To the Ends of the Earth

A Twelve-Session Bible Study Through the Book of Acts

Adapted from sermons by Rev. Shannon Canoy

Expanded Bible study and participant workbook

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A Note to the Reader

This study is adapted from my Book of Acts sermon series, preached in 2025. The sermons anchor the teaching on the Spirit, Pentecost, witness under pressure, Stephen, Samaria, Saul, Cornelius, prayer, the missionary journeys, Ephesus, Paul's farewell, and his defense in Jerusalem. Several stretches of Acts did not have a dedicated sermon in the supplied collection. The sections on Acts 15, 18, 21–22, 27–28, and other connecting passages are new study material, marked “Connecting study” where the added teaching is substantial. Read the whole assigned passage in your Bible; these pages summarize and guide conversation instead of reproducing long Scripture quotations.

Acts is the second volume of Luke's account, continuing from the Gospel of Luke. Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8 supplies a map for the story: the Spirit empowers his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and toward the ends of the earth. The book closes in Rome with the gospel being proclaimed, but the work of witness continues. Each session includes a reading, a teaching, questions for a group, and a practice for the week. The questions are invitations to return to the text, not a test of how much you remember. The downloadable PDF includes a participant notes page for each session at the back.

Session 1 — Power to Be Witnesses

Read: Acts 1:1–26; Luke 24:44–53; John 14:16–17.

Look closely: Acts 1 starts with forty days of instruction about the kingdom after Jesus' resurrection. His disciples then ask about restoring the kingdom to Israel; his answer gives them a mission but does not deny that the kingdom matters. Trace the geographic expansion promised in verse 8 against the movements later in the book. Prayer precedes Pentecost, and the community also deals responsibly with the vacancy among the Twelve. The word “witnesses” refers first to those who had seen the risen Jesus; as the book continues, others proclaim the testimony they have received. Their authority rests in the Lord they announce, not in their ability to manufacture a dramatic experience.

Before Jesus ascends, his disciples ask if he will now restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus does not give them a timetable. He promises power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and gives them a calling: they will be his witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem and reaching outward (Acts 1:6–8). The charge is bigger than a command to talk about faith. They are to testify to the crucified and risen Lord with the Spirit's help.

My opening sermon follows the language of the Spirit being with believers, in believers, and coming upon them. These phrases help me teach the Spirit's personal presence and power for witness. The book of Acts gives several scenes of empowerment; Christians differ on how to relate these to conversion in every believer's life. In my Pentecostal tradition, I pray that followers of Jesus will seek the Spirit's empowering work as they obey the mission of Christ. The passage's clear starting point is that witness depends on God's gift rather than human courage alone.

The disciples pray and wait together in Jerusalem. They also select Matthias to take Judas's place among the Twelve. Prayer and practical decisions belong together here. Their waiting is active trust, not a reason to avoid responsibility. Acts will show that the church's witness grows through people who listen, pray, speak, and serve in the power God gives.

Discuss: What do the disciples ask Jesus, and what does he promise instead of a date? Which places does Acts 1:8 name? What does the community do while waiting? Where are you tempted to substitute planning for prayer, or prayer for obedience?

Trace the passage: Read Acts 1:1–14 and list what Jesus teaches, promises, and declines to specify. Which action is assigned to the disciples?

Practice: Read Acts 1:8 each morning this week. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you bear witness to Jesus in a specific relationship or setting.

Session 2 — Pentecost and the Gift of the Spirit

Read: Acts 2:1–47; Joel 2:28–32; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

Look closely: Luke names visitors from many regions before Peter begins to preach. The many languages point outward: the mighty works of God can be heard by people gathered from far beyond Jerusalem. Peter's explanation draws on Joel and on the story of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation. Notice that the Spirit's coming does not replace proclamation of Jesus; it empowers it. When the crowd asks what to do, Peter answers with repentance and baptism, and Luke then describes the new community's practices. Study both halves of the chapter together. A discussion of tongues that never reaches the risen Jesus and the disciples' shared life has stopped too early.

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples gather in one place. A sound like wind fills the house, something like tongues of fire appears, and the Spirit enables them to speak in other languages. Visitors from many places hear the mighty works of God in their own languages. The crowd is amazed, confused, and divided in its response. Peter stands and explains what is happening through Joel's promise of the Spirit poured out and through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

My sermons on Pentecost and tongues emphasize that the Spirit equips the church for witness and that the New Testament does not invite us to dismiss the Spirit's gifts. Pentecost is a historic event in the life of the church; the passage also prompts us to seek the Spirit's help today. Acts 2:4 describes tongues on that day, while the broader book shows the Spirit working in varied ways. Christians hold differing views about whether tongues must accompany every later experience of Spirit baptism. Read Acts 2 alongside Acts 8, 10, and 19 before making a rule from one episode.

Peter's sermon centers on Jesus. He calls his hearers to repent and be baptized; those who receive the message join a community devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Pentecost is both an outpouring of power and the beginning of a people who learn to live together under Christ. Gifts and shared life should not be separated.

Discuss: What do the visitors hear, and how does Peter interpret it? What does Peter say about Jesus' death and resurrection? How do the people respond? What practices mark the community in Acts 2:42–47?

Trace the passage: What questions does the crowd ask in Acts 2, and how does Peter answer them? How does the chapter move from an event to a way of life?

Practice: Pray for the Spirit's help in making Jesus known. Share a meal or pray with another believer as a small act of the shared life Acts describes.

Session 3 — Courage, Community, and Truth

Read: Acts 3:1–26; 4:1–37; 5:1–42.

Look closely: Peter's speech after the healing in Acts 3 attributes the man's restoration to the name of Jesus and calls his hearers to turn to God. The healed man stands beside the apostles when the authorities examine them, making the event difficult to dismiss. Chapter 4 places their boldness next to corporate prayer and practical sharing; chapter 5 exposes a lie committed inside that same generous community. Luke is showing public witness and internal honesty together. Notice what Peter says about the property in Acts 5:4: no one was forced to sell it or surrender the proceeds. The issue is pretending before God and people to give what one has withheld.

Peter and John meet a man who has been unable to walk and who expects a gift of money. In Jesus' name he is healed. Peter does not take credit; he calls the crowd to repentance and points to the risen Christ. The authorities question and threaten the apostles, demanding silence. Their reply sets the pattern for a conscience bound to God: they cannot stop speaking about what they have seen and heard. When commands conflict, they say they must obey God rather than people (Acts 4:19–20; 5:29).

That conviction does not authorize defiance whenever we dislike a rule. The issue in Acts is a direct order to stop bearing witness to Jesus. The believers pray for boldness and continue to speak, accepting the cost. Our courage should carry the same honesty and humility with which Peter gives Jesus the glory for the healing.

Acts then turns to the church's common life. Members share with those in need. Barnabas gives generously. Ananias and Sapphira try to gain the reputation of wholehearted giving while deceiving the community about their gift. Peter says the property and its proceeds remained theirs to decide about; the sin was their lie. My sermon holds these stories side by side because unity and truth belong together. A church can look generous while hiding a desire for status. The Spirit calls us to sincerity as well as service.

Discuss: How does Peter explain the healing? What specific order do the authorities give? What are believers asked to pray for? In Acts 5:4, what does Peter say Ananias was free to do, and why does that matter for understanding the story?

Trace the passage: Compare Peter's words in Acts 3:12–16 and Acts 5:3–4. What does he refuse to claim, and what behavior does he challenge?

Practice: Serve someone quietly this week, and ask whether your words about generosity match your actual choices.

Session 4 — Scattered but Still Speaking

Read: Acts 6:1–15; 7:1–60; 8:1–40.

Look closely: Acts 6 names both a real distribution problem and a real cultural fault line between Hellenistic and Hebrew believers. The leaders neither deny the problem nor abandon prayer and the word; they arrange for trusted people to serve. Stephen is soon challenged in public. His long speech in chapter 7 retells Israel's history around God's action beyond any single place and the people's recurring resistance. Scattered after his death, believers preach in Samaria, and Philip later explains Isaiah to an Ethiopian official. Luke's movement from conflict within the church to witness across social boundaries challenges us to value practical service and patient explanation of Scripture together.

Growth exposes a failure in daily food distribution: Hellenistic Jewish widows are being overlooked. The apostles call the community to choose qualified servants so the need is met and prayer and teaching continue. Stephen, one of the seven, later stands before the council. His speech tells Israel's story and challenges the leaders for resisting God's work. He is killed, yet prays as he dies. His witness is costly and his last words recall the mercy of Jesus.

After Stephen's death, persecution scatters believers. They carry the word into Judea and Samaria. Philip proclaims Christ in a Samaritan city. Simon, once admired for his magic, tries to acquire authority over the Spirit with money; Peter calls him to repent. My sermon uses the language of bitterness here. The text names Simon's distorted heart; it does not license us to diagnose every struggling person from a distance. Let the warning send us to self-examination and honest prayer.

Philip also meets an Ethiopian official reading Isaiah. He begins with that passage, tells him the good news about Jesus, and baptizes him when they come to water. Acts 8 shows the gospel crossing boundaries of place, social standing, and prior religious expectation. Stephen's death is tragic, yet the word of Christ is not silenced. The Spirit uses ordinary travelers as well as recognized leaders.

Discuss: Who is neglected in Acts 6, and how is the church's response organized? What does Stephen emphasize in his speech? What does Simon misunderstand about the gift of God? How does Philip begin his conversation with the Ethiopian reader?

Trace the passage: What problem is named in Acts 6:1, and how does the whole community participate in the solution? Where does Philip begin when the Ethiopian asks for help?

Practice: Ask whose needs may be overlooked in your church or neighborhood. Take one concrete step to notice and serve that person.

Session 5 — A Persecutor Meets Jesus

Read: Acts 9:1–31; 11:19–30.

Look closely: Luke introduces Saul as an active persecutor, then lets us hear both his encounter with Jesus and Ananias' fear about going to him. Ananias does not become naïve: he names the danger when the Lord calls him. Saul must receive help from someone he had hoped to harm. After his baptism, others still have understandable questions about his change, and Barnabas helps them hear his story. Acts does not say every conversion will be as dramatic as Saul's. It does show the church learning to discern changed life and offer a place to serve. The Antioch congregation later models another step: believers from different backgrounds are taught together and send aid when others are in need.

Saul approves of Stephen's death and sets out to arrest followers of Jesus. On the road to Damascus, the risen Lord stops him and asks why he is persecuting him. Saul is blinded and must be led by the hand. Ananias hears the Lord's instruction to go to him and has a reasonable fear: Saul is known as a threat. Nevertheless, Ananias goes, calls him “Brother Saul,” and prays for him. Saul is baptized and soon begins proclaiming Jesus.

My sermon calls this a radical transformation. It is certainly that, but the story also honors the quieter courage of Ananias and the patient welcome of Barnabas when others doubt Saul's change. A dramatic conversion is not the only form of the Spirit's work. God works through a witness willing to visit an enemy, through a community learning discernment, and through a new believer learning obedience. Acts later calls Saul by the name Paul; the text does not say that Jesus renamed him on the road.

The scattered believers bring the good news to Antioch, where Barnabas and Saul teach a growing church. When famine is predicted, the disciples send help to believers in Judea. The mission that began in Jerusalem now produces a community beyond Jerusalem that remembers the needs of others. Conversion changes both our speech about Jesus and our care for people.

Discuss: What does Jesus say to Saul, and why is that question striking? What concerns does Ananias raise? How does Barnabas help Saul? What does the Antioch church do when it hears of need in Judea?

Trace the passage: Track who speaks for, helps, and questions Saul in Acts 9. What does each person's response add to the story of his conversion?

Practice: Pray for someone whose story you think cannot change. Ask the Lord whether you can take a wise, safe step of welcome or practical care.

Session 6 — No Outsiders to the Gospel

Read: Acts 10:1–48; 11:1–18; 12:1–24.

Look closely: Cornelius and Peter receive separate instructions before they meet. Neither vision is the whole gospel: Peter still speaks of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and forgiveness. Read Acts 10:34–43 as the center of his visit. The Spirit's coming helps Peter recognize that Gentiles are received, and he tells the Jerusalem believers the story again in chapter 11. Acts 12 then refuses an easy promise about protection: James is killed and Peter is released while the church prays. The same God is present in both accounts. We can hold grief and gratitude together without assigning blame to those whose prayers seem unanswered.

Cornelius fears God, prays, and gives generously, but he still needs to hear the message about Jesus. God prepares Peter, too. A vision challenges Peter's assumptions, and messengers invite him to visit a Gentile home. Peter comes to understand that he should not call a person unclean whom God is receiving. As he speaks about Jesus' death, resurrection, and forgiveness, the Spirit falls on those listening. Peter orders them to be baptized. Back in Jerusalem he recounts what happened, and the church praises God for granting repentance leading to life to Gentiles.

My sermon calls these “divine interruptions.” We may imagine God is working only on the person we hope to reach, while he is also changing the witness. Yet Acts 10 does not teach that Cornelius' generosity made the gospel unnecessary. Peter had to speak of Jesus, and Peter had to cross a boundary he once accepted. The church then had to recognize what God had done.

Acts 12 places James's death next to Peter's surprising release from prison. The church prays earnestly, and Peter is freed; James is not. My sermon asks what we do when God's answer does not seem fair. The passage will not support a formula that faithful prayer guarantees rescue. It calls us to pray honestly, trust God's goodness, mourn real loss, and keep bearing witness even when outcomes differ. Herod's power is temporary; the word of God continues to grow.

Discuss: What does Peter learn in Acts 10 and explain in Acts 11? What is the message he delivers to Cornelius' household? How does Acts 12 hold answered prayer and grief together? Where might God be changing the witness as well as the hearer?

Trace the passage: What does Peter proclaim in Acts 10:34–43? Compare what the church knows about James and Peter before anyone learns the outcome of Peter's imprisonment.

Practice: Pray for someone outside your usual circle. Listen to that person's story before deciding what they need to hear from you.

Session 7 — Sent by Grace

Read: Acts 13:1–52; 14:1–28; 15:1–35.

Look closely: In Acts 13, the church in Antioch worships, fasts, commissions, and sends. Barnabas and Saul do not appoint themselves. Their first journey reveals both joyful reception and resistance, including a crowd at Lystra that mistakes a healing for evidence that gods have appeared. Paul's refusal of divine honors is part of his witness. The debate in chapter 15 follows from that mission: must Gentiles become Jews to be saved? The council listens to testimony and Scripture, distinguishes the grace of Jesus from an added requirement, and communicates practical guidance. It offers a model of shared discernment while preserving the particular first-century questions it was answering.

At Antioch the church worships, fasts, and listens as the Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul. They are sent with prayer, not as lone travelers building a private ministry. In Pisidian Antioch Paul recounts God's story and announces forgiveness through Jesus. Some receive the word and others oppose it. In Lystra a man is healed; the crowd mistakenly tries to honor Paul and Barnabas as gods. They refuse that glory, then continue the mission even after Paul is attacked. My sermons draw out grace and perseverance: the gospel is God's gift, and hardship does not prove that he has left his servants.

Connecting study: Acts 15 records a dispute that follows the Gentile mission. Some insist that Gentile believers must be circumcised to be saved. The apostles and elders hear testimony and Scripture, and the Jerusalem meeting refuses to place that burden on Gentiles. The letter they send also asks Gentile believers to avoid practices that would wound fellowship in their shared community. Salvation comes through the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the church must work patiently to live together across cultural differences.

Luke records disagreement as well as unity. Mission does not remove the need to listen, reason from Scripture, and make decisions together. The Antioch church reports what God has done on its journey; the Jerusalem church receives testimony and sends a response. It is a model for careful communal discernment without turning every decision into a perfect pattern for every later church.

Discuss: Who sends Barnabas and Saul? How do the people of Lystra misread the healing? What specific requirement is challenged in Acts 15, and what reason does Peter give? How do the churches communicate across distance?

Trace the passage: How does Acts 13:1–3 describe the sending church? Which question is Acts 15 resolving, and how does its answer preserve the gospel of grace?

Practice: Ask where your church may be adding a cultural requirement to the gospel or neglecting a practice that would help believers live together in love.

Session 8 — Songs in Prison and Conversations in the City

Read: Acts 16:1–40; 17:16–34; 18:1–17.

Look closely: At Philippi, the Lord opens Lydia's heart, Paul and Silas endure imprisonment, and the jailer asks how to be saved. Three different people and circumstances are brought into one new community. Their midnight song should be read alongside their wounds and their legal protest after release; trust does not require denying injustice. In Athens, Paul's grief over idols moves him toward conversation and a speech that ends with resurrection and repentance. In Corinth, the Lord tells him to keep speaking, and he works alongside Aquila and Priscilla. The journey is made of spectacular deliverance and slow, faithful work, each under God's care.

Paul's team comes to Philippi on the second missionary journey. Lydia hears the message and the Lord opens her heart. Later Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned. At midnight they pray and sing. When an earthquake opens the prison, they do not use the moment to abandon the jailer. He and his household hear the message of the Lord Jesus, and he cares for their wounds. My sermon asks us to learn to sing in the darkness. Their worship is honest dependence on God, not evidence that pain is unreal or that every believer must feel cheerful in suffering.

In Athens Paul sees the city's idols and is deeply distressed. He speaks first in places where people gather, then addresses the Areopagus. He begins with what his hearers know, corrects their idea of God, and calls them to respond to the risen Jesus. My sermon urges conversation with people who do not yet believe. Paul's example includes both listening to a culture and naming the point where the gospel challenges it.

Connecting study: Acts 18 moves the story to Corinth. Paul works with Aquila and Priscilla, reasons in the synagogue, and remains despite opposition after the Lord encourages him. Later Priscilla and Aquila explain the way of God more accurately to Apollos. Some chapters of mission are dramatic; many are built from work, hospitality, patient teaching, and courage that lasts longer than one public speech.

Discuss: What changes in the jailer's response to Paul and Silas? How does Paul begin his speech in Athens, and where does he bring the conversation to Jesus? What roles do Aquila and Priscilla play in Acts 18?

Trace the passage: Compare Lydia, the jailer, and the Athenians: what does each already know, and what must each hear about Jesus?

Practice: Listen well to someone whose assumptions differ from yours, then find a natural way to speak truthfully about Jesus without forcing a conversation.

Session 9 — When Jesus Is Magnified in Ephesus

Read: Acts 19:1–41.

Look closely: Acts 19 holds together public teaching, unusual miracles, false imitation, costly repentance, and economic opposition. Study the sequence rather than extracting one sensational scene. Paul's teaching concerns the kingdom of God; the name of Jesus is magnified when would-be exorcists discover it is no magic formula; believers openly confess practices they now reject. The book burning measures the social cost of leaving magic behind but should not become a compulsory ritual in other settings. The craftsmen's riot reveals that when people stop worshiping Artemis, those who profit from her shrine become afraid. The Spirit's work touches allegiance, habits, and public life.

Acts 19 opens with Paul meeting disciples in Ephesus who know John's baptism but have not yet understood the full news of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He teaches them, and the Spirit comes upon them. Paul then reasons publicly, and the word spreads through the region. Luke reports unusual miracles, but he also shows the danger of trying to use Jesus' name as a technique. The sons of Sceva attempt to invoke the name Paul preaches without belonging to Christ. Their failure becomes public, and the name of Jesus is magnified.

My sermon on the marks of revival turns to what happens next: people confess their practices and burn books associated with magic. The scene is not a license to pry into another person's past or to put a price on someone else's repentance. It is a picture of people openly turning from what had held them. Acts says the word of the Lord grows mightily. Their change is connected to the power of the gospel, not to the power of an object once touched by an apostle.

The chapter also describes an uproar because the gospel threatens the business tied to the cult of Artemis. When worship changes, habits and economies may be unsettled. Yet Acts does not tell the church to seek a riot. Luke shows both the cost of repentance and the importance of a truthful public witness. We are called to honor Jesus, examine what we depend on, and let his word shape daily practice.

Discuss: How are the disciples at the beginning of Acts 19 taught? What distinguishes Paul's ministry from the sons of Sceva? What changes in the lives of those who believe? Why does Demetrius fear the growth of this message?

Trace the passage: Which scenes in Acts 19 show people trying to control spiritual power, and which show people yielding to the Lord?

Practice: Identify one practice or source of confidence that competes with trust in Christ. Discuss a truthful step of repentance with a trusted believer.

Session 10 — Finish the Race and Care for the Flock

Read: Acts 20:1–38; 21:1–36; 22:1–30.

Look closely: Paul's farewell begins with an account of how he lived among the Ephesians. He taught in public and in homes, spoke to Jews and Greeks, and expects suffering without knowing every detail. Before instructing the elders to care for others, he tells them to take heed to themselves. This order matters for leaders who might preach sound doctrine while neglecting their own life. Acts 21–22 then brings Paul into Jerusalem, where he faces a violent accusation and still asks to speak. He uses the opportunity to tell his conversion story and invokes his legal rights when needed. Courage includes clarity, wise restraint, and an accurate account of what happened.

At Miletus, Paul calls the Ephesian elders to him. He recalls serving with humility and tears, teaching publicly and in homes, and proclaiming repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. He does not know precisely what will happen in Jerusalem, but he knows hardship awaits. His desire is to finish the course and testify to the gospel of God's grace. My sermon calls this running the race with joy. Joy here is a durable allegiance to Christ, not a demand to enjoy suffering.

Paul charges the elders to watch themselves and the flock, and to remain alert for harmful teaching from outside and inside the community. My second sermon on this address urges leaders to teach the whole counsel of God, take heed to their own lives, and guard the church. The passage locates the flock in God's care and tells leaders to be attentive servants. It never gives leaders permission to use fear or control to protect their position. Paul entrusts them to God and to the word of his grace.

Connecting study: In Acts 21–22, Paul reaches Jerusalem despite warnings about suffering. A crowd attacks him after a false assumption about the temple; Roman soldiers intervene. Given a chance to speak, he recounts his encounter with the risen Jesus and his call to the Gentiles. The story prepares us for Paul's extended witness in custody. Courage and prudence appear together: he testifies and also invokes his rights as a Roman citizen.

Discuss: What does Paul name as the center of his testimony in Acts 20:24? What must the elders watch over first? What does he do when challenged in Jerusalem? How can care for a church combine truth, humility, and accountability?

Trace the passage: Read Acts 20:18–35 and separate Paul's description of his conduct from his charge to the elders. How does the first support the second?

Practice: Pray for those who teach and lead in your church. Ask one person you trust where you can grow in faithfulness and care.

Session 11 — Take Courage in the Long Trial

Read: Acts 23:1–35; 24:1–27; 25:1–27; 26:1–32.

Look closely: The Lord's word in Acts 23:11 promises that Paul will testify in Rome, not that the trip will be fast or free of danger. Luke then follows a plot, a transfer under guard, repeated hearings, and long delays. Paul answers accusations without giving up the center of his message: Jesus has risen. Felix hesitates; Festus handles an appeal; Agrippa hears Paul's testimony and responds with questions. Their hearings show that persuasive speech does not guarantee agreement. The Lord can use legal protections and the slow workings of a court while still calling Paul to truthful witness. The book reports outward events more fully than Paul's private thoughts; let its restraint guide ours.

Paul faces the council in Jerusalem and then a plot against his life. That night the Lord stands near him and tells him to take courage: as he has testified in Jerusalem, he must testify in Rome. My sermon, “Be of Good Cheer,” draws encouragement from that promise. Jesus does not say the journey will be easy or that the hearings will end quickly. He says Paul will bear witness. That purpose sustains Paul through delay and uncertainty.

Connecting study: The next hearings bring Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. He speaks of the resurrection and gives an account of his commission from Christ. Felix postpones a decision; Festus hears his appeal to Caesar; Agrippa hears the story of his transformation. Luke records leaders listening for different reasons and responding differently. Paul cannot control their response. He can speak truthfully, respect the process where possible, and keep the risen Jesus at the center of his defense.

The sermon imagines Paul's discouragement, which is understandable, but Acts does not tell us every feeling he had. We should not need to invent his inner life to receive the Lord's instruction to take courage. The passage invites patient faithfulness when obedience puts us in a place we would not have chosen. God's presence does not make the waiting brief; it makes continued witness possible.

Discuss: What exact promise does the Lord give in Acts 23:11? What claims does Paul repeat in his hearings? Which responses to his testimony differ? How can we distinguish what Acts reports from what we imagine Paul felt?

Trace the passage: Make a timeline of Acts 23–26 with the name of each official and the central claim Paul repeats. Where is patience required?

Practice: If you face a long unresolved situation, write down what is known, what remains uncertain, and one act of faithfulness possible this week.

Session 12 — The Word Is Not Bound

Read: Acts 27:1–44; 28:1–31; Acts 1:8 again.

Look closely: Acts 27–28 is more than a travel epilogue. Luke names decisions aboard the ship, Paul's warning, the storm, fear, food, escape attempts, and the eventual survival of everyone. Promise and practical care work together. On Malta, islanders offer hospitality, and Paul continues the journey to Rome. There he remains under guard but welcomes visitors and proclaims the kingdom and Jesus without hindrance. The geographic promise of Acts 1:8 is not exhausted by the last page, but Rome is a powerful sign that the message has crossed enormous boundaries. Notice what Luke does and does not report: Paul is not shown preaching to Nero or describing his own final fate.

Connecting study: Paul sails toward Rome under guard. He warns of danger, but the voyage continues and a violent storm strikes. When others despair, Paul reports an assurance that those aboard will survive, though the ship will be lost. He urges them to eat and helps hold the group together. Everyone reaches land. On Malta the islanders offer hospitality; Paul remains there for months before the journey resumes. The episode gives us courage without pretending storms are harmless. God preserves them through practical actions, the sailors' skill, and the mercy of strangers.

In Rome Paul is allowed to stay under guard. He invites local Jewish leaders to hear why he is there and speaks with them about the kingdom of God and Jesus from the Law and the Prophets. Some are persuaded; others do not believe. Acts ends with Paul proclaiming the kingdom and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with boldness and without hindrance. The book does not narrate a testimony before Nero. Luke ends with a witness who is confined and a word that continues to go out.

Return to Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8. The gospel has crossed barriers of geography, language, status, fear, and opposition. The Spirit has empowered a diverse church to speak of Jesus, meet needs, correct its mistakes, and endure. We are still called to depend on that Spirit and make Jesus known in the places God gives us. The book closes in Rome, but it leaves the church facing outward.

Discuss: How does Paul act for the good of others on the ship? What kind of reception does he receive on Malta and in Rome? What does Acts actually say about Paul's circumstances at its close? How does the ending answer the promise in Acts 1:8?

Trace the passage: Which actions help the passengers survive in Acts 27? In Acts 28, what is restricted and what remains free?

Practice: Write the name of a place or person beyond your usual circle. Pray, listen, and take one thoughtful step of witness or service there.

Session 1 — Power to Be Witnesses

Read: Acts 1:1–26; Luke 24:44–53; John 14:16–17.

Observe the passage

Read Acts 1:1–14 and list what Jesus teaches, promises, and declines to specify. Which action is assigned to the disciples?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 2 — Pentecost and the Gift of the Spirit

Read: Acts 2:1–47; Joel 2:28–32; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

Observe the passage

What questions does the crowd ask in Acts 2, and how does Peter answer them? How does the chapter move from an event to a way of life?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 3 — Courage, Community, and Truth

Read: Acts 3:1–26; 4:1–37; 5:1–42.

Observe the passage

Compare Peter's words in Acts 3:12–16 and Acts 5:3–4. What does he refuse to claim, and what behavior does he challenge?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 4 — Scattered but Still Speaking

Read: Acts 6:1–15; 7:1–60; 8:1–40.

Observe the passage

What problem is named in Acts 6:1, and how does the whole community participate in the solution? Where does Philip begin when the Ethiopian asks for help?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 5 — A Persecutor Meets Jesus

Read: Acts 9:1–31; 11:19–30.

Observe the passage

Track who speaks for, helps, and questions Saul in Acts 9. What does each person's response add to the story of his conversion?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 6 — No Outsiders to the Gospel

Read: Acts 10:1–48; 11:1–18; 12:1–24.

Observe the passage

What does Peter proclaim in Acts 10:34–43? Compare what the church knows about James and Peter before anyone learns the outcome of Peter's imprisonment.

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 7 — Sent by Grace

Read: Acts 13:1–52; 14:1–28; 15:1–35.

Observe the passage

How does Acts 13:1–3 describe the sending church? Which question is Acts 15 resolving, and how does its answer preserve the gospel of grace?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 8 — Songs in Prison and Conversations in the City

Read: Acts 16:1–40; 17:16–34; 18:1–17.

Observe the passage

Compare Lydia, the jailer, and the Athenians: what does each already know, and what must each hear about Jesus?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 9 — When Jesus Is Magnified in Ephesus

Read: Acts 19:1–41.

Observe the passage

Which scenes in Acts 19 show people trying to control spiritual power, and which show people yielding to the Lord?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 10 — Finish the Race and Care for the Flock

Read: Acts 20:1–38; 21:1–36; 22:1–30.

Observe the passage

Read Acts 20:18–35 and separate Paul's description of his conduct from his charge to the elders. How does the first support the second?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 11 — Take Courage in the Long Trial

Read: Acts 23:1–35; 24:1–27; 25:1–27; 26:1–32.

Observe the passage

Make a timeline of Acts 23–26 with the name of each official and the central claim Paul repeats. Where is patience required?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?

Session 12 — The Word Is Not Bound

Read: Acts 27:1–44; 28:1–31; Acts 1:8 again.

Observe the passage

Which actions help the passengers survive in Acts 27? In Acts 28, what is restricted and what remains free?

Understand what it means

What does this passage say clearly? Where does an interpretation bring in other texts or assumptions?

Respond and pray

What will you do or pray differently because you read this passage?