and they are set free. Because of this miracle, the jailer guarding them actually receives the Gospel!*

Paul and Silas, in the midst of their problem, were praising God. How? When Paul encountered suffering he chose praise. Joy in suffering was a theme throughout Acts and Paul's life. Paul and Silas knew that the Lord is still good even though they were in prison. Praise is POWERFUL. When you know the heart of the Father you know can have joy in the midst of trial.

Speak with authority to the problems you're facing and praise God directly for the victory, even if you don't see it yet. Each one of us has the power to overcome, not because of who we are, but whose we are.

**Chapter 17 Plot Summary:** *In this chapter you see Paul taking the Gospel with Him wherever he goes: From Thessalonica, to Berea, to Athens. They face opposition from Jewish leaders along the way. In Athens, Paul addresses the issue of idols. He gives a power message about our power not coming from those things but from the resurrection. He is mocked by some but others come to believe.*

If you were on the opposite side of Paul, he would have been very annoying. You couldn't get this guy to give up.

**"We will kill you!"**

*"To die is gain."*

**"We will torture you!"**

*"I don't count the present suffering to compare the the future glory."*

**"Ok, Fine! We'll lock you up."**

*"I'll sing and pray while I'm down there."*

What allowed Paul to be so fervent in his belief? The truth of the Gospel was rooted deep within him. We can have head knowledge of God but not be rooted in him. Rootedness only comes from relationship. The kind of confidence Paul had only comes from spending time with the Father. He could confidently face trials and tribulation because he was rooted in God.

We can have the same confidence when we intentionally choose to spend time with the Father and allow the Word to mark our hearts.