

*50-Day
Devotional
Study of the
Book of
ACTS
(Days 1-25)*

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How to Use this Book:

God's Word is Awesome! The Lord promises that if we will diligently study the Bible He will use it to increase our faith. Romans 10:17 says: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The first thing you need to do to make this study be everything it can be for you is to **commit yourself to becoming a student of God's Word.** You're going to need to find at least 30 minutes each day to study and to prayer! Don't cop out and say you can't do that! How much time do you spend on the phone each day? How much time watching TV? How much time on the InterNet? You can find 30 minutes for God!

Next you need to begin each session in prayer, asking God's Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth! Then read the passage for the day, preferably in the New King James Version of the Bible. Then follow the study guide for that day, which will guide you through this wonderful book.

You will also want to take a 3x5 Index Card and write the memory verse on it. Use it throughout the day to help you learn key Bible verses. I can guarantee you you'll never be sorry in the future for Bible verses stored in your mind!

Then end each time in prayer also, using the things you've learned that day as a launching pad into praying for all the things going on in your life.

God bless you as you study God's Word!!!

Day 1- Read Acts 1:1-11 Memorize 1:8

Theophil-who? Theophilus! It means God-lover! Have you ever heard the words theology and Philadelphia? Theology means the study of God, Theos in the Greek language. And you have probably heard Philadelphia called the city of ‘brotherly’ love, er, love. So Theophilus means God-lover. While that may be a specific person, it probably is a generic address to all the God-lovers, including you and me, who wanted to know about “all that Jesus did and taught,” and now want to know what happened in and through the early church!

Note: If you read Luke 1:1-3, you find Luke addressing Theophilus! So “Luke” is the “former account” he speaks of in Acts 1:1!

Before we move on, are you a Theophilus, a God-lover? Pray now that God will use this study to make you fall more and more in love with Jesus!

Now fill in the remainder of Acts 1, verse 3:

Being seen by them _____ days and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the _____ of God.

Did you know that between the Resurrection (rising from the dead) of Jesus Christ and the Ascension (going back to Heaven) of Jesus Christ he spent 40 days teaching the disciples about the Kingdom? Now you do! My guess is that he took the Old Testament scriptures and reminded them of his own teaching and how His life, death, and resurrection fulfilled scripture. Why do I think this? Because the truths about his life, death for sinners, and resurrection (so that we too may have life) become the central message every time someone preaches in the Book of Acts. File that away.

Now about the Kingdom of God. Bible interpreters have argued about exactly what Jesus meant when he spoke about the Kingdom. Throughout the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke we see Jesus using the phrases “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven.” Let’s give it a little thought. Fill in the blank of Matthew 4:17 here:

“_____, for the kingdom of heaven is at _____.”

What’s it basically saying? “Change your ways, people, God’s here now!”

In Matthew 13 Jesus tells us some stories of the Kingdom to help us understand more:

Story:	Meaning:
Parable of Sower	Only those who understand and apply Christ’s rule are fruitful
Wheat and Tares	Christ’s people will be in his future kingdom- others are cut off
Mustard Seed	Christ’s rule starts small, but permeates everything
Treasure	Christ’s rule is worth giving up everything you value

In Short, when Jesus talks about the Kingdom, he is talking about what His leadership looks like in the lives of those who submit to him, both now and into the

future. And even those who die rejecting Him will refer to Him as Lord from their place of punishment (see Philippians 2:9-11).

Now fill in the blanks of Verse 8:

“But you shall receive _____ when the _____ has come upon you; and you shall be _____ to Me in _____, and in all _____ and _____, and to the ends of the _____.

There is so much to say about these words! Let’s back up to verses 4-7 to make sense of this power-packed verse! Draw a line from the verse number to the truth it is teaches:

- Verse 4 a. Your focus is not to be on political rule but on spiritual impact
- Verse 5 b. But Jesus, when are you going to zap Israel’s enemies? Isn’t that why we’re all really here?
- Verse 6 c. Don’t go out in your own strength but wait for the promised Holy Spirit that Jesus spoke of in John 14-17
- Verse 7 d. In a few days I (Jesus) will be back by my Father’s side, the work of salvation complete. Then true believers will have the Spirit of God living inside them!

Answers: Verse 4=c Verse 5=d Verse 6=b Verse 7=a

Aren’t people fickle? After all his time teaching them, after they observed his life, death, and resurrection, they still wanted to rely on their own strength and be part of a great political empire. Jesus responds by telling them to wait on God’s power, and then be not wallopers but witnesses. That’s our problem also- we often in righteous zeal want to wallop in our own strength instead of witness in His. We forget how wicked and stubborn we were when God saved us. We too need to repent, to “change our ways because God’s here now.” **If you have been a walloper repent now, and ask for God to turn you into a witness!**

We also need to mention that Jesus leaves us a pattern for our worldwide witnessing efforts.

What is your Jerusalem? (That’s where they lived)_____

What is your Judea? (That’s their country)_____

What is your Samaria? (Those near you different than you)_____

Do you have a personal plan to win these people in these places and the rest of world? If not, began praying now for God to give you a vision to be a worldwide witness! The rest of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit did this through the early disciples.

Cool Fact: I Thessalonians 1:8 and Romans 1:8 show 2 New Testament churches fulfilling Acts 1:8!

In verse 11 we see what are probably two angels talking to the disciples, who are still looking up after Jesus splits the sky. Their message? “What are you waiting for? *Do what he said!* Then he’ll come back and get you!” Friend, pray to God now and commit that you will be not only a God-lover, but a God-sharer!

“And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14

Day 2-

Read Acts 1:12-26

Memorize 1:25

Names for boys: Peter, James, John. Andrew, Phillip, Thomas. Bart, Matthew, Simon. All have stood the test of time as names that parents wanted for their children. But not Judas. Even the fact that one of the disciples named Judas (the son of James) was a godly man didn't change the fact that the other Judas, Judas Iscariot, had betrayed the Lord Jesus. For thirty lousy pieces of silver. The man who had kept the money for Jesus (and doubtless had access to more than 30 pieces of silver) betrayed Jesus, and forever will be the standard bearer for all those who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, but whose hearts are far from him. Don't let it happen to you. Your name will be worthless.

Today's passage is the one in which the disciples follow the scriptures and replace Judas with another disciple. The Old Testament text used was Psalm 109:8- "Let another take his place." Write down verse 4 from Psalm 109 here:

Wow! What an accurate picture of Judas' betrayal, written by David hundreds of years before Judas' evil deed. Note the contrast between David the man of God (who represents Jesus and his disciples) and David's enemy (who represents Judas and those who betray the Lord). Draw an arrow from the descriptions to the man:

	<<<Love	
	Accusations>>>	
Man of God	Prayer	Betrayer
	Evil	
	Good	
	Hate	

Now note verse 14, which shows the first disciples modeling unity through prayer, not accusations! The results of prayer are a desire to see scripture obeyed!

Pray now that your life will model, like the early disciples, a desire for prayer and obedience to God's Word. I have found it incredibly hard to be upset with the brothers and sisters in Christ I pray with.

Some have tried to say that the account given of Judas' death in Matthew 27:3-10 (which has Judas hanging himself) doesn't square with the account given in verse 18. Write here how you think the accounts can be reconciled: _____

Easy: He hanged himself, and because of his bad deed, no one buried him. His body rotted, and his insides fell out. Sins wages.

Interestingly, the disciples chose two men who had witnessed everything along with them to be possible successors. They prayed and then chose lots to pick the man, trusting God's will to be done!

At this point it is helpful to say a word about the Book of Acts as a narrative and what that means for interpretation. Acts 1:24-26 does not mean that God's way to choose leaders is to draw lots. That is the way it happened in Jerusalem at that time, and may be a way people choose to pick leaders today.

But narrative literature describes what happened. Other kinds of literature in the scripture tell exactly how to do something. That kind of prescriptive literature (which prescribes how to do something) should be given more weight in interpretation than narrative literature (which describes how something was done).

For instance, in the Old Testament there was a foolish man who was so excited about what God had done that he said he would offer the first thing he saw when he returned home as a sacrifice. The first thing he saw was his daughter. The man was a fool. We learn from that as narrative scripture what not to do, and of course it is not prescriptive for us to join him in his folly. There are other times in narrative literature where the example is a more positive example that should be followed, although elements of it might not be the prescribed way to do it. Our current passage is an example.

So what is the lesson we DON'T learn from Acts 1:24-26:

- A. A group of believers should choose from among godly leaders
- B. A group of believers should pray about who they choose for leaders
- C. A group of believers should always draw lots when selecting leaders

Obviously the answer is C. We should choose from among godly leaders, and pray about our decision. Drawing lots is optional! Today as you pray ask God to give you understanding as you read the scripture, and pray that you will "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Also pray for a good name, one that is respected because of your walk with God! Live by faith so it will become a reality!

Day 3-

Read Acts 2:1-21

Memorize 2:6

Our passage for the day begins with reference to that word Pentecost that has so influenced the Jewish and Christian world. And yes, that's where the word *Pentecostal* comes from. This is the day that Jesus was referring to in Acts 1, verses 4, 5, and 8. But the Day of Pentecost goes back even further. It was one of the major feasts, or festivals the Jewish people observed every year! You can read Leviticus 23 if you want to see the festivals that the Old Testament records. Other festivals, like Hanukkah, came after Old Testament times.

Amazingly, every Old Testament festival also was a picture of how God the Father was going to work through God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit. For instance, Jesus died at the time of the Passover, and was called the Passover Lamb. The day after Passover started the feast of Unleavened Bread, which reminds us that Jesus' body did not decay in the grave. The third day from Passover the Jews celebrated Firstfruits, and the Bible calls the risen Jesus the firstfruits of those who would also rise from the grave!

50 days later the Jews always celebrated Pentecost. The Pentagon has 5 sides, right?! Pentecost means "5 weeks" plus one day from Passover! Pentecost was a festival of joy and origination! And that's precisely what happened at this day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was given and the church age began! Let's review by matching the feast day with the fulfillment: Write the correct letter next to the number below:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Passover | A. Holy Spirit given in joy; church age begins |
| ___ 2. Unleavened Bread | B. Risen Jesus first of many more to rise |
| ___ 3. Firstfruits | C. God passes over our sins thanks to Christ's sacrifice |
| ___ 4. Pentecost | D. Christ's body does not decay |

Answers: 1 = C 2 = D 3 = B 4 = A

Now hold on to your socks-because I'm about to blow them off of you! Do you know what the next feast was for Israel? It was the feast of trumpets! So what, you say! Well, write I Thessalonians 4:16-17 here:

Did you catch that?! The next thing to happen will be Jesus coming back for Christians at the sound of a trumpet blast! Isn't that awesome?! Take a moment and thank God for

how awesome His Word is from Genesis to Acts to Revelation! Also thank Him for the incredible truths that are fulfilled in the feasts of the Lord!

Now, you may ask what we're supposed to do in between the Day of Pentecost and the day that Trumpet blows. Well, exactly what happens here in Acts chapter 2! Let's explore!

We only read a few verses until we see that right along with the Holy Spirit filling believers is that they spoke in other tongues. Jesus had told the disciples that upon receiving the Holy Spirit they would be witnesses (see Acts 1:8).

Many people have tried to make speaking in tongues the issue from this text. We will address this further after we've read the other passages on speaking in tongues.

But we should note here that clearly the emphasis of our passage is the power of the Holy Spirit and how he used believers to witness! With that in mind, circle the side of the following statements that are obviously true from simply reading this text:

1. a. People heard their own language spoken by others who didn't know it
 OR
 b. People heard an unintelligible language, a heavenly sort of prayer language
 See Verse 6

2. a. People spoke in tongues to edify those who had already believed
 OR
 b. People spoke in tongues to witness of God in specific languages
 See Verse 11

3. a. The theme of the text is that Joel's prophesy was fulfilled by the gospel now being shared openly and freely with great boldness from the Spirit of God
 OR
 b. The theme of the text is that Joel's prophesy was fulfilled by any dream, any vision, any miracle that anyone now has, regardless of the subject
 See Verse 21

Answers: 1=a 2=b 3=a

As we close today's study, we see something remarkable. It is Peter, the very disciple who had denied Christ 3 times, who now, filled with the Holy Spirit, is speaking with boldness to the assembled crowd! His point by quoting Joel is that God is the one behind everything happening; He is the one giving this kind of power to ordinary people, some mere fishermen, others former harlots and tax collectors! And then he says that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

In essence, Peter is saying, He saved us, He can save you too! Let him! Call on his name! If you have never trusted Christ, call on Him now! Be saved! And if you have already called on His name in salvation, then thank Him for saving you!

Day 4-

Read Acts 2:22-41

Memorize 2:38

In today's verses Peter the former fishermen is still speaking with boldness from God as a born again fisher of men! As we go through the rest of the Book of Acts we should pay special attention to what these first Christians said when they preached and spoke about God's plan, who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us, and the offer of the gospel of salvation to sinners. With those things in mind, write after each verse number the truth it contains about Jesus:

V.22 _____

V.23 _____

V.24 _____

V.25 _____

V.27 _____

V.28 _____

V.30 _____

V.31 _____

V.32 _____

V.33 _____

V.36 _____

Over and over the theme is that the same Jesus they thought they had done away with by killing was alive and was manifesting the power they now saw. In every generation men have tried to say that God is dead, that Jesus is irrelevant, and yet, with apologies to Time magazine, every century has Jesus as the Man of the century, influencing more people than anyone on earth. When the people in Jerusalem that day heard this, they were cut to the heart! Our responsibility is to share the gospel every chance we get, and when we see people cut to the heart by the Holy Spirit, and asking "what shall we do," we need to share what Peter does in verse 38. Write verse 38 here:

Before we leave this verse, we should make a few comments about baptism. It is taught by some that the physical act of baptism saves a person. Elsewhere some in Paul's day taught new converts that if they did not get circumcised they were not really saved. Paul demolishes that argument in the books of Romans and Galatians. Paul's arguments against the physical act of circumcision being necessary for salvation pretty well correspond as an answer to those that believe the physical act of baptism is necessary for salvation.

Most of the time the problem comes from not understanding that there is a spiritual baptism that happens at the moment a person is saved. Then people are physically baptized as an act of open, public identification with Jesus in response to his command that obedient disciples be baptized. This same Peter clears this up for us in I Peter 3:21. Write it here:

It's not the water that washes away our sins, but the changed life that Christ has brought through washing us with His blood. That's why there are scores of other verses that say that the key to salvation is repenting (turning from sinful practices) and believing by faith in Christ, letting Him be the new boss of your life. The beautiful picture that physically getting baptized is of our conversion is further illustrated by Paul talking about the spiritual baptism we received in Christ (see Romans chapter 6).

In this whole discussion let's not forget verse 41. After the call to repent is issued, after the call to get the spiritual baptism that is characterized by receiving the Holy Spirit is issued, after the call to be saved is issued, those who are in this way born again *gladly*, let's say it again, *gladly*, verse 41 says, *gladly* received his word *and were baptized* physically.

People who gladly receive the Lord today will also want to be baptized and so identify with Christ and be added to a local church today like they were so many years ago.

Tomorrow's discussion will talk a little more about the kind of church new converts will benefit most from being added to!

For now do business with God. Have you gladly received the word spiritually? Then it is time for you to physically show your identification with Christ by being baptized and joining a church. Thank God for turning men like Peter into bold champions for Christ.

Day 5-**Read Acts 2:42-47****Memorize 2:42**

You will not read much Church Growth literature today without this passage of scripture being referenced. It is a great place to start when considering what our churches should be like. Let's fill in the blanks to these verses from the New King James Version:

And they continued _____ in the apostles' _____ and _____, in the breaking of bread and in _____. Then _____ came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the _____. Now all who _____ were together, and had all things in _____, and sold their possessions and goods, and _____ them among all, as anyone had _____. So _____ daily with one _____ in the _____, and breaking bread from _____ to _____, they ate their food with _____ and _____ of heart, _____ God and having _____ with all the _____. And the _____ to the _____ daily those who were being saved.

Now as we take a closer look to these things that characterized the first church, let's make some comments about particulars!

Continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship...Note that the basis for their fellowship was a steadfast commitment to the authoritative teaching of doctrine by the apostles. Elsewhere it is made clear that the Bible is the authority for our fellowship and life as believers (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Fellowship is often misunderstood to mean any gathering of believers. "Come to the Volleyball fellowship," we're told. The truth is that we have to be walking in the light of God's instructions to have true fellowship with one another (see I John 1:5-7). If three people are gathered, and only 2 are committed to doing what's Biblical, the third will not feel Acts 2 type fellowship.

And in prayers...Many adults and youth in churches today absolutely refuse to pray with other believers, to be heard praying out loud. In the first church, when believers gathered together, they prayed together! We must also!

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles... Some theologians today argue that miracles ceased when the last apostle died...others argue that if you have enough faith you will see miracles constantly in your life. There is room for disagreement here.

I believe that God still works miracles and uses people to do it, but that He always should get the glory and that He only should get the glory, causing us, like the early church to fear (stand in awe of) Him. I believe very little good comes from seeking the gift more than the giver, and that much harm is done on Sunday mornings by people trying to manufacture miracles to awe their congregations.

God says that the faithful speaking of his Word will work more than our lame efforts to wow each other in the church (see, for instance, I Corinthians 14:19). I also don't think God receives much glory from TV Evangelists in \$1000 suits who live in mansions putting on "heal-a-thons" in Arenas around the globe. But what do I know! I do know that we must love each other fervently, even when we disagree on some of these issues!

...sold their possessions...and divided them among all, as anyone had need... Most people don't think they're getting into this when they get saved and join a church! Members in the first church saw needs in their midst and sacrificed to meet those needs. This does not mean they sold their homes and all lived together. It does mean they viewed their money and things as God's, and instead of pampering themselves with unneeded "extras," lived humbly so they could minister to others through giving.

The modern example might be a teenager who cuts down on the number of CD's they buy to give to help others. Or a family selling their boat and giving the money to help someone in their church in some way- like perhaps helping a youth go to a Christian college! It could mean downsizing houses and dressing more simply to be able to give.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple... the temple was not their church, it was the center of religious and political life for Israel. In part of it the new believers met, and there they were seen openly by those around them! Theirs was a public faith! I'm sure some of the reaction was something like this, "Justin, what are you doing with those followers of the Nazarene?" "Well, Silas, Jesus whom they preached is alive and has changed my life! Let me tell you about Him!"

Breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart... For the first church going to a building was not church- indeed, they had no building of their own. So they simply and joyfully got together in each other's homes all the time and built up each other's faith!

Now we have nice buildings, but we should not forget to meet informally with other believers in our homes and in their homes, gladly sharing what God is doing in our lives. For youth this could be intentionally having friends over to hang out and informally lift up the name of Jesus!

...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Notice that as they praised God and shared with each other and continued in doctrine and prayers, God gave them favor with Non-Christians and God added new converts daily. Note that this is the first time the word church is used in the Book of Acts; what an example to follow!

Now we do everything short of paying people to come to our churches, and when they do come few “continue” in the Lord’s ways. Pray for you and your church, and if you are a youth for your youth group, that as you lead in your church getting back to these Acts chapter 2 truths, the Lord will bless by people coming to know Christ and being added to your church.

Day 6-

Read Acts 3:1-26

Memorize 3:19

Towards the end of Acts chapter 2 we had read that many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Our chapter begins with an example of such a miracle being done. Just as Jesus had healed a paralytic in Mark chapter 2 saying “arise...and walk, now Peter heals a lame man by saying, “in the name of Jesus, “rise up and walk.” The disciple had done what the master had done! And the amazement that this created led to another crowd gathering and Peter being able to preach another great sermon that saw more people come to Christ.

There are 3 schools of thought about miracles today.

One says that miracles were done just during the immediate years after Jesus by his early disciples so that the gospel would spread rapidly, but with the death of the first Jesus generation miraculous gifts ceased. Miracles may still happen, this group would say, but there is no such thing as modern day miracle workers. Those who teach this are known as cessationists, and include some of the best teachers and preachers in the world.

Others believe that just as the miraculous gifts occurred in the book of Acts, they occur today and we should expect them to occur often like they appear to in the Book of Acts. Many don't feel as though they have been to church unless they hear speaking in tongues and an offer to pray for healing is extended to the congregation. Pentecostals and Charismatics fall into this category, and some of the most impressive evangelistic numbers in the church today come from such groups.

The third category, which includes me, takes a middle ground approach. I do not feel comfortable calling myself a cessationist. But I am also troubled by what in my view is the over-emphasis on miracles among so many of my Pentecostal brothers and sisters.

Against being a cessationist, I see I Corinthians 12 informing me that God the Holy Spirit does gift some people, but not all, with gifts of healing, miracle-working, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

Against an over-emphasis on miracles, I also have I Corinthians 14 informing me that 5 words that can be understood in corporate worship are better than 10,000 words that can't be understood. That seriously limits the value in worship services of placing the value on the phenomenal.

Nowhere in the epistles that follow the Book of Acts is a disciple like you and I ever commanded to bring forth a sign, wonder, or miracle.

We are commanded to pray, praise, make disciples, love one another, give, and serve, but never to bring forth a miracle. In my view the answer between being a cessationist and over-emphasizing the role of miracles today is I Corinthians 13, where love is the disciples' guiding principle.

Let's look at some other passages that help us out here. Next to the number of the verse on the left, write the letter of the statement that goes with the verse:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Matthew 10:1, 5, 8 | A. Some get gifts of healing and other miracles |
| 2. Acts 6:8, 8:6 | B. Christ will say He did not know some wonder workers |
| 3. I Cor. 12:9-10, 28-30 | C. Satan's lawless one will work signs and lying wonders |
| 4. Matthew 7:22 | D. Disciples to work miracles on their short trip |
| 5. 2 Cor. 12:12 | E. Early deacons Stephen & Philip worked miracles |
| 6. Matthew 24:24 | F. The signs of an apostle were worked among you |
| 7. 2 Thess. 2:9 | G. False Christs will show great signs and wonders |

1=D 2=E 3=A 4=B 5=F 6=G 7=C

Moving on, we see in verses 12-13 that Peter is careful to give God the glory for the great miracle that has happened in their midst. Don't look at us, he says, we did not do this in our power. He then goes on to tell them who they should look at: Jesus! There's the winning formula, friend. Get people's eyes off of you and your gifts and talents as soon, as possible, and turn their eyes upon Jesus!

As you read through Peter's sermon in verses 13-26, circle the main point he makes:

1. Jesus is the Promised One of the Old Testament scriptures
2. Our sins nailed Jesus to that cross but they couldn't keep him there
3. God will forgive us if we'll repent of our sins and be converted by trusting Jesus
4. All of the above

You answer should be D, all of the above.

As you pray today, thank Jesus again for saving you from your sins. Commit to giving God all the glory whatever your spiritual gift may be. And commit yourself to loving your brothers and sisters in Christ who see things a little differently than you do! The saints of old said it well:

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity”

Day 7-

Read Acts 4:1-22

Memorize 4:12

Our passage today is pretty straightforward in showing the boldness that had come to the disciples after Christ's resurrection and the day of Pentecost when they had been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. What makes it so joyous to read is when we think back to how scattered and frightened these same disciples were after Christ had been arrested. It is possible that Peter actually now gets to defend his faith in the very place he had denied Christ only a couple of months before! Oh the change that had come!

The religious leaders had thought that crucifying Jesus would end the Jesus movement. But the numbers of Christians just kept growing. According to verse 4, what was the number of just men that had believed? _____

When you add in women and children, the number of disciples may have now grown from only 120 in Acts 1:15 to over 20,000 people! How could they stop the Jesus freaks now?

There is a saying about some athletes: "you can't stop them, you can only hope to contain them!" Well, that's what the religious leaders came up with next. Crucifying Jesus hadn't worked. And there were too many believers now. Maybe they thought, "We can't stop them, but maybe we can slow them down some!" So they brought Peter and John in to harass them.

Jesus had told them in advance there would be moments like this! Look up Matthew 10:17-20. Write verses 19 and 20 here:

It gives me goosebumps that God in his sovereignty has allowed Peter to return to where he had blown it and now stand like a rock for Jesus! Remember, Jesus had seen him as Simon the fisherman and given him the nickname Peter, which means rock. He had wilted like a flower during Jesus' arrest. Now, with just as much danger before him, but now filled with the Spirit of God, he stands like a rock! Oh, the grace of God that doesn't give up on people like Peter, and people like you and I!

Again we learn from Peter the main things we are to emphasize- Christ's death in the place of sinners and his resurrection to show His power over death. Verse 12 is so important for you to memorize. Fill in the blanks of it here:

Nor is there _____ in any other, for there is no other _____ under Heaven given among men by which we must be _____.

No salvation in Buddha's name.

No salvation in Confucius' name.

No salvation in Mohammed's name.

No salvation in Krishna's name.

Jesus is the only name written under Heaven by which sinners may be saved!

In verse 13 we find that the religious leaders marveled at the boldness of Peter and John. They regarded them as ignorant fishermen, and yet they spoke as if they were from another world. Look at the end of verse 13 and write the reason why these simple fishermen had been made wise:

They had been with Jesus! 2,000 years later, Jesus is still confounding the learned of this world by making the foolish wise beyond any academic training they can receive! The bumper sticker is true- wise men still seek Him!

All that was left to do for the religious leaders was to threaten them! Verse 18 says they commanded Peter and John not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus!

Fat chance of that being honored by a couple of Spirit-filled fishermen turned fishers of men!

As you pray today, ask God to fill you with His Spirit, so that you too can stand up to the pressure of Jesus haters and say with Peter and John, "I can't stop speaking about the things I have seen and heard!"

Day 8-

Read Acts 4:23-37

Memorize 4:32

There is simply no substitute in the church of the living God for united prayer and praise. In so many churches today almost no significant time of corporate prayer takes place. There is much fanfare and brouhaha about programs that we are involved in, but the average American Christian is scared to death to pray out loud with other believers. As my former pastor used to say, *“and we wonder why there’s no power!”*

Our passage today yet again show us that to be like the first Christians is to prioritize prayer with other believers.

Verse 24 says that they raised their voices together in “one accord.”

I love this definition of the word Homothumadon adapted from Smith and Thayer’s Bible Dictionary:

A unique Greek word, used 10 of its 12 New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. Homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to "rush along" and "in unison". The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church.

What this definition makes clear is that our unity in Christ is not based on just being in the same room together, or that we both profess to know Jesus. Our unity is based on the fact that you and I are rushing along after the same objective: To glorify God and to put Christ first in our lives. This is exactly what John is getting at later on when he writes I John 1:7. Look it up and write it here:

Verse 28 gives great insight into the question of Jesus’ death for sinners. Even though Herod and Pilate and various Jews and Gentiles had acted together to deliver Jesus to death, the apostles realized that nothing had happened that wasn’t part of God’s plan. Don’t spend too much time dealing with “who killed Jesus.” Over the centuries some professing Christians have been involved in needless persecution of Jewish people, uttering the foolish remark that “you Jews killed Jesus.” That is terrible. The scripture makes clear that Jesus voluntarily died for the sins of the world as part of God’s pre-ordained plan.

The question is not who, but why! Why was God’s plan for Jesus to die? 2 Corinthians 5:21 says it well. Look it up and fill in the blanks:

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be _____, that we might become the _____ in Him.”

Now look at verse 29. In the midst of the threats the early church experienced, was their prayer:

- A. That they would be preserved from danger
 - B. That they would speak gospel truth boldly
- OR

The answer is B.

How does God respond when his children rush along together in desire to serve Him boldly?

Verse 31 tells us: God answers in power, filling those believers with His Spirit and making them bold speakers of God’s truth. Oh, I hope this is what you want for your own life and for your church! Do you regularly meet together with other believers to pray and praise like this? If not, you are missing New Testament Christianity.

The beautiful things we saw in chapter 2:42-47 are again seen here in verses 32-37. We have covered them already. But there is one other thing to see here.

When God’s people are practicing Biblical Christianity, God does an amazing thing. Right there in their midst he honors their faithfulness by birthing the next generation of ministers right there in their spiritual incubator! Don’t you want that for your church?!

In verses 36-37, we hear about a man named Joseph from the island of Cyprus. His obedience to God was so inspiring to the apostles that they didn’t call him by his real name. They gave him a nickname! Do you know what it was? Barnabas! It means “Son of Encouragement.” In our day we would say, “Mr. Encouragement.” As we go through the book of Acts, remember that Barnabas was his nickname, based on the encouragement his growing faith was to the apostles.

As we close today, let me ask you a question. If the leaders of your church were to give you a nickname today based on your interaction with them, what would it be? Would it be “Mr. Encouragement?” I hope it wouldn’t be “the skunk.” When a church is growing like it should, Barnabas’ begin emerging in the life of the church. They have been encouraged by the leaders, and in turn they encourage the leaders! As you pray today, ask God to make you an encouragement to your church family!

Day 9-

Read Acts 5:1-17

Memorize 5:3-4

One very foolish thing that scoffers say about the Bible goes something like this: “I just don’t think the God presented in the Old Testament is the same as the God presented in the New Testament.” Usually if asked to explain what they mean they will say, “well, the God of the Old Testament seems to be a God of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is a God of love.” What these people are usually showing is that they haven’t read either the Old Testament or the New Testament very closely. Jesus Himself spoke more about Hell than He did about Heaven.

Both Old and New Testament make clear that 2 truths exist at the same time:

1. God will judge sin.
2. God is merciful to repentant sinners.

Look up Exodus 34 and read verses 5-9. Write verse 6 here:

When God wanted to proclaim His name to Moses, he spoke first of traits like mercy and grace and goodness. But what kind of God does He say he is in verse 14 of Exodus 34?

God is both a loving God and a jealous God. His jealousy is perfect because He knows that nothing on earth that we choose over Him will be better for us than choosing Him.

When someone in Old Testament Israel claimed to know God but their actions betrayed God, it brought on his wrath. As we see in our passage today, the same was true when Ananias and Sapphira claimed to know God but their actions betrayed God. It brought God’s wrath down upon them.

We demonstrated earlier that Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

One thing he does exceptionally well is to compare and contrast people. Chapter 4 ended with Barnabas’ faith being displayed by his obedience. Now chapter 5 begins with Ananias and Sapphira showing their unbelief by their disobedience. The point is incredibly relevant for today- part of our worship of God is total honesty with God and integrity in our dealings with our church. We are not to be flippant when we go to God’s

house but instead have a healthy respect and “fear” of God. Nowhere is this taught better than Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. Fill in the missing blanks from that scripture here:

“Walk _____ when you go to the house of God; and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of _____, for they do not know that they do _____. Do not be _____ with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything _____ before God. For God is in Heaven and you are on earth; therefore, let your words be few.”

I asked you to memorize verses 3-4. In verse 3 Peter says that Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit. Who does he say in verse 4 that Ananias had lied to?

You should have said ‘God.’

The reason I had you memorize these verses together is that they make the clear point that Peter proclaimed that the Holy Spirit is God. This is one of those places you should turn to when someone doubts whether or not the Bible claims that the Holy Spirit is God.

Does it seem incredible that God would physically judge someone in church for such disobedience?

You better learn from the Scriptures! God is still a jealous God! Later the Apostle Paul writes that some in the congregation at Corinth had actually gotten sick and some died because of taking the Lord’s Supper in a flippant manner (see I Corinthians 11:26-30). Don’t play games with God, Christian!

That sure is the message that they got in Acts 5! Write verse 11 here:

In times of complacency Christians compare themselves with each other and the world around them and don’t see their sins as so bad.

But when revival comes to Christians they stop comparing themselves with each other and instead realize that compared to a Holy and Righteous God their lives fall way short of God’s glory. And a healthy fear emerges that leads to humility and confession of sin and a desire to see God the Holy Spirit clean the sin right out of our lives.

The reason I state this is that when the “fear” of God is produced such as we see in verse 11, inevitably the more pure witness that results in believers lives will turn into the results we see in verse 14. As the believers in Acts 5 became disciples like Barnabas, and less like Ananias and Sapphira, God continued to add believers to their assembly and work wonders in their midst.

As you pray today, are there any areas that you are lying to the Holy Spirit about like Ananias and Sapphira did? Oh friend, confess your sin now and receive Christ's forgiveness. Ask Jesus to teach you the "fear of God."

Day 10-

Read Acts 5:17-42

Memorize 5:39

By this passage the High Priest, along with the Sadducees, was beside himself with indignation.

Turn to Matthew 22:23, and fill in the blank what key doctrine the Sadducees rejected:

_____.

Now re-read Acts 4:1-2. The major religious parties within Judaism in the days of Jesus and the apostles were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The common person was more likely to be influenced by the Pharisees, but the Sadducees probably had more seats on the Sanhedrin.

As you have already discovered, the Sadducees denied that there would be life after the grave. But now there were thousands of these Christians running around and preaching that that just as Jesus was raised from the dead people who trusted Jesus could also live forever. So in Acts 4 they had harassed Peter and John to try and dissuade them from preaching Jesus. It hadn't worked- more people now believed than ever!

So now the Sadducees laid hands on the apostles and threw them into prison. "We warned them," they thought. "Let's shut them up now by throwing them in prison." Once again, it didn't work! An angel opened their prison door, and told them to go back into the temple and preach.

Among other things going on here, take a moment to chuckle at God's sense of humor! The verses that follow record that the leaders sent to the prison to bring the men out, only to find out that they were not only not there, they were preaching in their backyard! It's hilarious!

But the leaders didn't think it was very funny! So they bring the apostles before them again, and ask why they insist on spreading the doctrine of Jesus when they had been told they could not. Peter's answer is as relevant today in the secular halls of America and Europe as it is in some oppressive states in Asia and the Middle East. Write verse 29 here:

Brother or sister in Christ, it's been 2,000 years now, but the world is no more excited about people sharing the truth about Jesus today. Preach Christ anyway! Speak the truth in love!

We should not leave verses 29-32 without noticing a mini sermon by Peter. Every chance they got, they spoke to Non Christians about Christ's resurrection, and forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who repent and obey.

Right there and then, the leaders wanted to kill the apostles as Jesus had been killed. But a wise Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and spoke. What he says can be viewed as one of the most eloquent appeals for religious liberty in the entire Bible.

One of the reasons I am proud to be a Baptist Christian is that Baptists historically have resisted efforts to wed church and state, preferring to use words to convert people instead of weapons.

Tragically, many times in the last 2,000 years Christians, finding themselves in the seat of power, used that power to oppress others. I like what Gamaliel says, "let them alone." If of men, this Christianity will ultimately fail. If of God, nothing we can do will stop it."

Oh how I wish that all countries in the world would end their religious oppression immediately, and let everyone share with their neighbor what they believe to be the truth. No crusades. No jihads.

Gamaliel's comments kept the apostles from dying that day, but alas, they still were beaten and told not to share the gospel before they were released. Fat chance!

From verses 41-42, which answer best illustrates the apostle's response as they left:

- A. Immediately went out and got a lawyer to bring a lawsuit against the council
- B. Immediately called CNN and FOX news to broadcast their allegations against the council
- C. Immediately wrote a support letter asking donors for extra funds to combat the enemy
- D. Rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer for Jesus and kept on teaching and preaching Jesus

The answer, of course, is D. Would it be today? As you pray today, ask God to give you the apostle's perspective about suffering mistreatment for the name. You can make it through what God has in store for you, and you can do it rejoicing!

Day 11-

Read Acts 6:1-7

Memorize 6:4

The church in Jerusalem was growing like wildfire!

The last count of people had come in Acts 4:4. How many men were counted there?

When we add in women and children, there is every reason to believe that the church by now may have included well over 20,000 people.

With this kind of growth inevitably came people with more needs to be met than leaders to meet the needs. Our passage today shows the apostles acting brilliantly to address the church's growing needs.

The church was still so young in Jerusalem that almost all of the believers there were Jews by background. But 2 distinct groups comprised these Jewish Christians. Hebrews were those native to Palestine that mostly spoke Aramaic and Hebrew and were steeped in Jewish culture. Hellenists were those from other parts of the world who mostly spoke Greek and were less familiar with Hebrew and Aramaic. Beyond the language differences they had been exposed to cultures radically different than Palestine.

The church up to this point had experienced remarkable unity despite these differences. Now the church was going to get its first test in dealing with the inevitable problems that will arise when sinful human beings gather together.

Apparently, one of the ministries the apostles had taken on was a daily distribution of food to widows. Those from a Hellenist background thought their widows weren't being treated as well as the widows from a Hebrew background. All of the apostles, as natives of Palestine, were from a Hebrew background. Whether they liked it or not, there were appearance issues to deal with.

To their credit the apostles handle this matter with great wisdom. They didn't act defensively. They didn't act alone. They obviously had a solution they had prayed and worked through in their own minds. But they didn't dictate it to the people. They presented it to the people. The people appreciated their leadership and agreed to what was proposed. What a great working model for a church being led by its elders into decisions that benefit the whole body!

In verse 2 the apostles show that they were aware of what their priorities were to be.
Write it here:

The word we get deacon from shows up in verse 2 in the Greek language. The apostles knew that they should not leave the Word of God and “deacon” tables. Verse 4 adds in that they will keep sticking to prayer and to “deaconing” the Word.

Oh that more pastors would keep this in mind today. Churches need to zealously guard their Pastors time to study the Word of God. The early church did this by raising up “deacons” to lead out in meeting the physical needs while the apostles (later elders) met the congregations spiritual needs.

In verse 3 the apostles give the qualifications for this first set of deacons.

Fill in the blanks related to the kind of men they are to be from verse 3:

Men of good _____

Full of the _____ and _____

Later the apostle Paul would add a more detailed list of requirements in I Timothy chapter 3. Interestingly, the only difference between a deacon and an elder would be that elders were “apt to teach.” In all other ways the church was to expect the same kind of character from its deacons that it expected from its pastor/ elders.

One very cool aspect of this whole matter is that all of the deacons selected and approved by Hebrew apostles were from a Hellenist background (judging by their Greek sounding names). The church had more than addressed the complaints of the Hellenist community in their midst. They had looked beyond cultural differences to include not just a token Hellenist on the deacon body, but to make the entire deacon body at the time from the Hellenists! What a display of unity!

Verse 6 shows the first ordination ceremony for deacons in the New Testament. In a solemn ceremony, these men were prayed over by the apostles. Churches do well to follow this example today! Later, in I Timothy 3:13, Paul talks of the benefits of serving well as a deacon. Write that verse here:

Verse 7 closes our passage by showing what transpired because of the apostle’s good leadership on this matter. The numbers of people coming to know Christ continued to multiply. That’s what happens when ministry is shared throughout the congregation. As you pray today, ask God to use you to help your church keep growing because of your service in “just the right spot.”

Day 12-

Read Acts 6:8-7:19

Memorize 7:5

You know your church is on fire for Jesus when the deacons become evangelists!

Immediately after having the apostles lay hands on him in prayer and becoming a deacon, Stephen begins himself to do “great wonders” among the people. He became a bold witness for Christ, and as had happened with the apostles, his speaking the truth began to make others extremely angry.

A group known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to stir up people against

Stephen the deacon. What exactly was this Synagogue of Freedmen, you ask? Well, let’s do a little detective work and see if you can figure it out from the information supplied in chapter 6 verse 9. Next to the statement on the left write the letter of the best description of that truth that appears on the right.

_____ 1. Synagogue

A. Former slaves who had been set free

_____ 2. Free men

B. Jews from other parts of the Empire who spoke Greek

_____ 3. Hellenist Jews

C. Place where people gathered to study and defend Old Testament teachings

1 = C 2 = A 3 = B

Note that all of that information was discernable through carefully thinking about the verse and through what we have read already in Acts. Part of being a good Bible student is thinking like a detective!

These well-meaning men in the synagogue of the Freedmen were stymied by the wisdom given to Stephen by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, just as God had raised up the Hebrew apostles to speak to the Hebrew priests, now God had raised up the Hellenist deacons to speak to the Hellenist dominated Synagogue of the Freedmen. Stephen was one of them, and he was speaking with a power they did not understand. They couldn’t stop his well-reasoned arguments, so they decided to just stop him. Just as the Lord Jesus and the apostles had been seized and questioned, now the first deacon was to be as well.

As Stephen looks at his accusers in verse 15, his face looked like the face of an angel.

Only a close relationship with God can make that happen! Look up and read Exodus 34:29. The Freedmen accuse Stephen of speaking against Moses (v.11). And yet, as Stephen is about to preach, his face shines like Moses did! WOW!

Now all of chapter 7 except verse 1 is Stephen’s message. It is one of those special chapters that pretty much sums up the main things in the Old Testament. It deserves our attention for not just today, but the next 2 days as well. Remember though, this incredible speech is made not by one of the church’s apostles, but by one of it’s first deacons! Well look at the first 19 verses here.

The main point of Stephen's message is going to be that belief in Jesus is not contrary to the message of the Old Testament (as the Freedmen had asserted), but that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's message throughout the Old Testament!

These first 19 verses can be divided into 2 categories:

V. 2-8 From the time of Abraham to the time of the Patriarchs in the Promised Land

V. 8-19 The time of the Patriarchs in bondage in Egypt until the time of Moses
Throughout this chapter we see the activity of God leading to Jesus' emergence as the great I AM.

Fill in the blanks from the verses describing God's activity:

V. 2-3 The God of glory _____ to our father Abraham...*"come to a land that I will show you."*

V. 4 He _____ him to this land in which you now dwell.

V. 6 But God _____ in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land.

V. 7 *"And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will _____,"* said God, *"and after that they shall come out and serve me in this place."*

V. 8 Then He gave him the _____ of circumcision.

V. 9-10 But God was with him and _____ him out of all his troubles.

V. 17 But when the time of the _____ drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.

Stephen wanted the people to remember God's activity...In the past he had appeared, he had moved them, he had spoke to them, he had judged their enemies, he had made covenant with them, he had delivered them, he had kept his promise to them.

As you pray today, thank God for His precious activity in your life as well!

Day 13-

Read Acts 7:20-43

Memorize 7:37

Today's passage is the middle of Stephen the deacon's great evangelistic message before the ruling council and a gathered mob, stirred on by a group known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen.

The entire message is a brilliant summary of God's dealings with the Jewish Nation in the Old Testament era.

Yesterday the passage broke down into these categories:

V. 2-8 From Abraham to the time of the Patriarchs in the Promised Land

V. 8-19 The time of the Patriarchs in bondage in Egypt until the time of Moses

In today's passage Stephen reminds his hearers of how God raised up Moses, and how Moses spoke of another that God would raise up!

Write Verse 37 here:

What Stephen is saying in that verse is as penetrating as any conclusion any trained preacher could bring.

Stephen has reminded them of how God kept the promise he had made to Abraham about his descendants eventually being freed from bondage and going into the Promised Land (verses 5-7).

Hundreds of years after that promise God kept his word by raising up Moses. Moses led the Jews to exit (or exodus) Egypt and move toward the Promised Land.

Stephen reminds them in verse 37 about another promise God had made through Moses- a prophet would arise like Moses that the people would hear. He is speaking of course of the Messiah. Tomorrow we will see Stephen bring them to the truth that Jesus is that Messiah (or Christ, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah).

Friend, I have now read through the Old Testament many times. Let me make this observation as it relates to where Stephen is going. The Old Testament is a treasure of instruction, but it is an incomplete book. Throughout the Old Testament we are told of a day coming when the Messiah will appear.

In Genesis 3:15 we are told that the seed of a woman will bruise Satan's head, and all Satan will be able to do is to bruise his heel.

In Genesis 49:10 we are told he will come from the tribe of Judah, to him obedience will be due from the people, and that he will wash his garments in wine, in the blood of grapes.

Moses spoke of him in Deut. 18:15 as the prophet God would raise up as a type of second Moses.

Micah 5:2 told us that he would be born in Bethlehem though his goings forth are from everlasting.

Isaiah 7:14 told us he would be born of a virgin, and the only way to describe him would be "God with us."

Isaiah 9:6 told us he would be the Mighty God, equivalent to the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 53:10 told us that the Lord would crush him to make His soul an offering for our sin. Though he would die, the same verse says his days will be prolonged!

WOW!

There are so many more passages we could cite, but for our purposes it is enough to say that the Old Testament closed with nothing that comes close to fulfilling these verses.

Hundreds of years passed.

Now Stephen is proclaiming the truth of who Jesus was and is, the great I AM that Moses met at the burning bush.

Jesus had said in John 8:24, "Unless you believe that I Am, you will die in your sins."

Tomorrow we will see Stephen the preaching deacon drive this point home when he finishes his message.

Today as you pray, thank the Father for sending Jesus the Messiah to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. If you have never done so before, confess that you are a sinner, turn to Jesus in faith, asking him to forgive your sins and become your Savior and Lord.

BONUS: If you just can't get enough of today's study: On the next page match the letter on the right next to the verse on the left that states the truth we discover about Moses in the verse:

- _____ Verse 21 A. Moses had 2 sons in Midian
- _____ Verse 22 B. God revealed His plan to return Moses to Egypt to deliver Israel
- _____ Verse 23 C. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses when he was age 80
- _____ Verse 24 D. Pharaoh's daughter took Moses in
- _____ Verse 29a* E. Moses was a murderer
- _____ Verse 29b* F. At age 40 Moses developed a burden for his people's suffering
- _____ Verse 30 G. Moses was a fugitive
- _____ Verse 34 H. Moses was an Egyptian Scholar

* a or b after a verse is used to tell you that what you are looking for is in the first part of the verse (a), or the last part (b)

Answers: Verse 21 = D Verse 22 = H Verse 23 = F Verse 24 = E Verse 29a = G
 Verse 29b = A Verse 30 = C Verse 34 = B

Day 14-

Read Acts 7:44-8:4

Memorize 7:51

As a child I used to love to pick Dandelions and blow them until all that was left was the weed itself. As an adult homeowner now, I think differently about blowing Dandelions! I now know that when you blow a dandelion, dozens of little seeds blow through the air, resting on the ground to become more Dandelions virtually overnight. Pretty soon the entire yard is filled with Dandelions! If you want only grass in your yard, the worst thing you can do is blow a Dandelion.

Today's passage is the last part of Stephen the deacon's message before the ruling council and an assembled mob. At the end of it they seize Stephen and snuff out his life.

The result?

As a blown Dandelion fills the air with dozens of reproducing Dandelions, Stephen's death and the resulting persecution actually wound up accelerating the churches fulfilling of Christ's Great Commission!

So far Stephen's message could be outlined like this:

- V. 2-8 From Abraham to the time of the Patriarchs in the Promised Land
- V. 8-19 The time of the Patriarchs in bondage in Egypt until the time of Moses
- V. 20-43 How God raised up Moses, and reminder that Moses spoke of another Prophet that God would raise up!

In this last section of his message, Stephen gets right to his point: the people have sinned greatly by replacing faith and obedience with a Temple based pride that leaves God out. Over the centuries, God had sent prophets to tell them this and prophesy of the coming of the Messiah. Almost without exception these prophets had encountered persecution and opposition by the people. Now God has sent the promised Messiah, His very own Son, and he has been betrayed and murdered.

Verse 54 and following shows the response of the crowd. They seized Stephen and dragged him out of the city. They took off their coats like men rolling up their sleeves for a fight, and put them at the feet of one of their primary instigators, a man named Saul. And then they picked up rocks and hurled them at Stephen's body until it became lifeless. Later some good brothers retrieved the body and gave him a decent burial.

Back in the 1950's 5 missionaries were spared to death by the Auca Indians as they tried to make initial contacts with them for the purpose of leading them to Jesus. LIFE Magazine covered the story with an incredulous caption that read, "Why This Waste?"

Friend, none of us desires to die a brutal death, but every time a Christian gets killed (or martyred) for their faith it is never a waste in God's economy. Sometimes it is evident within days, other times it takes weeks, months, years, even decades to see how God used the martyrdom of his precious saints. But the death of a martyr ALWAYS advances the Kingdom of Christ.

That was true for the 5 Missionaries who died at the hands of the Auca Indians. Some of their wives including Elisabeth Elliott took the gospel to the Aucas, and nearly the entire tribe was converted. The church among the Aucas has elders in it now who personally had been involved in the murders.

That was also true for Stephen, the churches very first martyr. In the chapters to come we will see that young Instigator named Saul converted and become the great missionary Paul, who among other things wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. We also see that the ensuing persecution after Stephen's death led to many Christians who had been very comfortable in their church in Jerusalem being thrust out into all parts of the Roman Empire. As they went they shared their faith, and it wasn't long before there were many more churches than there had been before!

How does Heaven view the death of a martyr? Verses 55-56 show us. Elsewhere Jesus is pictured seated at the Father's right hand (See either Ephesians 1:20 or Hebrews 8:1). In verses 55-56 he is seen not seated but standing. Why?

There are 2 possible explanations, and both are exciting to think about! Jesus may have been standing to lead the angels in a standing ovation for the faithful Stephen! Or he may have been standing to reach his arms out to Stephen, ready to receive his child who was about to come home!

As you pray today, ask God to help you be faithful no matter what comes. For some reading this, that may very well mean a martyr's death. But less than one minute after your body is destroyed, you will be with King Jesus!

Day 15-

Read Acts 8:4-25

Memorize 8:8

Revival has come when the churches Deacons' go out of their way to preach the good news to those who are different than most of the churches members!

You will recall that Phillip was one of the 7 Hellenists (Jews who spoke Greek only, not Hebrew) chosen to be a Deacon in Acts chapter 6. His fellow Deacon Stephen is killed as he preaches in the passage right before this one. Verse 4 tells us that those who were scattered after persecution broke out went everywhere preaching the word. Apparently Phillip wound up North of Jerusalem (Down in altitude) in the city of Samaria.

And there he preached! Do you have goosebumps yet? Do you realize what this meant? Jesus' prophecy of the expanse of the gospel was making it's next big step forward! Remember Acts 1:8? Jesus had said they would be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth! Goosebump time! Here we are at Samaria, and it is not an apostle or a pastor/elder who preaches there first, but a layman, the deacon named Phillip. Game on for the Great Commission!

Now let's test your knowledge about the city of Samaria. Write True or False in the space next to the statement, then check your answers below.

1. Samaria is the third most mentioned city in the Bible _____
2. Samaria was the capitol of the Northern Kingdom of Israel _____
3. Samaria had been a pagan city before Israel occupied it _____
4. Samaria fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. _____
5. Most Southern Kingdom Jews were bigoted towards Samaritans _____

1=True, only Jerusalem and Babylon are mentioned more

2=True, After the nation was divided-Jerusalem was capitol of the Southern Kingdom

3=False, King Omri built it in 880B.C. to be the capitol

4=False, Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722B.C.; the South fell to the Babylonians

5=True, as well known through the story of Jesus winning the woman at the well there

After taking that quiz, hopefully you have a greater appreciation of how groundbreaking Phillip's preaching the gospel to the Samaritans was.

ALL of the believers knew the heart of Jesus on this matter! Phillip did something about it! Revival will come to me and you when we start doing something about the radical message of reconciliation that has been given to us in the gospel! Phillip wasn't just crossing the line, he was erasing it! **GLORY TO GOD!**

How did God respond? By giving Phillip the ability to clearly speak the gospel, and many were saved and baptized. God also worked miracles of healing and exorcism through Phillip, as he had done with the apostles.

When word of this reached Jerusalem, the apostles sent Peter and John to check it out and help Phillip get the believers there off to a good start. Isn't it neat to see Pastors and Deacons working together outside the church walls to help believers grow! A lot of junk happens in today's churches because Pastors and Deacons are arguing inside the walls about mundane matters rather than being together out in the field winning, discipling, and equipping people.

Now when there is a move of God like the one that happened there at Samaria, and many are dramatically saved, there are often others attracted simply because something exciting appears to be happening. There are often some who profess Christ, follow through with baptism, and yet are either ignorant of basic truths or in reality still lost. Baptism is just getting wet if a person has not really been converted.

And so we read about Simon the Magician, who "believed" and was baptized. Verse 13 says he was amazed at the miraculous power he saw flowing through Phillip. When Peter and John came they were able to lay hands on people and the Holy Spirit came upon them. Simon the Magician in his ignorance and to be frank, his idolatry, tried to buy the "power" with money. Read verses 20-23 again for Peter's response.

We would do well in the church today to imitate Peter here, making sure the potential convert and the new convert know not only what the gospel is, but also what it isn't! Hopefully Simon the Magician did repent! And hopefully thousands in the church today will repent of behaving as if God is a genie in a bottle, who must bless us if we get the "name it and claim it" formula just right.

One more thing needs to be looked at today.

Read again verses 14-17. If these verses were taken in isolation of what the Apostles Letters (Romans to Revelation) teach, we might misunderstand the flow of salvation to look like this:

- A person believes in Jesus and is baptized.
- But something is missing.
- They are incomplete until someone lays hands on them and prays, and only then do they receive the Holy Spirit.
- Many who teach this would add that Speaking in Tongues is the evidence that the person now has received the whole gospel.

If you were to take these verses and a few other passages in Acts you could come to this conclusion and teach it to others. But you would be making a serious error. You would be basing your doctrine on a narrative passage of scripture when there are passages in the Apostles Letters that follow that clearly teach that a true believer receives the Holy Spirit at salvation. Remember: narrative passages must be interpreted in light of clear doctrinal teaching passages, not vice versa. We must continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, just like the first church did (Acts 2:42).

Fill in the missing blanks to Ephesians 1:13-14 here:

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were _____ with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the _____ of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

So the doctrinal epistles teach that at true salvation a person receives the Holy Spirit as part of the salvation deal!

So what's going on in our narrative passage for today, Pastor Danny? I'm glad you asked!

In Acts 1:8, Jesus had told his disciples they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they would be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Then at the day of Pentecost the Spirit came upon the apostles there, they preached with power, and the church was born. An entirely Jewish church made up of those who had previously accepted Jerusalem as THE place to worship. Now Samaritan Jews who had previously had their own mountain to worship at were coming to Christ. In a few chapters even Gentiles are going to be accepted by God. Several times in the book of Acts, including our passage, there is a mini Pentecost event through the hands of the apostles that confirm that in Christ Jesus it is no longer us versus them, our place to worship versus your place to worship.

You understand, of course, that had this not happened as Acts 1:8 was being fulfilled, that PRIDE could have overtaken even the apostles and many would have claimed that those who had experienced Pentecost in Jerusalem were more special than THOSE Samaritan Jews or THOSE Gentiles.

The verses below confirm that I am on the right track, as we see the reaction the Jewish believers had when Gentiles were converted:

And those of the circumcision who believed were ASTONISHED, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Acts 10:45-46

As you pray today, ask God to help you be like Phillip, erasing the lines people have created!

Day 16-

Read Acts 8:26-40

Memorize 8:35

This is a delightful little passage!

Phillip the deacon has just seen God move in a mighty way in Samaria as he shared Jesus there. We learned about that in yesterday's passage. Phillip didn't share Jesus because he had to- he shared because he wanted to!

Today's passage shows us that there is a snowball effect in personal evangelism. The more we share Jesus, the more confident we become in sharing Jesus. God looks down from Heaven and sees that we are one of the ones He can count on, and he lines up circumstances to give us new opportunities to share His love with others.

Verses 26-27 are very significant. Philip is asked by an angel, a messenger of God, to go away from the populated area he was just in out to the desert.

I don't know about you, but my response to God probably would have been, "Why? What in the world for?"

But Phillip's response was perfect obedience. Write the first five words of verse 27 here:

Folks, there is power when a man or woman of God is BOTH willing to share the gospel AND willing to go to out of the way places to share at God's command!

My sister and her husband are in out of the way Papau New Guinea because of their desire to see the good news impact people in out of the way places! May their tribe increase!

God had a divine appointment for Phillip on that desert road! An important Ethiopian man, Treasurer for Queen Candace, was on his way to Jerusalem to worship. The fact that he was a Eunuch means that he had been emasculated. If you don't know what that means I'll have to let you look it up in the dictionary! Eunuch's generally attended to the needs of the King's women.

The fact that he was on his way to worship in Jerusalem indicates that he was either Jewish or a God-fearer. The God-fearers were Gentiles who were allowed to sit in designated areas in Jewish synagogues and who had come to love God but had not adopted the Jewish regulations.

Read verses 28-31 again! I wonder what the Ethiopian was thinking as Phillip ran up beside the chariot no doubt led by fast horses! What a sight it must have been! Phillip overtaking the chariot on foot! I bet he was glad the African man offered him a place to sit!

It is obvious that God had prepared the heart of the Eunuch through the Word of God to hear Phillip share Jesus! Verse 31 should grip us- We need to study God's Word so we can explain it to people whom the Spirit of God is dealing with!

Well, because he had been obedient, Phillip now was given the opportunity to share Jesus with the man!

The man's heart was so stirred, he was ready to be baptized as a believer!

Note that he didn't ask Phillip to take the canteen and sprinkle him with some water, or pour it over his head. Verse 36 tells us that when he came to some water, he realized they could go down in it and Phillip could baptize him!

The Ethiopian asked this question, "What hinders me from being baptized?"

Write Verse 37, Phillip's response, here:

Now let me meddle for a second! Have you been baptized as a believer? If you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart, and have received Him as your Savior and Lord, NOTHING hinders you from being baptized! Talk to a Pastor about it as soon as possible!

After Phillip won the man to Jesus, he was off to the next assignment that the Spirit had for him. Tradition tells us the Ethiopian man went back to Ethiopia and planted one of the first churches in Africa! God can truly use divine appointments in your life to- if you let Him! If you don't, watch for Spirit filled evangelists running by you on the highway to get to the places you should be going!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the simple obedience that was modeled by the godly layman Phillip!

Day 17-

Read Acts 9:1-31

Memorize 9:15-16

Buckle your seat belts if you haven't already! In the last couple of chapters we have seen the Acts 1:8 speedometer picking up speed. With the conversion of Paul in this chapter, we are now about to get on the Great Commission Autobahn!

Interestingly, Chapter 9 begins and ends with Paul involved in attempted murder! At the beginning of the chapter, he is the persecutor; at the end of the chapter, he is the persecuted!

Let's go ahead and call him Saul, for that's the name he goes by for a few more chapters (what is it with Bible people and changing their names?!). You may remember that he was the one who had held the coats as the mob stoned Stephen to death at the end of chapter 7. That happened back in Jerusalem, and shortly afterwards persecution led to these Christian Jews being dispersed all over the Roman Empire.

As they went these Christians were talking about Jesus everywhere and others were being saved, as we saw in chapter 8 in Samaria. It is obvious that reports had not just gotten back to the church in Jerusalem about all the new Christians, but to Saul's persecution headquarters in Jerusalem as well. Verse 2 lets us know he had sought and received permission from the high priest in Jerusalem to purge Jewish synagogues in other cities of these Christian Jews.

Paul's zeal in this matter was intense, seen both in the murderous threats he was making in verse 1 and by the sheer distance it is from Jerusalem to Damascus. Check it out on the maps in the back of your Bible. Damascus is way north of Jerusalem!

Read again verses 3-9.

There is much that could be said about this encounter between Jesus and Saul. But I just want to ask you one question about this encounter to make you think:

When Jesus appeared to Saul and told him what to do, could Saul have said no to the Lord?

Obviously hypothetical questions are by their very nature unfair to ask. But thinking about that one has been of great benefit to me when I ponder it! Just like Saul, I pretty much had other plans for my life than what I am now, even calling myself an Atheist. Then out of the blue Jesus Christ saved me! Looking back, all of a sudden I was saved, following Jesus and promoting the very faith I had mocked days earlier! Reflecting on Saul's salvation, and my own, I have written this statement:

“Grace is not something you grasp; it's something that grasps you! And when it grasps you, it does not let go!”

Well, just like we saw God unite the Ethiopian man and Phillip in the last chapter, here we see that God was simultaneously working to unite a disciple he had in Damascus named Ananias with Paul. Another divine moment was unfolding!

WARNING: A Christian's prayer time can lead to dangerous assignments!

Skim verses 10-19 again!

I love Ananias' little argument with God while he was praying! "God, don't you know Saul is a dangerous man, they call him the Terminator...Oh, of course you know, you are God...Lord, when I said I would do anything for you I kind of had in mind being an usher on the Lord's Day...Oh, you really want me to go to Judas' house and pray for him...I'm a little uncomfortable going to a guys house named Judas, Lord...oh, okay, Lord, I submit...I knew I should have gone as a chaperone to the youth camp down by the sea of Galilee...wait, that's probably a tougher assignment than this one!"

And so Saul gets saved and baptized! I wonder how many Saul's the church misses out on today because we are reluctant to be like Ananias.

In Galatians 1:18 we learn that Saul spent 3 years in Damascus growing in the Lord and boldly witnessing.

What a great sense of humor God has! The high priest agreed with Saul's plan to stifle the faith at the synagogue in Damascus, but when Saul gets there he is sharing Jesus, and the irony of it did not go unnoticed to those there (v. 20)!

Pretty soon Saul's life was in danger, and the disciples helped smuggle him out and sent him to Jerusalem. Although 3 years had passed, verse 26 indicates that the Christians there were very skeptical over Saul's conversion. They must have thought it was a trick to arrest some of them. Their concerns were legitimate: in verse 31 we see that Saul's conversion effectively ended that wave of persecution that he had been largely responsible for!

What did God do to help Saul get accepted? Just as he had hooked Saul up with Ananias in Damascus, God led Mr. Encouragement, Barnabas, to hear Saul's story and assure the leaders that Saul's faith was too legit to quit!

As a Pastor I can't tell you how important people like Judas and Ananias and Barnabas are in God's overall plans being fulfilled! Behind every Billy Graham there are a host of names who helped win and disciple and encourage them. Great is their reward in Heaven! As you pray today, ask God to make you sensitive to what he is doing in others lives!

WARNING: Don't think of the life of a witness as glamorous. God had wonderfully saved Saul and turned him into a powerful witness. But as verse 16 says, Saul's life would be one of much suffering. Don't sign up if you are after this life's rewards! God may bless you with accolades and material comforts, but he also may bless you with circumstances that will keep you humble and encountering much hardship. The ultimate rewards come in the next life, not this one!

Day 18-

Read Acts 9:32-43

Memorize 9:36

This is a delightful little passage! It packs a lot of information into a few verses!

Circle the best answer in the following multiple choice question...

What can be drawn from this passage?

1. Peter has now matured into the “rock” that Christ said he would be
2. God can and does marvelously heal people
3. There is something special about a godly woman
4. All of the above

I think the best answer is number 4, all of the above! As this passage opens, the gospel has now been actively spreading all over the place. Peter doesn't just stay in his comfortable study back in Jerusalem, but is going out to where the action is! From verse 32 we gather that he is on kind of an “apostolic encouragement tour.”

In Lydda Peter heals a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and bedridden the previous 8 years. WOW! I wish I could do that! And if I could I would! Actually, *Jesus* healed Aeneas *through* Peter! Theologians argue over whether anyone has the gift of healing nowadays or whether it was just for the apostles during the New Testament days to confirm that they had been with Jesus.

What should not be in doubt is that people still get healed. We have all heard testimonies of people who were told by doctors they would not walk again but the doctors were wrong. We have heard stories of people who were supposed to die because of cancer, and yet another check discovered no cancer!

I offer the following three points about healing:

1. If you can heal somebody, do it! I would!
2. Never forget that it is God who is responsible for any true healings that happen, not any individual. God deals harshly with those who give themselves the glory due Him. Moses was an awesome man of God, but was not allowed to go into the Promised Land because of such a sin (see Numbers 20:9-13, where Moses lets the people believe that he gave them water)
3. Realize that God is Sovereign over when healing happens and when it doesn't. Sometimes wicked people get healed and godly people die. People who pray and have faith get healed sometimes, and people who pray and have faith don't get healed sometimes. God's ways are not our ways and we don't get to know why he allows things to happen the way he does!

Let me underscore that last point! It is spiritual terrorism to suggest to another person that their loved one was not healed because they didn't have enough faith or because they didn't pray enough.

Well, moving on from Lydda and Sharon Peter came to Joppa. There he has a chance to raise Tabitha, or Dorcas, from the dead (I think I would go by Tabitha also- sorry to all of you named Dorcas!). It is so cool to think of someone being raised from the dead that we can overlook what a fantastic disciple Tabitha was.

From verse 36 write the things that Tabitha was known for in Joppa:

So many women and men are known for being gossips and full of anger. Praise the Lord for disciples like Tabitha who were known for loving deeds!

Can't you just picture the scene from verse 39? Peter is there among the weeping disciples, and they are pointing out to him that she made most of the clothes they were wearing! That is such a powerful image.

And then, talk about your miracles! Peter raises Tabitha from the dead! That's awesome!

The common thread throughout the two miracles is that when word got out, many believed in Jesus and were saved! Hallelujah!

As you pray today, ask God to make you a person full of good works like Tabitha. Also ask God to give you a heart for people like Peter had. And friend, whatever gifts he has given you, whether healing, service, evangelism, or whatever else, use those gifts for Christ's glory, not your own, and to advance his Kingdom, not line your own pockets!

Day 19- Read Acts 10:1-23 Memorize 10:15

Today's passage reminds us that the word disciple means learner. Here we see Peter struggle to apply the truth that under the New Covenant God was now setting aside the dietary code called for in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. God's plan was now for Jewish believers like Peter to set aside non-essential issues like diet so that they could share with the Gentiles the only issue that now mattered: salvation for sinners in the matchless name of Jesus!

I think it's neat that the last chapter closed with Simon Peter staying with Simon the Tanner. This chapter opens and "Simon and Simon" are still together! Isn't it wonderful that the same apostle who had preached and 3,000 were saved at Pentecost wasn't staying with preacher buddies but with a working man? Oh that that were more true of preachers today! In our passage for today Peter is going to meet a new friend, Cornelius, a soldier who was in charge of over 100 troops in the Roman Army's Italian regiment!

To discover more about Cornelius write verse 2 here:

Verse 4 tells us that God had taken notice of Cornelius's prayers and gifts. Cornelius was one of the "god-fearers." God-fearers were Gentiles who had fallen in love with the God of the Hebrew Bible but had not converted to Judaism through circumcision and observance of Israel's Civil Laws (such as it's dietary code). As Micah 6:8 had called for, they did justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God. They just didn't want to give up their cultures and adopt Jewish customs.

And God was impressed with Cornelius! He looked down from Heaven, and sent an angel to begin the process that would lead to Cornelius meeting Jesus! Before we go on, say a prayer asking God to smile over your prayers and gifts offered to him in humble adoration- the way he did with Cornelius!

Skim verses 9-16 again! As Cornelius' trusted servants made their way to Joppa to see Simon and Simon, Peter was with Christ in the school of prayer. On the top of the Tanner's house, a watershed moment happened in the history of the Christian church. I don't know if there is a historical marker at that house in Joppa today, but I can tell you what happened at that place is more important than all of the cathedrals in Europe combined.

That day, Peter the Jewish believer was told that it was now okay to eat things like ham that had been forbidden under Old Covenant law. God's pronouncement in verse 15 was clear: "What God has cleansed you must not call common?"

According to v. 16, how many times did God have to repeat the vision to Peter? _____

That makes me smile! I don't know about you, but sometimes God has to repeat things several times to me also before I get it! Thank God that he is patient with His children. This isn't the first time God repeated something to Peter three times! Remember at the end of John chapter 21? Three times Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" And three times Peter answered yes. All 3 times Jesus responded by asking Peter to "feed my sheep." Tomorrow we will see Peter feed Cornelius and other Gentile sheep the gospel!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the same heart Peter had to obey His Lord even when He didn't understand. May you too be one who "feeds God's sheep," whatever the cultural differences you and they may have!

Day 20-

Read Acts 10:24-48

Memorize 10:28

Today's passage is a watershed moment for the church of Jesus Christ. God brings together Jew and Gentile around the person of Jesus Christ!

According to verse 10, what are some of the things Peter as a Jew had to give up to meet with Cornelius the Gentile?

Peter had to overcome so many differences! Jews didn't eat with Gentiles, period. Jews ate different things than Gentiles, period. Jews despised Roman soldiers as occupiers of their nation, Period!

End of sentence, right? Not to God!

Certainly the Old Testament Law had spelled out a distinct dietary code, but it had also encouraged Israelites to be diligent to help the foreigners in their midst. In the Old Testament book of Jonah, God even ordered Jonah to preach to the Gentile city of Ninevah! Jonah chapter four tells us that Jonah was upset about the task, because he knew that if those Gentiles from Ninevah heard God's message and repented, God would have mercy on them.

Against that backdrop we see why this is one of Peter's finest hours! For his part, Cornelius is so overcome by the vision that he has had that he falls down and worships Peter when he meets him! What a sight that must have been! Peter comes in to the house, apprehensive at meeting up with a non Jew, and all of a sudden one is groveling at his feet!

Eventually the scene turns to Peter getting to preach to Cornelius and his Gentile friends. He has been sent by Jesus to help these Gentile "God-fearers" learn the "rest of the story" about Jesus. What is neat is that Peter opens by telling them something he has learned!

What does verse 35 say that Peter has learned?

Peter has learned that God shows no partiality! Maybe some of our teaching would be more effective if we were like Peter, feeling vulnerable enough to share what we have learned before we ask someone else to learn what we are teaching!

Peter's sermon is similar to the one he preached in Acts chapter two. He speaks about Jesus' life and ministry, his death on the tree, and the miracle of His resurrection. Then in verse 43 he says that whoever believes in Him will receive the remission of sins.

Remission is just a fancy word for forgiveness! Whoever believes in Jesus, Jew or Gentile, has their sins forgiven! Now that's good news!

The response was immediate! The Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends!

We're told that those of the circumcision were astonished when they saw the Holy Spirit come upon these Gentiles! When it says they were of the circumcision it means they were Jewish believers. Verse 46 tells us that the new Gentile believers spoke in tongues. Just as tongues had been present right before a whole bunch of Jews got saved in Acts chapter two, tongues are now present right after these gentiles got saved.

The Jewish believers were astonished that the Holy Spirit would come upon non Jews as He had on Jews. In verse 47 Peter dares his Jewish believing friends to recognize that they have seen God work powerfully in their midst. And right there on the spot Peter commands these new disciples to be baptized. Evidently they were, and a new day had dawned for the church.

Write Galatians 3:28 here:

As you pray today, thank God that he has made the gospel available to all without prejudice!

Before we finish for the day, we should address a question that may have come into your mind. Does this passage mean that when people truly become Christians they speak in tongues?

Some do teach that, but I believe they are in error. A very simple principle of Bible study is that narrative passages like this one (that describe what happened at a point in time) are to be understood in light of didactic passages. A didactic passage is a teaching passage that clearly explains what we are to believe about a doctrine.

An example of not forming doctrines from narrative passages is Jephthah's vow in Judges chapter 11. There Jephthah foolishly declares that when he gets home he will sacrifice the first thing he sees come out of his doors. He gets home and the first thing he sees come out of his doors is his daughter. He foolishly sacrifices her. Obviously we are not to do what Jephthah did, even though the passage starts by saying "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah."

The question we have to ask about speaking in tongues is this: "Is there a didactic or teaching passage in the scriptures that tells us what to make of speaking in tongues?"

The answer is yes: I Corinthians chapters 12 through 14 give comprehensive instructions to the church about speaking in tongues.

For our purposes today let me just refer to I Corinthians 12:4-11, which clearly teaches that speaking in tongues is one gift given to some in the body of Christ as the Spirit wills, not a gift given to all who receive Christ.

Friend, the remarkable thing that we should take away from today's passage is that God the Holy Spirit will take up residence within a believer! That is the testimony of BOTH narrative AND didactic scripture:

**"Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."
-Ephesians 1:13**

Day 21-

Read Acts 11:1-18

Memorize 11:17

I love the example that Peter sets for us in this chapter.

Peter and his ancestors had followed a strict dietary code for over 1400 years that God had imposed on them. Yet now God was telling Peter that the completed work of Jesus Christ now made the dietary code of the old covenant obsolete. In verse 9 God says directly to Peter that Peter must not call common or unclean what God has cleansed. What would Peter do in response to hearing God's Word?

This is a critical passage for us because we all over time develop our own traditions in our lives and churches and denominations. Than one day as we carefully read God's Word we come to understand that one of our traditions is suspect based on what God says to us in the Bible. What will we do in response to hearing God's Word?

Peter decided to obey God, and we must also!

I love how Peter responds to his critics by patiently recounting for them the amazing work that God had done among the Gentiles. Write verse 17 here:

Ask God now to give you the same heart he gave Peter. In this instance, Peter knew it was folly to try and stand against God for the sake of obsolete rules. But make no mistake about it, many church people love their obsolete rules. In this instance the church responded well, and realized that God was at work. Unfortunately, sometimes obeying God's Word will lead to the scorn of your church friends. That's okay- just make sure it really is a Biblical truth you are adopting!

During the reformation they had a phrase that will help you. Your goal, like theirs, should be a life "ever reforming according to the Word of God."

Fill in the Blank: What does verse 18 say is a gift of God? _____

- A. Perspective
- B. Faith
- C. Repentance
- D. None of the above

In Ephesians 2:8 we read that faith is a gift of God. In verse 18 we read that the Jewish believers marveled that God had granted these Gentiles repentance unto life. You should have answered c.

Properly understood, both repentance and faith are gifts of God. They are also what we call for as we preach to others: that they should turn from sin and self rule (to repent is to turn) and believe in Jesus who alone can give eternal life.

There is a point to the Bible describing repentance and faith as gifts of God. Since ultimately God gives them, they will both be seen in the lives of true believers. Where they are absent, there is reason to doubt whether that person is truly a Christian.

Listen to this Biblical truth: you can't be forgiven of sin you haven't repented of. Many people claim to be Christians who blatantly and unashamedly practice deeds the Bible states are sins. By definition they have not repented.

A person who has repented has made a once and for all decision to agree that what God calls sin in the Bible is sin, period. I am not saying they don't struggle with sin; all believers do struggle with sin and fall annoyingly short of the glory of God until we die and go to Heaven. But we have settled repentance- what God says about a matter is what we say about a matter, period!

Having received this gift of repentance we also receive the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. All of a sudden we realize that He is who He said He was, and that He did what the Bible said He did on our behalf- and we receive Him into our lives and become children of God!

As you pray today, if repentance and faith are both settled matters for you, thank God that He has given you these twin gifts!

Day 22-

Read Acts 11:19-30

Memorize 11:23

Do you remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8?

He said that His disciples, after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, would be witnesses. Then he mentioned four places that they would be witnesses to.

The first place was Jerusalem, that's the city they were in.

The second place was Judea, that was the rest of the "country" they were in.

The third place was Samaria. You may remember that Israel was divided after a civil war into North and South. Samaria was what was left of the North after it had been conquered by Assyria. Many of the people were mixed descendants, half Jewish, half Assyrians- now called Samaritans. To go to this area involved overcoming racial prejudices.

In the blank below, write the fourth place they were to go to:

(Look at Acts 1:8 again if you need to)

It is neat when you look in the Bible and see Jesus' words being fulfilled!

Acts chapters 1-7 show the church clearly blossoming and then encountering persecution in Jerusalem.

Acts chapters 8-11 show the gospel taking hold throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (see 8:1). Chapter 8 showed the witnessing exploits of the new Deacon Phillip. He won so many in Samaria that the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to help (8:14). Peter and John went on to preach in other Samaritan villages (8:25).

Phillip then received a word from the angel of the Lord to go down the desert road toward Gaza, a city in Judea. On the way he was able to win an Ethiopian official to the Lord. Afterwards, he preached in other Judean cities, going all the way from Azotus to Caesarea. You may want to identify those cities and the next ones I mention on the maps in the back of your Bible.

Paul's conversion is spoken of in chapter 9, a teaser of his involvement to come in the gospel expanding to "the ends of the earth." Chapter 9 ends with Peter doing great ministry in the cities of Lydda and Joppa. Up until that point, the gospel had mostly gone to those who were from some type of Jewish background.

Peter's witness to Cornelius the Centurion in chapters 10 and 11 serve as both an end of one section and a beginning of another.

Cornelius lived in Caesarea, illustrating how the gospel in chapters 8 and following had begun saturating Judea and Samaria. The fact that Cornelius was a Gentile prepares us for the next section of the book of Acts, starting in today's passage.

When the gospel gains a foothold in Antioch, well north of the cities already mentioned, the gospel was on its way to the "ends of the earth."

Verse 21 tells us that when the gospel was preached to the Gentiles in Antioch, a great number believed and turned to the Lord. As we have seen already, it was the habit of the Jerusalem church to send out an apostle to help new churches get going right. We have already seen the personal struggle Peter had in reaching out to Cornelius and his Gentile friends. The man they sent would have to be a special man, able to get beyond cultural differences.

Enter Barnabas! The same one who had helped Saul be accepted by the apostles in Acts 9:27 was now called upon to see what in the world God was doing in Antioch. Write verse 23 here:

I hope when we see God working in the lives of new Christians we get as excited as Barnabas did here! Do you remember that Barnabas was a nickname? It meant "Mr. Encouragement!" In Acts 4:36 we learned that his real name was Joseph, a Jewish believer from the island of Cyprus. I love the description of Barnabas in verse 24 as a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit. May the same be said about us!

One of the great things about the book of Acts is that it shows real people under construction! In verses 25-26 we see Barnabas go and get Saul (Paul) and use the opportunity God gave him to teach the new Christians as an opportunity to train Paul.

Instead of doing ministry alone more of us should do ministry together with someone who shows promise. Here's how you and I can follow Barnabas' example during that wonderful year he and Paul ministered together at Antioch:

The Barnabas School of Training:

1. I teach, my disciple is with me observing
2. We both teach, the disciple taking on more responsibility over time
3. The disciple teaches alone, I provide positive feedback
4. The disciple teaches without me there, I debrief afterwards (Mark 6:30-31)
5. The disciple teaches while a new disciple observes them!

It is no surprise that later Paul's life illustrated vibrant relationships with others (see 2 Timothy 2:2). He had learned from the master! And it was here the disciples were first called Christians. That's a way of saying, "little Christs." When we disciple and train other Christians, the faith grows strong and others see Jesus in our lives!

Verse 28 speaks of a famine that is about to hit Jerusalem. These new Christians at Antioch decided they should give to help provide relief for struggling Christians in Jerusalem.

Answer the following question.

According to verse 29, what did each believer give? _____

- A. Ten Percent of his income
- B. 1000 shekels each
- C. A pledge to give 50 shekels a week for 3 years
- D. As much as he could according to his ability to do so

Obviously the answer is d. They saw a need and everyone gave what they could to meet the need. This was the church at its finest!

Do you catch the irony here? Usually in our day the mother church gives to help the daughter church. Here we have the church plant raising money to help the more established Jerusalem church survive.

Support church planting, folks! You may be making an investment that will one day save your own church!

As you pray today, ask God to give you the same kind of heart he gave these early Christians. If your experience is far from this kind of Christianity, ask God to change that in your life- if you dare!

Day 23-

Read Acts 12:1-25

Memorize 12:24

This is a remarkable little chapter tucked into the book of Acts!

It is a powerful statement to would be persecutors of the church:

- For every James you kill, God will raise up another James!
- Every time you imprison a Peter, God will call forth a John Mark!
- Every time you try to squash the Word of God, it will multiply!
- If you try and take the glory that goes alone to God, you might get worms!

Let's start by thinking about the two James in this chapter.

According to verse 2, whose brother was the James that Herod killed? _____

This is big information. If you recall, Jesus often spent extra time discipling three men: Peter, James, and John (see Matthew 17:1). James and John were brothers, the sons of the fishermen Zebedee (see Matthew 4:21). Jesus had nicknamed them the Sons of Thunder (see Mark 3:17). James was one of the 12 apostles. Can you imagine the sorrow this murder must have had on his brother John and the entire church at Jerusalem?

Before we go into Peter's address, look at verse 17. Here we see another James. This James seems to have become a key leader in the church in Jerusalem. Look at Acts 15:13 and Acts 21:18 now. Write Acts 21:18 below:

In the Book of Acts we see a transition taking place from the Apostles functioning as the first group of plural elders or overseers, to others functioning as the elders. In Acts 6 it is the Apostles providing "elder" leadership to the church. In Acts 15 it is the Apostles and elders together overseeing the Jerusalem Council. By Acts chapter 20 the Apostle Paul is seen coming before just the Elders of the church in Jerusalem. And who is the first among these elders? Probably the same James we see in verse 17!

Matthew 13:55 tells us that one of Jesus' brothers was named James! It is very likely that this is the James who becomes the leader among leaders in Jerusalem, the very James mentioned in Acts 12:17. It also makes him the primary candidate to be the writer of the book of James! Many say that the book of James has striking similarities to Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). It's kind of neat to think about the talks that went on between brothers in the home of Mary and Joseph! Herod had killed one James, only to see another rise to leadership in the early church!

Verse 2 in Acts 12 tells us Herod saw that the death of James pleased the Jewish leaders of the day- a sad commentary. Please, whatever your religious faith, don't be pleased at the persecution of anyone. It is very, very sad that over the centuries Christians have sometimes been guilty of becoming persecutors, or of being pleased when another religion was being persecuted. It just shouldn't be so among us.

Verse 5 tells us what the churches response should be to persecution: Constant prayer. There are many ways to become informed of Christians and others being persecuted, such as worthynews.com. I urge you to become a prayer warrior for those experiencing imprisonment because of their faith.

Despite Herod's concerted efforts to keep Peter locked up, an angel of the Lord got Peter out and brought him to an astonished group of praying Christians! Be on the lookout church- God may have the answer to your prayers appear right before your eyes! Those gathered probably thought Peter was as doomed as the apostle James- but God had other plans!

Herod thought he was on the way to eliminating the church when he imprisoned Peter, instead, God was calling forth another to share the gospel. For at the home the Christians were praying, a young man named John Mark was present. And despite one big setback in a few chapters, Mark became a very fruitful witness for the Lord, as evidenced by the fact that he wrote the Gospel of Mark!

Look up and fill in the blank below from Galatians 6:7-

“Do not be deceived, God is not _____; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

It is hard for us to figure out why God allows the wicked to prosper. But don't be mistaken friend, God is not mocked. The person who takes God on will have one of two things happen to them:

Eventually they will either be saved and promote the faith they once tried to destroy (like Paul), or they will be judged by God for cosmic treason against the Ruler of the universe.

Herod started the chapter by killing James. This caused James no eternal harm- he was immediately in the presence of God and the angels. But the chapter ends with Herod being consumed by worms- God will not share His glory with any human ruler. We could wish a shorter time for the Hitler's of this world to wreck havoc- but do not be deceived- the Herod's and Hitler's of the world always reap what they have sown.

Herod is no more- but 2,000 years later the Word of God continues to grow and multiply! Today as you pray, commit to sharing that Word with others just as both James' did!

Day 24-

Read Acts 13:1-13

Memorize 13:2

In our day we often make the mistake of emphasizing the wrong starting place for the impact we are to have for the Lord.

When we want to reach the world for Christ, we do some of the things below:

- Defer to more established churches, thinking ours is just too small
- Form an evangelism or missions committee
- Do a demographic study of the lost we want to reach
- Take evangelistic training, a lot of evangelistic training
- Determine a marketing plan using radio and television ads
- Come up with a big name evangelist to bring people to us to hear the gospel
- Send our money somewhere for others to do it

All those and more are things that we commonly do when we feel guilty over not reaching more people for Christ. And some of them can be helpful as PART of an unfolding strategy. But we can also get discouraged because we think we don't have enough resources to do something significant for Christ.

If you have ever felt like that there is great encouragement in our verses for today. Because today we see that the size of a church and the amount of it's resources has nothing to do with whether a church bears significant fruit for the kingdom. What does matter is that a churches leaders and its members pray together and are personally on mission with God.

The church in Antioch was nowhere near as large as the Mega church in Jerusalem had been. It had either several dozen or several hundred people around, but nowhere near the several thousand that had been in Jerusalem before the persecution. It was still a relatively recent church plant, just getting established. Antioch wasn't even in the Promised Land, but in modern day Syria. Surely Jesus' prophecy in Acts 1:8 that the gospel would go to the ends of the earth would be spear-headed by a church in the Promised Land, wouldn't it?

NOPE! The newer, smaller church in Antioch became the launching point for the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. As the next few chapters unfold, we will see Barnabas and Paul and their companions boldly take the gospel to places as yet without churches. And it all started as the leaders of Antioch were praying together in our verse 1!

You may recall that Barnabas and Saul had taken an offering from those generous Antioch Christians to the now struggling church in Jerusalem back in Acts 11:29-30. Acts 12:25 shows that Barnabas and Saul had now returned to Antioch from that short term mission trip. Perhaps while they were in Jerusalem they had talked over with the Elders a desire to take the gospel further than Antioch. It's intriguing to think about, but we just don't know. But our verse 1 shows Barnabas and Saul together with the other "overseers" in prayer.

Verse 2 tells us they were doing what to the Lord? _____

Have you ever thought of your intense prayers as ministry to the Lord? Maybe if you and I did, we would fast more for even greater focus. One of your ministries in life is your prayer life- don't take it lightly!

As the leaders in Antioch prayed, they heard God the Holy Spirit call out Barnabas and Saul to the missionary task. A call to an individual does not come in a vacuum- it is testified to by others in the body of Christ. Local churches like the one in Antioch have a key role in affirming those they sense are called to the ministry. By this point, both Barnabas and Saul have proved themselves faithful in Antioch (see chapter 11:19-30).

Interestingly, the Lord was not calling some youth of the church to the mission field, but two of its best teachers! We should expect the same kind of things to be happening today!

Having laid hands on them after more fasting and prayer, the team went out. Maybe we should also expect more teams to be called from within our churches today!

The first place they went was the island of Cyprus, to the city of Salamis. Can you think of any reason Barnabas and Saul may have gone there? Write it below:

Here's a hint for you: look at Acts 4:36-37. More than likely, there was a burden to share the gospel among family, friends, and countrymen. This same desire burns in the hearts of all us, doesn't it! What an opportunity God was giving Barnabas.

There is one last point to make today. Sometimes when we are witnessing we need to say things more directly than Americans have become accustomed to saying them. None of us likes to come across as rude or pushy. But sometimes the Lord wants us to be bold and challenge people directly. I believe the Holy Spirit will prod us to know when such a time has come. In that moment, friend, you must obey and be bold. Skim verses 8-12 again. Because of Paul's boldness before the false prophet, the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, will be in Heaven.

The spiritual confrontation no doubt shook up young John Mark, for verse 13 tells us he deserted Paul and Barnabas at the next stop. That itself will be part of the unfolding story to come.

As you pray today, repent of any thinking that you can't play a vital role in the spread of the gospel. If your prayer life will turn into "ministry" to the Lord, and if you are willing to be part of the answer to those prayers, God will use you mightily!

Note: Sandy Creek Baptist Church was planted in tiny Sandy Creek, NC in 1755. Within 17 years they had planted 42 more churches. The "Antioch" spirit displayed in Sandy Creek and other places became the backbone for my own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention. I see it alive and well now in such great denominations as the Presbyterian Church of America and Calvary Chapels!

Day 25-

Read Acts 13:14-52

Memorize 13:48

As we begin today's study, you may want to check the back of your Bible to see if it has a map about Paul's missionary journeys. Many Bibles do contain such a map, and it makes it easier to follow Paul's progress as the book of Acts unfolds.

Yesterday we saw that Paul and Barnabas had been to a couple of places on the island of Cyprus. We only hear for sure of one convert there, a proconsul in Paphos named Sergius Paulus. After Paphos Paul and Barnabas sailed over to the mainland and came to Perga. It was there that John Mark left them. From Perga, they came inland to another city named Antioch in Pisidia. The rest of chapter 13 deals with events in this Antioch.

In this section, it becomes increasingly clear to us that Paul had a strategy in every place he visited. Based on verses 14-15, where was the first place Paul liked to go in a city if there was one? _____

Hint: Look at verse 5 also if you need to.

Paul was a Jewish Christian, and Jews gathered around the Roman Empire in synagogues. To qualify as a synagogue in a city, there had to be at least 10 households led by Jewish men. It sounds strange to us today that at Salamis and Antioch Pisidia and other places they would let Christians preach in their Jewish synagogues. But Paul had all the proper Jewish credentials, and these were places outside of Israel, Jewish outposts struggling to preserve Jewish identity hundreds of miles from Jerusalem.

After the reading of the scriptures, it was not uncommon to ask the Jewish men present if they had anything to share. As we have described earlier, there were also many Gentiles in attendance who had come to believe in God but had not become Jews. They were called God-fearers. This became a perfect opportunity for Paul to preach to both groups at once, and proclaim that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. In verse 16 that's exactly what he does!

The message is beautiful in it's relevance to the crowd Paul is preaching to. Later we will get to see how Paul preached to a crowd of Gentiles in Athens ignorant of the Old Testament. But to this group of people Paul preaches that Jesus has the credentials to be their long awaited Messiah. In verse 23 he refers to the promised son of David. As he preaches about Jesus he testifies to the amazing fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. And then he reaches the profound relevance that Jesus has for each of them Jew and Gentile alike. Write verses 38-39 here:

Now the response in Antioch is very encouraging. We only know of one man for sure that was saved back in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus. Can you tell I like to keep typing his name! Serg wasn't even saved in Salamis where we know Paul had preached in a synagogue (verse 5).

There's a lesson in that, friend- our job is to share the good news. Some will respond and others won't. We have a nasty habit of only sharing when we feel pretty good that the message will be received by our hearer. But the fact is that we will not lead to Jesus 100 % of the people we DON'T share with. God may bring them to salvation some other way, but it won't be any thanks to us. Paul was faithful to share and leave the results to God. We must also!

Verses 42-43 show good reason to believe that there were both many Gentiles and many Jews interested in knowing Jesus. The next Sabbath nearly the whole city showed up to hear the gospel. That's the good news. The bad news is that sharing the gospel had led to opposition for Paul and Barnabas. Friend, it happened to Jesus, it happened to Peter, and it happened to Paul. If you become one who shares the message faithfully, you will encounter trouble. Do it anyway!

You can look at the statement in verse 48 many ways. It says that "as many as had been appointed unto eternal life believed." Obviously this is one of those verses we Calvinists use to speak about predestination and election and other awfully hard to understand words.

But the neatest thing about that statement is that it is very encouraging to us when we share the gospel. It helps us understand that our job is to be faithful to share and leave the results with God. That keeps me going! It also keeps me humble- God is the one who makes true salvation happen and He is the only one who gets the glory for it. NOT the evangelist. Knowing that also helps us not to be manipulative and pressure someone into praying a prayer they don't really understand or mean.

Later in Corinth, when Paul is discouraged, a similar statement to this from the Lord brings him great encouragement. As you pray today, thank God that He has appointed you to eternal life!