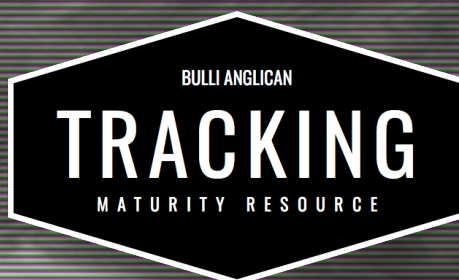


UNSTOPPABLE

ACTS 5-9 | *THE FEROCIOUS GROWTH OF THE EARLY CHURCH*





TERM 1 MEETING JESUS
THURSDAYS 7:30-8:30
STARTS 27TH FEB



DAILY READING NOTES TERM 1 2020

UNSTOPPABLE: ACTS 5-9

Growth Group Studies, Sermon Notes & Daily Reading Notes

Week	Passage	Study Title
1	Acts 5:1-11	Ananias And Sapphira
2	Acts 5:12-42	The Apostles Persecuted
3	Acts 6:1-7	Growing Pains Of The Church
4	Acts 6:8-8:1	Stephen The Martyr
5	Acts 8:1-8	The Persecution And Scattering Of The Church
6	Acts 8:9-25	Philip And The Sorcerer
7	Acts 8:26-40	Philip And The Ethiopian
8	Acts 9:1-31	Saul's Conversion

We want to encourage each other to be on mission to our friends, family and contacts who aren't disciples of Jesus - yet.

Who are you on mission to?

Make a list and start praying for them (and yourself).

Pray for three friends, once a week, for one minute (3-1-1)

List the names of your family/friends here:

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

1. PERSONAL READING

- Use this guide to help you read your Bible every day.
- Start by reading Acts 5-9 in one go if you can, then slowly work your way through.
- Scribble down your thoughts and questions each day and remember to pray and ask God to speak to you by His Spirit, through His Word.

2. GROWTH GROUPS

Take this guide with you to your growth group each week so you can write down prayer points that come from the study that week and prayer requests from the members of your group.

- Let your group know who you are on mission to.

3. CHURCH

- Keep this guide with your Bible and bring it with you to church.
- Scribble down sermon notes in the space provided.

PRAYER POINTS - TERM 1

THE LOCAL MISSION

- Meeting Jesus - Pray for many church members and their friends to attend Meeting Jesus in term 1 and for those who come to put their faith in Jesus as the ruler of all and the one who saves us from sin.
- Pray for the staff team as they train and equip church members to carry out ministry in teams. Pray for ministry team leaders. Especially new member Steve Roberts who is standing in as senior minister until a new senior minister is chosen.
- Ask God to provide our church with a new senior minister who will lead us faithfully and effectively in the mission to make disciples of Jesus by training and equipping church members to carry out gospel ministry. Ask God to give our team of nominators wisdom as they look for a new senior minister.

MISSION PARTNERS

Please continue to pray regularly for these mission partners as they seek to extend the Gospel into the lives of new people in other places.

- Jim and Tanja French in Valencia, Spain - along with their kids Evie and Silas
- Matt and Naomi Warth in Wickham, WA - and their kids Zech and Solomon.

UNSTOPPABLE ACTS 5-9

THE FEROCIOUS GROWTH OF THE EARLY CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Together with the gospel of Luke, Acts is part two of a two-volume set with a clearly stated purpose. In Luke 1:1-4, Luke tells us that his purpose in writing was to provide an orderly account of the events that happened. He researched the facts from eyewitnesses so that Theophilus (a recent Gentile convert) may have certainty about the things he had been taught about Jesus.

By the end of Luke's gospel, we have been taken through an historical account focusing on Jesus, the one that all Scripture points towards; the one purposed by God to be the Lord and Saviour, Christ the King. The focus of volume one (Luke's gospel) is to present us with the historical Jesus as the promised Messiah who had to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day (Luke 24:46).

The focus of volume two (Acts) is about the next stage of God's purposes through Jesus. We are told that Jesus, because of His death and resurrection, is the reason that a message would be preached by the Apostles (who were eyewitnesses to these events). The Apostles would preach a message calling people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins beginning in Jerusalem and going out to the nations. This gospel message would be preached after Jesus sent His Spirit, who would empower them for this task (Luke 24:47-49).

When Luke begins his second volume, he reminds Theophilus of this background in Acts 1:1-5. All this prepares us for Acts 1:8, which serves as both the mission statement and the structural key to unlocking the book's message. After Jesus ascends to heaven, He pours out His Spirit marking the beginning of a new era, the last days have come! From here, we are introduced to a very different bunch of disciples to the ones first described as huddled together in an upper room. Peter now stands up in front of a crowd of thousands and preaches the first gospel message, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, declaring Jesus to be both Lord and Christ. Peter calls people to repent so they might find forgiveness for their sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This message results in 3,000 people being saved that day!

While often referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, the book seems less interested in praising or highlighting them. It is far more interested in the

ongoing ministry of the risen and ascended Jesus, who continues to be at work in the world by His Spirit through the Word spoken by the Apostles.

Jesus is still present and active in the world by His Spirit. He is still active in salvation through the preaching of His gospel word. The book of Acts tells us that the ministry of Jesus has not ended, it has only begun! It tells us that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, God's purpose to gather a people back to Himself cannot be stopped by anyone or anything! And

this is exactly what we read about. Chapters 1-7 record the unstoppable nature of the gospel and its impact throughout Jerusalem despite the rise of persecution and opposition. Chapters 8-12 show the gospel's impact into Judea, Samaria and eventually into the Gentile world – pushed forward even more by those who try to stop it! Chapters 13-28 focus on Paul's three missionary journeys where the gospel continues all the way to Rome where the book ends but the preaching of the gospel doesn't. The history recorded for us by Luke shows over and over again the opposition to and persecution of God's Apostles and His people – yet the message they preach cannot be restrained, it is supernaturally empowered making it unstoppable!

This term we will be looking at Acts 5-9 - "Ferocious Growth", a great series title because it describes the unstoppable nature of Jesus' ongoing ministry to gather a people back to Himself through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He has won the ultimate victory over sin, Satan and death, and has poured out His Spirit through whom He continues to work in the world.

The book of Acts reminds us that the Christian life will not be easy. It does not promise comfort or ease; quite the opposite. However, it does draw our attention to the confidence we can have in the invincible risen and ascended Jesus, who we can trust to bring about God's purposes in the world as we declare the powerful gospel message about Jesus Christ the Lord. Acts reminds us that Jesus' mission in the world has not ended, it continues through us (as it did with the Apostles) as we declare the life-giving gospel to a world lost and dead in sin. In this book, we are given a clear vision of Jesus' unstoppable mission in the world and our part in it.

WEEK 1 FEBRUARY 16-22

WEEK 1: ACTS 5:1-11 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes
- Questions
- Implications: To do / To change
- For Prayer
- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 1 ACTS 5:1-11

WEEK 1 - DAILY READING NOTES

Acts is a book where there is often interpretive disagreement. In fact, it has been said, the book of Acts is the seedbed of all modern day heresy. As we look at Acts, a common question people ask is, how much of what happened in Acts should we expect to happen today? This week we will spend some time thinking about how we should approach reading and applying the book of Acts so we are in a better position to start working through the content of its message.

DAY 1

Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2

1. Luke is commonly held to be the author of both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. He was a historian, medical doctor, missionary, travelling partner and valued friend to the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:10-14; 20:5-6; 28:16; and Col. 4:14). What do you learn from these opening verses about Luke's purpose in writing Luke and Acts?
2. From what we read in Acts 1:1-2, how does Luke describe the focus of his work in the "former" book?
3. The Christian faith differs to all other religions because it rests soundly on the verifiable reality of historical events. Why is this premise so important for Theophilus to understand? Why is it important for us today?

Thank God for the confidence we can have that He has used men like Luke to preserve for us the truth of events that happened concerning Jesus and what He taught. It is not just the imagination of someone's fanciful religious dreams, but the reliable truth about the God of the universe who came to bring salvation in the person of His Son, Jesus.

DAY 2

Read Luke 24:45-49 and Acts 1:3-8

1. Yesterday we looked at Luke's purpose in writing a well-researched and orderly account so that Theophilus could have confidence in the things he had been taught about Jesus and

all that He fulfilled. By the end of Luke's gospel, we see the crucified and resurrected Jesus and hear some of His final words to his disciples about what must happen in fulfillment of the Scriptures. What does Jesus say must happen?

2. How much of what Jesus said in Luke 24:45-49 had already been fulfilled by the end of Luke's gospel? In light of this, how does the end of Luke's gospel prepare us for what we should expect to read about in the book of Acts? How does this match up with Luke's words in Acts 1:3-8?
3. What does Luke tell us about God's purpose for the nations?
4. What do we learn about how God will bring about the fulfillment of these purposes?

Praise God for the forgiveness of sins made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection. Thank Him that His heart is to rescue a people from all the nations to Himself. Thank Him for pouring out His Spirit to empower the Apostles to bear witness to all Jesus said and did to win the possibility for us to be forgiven and saved!

DAY 3

Read Acts 1:8-11

1. Acts 1:8 outlines Jesus' program for His disciples. How might this verse shape what we should expect to read about in Acts?
2. When you think about this week's readings in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2 (along with Luke 24:45-49 and Acts 1:8), how do these verses help answer the question about the type of book we are reading? (Hint: Is it like a letter written to a church offering 'instruction' about how they should think and how they should live? Or, is it a historical narrative 'describing' the events that happened in fulfillment of the Scripture?)
3. Acts 1:1-11 sets the scene of Luke's second volume with great expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit who will empower gospel preaching to the nations. Where is Jesus now? Does this mean His ministry has ended? If not, how does His ministry continue? (Hint: Who do the Apostles bear witness to, and who empowers them?)
4. How do these verses help us think about the purpose of the Holy Spirit being poured out?
5. Given Jesus has not yet returned, we are still in the same era that the disciples were in, one that God purposed to empower the gospel to go out to the nations by His Spirit. How does this challenge the way you think about the role of the Spirit in your life today?

Praise God for His purpose to pour out His Spirit to empower those first Apostles, and all those throughout history who followed them, to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Thank God for His faithfulness to His promise and the assurance of Jesus ongoing ministry in the world by His Spirit through the preaching of His Word – because your faith in Jesus today rests on this and calls upon you to continue the same work by the presence and empowering of the same Spirit.

THINKING FURTHER THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It is important to understand what the disciples meant by their question in Acts 1:6. Briefly, the Old Testament prophets envisioned a great future time of restoration where Israel would be triumphant and God's enemies destroyed. This would take place on the Day of the Lord, the day when God would personally intervene in history as the King (or Messiah, which means the same as Christ – anointed one). This day would restore national Israel as the centre of God's rule over his people. Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt and Davidic rule re-established. Gentiles (all non-Jews) who wanted to be included would come running, seeking to be accepted because they saw the glory of God revealed in the redemption of Israel. That day is also the day on which the Holy Spirit is poured out on all people. It is the day on which salvation comes to all those who call on the name of the Lord.

DAY 4

Today and tomorrow we will consider the difference between reading an historical 'description' of events (which are sometimes unusual like here in Acts) compared with the clear 'instruction' we are given in other places of the Bible to shape how we are to think and act, and what to expect God to do in the everyday reality of life.

Read Matthew 17:24-27 and 22:16-22

1. How did Jesus go about getting money to pay His taxes?
2. Is Jesus' confirmation of the need to pay taxes (22:16-22) matched with a command to do it like He did (17:24-27)? Does Jesus' unusual approach to paying taxes give us reason to expect we should do the same?
3. Is there any other teaching in the Bible about how we should raise money to pay our way through life, including paying our taxes? (See 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.)
4. Looking again at Matthew 17:24-27, why does Jesus pay His taxes in this way?

5. How then should we respond to the Bible's teaching about how to pay taxes and working?

Here in Matthew, we see that an historical account often serves a different purpose than to simply provide an expectation that we should experience the same thing again as part of our normal lives. Acts is also an historical narrative telling the story of the events that happened after Jesus ascends to heaven, and how they work together to fulfill God's purposes. So, when things seem odd, or unusual, we ought not get too hung up on the events themselves but try to understand how they fulfill Jesus' ministry.

Pray that God would help you see the greater truths about who Jesus is and what He's doing in the world rather than merely getting hung up on whether something would, could or should happen again. Pray that God would help you work hard to understand His Word and apply it faithfully to your life today.

THINKING FURTHER

If you are keen to dig deeper and look at more examples, consider the following passages:

1. Acts 5:1-11 shows how the Apostles dealt with sin, but 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 seem quite different. Which approach are we to follow today: the 'description' in Acts, or the clear 'instruction' by Paul in 2 Timothy and 2 Thessalonians?
 - a. How does this help us think about the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles compared to the way we are to minister today?
2. John 11:38-44 and Acts 20:7-12 record the occasions when Jesus and the Apostles raised people from the dead. Yet it is not the only way people today can be involved in the same ministry – see John 11:25-26 and 2 Timothy 1:9b-10. If Jesus and the Apostles are not meant to be a model for us to follow, why did they do it that way?
 - a. How does knowing about the physical miracle of Jesus and the Apostles in raising people from the dead give you confidence in the greater miracle of the gospel bringing people back from spiritual death into spiritual and eternal life by believing in the gospel of Jesus?
3. John 9:1-12 and Acts 14:8-9 describe Jesus and the Apostles healing people. Is there a command for us to do the same? Now look at the instruction Christians are given in James 5:13-19. How does this passage help us see a difference between Jesus and the Apostles and our role today?
 - a. When faced with illness, how should we respond in light of this? Is this the way you face sickness today?



YOU'RE WELCOME TO JOIN US THIS...

EASTER

GOOD FRIDAY - APRIL 10TH 9AM
EASTER DAY - APRIL 12TH 8AM, 10AM & 5PM

What to Conclude?

There is a clear difference in how we should read a document that is ‘describing’ events compared with one offering ‘instruction’. Acts is an historical account ‘describing’ events for us rather than a document to instruct us how to live. Tomorrow we will consider why there is sometimes a difference between Jesus and the Apostles’ model of ministry compared to the ‘instruction’ given to Christians by them. We will consider what purpose those things serve if they are not models or commands to follow.

DAY 5

Read John 20:30-31 and 2 Corinthians 12:12

1. Why are some of the more unusual, or miraculous events described as occurring for Jesus and the Apostles? How does this impact the way we think about them today?
2. What things might we look for to know if a particular historical event is a model for us to follow? If an event has no command for us to do likewise, what are we to learn from it?

Praise God for sending Jesus, the true King of all creation, the one with power to rule over all things. Thank Him for the miracles He performed so that we might know He is the Son of God and have confidence to believe in His name. Thank Him also for the message of the Apostles, who were chosen by Jesus to continue His ministry with His authority. Let us listen to their words as the words of Jesus Himself. Take time to pray for your family, friends and those all over the world who need to hear the message of Jesus so they too might believe in His name.

WEEK 1 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA

PERSONAL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Who did you intentionally sit next to and speak with at church?
2. Did you take any opportunities God gave you to speak about the Gospel this week? If not, what stopped you? If yes, how did it go?

LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

Been learning more about...?

I've been doing _____ instead of _____...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

Passage: Acts 5:1-11

Context:

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is confronting and disturbing, particularly to start off this section of Acts with. Did Peter have two people killed for keeping a bit of money for themselves? This boils down to the heart motivation and lying to the Holy Spirit – it cannot be done without being found out. Ananias and Sapphira are judged for their deception and the judgement is substantial – they pay with their lives. But the message here is one of giving cheerfully, generously and trusting in the provisions of God, or being deceitful and selfish for the sake of appearances and not trusting in God's provision for them. Their heart was not right before God.

Read Acts 5:1-11

Questions

1. What strikes you most about this passage?
2. Why might Luke have started this new section with this story? What's the point of recording this event in his account?
3. Is this account intended to make us look at others or look at ourselves? If so what kind of things are we meant to reflect upon?
4. What does the death of these two people reveal about God's interest in the life and actions of his people and his church?
5. Can we assume he is still just as interested in what's going on in the hearts of those who gather in the name of Jesus?

TAKE HOME

6. The issue of money comes up here - and giving.
 - a. **Why we give:** How seriously do you take investing in the progress of the gospel in our world? How does this passage challenge with our giving so that people may know Christ?
 - b. **How we give:** What attitude to giving does the spirit of God encourage us to have through this passage? How does your heart need to be corrected in this area?

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anyone who might benefit from your prayers, a catch up, a conversation about spiritual things or an invitation to a meal or church?

WEEK 2 FEBRUARY 23-29

WEEK 2: ACTS 5:12-42 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes
- Questions
- Implications: To do / To change
- For Prayer
- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 2 ACTS 5:12-42

WEEK 2 - DAILY READING NOTES

DAY 1

Acts chapter 2 comprises three main sections. The first section (2:1-13) describes the event of Pentecost. In the second section (2:14-36) Peter explains the event by interpreting it through the lense of Old Testament fulfillment – this is also a key section to help us understand what to make of the Pentecost event. The third section (2:37-47) describes the effects of this event on those people who are now part of God’s people, His church.

Read Acts 2:1-13

1. What might the following imagery Luke uses to describe this event mean?

a. “Blowing of a violent wind” (see also Exodus 37:9-14; Job 38:1)

b. “Tongues of fire” (see also Exodus 3:2f; 19:18; Luke 3:16)

2. How does the crowd respond to the disciple’s new speaking abilities, and why?

Praise God for sending His Spirit to those first disciples at the time of Pentecost to empower them to declare the life-changing message of the gospel to the world.

THINKING FURTHER THE OLD TESTAMENT AND HOLY SPIRIT

We shouldn't think that the Holy Spirit only appears at Pentecost. In the Old Testament, He is linked with creation (Genesis 1:2), the judges (Judges 11:29), kings (1 Samuel 10:10) and prophets (2 Kings 2:15-16).

However, these experiences of the Spirit were very different from ours. They experienced the Spirit only as a temporary blessing to empower them for particular tasks. Moreover, only some of those under the old covenant received the Spirit. Because of God's promise through the prophets, they longed for the time when there would be a full and permanent experience of God's Spirit.

Have a quick look at the following passages. What growing expectation do they give?

- Numbers 11:26-29; Deuteronomy 30:6
- Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-28
- Isaiah 11:1-3; 62:1
- Joel 2:28-32

We see from these passages that the prophets longed for the pouring out of the Spirit on every Israelite, and they believed that a particular king (the Davidic Messiah) would come who would have that Spirit permanently and lead them forever. More than this, they saw that the coming of the Spirit on all Israel would signify the arrival of the Day of the Lord, that is, the beginning of the 'end times'.

DAY 2

Read Acts 2:14-21

Over the next three days, we will move away from the description of the event of Pentecost into Peter's (or God's) explanation of what it all means.

1. Peter's explanation begins by connecting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with a promise in Joel 2:28-32. What conclusions does he draw from this Old Testament passage? (Hint: look at yesterday's 'Thinking Further' section)

2. What key parts of this prophecy apply to us today?

3. Take some time to reflect on the reality that God now dwells among His people by His Spirit – men, women, boys, girls, the young and the old. Anyone that calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, and the very presence of Jesus by His Spirit will dwell in them. What an amazing promise of God has been fulfilled; such an intimate connection to the God of the universe is now made possible! What reaction does reading about this event stir in you?

Thank God for bringing His promise to fulfillment, for pouring out His Spirit at Pentecost and beginning a new age. Thank God for the gospel coming to Australia where you had the chance to hear it and to call upon the Lord and be saved. Thank Him that you have now also been gathered into God's people, a people in whom He dwells by His Spirit.

THINKING FURTHER THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke pointed out from the very beginning that Jesus is the Spirit-anointed one in fulfillment of the Old Testament hopes (that's what Jesus' baptism is about, see Luke 3:22; 4:1; 4:14 and most importantly 4:18-21). He is the promised Spirit-anointed leader who will be with his people and lead his people forever.

At Pentecost, Jesus pours out the Spirit in fulfillment of all the prophets' expectations. Pentecost therefore marks the coming to fruition of the Old Testament hopes of the new covenant, the creation of the new people of God, and the beginning of the new age. It also fulfills Jesus' promise to be with His people always (the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; He continues to be present with us but in a different way), and it marks the end of Israel's exclusive claims on God. All people may now enter into his presence by faith in Christ, and faith in Him alone (see the Joel passage quoted in Acts 2).

Therefore, Pentecost is an enormously important occasion. It brought joy to those who were there because they understood the implications of what was happening. As an event it is hardly repeatable, but its implications flow down to each one of us as we too may have Christ with us by His Spirit as we put our faith in Him.

DAY 3

Read Acts 2:22-36

1. Peter's explanation about the Spirit being poured out results in preaching that is actually all about Jesus! What do we learn about Jesus from the following verses?
 - a. 2:22
 - b. 2:23
 - c. 2:24-32 d. 2:33-35
2. Why is Peter's explanation about these events so amazing?
3. How does this passage impact the way you think about Jesus?

Praise God for His eternal sovereign purpose to send Jesus to suffer and die at the hands of wicked men. For through this, His plan of salvation unfolds as He conquers sin and death, rises from the grave never to die again, and now reigns in sovereign power as both Lord and Christ. Thank God that even when things look grim from an earthly perspective, that God's purposes in the world cannot be stopped because He will work sovereignly to bring them to completion!

THINKING FURTHER BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

These opening chapters of Acts introduce us to the language of 'Baptism of the Spirit'. This language is often misunderstood causing some confusion so we will consider it briefly here to help clarify it. There are several key passages in Acts that describe the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-13; 8:14-17; 10:34-48 and 19:1-7). They follow the basic order of the gospel going

from the Jew to the Gentile, which Jesus described in Acts 1:8. Initially, Jews and God-fearers in Jerusalem receive the gospel (Acts 2), then Samaritans in Samaria (Acts 8), then a Roman God-fearer in Caesarea (Acts 10) and later converts of John the Baptist in Ephesus (Acts 19).

In each case, it is very significant that the Apostles are called to physically witness the coming of the Spirit as the gospel spreads beyond Jerusalem. This is because up until now the Israelites had been God's chosen people. God had worked almost exclusively with them, and so it was enormously difficult for Jewish Christians to accept that the gospel had brought an end to their national privileges and put them and the Gentiles on equal footing. Therefore, each stage (Acts 1:8) that the gospel went out of Jerusalem was highly significant. The Apostles witnessed each stage of God's outpouring of his Holy Spirit onto a previously rejected people, so that now Jew and Gentile became members of his family without favouritism.

This 'pattern' is not seen with later writings because the Apostles no longer needed to defend the presence of the Spirit within the Gentiles (a previously difficult thing for the Jews to accept). The Gentiles had clearly been included as God's new people. This helps us understand that what we have here in Acts is not meant as a pattern for us to follow, but is the record of the unique and unrepeatable beginnings of the new people of God.

Spend time now comparing the four accounts of the Holy Spirit's coming (Acts 2:1-13; 8:14-17; 10:34-48 and 11:1-18; and 19:1-7).

What are the differences and similarities?

What is the significance of the Spirit's coming on these four groups?

DAY 4

Read Acts 2:22-36

In Peter's first gospel sermon he connects the event of Pentecost to the promises of the Old Testament showing their fulfillment. We've looked at how he refers to Joel 2, but there are two other Old Testament passages he quotes. Today we will consider what point he is making about Jesus from each of these passages.

1. In 2:31, Peter connects Jesus' resurrection to Psalm 16 to prove that Jesus is the _____.

2. In 2:36, Peter connects Jesus' ascension to Psalm 110 to prove that Jesus is the _____.

3. Why does acknowledging the truth about Jesus demand a response by those Peter was speaking to in this first sermon, and still today?

4. Jesus is declared to be both Lord and Christ, Ruler and King, who reigns in power over all things because of His resurrection and ascension. He is the One who continues to be present in the lives of His people by His Spirit, and He continues to be at work in the world by His Spirit. How does this impact the way you think about the presence of Jesus in your life today?

Take some time to reflect on Jesus as both Lord and King. Give thanks to God for sending Jesus, and for the comfort and confidence we can have knowing His continued presence in our lives today. Pray that God would help you have great confidence to live your life as one who is on mission for Jesus in every way!

DAY 5

Read Acts 2:37-47

Today we will consider the last section of this account, which describes the people's response to Peter's message, the gospel, and the ongoing effects of the gospel on the people as their lives are changed by this new reality they find themselves in.

1. Peter has declared the gospel of Jesus, Christ and Lord, killed yet resurrected and now ascended in power at the right hand of God. Hearing this message the people are "cut to the heart", and now ask Peter how they should respond. How does Peter answer them?

2. How does Luke describe for us the ongoing effect of the gospel on this new community of believers?

3. Remembering this is a 'description' of events, how should we apply this 'description' of those first Christians living in a radical and genuine Christian community to us today?

Praise God for those first 3,000 people who owned their guilt in sending Jesus to the cross, those who turned back to God in repentance and faith to find forgiveness and restoration back into God's people by His Spirit. Pray that the reality of the gospel might take hold of us all today in deeper ways, causing a greater conviction in us to be about Jesus and His mission in the world. Pray also that we might have an increasingly genuine display of a life changed out of materialistic self-indulgence into generous sacrificial service of each other.

WEEK 2 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

THE APOSTLES PERSECUTED

PERSONAL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Who did you intentionally sit next to and speak with at church?
2. Did you take any opportunities God gave you to speak about the Gospel this week? If not, what stopped you? If yes, how did it go?

LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

Been learning more about...?

Improved with...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 5:12-26

Context:

The powerful impact of the gospel continues to turn the hearts of the people of Israel back towards God in large numbers. This further arouses the jealousy of the Jewish leadership who had manoeuvred themselves into positions of power and influence via political deals and nepotism. These are the same leaders who crucified Jesus because, while they would not submit to his authority, they could not deny his public displays of power and the influence this was having on the people.

Read Acts 5:1-11

Questions

1. What do you like most about this passage? How do you see Luke's sense of humour showing up?
2. Vs 29-32 The apostles seem pretty comfortable and confident speaking about the three persons of the trinity - and they are just fishermen not graduates of Bible college! Do you think the average christian today would speak so clearly about God and the gospel? If not, why not?
3. Where do we see the driving motivation behind the actions of the high priest and sadducees?
4. The apostles are arrested twice and then flogged before being released. They were publicly disgraced and humiliated but they leave rejoicing all the same. Do you see this courage and commitment in the life of believers today? If not what's the difference?
5. The apostles directly disobey the commands of those in authority. In other parts of the New Testament christians are taught to obey the laws of the land. Where would we see the need for this type of Godly disobedience against civil authorities in our own society? How could this example of the apostles be used by some Christians to excuse poor attitudes and behaviour?
6. What's your judgement of the Pharisee named Gamaliel? (He happens to be the man who undertook Saul's training - before he became Paul)

● TAKE HOME

7. The issue is persecution as a result of proclamation of the gospel.
 - a. **Read v19,20:** How well does the angel's instruction capture what we're on about as disciples of Christ?
 - b. Why doesn't the fear of persecution seem to stop the disciples from speaking about Christ? In your opinion, are we proclaiming enough as a church and as disciples? What's will enable fearful Christians to speak up?

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anyone who might benefit from your prayers, a catch up, a conversation about spiritual things or an invitation to a meal or church?

PRAY FOR OUR MISSION PARTNERS

Matt, Naomi, Sol & Zech Warth



The Warth's are serving Jesus and the communities of Wickham & Roebourne, Pilbara, WA.

They're involved in three different forms of chaplaincy among indigenous & mining families including:

- Community – meeting and loving people where they are in dysfunction or otherwise. Running church gatherings & bible studies
- School- working with children and staff listening through life's uncertainty, working change, finding confidence.
- Prison – Bringing hope and assurance in and of Jesus to the men and women seemingly at their lowest point in life.

For Your Prayers:

Loving Jesus remains central in all we do so prayer that we'll remain faithful to Him.

- Protection in the community suffering through sorrow, grief and hurt, speaking Jesus confidently into everyone's lives. Being light in such a dark place.
- Relationships with school and prison staff, gaining their trust to provide opportunity to love and care
- Trusting in Holy Spirit working in the lives of many people bringing trial, transformation and promise of salvation.

WEEK 3 MARCH 1-7

WEEK 3: ACTS 6:1-7 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes
- Questions
- Implications: To do / To change
- For Prayer
- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 3 ACTS 3:1-6:7

WEEK 3 - DAILY READING NOTES

This week's readings explore the impact of the gospel as it takes hold of those in Jerusalem in fulfillment of God's purposes (Acts 1:8). We come across the first of fourteen miracles in Acts that verify the Apostle's ministry as the God-ordained continuation of Jesus' ministry. We see how this miracle opens the door to gospel preaching and as gospel preaching increases we also see growing opposition. However, amongst it all we will see over and over again that the gospel is unstoppable!

DAY 1

Read Acts 3:1-26

1. Looking at 3:1-10, we see a wonderful miracle of a lame man who is healed by Peter. Miracles are a sign that point to something beyond the miracle itself. Look back at Acts 2:22 to see what truth Jesus' miracles conveyed about Him. In light of this, what statement is being made about God's role in the Apostle's ministry through this miracle in 3:1-10?
2. This miracle opens the door to Peter explaining the gospel to the crowd (3:11-26). What does he say about:
 - a. Jesus?
 - b. How the people should respond?
 - c. What the outcome will be for those who do respond well?
3. Peter's preaching tells us Jesus was sent to wipe away our sins (3:19) and to turn us from our wicked ways (3:26). Do you know the forgiveness of sins and a life changed from pursuing sinful desires?

Praise God for such a clear endorsement of the Apostle's ministry by empowering them to perform miracles to bring glory to Jesus and the good news of what He has done to bring forgiveness of sins and new life! Pray that God would grow your awareness of sin and ungodliness in your life so that you might continue to live the life Jesus has made possible for you by His death, burial and resurrection.

DAY 2

Read Acts 4:1-31

1. The context for this chapter flows straight out of chapter 3 where Peter (with John) has healed a lame man and begun preaching about Jesus to the crowds. What impact is the gospel having on the crowds? (Hint: there are two key responses)
2. What do the religious leaders ask Peter and John?
3. Peter is "filled with the Holy Spirit" (4:8) and gives them the answer. What does he say?
4. A recurring phrase in the book of Acts is people being "filled with the Spirit". What outcome does being filled with the Spirit have on Peter (4:8)? And what outcome does being filled with the Spirit have on those young Christians who prayed together (4:29-31)?
5. In 4:12 we are reminded that Jesus is the only way people can know the hope of salvation. We are also reminded that God gives the fullness of His Spirit to empower His people to speak about Jesus boldly. This should be a cause for great joy, growing confidence and motivation for us to focused prayer and evangelism. What things tempt you to be quiet about Jesus?

Thank God for the gospel that brings salvation to those who believe. Thank him for the insight we see here today that opposition to Christians speaking about Jesus should be no surprise, but that God gives His Spirit to empower us to speak clearly and boldly despite opposition. Pray that God fills you with His Spirit today that you might speak about Jesus with boldness.

DAY 3

Read Acts 4:32-5:11

1. Looking at 4:32-37, what positive impact is God's grace having on this new community of Christians regarding their wealth? How does their example challenge you today?
2. Looking at 5:1-11, what is at the heart of Ananias and Sapphira's sin and why is it judged so harshly?
3. It is easy to copy external behaviours that have the appearance of godliness and integrity without the honesty of heart that must accompany it to be pleasing to God. We can all be at risk of 'faking it' at times for a range of different reasons. The great danger is not that people might be disappointed in us if they find out, but that our fake actions are telling lies to the Holy Spirit. While this case in Acts is extreme, and not the norm, it serves as a sobering reminder about the importance of living genuine lives, honestly before God and each other. How does this challenge you today?

Ask God to guard you against the satanic temptation of thinking you can pretend to be godly by your actions while being another on the inside. Ask God to forgive you for the times when you have not been honest before Him, and pray that God continues to transform your heart so that you might live freely, honest about where you are and grow in being generous with what you have.

All In

**WORSHIP - TESTIMONIES
AGM - LOOKING AHEAD**



**COMBINED GATHERING 9:30AM
15TH MARCH FOLLOWED BY LUNCH**

DAY 4

Read Acts 5:12-42

1. What different reactions do you see here to the Apostle's work?
2. Even though they face increasing opposition, what motivates the Apostle's to keep going? (See 5:29ff)
3. Remembering that the Apostles are still in Jerusalem (5:12, 5:16), and that Luke is interested in helping us see the fulfilment of God's purposes (Acts 1:8), how do his comments in 5:14 and 5:41-42 serve that purpose?

Opposition to the gospel was part of the early Christian experience and has remained the case down through the ages in varying degrees. Even today, Christians around the world are heavily persecuted, even to the point of death. While this is a cause for concern and prayer, it is extremely important to see the way the Apostles handled opposition – they continued to boldly and courageously trust in Jesus by declaring the gospel despite opposition. God sovereignly used this hardship to bring the fruit of salvation for “more and more men and women” (5:14) in fulfillment of His promise.

Pray for our brothers and sisters around the world today who are suffering for the sake of the gospel, that God would strengthen their faith, fill them with His Spirit and enable them to press forward for the sake of ‘more and more’ men and women being saved. Pray also that you would consider how you might step up in counting the cost in speaking about Jesus to those you can today.

DAY 5

Read Acts 6:1-7

1. Yesterday we saw that Jesus was saving more and more men and women around Jerusalem as the gospel was preached. Here we see this growth in Christians bringing with it the increasing importance to love and care for those in need. What do you learn here about the importance of churches maintaining a clear priority of the ministry of the word and prayer?

2. What is the outcome of this decision to enable the Apostles to continue focusing on this ministry? (See 6:7)
3. As you consider the spiritual requirements of those who served the practical needs of those in the community (6:3, 5), is there a 'lesser' need for personal godliness to serve God's people like this? As you consider your own ministry, no matter what it is, how is this a challenge for you today?

Pray that God might continue to give us wisdom for how to best love and care for those in need among us without compromising the priority of gospel ministry so that we might continue to see God save many more people.

NOTES

WEEK 3 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

GROWING PAINS OF THE CHURCH

MY GOSPEL MINISTRY UPDATE

Who are you concerned about at church? Who's progress are you pleased about?

MY LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

Something I want to work on...?

Getting better at _____...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 6:1-7

Context:

The new church community looks after its members by putting some of their money towards food for the more vulnerable disciples such as the widows. Like today, the church in Acts is not a group of perfect people. While their kindness is great compared to the rest of society they aren't immune to worldly values. Barriers exist along cultural and ethnic lines and the generous offer of food for widows is limited to the dominant culture Jerusalem which is the Hebraic Jews while the Hellenistic Jews are missing out. The Hebraic Jews were more aligned with traditional Hebrew culture and spoke mostly Aramaic while the Hellenistic Jews were more assimilated into Greek/Roman culture and spoke Greek. A complaint is raised over the discrimination, followed by a discussion and then the reorganisation of food distribution.

Read acts 6:1-7

Questions

1. Note how Luke records the facts of this event but refrains from commenting on who is right or wrong. The Hellenistic Jews appear to raise a valid concern if the church is “one in Christ Jesus” but the word ‘complain’ does have negative connotations - see Numbers 11:1. Do you grumble? What would be a positive way to raise and talk about issues like this within a church community?
2. The Apostles delegate the authority and responsibility of distributing food to a team of regular church members. Note in verse 3 the calibre required for service in this area of the church, as well as the type of people who are chosen. Full of the spirit = faithful and focussed on God. Wisdom = thoughtful, smart and prayerful about the best way to go about things - given the overall purposes of God and their particular circumstances.
 - a. How could being both ‘spirit-filled’ and ‘wise’ shape our own approach to ministry and leadership in various areas of gospel ministry?
 - b. How important is it for leaders to delegate ministry responsibilities to church members? See Ephesians 4:11-12.
3. What would be some benefits of working as a team - compared to individuals simply turning up when their name appears on a roster?
4. Church life involves serving in many smaller ways for the sake of the gospel. Are you prepared to put aside the time, energy and some of life’s other activities so that you can serve the growth of the gospel in our area?
5. There’s no mention of these men being ‘gifted’ in the job they are given to do. There’s just a need! Are you happy to serve the Lord Jesus whenever and wherever you’re needed - even if it’s behind the scenes?
6. Note the priority of the Apostles was to the ministry of the word (proclaiming the gospel, teaching/preaching from the bible to crowds and individuals) and to prayer. Why is it important for the ministry of the word and prayer to remain a priority for the church and its leaders?
7. Read verse 7. The way they chose to manage their people, time and resources at this particular moment in history made a positive impact on the progress of the gospel which took the form of unbelieving people being converted to Christ: *“The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”* Our situation today may be different to theirs, but:
 - a. How might we measure whether or not our ministries and teams are helping the overall progress of the gospel in the Northern Illawarra?
 - b. Does God even care about the number of unbelieving people in cities and communities being converted into disciples of Christ?
 - c. What part, if any, should the increase of new conversions play as we evaluate, modify, initiate or even bring to an end various ministry areas and/or activities?

TAKE HOME

8. Have a think about your involvement in ministry - both informally as an individual/friend/family member, etc - and formally as a member of a ministry team at Bulli Anglican.
 - a. If you're not very involved in ministry ask a church leader about getting involved.
 - b. If you are serving, how well is your team functioning at the moment? Are you clear on your purpose as a team? Your goals? Talk to your team leader (or put your hand up to be a team leader!) and ask if there's something you could do to help your team, and your area of ministry, thrive.

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anything you've read in the bible lately that is worth repeating to someone else? (silly question)

Who might benefit from hearing these words via a phone call or coffee with you this week?

WEEK 4 MARCH 8-14

WEEK 4: ACTS 6:8-8:1 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes

- Questions

- Implications: To do / To change

- For Prayer

- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy... 😊

WEEK 4 ACTS 6:8-8:1

WEEK 4 - DAILY READING NOTES

The first five chapters of Acts have focused on Jerusalem, where the Spirit has empowered the gospel to be preached resulting in more and more people being saved but along with it comes a constant rise of persecution. This week we will see the gospel break out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria in fulfillment of God's purpose (Act 1:8). It begins with rising hostility in Jerusalem climaxing with Stephen being stoned to death. Stephen's death causes the Jerusalem Christians to be scattered far and wide. Amazingly, in God's wisdom and sovereignty, this persecution causes the gospel to spread to Judea and Samaria (8:4-25), to the Gentiles (8:26-40) and eventually to the most unlikely of converts, Saul (9:1-30 – we'll read about Saul the week after next).

DAY 1

Read Acts 6:8-15

1. What (false) charges are brought against Stephen?
2. What causes Stephen's opponents to resort to making up false charges about him?
3. What reality check do we find here about the way some people will respond to the gospel?

Pray for those around the world who are hostile towards the things of Jesus, especially those who go to extreme lengths to oppose the gospel of Jesus and those who follow Him. We know that hostility will often be aroused by the gospel, so pray that God's church all over the world might not shrink back in fear, but stand strong, full of the Holy Spirit, holding out the truth of Jesus for all to hear.

DAY 2

Stephen has had two charges brought against him. First, that he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God (6:11). (Blasphemy means to speak about God, or things of God without any reverence or respect.) Second, this charge is raised because he never stops speaking against the temple and the law (6:13). As you read through Stephen's speech, think about how his response defends himself against these allegations.

Read Acts 7:1-53

1. How does Stephen defend himself against the charge of blasphemy? (Hint: what does Stephen's speech reveal about his attitude towards God and His Word?)
2. What does his speech teach about the importance of the temple as the place where God's presence will dwell? (7:44ff)
3. What does his speech show about how the Israelites treated God and his law (7:39ff)?
4. Who does Stephen liken the religious leaders (Sanhedrin) to and why?

Pray that God would help you develop an ever-deepening reverence for God, His Word and a delight in the One to whom it all points, Jesus.

DAY 3

Read Acts 7:51-53

1. Circumcision was given by God as an outward sign of inward belonging to him and his covenant people (covenant = the promise of descendants to Abraham). What does Stephen mean about the inward condition of the religious leaders when he says their hearts and ears are 'uncircumcised'?
2. In what area of your life are you aware of the temptation to develop a 'disconnect' between your outward self and your inner self?
3. "You always resist the Holy Spirit!" How are they resisting? What response is the Holy Spirit intending to bring about in people? (See 1 Corinthians 12:3)

4. Paul writes in Galatians 5:25: *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* Since the Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of Jesus as Lord how are you learning to keep in step with his lordship? In which aspect of life do you want to walk more closely with the Spirit by submitting to his Lordship?

Praise God that by his grace he has opened our eyes to the truth of Jesus: who he is and what he's done to bring us to God. Ask him to lead you today, and always, away from the temptation to resist the Holy Spirit through disobedience to Jesus and to keep in step with the Spirit.

DAY 4

Read Acts 7:54-60

1. What is the response of the religious leaders to Stephen accusing them of the same sin as their forefathers?
2. What happens to Stephen?
3. In the midst of this rising aggression where things spiral quickly to a fatal outcome, Stephen's eyes are fixed on the realities of heaven and the sovereign rule of Jesus. How would this vision be a comfort for Stephen? How is this relevant for us today?

Pray that God might help you become so convinced of the sovereign rule of Jesus and the realities of a life beyond the grave which so shadows this life that you might be able to face death without fear, but with certain and solid hope.

DAY 5

Read Psalm 73

1. What is the truth asserted in verse 1 that is explored by this Psalm?

2. How would you describe the kind of thinking of v2-12 that undermines the Psalmists faith in God's goodness?
3. V13-14 is the low point for the writer of the Psalm: the fear that working hard to remain pure in God's eyes is all for nothing in the end. When, if ever, have you felt this way?
4. V7 Is a turning point that corrects the writers perspective. How would you sum up the conclusion of the Psalm?
5. In Acts we see that the unstoppable Gospel is met with fierce persecution. This is also true around the world today whenever God's people stand for Jesus. We might be tempted to make the same error as the writer of Psalm 73. At what moments do you feel tempted to remain silent about Jesus? Which verse in the Psalm will give you strength at those times?

Use v27-28 as the basis of a prayer. Ask God to keep you seeing life from his perspective, to be your refuge from the deception and darkness of this world and to be the source of your words of praise before others today.

WEEK 4 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

STEPHEN THE MARTYR

MY GOSPEL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Who did you welcome and care for at church? How have you shown hospitality to a new person or a christian brother or sister you don't know very well?

MY LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

Been learning more about...?

I've been learning to _____ instead of _____...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 6:8-8:1

Context:

Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin is the longest speech in the Bible. It is a magnificent walk through the history of the Israelite nation and highlights God's faithfulness to his people despite their continued rejection of him and his faithful servants. Stephen is introduced in this chapter as "a man full of God's grace and power" who performs miraculous wonders and signs among the people - presumably to underline the power and truth of the gospel message he was proclaiming. But just as opposition rose up against the Apostles it rises up again towards Stephen.

Read Acts 6:8-8:1

Questions

1. Although Luke begins by referring to Stephen's miracles what's the main focus of Stephen's activities in V10 that gets the members of the Synagogue fired up?
2. Notice Stephen speaks wisely and, while many others believe his message, the leaders are still not convinced. How does this mixed response to Stephen (and to Jesus!) shape our thinking, understanding and expectations towards mission amongst the people of our own area?

The main accusations aimed at Stephen involved blasphemy towards God, Moses, the law (associated with Moses) and the temple. In his speech he makes it clear that:

- God brought about the people of Israel by his own power according to his promise to Abraham. His grace and mercy alone are the source of everything. v2-34
- By choosing Moses, God established a pattern of salvation that involved sending a saviour to his hopeless, helpless people. Their history was always about God's grace and power not their good qualities. v34
- Despite God's goodness the people of Israel had rejected him and his servants from the very beginning. v35, v39
- God was around long before the temple even existed - even as a tabernacle. It was God's idea as a foreshadow of Christ and was never meant to remain. V48,49

3. The Jewish leaders claim to be the faithful ones. What is the overall point Stephen makes with his speech? Is there a key verse that sums it up?
4. The Sanhedrin go berserk in response to Stephen's speech. Meanwhile, he receives a vision of the heavenly realm and calls it as he sees it: the Son of Man (the title Jesus took for himself) standing at God's right hand. How is Luke's description of the Jews in v57 revealing?
5. Note the similarities between the accounts of Stephen and Jesus (especially v57-60). How does the murder of Stephen line up with the idea that the word of God is 'Unstoppable'?
6. Note who is mentioned in 7:58 and the beginning of 8:1. How does this underline the unstoppable nature of the gospel?
7. Saul supported the persecution, heard Stephen's speech and approved of his killing. It was unthinkable that he would believe the gospel. Is there anyone you know who is similar to Saul? Does this story change the way you think about them?

Before the events of this chapter Stephen is described as a man full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith, full of wisdom, full of God's grace and power. These are the qualities that led him to speak about Jesus with courage and faithfulness. Through Stephen's faithful message people believed and were saved from eternal destruction - even though he died for the sake of the

Gospel. It was the truth that offended the leaders and brought about the persecution - not something Stephen did wrong.

8. Persecution will always take place when God's people carry out the mission of making disciples. Are you willing to stand for Christ and speak about Christ in your world?
9. How much does fear of persecution influence your thoughts, words and actions concerning local mission?
10. Notice Stephen did not go around making big speeches all the time prior to this occasion. He was primarily known as a spiritual man of grace and wisdom who spoke the truth among the people around him. Why is being Godly so important for someone on mission?
11. While a minority group stirred up hostility towards Stephen, there were many others would have heard his message prior to this moment and found salvation in Jesus! If we're listening to the voice of our Heavenly Father what should we pay more attention to:
 - a. The angry shouts of the hostile minority?
 - b. The future pain of the 'many' who are waiting to hear the gospel and will perish without it?
 - c. The potential discomfort of church members who don't really like change?
12. Are you more optimistic or pessimistic about the way people might respond to the gospel if you were to speak to them? What kind of mindset do we need if we're going to be effective at reaching others for Jesus?

TAKE HOME

13. As we consider mission in our own area it is important to understand that Stephen was a Jewish man speaking to fellow Jews about their Messiah. He knew his audience. How well do you know the crowd/the people you're trying to win for Christ? Describe them and bring it back for next week. Think about values, beliefs, fears, needs, etc.

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anyone who might benefit from a catch up with you to read the bible and pray together

NOTES

WEEK 5 MARCH 15-21

WEEK 5: ACTS 8:1-8 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes
- Questions
- Implications: To do / To change
- For Prayer
- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 5 ACTS 8:1-8

WEEK 5 - DAILY READING NOTES

DAY 1

Read Acts 8:1-8

1. Looking at 8:1-3, what purpose does Stephen's death play in God's sovereign plan for the nations (Acts 1:8)?
2. What reaction increases in response to the gospel growing?
3. The Samaritans are a race of people resulting from the mixed marriages of the Jews with the Assyrians dating back to the Assyrian assimilation in 722BC. The 'pure' Jews looked down on the Samaritans as second class because they were no longer true Jews or heirs to God's promises. In light of this history, why might it have been important for Peter and John to witness them receiving the Spirit through faith in Jesus alone, with no reference to anything Jewish at all?

Praise God that the Spirit (and salvation) is not frustrated by the aggressive persecution of God's people. His salvation crossed all boundaries and borders so that God's people might powerfully proclaim him to every nation on earth. Pray for the people of other nations to know Christ. Pray that God would stir your heart and give you opportunities to share the good news about Jesus with someone you know. Pray about who you might like to ask to read the Bible with to begin that journey.

DAY 2

Read Acts 8:1-3

1. Why do you think the apostles stayed in Jerusalem?

2. What do we discover about Saul in these verses? What impression do you have of this man?
3. The persecution of the church continues today in many places. How would the book of Acts help to comfort and strengthen people facing persecution or hardship?

Persecution of God's people causes great sorrow for those caught in the suffering. Yet the gospel is more powerful and holds out hope to all who believe. Spend some time in prayer for our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church who will face trouble, hardship, cruelty and even death for the sake of Christ today. Pray specifically for God's servants in North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Yemen, Iran and India.

DAY 3

Read Acts 8:4-8

1. What is the defining feature of those believers who were scattered?
2. Why do you think the persecution made them bold instead of quiet about Jesus?
3. What do we learn about the purpose God has for the miracles and signs in relation to the preaching of the gospel message?

Praise God for the power of his gospel which crosses over all human borders and boundaries to bring great joy. Think of someone you can share the gospel with today. Pray that God will give you the opportunity and the words to say. Be joyful in Christ and the good news that we are right with God through him.

DAY 4

Read Ephesians 6:10-17

1. As we consider the persecution in Acts we might be tempted to view unbelieving people as our enemies. Who does v11 name as the enemy of God's people?
2. V12 What is the nature of the opposition we face as we carry out the mission of making disciples of Christ?
3. The word 'stand' is used three times in v13-14. What is the alternative to standing firm in Christ?
4. Putting on the armour of God means being mindful of all that he has done for us in Christ. In Jesus we have truth, righteousness, faith, salvation and the 'spirit-powered' word of God. These things accompany a 'readiness' to do what? (Hint: where does our readiness come from?)

Praise God that he has fought and defeated our enemy when he fought and defeated sin, the world and the devil through his death and resurrection. Call on his strength to live and speak for him today.

DAY 5

In Acts we see the unstoppable gospel crossing borders and conquering darkness and evil to set people free. Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus why this is wonderful news for them.

Read Ephesians 2:11-18

1. V11,12 What were the defining features of their life before they came to know Christ?
God promised blessing to Abraham and his descendants. His blessing would reverse the curse that came with sin. However, non-Jewish peoples (gentiles) could make no claim on this promise or the blessing it held. Instead, gentiles had to live at a distance in the fearful expectation of God's righteous judgement falling upon them sooner or later. Or else they could throw themselves on his mercy and see what happened.
2. V13-18 what has Christ done to change everything for humanity? How do you feel about this?
3. We are brought near to God and his people by the blood of Christ. According to v15 what is Jesus' purpose for humanity?

We have access to the Father by the presence of his Holy Spirit who dwells in the hearts of all believers. Ask your heavenly Father to help you by his Spirit to grasp more and more the wonder, joy and peace of knowing Jesus as Lord. If there is any threat to the peace between you and other believers bring that to God also and ask him for wisdom and strength to do what must be done.

WEEK 5 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

PERSECUTION AND SCATTERING OF THE CHURCH

MY GOSPEL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Who did you intentionally sit next to and speak with at church?

MY LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 8:1-8

Context:

In this section we see the devil attack God's church via external pressure from opponents. The stoning of Stephen begins a great persecution on the church. We need to go back to Acts 1:8 to understand the significance of this passage. Whilst the church is scattered they are going to be witnesses in the next frontier of the church. This scattering, although directly related to persecution against the church, is God's way of growing the gospel and expanding the church. It is here that Saul's crusade against the church begins in earnest. Philip is introduced as one of those who is also scattered. He will be the subject of the next two passages.

Read Acts 8:1-8

Questions

1. V8:1b As a wave of persecution breaks out many believers leave Jerusalem. To which areas does the scattering take them?
2. Go back and look at Acts 1:8. How is this scattering significant?

3. What does this tell us about the power of God during times of trouble?
4. What kind of person does Saul appear to be? Are there any similarities between his behaviour here and his work later on in Acts as a missionary for the gospel?
5. Notice how those who were scattered kept preaching wherever they ended up. What does this tell us about these early believers?
6. Samaria represents a new territory beyond the borders of Judea into which the gospel moves and the outbreak of supernatural activity signifies the breaking of this new boundary. According to v8 the defining mark of the Samaritan's newfound faith is joy. How do you think this joy was expressed? Should joy in the Lord be the prevailing characteristic of our lives and our gatherings? How do we restore and express our joy in Christ?

TAKE HOME

7. In God's sovereign power the gospel advanced as the scattered Christians shared Jesus to new people in new locations. The persecution that people meant for evil was part of God's sovereign plan to bring new life to people living under the shadow of judgement. God is always in control and everything that happens, whether good or bad, takes place according to his good purposes. Has it occurred to you that God brought you to the Illawarra to carry out his plans in this part of the world? His plan has not changed. He wants his servants to tell people about the good news of Jesus. Commit yourself to telling someone about Jesus this week or inviting them to hear about him. Pray about it together.

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anyone who might benefit from a catch up with you to read the bible and pray together

WEEK 6 MARCH 22-28

WEEK 6: ACTS 8:9-25 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes

- Questions

- Implications: To do / To change

- For Prayer

- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 6 ACTS 8:9-9:9

WEEK 6 - DAILY READING NOTES

DAY 1

Read Acts 8:9-13

1. In v9-11 What do we learn about the people of the city in Samaria according to the attention they gave to Simon?
2. How are they similar to people in our own society? How are they quite different?
3. In v12,13 Philip's proclamation is accompanied by miracles and signs that marked Jesus' own ministry. Many believe and are baptised including Simon. Why do you think Luke singles out Simon for special mention at this point?
4. New faith in a person is cause for great rejoicing! But new faith isn't always as straightforward as we might hope because people are complicated to various extents. What is your initial assessment of Simon's faith in v13?

The faithful proclamation of the Gospel is powerful in every time, place and culture. Pray for those who preach the Gospel in our own region - for leaders of churches, for gifted evangelists and for ordinary Christians who have the privilege of bringing the extraordinarily powerful message of Christ to the people of our community, region, nation and world.

DAY 2

Read Acts 8:14-25

1. Why do the apostles send Peter and John to Samaria?

2. The apostles held special authority as Jesus' representatives and their visit signified that the Gospel in Samaria was the same as the gospel in Jerusalem. For the same reason the arrival of the Holy Spirit is also delayed until the apostles came to lay hands on the new believers and pray. It showed that the Samaritans were equally part of God's new kingdom. Why would it have been important for both Jews and Samaritans to understand this?
3. How does Simon respond to seeing the Holy Spirit being given by the laying on of the Apostle's hands? How do the Apostles respond to his request?
4. How Peter makes a very clear distinction between the nature of the Holy Spirit and other spiritual forces associated with Simon's sorcery. What point is he making? How could we also make a similar mistake to Simon in the way we relate to God or by the things we pray for?

Praise God that the Spirit (and salvation) is not restricted to the Jewish people. He is given freely to anyone who hears the gospel, repents and puts their trust in Jesus. The Spirit is not a commodity that can be purchased, or a genie in a bottle that can be controlled or manipulated. The Spirit has been poured out to empower gospel preaching to the nations so that salvation might go to more and more people as they repent and put their faith in Jesus. Pray that God would strengthen the conviction of His church and raise up many more people who will count the cost and take the gospel to the nations.

DAY 3

Read Acts 8:26-40

1. Up until now we've seen the gospel preached to crowds of people in a public setting. In this section we see the importance of personal evangelism in God's purposes also. What can we learn from Philip in the way he shares the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch?
2. How does this account help to show the fulfilment of God's purposes given in Acts 1:8?

Pray that God would stir your heart and give you opportunities to share the good news about Jesus with someone you know. Pray about who you might like to ask to read the Bible with to begin that journey.

DAY 4

Read Acts 9:1-2

1. How might you describe Saul from these opening verses?
2. This is not the first time we've encountered Saul. Look back at Acts 7:59- 8:3 to gather some more insight. What is the likelihood that this man, left to his own devices, would ever become a Christian?
3. The passion and energy that Saul exerts in his desire to destroy those first Christians must have been terrifying. Have you ever experienced opposition because of your faith in Jesus? How does it affect you?

Pray that God would give strength and courage to His people around the world, especially those facing fierce hostility because of their faith in Jesus.

DAY 5

Read Acts 9:3-9

Paul's conversion is given to us three times in the book of Acts (Acts 9, 22 and 26) because it is so strategic to God fulfilling His purposes to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

1. What happens to Paul?
2. Who does Jesus say He is persecuting? Why is that a surprise?

3. How does Saul respond?

4. Do you think the account of Saul's conversion is meant to be understood as a normal pattern for others?. Why or why not? (Hint: think back to Luke 24 and Acts 1)

5. How is Saul's conversion an encouragement for us today?

Praise God for His sovereign grace in changing even the hardest of hearts to respond in repentance and faith. Pray for those you know personally, our mission partners and those they are seeking to reach, and the worldwide church as it seeks to take the gospel to the nations

NOTES

WEEK 6 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

WEEK 6 - GROWTH GROUP STUDY

PHILIP AND THE SORCERER

MY GOSPEL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Before you went to church this week did you ask God to make you aware of any people he wanted you to speak to? Who did you intentionally sit next to and/or speak with?

MY LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

God has been telling me to trust him with...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 8:9-25

Context:

In this section we see the power of the Holy Spirit collide with rival spiritual powers as the gospel moves through the region of Samaria in fulfilment of Jesus words in Acts 1:8. One reason the Jews rejected the Samaritans was the idol worship which took place among their ancestors around 600 to 700 hundred years earlier. For this reason among others Samaritans were considered polluted rather than pure in terms of faith and bloodlines.

Read 8:9-25

Questions

1. What does Luke tell us about the kind of public attention Simon received for his demonstrations of super-natural power? What does this show us about Samaritan society?
2. Many people, including Simon, are converted and baptised. Simon in particular is mentioned because of his astonishment and fascination with the signs and miracles taking place. What does this tell us about the power of the gospel compared other spiritual powers?

According to the Jews, the Samaritans were excluded from membership of God's people because they had mixed heritage. They were seen as 'sort of-Jews' but not proper Jews therefore it was big deal when the apostles heard that people in Samaria had accepted the word of God. It meant that God's salvation was not confined to the Jews alone. But we also discover that the Holy Spirit did not come to dwell in the Samaritan believers at the time of their baptism. Instead, God delayed the arrival of the spirit until a couple of the apostles arrived, prayed and laid hands on them. The laying of hands was a visual sign of affirmation saying, 'This person has been chosen by God for a special purpose and has our blessing.'

3. Why do you think the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria?
4. Why was it important for the apostles of Jesus to be present when the Holy Spirit arrived? What point is being made about the gospel that came to Samaria compared to the gospel that being preached in Jerusalem?
5. What did Simon get wrong? What did he have to be bitter about? In what way is he similar to Ananias and Sapphira?

TAKE HOME

Because of sin the world is divided. People are divided on many grounds: age, gender, culture, ethnicity, interests, wealth, class, race and the list goes on. In Acts, however, we see God beginning to unite humanity in the gospel. Paul wrote to the people of Galatia: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* And to the people in Corinth he insisted: *"...that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."* Sadly. Churches can often reflect the very same divisions that exist in society and Christians can have massive blind spots concerning their exclusivity where people end up only relating in love to those who are like themselves. Disunity was, and is, one of the main factors that threatens to destroy the work of the Holy Spirit. But our role in church is not to make friends but to make and mature disciples. We are called to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ and to present them as mature in him.

6. Who do you mainly relate to at church? Do you take the time to show interest in the lives of people who are different in age, gender, marital status, parental status or values? Do you reach out to include these people or new people in your conversations at church?

What about welcoming others into your home for a meal together? If this isn't happening make a plan and decide for the sake of Christ who you will reach out to both within our church community and/or life in general. Share the plan with your group and ask about it next week.

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anyone who might benefit from a catch up with you to read the bible and pray together

PRAY FOR OUR MISSION PARTNERS



**Jim, Tanja,
Evie and Silas French**

Continue to pray for our good friends the French's who are doing the Lord's work in Spain:

"We are so aware of your prayers and your care for us here in Spain, especially when it comes to our children and their schooling. Thank you so much for your encouragement and support. We have seen many prayers answered and are looking forward to sharing more about what God

is doing in Spain with us through you."

As a family we are part of the Anglican Church in Valencia which is an international evangelical church. We serve & support where we can although our main purpose and ministry in Spain is teaching the Bible through MOCLAM.

For Your Prayers

Give thanks for:

- our church and the opportunities for us in Valencia to serve there as a family
- our language development and better understanding at school and daily life
- the safe arrival of the Snowden's and Miriam and our shared office space with a great set up and wonderful colleagues
- our quality MOCLAM students

Please ask for:

- wisdom to care for the needy people at our church as well as leading small group Bible study for Jim and Sunday school for Tanja
- us to be strong in the grace that is in Christ when teaching the Bible
- Evie & Silas' schooling and our witness as Christians at their school
- health for us as a family as we have been much more prone to colds than normal

WEEK 7 MARCH 29 - APRIL 4

WEEK 7: ACTS 8:26-40 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes
- Questions
- Implications: To do / To change
- For Prayer
- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 7 ACTS 9:10-31

WEEK 7 - DAILY READING NOTES

DAY 1

Read Acts 9:10-25

1. What does God tell Ananias about His purposes for Saul? (9:15-16)
2. What evidence do you see in this account of Saul's changed attitude towards God, His people and the unbelieving world?
3. When does Saul get started on his new mission in life?

Thank God for His sovereign plan to take the gospel to the nations, even through the most unlikely of servants! Reflect for a moment on this: it was God's sovereign work in Saul's life that caused the gospel to come to us today. Thank God for His faithfulness to His promises!

DAY 2

Read Acts 9:26-31

1. What do you think it was like for the Apostles to hear that Saul was coming to town?
2. What does Paul do that would have been a compelling reason to believe he was a genuinely converted man?
3. What is the importance of 9:31 for the book of Acts?

Praise God for sending the gospel out to Judea and Samaria, for strengthening His church there – and beyond through the ages. As the book of Acts tells us, God is interested in more and more people being saved. Keep praying that God would work among us to be saving people.

DAY 3

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17

1. After reading about Saul's life before Jesus, how does reading his reflections in 1 Timothy impact you today?
2. How does hearing Paul's story offer hope to those who are a long way from God?

There are people all over the world who are violently opposed to the gospel of Jesus. How might you respond in prayer for them today?

DAY 4

Read Philippians 3:1-11

1. In this passage Paul refers in detail to his former way of life to contrast the empty message of false teachers with the supreme value of the gospel. He exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord rather than taking pride in their efforts to keep the law. What is the reason we can rejoice in the Lord according to v8,9?
2. How does Paul describe the value of knowing Christ compared to the value of anything else? v8
3. In v10 what does Paul want more than anything else? For what outcome?

4. Knowing Christ means putting sin to death while taking hold of a new life that comes as we obey God. Is this what you want more than anything else? If knowing Christ is going to be your greatest desire what might have to change in order to reflect this priority?
5. Why is it worth making Christ your number one love? What's the alternative?

How can the desire to know Christ and make him known change the approach you take to whatever lies ahead today? Ask God to help you put Jesus in first place in every part of your life.

DAY 5

Read Philippians 3:10-16

1. Paul says that knowing Christ is everything - and yet he hasn't yet arrived at this goal. According to Paul what must Christians spend their lives doing in the meantime? V12-14
2. What is the goal and the prize that he is speaking about?
3. While he presses on Paul also says that Christ "took hold of me" and that it is God "has called me heavenward." What does this remind us about all the efforts we make to serve Christ and follow him?
4. Paul says Christians who are 'mature' should take the same approach as him. Is maturity something you are striving for as a Christian? It means to become more Christlike in character, attitudes and behaviour. In which areas of life are you seeking to develop maturity?

Praise God that God's servants are never alone in their walk with Christ. In the midst of our labour for the gospel, his power upholds us and his spirit dwells in each of his children providing the strength and power needed to carry out the task to which he has called us.

WEEK 7 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

MY GOSPEL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Who did you intentionally sit next to and speak with at church?

MY LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

Been learning more about...?

I've been doing _____ instead of _____...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 8:26-40

Context:

The power and sovereignty of God take centre-stage for the rest of Acts 8 and 9. An angel comes to Philip and tells him to go to a specific location where he is given a divine appointment with a senior official from Ethiopia. A discussion of a passage from Isaiah 53 gets Philip a seat in the Ethiopian's chariot then, after some questions and a conversation around the scriptures, the official puts his faith in Christ and asks Philip to baptise him. Once again the power of the word of God is shown as it passes from believer to new believer on its way to the nation of Ethiopia.

Read Acts 8:26-40

Questions

1. Clearly God has a purpose in sending Philip to this man. How do we know God had already been working in his life to prepare him for the gospel? V26-29
2. Which aspect of Acts 1:8 does it fulfil?
3. How was this passage from Isaiah 53 a helpful starting point for a conversation with the Ethiopian?
4. Read Luke 24:44-49. This passage reminds us that every part of the Old Testament teaches us about Jesus, and leads to the good news. It's not too difficult for a Christian to figure out who the passage from Isaiah 53 is about. But there are plenty of other passages and books that are more difficult to understand and easier to misinterpret. How confident are you with understanding and interpreting the Old Testament? What are some principles you have found to be helpful?

If you want to get better at reading and understanding the whole Bible try one of these:

- *According to Plan* - Graeme Goldsworthy
 - *Gospel & Kingdom* - Graeme Goldsworthy
 - *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth* - Gordon D Fee, Douglas Stuart
 - *God's Big Picture* - Vaughan Roberts
5. Just the bible, a conversation and the power of God's spirit. Is that all we need for mission today?
 6. How confident are you that reading the bible with someone who's interested will lead to their conversion to Christ? Have you ever done it? Have you asked? If not, why not? If so, how did it go?
 7. According to Jesus' great commission Philip was already on his way to make disciples. But in Acts 8 he gets a specific instruction from the Holy Spirit which sends him to a particular person. You might be looking for every opportunity to share the gospel with others - but has God ever directed you to a specific person?

The emphasis in Acts is all on God's plan and the power of the Holy Spirit. But Philip's story doesn't mean we should stay silent until God gives us a specific person to speak to. Philip was already on mission and no doubt that made him ready to listen to the Holy Spirit's guidance. The text doesn't tell us what the Spirit's voice was like so we can only speculate.

8. After hearing from Philip the man from Ethiopia wants to be baptised as a follower of Jesus. Baptism marks the end of the old life/self and the start of the new life/self in Christ. Jesus commanded that all new believers be baptised as an outward expression of inward renewal that has already taken place at the moment someone believes. Have you been baptised yet? What's stopping you? Talk to one of the leaders at church about being baptised asap.

TAKE HOME

9. After the baptism Philip appears to teleport! Luke doesn't explain how this happens and leaves us to wonder. But notice the Ethiopian man's response to his Baptism! He is a changed person and goes home rejoicing over what he has found. He was eager to be baptised in Jesus and probably just as eager to tell everyone at home what had happened. People who have been Christians for a long time can lose their joy in Christ.

What restores your joy in the Lord?

Make it your goal to rejoice in the Lord this week - in his grace, his salvation, his love - and let your joy in Christ be evident to people around you. Let your joy be clear as you speak about Jesus - the source of your joy (and if speaking about Jesus freaks you out then share this fear with your group and let others pray for you. Ask God to let your joy be greater than your fears). Regular time in prayer and the Bible each day is the starting place for restoring our joy in Christ.

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Anyone who might benefit from a catch up with you to read the Bible and pray together

BAPTISM

In the Anglican Church we accept that kids come under the umbrella of their parents as they make all kinds of decisions on their behalf: where to live, how to behave, who our friends are, what's right, what's wrong, etc, etc. Parents also speak and believe on their children's behalf - until they become adults and decide one way or the other for themselves. God acts this way towards children in the bible as well. For example, when he saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt he didn't separate out the kids and leave them behind in Egypt because they weren't old enough to decide for themselves whether or not to trust in the LORD. By his grace he included them, under the care of their parents, and called them all his precious people!

On this basis our church welcomes children of believing parents into Christ just as much as we welcome their parents into Christ. We treat children as full believers, under the care and authority of one or both of their parents, and baptise them into Christ along with their parents. As parents, and as a church, we pray for, teach, encourage and raise our kids as disciples of Jesus - rather than treating them as unbelievers and outsiders to Christ for the first 15 years or so of their lives.

It would only be after a child became an adult and decided to reject Christ that we would then treat them as an unbelieving person, in which case, we would love them as much as ever, graciously and sensitively share the good news with them and pray for them to know and trust Jesus as Lord.

Maybe you don't have kids but as a member of Jesus' church we want you to treat and love them as fellow-members of Christ's body. If you have kids and haven't baptised them talk to one of the leaders at church about doing it! It's the way Jesus commands us to publicly acknowledge his saving grace and to celebrate each person's place among God's forgiven people!

The alternative is to treat our children as outsiders to the kingdom until they decide to become Christians. Some take this approach but it can be problematic at times, for example, it would rule out praying as a family because it wouldn't be right to expect an unbelieving person to pray to a God they don't know and love - right?

Child baptism is not the position of some churches and sometimes people can get very anxious about it as though someone's view about it will determine their very salvation. While we strongly believe in child baptism we wouldn't see it as a salvation issue or something people should break fellowship over. It definitely doesn't rule you out from being a member of Bulli Anglican. But it is something we would urge you to think seriously about. We want all children of one or both believing parents to be baptised into the Lord Jesus. If you have questions ask one of our church leaders.

WEEK 8 APRIL 5 - 11

WEEK 8: ACTS 9:1-31 - SERMON NOTES

- Notes

- Questions

- Implications: To do / To change

- For Prayer

- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 8 ACTS 9:32-11:18

WEEK 8 - DAILY READING NOTES

This week we will read through Peter's ministry as recorded from 9:32-11:18. The dominant focus of this section is Peter's vision, which is connected to the conversion of Cornelius and his whole household. It is a turning point in the book of Acts because it is the first account of a 'Gentile' conversion marking another key transition in fulfillment of God's promise (Acts 1:8).

This week's readings will finish with Peter heading back to Jerusalem to explain this event to the Jewish Christian leaders. This section concludes with them praising God that salvation is for all nations, and is only possible on the basis of repentance and faith in Jesus, not Jewish customs, practice, or laws. This lays the foundation for the global mission which the rest of Acts focuses on (chapters 13-28) as Paul's three missionary journeys record the unstoppable gospel going all the way to Rome.

DAY 1

Read Read Acts 9:32-43

1. What is this account about?
2. Who is acknowledged as healing Aeneas? Is that a surprise to hear? Why might that be significant?
3. What impact do these two miracles have on those who heard about it?
4. How might this be a greater miracle than the physical healing of Aeneas and Tabitha?
5. What do you find challenging about this account?

Praise God for the continuing ministry of Jesus in the world. Pray that God gives you a heart like His for those who are sick, hurting and in real need. Pray also that He gives you clarity on the greater spiritual need for salvation that people have, and the need that is met in them hearing and responding to the gospel in repentance and faith in Jesus.

THINKING FURTHER: HEALING IN ACTS

There are four clusters of miraculous signs and wonders in the Bible. We see these clusters during the time of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the early Church. Each cluster of miraculous signs comes before a significant event in the history of God's purposes in the world.

The raising of Tabitha is meant to remind us of others in the Bible (see 1 Kings 17:8-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Luke 7:11-17; 8:41-42, 49-56). We are meant to see that the power demonstrated by these three key characters of times past (Elijah, Elisha, but particularly Jesus) is continued on in the ministry of the Apostles. It tells us that this is another highly significant moment in God's history of salvation. For the first time the gospel was going to break free from Israel and go to the Gentiles!

We are not meant to understand these miracles as normative for us today, just as we would not see Elijah's or Jesus' miracles as normative for us. This is not to say that God can't or won't heal outside these times, but to think of them this way is to miss the bigger point. We are meant to look to what the signs point us to. In this case, the gospel is about to break out and go to the Gentile nations in fulfillment of God's purposes and this is highlighted by another 'cluster' of miracles to draw attention to the importance of this moment in history.

DAY 2

Read Acts 10:1-8

1. What can you learn about Cornelius from this passage?
2. It's hard for us to grasp the gravity of what's happening in this passage without some background. Up until now, a devout Jew would have absolutely nothing to do with a Gentile; they would not sit down at the same table as a Gentile! That Cornelius, a Gentile, is acknowledged by God as god-fearing and generous, and that his prayers have been considered a "memorial offering before God" is nothing short of amazing. Something truly extraordinary is happening in this passage. What does God tell Cornelius to do and how does he respond?
3. Cornelius responds to God's message with trust and obedience. How does his response stir you today?

Thank God for showing us His heart for the nations, while we don't see the full story yet, we at least see that God hears the prayers of those who genuinely seek after Him. We also see God preparing the way for Cornelius to meet Peter, one to whom the gospel has been entrusted. Pray that God would give a hunger to many people to be reconciled to Him, and that many more men and women would be raised up and entrusted with the gospel to share with them. Pray that you might be faithful with sharing the gospel to those you care for.

DAY 3

Read Acts 10:9-23a

1. How does Peter's response in 10:14 help us understand the significance of the vision he saw?
2. How might God's response in 10:15 shed some light on what He wants Peter to understand by this vision?
3. As you consider the sovereign work of God to bring Cornelius and Peter together, what does this suggest about the importance of this meeting for God's purposes unfolding through it?
4. What encouragement is it to you to read about the depth of God's sovereign involvement in daily life? How might this help shape the way you pray for those who don't know Jesus?

Thank God for so clearly preparing the way for Cornelius and Peter to meet. While this account is strategic in the book of Acts as it records the first Gentile hearing and responding to the gospel, we know the same God who orchestrated these events is still at work in the world today. Pray for those you long to see restored back to God, that God might sovereignly work in their hearts to prepare them to hear the gospel, as He did with Cornelius.

DAY 4

Read Acts 10:23b-48

1. Looking at 10:23b-33, what role has God played in orchestrating this meeting? How did he prepare Peter? How did he prepare Cornelius?
2. Can you summarise the content of Peter's gospel message in 10:34-43?
3. What is the outcome of Cornelius (and his household) hearing the gospel message? How does Peter respond?

It really is hard for us to feel the weight of what just happened in this event. For the first time in all of Israel's history, God had included (blessed) a Gentile in fulfillment to His promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) without any reference to the Jewish law. The good news of what Jesus has done in His life, death and resurrection has opened the way for all people to come back to God! This is possible through repentance (turning away from sin and back to God) and faith in Jesus alone.

A new era has dawned, one where the Spirit of God was poured out on those first Gentile converts because they trusted in Jesus. This now marks God's program for the world, one that the rest of Acts will continue to unpack. This same gospel must be preached to the nations so that more and more men, women, boys and girls can be gathered back to God to find forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life with God.

- *Have you turned back to God and put your trust in Jesus?*
- *Are you aware of this urgent priority both for your own life, but also those around you who don't know Jesus?*
- *How can you pray about this today?*

DAY 5

Read Acts 11:1-18

1. Luke has already recorded the details of Cornelius' conversion (10:1-48), yet he records the same details again a second time as part of Peter's explanation of this event to the

Apostles in Jerusalem (11:1-18). Why might Luke spend so much ink describing the details of this event a second time?

2. Remembering that Acts 1:8 is God's revealed program for the world, what significant transition has just taken place in God fulfilling His promise (especially 10:15-18)?
3. How does this passage ignite your passion for mission?

Pray that God continues to work in your heart to bring it in line with His – that we see the desperate need to take the gospel to the Gentile world, the thing that began with Cornelius' conversion and continues today.

NOTES

WEEK 8 GROWTH GROUP STUDY

SAUL'S CONVERSION

MY GOSPEL MINISTRY UPDATE

1. Who did you intentionally sit next to and speak with at church?

MY LIFE AS A DISCIPLE

What came up as I went through the readings this week....

What came up from the sermon at church this week...

Been learning more about...?

I've been doing _____ instead of _____...

GROUP PRAYER TIME

BIBLE STUDY

PASSAGE: ACTS 9:1-31

Context:

This is one of the most astounding stories in the Bible as we consider how bad Saul was before he became Paul. The murderous threats of Saul that begin this chapter only enhance the significance of his repentance. He is as bad, if not worse, than those who crucified Jesus because he carries out a prolonged campaign of hatred not just towards one person but to one after the other. Saul's conversion is God's master-stroke in converting one of the devil's chief lieutenants! It must have been so strange to hear Paul preaching the gospel, rather than rounding up and persecuting those who preached it. Paul's ministry ushers in a time of peace for the early church, where it is strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 9:1-31

Questions

1. Read the previous mentions of Saul in Acts 7:57,58 and 8:1,3. What catches your attention about these descriptions of him?
2. Now read Acts 9:1-4. What further insight into his nature and character do we get from these verses? What do you think makes him such a bad man?
3. The voice of Jesus calls out, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Jesus identifies so closely with his people such that hurting them means hurting him. How does that challenge the way you think about your identity when you're at work, at home, with others, etc? Do you think of yourself as a representative of Jesus to the people in your world?
4. In V15 how does God's purpose for Saul line up with his plans for the gospel in Acts 1:8?
5. How does the conversion of Saul demonstrate the 'power' aspect of the Gospel?
6. In v17 how do Ananias' words reflect the grace of God towards sinners? How do you go with extending God's grace to people who may have caused suffering to you or people you care about?
7. Paul's conversion is sudden and dramatic. But how does Luke also include elements of humour in 20-30?
8. In Damascus and Jerusalem Saul begins to preach about Jesus without delay and in a very short time there is opposition and even the threat of death from his fellow Jews. His identity has changed but how has his personality not completely changed in terms of making trouble?
9. Saul was a Jew and in some ways it may have given him permission to boldly (not necessarily the same as insensitively or rudely) proclaim Christ to his fellow Jews. Does being Australian make you bold to proclaim Christ to other Australians? Should it? (Proclaim simply means to declare, assert, testify something as true).

TAKE HOME

10. God's grace in Saul's life makes for a powerful and dramatic story. God's grace in your life is just as significant and powerful because he has raised you from death in sin to new life in Christ and has given you a deep conviction that Jesus is Lord of all including you and/or life. But maybe the circumstances aren't quite as dramatic compared to Paul. For next week's growth group write out the story of how you became a Christian and read it to someone at the group. Give your story:
 - a. A beginning - I was like this... give an example(s) because...
 - b. A complication/crisis - BUT there was always... I was always feeling like/doing/ searching for/trying to/wishing that/needing/hating/fearful of....

- c. And a conclusion - Then one day/year/i met someone/ I came to understand something about Jesus that changed things for me.... and I had a decision to make... and I became a Christian. And now... (examples of how things have changed)

Make it easy, not too long, don't use Christian jargon or ideas that don't mean anything to people who aren't Christians. For more details check out this short vid by Sam Chan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auPmVfGkXIY>

If you get the chance try telling it to someone who's not a christian. It's fine to explain that you are just practicing because telling others about Jesus is Christians want to do.

ONE TO ONE CATCH-UP:

Make it someone who might like to hear your story. Even if you read it out!! They won't mind. Would you?

WEEK 9 APRIL 12-18

WEEK 9: EASTER SUNDAY - SERMON NOTES

- Notes
- Questions
- Implications: To do / To change
- For Prayer
- **Love, Joy and praise:** What I've heard today that makes my heart leap for joy...

WEEK 9 ACTS 11:19-12:24

WEEK 9 - DAILY READING NOTES

This week we will witness increasing opposition to the gospel and those who carry it, even to the point of death. Yet in the midst of this we will witness God's sovereign use of this opposition to ironically cause the gospel to go even further, showing it to be unstoppable! This section ends with a great reversal of power. King Herod, who is driving an even more intense outbreak of persecution, is struck down by the true and living God. The final picture of this chapter is a description of the unstoppable and all-powerful Word of God that continues to spread and flourish.

DAY 1

Read Acts 11:19-30

1. What do we learn about the impact of Stephen's death for the gospel going out to the Gentiles?
2. After hearing Peter's explanation of Cornelius' conversation (11:1-18), the Apostles in Jerusalem are ready to respond to the growing number of Gentiles being saved (11:21). What do they do?
3. We see here the miracle of God saving more and more people matched with the ready response of the church to teach those people, to ground them in the faith, and to help provide for their practical needs. How does this bring clarity to the heart of what God's people are to be about?

Pray that Bulli Anglican would continue to be a place where more and more people would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, be grounded in faith and support one another in community. How are you going in serving God by being in ministry at Bulli (and beyond) and working to see God's church grow? How can you pray about that?

DAY 2

Read Acts 12:1-4

1. What do you notice in these verses that increases to a whole new level?

2. The story of the gospel going out to the nations has been tainted by opposition and persecution. Given the spiritual and eternal importance of God saving a people for Himself out of the bondage to sin and Satan, is it really a surprise that increasing opposition is found where the gospel is growing?
3. At this point, what hope does there seem to be for Peter?
4. How would you go facing such strong opposition to your faith in Jesus? Would you stand strong, knowing it might cost your life?

Pray that God would increasingly help you see your life through the lenses of eternal realities, matters of life, death, heaven and hell. Pray that you will give yourself to things that will echo into eternity.

DAY 3

Read Acts 12:5-10

1. It's worth remembering that Jesus himself chose the Apostles and commissioned them to be His Spirit-empowered witnesses to the world about the wonderful good news that forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life might be taken to the nations (Luke 24; Acts 1). At this point in the story, we see a beautiful combination of the earnest prayers of God's people and the divine power of God standing behind His Apostles enabling Peter's escape so that the gospel might continue to spread. While this is not a promise that every Christian will be supernaturally rescued from prison, it is a remarkable picture of God's sovereign power to fulfill His promise to bring the message of the gospel to the nations. What encouragement do you take from this passage?
2. While escape was made possible for Peter, many Christians today remain in prison for their faith. What example does the church of Peter's day offer us for those currently in prison for their faith in Jesus?
3. How healthy is your prayer life? Do you pray for those outside this country, those imprisoned for their faith in Jesus? How can you apply today's passage to your life?

Ask God to increase your heart for the nations, both that they would hear the gospel and be saved, and that those who suffer for the sake of Christ might stand strong.

DAY 4

Read Acts 12:11-19a

1. What insight does this passage give you about the way Herod understood and used power?
2. How do the fervent prayers of the Christians indicate where they understood true power to be found?
3. What makes this a refreshingly honest account of history? Can you relate to these Christians at all? If so, how?

Thank God for His sovereign rule over history, that even the most apparently powerful humans are not able to stop His purposes coming to pass. Pray that your trust in God grows as you see God's faithfulness more and more.

DAY 5

Read Acts 12:19b-24

1. What does this final account reveal about how Herod saw himself?
2. How does God respond to Herod's arrogance?
3. How does this account end? What does this conclusion tell you about the nature of true power and where it lies?

Kings and queens come and go, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Pray that God continues to add to our number those being saved as we hold out the Word of the gospel. Pray that you might grow in your confidence that God's gospel word is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

MY MINISTRY TEAM - NOTES & TO-DO

GS

GROUNDWELL

TERM

Luke: The
Facts About
Jesus

One

F R I D A Y 7 P M

What's On

WK1

Jan 31 / Luke 2:11 / The World
Needs Now / Spectacular Hockey
Tournament

WK2

Feb 7 / Luke 5:1-11 / Come
Fishin' / Beach Sports

WK3

Feb 14 / Luke 5:17-26 / Jesus:
More Than You Expected /
Games and Injury Night

WK4

Feb 21 / Luke 6:43-45 / Good Fruit,
Bad Fruit, Inside Out People /
Movie Night

WK5

Feb 28 / Luke 7:36-50 / We All Have
A Past / Fantastic Plastic: Inflatable
Pool Battle (BYO Soft Floaty Device)

WK6

March 6 / Luke 8:22-39 / Power Over
Evil / Slack Lining & Human Pinball

WK7

March 13 / Outing! / FREE TO BE
Regional Youth Event (W'Gong Ent.
Centre)

WK8

March 20 / Luke 12:35-48 / Better
Get Busy / Ring of Fire Circle Games

WK9

March 27 / Luke 16:19-31 / Hell - How
Bad Could It Be? / A Night At The
Races & Cockroach Racing! (BYO Speedy
Roach...)

WK10

April 4 / Luke 23:26-43 / The Great
Exchange / Chocolate Games & Balloon
Battles

Bulli Anglican Church

Call Paul: ☎043893 294

