

This Fall we will take a deep dive into the events and the theology in the Book of Acts. After Jesus is gone, the Church must figure out its way of life and determine how it will preserve and promote the mission Jesus died for. Acts is an action-packed ministry and mission narrative that continues to teach today's believer what it truly means to be a Christian.

This Study Guide, carefully curated by Pastor Dino, offers a basic framework for keeping up with the series & diving a bit deeper into your own Scripture study!

By keeping up with this series and the next one, you will have read almost the entire New Testament – and that's something to celebrate! Take your time reading, pondering the questions, pray and read again. The study guide is intended to help you along, not be an exhaustive homework assignment! So spread the work out over the whole week, make a plan, and get it going!

WEEK 1: August 12 - 18, 2024

READ Acts chapter 1

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In the 1st chapter, Jesus is shown providing some structure amidst the chaos of the Crucifixion by offering his disciples some final teachings, then handing the ministry off to them. Each of the Gospel endings overlap in thematic ways with the first chapter of Acts, so you'll be reading the final chapters of each Gospel this week to broaden the context of this vital time in the development of the Church.

Additional readings for this week: Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21

Questions for you to ponder

- What parallels did you find between the four Gospel endings and the first book of Acts? What are the standout differences found in each of these readings?
- Since Luke is responsible for writing the Gospel of Luke AND the Book of Acts, in what ways are you able to see the two stories connecting together as one?
- Acts 1:7-11 is a fairly dramatic account. Put yourself in the apostles' shoes for a moment... What would have been going through your mind in those moments? How would you be feeling? What would you be thinking about?
- What does this passage tell us about Jesus' identity and mission? What does it tell us about the Holy Spirit?
- Are there any ideas presented in this week's reading that jump out at you, speak to you, challenge you, or confuse you? Take your time reading and pondering those ideas and questions; **then** read and pray again. Ask God what He's trying to say to you!

WHO IS 'THEOPHILUS'?: meaning "friend of God" or "lover of God" - the person for whom Luke originally wrote his two books. Luke's desire was to prove the truth of the Messiah's life, death and resurrection. Luke wrote these two books around 61-63 AD, at which time he was with the Apostle Paul during his Roman imprisonment. It is possible Theophilus was a titled Roman official, a benefactor/supporter of Luke's work, OR maybe not a person at all, but rather a general title for all Luke's readers.

FOCUS Sermon Scripture for Sunday, August 18: Acts 1:1-14

WEEK 2: August 19 - 25, 2024

READ Acts chapter 2

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In the 2nd chapter, we launch (at hyper speed!) into the advent of the Holy Spirit, the beginnings of the Church, and the initiation of Simon Peter's ministry as "The Rock" to whom Jesus handed off His ministry. This week, you will get to know the Apostle Peter better by reading the first of his two letters.

Additional readings for this week: 1 Peter

Questions for you to ponder

- How might you summarize Peter's second sermon (Acts 2:14-41) into a couple of main focal points? Why do you think Peter chose those themes for his early teaching?
- In which ways do the events of Pentecost indicate a continuation of Jesus' ministry?

THE "SPIRIT": The noun πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) is used 385 times in the NT and is generally translated as "spirit," but that word is highly mis-used today. In Biblical terms, "spirit" is not a supernatural expression of our being, but rather a mental or behavioral function that is activated most fully when we are joined to others who are experiencing the same.

- With the explanation of the "spirit" given above and what you've read in Acts 2, how would you respond to someone who is a Christian but does not think it is necessary to actually go to church?
- What elements of "worship" are present at the first church gatherings in Acts 2:42-47? What remains of that in today's church gatherings? And, what no longer remains? What do you wish was more present in today's church worship, and why?
- After reading the letter of 1 Peter, what parallels exist between this first sermon and his letter?

FOCUS Sermon Scripture for Sunday, August 25: Acts 2:22-41

WEEK 3: August 26 – September 1, 2024

READ Acts chapters 3, 4 & 5:1-16

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we get to witness, first hand, how the fellowship focus of the first Church becomes a breeding ground for effective Christian ministry. We'll get to witness more of the believers gathering together and doing ministry while we also see Peter take the reins of leadership! This week, you will also continue to expand your understanding of Peter's theology by reading his 2nd letter.

Additional readings for this week: 2 Peter

Questions for you to ponder

- Why do you believe Luke includes a miracle story so quickly in the Book of Acts? What is he trying to teach? How does this miracle affect the religious leaders, the crowd, and the apostles?
- Why are the Apostles persecuted? What do you believe is the true motivation behind their persecution? How does persecution occur in the present day?

THE SANHEDRIN was a council of seventy-one religious leaders, patterned after Moses' seventy elders of Israel. This group was active during the time of Jesus and the early church, until the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. They were under Roman authority in Judea and had the authority to punish Jewish people for their civil and religious crimes, but they could not execute anyone.

- What insights can you draw about the Christian faith from Peter and John's response to the Sanhedrin in ch 4? What echoes do you hear from Jesus' teachings?
- What ideas appear in the 2 Peter letter that are consistent with what is occurring in Acts? How does that further inform your understanding of Peter's ministry?
- What do you make of the Ananias and Sapphira account in ch. 5?

FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sun., Sept. 1: Acts 3:1-8, 4:8-12, 5:12-16

WEEK 4: September 2 - 8, 2024

READ Acts chapters 5:17-42, 6 & 7

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we experience the downside – the risk – of ministry investment, which is heavy persecution that costs the Church dearly! How do the apostles choose to respond to this persecution? In addition to this week's Acts readings, we will start on the first of John's three letters. As John takes a strong leadership role alongside Peter during this period, it's important to see how his theology develops.

Additional readings for this week: 1 John

Questions for you to ponder

- How do the Apostles choose to respond to the persecution? What do they do and why do you think they do it?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit throughout these chapters that are full of persecution?

THE DEACONS OF OLD - The διακονία (*diakonia*) is most readily defined as practical ministry, whether that's preaching, serving someone, or distributing things that people need. The original deacons arise in Acts 6 to meet a specific need - making sure the widows get food - but their ministry quickly expands beyond that. The Apostles delegate this ministry to them and it is the foundation upon which "deacons" ministries are built today, although the specifics of the role vary among churches.

- What further insights can you draw about the Christian faith from the response to the Sanhedrin in ch 5? How is it similar to and/or different from the ch 4 response?
- Why do you believe is Stephen targeted for persecution, as he seems to be simply a do-gooder and not a rabble-rouser? What does he say in his long speech in ch. 7 that adds to your understanding of who Stephen is and what he stands for?
- What ideas appear in the 1 John letter that are consistent with what is occurring in Acts? How does that further inform your understanding of John's ministry?

FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sunday, September 8: Acts 5:27-40

WEEK 5: September 9 - 15, 2024

READ Acts chapters 8 & 9

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we examine the aftermath of a fairly successful persecution attempt against the Church! This causes two major unexpected pivots in the direction of the Church as new ministry opportunities and new leaders emerge. As John and Jude were contemporary to this time period and provide context, we will read three very short letters alongside Acts 8 & 9.

Additional readings for this week: 2 John, 3 John, Jude

Questions for you to ponder

- The initial scatter of the church is an unintended consequence of persecution in and around Jerusalem. What are some other ways that God can use seemingly negative circumstances to bring glory to His name? How have you seen that in your own life?

WHAT'S IN A NAME? – Saul & Paul are the same person, but in Acts 13, Saul starts going by Paul exclusively. Across the internet, you can find sermons and articles saying: "Saul means 'great man' and Paul means 'small man' and Jesus changed his name when he became a Christian," but that's not actually the case! Saul is a Hebrew name; Paul is a Greek name. When Saul is ministering amongst Jews (who definitely know him as a *maybe* transformed bad guy), he goes by his Hebrew name and doesn't try to hide it. After all, for people to know exactly who he is... THAT is going to preach! It's only when he goes out into the world on his mission trips in Ch. 13 that Luke starts referring to him by his Hellenized name, which would apply to the new Gentile audience Paul is trying to reach. When he's back amongst the Jewish people in Acts 22, he refers to himself as "Saul."

- What do you make of the whole episode where Paul becomes blind and has to be healed? Since the blindness theme comes up often in Scripture, what other ways are we "blind?" In what ways can we become not-blind or less-blind?
- By the time we get to Acts chapter 9, it seems like a solid foundation has been built for the Church to survive, then thrive. What are the steps taken by the Church that indicates it has moved from simple survival mode to a thriving and growing body?

FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sunday, September 15: Acts 9:1-20

WEEK 6: September 16 - 22, 2024

READ Acts chapters 10 & 11

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we take a deeper look at the seismic shift of the church...the moment in time that defines the Church more than any other! So this week, we'll be looking at the rapid spread of the church, as well as the refocusing of their ministry efforts. As James was around and active in ministry (he even shows up in upcoming chapters), his letter provides additional insight into the church's ministry focus.

Additional readings for this week: James

Questions for you to ponder

- Try and make sense of Peter's vision in chapter 10. What do you think of Peter's responses? How would you have handled the situation differently?
- In Acts 10:16, the "three times" motif re-emerges in Peter's life. This is very significant and requires a bit more thought. What are the other "three times" instances that involved Peter? Why do you think God chooses to use this motif again at this moment?

LET'S MAP IT OUT – On the next page, you'll see a map of Israel around the years 30 - 40 A.D. It's one thing to talk/read about the spread of the church. It's another thing to see it! Get 3 different colored highlighters (crayons, markers, etc.):

- 1) With one color, highlight the ministry coverage of Jesus between the years ~30-33 A.D. Make big dots on the following locations: Sidon, Tyre, Nazareth, Samaria, Bethlehem, Bethany, Bethany East of the Jordan, then up the Jordan River to Bethsaida. Connect all those dots to create a closed figure. THAT is the full territory of Jesus' three years of ministry.
- 2) With a different color, highlight Jerusalem really well! That represents the first Church's contraction after Jesus' departure, and where they stayed put from ~33 - 36 A.D.
- 3) With your last color, highlight all the NAMED LOCATIONS found from Acts 8:1 through 11:18, which covers ~36-38 A.D. You can exclude Judea (a region) & Tarsus (Paul's birthplace in Asia Minor). Once Antioch is mentioned, you can stop!

*If you get stuck, there's a complete list of #3 locations at the bottom of the Week 7 guide.



FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sunday, September 22: Acts 11:1-21

WEEK 7: September 23 - 29, 2024

READ Acts chapters 12, 13 & 14

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we are well on the way to the Church being established outside of Jerusalem, with a new center in Antioch, and the mass spread of the Gospel is poised to begin through Paul's leadership! At this point, we begin to engage Paul's letters, because they were written to the very churches he visited during his missionary journeys. What do we learn from the book of Acts about Paul's work in these locations? And, how do his letters add to our understanding?

Additional readings for this week: Galatians

Questions for you to ponder

- Bible timing is interesting, so here's a general timeline. Skim back through the headings in these chapters. Why do you think Luke would be motivated to arrange the action this way? What point might he be trying to make?
 - Acts 1 - 11:18 ~ 33 - 38 A.D. 10 ½ chapters = ~5 years
 - Acts 11:19-30 ~ 38 - 43 A.D. ½ chapter = ~5 years
 - Acts 12 - 14 ~ 43 - 48 A.D. 3 chapters = ~5 years
- By the time we get to chapter 12, the new central hub of the Church is Antioch in Syria, 350 miles north of Jerusalem. Why do you think this happens? Why is it important? What does this change teach us as Christians? What does this teach today's churches?

BARNABAS — Joseph, a Jewish man from the island of Cyprus who was an early disciple of Christ. His new name means "son of comfort" and was given to him by the Apostles. Barnabas plays a key role in the development of Paul's leadership and ministry, as they were ordained by the Church together for the first missionary journey. Unfortunately, in Acts 15 they part ways following a disagreement, and Barnabas is never heard from again.

- As you read through the first missionary journey on Acts 13 & 14, what jumps out at you the most? Why do you think that jumped out at you? What is there to learn there?

FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sunday, September 29: Acts 13:32-47

Answer Key to Week 6's maps

3) Samaria (8:5); Jerusalem (8:14); Gaza (8:26); Azotus (8:40); Caesarea (8:40);
Damascus (9:2); Galilee (9:31); Lydda (9:32); Sharon plains (9:35); Joppa (9:36)

WEEK 8: September 30 – October 6, 2024

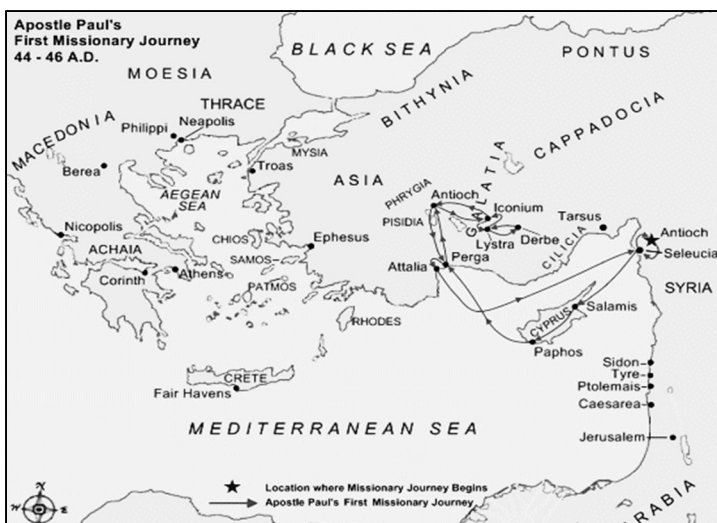
READ Acts chapters 15 & 16

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we take a pause from the fast-paced nature of Acts and examine the two prison break stories. We read about Peter's escape last week and about Paul's escape this week. Because the Acts reading is light this week, this is a good opportunity to catch up (if you need to) and really dive in on Paul's letter to the Philippians, which is the direct setting of the majority of this week's reading.

Additional readings for this week: Philippians

Questions for you to ponder

- Compare and contrast the two prison break narratives in Acts 12 & 16; what is the takeaway from these stories, in light of what's happening in the book of Acts?
- As you cross-reference Paul's letter to the Philippians with the overall action in Acts 16:11-40, what sort of "bigger picture" of his ministry can you more readily see? In other words, how does the letter fill in the narrative?
- Look at the two maps below that highlight Paul's first and second missionary journeys (arrows), which took place during an 8 year span from 44–52 A.D. And now, remember where we started (cf. Week 6): from 33 – 36 A.D. the church contracted back to Jerusalem, then it expanded until 38 A.D. to about Sidon & Tyre, before taking the next five years to re-center itself in Antioch of Syria. What do we learn from this expansion?



FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sun., Oct. 6: Acts 16:25-36 (+ 12:5-11)

WEEK 9: October 7 – 13, 2024

READ Acts chapters 17, 18 & 19

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! In this week's chapters, we go back into Paul's missionary journeys. As the church rapidly expands, Paul's approach to ministry becomes more refined, and his ministry has much higher risk the further he moves away from home. This week we will also look at Paul's 1st and 2nd letters to the Thessalonian church, which reflects the beginning of the Church pushing into the major centers of Greco-Roman society.

Additional readings for this week: 1 Thessalonians & 2 Thessalonians

Questions for you to ponder

- Paul's 2nd mission trip continues at 17:1 and his 3rd journey begins at 18:23. With what you are reading this week (ch. 17-19), what similarities do you notice between these two trips? What differences do you notice? What do you notice about these two missions that is similar to or different from the 1st journey from a couple weeks ago?

"TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" – In Acts 17, Paul arrives in Athens and faces the Areopagus – a council that governed religious and educational matters. Being that Athens was a major center of Greek polytheistic culture, Paul was not shocked by all the idols and altars that were present throughout the area. However, one idol clearly catches his attention due to its unique inscription: "To An Unknown God." The rationalization for this, according to the Greeks, was that they might have inadvertently left some gods out of their pantheon, so this was intended to "cover the bases." Paul masterfully uses this inscription to explain that their "unknown god" was actually the LORD, who could be known to them through the Scriptures, in the person of the resurrected Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul lets them know that the Lord *could* be known and *wants* to be known, always remaining near, even to confused, unbelieving people.

- In Acts 18:9-10, we see the Lord speaking to Paul. If that message still applies to Christians today, what should we be doing? How does this inform our behavior?
- As you read through all of Paul's adventures in light of the message in the previous question, what is your risk-reward assessment of Paul's ministry? How much "cost" does Paul take on? And, how would you apply Paul's principles to your own life?

FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sunday, October 13: Acts 17:16-32

WEEK 10: October 14 – 20, 2024

READ Acts chapters 20 through 28

The book of Acts, written by Luke, is all about fully investing in ministry! And this week, we are bringing it all home! While there is substantial Acts reading this week, it's important to keep this narrative all together from the end of the 3rd missionary journey through to Paul's ministry in Rome – his ultimate destination! Following this series, we'll start a new series called "Lessons From Paul" centering on five of Paul's major teaching themes, while taking us through the Pauline letters that we have not yet covered! Yes, there will be a study guide!

Additional readings for this week: none, but the next series ("Lessons From Paul") will continue the reading goals we have established during this series!

Questions for you to ponder

- As you've read through the whole book of Acts, in what ways are you able to affirm Pastor Dino's point that the whole book is all about full investment in ministry?
- Keep in mind that Luke wrote his own named Gospel *and* the Book of Acts. What do you think he is ultimately trying to say across the arc of this writing?

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT – Paul prophetically announces, toward the end of his 3rd missionary journey, that he will be arrested for his ministry work upon arriving in Jerusalem. Long story short...that's what happens, accompanied by false allegations that he's turning people against Judaism (and God!)

As a Roman citizen, he had the right to a fair trial, but relief ever came because the Sanhedrin officials were fighting each other, and people were regularly plotting to kill Paul. He was transported out of Jerusalem to nearby Caesarea for his safety, and placed under arrest while he awaited trial for "disturbing the peace and inciting riots." The governor Felix held off ruling on the case for two years while Paul sat in jail. At the time another governor, Festus, took over, Paul exercised his Roman right to a trial before Caesar in Rome and was transported there.

All we know is that he spent another two years under light house arrest in Rome. He retained the ability to write letters, preach, do ministry, and spend time with visitors. We are not told if he ever went to trial, and everything we think we know about Paul *after* that is pure speculation and tradition.

FOCUS Sermon Scriptures for Sunday, October 13: Acts 28:16-31