1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Acts, Part 1
Theme: The Church Begins

Overview: Since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has always had a people, but he has not always had a church. Even though the church was envisioned in the great commission of the Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-3), predicted by the prophets during a locust plague (Joel 2:28-32), and promised to the apostles at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13-20), she was not actually born until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41). But after her birth, the church spread like fire across the Roman Empire. In this first part of our study of Acts, students will learn about that birth, how the early disciples shared their possessions with any who had need (especially widows), and how Philip the evangelist and Peter the apostle stretched that early church to be more inclusive.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

Acts is the second volume of a two-part work by Luke, the "doctor" and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). In his "former book" (the Gospel of Luke), he wrote about "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). The "we" passages in Acts (e.g., Acts 16:10-17) show that Luke was an eyewitness to many of the events he recorded.

Audience

Like the Gospel of Luke, Acts is addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), possibly a Roman official or patron, so that he might "know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4). Through him, Luke wrote for the wider church, both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Date

Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome for two years (Acts 28:30-31), so it was probably completed around AD 62. The events in this study took place in the years immediately following Jesus' resurrection and ascension, about AD 30–40.

Setting

The story begins in Jerusalem, where the apostles waited for the promised Holy Spirit. After Stephen's martyrdom, persecution scattered the believers, and the gospel spread "in all Judea and Samaria" (Acts 1:8; 8:1). Philip preached in Samaria, and Peter ministered in the coastal towns of Lydda and Joppa, one step closer to the Gentile mission.

Theme

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Acts records the birth and growth of the church as the Spirit empowered ordinary believers to preach Christ crucified and risen.

Why Study Acts?

Acts shows what the church looked like in its earliest days. This study calls believers to devote themselves to what the first church devoted itself to, to be genuine in their generosity, to find creative solutions to church problems, to share the gospel with everyone, and to serve in whatever way God has gifted them.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1:	Acts 2:1-4, 14-15, 22-24, 29-32, 36-42
WEEK 2:	Acts 4:32–5:16
WEEK 3:	Acts 2:44-47; 6:1-7
WEEK 4:	Acts 8:4-24
WEEK 5:	Acts 9:32-43

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Devote yourself to the things the early church devoted itself to.**

STUDY: Acts, Part 1

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 2:1-4, 14-15, 22-24, 29-32, 36-42

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 2:1-47; Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11

BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

BY MARK SCOTT

Many will recognize the name of evangelist Dean Sharp. He preached a revival sermon entitled "Operation Steadfast." It was based on the *King James Version* reading of Acts 2:42, "They continued steadfastly in. . . ." The message traced what the young church continued to do in its earliest days. When the church was born, it immediately gave herself to doing what "Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1).

The Spirit and the Church

Acts 2:1-4

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and so was the church. The Twelve (minus Judas, plus Matthias) constituted the New Israel. The prayer meeting that preceded the birth of the church consisted of about 120 people—notice the number 12 even in that number (Acts 1:15-26). The apostles waited and waited (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). Then, on the 50th day following the Passover Sabbath, the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church.

The pronoun *they* might refer to the 120 people gathered for prayer, but it would certainly refer to at least the Twelve apostles. They were in *one place*, though the precise location is unknown. Wherever it was, it gave way to a larger area that would accommodate the large Pentecost crowd. Three events characterized the Spirit birthing the church—wind (the sound of it, at least), fire, and speech—which are all rather consistent "signs" of the presence of God in both Testaments. The *sound like the blowing of a violent wind* reminded the apostles of Jesus' promise (John 20:22). The *fire* (shaped like tongues on their heads) was symbolic of purification and even judgment (Matthew 3:11; Hebrews 10:26-27). The "inspired" speech was the ability to speak other languages, discerned by the nations and the people who would have spoken those dialects (Acts 2:5-11).

Jesus and the Church

Acts 2:14-15, 22-24, 29-31

First the apostles came together, and then the multitude came together. Sixteen people groups and places are mentioned that had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (and perhaps Passover earlier). They were amazed and perplexed by what they heard (i.e., the gospel in their own languages and dialects). But some mocked the apostles, saying that they were filled with *new* (or sweet, the Greek word *gleukos*, the source of our word *glucose*) *wine*.

The apostles preached about Jesus, Jesus, and Jesus, and Peter's sermon was the one recorded. He addressed the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the guests of Jerusalem, and then he quickly dismissed the mockery. Not only would new wine not have been produced in the spring of the year, but to be drunk at such an early hour of the day made the charge ridiculous.

Peter then quoted from Joel 2:28-32, which was the prediction of the coming of the Spirit. Then he moved quickly to speak about Jesus. The gospel was all about Jesus. Peter mentioned Jesus' credentials (miracles, wonders, and signs), his fulfillment of God's deliberate plan, his gruesome crucifixion, and his glorious resurrection.

Spoiler alert: the bulk of the Pentecost sermon was about the resurrection; 10 of the 19 verses were about it. Peter marshaled support from Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to prove his point. Much of the good news is summarized in the phrase "death could not hold him." The Psalms make us think of King David. But that patriarch and prophet has a grave in Jerusalem to this very day (though the credibility of the designated spot is unlikely). David's bones are somewhere in Jerusalem. The Son of David's bones are nowhere to be found.

The People in the Church

Acts 2:36-42

Peter's sermon-in-a-sentence is verse 36. By virtue of the resurrection, God made Jesus, whom the people had crucified, both Lord and Messiah. That was as much as the people could take. They were deeply convicted (*cut to the heart*) and asked what they could do to get right with God (a question asked four times in the New Testament).

Peter did not tell his audience to believe, because they would not have asked their question if they did not already believe. Peter told them to *repent* and *be baptized* because they desperately needed to do both. This would provide *forgiveness* and the reception of the *Holy Spirit*. Two commands followed by two promises. And this promise of salvation was for individuals, families, and ethnic groups far off.

Peter's sermon went on as he exhorted the people to *save yourselves*. Three thousand responded, and the church was born. They gave themselves to teaching, fellowship, Communion, and prayer. Those actions should steadfastly be enjoined today.

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MORE TO RESTORE

BY DAVID FAUST

I was brought up in the Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, but I have remained in this tribe by personal choice. After field-testing Restoration Movement ideals over nearly five decades of ministry, I am convinced these principles remain relevant and appealing to Christians weary of division and to seekers looking for a place to belong.

Our movement's goals make sense: honor Christ, respect biblical authority, pursue unity with other Christ followers, and make disciples of all ethnic groups. I agree with our slogans, even though we fall short in applying them. "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." "In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love." "We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only."

Keeping the Movement Moving

There is still more to restore. Lost souls need peace with God. God's family shouldn't be splintered and distracted by human opinions and traditions. The faith, hope, and love that marked Jesus' first-century disciples still need to be restored.

Restoration hasn't been completed. It's an ongoing movement—a work in progress. The Bible's church history record is called the book of Acts, not the "Book of Inaction" or the "Book of Good Ideas." The early church had its problems, but the New Testament offers encouraging glimpses of what God can do through ordinary people who are convinced about Jesus' resurrection, filled with the Holy Spirit, and focused on making disciples. Finding fault is easy. It's more productive to ask, *How can we keep the movement moving?*

Revisiting Pentecost

If you have read the second chapter of Acts, you are familiar with Dr. Luke's record of what transpired on the Day of Pentecost. Does the story still inspire you? What can we discover (or rediscover) by reading Acts 2 with fresh eyes?

Reliance on prayer and the Holy Spirit. Before preaching the gospel to diverse groups of listeners in Jerusalem, Jesus' followers "all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). In today's complicated world, we can't make disciples in our own strength. We need to pray for the Spirit's help.

Christ-centered preaching. A few weeks earlier, Peter lost his nerve and denied knowing Jesus; but at Pentecost he spoke boldly, clearly, and logically, declaring Jesus to be the Lord and Messiah. Effective preaching still centers on the prophesied, crucified, and risen Christ.

Urgency about the mission. Peter "assured," "warned," and "pleaded with" his listeners to believe in Christ, repent, and be baptized (Acts 2:36-41). Paul's life goal was "to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). We need to restore the sense of urgency that motivated the first-century church.

Keep the main things the main things. After thousands were baptized on the Day of Pentecost, those new believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, shared their lives and resources in fellowship (*koinonia*), remembered Christ by breaking bread together, and continued steadfastly in prayer (Acts 2:42). Do our church calendars and programs prioritize these vital practices?

Acts 2 describes an exciting movement. People were awe-filled and joy-filled. Devoted and united. Hospitable and generous. Praising God and serving others. Seeing new Christ followers added daily. Don't you want to be part of that? What "Acts" of ours will help to keep the movement moving?

Personal Challenge:

If you are not well acquainted with the Restoration Movement, ask someone (perhaps a minister or elder at your church) to inform you about the movement's history and guiding principles. If you are already well acquainted with the Restoration Movement, find an opportunity to discuss the movement's ideals and slogans with your small group, a class, or a friend who knows little or nothing about it.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you "go public" with your love for God and his love for you this past week?

2. What sounds and sights come to mind as you think about what happens when you come to worship each Lord's Day?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 2:1-4, 14-15, 22-24, 29-32, 36-42** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. Jesus' followers were "all together in one place" when the Holy Spirit came in the form of wind (the sound of it, at least), fire, and speech. Why was this convincing evidence of God's presence?
   - What convincing evidence of God's presence do we have today?

4. The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus' followers to "speak in other tongues" (v. 4). A crowd of people of various nationalities gathered and "each one heard their own language being spoken" (v. 6).
   - What does this reveal about God's love for the world and his desire for us in regard to that world?

5. Some people who were gathered at Pentecost mocked those who spoke in "other tongues." Have you ever been mocked for your faith?
   - How did you respond?
   - Looking back on that incident, is there something you would do differently?

6. In his Bible Study this week, Mark Scott notes that 10 of the 19 verses in Peter's Pentecost sermon were about Jesus' resurrection.
   - Why is Jesus' resurrection such an important part of the Christian faith?
   - When in your life has the impact of Jesus' resurrection been especially powerful to you?

7. Mark Scott refers to verse 36 as Peter's "sermon in a sentence." Why were the people, upon hearing Peter's message, "cut to the heart" and eager to do something (v. 37)?

8. Peter challenged his audience to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). What specific challenges do people in our culture face in following this instruction?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

10. Complete this statement: "I need the help of the Holy Spirit most of all in this area of my life: _____."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 4:32–5:16**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Be genuine in your generosity.**

STUDY: Acts, Part 1

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 4:32–5:16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 6:1-4, 19-24; 2 Corinthians 9:6-12

SHARING AND PRETENDING

BY MARK SCOTT

At times, people can do all the right things with all the wrong motives. Youth groups can visit the residents in a nursing home (good thing), but they might hate every minute of it (wrong motive). Jesus spoke of how the religious leaders of his day (he called them "hypocrites") carried out good actions (giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting) with disingenuous motives (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16). It is always best to unite motive with manner and attitude with action.

Sharing Makes the Church a Generous Place

Acts 4:32-37

Acts 4:32-37 is the second summary section of the book of Acts—the first one being Acts 2:42-47. Luke does this every so often (e.g., Acts 5:12-16; 6:7; 9:31). He pushes pause and succinctly summarizes many activities of the church. This section concludes the two chapters covering the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple and the consequences of that miracle for Peter and John in particular. These men had received threats from the Sanhedrin, but they had also received boldness from the Holy Spirit, a boldness that other believers later received in answer to their prayer (Acts 4:31).

Unity characterized the earliest days of the church. All the members were on the same page. This showed up in their care for one another. One is struck by the unity reflected in the church's being *one in heart and mind*. There is no substitute for that. Three attitudes characterize people in general: what's yours is mine, and I will take it (thief); what's mine is mine and I will keep it (narcissist); what's mine is yours, and I will share it (Christ follower). Possessions were intended to be shared—not retained. The phrase, *there were no needy persons among them*, shows the remarkable impact of the believers' generosity.

Great power (evident in their preaching of the resurrection) and the powerful working of God's *grace* (evident in their lavish generosity) was what caused the members to share their goods and lay them at the apostles' feet. The apostles, who oversaw the contributions, made the distributions as needs dictated.

One such generous example is highlighted. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whose nickname was Barnabas, sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the church. Questions about the parcel's location and why a Levite owned property are not answered in the text. But the author (Luke) clearly approves of the example. This noteworthy action stands in stark contrast with the sinister ones immediately following.

Pretending Makes the Church a Dangerous Place

Acts 5:1-11

Barnabas might have received "good press" for his generosity. Contextually speaking, Ananias and Sapphira perhaps wanted similar press. Something must have motivated their pride. They sold a piece of property, as had Barnabas, but they conspired to "keep back" some of the proceeds. (That same phrase, "keep back," appears in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, in Joshua 7:1 to describe what Achan did with "devoted things" from the defeat of Jericho.) It amounted to embezzlement.

Retaining a percentage of the proceeds from the sale was not the problem. Pretending to have given everything was the problem. Peter, who confronted both husband and wife, accused them of *lying* to the Holy Spirit and to God, as well as *testing* the Spirit of the Lord. It was a very serious sin that resulted in terrible consequences (i.e., death). We might consider this couple's death as an overly harsh punishment for a little lie. Or was it? The integrity of the Christian community was at stake. Just as Achan's sin had the potential of disrupting the progress made in conquering Canaan, Ananias and Sapphira's sin risked disrupting the progress of the church in fulfilling its God-ordained mission.

Luke records the immediate burials of Ananias, then Sapphira. It is hard to imagine Sapphira not hearing about her husband's passing in the three hours after his death (Acts 5:7). We are left to wonder. They were buried beside each other. Great power and great grace made for a generous church. *Great fear* made for a dangerous church.

Miracles Make for a Healing Church

Acts 5:12-16

The sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira were no doubt miraculous. But the apostles worked many other miracles. Many *signs and wonders* were performed, which gave credence to the message the apostles preached. Crowds brought sick and demon-possessed people, and all of them were healed. Even Peter's shadow healed some.

Thus, the church was considered by onlookers not only as a dangerous place but also a desired place. The church grew so much that the large gatherings had to be held in a part of the temple known as *Solomon's Colonnade*. The Lord kept adding men and women to the number of the saved. The church was looked upon with fear but also treated with great respect and admiration.

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CUT IT OUT AND GIVE IT UP

BY DAVID FAUST

I take a lot of photos with my cellphone. You probably do, too. Because I'm not a skilled photographer, I appreciate my phone's "Edit" function. If the picture contains unnecessary details or distractions, I can trim them out with a flick of my fingers.

Authors and journalists value a different kind of editing. Do you want to improve your writing? Then you should brighten up your verbs, shorten your sentences, and delete unneeded words. Like sculptors carving marble statues, skilled writers understand: What you cut matters as much as what you keep.

The same principle applies with finances. Someone quipped, "Due to budget cuts, the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off." But the fact is, if we cut unnecessary expenses, we can have more and give more. There are only a few things we can do with money: save it, spend it, invest it, or give it. Budget cuts require courage and willpower; but by making strategic lifestyle edits and choosing to live more simply, we free up more funds to invest in the Lord's work and meet the needs of others.

Lessons in Generosity

The first-century church has a lot to teach us about financial stewardship. In the book of Acts, there was a link between unity and generosity. Giving flowed naturally because the believers "were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32). They were excited about their shared purpose. Do you want to increase your church's financial impact? Cut out disunity! Conflict and distrust stifle generosity, but it's amazing what like-minded people can accomplish when they band together and give according to their ability.

Among the early disciples, "No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own" (v. 32). No arm-twisting was required. No one was forced to give. After selling their property, believers cheerfully placed the proceeds "at the apostles' feet" (vv. 35, 37, 5:2), releasing their donations with no strings attached. And notice—the plural possessive word "apostles'" highlights an important layer of accountability. Multiple leaders saw the funds, ensuring the money would be used for the right purpose, not misused for personal gain.

Do you want to increase your church's financial impact? Cut out dishonesty and selfishness! Increase transparency and accountability. The Lord's judgment against Ananias and Sapphira might seem harsh, but lying to the Holy Spirit is a serious offense. Deception, greed, and self-centeredness discourage generosity, while transparency and accountability fan it into flame.

The first-century disciples gave sacrificially to help the poor, but they didn't neglect the Great Commission. They met physical needs without ignoring spiritual needs. "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33), but at the same time, "there were no needy persons among them" (v. 34). I've heard Christians argue whether we should focus on preaching the gospel or caring for the poor. My recommendation? Cut out needless debates and do both!

Give It Up

Sincere, generous giving provides tangible evidence that the Messiah came "to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). It's a practical way to love God, love our neighbors, and obey Jesus who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Are we weakening the church by our disunity, dishonesty, greediness, and needless debates? It's time to cut it out—and give the Lord what he deserves.

Personal Challenge:

Make an over-and-above gift to a mission or nonprofit organization, and include an encouraging note to thank them for their service.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what way or ways did the Holy Spirit help you in your walk with the Lord during the previous week?

2. Tell about an act of generous giving you recently saw that genuinely touched you. (NOTE: This should be something you saw in "real time," not something you saw on TV or in a movie.)

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 4:32–5:16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. "All the members [of the church described in Acts 4] were on the same page," writes Mark Scott.
   - What would this look like in terms of what those within a congregation believe?
   - What would this look like in terms of attitudes and conduct?
   - How would this affect how conflict within the congregation is handled?

4. Barnabas is highlighted in the book of Acts as an example of true generosity.
   - Who have you known whom would you highlight as someone who has shown you such generosity?
   - If that person is still living, have you thanked them for their kindness? (If the person is no longer living, take time to thank God for their example.)

5. What are the risks of being known as a giving person? What are the blessings of being known as such a person?
   - Replace the word "person" in the above two questions with the word "church." Are the answers similar? How might they be different?

6. What can you learn about God's desires for giving from this passage?

7. What influences in today's cultural climate can keep people from being as generous as they might otherwise be?

8. Acts 5:14 says that in spite of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, more and more individuals "believed in the Lord and were added" to the church. What makes a church the kind of place where people desire to be a part of it?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

10. Acts 4:33 describes God's grace as "powerfully at work" among all the Christians. Keep a record in the coming week (in writing or digitally) in which you record how God's grace is being demonstrated in your daily life.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 2:44-47; 6:1-7**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Look for creative solutions to church problems.**

STUDY: Acts, Part 1

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 2:44-47; 6:1-7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3-10, 16; Deuteronomy 24:17-22; 26:12

THE WIDOWS AND THE SEVEN

BY MARK SCOTT

The main text for this lesson has often been considered a template for selecting leaders in the church—particularly deacons. But perhaps that is not its purpose at all. Maybe it is a template on how the early church resolved problems. Technically, deacons are not even mentioned in the passage (though the Greek verb for "serving," from which we get our word "deacon," is mentioned). Luke seemed content to refer to them as the *seven men*.

The New Testament describes the selection of church leaders in various ways. Jesus handpicked them (Luke 6:13), Paul and Barnabas "appointed" (literally "to raise the hand") elders in the church (Acts 14:23). Titus likewise was instructed to "appoint" ("to cause to stand") elders in every city (Titus 1:5). So there seems to be some fluidity in how the earliest church selected their leaders. In our lesson text, the congregation played a role, as guided by the apostles.

The Precedent for Widow Care

Acts 2:44-47

Two emphases provided the precedent for widow care. First was the Old Testament itself. The Law of Moses made it abundantly clear that widows, sojourners, and the fatherless were to be cared for (Deuteronomy 24:17-22; 26:12). They were not to suffer from misapplied or perverted justice, and garments were not to be taken in pledge from them. During harvest, fields, olive trees, and vineyards were not to be stripped bare. Leftovers were to be intentionally left for those in need. They were also to receive (along with the Levites) a portion of the tithe that was collected from the harvests every three years (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

The second precedent was the practice of the early church. Miracles were quite common in those early days (v. 43). *Wonders* (miracles that cause great surprise) and *signs* (miracles that point to greater spiritual realities) were being performed by the apostles. Just as stunning, perhaps, was the tender and unselfish care the church provided to everyone in the body. People experienced the wonder of unselfish love as they shared all things in common. This showed in the way believers sold properties and gave the proceeds to anyone who had need. They met in large gatherings (in the *temple courts*) and in *homes* (where they shared common tables). They shared in the breaking of "the" bread—Communion (Acts 2:42)—as well as the breaking of bread, or the sharing of meals, in each other's homes. It was an exciting community as they rejoiced, praised God, and enjoyed the *favor* (grace) of all the people. No wonder God added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The Proposal for Widow Care

Acts 6:1-7

The number of disciples was increasing during the days of the earliest persecutions of the church (Acts 4:3, 18, 21; 5:41-42). Some scholars estimate that the church could have grown to 20,000 people by the time of this complaint about food distribution. External conflict for the church is not pleasant, but internal conflict is more deadly. When the integrity of the believers' speech breaks down, the mission of the church cannot help but be compromised (Acts 5:1-11). Likewise, when charges of prejudice are made (whether founded or unfounded), someone is hurting.

Hellenistic Jews were those who had been heavily influenced by the Greek or Hellenistic culture spread by Alexander the Great. These were Jews who had become Christians—but they had come under the umbrella of Greek culture, language, and philosophy. These folks *complained* (murmured or grumbled) against the more native *Hebraic Jews*, who might be called "true-blue Jews." They were Christians but still heavily steeped in their Jewish traditions.

J.K. Jones said, "There is a grain of truth even in unjustified criticism." Whether it was true or not, some felt that prejudice was being shown. Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the "Meals on Wheels" program of the early church. The Twelve called a congregational meeting. They explained the dilemma: they were being distracted from the praying and preaching that Jesus called them to do. They suggested a plan to solve the problem that consisted of the believers choosing seven men to handle this responsibility. The whole group selected the men, then presented them to the apostles who ordained them (laid hands on them) to the work.

All of the seven men chosen had Greek names, which was a risky yet innovative way to solve the problem since, coming from that background, they would be more sensitive to the needs of those widows who had been overlooked in the distribution of food. All of those chosen had to be known as men *full of the Spirit and wisdom*. The result was church growth. The gospel spread because the apostles could go back to preaching and prayer. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly—even to the point that a large number of priests obeyed the faith. What a creative solution!

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USEFUL LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM ACTS 6

BY DAVID FAUST

It's been said, "When the Lord starts blessin', the devil starts messin'." Right when the gospel was taking root and "the number of disciples was increasing" (Acts 6:1), an internal dispute threatened the fledgling church.

Feeding hungry widows was a noble goal, but hints of injustice and prejudicial treatment tainted the process. Some complained that the widows with Grecian backgrounds weren't receiving their fair share, while the Hebrew widows were being favored. If one of those overlooked, under-served widows happened to be your aunt or your next-door neighbor, you would have been upset, too. This simmering conflict could have blown the young church wide open.

We can learn a lot from the way the apostles handled this potentially explosive situation.

They Listened to the People

The apostles didn't ignore the complaints. They took them seriously.

Admittedly, some ideas are bad ideas, and some church members are never satisfied. Whiners whine and complainers complain. Leaders can't please everyone. But good shepherds know their sheep. They understand the legitimate concerns and real-life issues that threaten and worry the flock. Leaders make better decisions when they engage in active listening.

They Clarified the Church's Priorities

Elders and ministry leaders should have servants' hearts and be willing to get their hands dirty, but that doesn't mean they must dive in personally and fix every troublesome issue that comes along. It's important to have boundaries.

The apostles said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2). Without minimizing the importance of feeding the poor, they found a creative way to address the problem. The apostles needed to focus on "prayer and the ministry of the word" (v. 4), while others could care directly for the widows.

They Delegated Responsibility to Qualified Individuals

It was time for others to step up. The apostles told the gathered congregation, "Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Wise, godly servant-leaders could be trusted to handle the food distribution.

Too many churches today—even ones that affirm the ministry of all believers—act as if their paid staff are the important performers. In this flawed model, the congregation is little more than a passive audience. Instead, leaders ought to be equippers who treat "lay" volunteers as valued coworkers to be prepared, empowered, and released for ministry. As Moses learned from his father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18, delegation lightens the leadership burden, involves others in ministry, and helps to prevent burnout.

They Cleared the Way for the Church to Grow

The "proposal pleased the whole group" (Acts 6:5), making this one of the most positive congregational meetings in church history! Wise leadership prevented a molehill from becoming a mountain. Instead of drifting into rancorous division, this forward-looking and faithful, proactive, and prayerful church experienced explosive growth. "The word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (v. 7).

Listen well. Clarify priorities. Delegate wisely. Confront obstacles that stand in the way of unity and growth. Seek creative solutions that engage the congregation. These are not flashy ideas, but God blesses leaders who understand them and put them into practice.

Personal Challenge:

Does an unresolved conflict or a festering problem currently threaten your church? Take at least one proactive step (active listening, supportive prayer, creative problem-solving, encouragement of stressed-out leaders, recruiting additional people to serve) to help resolve it.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Did you keep a journal of God's grace this past week (as was suggested at the conclusion of last week's lesson)? Share one example of how God's grace was evident to you during the week.

2. Think of a time when you saw a person in need and could have helped them, but you didn't. What kept you from reaching out and helping in that situation?

   Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 2:44-47; 6:1-7** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. The early Christians "broke bread in their homes" (Acts 2:46). What is there about sharing a meal with others that often encourages open conversation?
   - In today's culture, what makes planning these kinds of meals a challenge?
   - What steps can you take to increase the likelihood that such meals happen in your personal surroundings?

4. The Christians in Acts 2 were "enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:47).
   - What did the early church do that earned them such "favor"?
   - Why does such "favor" in today's church seem to be lacking?

5. David Faust describes the church in Acts 6 as "fledgling" (still young and somewhat inexperienced).
   - What problems might newer churches have that older, more established churches do not?
   - What problems might older, more established churches have that newer churches do not?

6. Certain widows were being overlooked in the food distribution ministry of the Jerusalem church.
   - In what areas of today's society can widows often find themselves overlooked?
   - What other groups today are often overlooked and neglected?

7. The apostles desired to devote themselves to "prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).
   - Why were these two items so important to the apostles?
   - Why should they be given such priority today?

8. What criteria would you use to determine whether someone is "full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3)?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

10. David Faust says, regarding finding a solution to the dilemma facing the church in Acts 6, "It was time for others to step up." Think of a place in your church's ministries or in your community where you can "step up" and become more involved. Or if there's a need in your church or community that is being overlooked, consider speaking to one of your church's leaders about stepping up to address that.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 8:4-24**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Be open to people not like you; share the gospel with everyone.**

STUDY: Acts, Part 1

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 8:4-24

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 1:8; John 4:1-42

PHILIP PREACHES IN SAMARIA

BY MARK SCOTT

Philip the evangelist's name means "lover of horses." This man of God—one of the "magnificent seven" from Acts 6:1-7—certainly "got on his horse" to take the gospel to the Samaritans. Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The geography of this lesson text shifts from Jerusalem (Acts 1–7) to all Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12). Jesus had already widened the perimeters of the gospel through his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-30), in his offer of living water to the woman at the well (John 4:4-14), and in making the Good Samaritan the hero of one of his parables (Luke 10:25-37).

The believers now needed to keep riding that horse (i.e., preaching the gospel) in following their Lord's leading.

God used Stephen's martyrdom as a means of moving the church out of Jerusalem and into the wider world (Acts 8:1-3). Preaching was at the heart of this movement. Two phrases in this lesson text, *preached the word* (v. 4) and *proclaimed the good news* (v. 12), come from a Greek participle that means "evangelizing." And the word *proclaimed* (v. 5) comes from a Greek word that means to "herald the king's message." Finally, the phrase *had accepted the word of God* indicates the Samaritans had welcomed the message of the gospel.

Salvation for the Samaritans

Acts 8:4-8

The apostles stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Several explanations have been suggested for why they did this; perhaps the apostles were still "highly regarded" in the city (Acts 5:13), and they were not in danger as others might have been. In contrast, the "average Christians" scattered from the city and preached the word wherever they went. Thus, those without seminary degrees evangelized. Luke focuses on Philip's work, perhaps due to Philip's stunning ministry and bold efforts. *He went down* means he left the elevated location of Jerusalem, then journeyed north to a city in Samaria.

Philip's ministry had three parts to it. He *preached* because the crowds heard him, and they all paid close attention to what he said. He *cast out demons* (some came out with shrieks). He also *healed* those who were paralyzed or lame (these definitely were signs of the messianic age—Isaiah 35:5-6). This gospel expansion resulted in *great joy*.

Salvation for Simon

Acts 8:9-13, 18-24

Simon the Sorcerer is singled out as significant in Samaria. Scholars disagree over whether he was a genuine convert. When Luke writes that a person "believed and was baptized," he rather consistently is referring to a person becoming a believer. But Simon seemed to fail in his faith so quickly, much as the Galatian believers did (Galatians 1:6). He was certainly walking on shaky ground.

Simon practiced *sorcery* (magic—mentioned twice, in verses 9 and 11). He amazed both the high and low. The people thought he was the *Great Power of God*, and this fed his ego to the point he boasted about himself. But it did not take Simon long to compare the real God-like power to his counterfeit, Satanic-fed power. He got in the baptism line and followed Jesus. He had amazed the people, but now Simon was amazed at Philip's miracles.

If someone can be converted to Christ in an hour (Acts 16:33), can someone backpedal in faith in the same amount of time? Actually, we do not know how much time elapsed between Acts 8:13 and 8:18-19. Maybe it was days (even months?). Perhaps the old temptations crept back and perhaps Simon saw evidence from what Peter and John had done in laying their hands on the Samaritans, but Simon wanted to buy Holy Spirit power and maybe even apostleship. (Simon's name is the source of the word *simony*, defined as "the buying or selling of a church office or ecclesiastical preferment.") Peter minced no words. Simon Peter told Simon the (former) Sorcerer to *repent* and *pray*. Simon then asked Peter to pray for him.

Support from the Apostles

Acts 8:14-17

Many scholars believe these verses are some of the strangest in Acts. They break the norm of hearing, believing, repenting, and being baptized. Word about the Samaritan revival reached Jerusalem. Peter and John were sent to check out the new converts. When they got there, they noticed the absence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 19:1-7). So, they prayed for the converts and laid hands on them to receive the Spirit.

Most likely the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit upon their conversion (in keeping with Acts 2:38). What they lacked were miraculous gifts, which demanded apostolic hands. With the gospel's entry into Samaria, a significant step in fulfilling Jesus' commission to the apostles (Acts 1:8), had been achieved. It was important that the apostles witness firsthand this milestone.

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DON'T GIVE UP ON EVANGELISM

BY DAVID FAUST

"Christians and non-Christians have something in common: We're both uptight about evangelism," said Rebecca Pippert in the first line of her book, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*.

Our non-Christian neighbors are weary of polarizing political dialogue and are conditioned to distrust religion, making it difficult to initiate conversations about faith. Meanwhile, Christians wonder how to share the good news with those who shy away from churches, consider sin a nonissue, brand Bible believers as judgmental, and assume all go to heaven no matter what they believe. Here are some things I have learned about evangelism.

The gospel of grace should be presented graciously. Remember, Jesus embodied both grace and truth (John 1:14).

Authentic relationships are crucial. On rare occasions, we may get to share the gospel with complete strangers, but more often, opportunities arise in our daily surroundings and networks at home, work, or school, in backyards and coffee shops, at ball games and other places where people gather. Theologian Michael Green wrote that first-century Christians "gossiped the gospel." For them, sharing the good news wasn't an awkward duty. Their positive testimony spilled out naturally in ordinary conversation because they were convinced Christ was risen from the dead.

Pre- and post-evangelism matter, too. Crops grow best in well-prepared soil. By earning trust, building genuine friendships, setting a winsome example, demonstrating God's love in practical ways, and praying for others, we plant gospel seeds and trust God for the increase. And after repentant believers are baptized, they still need help learning what Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). Follow-up is crucial as new disciples begin to grow, serve, give, and share their own faith.

Disciple-making is a team effort. It's not just the preacher's job. When severe persecution broke out against the church, "all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). Ordinary followers of Jesus—not their prominent leaders—scattered like grains of salt seasoning the world. Jesus intended for the gospel to spread in an ever-widening circle to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), but it took persecution to get his followers moving. *Christian Standard* publisher Jerry Harris once wrote, "I am not sure Acts 1:8 would have happened had it not been for Acts 8:1."

"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). Persecution forced these "scattered" believers away from their homes. It took courage and faith to leave the familiar streets of Jerusalem—especially for those who ended up in a Samaritan city where objectionable religious practices prevailed and longstanding animosity existed between Jews and Samaritans. But with the Spirit's help, "wherever they went" (v. 4), enthusiastic believers like Philip overcame their hesitation and preached with surprising success, leading to "great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8) and proving once again that the gospel is "the power of God that brings salvation" (Romans 1:16).

Likewise, in the early days of the Restoration Movement, the gospel spread across the American frontier because ordinary people carried the message and planted churches "wherever they went."

Someone has said that churches aren't dying because people aren't going to church; churches are dying because churches aren't going to the people. So, instead of trying to make the church more like the world so the world will go to church, what if we try to make the church more like Christ so the church will go to the world?

Personal Challenge:

On an index card, write the name of a non-Christian in your circle of influence who needs to hear the gospel. Look at that card each day for a month, praying for an opportunity to deepen your relationship and talk with that person about Jesus.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Did you "step up" during the past week to increase your involvement with some ministry within your church or to your surrounding community? What steps did you take?

2. What subjects do you find easy to talk about with others (even with complete strangers)? What subjects are harder for you to discuss with others?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 8:4-24** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. "Those who had been scattered [following the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem] preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). Why didn't they cower in fear or go into hiding to protect themselves?

4. Why are Christians often hesitant to share their faith with others? What are the specific challenges to sharing one's faith in the following settings?
   - workplace
   - school
   - neighborhood
   - family

5. There was "great joy" as a result of Philip's ministry in Samaria (Acts 8:8).
   - How would you define the joy that Jesus offers to us?
   - How does the joy Jesus offers differ from what the world offers?
   - Have you known someone who exhibited "great joy" because of Jesus?
   - How could you tell their joy was real and not just "for show"?

6. Peter described Simon's heart as "not right before God" (Acts 8:21). How does one maintain a heart that stays "right before God"?
   - What in today's culture makes "heart health" challenging to maintain?

7. Mark Scott describes Simon's ego being fed by people calling him the "Great Power of God" (Acts 8:10).
   - How can our egos get in the way of a close relationship with God?
   - How do we keep our egos under control?

8. What makes the difference between a person faithfully following the Lord and someone who chooses to follow, then falls away quickly or fails repeatedly?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

10. At the beginning of each day this coming week, write down one recommendation for yourself as part of a personal prescription for spiritual "heart health." Ask the Lord (the Great Physician) for his help in following your prescription.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 9:32-43**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FIVE

LESSON AIM: **Look for ways to serve in whatever way you are gifted.**

STUDY: Acts, Part 1

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 9:32-43

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11

PETER SERVES IN LYDDA AND JOPPA

BY MARK SCOTT

Acts 9 highlights the two pillars of the early church, Peter and Paul. Most of the chapter tells about the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and some of his earliest ministry. The remainder of the chapter tells about the miraculous ministry of Peter. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, but he typically went to the Jews first when he arrived in a town to plant a church. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, but he used the keys that Jesus had given him (Matthew 16:19) to open the kingdom to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48).

The locations and details in this lesson matter. Peter used his gifts to serve the Lord as he had opportunity. Peter had the gifts of preaching, teaching, and healing (cf. Acts 3:1-10). In this lesson text, he made full use of that last gift, which was consistent with his later instruction to the church in 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Note the locations of these events. The apostles had stayed in Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:2). But in time, they left Jerusalem and headed in different directions. Peter went west to Lydda (the Old Testament city of Lod). Then he was summoned to Joppa. That is where the prophet Jonah—recall that Peter's given name was Bar-Jonah (i.e., Son of Jonah)—fled to board a ship headed to Tarshish. Jonah was hesitant about going to the Gentiles in Nineveh, and Peter was hesitant to go to the Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10:28). And Peter, upon arriving in Joppa, stayed with a tanner named Simon. This, of course, put him in contact with skins of various animals (some no doubt unclean). Both Lydda and Joppa move us one step closer to the Gentile mission of the church.

The Healing of a Paralyzed Man

Acts 9:32-35

As Peter traveled west, he encountered some of the *Lord's people* (literally, "set apart people" or saints). This indicated the gospel message had preceded Peter's arrival. In Lydda he found a man named Aeneas (a name meaning "praise or praiseworthy"). He was *paralyzed*, which caused him to be bedridden for eight years. Peter felt compelled to heal him, which is part of the larger impact of the work of Christ and previews the healing that all of creation will experience one day (Romans 8:19-21).

As Peter spoke with Aeneas, he first used an indicative verb and then an imperative. The indicative was, "Jesus Christ heals you." This time there would be no question as to the source of healing (cf. Acts 4:10). The imperative was, "Get up and roll up your mat." The man did it immediately. This miracle was the impetus for a critical mass of converts in Lydda and Sharon. People *turned to the Lord* (a summary way of speaking of conversions; "believed in the Lord" will later be used in a similar way, Acts 9:42).

The Raising of a Dead Woman

Acts 9:36-43

Not far from Lydda was the seacoast city of Joppa, which today is swallowed up by the modern city of Tel Aviv. News of Aeneas's healing reached the believers in Joppa. So, Luke shifted the scene to that city and to a woman who had died; her Aramaic name was Tabitha, and her Greek name was Dorcas. Both names mean "gazelle," perhaps referring to being clear-sighted and coordinated. She is the only woman in the New Testament who is called a *disciple*.

But more significant than where she lived, or the meaning of her name, or the fact that she was called a disciple was that she was well known for her good deeds. The text says she was *always doing good*. She also remembered Jesus' teaching to *help the poor*. She conducted a significant ministry to widows, which included being a seamstress for them by making robes and other clothing.

We do not know what the believers thought Peter could do in summoning him to Joppa from Lydda. Had Peter raised anyone from the dead before (cf. Matthew 10:8)? Was this among the "wonders and signs performed by the apostles" earlier (Acts 2:43)? Peter went with the two who summoned him. When Peter arrived in the *upstairs room* (mentioned twice in the passage), he found the typical mourning scene from the ancient Near East. People were crying and speaking kindly about the departed.

Peter sent everyone away, knelt, and prayed. What happened next was reminiscent of Elijah's, Elisha's, and Jesus' resurrection miracles done in a private setting (1 Kings 17:21, 22; 2 Kings 4:32-35; Mark 5:38-43). Peter called Tabitha back to life. She opened her eyes and sat up. Peter helped her up, called the believers in—especially the widows, Luke notes quite tenderly—and *presented her to them alive* (i.e., caused her to stand). The result of Peter using his gifts? Many people believed in the Lord. May we use our gifts to achieve the same purpose.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SERVE?

BY DAVID FAUST

Service has a sound. It sounds like snow shovels scraping on the sidewalk so aging neighbors will have a dry path to walk, and hammers pounding nails at a Habitat for Humanity building site. It's the screech of a siren as an emergency vehicle speeds to the scene of an accident, and the rustle of pages turning while a volunteer helps a first-grader learn to read.

Service has a fragrance. It's the aroma rising from hundreds of loaves of homemade bread my wife has baked and given away over the years. It's the smell of leaves raked from a shut-in's backyard, and the odor of motor oil when an amateur mechanic volunteers to fix his neighbor's car. Sometimes service smells like changing diapers in the church nursery or going on a mission trip to a city where raw sewage runs in the streets.

Service has a feeling. Often it feels uncomfortable—like the day I spent on a mission trip assisting a dentist in a Mexican village. My awkward efforts confirmed that God didn't call me to be a dental hygienist. But throughout the day, the dentist's skill turned painful problems into thankful smiles, and the dentist smiled too because she was doing what the Creator wired her to do.

Service has names. These names are words from the Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written. *Doulos* ("slave") is used to reveal that Jesus "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). *Therapon* ("attendant" or "worshipper"), from which we derive "therapy" and "therapeutic," appears in Hebrews 3:5, which says "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house." Jesus used *diakonos* ("deacon," "minister," "waiter," or "helper") when he said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26). *Uperetes* ("assistant" or "attendant") describes someone who does menial or lowly tasks. It was used for slaves assigned to row in the lowest deck of a ship. Paul used this term when he referred to himself and the other apostles "as servants of Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Service has role models. Daniel served with integrity and skill in the highest echelon of a pagan government. Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Tabitha (Dorcas) was "always doing good and helping the poor," and when she died, widows showed Peter the clothes she had made for those in need (Acts 9:36-42). Service looks like someone staying late to clean up after church dinners. It looks like kindhearted children who make sure no one in their class has to eat lunch alone. Service is visible in the volunteers who visit the sick and teach the church's middle schoolers week after week.

Service has a purpose. Joy and satisfaction come as side benefits, but we don't serve to impress others, to earn points with God, or even because it makes us feel good. As 1 John 3:16 makes clear, the fact Christ laid down his life for us motivates us to share his love with others.

Service has a reward. Jesus said, "If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple . . . that person will certainly not lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42). Admittedly, the world's needs seem overwhelming. You and I can't solve every social problem or mend every broken heart, but we can give cups of cold water for Jesus' sake. Everyone thirsts for a taste of God's goodness. Quenching that thirst—even for a moment—is one of the most rewarding roles of all.

Personal Challenge:

Do a random act of kindness for someone else this week.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Did you compile your "prescription for heart health" over the past week?
   - Which item on your prescription would you say is most urgent for you to follow?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 9:32-43** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Try to put yourself in the place of Aeneas, paralyzed and bedridden for eight years—then miraculously healed and able to walk! What would be on your "to-do list" for your first day up and moving after eight years of paralysis?

3. When you think of "always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36), who (or what) comes to mind in terms of:
   - a person?
   - a ministry or nonprofit organization?
   - a special event?

4. David Faust describes some of the sounds and fragrances associated with doing good. What sounds and fragrances could you add, based on how you have seen others doing good in action?

5. The widows in Joppa showed Peter the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made when she was alive. What do you possess that someone made especially for you? (If there is a story behind that item, share it with your class or small group.)

6. What factors can keep us from doing good and helping the poor as often as we might like?
   - How can we lessen the influence of these factors?

7. Peter got down on his knees and prayed for Dorcas.
   - Have you ever gone to your knees in prayer for someone or during a time of great need? What were the circumstances?
   - What spiritual impact does kneeling in prayer have?

8. How do you think Dorcas's ministry was affected following Peter's miracle of raising her from the dead?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

10. Go back to the items listed in Question 3 under "always doing good and helping the poor." Commit to helping a person, a ministry, a nonprofit organization, or assist with a special event this coming week in one of the following ways:
    - volunteering
    - financial support
    - encouraging note, email, or text
    - daily prayer (let the person or group know of your prayer commitment)

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.