



STUDY GUIDE
St John's Southbourne

THE GOOD NEWS GOING OUT TO ALL THE WORLD

We're picking up the story of Acts in 6, as the early church grows and enjoys seeing the Lord at work. At the same time, this growth leads to challenges and persecution. Despite this, or perhaps even because of it, the good news of Jesus as the risen Lord starts to head out further afield. Just as Jesus had said, his disciples would be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

We are the beneficiaries of that mission, and we are also called to play our part. This series will be very applicable to us, even across the time and distance since these events. As the same Spirit of God that empowered their witness, will empower ours too when we ask him.

NOTES ON SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are a great opportunity to encourage one another. Hopefully they are times when God is at work and people feel valued, listened to and open to the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. These questions offer a framework for discussion but please feel free to explore and develop your own discussions on God's word.

My suggestion is that you begin each week with time for one another before getting into the Bible - find out how people are, what's God been speaking to you recently, what have you found encouraging or challenging - those sorts of things. Then after reading and discussing what God's saying through his word, it would be good to pray together. You might like to use worship music, quiet times, and other ways to respond.

Please make time to enjoy spending time together, and enjoy!

FURTHER READING TO DIG DEEPER

- The Message of Acts, John Stott (Bible Speaks Today)
- Acts 1-12 for you, R. Albert Mohler
- Online with videos: <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-acts/>

12/04/26 | Acts 6:1–7: The Choosing of the Seven

Context:

As the early church grows, it faces its first major internal cultural conflict, leading to the appointment of the first deacons to ensure no one is overlooked.

Discussion Starters:

- Who were the two groups mentioned (v. 1), and what was the root cause of the complaint?
- Why did the Apostles believe it was wrong for them to 'neglect the ministry of the word' to serve tables?
- Look at the criteria in v. 3. Why are 'wisdom' and being 'full of the Spirit' necessary for practical administration?
- How did the whole community participate in the process of choosing these leaders?
- Verse 7 shows the outcome. Is there a relationship between healthy internal administration and effective outward mission? Have you heard of the 'Trellis and the Vine'?
- How do we sometimes separate 'spiritual' work from 'practical' work? How does this passage challenge that divide?
- Do you see your service as facilitating others to serve and grow?
- How can we better support those who do the 'table-serving' (logistics, cleaning, finance, etc) ministries in our congregation?
- What does 'being full of the Spirit' look like in a finance meeting or a practical planning session?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for the logistics and administration of the church, asking for Spirit-led wisdom in every practical task.

19/04/26 | Acts 6:8–15, 7:48–8:1: The Stoning of Stephen

Context:

Stephen, full of grace and power, faces intense opposition as he challenges the religious establishment and their misunderstanding of God's presence with his people through their history.

Discussion Starters:

- What made Stephen such a threat to the religious leaders (6:8–10)?
- How did the opposition respond when they couldn't win the argument (6:11–14)?
- Stephen argues that the 'Most High does not live in houses made by human hands' (7:48). Why was this so revolutionary and offensive to his hearers?
- In his final moments, Stephen sees Jesus 'standing' at the right hand of God. What might be the significance of this vision?
- How does Stephen's prayer for his executioners (7:60) echo Jesus?
- Why is it often 'good' people who find the gospel of grace most offensive?
- How do God's Word and Spirit sustain us when we face opposition for our faith?
- Do we sometimes try to 'tame' God by confining Him to our buildings or traditions?
- How does the introduction of Saul at the end of this passage (8:1) give us hope for the people we find most difficult today?
- What does 'success' in ministry look like based on Stephen's life?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for the courage to speak the truth in love and for the grace to hold no bitterness toward those who oppose the faith.

26/04/26 | Acts 8:1b–8: Church Persecuted and Powerful

Context:

A wave of persecution attempts to crush the church but inadvertently serves as the catalyst for the Gospel to reach new territories.

Discussion Starters:

- Persecution broke out 'on that day.' How did the believers respond to being scattered (v. 4)?
- Why is Philip's choice to go to Samaria (v. 5) a major milestone in the book of Acts?
- What accompanied Philip's preaching (v. 7), and why were these signs important in a city like Samaria?
- Verse 8 says there was 'great joy in that city.' What was the source of that joy?
- How does this passage demonstrate God's sovereignty over evil (persecution)?
- If our church was 'scattered' today, would the Gospel continue to spread through our individual conversations?
- Have you ever experienced a 'forced change' (job loss, move) that ended up being a new opportunity to serve the Lord?
- Who are the 'Samaritans' in our society—groups of people we might instinctively avoid or judge?
- How can we cultivate 'great joy' in Southbourne through our collective witness?
- What does it look like to 'preach the word wherever we go'?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for those who are currently displaced or suffering, asking God to turn their hardship into a platform for His grace.

03/05/26 | Acts 8:9–25: Simon the Sorcerer

Context:

In Samaria, the Gospel clashes with the occult power of Simon, exposing the difference between seeking power for oneself and receiving it as a gift from God.

Discussion Starters:

- How did Simon influence the city before Philip arrived, and how did the people view him?
- What was the difference between the 'amazement' Simon caused and the 'belief' the Gospel produced?
- Why did Peter and John travel from Jerusalem to Samaria (vv. 14–15)?
- What was Simon's fundamental error in wanting to 'buy' the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- Peter tells Simon his heart is 'not right before God.' What defines a 'right heart' in this context?
- Why is it dangerous to view spiritual gifts or church roles as tools for personal status?
- Have we ever tried to 'bargain' with God (e.g., 'If I do this, God will do that')?
- How do we distinguish between true spiritual power and impressive human talent in the church?
- Simon asked Peter to pray for him (v. 24). Do you think his response was genuine repentance or just fear of consequences?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for humility and pure motives in all we do, asking God to root out any desire for self-exaltation in our service.

10/05/26 | Acts 8:26–40: Philip and the Ethiopian

Context:

The Spirit leads Philip from a crowded revival to a lonely desert road to meet a single high-ranking official seeking the truth.

Discussion Starters:

- Philip leaves a successful ministry to go to a 'desert road.' What does this teach us about the nature of obedience?
- Who was the Ethiopian eunuch, and why would he have been an 'outsider' to the Jewish faith?
- What was the man reading, and why was it the perfect starting point for Philip?
- Why did Philip 'start at that very passage' (Isaiah 53) to preach Jesus?
- What does the Ethiopian's immediate request for baptism tell us about his heart?
- Philip 'found himself at Azotus' (v. 40). How comfortable are we with God's 'sudden' changes to our plans or locations?
- How can we become more sensitive to the 'prompts' of the Holy Spirit to speak to individuals in our day-to-day life?
- Who are the 'seekers' you might know—people who might be reading or listening but need someone to 'explain it to them'?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for 'divine appointments' this week—for the eyes to see and the courage to follow where God is leading.

24/05/26 | Acts 9:1–19a: Saul's Conversion

Context:

Saul, the church's most violent persecutor, is confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, forever changing the course of history.

Discussion Starters:

- What was Saul's goal as he set out for Damascus, and what does this reveal about his zeal?
- Why did Jesus ask, 'Why do you persecute me?' (instead of 'my people')?
- What was the significance of Saul's three days of blindness and fasting?
- Describe Ananias's hesitation. Do we ever find ourselves hesitating to trust God's call?
- God calls Saul a 'chosen instrument.' How did Saul's specific background prepare him for his unique mission?
- What is the most 'unlikely' conversion you have ever heard of? How does this story encourage you to pray for other unlikely people?
- How does Saul's story prove that no one is 'too far gone' for God's grace?
- What 'scales' fell from your eyes when you first truly understood the Gospel?
- Saul was told he must 'suffer for the sake of my name.' How do we view suffering in our own Christian walk today?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray specifically for the 'Sauls' of our modern world—those who actively oppose the Gospel—that they would have a 'Damascus Road' encounter.

31/05/26 | Acts 9:19b–31: Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Context:

Now a believer, Saul faces the dual challenge of convincing the church he has changed and surviving the anger of his former associates.

Discussion Starters:

- Saul 'immediately' began to preach. Why was his message so confounding to his former allies?
- How did the believers in Damascus show their care and protection for Saul (vv. 24–25)?
- Why were the disciples in Jerusalem initially afraid of him? Was their skepticism justified?
- What was Barnabas's role in Saul's acceptance? Why is 'sponsorship' or 'advocacy' important in the church? Can it also be dangerous?
- Saul was eventually sent away to Tarsus. Why do you think God allowed this period of 'waiting'?
- Verse 31 summarises a season of peace. What were the two core pillars of the church's growth during this time?
- How do we welcome people who come into our church community, especially if they are a bit different to us?
- Who has been a 'Barnabas' to you, taking a risk to bring you into the community?
- What does it look like for a church today to walk in 'the encouragement of the Holy Spirit'?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for the grace to be 'Barnabases'—encouragers who see the potential in people that others are afraid of.

07/06/26 | Acts 10:23b–48: Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

Context:

Peter enters the home of a Roman Centurion, breaking centuries of religious taboos and witnessing the Holy Spirit fall on Gentiles for the first time.

Discussion Starters:

- Why was Peter's act of entering Cornelius's house (v. 28) such a radical break from tradition?
- What did Peter mean when he said 'God shows no partiality'?
- What are the key elements of the Gospel message Peter preaches in vv. 36–43?
- Was it significant that the Spirit fell before they were baptized?
- How did the 'circumcised believers' (Jewish Christians) react to this unexpected move of God?
- What are the 'prejudices' or 'invisible walls' that still exist in the modern church?
- Do we ever subconsciously think that some people are 'easier' for God to save than others?
- How can we practice 'showing no partiality' in our local outreach and friendships?
- Peter stayed with them for 'some days' (v. 48). Why is shared life and hospitality crucial for breaking down social barriers?
- How does this passage start to fulfill the 'ends of the earth' promise from Acts 1:8?

Prayer Suggestion:

Pray for a heart that is open to those who are 'different' from us, asking God to break down any walls of prejudice in our community.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES, PRAYERS etc

**Those who had been scattered
preached the word wherever they went.**

Acts 8:4 (NIV)