

# WEEK 1

## JERUSALEM

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### TOUCH BASE

Take some time to go around the room and briefly introduce yourselves. What are you hoping to gain from studying the Book of Acts and the early church?

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #1: *Jerusalem*
- Read Acts 1:1-12 and Acts 2:1-8; 14-41

As you watch the video, take notes on the elements of Peter's speech.

*He talks about:*

Two \_\_\_\_\_ (the crucifixion & the resurrection)

Two \_\_\_\_\_ (the prophets and the apostles)

Two \_\_\_\_\_ (forgiveness and the Spirit)

Two \_\_\_\_\_ (believe and be baptized)

*The first church is a...*

\_\_\_\_\_ church

\_\_\_\_\_ church

\_\_\_\_\_ church

\_\_\_\_\_ church

\_\_\_\_\_ church

### TALK IT OUT

1. What do you think this "speaking in tongues" miracle is really all about? In other words: Why do you think it's significant that the first public miracle in the history of Christianity (after Christ) was this amazing moment when the international pilgrims to Jerusalem all hear the disciples

speaking in their own languages? What could God be showing through this about his heart for all these people?

2. Look at the elements of Peter's speech. In your own personal experience with churches in your life, which (if any) teachings were under-emphasized?
  - The crucifixion
  - The resurrection
  - The prophets (the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures, especially prophecies about Jesus)
  - The apostles (The New Testament, especially the epistles from apostles like Peter, John, and Paul that contain their teaching)
  - Forgiveness
  - The Holy Spirit
  - Personal belief in Christ and repentance
  - Baptism
3. What can churches do to make sure those aspects are not left out?
4. What is attractive to you in the descriptions of the early believers in Acts 2:42-47?
5. Look at the five characteristics of the early church on the next page. In your own personal experience with churches in your life, which if any do you think has been under-emphasized?
6. What practical steps can churches take to try and encourage all these characteristics:
  - A learning church:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”
  - A loving church:

“...and to fellowship... all the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

- A worshipping church:

“Everyone was filled with awe... They continued to meet together in the temple courts... praising God...”

- A joyful church:

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...”

- A growing church:

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved...”

## **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

Speaking honestly, does anything about these descriptions of the early church make you feel uncomfortable? What is it? Though it makes you uncomfortable, are you open to God working in that way in your life? Or at least open to praying for God to work in your life however he pleases?

For next week, come prepared to briefly share your own spiritual journey, in 4 minutes or less. How did you become a believer in Jesus? Did someone share Christ with you? Did it happen suddenly or slowly? What was the biggest thing that caught your attention and drew you in to Christianity? If you would not yet identify as a Christian, consider sharing with the group your spiritual journey so far.

## **TALK TO GOD**

Take some time to share prayer requests with each other. Have someone close in prayer, asking God to give you all the courage to read Acts with fresh eyes, open to what God wants to say to you and how he wants to grow you.

# WEEK 2

## DAMASCUS ROAD

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### TOUCH BASE

What impacted or encouraged you this week from the daily devotions? Share one highlight from your week.

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #2: *Damascus Road*
- Read Acts 7:58b-8:3 and 9:1-15

### TALK IT OUT

1. Prior to his conversion, how does the Bible describe Saul? (See Acts 7:58b-8:3)
2. What do you think was it was about Saul's background that would make him particularly effective as a spokesman for Christ?
  - He was a Type-A person
  - He was a religious person
  - He was an observant Jew
  - He spoke several languages
  - He was well-educated
  - He was a Roman citizen
  - Other:
3. How have you seen God use something in your background in a way that has surprised you?
4. Talk about light bulb moments: The light literally dawns on Paul when he has this encounter in Acts 9. Describe your own faith journey. Was there a "light bulb moment" on your road to faith or in your spiritual growth? Did it happen suddenly or slowly? At home, at church, or somewhere else? What was the biggest thing that caught your attention and drew you into (or back into) Christianity?

If you would not yet identify as a Christian, share your spiritual journey so far. What brought you to this study?

5. Saul was so certain he knew all about God—yet when God appears to him in the vision, Saul doesn't even know him. He is totally surprised by what God is really like. Did anything surprise you about what God is like the more you drew near to faith in Christ? Or perhaps you, like Saul, were a religious person who discovered something surprising and delightful about God as you grew in your faith. What was it?
6. In most of his sermons in Acts, Paul refers in some way to this personal experience: The risen Lord has touched his life in a powerful way! Why do *personal* stories of faith have so much impact?
7. How have you “witnessed” God working lately?

### **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

In the video, René said, “You can spend your days worrying that something is going to get you. Or you can live knowing God has already got you.” What is worrying you these days? Share it with the group and ask for prayer that you would have serenity even in the face of this.

### **TALK TO GOD**

Take some time to pray about the worries that you have shared with each other. Ask God to give each of you the peace and serenity that comes from knowing that God is with you and will never leave you.

# WEEK 3

## CAESAREA

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### TOUCH BASE

What impacted or encouraged you this week in the daily devotions? Share one high point from your week.

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #3: *Caesarea*
- Read Acts 10:1-48

### TALK IT OUT

1. Peter was a religiously observant Jew, keeping all the kosher food laws as best he could. That meant no shellfish, no eels, no pork, and many other dietary restrictions. Then he has this vision in which God declares that all food is clean. This recalls a couple verses in the Bible:

- Read Genesis 9:3. Here God gives Noah everything to eat.
- Read Matthew 15:10-20. Here Jesus declares that the rigorous enforcement of kosher laws by the Pharisees misses the point. It's not what goes into your stomach that defiles you, but what comes out of your heart.

What does this mean? Why do you think this was so difficult for Peter (and the other early Christians) to accept?

2. How do you see God preparing both Peter and Cornelius in this passage? How are you encouraged by their faith? How did Peter's vision change his view of God and the church?
3. Acts 10:34-42 contains the essential Christian message that has remained unchanged for 2,000 years. The truly revolutionary part of this message is that God shows no favoritism; he treats all people equally, and invites all to come to him through faith in Christ. How do you struggle

with living this out? Have you ever felt separated because of racial or cultural differences?

4. How can a lack of unity be harmful to the church? What are some practical ways you can be part of bringing unity in your church?
5. Racial tension continues to harm society today. Is there a step you can take in your neighborhood, church, or even your small group to reach out to people from a different racial or ethnic background? What are the obstacles to bridging these gaps? What are the benefits?

### **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

Take an honest inventory — what prejudices are you holding on to? Maybe you're prejudice towards people who are a different race than you, or people who are more conservative than you, or more liberal than you, or poor, or rich, the list of ways we judge people is way too long! How can you move towards Peter's "aha moment" where he says, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism..."?

### **TALK TO GOD**

Take some time to share prayer requests with each other. Have someone close in prayer, asking God to help you each embrace and live out the truth of God's wide and gracious love.

# WEEK 4

## THESSALONICA

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### TOUCH BASE

What impacted or encouraged you this week in the daily devotions? Who have been two of the most influential women in your life and why?

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #4: *Thessalonica*
- Read Acts 17:1-15

Video Notes:

*Four Truths:*

God's will is not always \_\_\_\_\_

God's purpose is more important than \_\_\_\_\_

There will always be opportunities so \_\_\_\_\_!

Judge everything by the \_\_\_\_\_

### TALK IT OUT

1. Thessalonica was a wealthy trading city on a major road. How was Paul received there? What accusations did Paul encounter?
2. What cultural barriers were being broken down in Thessalonica?
3. Who are the early adopters of Paul's message? Why do you think it was so appealing to them?
4. What are some things that hold people back today from accepting the Gospel? What can you do to break down barriers with the true message of the Gospel?
5. Paul is charged with turning the world upside down. In what ways is he really helping to set it right?

## **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

The Gospel has the power to break down all barriers. What barrier in your town needs to be broken by Jesus Christ's power? How about in your life? How can you move towards barrier-breaking this week?

God was working through Paul and Silas to turn the world right-side up again. But when you yourself are upside-down, right-side up appears to be upside-down! What area in your life needs to be turned right-side up by God?

## **TALK TO GOD**

Take some time to share prayer requests with each other. Have someone close in prayer, asking God to turn what is upside-down right-side up in your lives.

# WEEK 5

## ATHENS

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### TOUCH BASE

What impacted or encouraged you this week in the daily devotions?

If Paul were addressing your friends and neighbors today, how would he start? What positive aspect of the culture would he first highlight as a bridge to the Gospel? Complete this sentence:

“People of (my town/community), I see in every way you are very \_\_\_\_\_.”

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #5: *Athens*
- Read Acts 17:16-34

### TALK IT OUT

1. What was the city of Athens like in those days? How is the cultural environment we live in today similar or different? What impresses you about Paul’s experience in Athens?
2. What was Paul’s reaction when he saw the multitude of gods and idols in Athens? What distresses you about your town and would it line up with what distressed Paul? What action did Paul take (vv. 16-17)? What does this tell you about the kind of person Paul has become versus what he was like before his encounter with Christ?
3. How did the Athenians react when they heard Paul speaking in the marketplace (vv. 18-21)? Do you see a similar reaction as you share and live out your faith?
4. How did Paul compare/contrast the “unknown god” to the one true God? What does Paul say about God (vv. 24-29)?
5. How does God respond to man’s pursuit of substitute gods and idols (vv. 30-31)? Once the Gospel is heard, what is the hearer’s responsibility (v. 30)? How did the

Athenians respond to Paul's message of the Gospel (vv. 32-34)?

6. How can you follow Paul's example in the way he approached the Athenians with the Gospel? Are there any opportunities in the course of your daily activities you might have to share the Gospel with others in this way?

### **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

What "unknown gods" (idols) are you tempted to "worship"? Think about things in which you seek self worth, status, fulfillment, comfort, stress-relief, happiness, satisfaction, etc. Any thing (or person!) you rely on, or seek your value in, can become an object of worship.

### **TALK TO GOD**

Take some time to share prayer requests with each other. Have someone close in prayer, asking God to help each one of you turn towards God this week and worship him above all else. Pray for the boldness of Paul to share the Gospel this week.

# WEEK 6

## CORINTH

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### TOUCH BASE

What impacted or encouraged you this week in the daily devotions? Have you ever moved or visited a new city and felt lost? How did you settle in or find your way in that situation?

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #6: *Corinth*
- Read Acts 18:1-28

### TALK IT OUT

1. What kind of people did Paul surround himself with? How do you think serving alongside others encouraged and strengthened Paul's ministry?
2. Paul began his work, as usual, in the synagogue. What verbs are found in verses 5 and 6 that show Paul's passion for the gospel?
3. How does God encourage Paul in verses 9-10? Why do you suppose God timed it after "many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized" (vs. 8)?
4. Have you ever felt, when things are going well in your life, that there might be something bad just around the corner? Why do you suppose we tend towards this fear?
5. Someone once said, "Trust Sovereignty when there is no clarity." What does this mean to you? How does the Book of Acts demonstrate this truth?
6. In this story, Paul's freedom to preach is affirmed by a surprising source: the pagan Roman governor. How have you seen God work through non-believers or secular authorities to advance the Gospel? How does that encourage you?
7. In what ways have you seen God working in your city, community, or neighborhood to set people free?

## **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

No doubt Priscilla and Aquila were a tremendous encouragement and support to Paul in his ministry. Who in your life needs you to come alongside them for a season to support and to encourage them? How will you do that this week?

## **TALK TO GOD**

Take some time to share prayer requests with each other. Have someone close in prayer, thanking God for the Priscillas and Aquilas in your lives and asking God to open your eyes to see how you can be an encouragement and support to people around you this week.

# WEEK 7

## CAESAREA MARITIME

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### TOUCH BASE

What impacted or encouraged you this week in the daily devotions? Think of someone you know that has withstood extreme hardship or pressure well. What did you learn from watching them stay strong?

### TAKE IT IN

- Watch Video #7 *Caesarea Maritime*
- Read Acts 22:1-29

### TALK IT OUT

1. What is Paul accused of in Acts 21:27-29? What is Paul guilty of? Have your intentions ever been misunderstood? How did you respond?
2. Look at Paul's defense in Acts 22:1-29:
  - vv. 1-3: How does Paul open his testimony? How would you describe his tone?
  - vv. 4-5: How does Paul describe his past religious actions?
  - vv. 8-11: What is most striking to you about Paul's encounter with God?
  - vv. 12-16: Who came to see Paul? Why do you think God chose him to visit Paul?
  - v. 21: What does God commission Paul to do?
  - vv. 22-24: How did the crowd respond to Paul's defense? Why do you think they responded this way?
  - vv. 27-29: What does Paul reveal about himself in these verses and why does it matter? Why do you think he waited to reveal this?

3. In what ways are you like or unlike Paul in your response when falsely accused?
4. After reading Paul's testimony in this passage and learning about him throughout the Book of Acts, what do you see in his life that you'd like to imitate?
5. (If your group plans to meet next week for a series-ending celebration save this question for next week. If this is your last week, take a moment to think and share your answer now.)

As we wrap up our study of the Book of Acts what resonated most with you? (Some options: The many examples of perseverance through trial, an anticipation that God will work in great ways, the work of the Holy Spirit, the kindness of the Christians—especially Paul—towards those who were persecuting them, how the early church impacted all of church history, how diverse the church was—Jews, Gentiles, men, women, slave, free, etc.)

### **TAKE IT WITH YOU**

“But I have had God’s help to this very day...” (Acts 26:22a)

The history of the first church and its beginning depicts bitter persecution and miraculous triumph! But the courage of the early Christians to stand firm despite suffering testifies to the power of the Gospel and faith in God that is available to us all. The same Spirit who empowered the early believers empowers you today!

How have you seen “God’s help to this very day” in your life recently?

### **TALK TO GOD**

For the final time, take some time to share prayer requests with each other. Have someone close in prayer, thanking God for the opportunity to study his word together. Pray that God will use each one of you as he continues to write the story of his bride, the church.

