

**Acts of the Holy Spirit - 1**  
**Final preparations for the upcoming mission – Week of Sept 18, 2016**  
**Bay Park Life Groups – Leader**

We're so glad to have you on board for this eight-week journey through the first 8 chapters of Acts. Of all the books of the bible, why study Acts? Though the New Testament contains four Gospels chronicling the life of Jesus on earth, there is only one that covers the birth of the church and it's early growth – Acts. Luke, a companion of Paul, wrote Acts. His interest wasn't just accurate history. Luke's interest was in the church as a movement, that empowered by God breaks through cultural, geographical and political barriers. A rescue mission that starts small and goes viral, that is persecuted yet turns the world upside down. Acts is the history of mission, God's mission. Acts was most likely written around early 60 A.D. given that Luke never mentions the Neronian persecutions (64 A. D.) in which the likes of Paul and Peter were executed. That places the writing of Acts within about 30 years after the death of Jesus. Since then much has changed in the world we live, but God and his mission haven't changed. As a church on mission, Acts is our blueprint for success in mission.

Be sure to take time to welcome new people.

1. Bono of U2 fame said, *Religion is what happens when the Spirit has left the building*<sup>1</sup> . . . *A list of instructions where there was once conviction; dogma where once people just did it; a congregation led by a man where once they were led by the Holy Spirit. Discipline replacing discipleship.*<sup>2</sup> Do you agree or disagree, why or why not?

Together read Acts 1:1-11

2. Read Luke 1:1-4. What do these verses contribute to our understanding of the historical accuracy of the book of Acts?

1. Like any good historian, Luke depended on "eyewitnesses" who carefully guarded and "handed down" (Luke 1:2) the accounts. 2. Luke is not the only one to corroborate the facts - "many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things" (Luke 1:1). 3. Luke wasn't satisfied with hearsay - "I myself carefully investigated everything from the beginning... that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:3-4). Luke's education and status (physician) gave him the connections and skill needed to do thorough research. Guided by God, Luke's method was to use both historical accounts and eyewitness material, which he carefully compared and sifted through for his final product.

3. What does verse 1 tell us about Luke's theme and what difference does this make for Christians?

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<sup>1</sup> Bono: <http://www.u2.com/news/article/1060/>

<sup>2</sup> Bono: *In Conversations with Michka Assayas*, (Riverhead Books, 2005) p 201

Luke's first two verses are, therefore, extremely significant. It is no exaggeration to say that they set Christianity apart from all other religions. These regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime; Luke says Jesus only began his... after his resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Spirit he continued his work, first and foremost through the ministry of his chosen apostles and subsequently through the post-apostolic church of every period and place. This then is the kind of Jesus Christ we believe in: he is both the historical Jesus who lived and the contemporary Jesus who lives.

– John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (The Bible Speaks Today) IVP Press, 1990.

4. Why did Jesus first prepare the apostles' minds (3) before sending them power (4)?

Many people think that all the church needs is more of the Spirit, but the Bible never pits learning against power, truth against the spirit. Worship is always in spirit and truth (John 4:24). In fact, there is no Spirit power without truth, for the job of the Spirit is to take truths about Jesus and make them vivid, glorious and affecting to our hearts. ("The Spirit of truth... will glorify me by taking of mine and making it known to you." John 16:13-14). The Spirit gives us power by making the truth of God shine and empower us. ("He may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope... the power..." Eph.1:17-19. "He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit... that you may have power to grasp...how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." Eph.3:16-18). We can think of the Spirit as "fire", but the truth of God's word as "firewood". Without both wood and fire, you don't have a fire!<sup>3</sup>

5. What does the apostles' question reveal about their understanding of the kingdom (6)? How does Acts 1:1-11 help shape our understanding of the Kingdom of God?

They were still thinking from a God and us only (Jews, Jerusalem, Israel) perspective and not from a God through us to others mindset. They didn't understand the Kingdom of God (3) to include all nations. They didn't understand that the church was to be God's people on God's global rescue mission extending God's Kingdom in God's power. Their timeline was limited to Jesus is here now, so now is the end, as opposed to understanding the reality of Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming and the mission of the church in between.

6. Acts 1:8 gives the outline for the book of Acts, and more importantly for how God plans to build his church. What insights does verse 8 give us into how God is building his church today?

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, *Evangelism: Studies in the book of Acts*, (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005) p 3

7. The church is God's people on God's mission in God's power. The mission is one of profession (believing) AND proclamation (witnessing). The Spirit empowers both our believing AND our witnessing. Share either one positive or negative experience you've had with respect to being a witness. How has God spoken to your past experiences through your time in Acts?

8. On Sunday the thought was planted that one way to show our full dependence on the Holy Spirit and our desire to be on mission with him is to consistently pray that God would empower our witness. What did you think of the challenge?

Optional question: What irony, even humour, is hidden in the events Luke records in 9-11 and what implications can we draw for today?