

GROWING IN FAITH



Acts 1

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

Acts 1:1-5

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What do you think the disciples felt when instructed by their risen Lord to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit?

Has there been a time in your life when God has instructed you to wait for a gift? Is it hard or easy to wait?

Why Jerusalem?

Read Acts 1:14

What effect do you think this practice had on the disciples?

The first recorded act of the apostles is to complete their number.

What were their criteria for selection? (cf. Acts 1:21-22)

Do you surround yourself with people who encourage you in your faith journey, in your relationships, and your purpose in life?

What difference does it make when we surround ourselves with these kinds of people?

Read Acts 1:8. Jesus called his disciples to share the good news with people very different from themselves.

We do not always get the benefit of such a clear calling, but God calls us all to be ministers. With whom is God calling you to share the good news?

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Acts 2

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Acts 2:1-4, 12

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What a dramatic beginning! How do you answer the question, "What does this mean?"

What does Acts 2:1-4 mean for you? What does it mean for the Church today?

Read Acts 2:36-39.

What is Peter teaching us about God? About ourselves?

Read Acts 2:42-47.

What effect do you think these practices had on the believers?

What does this teach us about being the church?

What difference would it make if life looked like this? Is it even possible?

This chapter shares the birth of the Church.

Looking at ourselves nearly 2000 years later, what do we do well as the Church?

What do we do poorly?

How can you and I help the Church to do better?

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Acts 3

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

Acts 3:1-8

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Acts 1 began with an appearance of the resurrected Christ, Acts 2 the coming of the Holy Spirit, and Acts 3 with a miraculous healing.

What significance, if any, is there for 3 chapters and 3 supernatural events? Is Luke conveying a message or is it coincidence?

Read Acts 3:1-10

What is your first reaction to this story? Why?

Have you ever felt like the man in this story? I.e. have you ever felt like the one being saved? How did you react?

Read 1 Samuel 8. Compare to Jesus.

In the areas of your life where you lead (work, family, etc.) how do you reflect Jesus?

How do you reflect the stereotypical king in 1 Samuel 8?

What was your favorite part of Acts 3? Why?

What was your least favorite part of Acts 3? Why?

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Acts 4

They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:7-12

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Read Acts 4:7-12. This is a recurring and fundamental theme.

What does this mean to you personally?

Why do you think Peter repeats this theme?

What relationship does Acts 4:23-31 have with the rest of the chapter?

What role does prayer have in the life of the early church?

Read Acts 4:32-37. Compare to Acts 2:42-47.

How are these passages similar? Different?

Why does this theme seem to repeat?

The Lord added to their number.

This is Luke’s way of reminding us of the numerical growth of the gospel. They seem to be a community that people wanted to be a part of.

How can we be a community people want to be a part of? How can we live so that people want to be around us and have what we have?

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Acts 5

Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 5:38-42

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Rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

What a strange comment, why would they feel this way?

Does suffering for the name of Jesus play a role in the church today?

Ananias and Sapphira.

Intentions and deception seem to be the crux of the issue. How do you examine your intentions in the way that you live your life?

Read Acts 5:30-32.

Does this remind you of passages in chapters 3 and 4?

Peter sounds like a one-trick pony. What meaning is there in his repetition of this message?

Gamaliel.

His advice, whether out of faith in Christ or human wisdom, is quite profound. We often ask, “How can I know what God’s will is?”

Can we use Gamaliel’s advice to discern God’s will?

If so, how?

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Acts 6

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:2-7

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What is the issue at hand?

How do the disciples handle the issue?

What are the criteria for selecting the seven?

Compare these criteria to those you would use to hire someone for a job. What are the differences and why?

Using the right criteria.

If these criteria made such a difference then, would they make a difference today?

Have you ever thought about preparing yourself, spiritually, before you go to work or to volunteer?

What difference does or could that make in your life?

Stephen.

"Full of God's grace and power," Stephen exceeded his explicit commission.

How can we dream bigger in our current roles/jobs, to make a bigger difference in the world around us?

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Acts 7

However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?

says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?

Acts 7:48-50

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What are Stephen's main points of defense?
How does he challenge those who accuse him?

What parts of this recounting of salvation history stand out?

Patriarchal Epoch (vv. 1-16)

Mosaic Epoch (vv. 17-43)

Temple Epoch (vv. 44-50)

Growing in grace.

What are good ways to challenge each other to grow in our faith?

How should you be improving your life?

What are good ways to challenge others outside this group to improve the lives?

What are bad ways to challenge others outside this group to improve their lives?

Given the words.

Trust God, and you'll be given the right words at the right moments. Trust God, and you'll be given the right silence at the right moments.

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Acts 8

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Acts 8:17, 25, 40

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The gospel goes international.

What regions/countries are impacted in this chapter?

How do we make sense of Simon the Sorcerer?

Why did Peter rebuke him so harshly? Was it deserved?

What role does baptism play in a Christian's faith journey?

Phillip.

How does Phillip's story mirror Stephen's? How is it different?

The Spirit tells Phillip to go listen to the Eunuch. When have you felt a tug to help someone, to share your story, or to share the gospel? Did you do it? Whether you did or not, what was the result?

Was the great persecution necessary?

The result is that faithful people took the gospel to other parts of the world. Is enduring persecution necessary?

Is evading persecution faithless?

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Acts 9

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 9:17-22

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What do you think about suffering?

Must Christians suffer? If so, in what way or to what degree?

Is suffering bad, good, both, or neither?

What does Acts seem to say about the suffering of the faithful? (cf. Acts 5:41, 9:16).

Your experience of God.

We have all experienced God’s presence in some way, big or small. Take a moment to share one experience.

Saul’s life changed as a result. How did your life change when you have experienced God?

Saul, the man, the myth, the legend.

What about Saul’s story to this point stands out to you?

What do you see in his personality that benefits the kingdom of God?

What do you see in his personality that could hinder the kingdom of God?

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Acts 10

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Acts 10:34-38

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Cornelius, Peter, and Prayer

What role, if any, does prayer have in the visions Cornelius and Peter receive?

What role, if any, does prayer have for us?

Universal Grace

This is the early church’s first major step toward official acceptance of universal grace - God’s unmerited love offered to all people.

How does Peter’s vision prepare him for Cornelius?

Remember this story when we get to chapter 15.

The good news

Peter recounts the good news in the hearing of the gentiles. It is good news that changes their lives.

What is it? (Hint: verses 36-43).

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Acts 11

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

Acts 11: 15-18

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Verses 1-18

This is essentially a recount of the previous chapter. Why do you think Luke repeats stories like this?

The Church flourishes under persecution

It appears that the gospel spreads and strengthens as a result of persecution. Antioch will be a major church center.

Is persecution necessary to the growth and strength of the Church?

Where do you see the Church growing/spreading in the world? Is there a correlation with persecution?

What does it mean to be a Christian?

What does the term, coined in Antioch, mean?

What are some attributes? (E.g. verses 23-24, 29)

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Acts 12

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Acts 12:12-17

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Compare:

Acts 12:13-16

Luke 24:1-11

How are they similar? Different?

Oh Herod...

This whole chapter is a story to show power of God over human or evil power. God triumphs.

By whose power does Peter succeed?

In whose power does Herod trust?

What does Herod do that causes his death?

What does the gospel continue to do?

See v. 24.

Why does Luke repeat this idea?

Is it true? Why do you think it is or is not true?