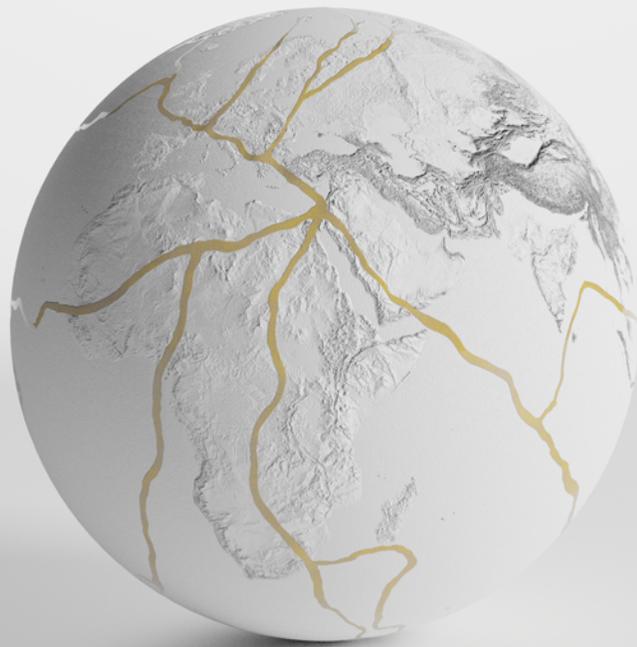


ACTS



REVIVAL & RECONCILIATION

ACTS | REVIVAL AND RECONCILIATION

The purpose of this guide is to act as a supplement to the current series of our church. Our teaching is out of the book of Acts, found in the New Testament of the Bible. This resource is for guiding discussions, learning more about the book of Acts, growing closer in relationship to Jesus, and knowing more about the events of our church.

CONTENTS

- Introduction, page 2
- Upcoming Events, page 3
- Recommended Resources, page 4
- How to Read Acts, page 5
- Discussion and Reading Questions, page 6

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of the book of Acts, we saw God's Spirit fill the followers of Jesus, and give life to the early church. As the salvation offered through Jesus was proclaimed, people followed Jesus, lives were changed, people were healed, and the church swelled into the thousands. The plan of God, however, is to unite all tribes, nations, tongues and languages under Jesus (Ephesians 1:9). And to that end works towards the reconciliation¹ of people to God by the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. And so in the second part of Acts, we see the Spirit begin to transform the church from a regional subset of Judaism to a worldwide faith that follows Jesus as King.

The work of God is miraculous as enemies of Christ become friends of Jesus, cultures and races separated by time and distance are brought into community by the Holy Spirit, and the gospel begins to spread across the Mediterranean through the people of God, who he has chosen as agents of reconciliation.

As we look at the work of God at the beginning of the church, we can be encouraged that the same God continues to reconcile the nations to himself, and has called us to be his partners in the gospel, acting as his ambassadors in this world. As God uses this section of Scripture to challenge us and encourage us, we remember the mission that our Lord has given us to go into all the world and make disciples.

Gavin Jarvis
Sparks Church Associate Pastor

¹ When scripture talks about reconciliation, it means to restore relationship, status, and unity. Specifically, we see it used in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 about God reconciling us through Christ.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Acts 29 West Conference | Engage 2017 - May 1st through 3rd

Though it may be easier for Christians to transform culture or even withdraw from it, what does it look like to engage culture, and do it well? Join hundreds of pastors, leaders, and Christians at Engage 2017 as we dive into the topic of engaging the culture – a conversation relevant for all believers, not just lead pastors or those in Acts 29. Engage will feature 25 speakers and 20 workshops. The price for the conference is 80 dollars, register at acts29uswest.com

Covenant Membership Class - May 22nd

If you are interested in becoming a Covenant Member of Living Stones, our next class is Monday, May 22nd at 6pm. Dinner is provided. Childcare can be provided, please RSVP on the City or at the Counter if you are joining us.

Men's Retreat - June 9th and 10th

On June 9th and 10th we are having a Men's Retreat at [Camp Alta](#). Our guest speaker for the weekend is Duane Smets, Pastor of Preaching and Vision at The Resolved Church in San Diego, CA. The retreat begins Friday afternoon and ends Saturday afternoon. The price for the retreat is \$110 dollars. Registration starts April 30th at sparks.livingstoneschurches.com/retreat

Drawing Near Class - June 13th - 15th

Is there a way for us as Christians to draw nearer to God in our daily lives, and what role does the Holy Spirit play to bring us closer to Jesus? Throughout the year we are having short classes on practical ways to grow in your faith and relationship with God. Our next class is on June 13th, 14th, and 15th from 7:00pm to 8:30pm. Each of these evenings are one class, to provide you with three options to attend. The Community Groups join us on these nights, and anyone who wants to attend are welcome. For questions, including about childcare, please contact Adam Lindsey at adam@lschurches.com.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

FRIEND OF SINNERS: HARVEY TURNER bit.ly/FriendofSinnersBook

In "Friend of Sinners," Pastor Harvey Turner unpacks the Why, What, and How of evangelism. The book begins with a close look at Christ's conversations with people, and Harvey then uses Christ's example as the foundation for the rest of the book. This practical, biblical approach to evangelism helps believers break down the barriers preventing them from telling people about Jesus so that they feel empowered to share the gospel.

Reading Difficulty: Easy

ACCIDENTAL PHARISEES: LARRY OSBOURNE <http://amzn.to/2no1pDM>

Anyone can accidentally make the Christian faith harder for themselves and the people around them! This quick read is a reminder to stay focused on Christ, remain humble, and really engage with what it means to follow Christ and the scriptures.

Reading Difficulty: Easy

THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOL 1: JUSTO GONZALEZ <http://amzn.to/2kRReD9>

How did the church of Acts become the global church that we see today? Justo Gonzalez looks at the good, the bad, and the ugly of the life of the church and celebrates the continual restoring movement of God in this comprehensive history of the church. Volume 1 covers the history of Christianity from Acts to around 1500 AD.

Reading Difficulty: Advanced, this is a large, though well written, book

HOW TO READ ACTS

Purpose - In a sentence, this book is about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and how the church spread the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, proclaiming life in Christ to all people.

Author - Luke wrote the book of Acts. Because of his dedication to Christ and personality as a doctor, he wants to explain accurately the continued work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and the first church. He uses eye witness accounts and is present for some of the events of the book.² As a gentile (see below), Luke is very interested in the global expansion of the gospel.

Key Themes - These themes occur in Acts 8-16.

Racial Tension and Reconciliation - A major theme of Acts and the 1st century church was tension between Jews and Gentiles.³ Specifically, a prejudiced attitude of the Jews and Jewish Christians towards Gentiles receiving salvation. In Acts 11, Jewish Christians come to Peter frustrated that he even ate with Gentiles. Later, a crisis occurs when the Gentiles are told that they must submit to rules and customs that either had no origin in scripture, or were fulfilled with the coming of Jesus (Acts 15). It is vital to our understanding of this section of Acts to see the Spirit of God working racial reconciliation in the church, powered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To that end, the Spirit will work throughout this section to unify Jewish Christians, Samaritans (who also didn't commonly associate with the Jews and vice versa), and the Gentiles. We will also see the major leaders of the church grapple with this issue and lead the church to an understanding of the gospel being available to all peoples, tribes, and tongues. This entire section invites us to reflect on where any of our prejudices and favoritism may inhibit us from sharing the good news of Jesus with others, or inviting others into our lives who may not be like us.

Peter and Paul - The focus will shift from the apostle Peter to the apostle Paul.

New Testament Letters - A few of the New Testament letters were written during this time.⁴ As far as we know, the following letters were written around these periods in Acts:

- Acts 12-14 - The letter of James
- Acts 15 - Paul's letter to the Galatians
- Acts 16 - Paul's letters to the Thessalonians (1 and 2 Thessalonians)

² Acts 16:10 is the first instance when the text will switch from "they traveled" to "we traveled".

³ Whenever they are talking about Gentiles in the book of Acts, they mean anyone who is not Jewish.

⁴ There is evidence that the gospel of Mark was being written at this time as well, but we cannot be conclusive about a completion date earlier than 60 AD.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following sections are for Community Group Discussion and Personal Reading. Here's a breakdown of each section.

Prayer Prompt - Every group discussion opens with a time of worship. Each prayer prompt focuses on praising and thanking God for what he has done, that is themed after the text for the week.

Discussion - Discussion time is when the group reads and discusses the text. There are four types of questions that will be asked:

- **Icebreaker** - Questions meant to direct attention to the text.
- **Observation** - Anything that the group notices in the text can be brought up and discussed. In fact, our hope is that it would!
- **Textual** - Questions that arise from the text specifically that may not have been brought up during observations.
- **Application** - How the message of the text applies to us practically and personally.

Closing Prayer - Prayers for each others lives, for the city, our church, and a time to reflect and pray that God would move in our lives in the way that we have seen in the text. For example, the closing prayer in the first discussion focuses on our desire to be witnesses in the workplace.

Personal Devotion - This section is for your personal use every week if you desire to pray and meditate on a specific aspect of the text. This is built to take time, and hopefully help create space for you to grow deeper in your relationship with God and your faith.

Sometimes a lesson is a prayer night for your group. Focus your time on those evenings praying for our church and our city.

RADICAL RECONCILIATION

April 24th - 27th

Acts 9:1-31

Prayer Prompt: Begin group with a time of worship and prayer. Spend time thanking God for his salvation. This can be a good evening for those in the group to recount how they became Christians and thank God for saving them.

Potential Icebreaker: Who would you be surprised to see become a Christian?

Read verses 1-19 and open the floor up to anything that the group would like to discuss, both at the beginning and the end of group.

What is the significance of the conversion of Saul?

What does conversion to Christianity mean for Saul? How will his life change?

Do you notice anything interesting about God's response to Ananias in verses 15-16? How does this connect to our lives and to verses like Ephesians 2:11-12?

Read verses 20-31 and open the floor up to anything that the group would like to discuss.

Do you have a personal story of radical conversion, either of yourself or someone you know?

What would some of the fears of the Christians be about Paul? What would be exciting?

What are the stories that you turn to that you hold up as evidences of your faith?

Closing Prayer: Spend time as a group praying for the enemies of God in our society to become friends of Jesus. Pray as well that the church would welcome with open arms those that used to be enemies of Christ.

Personal Devotion: Paul recounts the story of his conversion and who he was before he was a Christian in several places in the book of Acts. Check out the following passages this week and consider the life and conversion of a man, that serves as an incredible piece of early evidence of the legitimacy of the faith. Acts 22:1-21 and Acts 26:9-15.

RECONCILING THE NATIONS

May 1st - 4th

Acts 8

Worship: Spend a few minutes talking about the ways that God has been showing himself to the people in your group. This could be by revealing himself in prayer and scripture reading, at work, through miracles and answered prayer, etc.

Discussion: *Read and open the floor for the group to discuss anything that stood out in the text.*

What do you notice about **verses 1-25**?

How did God use the persecution of the church to bring the gospel to the nations?

What is wrong with the request of Simon the Sorcerer in verses 18 and 19?⁵

How does the Spirit of God bring together different types of people in the church? How have you seen this in your life?

Read verses 26-40.

There are both common and supernatural works of the Holy Spirit involved in the salvation of the Ethiopian Eunuch. What are they?

How does the gospel open a cross-cultural bridge for the Ethiopian to be saved?

How can the Ethiopian's conversion encourage us to engage with people with different backgrounds and ethnicities? If someone like this were to come to our group or church, how could we be welcoming and genuinely accepting of them?

Closing Prayer: Pray for the people we sense that God has been putting in our paths to share the gospel with, and for the church of God in our valley to grow in diversity.

Personal Devotion: The spread of the gospel to the first non-Jewish areas occurs in this text. With this in mind, set a goal this week to put yourself outside of your personal boundaries to build relationships and share the gospel. This could be inviting people you don't know well over for a meal, treating grocery trips as an opportunity for mission, or being intentional to have gospel conversations someone you know who doesn't know Christ.

⁵ It is not wrong to desire God to move in mighty ways. Several other things are occurring in this text.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION

May 8th - 11th

Acts 9:32-10:48

Prayer Prompt: Begin group with a time of worship and prayer. Pray and worship through Psalm 55:1-7, paying attention to God's promise to meet those who seek him and forgive their sins.

Discussion: Read the passage and open the floor up to anything that the group would like to discuss, both at the beginning and the end of group.

Read verses 9:32-43. What stands out to you from this text?

Why does Peter send everyone out while he prays for and raises Tabitha?

Read 10:1-23. What stands out to you from this text?

What is the significance of Peter's vision, as far as it relates to seeing Cornelius? (after spending sometime reflecting on this, turn to verse 28 for an answer).

Why would it be hard for Peter to reach out to Cornelius? With that in mind, are there people or people groups that you find hard to engage with? Why?

What does it look like for you to pursue relationship with someone who is different than you?

Read 10:24-48. What stands out to you from this text?

Look at verses 44-46 in depth. What is the significance of the household of Cornelius receiving the Holy Spirit while Peter was still speaking? Compare this to Acts 2:37-38 and Acts 8:14-17 together.

Do you have a checklist of what a believer must do to be received by God besides believing the gospel? How does this text and the gospel itself challenge our pre-conceptions of who people must be or what they must do?

Closing Prayer: Pray that as we grow in our faith that God would put our favoritism to death (10:34), and that God would save all nations, even in the city of Sparks.

Personal Devotion: Next week in group is a prayer week, so read Acts 11 this week. The chapter starts with the Jewish Christians being critical of the Gentiles in verse 3, but ends with the Gentile Christians raising a collection for the Jewish Christians in verse 30. Often times Church unity and reconciliation seems impossible, but the Spirit makes it possible! Pray this week for the Church of God, that we would be one church, united in one Spirit, under one Lord.

GLOBAL RECONCILIATION

May 15th - 18th

Acts 11

Prayer Night: This week, you will have a much shorter discussion and spend more time in prayer.

Discussion:

Read the whole chapter. What do you observe?

Tonight's prayer is simple and goes through the sections of Acts 11.

Prayer:

11:1 - Start the time of prayer acknowledging God as God, and thanking him for all of his works. These can be personal (salvation, a recent act of grace) or over-arching (thank you that you created the mountains, this land, you are in control). The idea is to center our minds on the idea that God is in control and is king.

Then, spend time praising God as the one who is saving countless thousands all over the world daily. The same God who saved us is calling people to His family on a regular basis.

11:2-18 - Confess our sins of judging others based on our prejudices and favoritism. This may happen in conscious ways or in unconscious ways, but we have seen in Acts that repentance is a cleansing, powerful force that through the power of God, sets us free.

11:19-26 - Pray that God would lead many to salvation, and that there would be a surprising openness to the Gospel. Pray for revival, that God would heal hearts, open the way to reconciliation and healing. Pray that the church would be a model of reconciliation between peoples, families, nations, races, etc.

11:27-30 - End your prayer with a time of praying that the needs of the church, as an individual and a community would be met. End your time by praying for each others needs, and asking if anyone is aware of needs within your community.

Personal Devotion: Re-read Acts 11:1-16. If someone came to us with the same attitude as they approached Peter, we may see ourselves dismissing their attitude and question. However, Peter uses this as an opportunity to teach those that come to him about the power of Jesus to reconcile the nations. Spend time thanking Jesus for his work in his church, and pray that God would give you patience and understanding when others come to you with questions about how your faith causes you to act in specific situations, and that we would be a people marked with diversity and understanding.

RESCUE AND RECONCILIATION

May 22nd - 25th

Acts 12

Prayer Prompt: Begin group with a time of worship and prayer. Read Habakkuk 2:14 together as a group and spend time rejoicing that no matter what happens in our daily lives, God will be glorified. Spend time worshipping Jesus as the king of his people, and worshipping the Spirit for continuing to spread the church throughout the world.

Discussion: Read the passage and open the floor up to anything that the group would like to discuss, both at the beginning and the end of group.

Read verses 1-19.

What is the response of the church to the arrest of Peter?

When does the angel rescue Peter, and how does that instruct us in prayer?

What are some of your individual or group thoughts when it comes to the suffering of Peter and James? How does your experience of faith compare or contrast with the life of the believers in Acts 12, and how can the reality of persecution transform your view of the church to a global vision?

Read verses 19-25.

Why does God kill Herod?

Work as a group to discover the contrast between Herod and the Church in this chapter.⁶

Closing Prayer: The church had a recognition of their need for God, and the glory of their king in contrast to all other earthly kings. Spend time as a group confessing your need for God to transform our view of him so that he is our primary devotion over nationality, kingdoms, etc. Pray that God would give your group a heart of prayer that seeks the intervention of the Lord in all things.

Personal Devotion: Find time this week to pray for the persecuted church. opendoors.org is a good resource to investigate the status of persecuted nations.

⁶ Herod is strong, the church is weak. Peter is in prison, Herod is on a throne. The angel rescues Peter, he kills Herod.

RECONCILIATION IS THE MISSION

May 29th - June 1st

Acts 13

Prayer Prompt: Begin group with a time of worship and prayer. Read Proverbs 3:5-6 together. Worship the Lord, who invites us to trust him with all of our heart, and who goes ahead of us to make our paths straight.

Discussion: Read the passage and open the floor up to anything that the group would like to discuss, both at the beginning and the end of group.

Read verses 1-3. This is 12 years after Paul's Conversion. What role does time, the church, and the Spirit's calling have in our life decisions?

What do you notice about the leadership of the church in Antioch?

Read verses 4-12. What do you notice from this text? What questions do you have based on this text, and what do you learn about God or man from it?

Read verses 13-41. Paul and Barnabas do some evangelism in this chapter. How can we learn from them and apply their evangelism methods to our non-Christian friends and family?

Read verses 42-52. Have you ever wondered why Christians are so concerned about a Jewish Book and a Jewish Messiah? How does this section begin to answer that question?

Paul takes a verse that refers to Jesus and applies the mission to himself. Do you view yourself as having the same mission that Jesus is given in Isaiah 49:6? Why or why not?

Closing Prayer: Pray that God would use our witness to be a light to the nations for Jesus. Pray that as we tell others about Jesus, the Spirit would go ahead of us and prepare peoples hearts. Ask the group if there are any major decisions or dreams that they have that your group can bring to the Lord for prayer together.

Personal Devotion: As the gospel begins to go to new regions outside of Jerusalem, the gospel message preached is being adapted to different cultures. Peter and Paul use many of the same verses in their sermons in Acts 2 and this chapter, but the sermons also contain many differences. Compare the two, and pray about this: If I were to deliver a similar message to the people that I know, what in the salvation story would appeal to their cultural background?

RECONCILIATION BY PLANTING

June 5th - 8th

Acts 14

Prayer Night: This week, you will have a much shorter discussion and spend more time in prayer.

Discussion:

Read the whole chapter. What do you observe?

Tonight's prayer is simple and goes through the sections of Acts 14.

Prayer:

14:15-17 - The God we worship is the Lord of all creation, who "did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Praise the Lord for his provision and his care, not only for his people, but for all peoples.

14 - Throughout the chapter Paul and Barnabas proclaim the gospel and reach out in faith when God calls them to. In addition, they are bold in the face of passive or blatant opposition. Pray for the believers in our valley, that we would all take opportunities given to us to share our faith, to pray for others in faith, and to be bold even when we encounter opposition.

14:15 - There is a temptation within our faith that as we see the Gospel bearing fruit, that we would interpret this as a sign of our greatness. Pray that our joy would continually be lifting Jesus up, and that like Paul and Barnabas, we can confidently say, "We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news!"

14:21-25 - A vital piece of the continuation of the Gospel is the planting of churches. We see this in this section as Paul and Barnabas install Elders in the communities that have received the word of Jesus. Pray for the planting of churches in the City of Sparks and in Northern Nevada. This includes two potential Living Stones church plants in South Reno and Douglas County. Pray also for faithful men and women to lead the church, and for men to feel God's call as elders in the local church.

14:26-28 - As our community groups prepare for a break over the summer, pray that in our lives the community of the church continues to play a major role in our walk with Christ, as we encourage each other and build each other up in the gospel. Pray for everyone's summer that it would not only be a joyful time, but one where God moves in each others lives. Pray also for the Men's retreat occurring this weekend.

RECONCILIATION BY GRACE

June 12th - 15th

Acts 15:1-35

Instead of meeting for normal group discussion, groups will spend their final week at the Draw Nearer class. The next two lessons are geared as personal devotions through the final two chapters of the 2nd Acts series.

Read 1-5. Circumcision in this passage is not just the physical action of circumcision, but a adoption of Jewish customs and laws by all Gentiles who come to Jesus. What is at stake for the Gentile Christians? How would a requirement of adopting Jewish Laws and Customs affect your faith?

Read 6-19. What is the decision of the apostles, and what lead them to that decision?

Are the apostles saying that the Old Testament wasn't important for the Gentiles?⁷

Read 20-35. Why are the prohibitions that the apostles gave to the Gentile-Christians important? Why would it be important for them to avoid eating certain foods and abstaining from sexual immorality?

How important are the sexual ethics of Christians today? Is it important to our relationship with God, the church, and the world? How?

Are there parts of other people's cultures that you don't like, that you would be tempted to prohibit them from doing if they joined your church, even if they aren't sins?

How does the gospel of Jesus Christ differ from our social and cultural preferences?

⁷ The Old Testament was the only books of the bible that were available to the Gentile Christians at this time. Additionally, the lack of need for following Jewish purity rituals didn't negate the importance of not murdering, committing adultery, or bearing false witness. The latter are both part of Old Testament Law and re-affirmed by Christ.

RECONCILIATION BY CONVERSION

June 19th - 22nd

Acts 15:36 - 16:40

Read 15:36-41. Mark quickly left Paul and Barnabas on their 1st missionary journey (Acts 12:25, 13:13). Later, Paul says that Mark is very useful to him (2 Timothy 4:11). How can this be an encouragement to both younger and older Christians, when younger leaders make mistakes?

What do we learn about revival and church planting from this passage? How is God's faithfulness still seen in this passage?

Read 16:1-12. Why does Paul have Timothy circumcised, especially considering his stance on circumcision in Acts 15?

What role does prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit have in evangelism and church planting?

Read 16:13-40. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the salvation of Lydia (14)?

Have you ever experienced a level of joy like the apostles did in verse 25, where they sung and encouraged each other in the midst of suffering?

What is God communicating about himself and his people by who he saves in this passage? The three characters being a woman, a slave, and a Gentile jailer.