

# How to Use Threshold Bible Study

**T**hreshold Bible Study is a dynamic, informative, inspiring, and life-changing series that helps you learn about Scripture in a whole new way. Each book will help you explore new dimensions of faith and discover deeper insights for your life as a disciple of Jesus.

The threshold is a place of transition. The threshold of God's word invites you to enter that place where God's truth, goodness, and beauty can shine into your life and fill your mind and heart. Through the Holy Spirit, the threshold becomes holy ground, sacred space, and graced time. God can teach you best at the threshold, because God opens your life to his word and fills you with the Spirit of truth.

With Threshold Bible Study each topic or book of the Bible is approached in a thematic way. You will understand and reflect on the biblical texts through overarching themes derived from biblical theology. Through this method, the study of Scripture will impact your life in a unique way and transform you from within.

These books are designed for maximum flexibility. Each study is presented in a workbook format, with sections for reading, reflecting, writing, discussing, and praying. Each Threshold book contains thirty lessons, which you can use for your daily study over the course of a month or which can be divided into six lessons per week, providing a group study of six weekly sessions (the first session deals with the Introduction). These studies are ideal for Bible study groups, small Christian communities, adult faith formation, student groups, Sunday school, neighborhood groups, and family reading, as well as for individual learning.

The commentary that follows each biblical passage launches your reflection on that passage and helps you begin to see its significance within the context of your contemporary experience. The questions following the commentary challenge you to understand the passage more fully and apply it to your own life. Space for writing after each question is ideal for personal study and also allows group participants to prepare for the weekly discussion. The prayer helps conclude your study each day by integrating your learning into your relationship with God.

The method of Threshold Bible Study is rooted in the ancient tradition of *lectio*

*divina*, whereby studying the Bible becomes a means of deeper intimacy with God and a transformed life. Reading and interpreting the text (*lectio*) is followed by reflective meditation on its message (*meditatio*). This reading and reflecting flows into prayer from the heart (*oratio* and *contemplatio*). In this way, one listens to God through the Scripture and then responds to God in prayer.

This ancient method assures you that Bible study is a matter of both the mind and the heart. It is not just an intellectual exercise to learn more and be able to discuss the Bible with others. It is, more importantly, a transforming experience. Reflecting on God's word, guided by the Holy Spirit, illumines the mind with wisdom and stirs the heart with zeal.

Following the personal Bible study, Threshold Bible Study offers ways to extend personal *lectio divina* into a weekly conversation with others. This communal experience will allow participants to enhance their appreciation of the message and build up a spiritual community (*collatio*). The end result will be to increase not only individual faith but also faithful witness in the context of daily life (*operatio*).

When bringing Threshold Bible Study to a church community, try to make every effort to include as many people as possible. Many will want to study on their own; others will want to study with family, a group of friends, or a few work associates; some may want to commit themselves to share insights through a weekly conference call, daily text messaging, or an online social network; and others will want to gather weekly in established small groups.

By encouraging Threshold Bible Study and respecting the many ways people desire to make Bible study a regular part of their lives, you will widen the number of people in your church community who study the Bible regularly in whatever way they are able in their busy lives. Simply sign up people at the Sunday services and order bulk quantities for your church. Encourage people to follow the daily study as faithfully as they can. This encouragement can be through Sunday announcements, notices in parish publications, support on the church website, and other creative invitations and motivations.

Through the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading, study, reflection, conversation, and prayer, Threshold Bible Study will help you experience God's grace more abundantly and root your life more deeply in Christ. The risen Jesus said: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev 3:20). Listen to the Word of God, open the door, and cross the threshold to an unimaginable dwelling with God!

## SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- Make your Bible reading a time of prayer. Ask for God's guidance as you read the Scriptures.
- Try to study daily, or as often as possible according to the circumstances of your life.
- Read the Bible passage carefully, trying to understand both its meaning and its personal application as you read. Some persons find it helpful to read the passage aloud.
- Read the passage in another Bible translation. Each version adds to your understanding of the original text.
- Allow the commentary to help you comprehend and apply the scriptural text. The commentary is only a beginning, not the last word, on the meaning of the passage.
- After reflecting on each question, write out your responses. The very act of writing will help you clarify your thoughts, bring new insights, and amplify your understanding.
- As you reflect on your answers, think about how you can live God's word in the context of your daily life.
- Conclude each daily lesson by reading the prayer and continuing with your own prayer from the heart.
- Make sure your reflections and prayers are matters of both the mind and the heart. A true encounter with God's word is always a transforming experience.
- Choose a word or a phrase from the lesson to carry with you throughout the day as a reminder of your encounter with God's life-changing word.
- For additional insights and affirmation, share your learning experience with at least one other person whom you trust. The ideal way to share learning is in a small group that meets regularly.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

- Meet regularly; weekly is ideal. Try to be on time, and make attendance a high priority for the sake of the group. The average group meets for about an hour.
- Open each session with a prepared prayer, a song, or a reflection. Find some appropriate way to bring the group from the workaday world into a sacred time of graced sharing.
- If you have not been together before, name tags are very helpful as group members begin to become acquainted with one another.
- Spend the first session getting acquainted with one another, reading the Introduction aloud, and discussing the questions that follow.
- Appoint a group facilitator to provide guidance to the discussion. The role of facilitator may rotate among members each week. The facilitator simply keeps the discussion on track; each person shares responsibility for the group. There is no need for the facilitator to be a trained teacher.
- Try to study the six lessons on your own during the week. When you have done your own reflection and written your own answers, you will be better prepared to discuss the six scriptural lessons with the group. If you have not had an opportunity to study the passages during the week, meet with the group anyway to share support and insights.
- Participate in the discussion as much as you are able, offering your thoughts, insights, feelings, and decisions. You learn by sharing with others the fruits of your study.
- Be careful not to dominate the discussion. It is important that everyone in the group be offered an equal opportunity to share the results of their work. Try to link what you say to the comments of others so that the group remains on the topic.
- When discussing your own personal thoughts or feelings, use “I” language. Be as personal and honest as appropriate, and be very cautious about giving advice to others.

- Listen attentively to the other members of the group so as to learn from their insights. The words of the Bible affect each person in a different way, so a group provides a wealth of understanding for each member.
- Don’t fear silence. Silence in a group is as important as silence in personal study. It allows individuals time to listen to the voice of God’s Spirit and the opportunity to form their thoughts before they speak.
- Solicit several responses for each question. The thoughts of different people will build on the answers of others and will lead to deeper insights for all.
- Don’t fear controversy. Differences of opinions are a sign of a healthy and honest group. If you cannot resolve an issue, continue on, agreeing to disagree. There is probably some truth in each viewpoint.
- Discuss the questions that seem most important for the group. There is no need to cover all the questions in the group session.
- Realize that some questions about the Bible cannot be resolved, even by experts. Don’t get stuck on some issue for which there are no clear answers.
- Whatever is said in the group is said in confidence and should be regarded as such.
- Pray as a group in whatever way feels comfortable. Pray for the members of your group throughout the week.

### Schedule for Group Study

Session 1: Introduction Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Session 2: Lessons 1–6 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Session 3: Lessons 7–12 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Session 4: Lessons 13–18 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Session 5: Lessons 19–24 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Session 6: Lessons 25–30 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8**



## Church of the Holy Spirit (Part 1)

The Bible is full of adventure, but the Acts of the Apostles is perhaps the most adventurous book of all. It takes us to some of the great cities of the ancient world: to holy Jerusalem, wealthy Antioch, scholarly Athens, cosmopolitan Corinth, and powerful Rome. It introduces us to all kinds of people: apostles, prophets, martyrs, philosophers, governors, kings, merchants, jailers, and sailors. It narrates for us a variety of events: dramatic spiritual experiences, missionary journeys, trials and imprisonments, powerful speeches that provoke dramatic responses, sea voyages and a shipwreck, and the clash of ancient cultures.

This work is most thrilling because here we see Christianity in its earliest youth, being lived for the first time in history. But we don't just read about these historical events as objective observers. As members of this same church, we are invited into this adventurous story because we realize in its telling that the adventure continues into the lives of all those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts is open-ended, for it continues into the life of the church and its members in every age.

The Acts of the Apostles is the second volume of a two-part work; the first volume is the Gospel according to Luke. The gospel is the account of Jesus, from his birth to his eternally glorified presence in heaven; Acts is the account of the early church, from its birth at Pentecost to its extended presence reaching out to the whole world. Yet, Jesus is the center of both works. In the first volume he is visibly present; in the second, he is the “absent” Lord who continues to work powerfully in the world through his word and his Spirit. In Acts, Jesus is not a hero from the past; he is the Lord of the present. Though established in his heavenly abode, Jesus continues to be present to his community on earth, empowering mediators to act on his behalf to continue the mission he began.

Luke must have drawn from a variety of earlier sources to write the Acts of the Apostles, just as he drew from several sources for his gospel. There were probably accounts, both oral and written, about the individual heroes of the early church—Peter, John, Stephen, Philip. There must have been collected records of local churches—Antioch, Corinth, Caesarea, Ephesus, and Jerusalem—from which Luke gathered details of events in those places. Perhaps Luke had access to travel diaries written by those who accompanied Paul. It is quite possible that Luke knew some of the influential people from the early churches—people like Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, Philip, Mark, Aquila and Priscilla, and even Paul himself—from whom he collected material for his detailed account of the apostolic church.

There was no shortage of informants and it was probably a case of too much information rather than too little. Luke had to decide what to leave out and what to put in. If we think about all that Luke could have written, we might get frustrated at how little he really tells us. There is much that we would like to know that Luke did not include. We might think that the book was misnamed: for it tells us almost nothing about most of the original twelve apostles, except for a list of their names in 1:13. We read a lot about Peter, and a little about John, James, and Judas, but that is all. Instead, we are introduced to lots of characters who are not apostles. We read about how the church expanded westward, through Greece and into Rome. But we are told nothing about the growth of the church in other directions—south into Egypt or east into Arabia. We certainly would have wanted to read a complete account of the lives of Peter and Paul. We see the deeds of Peter in the first half of Acts, but then we don’t read any more about him. The life of Paul seems complete

as we read, but the book ends with Paul as a prisoner in Rome. The book is left open-ended and seems incomplete.

Acts is the only book we have that narrates the church’s earliest history. If Acts had been lost, there is no work that could have taken its place. There are a few hints of events in the early church in Paul’s letters, but they do not give us the information we would long to know. What happened to the followers of Jesus? What did they do next? What did they do with the teachings of Jesus and the commission he gave them to continue his work? Without Acts there would be a gaping chasm in the New Testament, with the gospels on one side and the letters on the other. Acts is the necessary link, pulling the New Testament into a complete collection of inspired literature.

### Reflection and discussion

- What motivates you to want to study the Acts of the Apostles?
- What might be some of the reasons why Acts seems incomplete and open-ended?

### The Holy Spirit as Guide and Inspiration for the Church

The Acts of the Apostles might more accurately be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. It is this Spirit of God who is the truest apostle—“the one who is sent” by God to empower and guide the early church. In his narrative, Luke traces

the way the Spirit of God guided the community of disciples from the beginning of the church throughout the early stages of its growth. This same Holy Spirit, we may presume from Acts, continues to direct the church which had its origin at Pentecost and is now two thousand years old.

Luke's description of God's saving plan is marked out in three stages: that of Israel, of Jesus, and of the church. Both Luke's gospel and Acts begin with a transition to a new stage, and both of those transition periods are directed by the Holy Spirit. The birth and infancy narratives at the beginning of Luke's gospel mark the transition from the epoch of Israel to the new age of Jesus. And the birth and early days of the church at the beginning of Acts mark the transition to the new stage of the church.

After the age of Israel in which God's Spirit was diffuse, being bestowed periodically by God to his chosen prophets, priests, and kings, Jesus is uniquely and profusely blessed by the Spirit. This divine Spirit is the agent of God's action in Jesus throughout his life and the dynamism of his ministry. Jesus does not pass on the Spirit until his earthly mission is complete. But following his resurrection and ascension into glory, he bestows his Spirit permanently within his church. Once this community of disciples receives the Spirit, it is able to act as Jesus did. The Spirit that was his alone is now poured out upon them all. Peter proclaims: "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, [Jesus] has poured out this that you both see and hear" (2:33). "Clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), the community will now minister the presence of Jesus as Lord in the world. From the time of Pentecost, all the major characters in Acts are driven by the Spirit to act courageously and preach boldly. Clearly Luke considers the Holy Spirit to be the "life-principle" of the church.

The Holy Spirit guided the mission of the early church according to God's designs. In what has been called a "triple Pentecost," Luke narrates the gift of the Spirit first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans, and finally to the Gentiles. In the first Pentecost, many Jewish people gathered in Jerusalem accepted Peter's invitation to repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). As Luke narrates the witness of Jesus' disciples expanding to Judea and Samaria, he shows us that many Samaritans began accepting the word of God. So the apostles sent Peter and John to pray for the Spirit with the Samaritans, and they "laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (8:17). The final expansion of the good news to non-Jews—the Gentiles—began in

the city of Caesarea. When Peter was speaking to the crowd, he proclaimed that "God shows no partiality" (10:34)—that people from any nation can experience God's salvation. While he was speaking, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word." The Jews who had accompanied Peter were amazed that "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles" (10:44-45). This third outpouring of God's Spirit indicated that both Jews and Gentiles could be equally endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus making way for the expansion of the Christian mission to the whole world. Thus, the Holy Spirit guided the Christian mission, first in Jerusalem, then into Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth (1:8). The Spirit drove the church to cross every barrier in proclaiming the gospel.

### Reflection and discussion

- In what ways does Luke show that the Holy Spirit is the life-principle of the early church?
- What does the Holy Spirit encourage the community of disciples to do? How might God's Spirit be encouraging me as I begin this study of Acts?

### God's Salvation Extended to All

The entire event of Jesus Christ, from his earthly ministry through the expansion of his ministry in his church, is framed by the theme of the salvation of

God. The life of Jesus is prefaced by the proclamation that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6), and Acts concludes with the announcement that “this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles” (Acts 28:28). Jesus was proclaimed as Savior by the angels at his birth, and both Peter and Paul announce that Jesus is Savior for Israel (Acts 5:31; 13:23). By applying this ancient title for God to Jesus himself, Luke assures us that God has brought salvation to the world in Jesus.

God’s whole plan for the world can be described as the history of salvation. This divine plan had been revealed by God in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the events recorded in Luke and Acts are the completion of God’s ancient plan. At the end of the gospel, Jesus told his disciples “that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Acts confirms that the Scriptures of Israel are fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 1:16; 3:18-25). Luke stresses the continuity of God’s plan, which was worked out through the history of Israel, of Jesus, and of the church. Jesus is the center of God’s plan; he unites the past, present, and future. He is the one who was promised in the Hebrew Scriptures and who brought salvation through his life, death, and resurrection. And it is Jesus who continues after his resurrection and ascension to offer salvation to all humanity through his representatives in the early church. Indeed, “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The bestowal of the Spirit on both Jews and Gentiles demonstrates that God treats everyone the same, gives the same opportunities to all, and calls upon all people to respond to the salvation he offers through Jesus Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit, God unites Jesus and his church. Luke demonstrates this unity and continuity by showing parallels between Jesus and the apostolic community and between his gospel and Acts. The divine Spirit comes down on the assembled community at Pentecost, dwelling within the disciples and empowering the church, just as the empowering Spirit came to dwell in Jesus at his baptism. As Jesus had an introductory speech setting forth the purpose of his mission (Luke 4), so do his disciples, Peter and Paul (Acts 2:14f; 13:16f). As Jesus raised men and women from the dead (Luke 7:11-17; 8:40-56), so do Peter and Paul in the raising of Tabitha and Eutychus (Acts 9:36-43; 20:7-12). The trials of Jesus have intriguing parallels in the trial scenes of Stephen and Paul in Acts. The farewell discourse of Jesus in Luke 21

parallels the farewell discourse of Paul at Miletus in Acts 20.

These many parallels are the author’s way of demonstrating that the life of Jesus continues in his church: like master, like disciple. As Jesus prayed, preached, taught, healed, reconciled, and suffered, so his followers are shown doing the same things. We are invited into this ongoing account as disciples of Jesus. We too are called to do as Jesus did, to be his living presence in the world. This open-ended history continues in the lives of all who receive the “Spirit of Jesus” (16:7), in the lives of people ready to believe, pray, teach, serve, and forgive.

### Reflection and discussion

- What does God’s salvation mean to me? What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Savior of the world?
- What are some of the ways that Luke shows the role of the church in extending God’s salvation to the world?

### The Call to Evangelize the World

God’s desire to bring salvation to the world means that God wants all people everywhere to experience the forgiveness and divine life offered through Jesus Christ. Acts presents this universal will of God by demonstrating the worldwide mission of the church. By filling his gospel with outcasts and marginal-



ized people, Luke began to teach his readers that they are to be witnesses to all people. All kinds of people are the recipients of the mission of Jesus: rich and poor, powerful and weak, men and women, sinners and saints. In Acts we see a further extension of that mission: to widows, centurions, merchants, jailers, philosophers, governors, kings, and sailors. The gospel reaches into the lives of every imaginable kind of person. Disciples of Jesus are to be witnesses to every person throughout the world.

In the programmatic verse of Acts, Jesus commissions his apostles to be witnesses, first “in Jerusalem,” then “in all Judea and Samaria,” and finally “to the ends of the earth” (1:8). This opening-out of the gospel message to a continually wider audience forms the structure of the book. The good news of forgiveness and the manifestation of God’s Spirit is offered first to the Jews in Jerusalem, but then to “all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (2:39).

Beyond Jerusalem, the good news is first spread to the Samaritans (8:4-13). Then the message of salvation is offered to an Ethiopian traveling in Judea (8:26-39). It is then brought to the coastal region, to the inhabitants of Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa (9:31-43). The outreach to the Gentiles, the clearest expression of the church’s universal mission, begins with Peter’s entering the home of Cornelius and the conversion of his household. The Gentile mission is then followed by the mission to the Greeks in Antioch, and then by the long journeys of Paul with his fellow missionaries. The journeys of Paul extend throughout Asia Minor, into Greece, and finally to the capital of the empire, the city of Rome. When Paul travels to Rome, his witness to Christ has truly become universal; the mission has extended “to all the nations.”

This extension of salvation to the Gentiles does not mean that God has taken back his promises to Israel. Luke struggles with the fact that the majority of Jews did not come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, yet he never gave up on the “hope of Israel” (28:20). Luke makes it clear that thousands of Jews in Jerusalem converted in response to the apostles’ preaching (2:41; 4:4). The Jewish-Christian community grows steadily in number as more and more Jews join the community of believers (5:14; 6:7). Before showing the mission of Paul to convert the Gentiles, Luke wants to show us that God is faithful to his own historical people. Yet, even for Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the mission to the Jews is primary. Consistently Paul goes first to the synagogue of each town and preaches to the Jews. Even when his message is rejected

there and Paul states that he is turning to the Gentiles, he never gives up on his fellow Jews. Even the final scene of Acts shows Paul preaching the message of salvation, “from the law of Moses and the prophets” (28:23), to the Jewish people of Rome. Luke reports that “some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe” (28:24).

Acts presents for us a church made up of all kinds of people: Jews and Gentiles, the alienated and outcasts, apostles and martyrs. From Jerusalem to Rome, the people of God grow in number and devotion, accepting the gift of salvation which is offered to all. The community of those “saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (15:11) is destined to spread to the ends of the earth.

### Reflection and discussion

- In what way does the programmatic verse at the beginning of Acts (1:8) outline the entire scope of the book and the church’s mission?
- How does my own life seem to fit into God’s saving plan for the world?

### Prayer

*Lord God, you raised up Luke to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ and to evangelize through his writing the Acts of the Apostles. Prepare my heart to experience the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit through the pages of this inspired work. Show me how to take these words to heart and to meditate upon them. Stir up within me a deep desire to respond to the Spirit’s promptings and guidance as I seek to follow the way of Jesus in the world. Keep me faithful these weeks to the challenges of study and prayer which your word offers to me.*



## SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS, GROUP SESSION 1

1. If the group is meeting for the first time, or if there are newcomers joining the group, it is helpful to provide nametags.
2. Distribute the books to the members of the group.
3. You may want to ask the participants to introduce themselves and tell the group a bit about themselves.
4. Ask one or more of these introductory questions:
  - What drew you to join this group?
  - What is your biggest fear in beginning this Bible study?
  - How is beginning this study like a “threshold” for you?
5. You may want to pray this prayer as a group:
 

*Come upon us, Holy Spirit, to enlighten and guide us as we begin this study of the Acts of the Apostles. You inspired the writers of the Scriptures to reveal your presence throughout the history of salvation. This inspired word has the power to convert our hearts and change our lives. Fill our hearts with desire, trust, and confidence as you shine the light of your truth within us. Motivate us to read the Scriptures, and give us a deeper love for God’s word each day. Bless us during this session and throughout the coming week with the fire of your love.*
6. Read the Introduction aloud, pausing at each question for discussion. Group members may wish to write the insights of the group as each question is discussed. Encourage several members of the group to respond to each question.
7. Don’t feel compelled to finish the complete Introduction during the session. It is better to allow sufficient time to talk about the questions raised than to rush to the end. Group members may read any remaining sections on their own after the group meeting.
8. Instruct group members to read the first six lessons on their own during the six days before the next group meeting. They should write out their own answers to the questions as preparation for next week’s group discussion.
9. Fill in the date for each group meeting under “Schedule for Group Study.”
10. Conclude the session by praying aloud together the prayer at the end of the Introduction.

**“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?  
This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven,  
will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11**

## Jesus Gives a Mission to His Church

**ACTS 1:1-11** <sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, “Men of

*Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

In order to move on to his second volume, Luke summarizes the content of “the first book,” the Gospel according to Luke (verse 1). “All that Jesus did and taught”—his choosing of apostles, his suffering and resurrection appearances, his commission that they be witnesses to the world, the promise of the Spirit, and his ascension into heaven—forms a transition to the new stage of history, the story of the church. In his gospel, Luke had demonstrated that all the activities of Jesus were directed by the Holy Spirit, through whom Jesus had been conceived and by whom he had been anointed. In Acts, Luke shows that the church is empowered and directed by the same Holy Spirit, through whom the church is conceived and in whom the church is baptized and anointed. Truly, this two-volume work is united through the dynamic action of the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples meet with the risen Jesus, they are filled with hope and yearning. They want Jesus to finish the work he has begun, to fulfill his promise to restore God’s kingdom (verse 6). The reply of Jesus is twofold: first, he tells them that they cannot know “the times or periods that the Father has set,” ending their speculation about the end of the age (verse 7); and second, he tells them that they will be his “witnesses” in the world (verse 8). The promised kingdom will be fully restored as a gift in God’s own time. In the meantime, they are not to wait idly; rather, they are to be witnesses filled with hope in the promises Jesus has left them.

The ascension of Jesus means that the disciples’ understanding of the world is now different. They recognize that the one who has taught, healed, and loved them has been raised to rule with the world’s Creator. In this new reality, the future is still to be fully realized; it is open-ended to the movements of God’s Spirit. The disciples are not to stand gazing up toward heaven, for the presence of Jesus will be with them in the spiritual outpouring they will soon receive. They should return to Jerusalem to await their empowerment by the Holy Spirit for their witness, because the same Spirit who empowered Jesus will be present in his church.

The two great figures of the Torah and the prophets, Moses and Elijah, each

transmitted their “spirit” to their successors at their departure. Because Moses laid his hands on Joshua, his successor, Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom and did as God had commanded Moses (Deut 34:9). Before Elijah ascended into heaven, Elisha, his successor, asked for a double share of his spirit. So when Elijah departed, his spirit was actively present in his successor (2 Kings 2:9, 15). Likewise, as Jesus departs, he promises his Spirit to his disciples. In fact, the two men in white garments may well represent Moses and Elijah, the departed predecessors of Jesus, who appeared with him at the Transfiguration (verse 10). Jesus could have stayed on earth longer, or even forever, but he departed in order to leave his work in the hands of his church. The entire book of Acts demonstrates, then, that the work of Jesus continues in the church through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Reflection and discussion

- Do I seek Jesus by gazing to heaven or by doing his work on earth? What part of his mission has Jesus entrusted to me?
- What are the indicators that Luke’s gospel continues in Acts? How is the Holy Spirit the power who unites the two parts of Luke’s work?

- What is the task of disciples between the time of Jesus' ascension and his return in glory? Why does Jesus tell them not to speculate about the future? Why do the men in white tell them not to remain looking heavenward?

- Both Moses and Elijah ended their work on earth by passing on their own spirit to their successors. In what sense does Jesus complete this pattern?

- How does the beginning of Acts confirm, modify, or overturn my understanding of the purpose and mission of the church?

### Prayer

*Ascended Lord, send your Holy Spirit to me so that I may understand your word and proclaim it through my life. Empower me to witness to you and to continue your work in the world today. Come, Holy Spirit, come.*



**All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.** Acts 1:14

## Reestablishing the Twelve Apostles

**ACTS 1:12-26** <sup>12</sup>*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.* <sup>13</sup>*When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.* <sup>14</sup>*All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*

<sup>15</sup>*In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said,* <sup>16</sup>*“Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus—<sup>17</sup>for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”* <sup>18</sup>*(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.* <sup>19</sup>*This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)* <sup>20</sup>*“For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate,*

*and let there be no one to live in it';  
and  
'Let another take his position of overseer.'*

*<sup>21</sup>So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” <sup>23</sup>So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup>And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

The apostles travel the short distance over the steep descent from Mount Olivet and the equally steep ascent back into the city of Jerusalem. They return to the upper room where they had shared in the last supper of Jesus. Those gathered there had experienced the entire ministry of Jesus, including his crucifixion and resurrection appearances. The eleven apostles are joined with Mary the mother of Jesus, some of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, and some of Jesus’ extended family (verse 14). This is the nucleus of the church that will be empowered for mission by the Father’s gift of the Spirit. This time between the ascension and Pentecost is a significant pause between God’s mighty acts, a pause in which the church’s task is to wait and pray, “Come, Holy Spirit.” The witness of disciples must be more than just earnest striving and busy activity. They must await God’s grace with expectant hearts. Waiting and praying teach us that God’s gift of the Spirit is never our assured possession. God’s Spirit must be constantly sought anew in prayer.

The scene mirrors the beginning of Luke’s first volume. The gospel begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, the mother of Jesus, in order to give birth to Israel’s Savior. Acts begins with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the apostles, in order to give birth to the church. As with Jesus, who was filled with the Holy Spirit throughout his saving mission on earth, the church will be filled with the Holy Spirit for its expanding mission in the world. Throughout Luke’s inspired writing, Mary is a model for the

kind of expectant faith in God’s promises which Jesus desires for his church: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Luke 1:45).

As the apostles wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit, they discern through prayer and Scripture that they should choose another to complete the number of the twelve apostles. The betrayal of Judas and his ultimate suicide left a gap that must be filled before the Spirit descends to empower the apostolic church. Someone must take his office of responsibility within the core circle of apostles. The choice of an apostle is made this time, not by Jesus, but by those who will continue his work. The Twelve must be reconstituted before Pentecost, so that in that event Israel will be restored as the people of God.

Peter addresses the community about the process for replacing Judas. He states that the candidate must be “one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (verse 21). This span of witness includes the entire time of Jesus’ ministry and teaching, from the baptizing of John to the ascension of Jesus. The unique qualifications of this office demonstrate its foundational role for the church. Two men are put forward for the apostolic ministry: Barsabbas and Matthias. Accompanied by the prayer of the community, the final choice is left to God. Through the casting of lots, the Lord’s choice of Matthias is made clear. The decision is made both on qualifications and on divine choice. It is made from below, from the ranks of those whom the prayerful community chooses, and from above, as God graciously guides his church to fulfill its mission.

Matthias is then counted with the eleven apostles and the number is restored to twelve. The twelve apostles link the church to the events which originated the church, and through their “witness to the resurrection” they lead the church to fulfill its mission. With Peter, they testify to what has happened so that it may continue to happen within the church. With the twelve apostles restored, the community is ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

### Reflection and discussion

- In what ways is Mary a model for the newly emerging church?

- Why is waiting and praying just as important for the church as projects and activities?

- Peter describes the passage which he quotes from the book of Psalms as a revelation from God, that is, as Scripture “which the Holy Spirit through David foretold.” In what ways does this description of Scripture imply both its divine and human origins?

- The process for replacing Judas among the twelve apostles forms a precedent for how to make decisions as a community, looking to God to show the way. What elements of this process of discernment can help the church make decisions today?

### Prayer

*Come, Holy Spirit, teach me how to wait and pray for the experience of your outpouring. Transform me with your grace and make me holy so that I may bear witness to the name of Jesus through what I say and do. Help me to await Christ's return with joyful hope.*



**All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Acts 2:4**

## The Gift of the Holy Spirit

**ACTS 2:1-21** <sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and

Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”<sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”<sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

**T**he great event of Pentecost, in which the church burst forth with divine life, is narrated in only four verses (verses 1-4). But the truest significance of that event is the empowerment of the disciples by the Holy Spirit, and the result of that event continues throughout Acts and into the third millennium. John the Baptist had foretold that Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16), and Jesus had said, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12:49). Now the baptism of the church with the Spirit and fire stirs into flame the grace of Christ’s death and resurrection and breathes divine power into the newborn church.

The Jewish feast of Weeks/Pentecost, celebrated as a pilgrimage festival in Jerusalem, came to be associated with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai

as a covenant-making event. In Exodus, God established the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai and claimed them as his own people. In Acts, God creates the church and completes his promises to Israel as they renew the covenant at Pentecost. At Sinai, God came down upon the mountain with a terrifying noise and in a mysterious fire (Exod 19:16-19). The great sound and fire of Pentecost signify the mysterious presence of God that fills and renews God’s people with his Spirit.

The coming of the Holy Spirit takes place in the presence of Jews on pilgrimage from all around the world. Luke’s writing establishes a parallel between the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22) and the coming of the Spirit on the apostles. Immediately after the Spirit descended on Jesus, Luke listed the generations of Jews from Jesus back to Abraham and even further to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). After the Spirit descended upon those who would continue the work of Jesus, Luke lists all the nations around the world from which the Jews have gathered (verses 5-11). The church begins with the Jewish apostles of Jesus announcing the good news to Jewish people from throughout the world. The Twelve are the nucleus of God’s restored people, and the audience asks the question that will be answered in the coming chapters: “What does this mean?” (verse 12).

Not only is God creating his people anew, but the Spirit is coming to rest on each person as they begin to speak fearlessly. The very first person to speak is Peter. The same spirit that God blew into the dust to create a human being (Gen 2:7) now breathes life into this once cowardly disciple to create a new man. The same Peter who only a few weeks before could not speak up when his master was on trial now proclaims the message of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (verse 14).

Peter’s proclamation from the prophet Joel indicates that God’s promises were being fulfilled as the Holy Spirit is poured out without measure (verses 17-18). In previous ages, the Spirit had been given in measured form to prophets, priests, and kings. Now, through the saving death and resurrection of God’s Messiah, all God’s people experience the manifestation of God’s Spirit—sons and daughters, men and women, young and old, slaves and free people. What Moses had longed for is now a reality: “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). Now all God’s people share in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly anointing of Christ through sharing in his Spirit.

## Reflection and discussion

- The Holy Spirit still blows through the world, searching for hearts willing to be transformed by grace. What wonders is the Spirit displaying in the world today? What fire of grace do I wish to be lit in my heart?

- In what ways was Peter affected by the power of the Holy Spirit? In what similar ways has God's Spirit transformed my life?

- What is the relationship between the feasts of the Annunciation, the Baptism of Jesus, and Pentecost? Why is Pentecost the conclusion of the liturgical season of Easter?

## Prayer

*Creator God, you send your Spirit to complete your creative work in me. Take away my timid and cowardly spirit and give me a spirit of courage and fervor. Sanctify my heart for the glory of your kingdom, and kindle in me the fire of your divine love.*



**“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38**

# The Crucified Jesus Is Lord and Messiah

**ACTS 2:22-47** <sup>22</sup>*“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup>this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. <sup>24</sup>But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. <sup>25</sup>For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; <sup>26</sup>therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. <sup>27</sup>For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. <sup>28</sup>You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ <sup>29</sup>“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup>Since he was a*



prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup>Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

*‘He was not abandoned to Hades,  
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’*

<sup>32</sup>This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. <sup>33</sup>Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. <sup>34</sup>For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

*‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
<sup>35</sup>until I make your enemies your footstool.”’*

<sup>36</sup>Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

<sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” <sup>38</sup>Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” <sup>40</sup>And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup>So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. <sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**T**he speeches of the apostles, which are found throughout Acts, are replete with quotations from and allusions to the Scriptures of Israel. They express the early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament

in light of the resurrection of Jesus, the key that opens up all the mysteries hidden in Israel’s Scriptures. These speeches proclaim that Jesus is the climax of God’s saving plan and that his life, death, and resurrection fulfill the ancient Scriptures.

This first sermon of Peter is an example of this apostolic preaching. Peter stands up with the other apostles and calls on the crowd to listen. He presents Jesus the Nazorean and proclaims what God has done through him. Even though he was crucified as a criminal in Jerusalem, his death was not an arbitrary tragedy; rather, he was “handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” And God raised him from death, as his saving will directed, “because it was impossible for him to be held in its power” (verses 23-24). In this way, Peter expresses the necessity of the death and resurrection of Jesus in God’s saving plan.

Many of the psalms of Israel can be read as referring either to King David or to his descendant, the Messiah. As evidence of this way of interpreting Scripture in light of the resurrection, Peter quotes a few verses from Psalm 16, a psalm of comfort. These words about the one who saw the Lord ever before him (verse 25), whose flesh will not experience corruption and whose soul is not abandoned to Hades (verses 26-27), and to whom God makes known the ways of life (verse 28), refer to the one who is risen and alive in the presence of God. They cannot refer to David: everyone knows he died and was buried; in fact, his tomb was still among them (verse 29). Rather, they proclaim David’s descendent, Jesus the Messiah of Israel, the one who now reigns with God and pours forth his Spirit upon his church.

At the conclusion of Peter’s speech, the people are cut to the heart when he accuses them of crucifying the one whom God has made “both Lord and Messiah” (verse 36). Many are provoked to ask, “What should we do?” Peter responds with a clear call for a decision involving a no and a yes: “Repent,” saying no to your past life of rejecting God and living for yourselves, and “Be baptized,” saying yes to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Through repentance and baptism, all who enter this new community receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

From his own bitter experience of denying Jesus and then experiencing forgiveness, Peter knows only too well what is needed to receive abundant life. Repentance is not just being sorry; it is an act of radical conversion of the mind and heart, a conscious turning toward God in order to receive the life

he offers through Jesus. While repentance is primarily a personal and interior experience, baptism is a public and communal expression of this new life. Baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” expresses one’s faith in him and the reception of the gift of new life from God. God calls those in Jerusalem and their children as well as “all who are far away” to receive the gift of life he has promised. Many respond to Peter’s exhortation with enthusiastic acceptance, and thousands are added to the community of faith. These form a powerful communal witness to others in the city, so that more and more people come to know Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

The resurrection of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit truly transformed the lives of Jesus’ followers. In a short summary we are offered a description of the early church in Jerusalem. Four elements characterize that to which they were continually devoted: the teaching of the apostles, the communal life, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. The fact that each of these four is specified by the definite article, “the,” indicates that these are not just any teachings, fellowship, meals, and prayers. Rather, these are specific and particular actions of the early church.

The apostolic teaching includes doctrinal and ethical instructions rooted in the teachings of Jesus himself. As new members joined the community, they were offered these foundational teachings in order to deepen their understanding of the way of Jesus that they had chosen to follow. The communal life is more than just a warm-hearted fellowship among believers. The resurrection has truly transformed the priorities and social arrangements of their former status quo. Their unity in Christ extended to their sharing of material goods and a concern about all the needs of the community. The breaking of bread refers to the communal meals, including the Eucharist on the Lord’s Day. Modeled on the meals Jesus shared during his life, culminating in the Last Supper, the believers continued to gather in homes to worship God, knowing that the Risen Jesus was with them in the breaking of the bread. The prayers are most likely fixed prayer in the morning and evening, in addition to spontaneous prayer for the needs of the church. They continued to attend the services of the temple, praying the psalms and prayers of their tradition. In addition, they developed liturgical prayers for their worship at table as well as hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

In essence, the believers formed a learning church, a loving church, a worshiping church, and an evangelizing church. The quality of their life together

earned them the good favor of those outside the community. The church’s witness was infectious, and their numbers steadily grew as God converted hearts and led many to salvation.

### Reflection and discussion

- In what way is a decision about Jesus both a no and a yes? Why did so many respond enthusiastically to the message preached by Peter? Does the witness of my life add to the number of those being saved?
- Why does Peter’s sermon include so many texts from the Psalms? How is my understanding amplified when I read the Psalms through, with, and in Jesus Christ?
- The communal life of the early church was a visible testimony and witness to their faith for those around them. How can a parish become a truly learning, loving, worshiping, and evangelizing church?

### Prayer

*Messiah and Lord, you continue to call people to repentance and baptism through the witness of your disciples. Empower me with your Spirit and form me as your witness today. Enkindle your church with the fire of the Holy Spirit.*



**“I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you;  
in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”** Acts 3:6

## The Lame Man Healed at the Temple Gate

**ACTS 3:1-10** <sup>1</sup>One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup>And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. <sup>3</sup>When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. <sup>4</sup>Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” <sup>5</sup>And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup>But Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” <sup>7</sup>And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. <sup>8</sup>Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup>All the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup>and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

The work of the Spirit carries on where Jesus left off. The teaching, reconciling, and healing ministry of Jesus is extended into the life of the church through the Holy Spirit of Pentecost. The healing of the crippled beggar by Peter and John parallels the healing of the paralyzed man by Jesus in the gospel (Luke 5:17-26). Both accounts raise the issue of “what authority” is at work in the healing. The authority in each account is Jesus: Peter and John heal “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (verse 6). It is as if Jesus was still with them, responding to the needs of the sick and afflicted people who came to him for help.

Every day for centuries, in the morning and afternoon, sacrifices had been offered in the temple. For years the man who had been lame from birth sat every day at the Beautiful Gate, one of the entrances into the area of the temple, to beg for alms. Since Peter and John regularly entered the temple for afternoon prayers, they must have known the man. Perhaps they had even given him coins, since offering alms was a responsibility that Judaism took seriously. But on this particular afternoon, the apostles “looked intently at him,” sensing the Spirit’s desire to intervene in the man’s life. The lame man gives them his attention, no doubt hoping for financial help. Peter, however, provides him with more than money can buy. His words are emphatic and surprising: “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”

The miracle is not performed as a feat of magic to amaze the crowds. But, as in the healings of Jesus from the gospel, the miracle is a visual act that points to a deeper reality. In effect, Peter gives him a new life, portraying what God’s salvation does in the life of all who receive it. In speaking of the salvation to come, the prophet Isaiah had said, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (Isa 35:5-6). The lame man walking, leaping, and praising God is a tangible sign of the wholeness and fullness that salvation brings and that God desires for all people (verse 8).

This account shows how the emerging church is to engage the larger community in which it lives: demonstrating compassion in visible ways to manifest God’s saving power. The healing brings “wonder and amazement” to those who recognize the healed man as the one who used to helplessly ask for alms at the temple gate. Such a response has the potential to both awaken faith and create controversy.



## Reflection and discussion

- What is the difference between miracles and magic? Why was Peter able to work wonders in Jerusalem?

- Peter said: “I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you.” What did Peter have to offer to the crippled man? Why did Peter choose to heal this lame man and not others?

- Every day God places someone in our path who is in need. What kinds of suffering and pain do I encounter most frequently in those around me? What can I do to bring healing to them?

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and heal those impediments that prevent me from serving you. Show me that I have more than silver and gold to offer, and teach me to be aware of the healing power that I possess in your name.*

**“His name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.” Acts 3:16**

# Witness to Jesus in Solomon’s Portico

**ACTS 3:11-26** <sup>11</sup>While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s Portico, utterly astonished. <sup>12</sup>When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? <sup>13</sup>The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup>But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, <sup>15</sup>and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup>And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

<sup>17</sup>“And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. <sup>18</sup>In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup>Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, <sup>20</sup>so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus,

*<sup>21</sup>who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. <sup>22</sup>Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. <sup>23</sup>And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.’ <sup>24</sup>And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. <sup>25</sup>You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ <sup>26</sup>When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”*

**P**eter uses the opportunity of the crowd’s amazement at the lame man’s healing to focus their attention on Jesus Christ and to place the credit for the healing in the right place. The speech of Peter expresses the deeper meaning of the miracle account, and it establishes further parallels between Jesus and his apostles. Like Jesus, the apostles are now teaching in the area of the temple; and like Jesus, their teaching is closely connected to the amazing deeds they perform. The speech makes clear that the power at work in Peter and John is not their own. The crippled man was healed through faith in the risen Jesus.

Peter addresses his Jewish audience, speaking to them about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (verse 13). Peter identifies himself as a member of God’s people and a recipient of the promises of “the God of our ancestors” along with his audience. Peter wants to demonstrate that everything that God has done in his servant Jesus is the culmination of a long history of prophecy and expectation. Proclaiming how Jesus is the fulfillment of ancient Scriptures, Peter testifies to the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus is the Messiah who suffered for his people, the Christ who fulfilled what God “foretold through all the prophets” (verse 18). He is “the Holy and Righteous One” who was rejected by those he came to save. Yet, their tragic denial and handing over of Jesus to death was met by God’s raising him from the dead to become “the Author of life.”

The final part of Peter’s speech is a call to repentance and conversion (verse 19). Repentance means a change of mind, heart, and behavior; conversion means turning back to God. Peter admits that the religious leaders and the

people of Jerusalem “acted in ignorance.” Yet, ignorance does not leave them without responsibility. For this reason, Peter urges the crowd to repent and be converted. Their sin of not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and of putting him to death can be forgiven. If they turn away from sin and toward God, their sins will be “wiped out.” The Greek term also means “erased” or “obliterated” without leaving a trace, referring to what happened to letters written in ink when papyri were soaked and washed. As the letters on ancient scrolls were erased to create a new surface for writing, God wipes away sin through repentance and forgiveness.

The offer of blessings which God promised through Abraham and which is being proclaimed in the risen Lord is made to the people of Israel “first” (verses 25-26). But God offers healing and the opportunity of repentance to all people, “all the families of the earth.” These gifts are possible for all because Jesus, “the Author of life,” is risen from the dead. He alone has the power to restore people to their original wholeness and create them anew. Peter emphasizes life, not death; repentance, not blame; the forgiving power of God that can raise anyone from the death of sin, just as he raised Jesus from the grave.

### Reflection and discussion

- What are the various titles of Jesus that Peter uses in his speech? Which of these titles holds the most significance for me?
- What might the healed man be thinking and feeling as he listened to Peter speak?

- As I listen to Peter’s speech, which ideas move me to deeper faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Peter urged his listeners to respond to the good news he preached by repentance and conversion. Why are repentance and conversion necessary in order to experience the forgiveness that God offers us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Peter told the crowd that, if they repent and be converted, their sins will be “wiped out.” Do I believe that God completely erases my sins when I repent and turn to him?

### Prayer

*Jesus, you are God’s Servant, the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of life, the Messiah of Israel, the Prophet like Moses, and the Lord of all. Give me the grace of repentance so that I may experience the times of refreshing that come with your presence.*

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS, GROUP SESSION 2

1. If there are newcomers who were not present for the first group session, introduce them now.
2. You may want to pray this prayer as a group:
 

*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you have glorified your Son through his resurrection and ascension. Give us the gift of your Holy Spirit as we study the Scriptures so that we may understand your word and proclaim it with our lives. Empower us to continue the work of Jesus in the world today through the church and its ministry. Kindle in our hearts the fire of your love, and help us experience anew the grace of redemption you have brought to the world through Jesus, the Savior, Messiah, and Lord.*
3. Ask one or more of the following questions:
  - What was your biggest challenge in Bible study over this past week?
  - What did you learn about yourself this week?
4. Discuss together lessons 1 through 6. Assuming that group members have read the Scripture and commentary during the week, there is no need to read it aloud. As you review each lesson, you might want to briefly summarize the Scripture passages of each lesson and ask the group what stands out most clearly from the commentary.
5. Choose one or more of the questions for reflection and discussion from each lesson to talk over as a group. You may want to ask group members which question was most challenging or helpful to them as you review each lesson.
6. Keep the discussion moving, but don’t rush the discussion in order to complete more questions. Allow time for the questions that provoke the most discussion.
7. Instruct group members to complete lessons 7 through 12 on their own during the six days before the next group meeting. They should write out their own answers to the questions as preparation for next week’s group discussion.
8. Conclude by praying aloud together the prayer at the end of lesson 6, or any other prayer you choose.