

**MEN
LIKE
US**

ACTS

MEN'S SPRING SERIES 2023



MEN LIKE US: ACTS

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Table of Contents

Series Schedule.....	5
Introduction.....	6
One: The Historian.....	12
Two: The Builder.....	21
Three: The Encourager.....	31
Four: The Helper.....	39
Five: The Heir.....	48
Six: The Martyr.....	56
Conclusion.....	62
Group Contact Info.....	63
Group Prayer Requests.....	63
Notes.....	65

SERIES SCHEDULE

The Historian

Session One, February 28th: Church

Session Two, March 7th: Small Groups



The Builder

Session Three, March 14th: Church

Session Four, March 21st: Small Groups



The Encourager

Session Five, March 28th: Church

Session Six, April 4th: Small Groups



The Helper

Session Seven, April 11th: Church

Session Eight, April 18th: Small Groups



The Heir

Session Nine, April 25th: Church

Session Ten, May 2nd: Small Groups



The Martyr

Session Eleven, May 9th: Church

Session Twelve, May 16th: Small Groups

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

II Corinthians 4:7

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Roles

We will be looking at several spiritual roles we play in the life of the church. You will find that you take on each of these roles at certain points and in relation to certain people in your life. You may find one that is predominant for you but, in some way, each one speaks to our experience as Christian men. In order to see as much as possible in these roles, we will be looking at them through three lenses.

First Lens: Men Like Us

While we may be prone to see biblical people automatically as either heroes or villains, they are people. They have rich experiences and complex personalities. We need to see the men in Acts as real people who are not very different from us. This is the first lens we will use to see

these spiritual roles. Look for how these men fulfill these roles and what it means for you.

Here are some principles for studying biblical men in Acts:

- We look at biblical people to learn from them, but we look to the Holy Spirit to change us.
- We look at biblical people to see truth in action, but it is the Spirit that reveals truth to us.
- We look at biblical people as they rely on the Holy Spirit.

Second Lens: The Holy Spirit

Where the apostles interacted directly with Jesus, the men in Acts were led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His followers before this, in John 16:7, that it was to their advantage He go away, because if He did, He would send the Holy Spirit to them. This was so that they could carry on, and even expand on, Jesus' work in the world. In this study, you will need to look through the lives of the biblical men in Acts to better see the Holy Spirit. He is the real hero of the book and the orchestrator of the Church's work. We will be asking what we see of God the Holy Spirit and how He is empowering and guiding the men we read about.

Third Lens: The Great Commission

The book of Acts is a focused story. It does not tell us everything we want to know about life in the first century Church. Instead, Acts shows how the Great Commission began. Jesus left His disciples with final instructions to be His witnesses to the end of the earth and to make disciples from all ethnicities. We cannot ignore this when we study Acts – it is the point of the book, after all. When we look at the men of Acts through the lens of the Great Commission, we begin to see how God is placing us in different roles so that the Gospel will go out and God’s Kingdom will be furthered.

A Brief Overview of Acts

Acts begins with Jesus telling the disciples that the Holy Spirit will empower them and lead them to take the gospel message from Jerusalem to Samaria, Judea, and the rest of the world. The book is not an in-depth description of the early Church, telling us how we should worship together. Instead, the overall narrative of the book of Acts focuses on the expansion of the Church to the world – from Jews to Gentiles and from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts was written around 62 AD, covering the thirty years from Jesus to just before the death of Paul.

- ❖ Transition from the gospels (1)
 - Jesus promises the Holy Spirit and ascends to heaven.
- ❖ The Church is established at Jerusalem (2-8)
 - The Holy Spirit comes on the believers.
 - The Jerusalem church establishes worship and care for one another.
 - The apostles perform miracles.
 - Persecution of the church begins and the Stephen is martyred.
- ❖ The church expands beyond Jerusalem (8-12)
 - Philip shares the Gospel with Samaritans and an Ethiopian.
 - Saul encounters Jesus while persecuting the church.
 - Saul is converted and begins his ministry.
 - Peter performs miracles.
 - Peter leads a Roman soldier and his family to Christ.
 - Saul and Barnabas share the Gospel in Syria and Judea.
 - James is martyred and Peter is arrested and then freed from prison.
- ❖ The Gospel goes to the whole Mediterranean region (13-21)
 - Saul (now called Paul) and Barnabas travel from Syria around the Mediterranean, establishing churches.
 - The church has a debate on what Gentiles must do to be Christians.

- Paul and Barnabas separate ways. Paul takes Timothy and Silas on a tour of the Mediterranean, sharing the Gospel and visiting established churches.
- Paul again travels the Mediterranean.
- Apollos is discipled by Aquila and Priscilla.
- Paul spends three years at Ephesus and visits other areas, fundraising for the church at Jerusalem.
- Paul returns to Jerusalem where the Holy Spirit has told him he will be persecuted.
- ❖ Paul goes to Rome (21-28)
 - Paul is arrested in Jerusalem after Jewish leaders accuse him of heresy. He appeals to trial before the Roman emperor.
 - Paul is tried before regional rulers and shares the Gospel with them.
 - Paul is shipwrecked on the way to Rome.
 - In Rome, Paul spends three years under house arrest, sharing with visitors.

Study Format

Each week we will gather everyone together at the church for worship and teaching on the week's topic. Then read through that week's lesson on your own and write answers to the discussion questions. Be sure to actually write down answers since this will best engage you in what we are learning. Also, your group may not have time to go through every question each week. Answering all of them on your own will ensure that you get the most out of the study, no

matter what is covered in your small group. However, if you are unable to get to the homework one week, come to the group anyway.

Some weeks have more men than others. Do the questions for every section in the week's chapter.

There is a space at the end of this book for notes as well as prayer requests and contact info from your group. May you be a blessing to them and find ways to fulfill these spiritual roles in the life of your group.

SESSION ONE



A man who honors the story of the past to explain God's current work.

THEOPHILUS, LUKE, STEPHEN

Some men naturally enjoy studying history. You may think about how well you would fair in some historical war or admire craftsmanship from a time without modern technology. There is a draw to history – it captures our imaginations and molds the way we see our lives today. But history becomes a more powerful presence in our lives when it becomes personal. Your family heritage likely has a greater weight for you than history in general. If your father worked himself to the bone to build a small business that put food on your table, that may seem small in the grand scheme of world history, but holds a bigger place in your life than, say, the expedition of Lewis and Clark. When history becomes *my* story, it becomes vastly more powerful.

When history is shared, when *my* story becomes *our* story, it resonates even more. When you whisper to your wife, sibling, or a childhood friend, “Hey, remember when we...”, something profound happens. When we remember, hurt, fight, change, and move forward together, we are bound together for good or ill. When we look back together over the broad seasons of our lives, so that it seems like we have lived more than one life, we are shaped together by our history.

But for some, these experiences combine. For them, world history has become shared history. We might think of the way the Civil War is ever-present in the South, or the way the First World War is in Europe. When a single day’s drive can take someone to where their recent ancestors fought and died, when battle mounds and monuments are still present along roadsides, history remains part of the community. We might think of a shared love of a team – not only for what it is today, but for the shared memories of multiple generations of fans watching records made and legacies formed.

The Bible gives us a shared history. It tells us the story of God overcoming a world that fell away from its purpose. It tells of God forming a people for Himself from all the peoples of the world. Acts tells us our heritage as the Church – we are descended from apostles, prophets, and martyrs. We share common purpose with those who saw Jesus and experienced miracles of the Holy Spirit. The men of Acts are not fictional characters on a page, they are our spiritual ancestors.

The Historian

Historians understand the value of a shared story. In this role, men help others understand where we have come from so that we can know where we are going. Historians remind others of what God has done so that we can be thankful and trusting. They are familiar with the story God is writing. You find yourself in the role of the historian when you use your story, your family's heritage, your church's history, the Bible's narrative as a whole, or some other shared experience to help others understand their place in God's story.

Deuteronomy 32:7

Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been working in our world since creation (Gen. 1:2) and He lives in us (Rom. 8:11). God is the author of our story and lives in us. The Holy Spirit worked in the apostles so that they could remember the things Jesus had said and done (Jn. 14:26). God knew how important it was for them to carry the story forward. The Spirit also reveals what God is currently doing (I Cor. 2:13). Luke wrote his gospel and Acts after he collected the experiences of many who had seen the ministry of Jesus first-hand (Lk. 1:1-4).

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

The Great Commission

The gospel is, at its heart, a story. It is the story of how God set out to have a world full of people who shared in enjoying Him and loving one another. However, when people instead tried to replace God, He chose a single family to know Him again. He promised blessing to and through this family so that they would be the place all the world could come to experience Him. They would multiply so that the world would be full of those who knew God, as He originally intended. But they replaced this purpose with trying to be like all those who did not know God. So, God came to them to be rejected by them once again. In doing so, all the rejection they deserved in return for rejecting Him, was satisfied. God then told those who knew Him to begin again toward His purpose, now by multiplying followers who would love God and one another. In order to have a world full of these people, those who yet again reject God will be judged, removed, and punished so that all who remain will be worshipers forever.

By making the gospel story our story, we not only share history – we share purpose. We live at the most current sentence in the story God is writing. Our purpose is

found in the history of the men of Acts – to go and make disciples of all the peoples.

Theophilus



READ:

Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2

We do not know who Theophilus is, but there are a couple of leading possibilities. The name means “Lover of God” in Greek, so this may be a generic term that Luke is using for his Christian audience. But what is more likely in a first century context is that Theophilus is a wealthy person either interested in Christianity or wanting to promote understanding of the Christians. He may have commissioned Luke to write an account of Jesus’ life and of the Church’s growth. In this case, Theophilus sacrificed so that the story of what God was doing could be told. It is also possible that the book was commissioned as part of Paul’s legal defense while he was in Roman custody (this is how the book ends). If that is the case, Theophilus must have understood that to let people understand what God’s people are about, doctrine is not enough – the gospel is on display in real people’s lives.

I Thessalonians 2:8

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.



Discussion

1. *How much does the past matter to you? Does it shape how you see the present and future of what God is doing?*
2. *Are you able to share your story – with its highs and lows – to tell what God has done in you?*

Luke

Luke was not a first-hand witness to all of the things he wrote about. He worked as a journalist, gathering stories from the early church community to compile his account of Jesus' life (Lk. 1:1). He was a participant in Paul's travels, however. If you were to read through Acts, you would see him say "they" when he was not present, and "we" when he is recounting things which he saw himself. This means that Luke either labored in gather the story or labored in being part of it. Like Theophilus, Luke sacrificed to tell God's story. But while Theophilus may have sacrificed his money, Luke sacrificed much time and safety – God's story

mattered that much to him. Luke adopted the story God was writing – he became part of it even as he was telling it.

Hebrews 12:1

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,



3. *What is an area of your testimony that has been most helpful to others?*

4. *Telling God's story requires sacrifice. How hard is it for you to share what God has done in your life?*

5. *Telling God's story requires participation. Luke entered a story already having begun in the Church. Do you see the Church's story as your story?*

6. *Is there someone – a family member, coworker, or church member, perhaps – who could benefit from you being in the role of historian?*

Stephen



READ:
Acts 7

Stephen knew the story of the Israelites well. When he was accused of stirring up people against God (Acts 6:8-15), he responded by telling the Jews their history from Abraham to their day. He concluded that the Jews had corrupted the story – by crucifying Jesus, its hero. They had taken what God was doing and rejected it, thus rejecting their purpose. They failed to make God’s story their own. Stephen knew God’s purpose for His people, and he knew the cost of not being part of it. For Stephen, God’s story was His work of redemption, His method of calling people

The Historian

to Himself. God's story was so vital to Stephen that he died for telling it. Theophilus and Luke sacrificed certain things to tell the story, but Stephen sacrificed his life.

John 5:39

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,



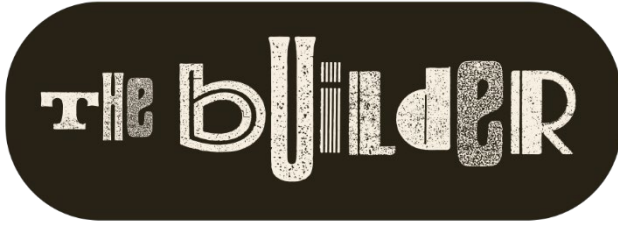
7. *How well do you know the Bible's story?*

8. *Is there someone you could help understand that God has a better story than the one they are writing for themselves?*

Other Verses for Historians

Dt. 4:9; 32:7 / I Chron. 12:32 / Ps. 45:17; 77:11 / Lk. 24:27 /
I Cor. 6:11 / Rev. 21:5-6

SESSION TWO



A man who lays a spiritual foundation for others.

**PETER, JAMES, JOHN, PHILIP, AQUILA,
PAUL**

Last time we looked at the role of the historian. The historian serves others by looking back and relating what God has done. In this session, we are looking at the builder. A builder looks forward to advance what God is doing. We will divide the six men of this session into two categories of builder – those who stay and build and those who go and build. Peter, James, and John worked in Jerusalem for years, while Philip, Paul, and Aquila took the gospel to new places.

Most men love to build and advance something. We expand, design, customize, tweak, tear down, re-arrange, and move on to build something else. This may be in backyards, garages, in video games, at work. In the role of builder, men reflect the heart of God who designed the

world. In fact, the first command God gave was a statement of purpose: “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:22). Man was meant to carry on God’s creation work by expanding the order of Eden and the relationship people had with God.

While men have an innate love for building, the role of the builder we are concerned with is one in which we lay a spiritual foundation in the lives of others. This is never a short-term role. Building, especially spiritually, takes time. Perhaps you don’t immediately think of yourself as having this role. You may not be in some official ministry position, but as a believer, you have already – or will – fulfil the role of builder in someone’s life. This is far more mysterious and daunting to us than building retaining walls or slide decks. Building spiritually is a great weight and challenge, but it is our purpose and privilege. As men, we disciple others to follow Jesus with us, cultivate our families to know the Lord, and move our church toward its mission.

You find yourself in the role of the builder when a person or group in your life needs you to use strategy and measurables to help them grow. It is in the relationships in which you help teach and spur others on to growth in Christ. The builder role as seen in the men of Acts is one of spiritual development.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit created the world along with the Father and Son (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4, 26:13). God is a master builder and His men are made in His image. Not only that –

The Builder

we have the Holy Spirit within us, forming the mind of Christ in us (I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5). The Spirit is also the Builder of the Church. When we look at its formation in the book of Acts, we see a community that only God could build. His methods, such as poverty and persecution, missions and miracles, are not what we might have used, but we learn their place in forming the Church.

The Spirit may have you stay and build in one place, like Peter, James, and John. But the Spirit also sends us. The word for “spirit” in the Greek of the New Testament is the same word for “wind”. The Holy Spirit’s work seems to blow the men of Acts along from this place to that purpose – at first glance almost randomly, but when we stand at the end of the book, we see His grand design (see John 3:8). The Spirit blows the builders where He needs them to be – Philip to Samaritans and an Ethiopian, Paul around the Mediterranean and finally to Rome.

Of all the roles we will look at, this one will be the most daunting and elusive for many. Spiritual growth comes with many questions and trials – progress is slow and non-linear. It makes us want to go back to building only retaining walls. But this is a role all men have as part of our families and church. We rely desperately on the Holy Spirit to guide us in helping build spiritually. He has put you in the lives of others often to fulfill this role so that they can know God better and grow in Him – that is how the Church is built up as the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Great Commission

The last thing Jesus commanded His followers to do was to go and make disciples of all nations. Builders work through practical and spiritual means not to have better lives or better churches only, but to make disciples of Jesus around the world. The builder role requires a focus on strategies, structures, and mission. A builder in the Church is thus focused on the Church's mission – to call the world to Jesus.

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.”

Peter, James, and John



READ :

3:1-10; 4:1-8; 5:12-16; 6:1-7

Our first three men, Peter, James, and John, stayed in Jerusalem to build and maintain the church there and to provide leadership to the growing churches in the surrounding regions. Sometimes fulfilling the role of a builder means we stay somewhere for a long time. This may

The Builder

be in someone's life or in a particular geographical area. However, Peter, James, and John do not stay to themselves. They go to those outside the Jerusalem church, especially with Peter going across religious and cultural boundaries to evangelize Cornelius (Ch. 10).

These men experienced the miraculous guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to overcome frightening barriers to building the Church. They would have remembered watching Jesus minister. He had led them to difficult places on a regular basis. He taught them what His Kingdom was about – now they were experiencing the heady early days of the Church as they carried on Jesus' life.

1 Corinthians 14:12

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.



- 1. What do you do – or could start doing – to be more built up by the Spirit?*

The Builder

2. *Is there someone in your life you already or could start - discipling, helping them follow Jesus along with you?*

3. *How much does fear or uncertainty keep you from building others up spiritually?*

Philip and Aquila



READ :

8:4-8; 26-40; 6:5; 21:8-9; 18:2-3; 18:24-28

Philip was one of the men appointed to make sure widows who were culturally Greek were taken care of. This meant that he was a spiritual builder in the realm of justice and service. While the apostles worked to build by teaching, training, and overseeing, men like Philip worked on the ground-level to ensure the gospel message was a tangible reality in the Jerusalem church. Being a builder can and should look differently for different people and situations.

The Builder

Philip also knew that in order to build the church, he needed to go out to others. He was the first to take seriously Jesus' command to go to the Samaritans. He helped a curious Ethiopian resolve his questions in Jesus. Philip was faithful to his local duties but was ready and willing to go where the Lord led him.

Later in the book, and several decades later in history, we see Philip again. He is still in Jerusalem and his daughters exercise the gift of prophecy. This is not to say that Philip was washed up or that he had retired as a church-builder who had given away his role. It means that Philip passed the role on to share it with others. Having children who actively follow the Lord is no small thing. It comes from the Spirit working in the child, the parent working with the child, and the child being willing to participate in God's will for their life. Having daughters who spoke miraculously for the Lord shows that Philip knew not only the need to go to unbelievers or to labor in the church, but to build at home. This is the most vital – and in many ways the most difficult – place to fulfill the role of a spiritual builder.

Aquila was a supporter of Paul who worked with him making tents to sell. Later, he helped a gifted and prominent speaker more fully understand the gospel. Aquila fulfilled the role of builder similarly to Philip. Both labored in practical ways for the spiritual good of the church. Both also built with their families. Aquila is always mentioned along with his wife, Priscilla. We do not know much about this man but he is clearly a man who built in

The Builder

his family so that his marriage was a source of ministry. He was nowhere near as prominent or eloquent as Apollos – yet it was Aquila who God used to teach and correct. Do not discount your builder role in your marriage, work, and small areas of influence.

Ephesians 4:16

from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.



4. *How do you need to spiritually build up your family? If your family does not welcome this, what will you do?*

5. *What are your strengths or styles that will help you build up others and the church?*

6. *What do you do that builds the church, even if it appears to be insignificant?*

Paul



READ :
20:17-38

The first twelve chapters of Acts focus primarily on the establishment of the Church in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. Peter is the most prominent person of this first section of the book. After Chapter 13, the focus shifts to Paul and how he took the gospel around the Mediterranean. Because Paul is such a powerful presence in the book, we cannot spend an appropriate amount of time looking at his ministry. Instead, we can use the passage above as a microcosm of Paul's role as a builder.

In Acts 20:17-38 Paul is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders after having lived with them for about three years. He was willing to go across culture to build the Church. He was willing to stay when he needed to stay and go when he needed to go. He had thoroughly taught the Ephesians and now it was time to hand things over to them. Paul was clear that they would not see him again – he knew his life would not be long enough for that. He was willing to sacrifice and face fear and danger in order to be a builder of the church.

II Timothy 2:2

and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

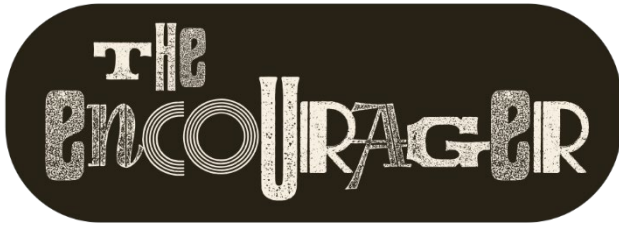


7. *Are you willing to sacrifice to build something for the Lord? What might it cost you?*

Other Verses for Builders

Acts 20:32 / Rom. 14:19; 15:2 / I Cor. 10:23 / Eph. 2:10-22;
4:29 / II Pt. 1:5-8 / Jude 20

SESSION THREE



A man who comes to the aid of another in distress to give them spiritual strength.

BARNABAS AND ANANIAS

Men like to know their place. We pay attention to rankings – at work, in sports, in our families. We want to “level up” – to be respected for our experience and accomplishments. Knowing our place gives our world structure and clarity. But men’s focus on our place can mean that we are competitive in places where competition does not belong. Men compete with their fathers, sometimes vicariously by competing with their sons. Fathers often try to make sure their sons know their place, rather than helping them find their place. Managers often dislike true success in those under their leadership because it is threatening. Rankings and competition work in sports

The Encourager

– but they must be shaped by God when they are brought into relationships.

Men are more fragile and yet stronger than they often think. Men's sense of self can be stripped away like flaking paint, regardless of how we carry ourselves in front of the world. But men also can endure great hardship - they do so best by enduring together. Men are strongest on teams, in military units, in ministry together, and in families. Men are designed to encourage one another.

Encouraging in the Bible means two primary things. First, to exhort, which is vision-casting wrapped in confrontation. Exhortation is spurring someone on to something higher. Second, encouragement means to give courage and comfort. In other words, encouragement tells someone what they can be and gives them the strength to get there.

The role of an encourager is not to compete but to call. An encourager calls forth what God has planted in a person. This may be over a great amount of time – like cultivating a seed to grow - or quickly – like fanning a spark into flame. Some men are better than others at taking on the role of an encourager, but it is a role we are all called to fulfill in someone's life. As a man, you need encouragement, and you need to give encouragement. When you do, you are fulfilling a part of your biblical purpose for the good of others. Do not underestimate the effect your encouragement will have.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

When Jesus left to prepare a place for us in heaven, He gave us the Holy Spirit to live in us. Jesus called the Holy Spirit “another Helper” and “the Comforter” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). These terms are both attempts to translate into English a Greek word meaning, “one who comes alongside.” Where Jesus was our first Helper, our Servant who came to care for the poor and powerless, the Spirit is a Helper who will be with and in us always. He is our Comforter, our Encourager. Acts 9:31 says that the Church throughout Israel and Samaria multiplied as it walked in both the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. We are only able to truly fulfill the role of an encouraging man when we allow the Comforter to give us the strength, exhortation, and calling we need. Then we are able to encourage others.

The Great Commission

God’s mission for us is not easy and cannot be accomplished alone. Whether one is a professional missionary like we see in Acts, or a Christian of any profession who is intentional about evangelism, we need encouragement. Carrying the gospel to new places and people is confusing, discouraging, and frustrating. Encouragers keep the mechanisms of the Church greased so that things do not grind to a halt. As an encourager, you play a vital part in helping others find Jesus.

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.



Barnabas



READ :

4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:21-26; 14:12; 15:36-41

Barnabas was the kind of person whose nickname essentially became their actual name. His real name was Joseph, but that did not capture who he was. “Barnabas” means, “Son of Encouragement” and he displays this throughout Acts. He sold a field and donated the money to the Jerusalem church to be part of the work of God there. He was the only one who got to know and trust Paul enough to be his “sponsor” and bring him into the church community when everyone else thought Paul was there to harm them. When the Spirit and the elders at Antioch sent a missionary team to the Gentiles, Barnabas was chosen. When Barnabas’ nephew deserted him and Paul on another journey, Barnabas was adamant that he be given a second chance.

When we look at the arc of Barnabas and Paul’s working relationship, we see Barnabas coming alongside Paul to support him as he entered the church at first. Then

The Encourager

on their first journey, Barnabas' name is always listed first so that he was the primary leader. Paul, however, had the greater gift of speaking (14:12). By the time of their second trip, Paul's name is always mentioned first. Barnabas was not the kind of person who permanently holds the role of a leader – but he was always an encourager. He was at his best when he came alongside someone else. The rift between him and Paul was not about Paul's growing role as leader, it was about Paul not having the same encouraging heart for a weaker man.

Matthew 12:19-20

He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory;



1. *Who in your life most needs you to be an encourager?
What can you do to encourage them?*

The Encourager

2. *Barnabas did not only encourage with words, but he also got personally involved in God's work. How do you, or could you, be an encouragement through your efforts?*

3. *How do you treat those who have failed you?*

Ananias



Read:

9:1-19

We do not know much about this Ananias. Bear in mind that he is not the same as the one struck dead with his wife. We see only this small portion of his life, and it is all centered around Paul. Ananias was instructed by the Holy Spirit to go to Paul and lay his hands on him so that Paul would regain his sight. God told Ananias that along with telling Paul that Ananias would come, He had shown Paul all the things Paul would accomplish and suffer for the Lord.

There was understandable fear and trepidation on Ananias' part. Paul was an infamous persecutor of the Church and now he was blinded and bewildered. It must

The Encourager

have seemed like approaching a wounded animal, but Ananias went anyway. He immediately called Paul, “Brother.” It is likely that he brought Paul to the church in Damascus (9:19). Ananias was Paul’s first encourager, and he could not then have fully known the impact he indirectly had on the Kingdom of God.

Philippians 2:1-4

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.



4. *Who was one of your early encouragers in the Lord? Contact them this week if you can and encourage them back.*

5. *What is your attitude toward people who are in some way undesirable? Can you get personally involved in their lives?*

The Encourager

6. *How ready are you to be “second fiddle” to someone else?*

Other Verses for the Encourager

II Cor. 2:5-7 / Gal. 6:1 / Eph. 6:4 / Col. 2:1-2 / I Thess. 5:11,
14 / II Tim. 4:2

SESSION FOUR



A man who participates in practical ways to make spiritual work fruitful.

SEVEN SERVANTS, JASON, JOHN MARK

P residents have speech writers, sports teams have waterboys, special forces have logistics coordinators, law enforcement has data analysts. Absolutely any visible and successful person has others around them in supporting roles. The spread of the gospel is no different.

Most men find themselves in the role of a helper – whether at home, at work, at church, or all three. Of the roles we examine in this study, this is one of the most common. It is crucial that we understand the role of a helper as a spiritual role, not as a physical role only. In fact, for a believer, everything is spiritual. The spirituality depends on the worker, not on the work. For instance, if a non-believing contractor is hired to do construction on a church, he is not doing spiritual work. But a believing

The Helper

contractor working on an office building is. When we do “practical” things unto the Lord, we do spiritual work. However, not all spiritual work is the same. While a believer may glorify God through work, its highest end is to see God glorified in the world. The helper role, as highlighted in Acts, is about building the Kingdom of God.

This role is ubiquitous in the book of Acts – nearly every believer we meet in the book is part of God’s work. We will look at just a small group of these men who exemplify the role of a helper.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is called our Helper (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). Throughout the book of Acts, He is always there – beside, in, and among the believers. The Spirit works under the surface to guide and empower His people. The fact that the Spirit fulfills the role of helper shows that this is not a minor or disrespected role. If God Himself serves as a helper, supporting is a noble – actually a divine – task.

We need the Spirit’s help, just as the first century Church did. We also need Him to send us to those in need of Jesus. The Holy Spirit’s power involves a centrifugal force, propelling us out of our comfort zone and into the world.

The Great Commission

Church is not a matter of only reading the Bible, praying, and singing. It involves innumerable acts of

The Helper

service. The work that drives the Great Commission may appear mundane, like Paul manufacturing tents, but is all part of a system of evangelism. Don't discount what you might do to help others advance the gospel or how God uses you to care for those in the church.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Seven Servants



READ :
6:1-7

This section is often cited as the earliest formation of a team of deacons, but the word “deacon” is not specifically used here. “Deacon” means a number of different things in different churches, so we will call these men the “Seven Servants”. They were specifically chosen for their good reputation, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and wisdom

The Helper

(6:3). Based on their names, they are culturally closer to the Hellenized widows they served than the traditionally Jewish members of the church. These widows were Jews who were culturally closer to the Greeks, and likely did not speak the same language as the local believers. It is possible that some were Gentile converts to Christianity. The Seven Servants worked hard to ensure that the gospel was embodied in the daily life of the Jerusalem church. They took care of vulnerable widows who were suffering cultural discrimination on top of all that losing their husbands meant in the first century – a loss of provision and honor.

These Seven Servants also allowed the apostles to attend to teaching. Their work therefore both directly and indirectly benefited the whole church. These men fulfilled a vital servant-leadership role that made life livable for the vulnerable. Without men fulfilling the role of helpers, the gospel would be a nice idea on paper but not the lived reality God designed it to be.

The Helper

Luke 22:27

For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.



1. *Do you see your practical work as spiritual worship?*
2. *Who is a vulnerable person or group that God has put on your heart? What could you do for them this year?*

Jason



READ :

17:1-9

Jason enters and exits the text of Acts rather quickly. He was a wealthy man living in the city of Thessalonica who hosted Paul's missionary group in his home for three weeks. It is not clear if Jason had been a Christian prior to

The Helper

Paul's arrival or if he was a very recent convert in the city. Either way, Jason immediately took a supporting role in Paul's ministry. At first, he simply opened his home. Having people in one's home for three weeks could be a stretch for anyone, but Jason's hospitality came with a much greater price than dirty dishes. As the Jews became increasingly upset with Paul's evangelism, they formed a mob and attacked Jason's house. He was forced to pay them off – or rather to post a sort of bail for Paul and his team that Jason would forfeit if they continued to minister in Thessalonica. Whether it is dangerous and expensive or not, helping others spread the gospel always gets us in deeper than we expected.

II Corinthians 9:11

*You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way,
which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.*



3. *How are you best able to help others through generosity or hospitality?*

4. *How much has being a helper cost you? Have you had to sacrifice anything for the gospel?*

John Mark



READ :

12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-41; Col. 4:10-11; II Tim. 4:11

Church history says that John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. Whether or not this is the case, he is best known as the man who left Paul and Barnabas to return home early from a missionary journey. The Bible does not tell us why he left – it must not be important. Regardless, Paul saw this as cause to never trust John Mark again, while Barnabas wanted to give him a second opportunity. It is possible that if you knew why John Mark left you would find it unacceptable and side with Paul. It is also possible that you would find it totally reasonable and side with Barnabas.

John Mark was likely ashamed of himself or angry at Paul's hard line, or both. Either way, he was a man who had been labelled as useless due to his own behavior. For a man, one of the most soul-destroying self-images is that of being useless. We are built for purpose and must not let fear, failure, or the opinions of others steal that from us. John Mark found other avenues of being useful and this rebuilt or reconfirmed his faithfulness.

The Helper

We need to look outside Acts to Paul's letter to the Colossians to see how John Mark's story concluded. Paul commended John Mark to the Colossians and lists him among other men who comforted Paul and were his fellow-workers. Paul's last letter before he was executed was II Timothy. Here at the end of his life Paul again asked that John Mark be brought to him because he was helpful.

II Timothy 2:21

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.



1. *What holds you back from your potential to be helpful?*

2. *You have almost certainly been labelled as “useless” or at least “unhelpful” at some point. How did -or can- you find new ways to be useful?*

The Helper

Other Verses for the Helper

*Prov. 22:9 / Ecc. 2:4 / Matt. 23:11 / Rom. 12:1-8 / I Cor. 3:13 /
12:1-31 / Phil. 2:4*

SESSION FIVE



A man who takes up the torch of the gospel for the next generation.

TIMOTHY, SILAS, EPHESIAN ELDERS

When we looked at the role of the historian, we saw that the story told across Scripture is our shared story. The gospel is transferred from culture to culture, from generation to generation. Some have said that the Church is always one generation away from extinction. This is true in the sense that the gospel must be continually passed on to each successive generation. Each child must find faith in Christ for themselves. But it is not true in the sense that the Church is always in jeopardy of disappearing. We know from prophecy that the Church will continue into the end times. While it is passed on to each generation, it must also be taken up by each generation. It is not only the children of believers who must take up the mantle of the gospel. It is also received by those who begin

to follow Jesus later in life, often with no Christian parents to learn from. The churches in the book of Acts included both of these, but mostly the latter. Nearly all adult Christians were the first Christians in their families. But they still inherited the gospel. They took up the role of builders and leaders, often with very little training from church planters like Paul.

The gospel never changes yet it is always being lived afresh. As culture changes, the Church will change. It responds in new ways to its world and expresses the gospel in new ways. Each generation gets to experience the gospel anew. In other words, the gospel stays the same while the church can and should change.

The first century church took the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. They navigated the shift from a Jewish church to a Gentile church, the earliest heresies, and the growing threat from persecutors. The challenges of passing the church from generation to generation is nothing new – it has been the perennial difficulty since the Church's beginning. Remember that your heritage is in the history of the Church. We are descended from missionaries and martyrs, from the wise and the wayward. God will continue to pass on His gospel – the heir takes it up and moves it forward.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

As Jesus was concluding His ministry, He told His disciples that it was better for them that He go away because He would send them the Holy Spirit instead (Jn. 16:7). The Spirit, in this sense, inherited Jesus' ministry. Because He lives in the believers, we inherit Jesus' ministry through the Spirit. Jesus said that His followers would do greater things than they saw Him do (Jn. 14:12). Whereas Jesus was in one place at one time, was external to the disciples, and took the gospel primarily to Jews within Israel, the Church expanded around the Mediterranean, has the Holy Spirit within them, and took the gospel to the Gentiles. If the Spirit is the heir of Jesus' ministry, the Church is as well.

The Great Commission

We do not take ownership of the gospel only to keep it for ourselves. As each generation inherits the Church, it also inherits the Church's mission. We bear the same responsibilities as the Apostles – to invite all nations into the Kingdom of God. You stand in a two-thousand year line of believers who all share a common core purpose – will you step into it?

Ephesians 3:21

to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



Timothy and Silas



READ :

16:1-5; 17:14; II Tim. 1:5-7; I Cor. 14:7; I Thess. 1:1

To look at Timothy and Silas, we have to bring in a few verses that fall outside the book of Acts, but when we do we get a fuller picture of these men. Silas served as an emissary of the Council of Jerusalem before Paul took him on as a partner to replace Barnabas (Ch. 15). Together they found and brought on Timothy (16:1-5).

Silas served and suffered with Paul as he learned what it was to be a church planter. Timothy had a Christian mother and grandmother who taught him the Scriptures. He was half Jewish and half Greek and, in order to reach Jews with the gospel, was willing to be circumcised as an adult. Both these men were willing to suffer to inherit Paul's work of evangelism. They were no passive trust fund kids; they actively took hold of their role as heirs and the difficulties that came with it.

The Heir

I Thessalonians 1:1 tells us who wrote this book of the Bible. We almost always say that it is by Paul, but this reduces the picture of Silas and Timothy as heirs of Paul's work. All three men are listed as the authors of the book ("Silvanus" is Silas). This says not only that the younger men were willing to participate in the work Paul had begun, but it also says that Paul was willing to make them an equal part of his ministry. Whether you find yourself more as the first generation or more as the second, passing on the gospel is a two-sided endeavor. You may need to take up responsibility or you may need to release it. Both are vital to the role of an heir.

II Timothy 3:14-15

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.



1. *Did you grow up with Christianity? How did your faith become your own?*

The Heir

2. *What are things from our Christian heritage that you appreciate? What do you hope to change? This could be within your family, church, or larger Christian society and history.*
3. *What has your experience passing on wisdom and responsibility to the next generation?*
4. *Who is someone you could do this with?*

Ephesian Elders



READ :
20:17-38

We have read this passage before when we looked at Paul as a builder. We can also look at it from the perspective of the Ephesian elders. These were not a collection of elders from a single church, but a gathering of

leaders from multiple churches around the Ephesus region. Before this scene, Paul had spent about two or three years with them, teaching them the gospel day-in-and-day-out.

Paul told them, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (32). They had inherited the gospel from the Jews, and then Paul’s ministry as a church builder. It was now their time to grow without Paul’s leadership so that their churches could thrive in the face of challenges.

Paul was visiting them again on his way back to Jerusalem where he knew he would be arrested. Paul warns the Ephesians that they will also face difficulties in their future. “Wolves” would come among them and create chaos (29). In order to build on Paul’s foundation, the Ephesians would need to be on their guard and stay true to the gospel.

5. *Looking back at those who have come before you in the faith - whether from the Bible, Church history, or in your life - what challenges did they face that you could learn from?*

The Heir

6. *What big challenges do you see the Church – including you – needing to take on going forward?*

Other Verses for the Heir

Rom. 8:15-18 / Heb. 11:1-12:1 / I Jn. 2:24 / II Jn. 1:4-8 / Rev. 21:7

SESSION SIX



A man who dies to self and fear because of his gospel convictions.

STEPHEN, JAMES, PETER, PAUL

Acts describes a great deal of suffering by the Christians, from imprisonment to displacement to shipwreck to execution. This section will not cover all the instances in Acts of suffering for the Lord, instead we will look at four men who were killed for Christ. The deaths of the first two are described in the book, and the second two are recorded in extrabiblical Church tradition. We will look at them all together, rather than as individuals.

The persecution of the Church is not a matter of ancient history – it is in fact much worse today. More than

The Martyr

360 million Christians suffer heavy persecution, one seventh of Christians worldwide. An average of thirteen believers are killed each day for their faith.¹ You are very unlikely to play the role of a martyr in this sense, but that does not mean you won't suffer for the gospel.

Perhaps you have been mocked, ostracized, lost job opportunities, or something else for following the Lord. We should be very careful not to equate this level of suffering with the high-intensity persecution of our global siblings. But we should also see our suffering for what it is: a chance to participate in Christ's sufferings for us (Col. 1:24), be blessed in Christ (I Pt. 4:14), and be bound to our spiritual brethren (Heb. 13:3).

Men are adept at suffering. We know it as a strange sort of beauty. We desire to live sacrificial lives of meaning and courage. Men suffer to strengthen their bodies, their resums, and their possessions, but Christian men are called to suffer to advance the gospel. Will you?

The Role of the Holy Spirit

While the world may seek to kill off God's people, the Holy Spirit gives life (Jn. 6:63). This is not only physical life and safety – after all, God allows our deaths – but the spiritual/eternal life that takes away the fear of death. Since the Spirit, as God, was part of raising Jesus from the

¹ The Open Doors World Watch List Report, 2023

The Martyr

dead (Rom. 8:11), so we have confidence that death cannot hold the believer down (I Cor. 15:26; Jn. 14:19; Col. 2:12).

The Holy Spirit remains with the Church forever, even living inside us (Jn. 14:16-17). He is the Church's comforter in times of fear and suffering (Acts 9:31; Rom. 15:13).

The Greek origination of the word, "martyr" means "witness". Martyrs hold to their accounts of what they had witnessed Christ do and are killed for it. Their deaths become a witness to the world of the power of God in someone's life. Likewise, the Bible uses this same word of the Holy Spirit, saying that He bears witness to us of God's covenant commitment to us (Heb. 10:15).

The Great Commission

Tertullian (155-220 AD) said, "The Blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Christianity is flourishing in countries like China and Iran, where it is heavily persecuted. Persecution was the first catalyst to spread the believers out from Jerusalem and it continues to be a source of expanding witness today. It is impossible to deny the power behind a faith that would go to prison or the grave declaring Jesus to be the Way. Let us remember that while we often look at Christians in other countries as "the wrong kind of Christian" because they are not of our style or all our particular shades of theology, they prove their devotion to Christ in ways we do not.

Hebrews 11:37-38

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.



READ :

7:54-60; 12:1-5; 14:19-23; 16:25; II Cor. 11:24-33

Stephen was stoned to death by a Jewish mob. James was stabbed. History tells us that Peter was crucified upside down and Paul was beheaded. The other apostles were killed as well. Only John survived to old age after surviving attempted execution and exile.

Jesus said that those who follow Him will suffer and He specifically warned these men that they would face particular pain. But they knew they carried the truth. It could only die with them if they denied it or failed to pass it on. In fact, the persecution of the Church has always led to its growth. Stephen, James, Peter, and Paul ended their lives witnessing to the truth of the life-giving gospel.

The Martyr

Acts 14:21-22

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.



1. *Have you suffered for your faith in any way? How?*

2. *How do you believe you would respond if you were heavily persecuted?*

3. *What makes believers ready to face danger and suffering?*

This week, go to one of these websites and find a way to learn, pray, or donate to support persecuted believers:

persecution.com opendoorsus.org persecution.com

The Martyr

Other Verses for the Martyr

Is. 53:7 / Ps. 69:26 / Matt. 5:10-12 / Jn. 15:20 / II Cor. 4:7-12
/ Rev. 2:10

CONCLUSION

1. Now that we are at the close of the study, what is the primary role you need to embrace at this point of your life?
2. What is the most important action you will take to live out your role going forward?
3. Who in your group do you most need to keep connected with after this series?

Small Group Names and Contact Info

Small Group Prayer Requests

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