



this is what we do

• FIVE WEEK DEVOTIONAL •



A 5-WEEK DEVOTIONAL

This Is What We Do

A companion devotional to the sermon series in Acts

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WEEK 1

Spirit-Empowered Mission

Acts 1:1–11

The book of Acts opens with a question: What would we be missing if we didn't have it? Without Acts, we'd know what Jesus did in his earthly ministry, and we'd have letters from men like Paul and Peter and John, but we wouldn't know how any of it actually moved forward. This week, we'll walk through the first eleven verses of Acts and discover that this isn't a history of what Jesus used to do. It's the record of what he started doing and hasn't stopped through the church.

This Is What We Do

ACTS 1:1–3

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

REFLECTION

Luke opens his second volume the way a careful historian opens a sequel. He points back to the first book he wrote. The first book he references is the Gospel of Luke. Luke, the man writing both Luke and Acts, was no casual observer. Luke was a physician who traveled with Paul on mission. He was a trained mind who tells us elsewhere that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning so he could write an orderly, accurate account. Sir William Ramsay, an Oxford University trained archaeologist said, "Luke is a historian of the first rank and should be placed along with the very greatest of historians." * In addition, Bruce Metzger, a leading textual critic from Princeton, said Acts contains information on "32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, and names 95 people without a single error." ** This shows Luke's devotion to attention to detail and reliability of the book of Acts in terms of getting its historical details correct.

In Acts 1, there is a single phrase: "all that Jesus began to do and teach." Began. Not everything Jesus did and taught. Everything He began to do and teach. In other words, this is only the opening chapter of something that God is doing. Jesus is still working. That one word reframes the entire book of Acts. It isn't a record of what Jesus used to do, back when He walked around Galilee in sandals. It's a record of what He started doing and what He has been doing ever since, through the church, by his Spirit.

That's the focus on this devotional. Not this is what Jesus once did. This is what we do! The truth is: There are twenty-eight chapters in the book of Acts. We are living through chapter twenty-nine. We are the Acts 29 church today. Why? Because the ministry of Jesus didn't end at His ascension. It transferred. Jesus' earthly ministry lasted three and a half years and produced thousands of disciples. Yet, that same ministry has over a people on the planet right now who claim allegiance to Him. We are not mere readers of what Jesus once did. We are participants in what He is still doing today.

References:

* Sir William Ramsay. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (1915).

** Dr Bruce Metzger. *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (1965).

APPLICATION

- Where have you been treating your faith like history you know, instead of a life you're in?

- What would change about this week if you believed Jesus was still actively working through you, not just in history?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You that the story didn't end with the Gospels. Thank You that you're still at work, still teaching, still building Your kingdom and that somehow, You've included me in it. Help me live today like a participant, not a spectator. Amen.

Proof Enough to Build a Life On

ACTS 1:3; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:6

"He presented himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

"Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep (died)."

REFLECTION

"Many proofs" is a legal phrase. Luke isn't asking his readers to simply take his word that Jesus rose from the dead. He's telling Theophilus that the resurrection wasn't a rumor whispered among a handful of grieving followers who wanted it to be true badly enough to convince themselves. It was demonstrated, repeatedly, over forty days, to people who had every reason to be skeptical, some of whom doubted at first and had to be convinced by exactly this kind of evidence.

Paul, writing within about twenty years of the event in 1st Corinthians 15 adds a detail that is shocking: More than five hundred people saw the risen Christ at one time. Most of them were still alive when Paul wrote that. That's not the kind of claim you make if you're worried about being checked. That's the kind of claim you make when you know the witnesses are still around to be interviewed, and you're inviting that kind of scrutiny.

It's worth asking yourself honestly: Is your faith built on proof, or on a feeling you've never examined? There's nothing wrong with feelings. Plenty of real faith starts with our feelings. But feelings fade with the weather, and a feeling-only faith tends to collapse the first-time life gets genuinely hard. A faith built on proof, on an actual historical event witnessed by hundreds of named and unnamed people, holds up under pressure in a way a feeling never can. Our faith was never supposed to be dependent on a feeling in the first place.

Forty days of appearances. Over five hundred witnesses. A doctor who investigated it all carefully before writing it down. This is not a flimsy foundation. It's proof enough to build your entire life on it. The book of Acts is about to show you a room full of ordinary people doing exact that.

APPLICATION

- Has your confidence in the resurrection ever actually been examined, or has it mostly just been assumed?
- Who in your life needs to hear that this isn't a feeling you're asking them to adopt, but a historical claim backed by real evidence?

PRAYER

Father, thank You for not asking me to believe blindly. Thank You for proof, for witnesses, for a faith that holds up under scrutiny. Build my confidence in what happened, so I can speak about it without hesitation. Amen.

Wait for the Promise

ACTS 1:4-5

"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

REFLECTION

Put yourself in the disciples' sandals for a moment. Jerusalem is not where they wanted to be. It's where Jesus was arrested on false charges and crucified. It's where they were a vulnerable minority. They were surrounded by people who had just executed their leader (Jesus) as a criminal. Every instinct would have said leave, scatter, go home to Galilee where it's safer. Galilee was 90 miles away from Jerusalem. It was the hill country for people who wanted to run. But Jesus's first instruction after the resurrection is: Wait in Jerusalem. The place where it wasn't safe or secure. The place where they had witnessed so much pain. The place of uncertainty and fear.

Sometimes going forward with God doesn't always feel like forward motion. Sometimes obedience looks like returning to the exact place you most wanted to leave and simply waiting there. Sometimes it means waiting with no information about how long it will take. They didn't know it would be ten days. They just knew they'd been told to stay and trust.

Notice what they were waiting for. They weren't waiting on a new game plan. They were waiting to be immersed in the Holy Spirit. That's the literal meaning of "baptized" here. What does that even mean? Up until this point in redemptive history, the presence and power of God had always lived somewhere specific. In the Old Testament, it was in the ark of the covenant (representing God's presence with them) was kept in the tabernacle. When they built in the Temple in Jerusalem, the ark of the covenant was in the holy of holies in the Temple. You went to the presence of God. It stayed in a building. What Jesus is announcing here, quietly, is about to upend that entirely. The presence and power of God is about to stop living in boxes and buildings and start living in people. People! Think about how extraordinary that is! Ordinary, frightened, sinful people waiting in an upper room because they were told to waiting on God's presence and power to fill them. They didn't have a category for this because it was so unusual.

Sometimes the most important thing God asks of you isn't a task. It's patience in the uncomfortable place. It's trusting that what He's about to do in you is worth the wait.

APPLICATION

- Is there an "uncomfortable Jerusalem" in your life right now? A place you'd rather leave, but sense God is asking you to stay and wait in instead?
- What would it look like this week to wait on God without demanding to know the timeline first?

PRAYER

Lord, waiting is hard, especially in the places I'd rather leave. Give me the same obedience the disciples had to stay when You say stay, and to trust that what You're preparing is worth it. Amen.

WEEK 1 · DAY 4

Not Immediately, But Incrementally

ACTS 1:6-7

"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.'"

REFLECTION

You can tell a lot about a person by the questions they ask. People can say all the right things about what they care about, but their questions reveal what they're really after. The disciples' question here does exactly that. After everything Jesus had taught them about the kingdom of God over forty days, their question is still, essentially, is this the moment You finally hand us the political power and kingdom we've been hoping for?

They're wrong in two specific ways. We make the same mistakes as well. First, they assumed the kingdom would arrive immediately in its fullness all at once. Jesus's answer, in effect, is that the kingdom of God doesn't move that way. It doesn't arrive overnight. It advances incrementally one conversation at a time, one prayer at a time, one invitation at a time, one changed heart at a time as people repent and believe and are born again into it. Second, they assumed it was a political, territorial kingdom, something that would look like Rome being overthrown and Israel being restored to earthly power with the disciples as the leaders of this new land. Jesus never corrects that assumption with an argument. He corrects it by simply refusing the premise and redirecting them to mission instead. The Kingdom Jesus is building isn't a nation. It's a Kingdom where God reigns and rules our hearts and minds. Where Christ is King over our lives.

There's something freeing in Jesus's response here: It is not for you to know. Some questions simply don't get answered on this side of eternity. Not because God is withholding information out of spite, but because the answer was never the point. What was the point, the very next verse makes clear. If you've been waiting for God to reveal the whole timeline before you'll move, you may be asking the wrong question entirely. The right question was never when will this all get worked out. It's what's my next faithful step today.

APPLICATION

- Where have you been demanding certainty about outcomes or timing before you're willing to take a next step of obedience?
- What's one "incremental" step --- maybe one conversation, one prayer, one invitation --- you could take this week instead of waiting for the whole picture?

PRAYER

Father, I don't need to know the times and seasons. I need to know my next step. Help me trade my demand for certainty for simple, faithful obedience, one day at a time. Amen.

WEEK 1 · DAY 5

Power to Be Witnesses

ACTS 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

REFLECTION

This is the hinge verse of the entire book of Acts. It's the one sentence that explains everything that happens across the next twenty-eight chapters. Two things are promised here: Power first, witness second. Not the other way around. Jesus doesn't say go be my witnesses and you'll eventually find the strength for it. He says the strength is coming, and the witness will follow from it.

What does it mean to be a witness for Jesus? Honestly, we struggle with that word sometimes. For some of us, witness sounds like knocking on doors of random strangers to talk to them about God. Something even the most extraverted of us struggle to do. Being a witness though is more than that. It means making the invisible Kingdom of God visible. You cannot see God. Nobody can. But you can see how someone who knows God lives, speaks, forgives, gives, and hopes. Through your life, something of the invisible God becomes visible to the people watching. That's not a job reserved for professional ministers. That's every single person who has trusted Christ, whether they feel equipped for it or not. See Ephesians 4:11.

And notice the geography Jesus lays out here: Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, then the ends of the earth. Local, regional, national, global. These are concentric circles moving outward from exactly where you already are. You don't have to book a flight to begin your mission. Your Jerusalem is your street, your job, your family, the people already in your life who have no idea the invisible God is real until they see Him in you. The global vision Jesus casts here doesn't replace the local one. It starts there but doesn't stop there.

This is also, not incidentally, a complete rejection of self-help religion. Jesus doesn't say try harder, do better, white-knuckle your way into being a better Christian. He says MY power. In other words, supernatural strength, available through his Spirit, for exactly the task He's giving you will be given to you. Your witness was never meant to run on willpower. You run on power that isn't your own.

APPLICATION

- Who is in your "Jerusalem" right now? Maybe someone close to you who needs to see the invisible God made visible through your life?
- Where have you been trying to be a Christian through sheer effort rather than asking for the power Jesus promises here?

PRAYER

Lord, I don't want to run on my own strength. Fill me with power that isn't mine, so my life can make You visible to the people around me starting right where I already am. Amen.

WEEK 1 · DAY 6

Lay Aside the Weight That Slows You Down

HEBREWS 12:1-2

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

REFLECTION

The disciples' wrong question in yesterday's reading wasn't really about theology. It was a symptom of drift. It is easy to get distracted from the mission of Jesus and instead get fixated on something smaller and more self-focused. That kind of drift isn't unique to the first disciples. It happens to churches, to families, to individuals, in quiet, small ways.

When we settle for attendance instead of transformation, we drift. In other words, we show up to church and go through the motions not expecting God to move us or make us different. Instead of transparency, we keep our real struggles hidden behind a persona nobody gets close enough to see through. When settle for knowledge instead of obedience, we drift. It's easy to accumulate more books, more podcasts, more Bible studies, while the actual behavior never changes, mistaking insight for maturity. Someone once called it "full heads and empty hands." We can know everything and still do nothing. When we settle for being collected instead of being sent, we drift. We can be content to be gathered in church without ever being mobilized out into the world. The church is a wonderful place for us to heal and grow, but it's not meant to replace engagement with the world as His witnesses. When we settle for felt needs rather than forever needs, we drift. In other words, we focus on how we feel instead of what looking at things from God's perspective. It's easy to get caught up in our feelings and focus on what we like or don't like & not on what God wants us to do.

Every one of those is a kind of weight, the exact word the author of Hebrews uses. They aren't necessarily sin, but they can be something that slows us down in the race of life in following Christ. It keeps us from running with endurance. The remedy for drift isn't more effort or more guilt. It's a fixed gaze: Looking to Jesus, the One who endured something infinitely heavier than your distractions, for the joy that was set before him. You shed it by fixing your eyes on Jesus & letting it go.

APPLICATION

- Which of these "drifts" is the one you recognize most honestly in yourself?
- What's one specific "weight" you sense God inviting you to lay aside this week?

PRAYER

Jesus, show me honestly where I've settled for less than what You're calling me to. Help me lay aside the weight that's slowing me down, and keep my eyes fixed on You as I run. Amen.

WEEK 1 · DAY 7

Why Do You Stand Looking Into Heaven?

ACTS 1:9–11; HEBREWS 3:15

"And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.' ... Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

REFLECTION

It's such a human moment. Jesus has just finished giving them a global mission, and the disciples' response is to stand there, necks craned, staring at the empty sky where He disappeared. You can hardly blame them. They'd never seen anything like it. God sends two angels with a gentle reminder disguised as a question: Why are you standing here looking up? Staring at the sky was never going to bring Jesus back. The only thing that would was the completion of the mission He had just handed them.

There's an urgency that we sometimes miss. They had no idea how much time there was left until His return. That's why Hebrews presses the point the way it does: Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart. Not tomorrow, once you've got it together. Not after you've indulged whatever you were planning to indulge tonight. Today! Because today is always the only day any of us actually have. Today is the day to take your next step forward whatever it may be.

So, where is God calling you to move forward in your family, marriage, relationships, money, commitment to Him? The excuse we use is that we've failed trying to move forward before. Failure is part of this, not evidence you were never meant to try. The righteous person falls seven times and gets back up the Bible says. Not zero times, not once, seven times! He still gets back up. If you've tried to take your next step before and it didn't go the way you hoped, that's not disqualifying. That's what going forward with God has always looked like for ordinary, imperfect people. The question these verses leave you with isn't whether you'll fail along the way. It's whether you'll keep looking up at an empty sky hoping things will change or get back to work on the mission that's actually in front of you. Today!

APPLICATION

- Where have you been "looking up" — waiting, stalling, hoping something will change — instead of taking the next step Jesus has already made clear?
- As you close this week, what's one place you've failed before at going forward, and what would it look like to get back up and try again today?

PRAYER

Lord, I don't want to spend my life staring at an empty sky when there's work in front of me. Help me hear your voice today, keep a soft heart, and take my next step — even if I've failed at it before. Amen.

WEEK 2

Bible-Focused Community

Acts 2:1–47

Acts 1 ends with eleven men staring at an empty sky, holding a promise they didn't yet understand. Acts 2 is where the waiting ends. In a single chapter the Holy Spirit falls, the gospel is preached for the first time since the resurrection, and a brand-new community takes its first breath. This week we'll walk through the whole chapter and watch a pattern unfold that still defines what a church is:

The Spirit falls, the word is preached, and a people is formed.

The Church's Birthday

ACTS 2:1-4

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

REFLECTION

October 28, 1902. That's the birthday of The Temple. Every local church has a birthday, and this is the chapter where the universal church gets hers. Ten days after Jesus ascended and fifty days after the resurrection, the hundred and twenty believers who'd been waiting together in Jerusalem finally got their answer. It arrived loud and visible. A sound from heaven like a rushing wind filling the whole house then something like flames coming to rest over every head in the room.

The Bible doesn't single out the apostles, or the most mature believers, or the most gifted. Every person gathered there both men and women, well-known and unknown received a tongue of fire and was filled with the Holy Spirit. That's a massive shift in how God works. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on specific people for specific tasks at specific moments, and then He could lift just as suddenly as He came. After Pentecost, every believer carries the Spirit permanently, not as an occasional visitor but as a resident in our hearts.

That changes what it means to follow Jesus. You are not waiting around for the Spirit to show up if you've trusted Christ. He's already moved in to your life. Back in the day, gas generators had to be manually switched when the power went out to provide power to the house. If it wasn't switched, there was no power available. The same is true for us. The question is whether you've made the switch to a power that isn't your own instead of running on willpower, guilt, or sheer determination. A Pentecost is available to all believer so we don't have to run on our own strength. Pentecost also functions as a kind of spiritual high point, a mountaintop the first believers could look back on for the rest of their lives. You need those too. Not because they're required for faith, but because remembering what God has done steadies you when the ordinary days get hard, and today is as good a day as any to ask him to make Himself known again.

APPLICATION

- Where in your life are you still operating like the Spirit is something you're waiting for, rather than someone who already lives in you?
- What's one "mountaintop" moment with God you can look back on this week when things feel flat or hard?

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank You that You don't come and go. You've made Your home in me. Help me stop living like I'm waiting for You to show up and start drawing on the power that's already mine in Christ. Amen.

Every Nation, Every Language

ACTS 2:5–11

"Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ... And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ... both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--- we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.'"

REFLECTION

The miracle here isn't ecstatic babble. It's real, intelligible human languages spoken fluently by people who had never studied them a day in their lives. Jerusalem that week was packed with devout Jews from a dozen different regions, carrying a dozen different native tongues. And suddenly they're hearing uneducated Galilean fishermen (men widely looked down on as rednecks) preaching fluently in languages they had never learned.

This mattered because language is one of the most stubborn barriers the gospel runs into. A missionary once spent years trying to reach a tribe in Central America, learning their language village by village, only to keep finding people who had simply never heard of Jesus. When he finally met the tribe's chief and urged him to read the Bible, the chief stopped him cold with a question: if your God is so smart, why doesn't He speak my language? That missionary went on to found one of the largest Bible translation organizations in the world, convinced no one should have to meet God in someone else's language.

Pentecost is the reversal of Babel. In Genesis 11, God confused one language into many and scattered a prideful humanity apart. Here, He uses many languages to gather a scattered world back together around one message. From its first sermon, the gospel was never meant to arrive wrapped in one approved culture or vocabulary. It speaks fluently into every heart language there is which was always the plan.

This is important to remember. When we talk about Jesus who doesn't know Him, do we speak "Christianese" in a language they don't understand? The best way to someone's heart is caring enough to say it in words that actually land and make a difference. What is your life and words speaking to those around you?

APPLICATION

- What does it look like to meet non-believers in your area of influence where they are?
- Have you assumed that people know about Jesus or know Jesus when they don't?

PRAYER

Lord, You've never needed anyone to learn Your language first. You learn ours. Give me the humility and creativity to speak Your truth in words that reach the people in front of me. Amen.

A Sermon You Can't Soften

ACTS 2:22–24, 36

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know --- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

REFLECTION

By this point the crowd is confused and suspicious. Some are mocking and assuming the apostles are drunk. Peter stands to explain what's happening, and in doing so preaches the first sermon of the church. What's remarkable is how specific it is. Peter doesn't describe a vague spiritual experience. He makes a historical claim about a real man: Jesus of Nazareth. His life was publicly verified by miracles the very crowd had witnessed firsthand.

Then Peter does something most of us would never dare. He puts the crime directly on the people in front of him. Not "humanity crucified Jesus" in some abstract sense. He says you crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men. That's about as far from a comfortable, seeker-friendly message as you can get. Yet it's exactly what gets through to them. Real gospel preaching doesn't dance around the truth. It names the role we had in the death of Jesus. He died for us because we are guilty of sin.

But the sermon doesn't end in accusation. It ends in reversal. God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. The story Peter tells isn't primarily about what was done to Jesus. It's about what God did through Him, overturning death and bringing resurrection defeating death, hell, sin and the grave.

This is how you know someone understands the gospel. It's when they know that Jesus didn't just die for sinners, but that He died for them as sinners. It's the difference between admitting the world has problems and admitting my role in it.

APPLICATION

- Have you ever made it personal? Have you recognized yourself as someone Christ had to die for? Or has your faith stayed at "Jesus died for sinners" in the abstract?
- Where might you be softening the gospel to keep it comfortable, for yourself or for someone you're talking to?

PRAYER

Jesus, I was part of the crowd that crucified You. Thank You that the story doesn't end with my guilt. It ends with You raised, reigning, and still willing to call me Yours. Amen.

Cut to the Heart

ACTS 2:36–37

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

REFLECTION

"Cut to the heart" is a visceral, almost violent image. It's not a polite nod people give to information they find persuasive. The crowd isn't impressed by Peter's logic. They're cut by it. There's a real difference between being convinced and being converted. Which one describes you? Plenty of people today can defend the resurrection, win the argument, and explain exactly why Christianity makes historical sense but still never known it personally.

One man recalled, decades later, being a child dragged along by his parents to a revival service in his hometown. Nobody in the family was a believer going in. He remembered the unmistakable sense of God's presence in the room, the preaching, and his whole family walking forward together that night to give their lives to Christ. What stuck with him even more than the moment itself was what happened after. It was the first time his father ever told him he loved him. That's what real conviction does. It doesn't just rearrange what you believe. It starts rearranging everything downstream of what you believe.

Conviction and guilt are not the same thing. Guilt is where you feel bad about what you've done. Genuine conviction is when you decide to do something about it. Conviction means we're ready to change course, not just to feel the appropriate amount of remorse and move on unchanged.

So ask yourself honestly: Has the gospel ever actually cut you or has it only ever informed you? There's no shame in realizing the answer is the second one. Plenty of people sit in church for years before it happens.

APPLICATION

- Is your heart cut by the gospel in a good way?
- Ask the Lord: "What shall I do"? And then do it.

PRAYER

Lord, don't let me settle for being informed when You're offering to transform me. Cut through my familiarity with the facts and get to my heart. Show me what to do and give me the courage to do it. Amen.

Repent and Be Baptized

ACTS 2:38–39

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

REFLECTION

Peter's answer to the crowd's desperate question is simple: Repent & Be Baptized. No elaborate program or multi-step process. Repent doesn't mean feeling bad about your sin, and it doesn't mean simply hating what you've done. Plenty of people who want nothing to do with Jesus still feel guilty about their choices. A bad conscience isn't unique to Christians. Repentance means to turn and change direction. The natural posture of every person is to have our back to God. To repent is to turn around & face God. It's not an emotion. It's a reorientation.

Baptism is what happens when that turn stops being private. Jesus never asked people to raise a hand, walk an aisle, or quietly believe something in their heart and leave it there. Those things aren't wrong, but they're not what He specifically commanded. He asked for baptism which is a public, physical, impossible-to-miss declaration that says, "I belong to him now, and I want everyone to know it." Your faith is deeply personal but it was never meant to be private.

Put the two together and you get the whole Christian life in miniature. It's an inward turning to God & an outward declaration of commitment to God. Everything after that is shaped by our turning from sin and toward God. Notice that verse 39 says this promise isn't just for the apostles' generation. It's for you, for your children, for everyone far off whom God calls. That includes you two thousand years later.

APPLICATION

- Where do you need to repent right now?
- If you've never been baptized, or were baptized as an infant without ever making that faith your own, what's keeping you from taking that step publicly?

PRAYER

Father, thank you that your promise reaches all the way to me. Give me a heart that keeps turning toward you, and give me the courage to make my faith public, not just private. Amen.

Devoted

ACTS 2:42

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

REFLECTION

The word *devoted* is doing a lot of work in this one verse. It doesn't mean attended occasionally or showed up when it was convenient. It means fully committed. It's the kind of allegiance that says no to good things in order to say yes to the best thing. That's a hard word to hear in a culture, and a calendar, that treats church as one option among many, squeezed in around work schedules, kids' sports, travel, and everything else competing for the same hours.

Luke names four specific things at which this devotion was aimed: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, the prayers. That little word "the" matters. It means gathering together to hear THE Word at a specific church. It means sharing THE real life with real people instead of staying anonymous. It means experiencing THE rhythm of prayer with and for each other together each week. One father, when his kids started getting serious about club sports, made a habit of sitting down with each new coach at the start of a season. He'd simply explain, respectfully, that Sundays were off the table for his family. Not because he disapproved of sports, but because church had become the fixed point everything else had to work around, not the other way around. It cost him something. Some coaches weren't thrilled. But it meant his kids grew up watching what devotion looked in a world of compromise.

What's crowding out that kind of devotion in your life right now? It might not be sports or dance or other activities. It might be work, hobbies, screens, or simply exhaustion. Name the thing honestly, because devoted people don't get that way by accident. They get that way by deciding, ahead of time, what they'll say no to.

APPLICATION

- What currently has a stronger claim on your weekly schedule than the gathered life of your church and are you okay with that?
- Of the four things named here --- teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer --- which is thinnest in your life right now?

PRAYER

Lord, show me what I'm devoted to by default, and help me become the kind of person who says no to good things for the sake of the best thing. Amen.

Day by Day

ACTS 2:44–47

"And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

REFLECTION

What's described here isn't an early experiment in communism. The text makes clear elsewhere that people still owned homes and didn't sell everything they had. This was more organic and voluntary. When the Spirit genuinely works in people's lives, they start loving people more than their possessions. Generosity isn't manufactured by guilt. It shows up almost on its own, as a byproduct of a changed heart.

Stories like this tend to surface wherever this kind of community takes root. A small group of friends once learned, almost by accident, that someone in their circle was going through a hard season and couldn't afford something she needed. They simply provided it without being asked. A couple who'd once set a modest giving goal found themselves, months later, giving far beyond what they'd first planned, surprised by how much their own hearts had changed. None of it was coordinated. It was just what happens when people stop gripping their possessions so tightly because their security has moved elsewhere.

Then comes the line that closes the chapter. The Lord added to their number day by day. Not in one dramatic event, but day by day. In other words, as the church stay committed to the four things we mentioned yesterday, God moved in the hearts of unbelievers. Church growth was never primarily a program to engineer. It was the Lord's doing worked out through faithful people showing up for each other day after unremarkable day.

That's a fitting place to end this week. Everything that's happened in this chapter with the Spirit falling, the word preached, the church formed answers the question Luke opened with: What is Jesus still doing? He's still building his church, one ordinary day at a time, and inviting you to make it your first community, not an occasional stop among many others.

APPLICATION

- Is there a need in your church community right now that you could meet quietly?
- What would it look like to make your church your first and primary community rather than one option among several?

PRAYER

Lord, loosen my grip on what I call mine, and make me the kind of person who notices and meets needs around me without being asked. Keep adding to Your church day by day, and thank You for including me in it. Amen.

WEEK 3

Prayed-Up Boldness

Acts 4:1–31

If Acts 2 was about belonging, Acts 4 is about what that people does under pressure. Peter and John get hauled in front of the very council that engineered Jesus's death, threatened, and ordered into silence. Right alongside the threats, more people believe, not fewer. This week we'll watch the earliest church learn what every generation of Christians has had to learn since: You face your fears by saying your prayers.

A Miracle With a Message

ACTS 3:6; 4:1–3

"I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" ... And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them ... And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening."

REFLECTION

Peter and John are on their way to pray when they pass a man who has been lame from birth begging at the temple gate. He asks for money. Peter has none but offers something better: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The man does, instantly, completely, in front of a crowd that knew exactly who he was and exactly how long he'd been unable to walk.

But the miracle was never the point. It was the platform. All through Acts, a good deed clears space for a good word. The deed gets people's attention and the Word is what actually changes them. The healing draws a crowd and Peter uses the moment to preach, not to take a bow. The sermon, not the sign, is what gets him arrested.

Look closely at what specifically provoked the arrest. It wasn't that a disabled man had been healed but that Peter and John were proclaiming that Jesus rose from the dead. That's the trigger, then and now. Nobody gets in trouble for quietly doing something kind. People get in trouble for making a specific claim about a specific risen person (Jesus) and inviting others to believe it. Nobody cares if you believe in God. Nobody cares if you believe in spirituality. But mention Jesus and everything changes. There's something about the name of Jesus that causes people to get uncomfortable. Have you been kind and compassionate to people and not told them why? Compassion without conviction is comfortable. It's also incomplete.

APPLICATION

- Where have you settled for doing good quietly without ever explaining why you do it?
- Who in your life has seen your good deeds but never heard the reason behind them?

PRAYER

Lord, don't let me stop at kindness when You're inviting me into conviction. Give me the courage to pair what I do for people with why I do it. Amen.

Trouble and Growth, Together

ACTS 4:4

"But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand."

REFLECTION

This verse sits between an arrest in verse 3 and a trial in verse 5. Peter and John are hauled off to spend the night in custody and sandwiched in the middle of that very bad news is the fact that many who heard the Word believed, and the count of men alone came to about five thousand. They expected them to retreat. Maybe go quiet for a while. Do some better PR. Soften the preaching a bit. Do something less risky. That's not what happened.

This has been the pattern across the global church's history not just this one chapter. Seasons of real pressure on Christians have rarely shrunk the church the way outsiders expect. Pressure on the church often leads to the church to clarify its mission and become even more bold in witness. The people who stay are the ones who actually believe the Bible. Wherever the gospel has faced the most restriction, it has often grown the fastest, not despite the pressure but almost because of it.

That cuts against an assumption a lot of us carry without realizing it. We think staying quiet protects us and that speaking up puts us at risk. Luke's account says the opposite happened here. The boldness that got Peter and John arrested is the very thing that grew the number of believers. Risk and growth show up in the same sentence, not opposite ends of the story. So ask yourself honestly: Where have you been playing it safe? In your witness, reputation, comfort? This verse tells us that boldness speaks louder than almost anything else.

APPLICATION

- Have you ever seen opposition or pushback actually open a door instead of closing one?
- Where in your life have you been assuming silence is the "safe" choice when boldness in facing the situation might be what moves things forward?

PRAYER

Lord, I default to silence because it feels safer. Show me where my quiet isn't protecting anything but it's just costing You a witness. Give me a reason to speak. Amen.

The Courage to Get Specific

ACTS 4:8–12

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by Him this man is standing before you well. ... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'"

REFLECTION

Peter and John are standing in front of the very council that organized Jesus's crucifixion, and they're asked a direct question: By what power did you do this? This is the exact moment where most of us would reach for something safe and vague. Maybe we say, "I was just trying to make the world a better place." Peter does the opposite. He names a name: Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. Specific, personal, and aimed directly at the people in the room.

That boldness is the whole point. A vague spirituality offends no one because it commits to nothing. "We're all searching" doesn't get anyone arrested. "This particular man, whom you killed, God raised, and He's the reason this healing happened" does. Real conviction has a name attached to it, not a general sentiment. Then Peter makes the most exclusive claim in the whole New Testament. There is salvation in no one else but Jesus. Not one option among several. Not a path among many. People often hear that claim as arrogant but think of it differently. If a building is on fire and there's exactly one working exit, nobody complains that there should be more options. They're just grateful there's a way out at all. Peter isn't narrowing the options out of pride. He's pointing at the only door that actually opens. Where have you been offering the vague version of your faith because it costs you nothing? The version of Christianity that never offends anyone usually isn't saying much of anything.

APPLICATION

- Where do you default to safe spiritual language instead of naming Jesus specifically?
- Do you think salvation ONLY being found in Jesus is exclusive?

PRAYER

Jesus, You are the name I need, not one name among many. Give me the courage to be specific about You, even when vague would be safer. Amen.

They Had Been With Jesus

ACTS 4:13

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

REFLECTION

The council's verdict on Peter and John is almost insulting. They are uneducated, common men. The word for ordinary in Greek is *idiotas* from which we get our word *idiot*. No seminary training, no ordination, nothing on paper that should make anyone listen to them. Yet they'd just watched these two men stand in front of the most powerful religious body in Jerusalem and speak without flinching. The council's own explanation for the boldness isn't talent, training, or personality. It's one line: They had been with Jesus.

Boldness, in this text, isn't a personality trait some people are born with and others aren't. It's not a skill you earn through years of study, though study has its place. It's the natural byproduct of time spent with Jesus. When you are close enough, long enough, to actually be changed by Him.

That should be freeing for anyone who assumes boldness is for extroverts, or for people with the right credentials, or for people who are naturally more confident than they are. It's not about ability. It's about availability. It's about showing up and staying close to the Lord and letting enough time with Jesus rearrange your life and what you're willing to risk.

When was the last time you spent enough unhurried time with Jesus? If boldness feels distant to you right now, that's probably not a personality problem. It's probably a proximity problem. Spend some time in worship and prayer to Jesus for an extended period today. Let Him make you bold.

APPLICATION

- If someone watched your life closely, would they conclude you've "been with Jesus," or would they have no way of knowing?
- Where specifically do you need some boldness in your life right now?

PRAYER

Jesus, my boldness is thin because my time with you is thin. Draw me close enough, often enough, that it becomes obvious to the people around me. Amen.

We Cannot But Speak

ACTS 4:18–20

"So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.'"

REFLECTION

The order from the council is about as direct as it gets. Don't speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus! The council has real legal authority behind that command and ignoring it carries real risk. Peter and John's answer isn't defiance for its own sake, but godly conviction. It's a question of ultimate allegiance. Peter and John ask if it's right to obey them rather than God? That's the test behind every act of faithfulness. Are we going to obey God or culture? They're not rebels by temperament. They're simply unwilling to let a human ruling override a divine one.

But notice the deeper reason they tell for continuing to speak the name of Jesus. It's not that they were trying to be strategic and we want to risk it all. It's "we cannot help but speak of what we have seen and heard." That's not a decision. That's an inability. When something has happened to you, silence stops being a real option, threats or no threats. If you had a cure for cancer and your loved one had it, you wouldn't stay silent. You would shout it from the rooftops to help others as well. The same is true for the ultimate cancer: sin. Jesus is the cure. We have to speak about it. May the need to speak about it flow out of us. Does your faith feel like an obligation you're willing to defend if pressed, or like something you've actually seen and heard that you simply can't keep to yourself? Those are two very different postures, and only one of them survives real pressure.

APPLICATION

- Is your faith something that makes staying silent impossible?
- Ask the Lord to stir up His Spirit within you to give you this kind of boldness.

PRAYER

Lord, let my faith be more than an obligation I defend. Let it be an experience so real that silence isn't an option for me. Amen.

Run to Your Friends, Then Pray

ACTS 4:23–24

"When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord...'"

REFLECTION

The first thing Peter and John do after walking out of custody isn't going home to recover alone, and it isn't jumping straight back into public preaching. It's running to their own people and telling them everything that just happened. Before anything else, they go find their community.

That's interesting, because it's easy to assume boldness is a solo sport. But here, the first move after a frightening encounter is to put it into words in front of people who already love them. Telling the story out loud does something that keeping it private can't. It turns a private fear into a shared experience, and a shared experience into shared courage for whatever comes next.

Then they pray together. That's a small detail easy to miss, but it's significant. Praying together out loud is awkward for a lot of people the first several times you do it. You can feel exposed in a way. But this is exactly how a group of frightened people turned individual fear into shared boldness. They bring the threat to God's attention out loud together at the same time.

Who are the people you'd run to first after something like this happened to you? When was the last time you prayed out loud together with them?

APPLICATION

- Who are the people you'd run to first if you faced real pushback for your faith?
- When did you last pray out loud with someone else about something that scared you rather than keeping it private?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for people I can run to. Give me the courage to tell my real stories and pray my real fears out loud with them, instead of carrying everything alone. Amen.

Not for Safety, But for Strength

ACTS 4:29–31

"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to Your servants to continue to speak Your word with all boldness, while You stretch out Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

REFLECTION

Look closely at what they don't pray for. They never ask God to remove the threat. They don't ask God for protection, safety, or an easier path forward. They ask God for boldness to keep speaking His word right in the middle of a danger that is still very much there. The threats haven't been removed by the time they finish praying. Nothing about their circumstances have changed. What's changed is them.

Our natural instinct is to pray: Lord, make this hard thing go away and if you won't, then maybe give me strength to handle it. Peter and John's prayer skips straight past the first request. They don't ask for the fire to be put out. They ask for the strength to keep standing in it. God answers immediately and physically. The building shakes, and they're filled with the Holy Spirit all over again. The same people who were already filled back in Acts 2. That is important to note. Being filled with the Spirit isn't a one-time event you check off and move past. It's something that happens again and again, when a fresh situation calls for a fresh measure of courage. They do exactly what they prayed for and continue speaking the Word of God with boldness.

This is the whole point of these last few weeks in miniature. Believe, belong, be bold — and underneath every one of them, the same simple habit: Face your fears and say your prayers. Not prayers asking God to remove the hard thing. Prayers asking Him for the boldness to stand inside it and speaking with Him until He does something about it.

APPLICATION

- What threat or fear in your life have you only prayed to have removed, rather than praying for boldness to face it?
- What would it look like to pray Acts 4:29 specifically this week --- not for safety, but for strength --- to keep speaking?

PRAYER

Lord, don't just take away what scares me. Fill me again, right in the middle of it, and give me the boldness to keep speaking Your word anyway. Amen.

WEEK 4

Heart-Fueled Generosity

Acts 4:32–5:16

We've fed our faith, fought for fellowship, faced our fears. Now Luke shows us a church still moving forward in generosity. Acts 4:32 says the believers were of one heart and soul, and that no one claimed their possessions as their own. Imagine an entire community quietly refusing the idols of consumerism, materialism, and individualism at the same time. Then, in chapter 5, the same chapter gives us the church's first sin and its first funeral: a husband and wife who wanted the appearance of generosity without the substance of it. This week is about what grace does to a heart when it's genuine, and what happens when we try to fake it instead.

One Heart, One Soul

ACTS 4:32

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common."

REFLECTION

This isn't a small group of friends who happen to get along. This is somewhere between ten and fifteen thousand people from different backgrounds, different income levels, different stages of life. They're described as being of one heart and soul. Most of us can't get everyone who shares our last name to agree on a restaurant. Luke says a crowd the size of a small city was unified.

The word "unity" and "uniformity" are not the same. Uniformity is everyone thinking the same way about everything. That's not unity; that's a warning sign. Unity is a group of genuinely different people who are aligned on the things that matter most: Who God is, What sin is, What Jesus did, What repentance and salvation mean. Underneath all of that, people can differ in age, culture, and bank account and still be one heart and soul, because what holds them together is bigger than what could divide them. Pastor Phil mentioned that there are three tiers in Christian beliefs. Tier one is the core beliefs to being a Christian. These are the essentials to belief. An example is that Jesus is the Son of God. There is no room for opinion in the core belief because He is who He said He is. Tier two is the non-essential beliefs that Christians can disagree on. Beliefs about baptism for example. Tier three are simply opinions. Timing of Jesus' return is a great example of this.

Unity produces something amazing. No one said that any of the things that belonged to them were their own. That's a direct challenge to three things our culture quietly trains us to believe. Namely, we are what we own, having more will make us happier, and we don't really need anyone else. A church unified stops being controlled by the expectations of the culture. A divided church turns inward and fights itself but a unified one has energy to reach the world in generosity. This type of unity makes the church's mission possible.

APPLICATION

- Where do you quietly confuse unity with everyone agreeing with you, rather than everyone being aligned on what matters most?
- Is there a brother or sister in Christ you've distanced yourself from over something isn't actually core to the gospel?

PRAYER

Lord, make me one heart and soul with your people, even the ones who don't look like me or think like me. Align me with what matters most, and loosen my grip on everything else. Amen.

On Loan, Not Owned

ACTS 4:32

"No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common."

REFLECTION

There are basically four ways a person can look at their possessions. The first is, "what's mine is mine." That's called selfishness. I earned it, I keep it, I owe no one anything. The second is "what's yours is mine." That's called stealing. Whether that's shoplifting or just the quieter habit of coveting what other people have and resenting them for having it, we can slip it that mindset. The third is "what's yours is everybody's." This is a forced redistribution from the government that sounds generous but was never voluntary, and tends to run out of steam the moment it runs out of other people's resources.

The believers in Acts 4 lived out a fourth way. It's "what's mine is actually God's." That's called stewardship. It rests on a simple but uncomfortable truth that none of us actually own anything. We're going to die, and when we do, someone else is going to live in our house and drive our car and sort through our things at an estate sale. Everything we think we possess, we only have on loan. A steward manages someone else's property well; an owner does whatever they want with their own. The believers in Acts 4 had figured out they were stewards. When we realize that everything we have --- including the very breath in our bodies --- is a gift from God, we understand that it all comes from God in the first place. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"

That reframing changes everything about how you hold what you have. It's not this is mine, and I'll decide if I feel like sharing some. It's this was never mine to begin with, so of course I hold it loosely enough to be useful to someone else when it's needed. Stewardship has two parts. First, it means managing well what you've been given. The second is being generous with what you have. You can't do the second without the first. People who are buried in poor decisions and debt aren't in a position to be generous no matter how much their hearts want to be.

So before you ask whether you're generous enough, it's worth asking an earlier question: Are you managing well what's actually on loan to you?

APPLICATION

- Which of the four postures toward possessions — mine is mine, yours is mine, yours is everybody's, or mine is God's — describes you most?
- Is there a management problem in your own life right now — debt, overspending, no plan — that's quietly making generosity feel impossible?

PRAYER

Lord, everything I have is on loan from You. Teach me to manage it faithfully, and free my hands to be generous with what was never mine to clench in the first place. Amen.

Great Power, Great Grace

ACTS 4:33

"And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."

REFLECTION

Two things are happening in this single verse, and the order matters. First, great power. The apostles are testifying to the resurrection, not sharing an opinion or a feeling, but reporting something they personally witnessed. Then, great grace. This was a tangible, visible quality resting on the whole community, the kind of thing people outside it could actually notice.

What is grace? Grace gets used so casually that its real meaning wears off. Grace is the opposite of karma. Karma says you get what you deserve — good for good, bad for bad, the books eventually balance. Mercy is a step further. Mercy means not getting the bad we deserve. Grace goes one step further still. Grace means giving someone good things they don't deserve at all. That's what was resting on this church. The people hadn't earned God's favor through performance, but they had been given far more than they deserved and they knew it.

This connects us to everything we looked at yesterday. Grace is what produces generosity. Not guilt, not a sermon, not a building campaign. Grace! When you understand that God gave you His first and His best and His only Son while you were still running from Him, and that you did absolutely nothing to deserve that, something in you loosens. You stop gripping your possessions so tightly, because you've just watched someone give up something infinitely more valuable for your sake. Generosity that comes from social pressure or guilt doesn't last and doesn't transform the heart doing the giving. But grace does. If you want to know whether you gotten God's grace, don't just check your beliefs. Check all the things God has done in your life in every area.

APPLICATION

- Have you ever thanked the Lord for the multiple ways of grace He has given you? Take a moment to thank Him for: Money, possessions, job, family, relationships, good things you didn't deserve.
- What would change about your life if you lived in gratitude daily for all things?

PRAYER

God, thank You for grace I never earned and could never repay. Let that grace do its work in me, until generosity isn't a discipline I force but a response I can't help. Amen.

Not a Needy Person Among Them

ACTS 4:34–35

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

REFLECTION

This is what grace looked like with skin on. It was a community where needs didn't go unmet. From time-to-time people sold what they could and gave the proceeds to whoever needed it. No one was forced. No law required it. It was simply what people who had truly grasped grace chose to do with what was theirs.

It's tempting to read this and assume it's describing an unusually generous personality type, as if some people are just naturally wired this way and the rest of us aren't. But Scripture treats generosity less like a personality trait and more like a grace you grow in. It's the same way you grow in prayer or in reading your Bible. Generosity deepens with practice over time. The question is: Am I practicing generosity on purpose?

There are three practical questions about generosity we need ask ourselves. First, is it a priority over the rest of your spending? Second, have you chosen a percentage to give or a vague give what you can? Third, has your giving increased as your income has increased? Almost everyone believes they're generous. Very few people can answer those three questions with specifics.

It's worth being honest with yourself here rather than comfortable. A vague sense that you're a giving person isn't the same thing as a dollar figure or a percentage you can name. One is a feeling. The other is evidence.

APPLICATION

- If someone asked you to name the percentage of your income you give, could you? Or is your generosity more of a feeling than a figure?
- Has your giving increased as your income has, or has your standard of living quietly absorbed every raise instead?

PRAYER

Lord, I don't want to just feel generous — I want to actually be generous, with numbers I could name and a priority I could point to. Show me where to start, or where to grow. Amen.

The Son of Encouragement

ACTS 4:36–37

"Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

REFLECTION

Of everyone who gave generously in that first church, Luke singles out one man by name. The interesting detail he includes isn't the size of the gift. It's his nickname. Joseph becomes so associated with encouraging generosity that the apostles start calling him Barnabas which means son of encouragement. That's the name that sticks all through the rest of Acts. We nickname the people who shape us, for better or worse, and this is about as good a nickname as a person could earn.

His generosity clearly moved other people. He wasn't giving to be seen and get the credit. His example became a real encouragement to everyone watching which is exactly how generosity tends to work. Generosity becomes contagious in a community the same way stinginess does as well. People watch what people around them do with their resources more than they listen to what they say they do.

This matters most close to home. Children learn what generosity looks like primarily by watching their parents write the check, make the sacrifice, or quietly help somebody out. The same is true in friendships. One person's example of real, unglamorous generosity tends to loosen up the people around them in a way that guilt-driven appeals never do. Have you ever seen *It's a Wonderful Life*? The scene at the end where everybody joins in the giving? Generosity is like that? Contagious.

Ask yourself who's actually watching your example right now. Is it a child, a friend, a spouse? If there was a nickname you earned about your giving, what would it be? Barnabus or something opposite to that?

APPLICATION

- Who is watching your example of generosity right now? What are they learning from what you do not what you say?
- Is there someone whose generosity has genuinely encouraged you to be more generous yourself? Have you ever told them that?

PRAYER

Lord, let my life quietly encourage someone else toward generosity, the way Barnabas encouraged the people around him. Make my example worth watching. Amen.

Why Has Satan Filled Your Heart?

ACTS 5:1–4

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.'"

REFLECTION

It's easy to misread what Ananias and Sapphira did wrong. Peter doesn't condemn them for keeping back part of the money. The land and the proceeds were entirely theirs to do with as they wished. Holding some of it back was never the sin. The sin was pretending they'd given all of it so they could receive the appearance of generosity without the actual cost of it.

This is the church's first recorded sin. It's worth noticing what it is and what it isn't. It isn't some dramatic scandal. It's simple hypocrisy. They were using God's name to make themselves look better than they were. That's another way of breaking the third commandment than most of us were taught. Taking God's name in vain (3rd commandment) isn't just about cursing. It's about using God or the appearance of godliness to make people think you are something you're not.

This story from the first century hits close to home. Most of us haven't done what Ananias and Sapphira did. But all of us know what it's like to put forth a version of ourselves that isn't true. We pretend our marriage, parent, finances or our spiritual life are more put together than what's really going on. The reason we do this is because the real version of life is too hard to admit. Ananias and Sapphira fell for the "pride of life" sin. That's the sin of wanting to be something we're not to build ourselves up in the eyes of other people. God values authenticity more than anything else.

Peter's question cuts to the actual issue: Why has Satan filled your heart to lie? Not to other people first, even though it looked that way but to the Holy Spirit. The lie that matters most isn't usually the one told to the people watching. It's the one told to God, and underneath that, to yourself.

APPLICATION

- Where are you currently performing a more put-together version of your life than what's true: your relationships, marriage, your finances, your faith?
- What would it cost you to tell the truth about that this week instead of maintaining the appearance?

PRAYER

Lord, I don't want to perform for people while lying to You. Show me where I'm managing an image instead of living honestly and give me the courage to tell the truth. Amen.

Great Fear, Greater Growth

ACTS 5:5–6, 11–14

"When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it... And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things... And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women."

REFLECTION

This is a hard passage of scripture. Ananias falls down dead at Peter's words and a few hours later his wife does too because she repeated the same lie without knowing what had happened to her husband. One commentator put it bluntly: If God dealt with every sin this way, every church would need a mortician on staff. The point isn't that this was God's normal pattern for handling dishonesty. It's that this was the church's first sin, and God was establishing, at the very start, how seriously He takes hypocrisy wearing the mask of faith.

Notice the phrase Luke repeats twice that great fear came upon the whole church. Not fear of being struck down for an unrelated mistake, but the fear of realizing God sees what's happening in a person's heart, not just the performance on the surface. Fearing the Lord, in Scripture's sense, means believing that God's ways are best, and that sin is genuinely dangerous, and that there's no such thing as a secret kept from Him. A church that has stopped fearing the Lord that way has usually also stopped taking repentance seriously.

But right alongside this big event, notice what happens. More than ever, believers were added to the Lord. God subtracted two people that day, and the church didn't shrink. In fact, it grew faster than before. A community willing to take its sin seriously is one people are drawn to, not repelled by. The world doesn't expect the church to be sinless. It notices, powerfully, when the church is honest about it.

So the real move this passage asks of us isn't performing less sin. It's moving from pretending to repenting. It's confessing instead of covering. It's agreeing with God about what's true instead of managing what other people see. It's moving from fronting to being authentic about who we are.

APPLICATION

- Is there a sin you've been managing and covering rather than confessing and repenting of?
- What one specific, concrete sin in your life do you need to confess to God and repent of?

PRAYER

Lord, give me a healthy fear of You. A fear that takes my sin as seriously as You do. Move me from pretending to repenting and let whatever You subtract from my life make room for what You want to grow instead. Amen.

WEEK 5

Gospel-Centered Purpose

Acts 6:1–7

We've fed our faith, fought for fellowship, faced our fears, and funded the future. In this final week, Luke shows us a church that has grown so quickly it's starting to strain at the seams. Instead of pretending the strain isn't there, the apostles name it, diagnose it correctly, and fix it without ever letting go of the one thing that can't be negotiated away: devotion to prayer and the Word. This is a short passage, only seven verses, but it's important. Up to this point, a handful of leaders did everything. From here out, everybody does a few things and the church multiplies because of it.

Growing Pains

ACTS 6:1

"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."

REFLECTION

Read the verse carefully and notice both halves of it. The church is increasing in number which is good news. It's the thing everyone was praying for. In the very same sentence, a complaint arises. Two groups within the church, Greek-speaking Hellenists and Hebrew-speaking Hebrews, are bumping into each other culturally. There are vulnerable widows who depended on the church's daily care and some are being overlooked in the process. Growth and conflict show up in the same verse.

It's tempting to read that as a sign something had gone wrong as if a genuinely Spirit-filled church shouldn't have problems like this. But that gets the story backwards. The problem exists precisely because the church had grown from a small, easy-to-manage group into a community of ten or fifteen thousand people, spanning different cultures and backgrounds. Complexity increases with any kind of growth. Whether it's a church, a family, or a business that is moving forward, growth will keep it running into friction it didn't have to deal with before. It's not because something is broken, but because there's more now to care for than there used to be.

It also matters who the church was failing to notice. They were widows who were among the most vulnerable people in that society. A church that's expanding quickly can start overlooking exactly the people it should be most careful to protect, simply because there's more going on and less margin to notice. So the real question isn't whether you'll hit friction as you grow whether in faith, in family or in anything else worth building. You will. The question is whether you'll treat the friction as evidence that something is wrong with the whole project, or as the normal, expected cost of something working.

APPLICATION

- Where have you mistaken the friction that comes with real growth for evidence that something has gone wrong?
- Is there someone vulnerable in your own life or church who might be getting overlooked simply because things have gotten busier?

PRAYER

Lord, don't let me panic at the friction that comes with growth, and don't let me grow so busy that I stop noticing the people You'd have me care for most. Amen.

Spiritual Problem or Systems Problem?

ACTS 6:1–2

"A complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.'"

REFLECTION

Notice what's missing from this story. Nobody is told to repent. There's no confession, no confrontation over sin, no suggestion that the Hellenists or the Hebrews had hidden motives that needed to be exposed. Compare that to the chapter right before it, where Ananias and Sapphira's lie was unmistakably a matter of the heart, and the response was direct and severe. Here, the apostles respond completely differently, because this is a completely different kind of problem.

That distinction is worth noting, because it's easy to flatten every problem into the same category. Some problems are spiritual. They live in the heart and the fix is confession and repentance. Other problems are what we might call systems problems. The fix is a better plan, not a more intense devotional life. A marriage that's struggling might be dealing with real dishonesty or unforgiveness; it might also just be two tired people with no shared calendar and devices in the bedroom at midnight. A community that struggles might reflect genuinely divided hearts, or it might just mean its facing issues its never faced before.

Misdiagnosing either direction causes real damage. Treat a systems problem like a spiritual crisis, and you'll pile guilt onto people. Treat a spiritual problem like a systems problem, and you'll reorganize a calendar around something that needs repentance. The apostles get it right here. They look at a real problem, correctly identify that nobody's heart is the issue, and build a structure to solve it instead of calling an altar time that wasn't needed.

Before you respond to the next recurring friction point in your life, pause long enough to ask the right diagnostic question: Is this about character or is it about capacity? Is it the result of sin or because of growing pains? That changes how you fix it.

APPLICATION

- Think of a recurring friction point in your life right now in your marriage, your home, or a ministry you're part of. Is it more a heart problem or a structure problem?
- Have you ever misdiagnosed one as the other?

PRAYER

Lord, give me discernment to tell the difference between what needs repentance and what just needs a better plan. Don't let me confuse the two. Amen.

Conviction, Not Guilt

ACTS 6:2

"And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.'"

REFLECTION

"They want me to mow the lawn too." "They what?!", I asked with incredulity. The voice over the phone was a pastor of a small church who was a friend. The people in his church believed the role of a pastor was to do all the ministry including, evidently, mowing the church lawn. "Tell them to read Acts 6 and Ephesians 4," I protested. The role of pastors and staff are to raise up believers to do the work of ministry that God has called the entire Church to do, not to do all the ministry themselves. God gave gifts to different people to be a blessing to the world and the Church. When we miss this, we miss the calling God has placed upon believers.

Imagine if the apostles had responded differently. A legitimate need surfaces — widows going hungry — and the apostles, not wanting to seem uncaring, quietly absorb one more responsibility onto their own plates. Preaching, teaching, prayer, and now also food distribution. It would look generous. It would also eventually break them, and it would leave the one irreplaceable thing they were supposed to be doing undone.

Instead, they say something that takes real courage to say out loud: It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Not "we don't care about the widows." Not "this isn't important." Just an honest, clear-eyed refusal to let a genuinely good need pull them away from their actual calling. That's the difference between operating out of guilt and operating out of conviction. Guilt says yes to everything because saying no feels unloving. Conviction has done the harder work of figuring out we're responsible for, and says no to good things in order to remain faithful to the one thing they are called to do.

This is a skill most of us never develop, because saying no to a real, visible need feels selfish in the moment, even when it's the wiser and more loving choice long-term. Leaders say yes to every request because no feels like letting people down. The apostles model something different. They have a clear sense of calling followed immediately by action to meet the need a different way rather than ignoring it. Where is God calling you to put your gifts to work in ministry?

APPLICATION

- What spiritual gifts or talents has God given you?
- What ways can you use them for His glory?

PRAYER

Lord, give me clarity about what You've called me to that I can say no to good things and say yes to the best things. Show me where I can use my gifts for Your glory. Amen.

Full of the Spirit and of Wisdom

ACTS 6:3

"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."

REFLECTION

Look closely at the two qualifications the apostles ask for. Not just spiritual maturity or competence on its own, but both together: full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. One without the other falls short. A person could be deeply devout and still be a poor administrator who leaves people worse off through sheer disorganization. A person could be remarkably capable and efficient while running entirely on self-sufficiency with no real dependence on God at all. The apostles weren't willing to settle for either. They wanted people who were both spiritually credible and practically trustworthy.

That matters because it's easy to quietly rank these against each other, as though spiritual depth is the "real" qualification and competence is just a nice bonus — or the reverse, where we hand responsibility to whoever is most capable without asking whether they're walking with God. Scripture refuses that split. Serving tables wasn't a lesser, more mundane job handed to the spiritually unimpressive. It required people full of the Spirit, doing a task that mattered enough to be named, prayed over, and commissioned publicly.

Look who gets chosen. They are men drawn from within the affected community, familiar with the exact problem they're being asked to solve. The apostles don't appoint outsiders to manage a problem they don't understand from the inside. They raise up leaders who already know the people and the pain firsthand and then entrust real responsibility to them.

Wherever you carry responsibility — at home, at work, or in a ministry — are you bringing both halves to it? The spiritual depth and the practical wisdom? Wherever you have influence over who gets entrusted with something, are you looking first to people who are actually close to the problem?

APPLICATION

- In a responsibility you currently carry, are you stronger in spiritual depth or practical wisdom and which one do you need to grow in?
- Is there someone close to a problem in your life or church who should be trusted with more responsibility for it, rather than someone more distant making the calls?

PRAYER

Lord, make me full of your Spirit and full of wisdom not one without the other. Let my devotion to you show up in how faithfully and wisely I handle what's in front of me. Amen.

Devoted to the Word and Prayer

ACTS 6:4–5

"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering."

REFLECTION

This single verse is the apostles' answer to every pressure that could have pulled them off course, and it's worth memorizing: We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Not "we'll try to fit it in." Not "we'll get back to it once things calm down." Devote — a whole, settled, non-negotiable commitment. Whatever else grows, changes, or demands attention as the church expands, this is the one thing that was never going to be compromised.

It's worth asking why prayer and the word specifically. Because everything else in a Christian's life draws its life from these two things. Prayer is where dependence on God gets developed. The Word is what changes hearts and lives. Starve either one and a church or a person can still look busy and impressive from the outside while quietly running on empty underneath. The temptation in every generation of the church is the same. Trade the Word and prayer for activity that feels urgent and looks productive in the name of meeting real needs.

That's not just a leadership principle for pastors. It's a pattern for anyone who wants their life to have actual spiritual substance rather than the appearance of it. What would it mean for you, personally, to say: Whatever else competes for my time this year, I will devote myself to prayer and to the Word? This is the one thing that gets protected first rather than whatever's left over after everything else has taken its share. The gathering's response is worth noticing too. It pleased the whole gathering. A clear, unapologetic commitment to first things didn't divide the church. It reassured it.

APPLICATION

- What currently competes hardest for the time you'd otherwise give to prayer and Scripture?
- What would it look like, practically, for you to protect prayer and the word first in your day and week rather than fitting them in with whatever's left over?

PRAYER

Lord, I don't want prayer and your word to be what's left over after everything else. Help me devote myself to them first, and trust You with everything that competes for that place. Amen.

Praying in the Unseen Realm

ACTS 6:6

"These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them."

REFLECTION

It would have been easy to treat this step as purely administrative. Seven qualified men had been chosen; all that was left was to announce it and get them started serving. Instead, the church stops and prays over them, laying hands on them before they do anything else. Even the most practical, logistical decision this young church made gets bathed in prayer before it becomes action. Nothing in this community was treated as too ordinary to bring before God.

That's a quiet but important correction to how a lot of us instinctively divide our lives. We tend to reserve prayer for the parts of life that already feel spiritual — a worship service, a crisis, a big decision — and leave the rest to run on our own effort: our schedules, our parenting, our work, the ordinary logistics of a week. But this moment suggests a different posture. If even a practical administrative appointment was worth praying over and setting apart, then very little in your life is too mundane to bring before God.

This is especially true for the parts of your life you can't directly control like the heart of a child, the direction of a friend who's drifting, the outcome of a hard conversation you haven't had yet. Those things live in what you might call the unseen realm. They are places only God can reach no matter how good your plan is or how hard you try. The discipline of interceding in prayer for people is some of the most significant work a believer ever does.

So ask yourself plainly: What in your life right now have you been managing entirely on your own effort, without ever bringing it to God in prayer? Who do you need to be praying for?

APPLICATION

- What ordinary, practical part of your life have you never actually prayed over, because it didn't feel "spiritual" enough to bring to God? Pray for it.
- Who in your life needs you interceding for them right now? Pray for them.

PRAYER

Lord, let nothing in my life feel too ordinary to bring to You. Teach me to intercede for the people I love in the unseen realm, trusting You with what I cannot reach myself. Amen.

The Word Increased

ACTS 6:7

"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

REFLECTION

The church grew, in part, because of how it dealt with the issue with widows. They correctly diagnosed the issue, kept the priority of prayer and the Word, and raised up trustworthy people to carry real responsibility. Problems handled well, according to conviction rather than panic, became the very soil the next wave of growth came out of. The growth here is layered: the Word increased, which is depth; the disciples multiplied, which is breadth; and remarkably, a great many priests — religious insiders who had every institutional reason to resist this movement — became obedient to the faith. Even the hardest ground produced a harvest.

It's worth stepping back and looking at the whole arc this devotional has walked through. You fed your faith, taking God at his Word and taking your next step. You fought for fellowship, refusing to let a Christian life happen in isolation. You faced your fears, learning that boldness comes from proximity to Jesus, not personality. You funded the future, letting grace let go of your grip on what you own. This week, you've watched a church learn to grow in a way that doesn't quietly erode the one thing that was never meant to be negotiable: Devotion to prayer and the Word.

None of this was ever really about a first-century church in Jerusalem. Luke wrote this book so that every church, every family, and every believer after it would have a pattern to walk in. The problems you'll face as you keep moving forward — in your faith, your home, your work, whatever you're building — are not a sign you've gotten off track. They're usually a sign that something real is underway. Now that you know what it looks like to move forward, what's the next step you're going to take?

APPLICATION

- Looking back across this whole series, which week landed on you the hardest? What's the one concrete step you're taking because of it?
- What would it look like for "the Word of God to increase" in your own home this next year?

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for showing your church how to move forward — faith fed, fellowship fought for, fears faced, the future funded, and your Word and prayer never set aside. Keep me moving forward too. Amen.