

# Acts of the Apostles by Louie Giglio

## Study Guide

### Session 1: Purpose & Power

#### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

#### **Main Idea**

Jesus calls us to build his church to the ends of the earth through bold evangelism and by making disciples of all people.

#### **Head Change**

To know that we have a mission to make disciples until Jesus returns.

#### **Heart Change**

To feel excited about God's mission to be unfolded in our lives.

#### **Life Change**

To look for God's purpose in every circumstance, even when God calls us to patiently wait where we are.

#### **OPEN**

**Do you believe that you have a purpose? If so, what is your purpose?**

It can be easy to go through the motions—to get so caught up in the demands of our lives that we don't even think about what the purpose of those days might be. In the book of Acts, God shows us that he has a purpose for us in every moment, even when it seems like nothing much is going on.

In this series, pastor and founder of the Passion Movement Louie Giglio will take us through the book of Acts. This book tells the story of the early church and holds deep promises for our lives. But chapter 1 of Acts does not begin with a bang, but with a command to wait.

#### **READ**

Acts 1 (If you are pressed for time, you can shorten your reading to Acts 1:1–11.)

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide for the book of Acts so that you can read this whole chapter and understand the context of this letter from Luke. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section**.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What promises did Jesus give to his disciples?**

**What purpose did he give to his church?**

*Show Session 1: Purpose and Power (18 minutes).*

## **DISCUSS**

Acts 1 is the bridge between the Gospel of Luke and the foundation of the church. It is a brief pause before Jesus released his disciples to spread the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. As we read this chapter, we will discover the purpose and power Jesus promises to give his followers and his call to us to participate in his ongoing work.

**Note:** To learn more about the author and purpose of the Book of Acts, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Read Acts 1:1–8.

These opening verses set the stage for the entire book of Acts, giving us an overview of Jesus's work between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven. While Luke, the author of Acts, does not give us an exhaustive list of everything Jesus did, these brief verses make one thing clear: the church was founded on the resurrected, living, and active Son of God, Jesus Christ. **What was Jesus doing at the beginning of Acts? What sorts of things seemed important to Jesus after his resurrection?**

Jesus commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. His command gave them a place, a purpose, and a promise, but they had to wait a few days to receive that promise. **What makes waiting on a promise different than waiting on an uncertain hope?**

Verses 6–8 show us that the disciples still did not fully understand Jesus's purpose. Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, but they thought he came to throw out the Romans and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. Their hope for Jesus was far too small, focusing on temporary changes rather than his eternal kingdom. **What are you hoping Jesus will do in your life? In your city?**

**In what ways might your hopes be too small, or too focused on your "kingdom" on earth?**

**What could it look like for you to refocus your hope on the kingdom of God?**

Instead of telling his disciples exactly when things would happen, he pointed them to what they should be doing while they wait. In the video, Louie showed us the four truths that will guide our waiting and our work for Jesus.

The first is the authority of Jesus, the one who conquered sin and death. Louie quoted from Matthew 28:18–19, “Jesus came near and said to them, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . .’” to help us see that Jesus not only has authority over sin and death but authority over *everything*.

**In what ways are you submitting to Jesus, the authority of heaven and earth, in your life? Are there any areas of your life you don’t see him as the authority?**

Jesus reminded the disciples of his authority before commanding them to make disciples. **What do you think it means to make disciples? How have you seen discipleship play out in your life?**

The second truth we can see in this verse is the promise of purpose. Jesus, the great author and authority, has given us a singular and clear purpose: to be his witnesses. But what does it mean to be a witness?

**What have you seen Jesus do in your life? In what ways has he changed your life? What have you heard or been taught about Jesus through his Word?**

**What do people changed by Jesus say about him?**

In a court, witnesses give testimony to what they have seen and heard so that the truth might be known and acted upon. As Christ’s witnesses, we are to testify to what we have seen, heard, and learned about Jesus so that the truth of the gospel might be known.

**What can you do to be a witness of Jesus in your spheres of influence?**

Being a witness may make us fearful or anxious. But Jesus has not left us alone. The third truth of Acts 1 is that God has sent his Holy Spirit (a promise the disciples had not yet received in Acts 1) to us. The Holy Spirit gives us the power we need to follow Jesus and the confidence we need to live by faith.

**What has God asked you to do that you feel inadequate for?**

**What additional resources or circumstances do you think you need to accomplish what God has asked you to do?**

God has given you a purpose, his presence, and the power you need to fulfill his call. The final truth from Acts 1 is that we are living in God’s greater story of grace. While each of us has a different experience, all of us are a part of God’s greater story.

The book of Acts shows us how the church began in Jerusalem, spread through Judea and Samaria, and grew throughout the known world. We are still caught up in the story of the church today as the gospel continues to reach new people.

**In what ways is God writing his story in your home, neighborhood, workplace, and church?**

**What might be your role in furthering his story?**

Read Acts 1:9–11.

**Note:** To learn more about the second half of Acts 1, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

The disciples were stunned when Jesus left. They had spent the last few years following him across Judea, watching his miracles, obeying his commands, and listening to his teaching. And now, they had to wait without him. Like the disciples, we are waiting for Jesus to return. Sometimes, it can feel like we are looking at the sky, waiting, with no powerful purpose.

**In what ways do you feel unsure of what God wants you to do next?**

God has given you a mission and a purpose, so even if you don't know what is coming next, you can always know what you should be doing today.

**Based on the truths from this chapter, what is your purpose for today?**

We are a part of God's greater story. We have purpose and power. **In what ways will you live out God's mission for you this week?**

### **LAST WORD**

The disciples were so stunned by Jesus's departure that two angels had to snap them out of their stupor to remind them of the commission they had just received. If you are unsure of what God wants you to do, don't wait around for a sign from heaven. God has told you what to do.

You are his witness, empowered by his Holy Spirit to make disciples. That is a mission worth giving your life to.

### **Weekly Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading

than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Session 1 covers only one chapter of Acts, which gives you space to go back to the Gospel of Luke. This will help you build the connection between these two books and understand the fuller context of this passage.

Day 1: The Resurrection (Luke 24:1–12)

Day 2: The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35)

Day 3: Jesus’s Final Appearance in Luke (Luke 24:36–53)

Day 4: Jesus’s Final Appearance in Acts (Acts 1:1–11)

Day 5: Waiting for Pentecost (Acts 1:12–26)

## Session 2: Strike the Match

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

#### **Main Idea**

Christians are a part of the same church that began on the day of Pentecost, called to spread the story of Jesus around the world.

#### **Head Change**

To know that we have a Holy Spirit-empowered role to play in building God's church.

#### **Heart Change**

To feel emboldened in our faith and excited about being a part of God's community.

#### **Life Change**

To live boldly as evangelists, enduring opposition and looking for opportunities to reach out to people who do not know Jesus.

### **OPEN**

**What is the scariest thing you have ever decided to do? Looking back, would you do it again?**

Fear is our bodies' response to danger. There is nothing in our brains that thinks skydiving, bungee jumping, or even roller coasters are safe, so when we do those activities, we get rushes of adrenaline and the overwhelming relief of having survived.

Even though it does not threaten our lives like jumping out of a plane, evangelism terrifies many of us and keeps us from living in the purpose and power God has called us into. In today's session, Louie Giglio will examine the bold mission of God and our place in his story. Does the fire that burned in the early church still burn within us today?

### **READ**

Acts 2:1–13, 37–47; 5:33–42. If you have time and would like to read more of this section to start your group time, add readings from Acts 3:1–10; 4:1–4, 23–31; 5:1–11, and 21–33.

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 2–5 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

### **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**In what ways does the Holy Spirit equip the church to fulfill Acts 1:8 in these chapters?**

**What is the response of the Jewish leadership to Pentecost and the ongoing evangelism of the church?**

**What is the church's response to opposition, beatings, and being jailed?**

*Show Session 2: Strike the Match (22 minutes).*

### **DISCUSS**

In this session, we will examine the powerful beginning of the church and its growth under persecution. It was the first evangelism movement. God worked providentially through his people to fulfill the first part of Acts 1:8—they became his witnesses throughout Jerusalem.

Read Acts 2:1–13, 37–41.

**Note:** To learn more about the Festival of Weeks and its connection to Pentecost, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

**Before we examine this passage, what are your initial reactions and observations of Pentecost? What appears to be the purpose of the Holy Spirit empowering the apostles?**

When the Holy Spirit descends, it is anything but serene. Luke describes the sound of wind as “violent,” and flames spread throughout the room and rested on each person. The Holy Spirit's descent was so loud that it drew a crowd. Take a look at verses 6–11. **Who is in this crowd?**

**In what ways does this gathering provide an opportunity for the disciples to fulfill Acts 1:8?**

This scene might appear chaotic, but it did not devolve into ecstatic confusion. Instead, the disciples leaped into action, telling Jews who had gathered from all the corners of the known world about Jesus in every known language. This miracle not only foreshadows the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth but also confirms the truth of the disciples' message. Anyone can refute a message, but a message with power is hard to ignore.

**What events in your life have confirmed the truth of the gospel?**

**In what ways is the Holy Spirit empowering you to share the gospel today?**

**What keeps you from sharing the gospel? Are there any boundaries that challenge the spread of the gospel where you live?**

The same Spirit that empowered the disciples resides in every Christian. He empowers us to leap into the mission of God and spread the gospel to those who don't know Jesus. Some people may believe us and accept Jesus. Others may reject us out of hand. Regardless of the result of our evangelism, the Holy Spirit moves us to action.

**What fears or hesitation in your own life do you need to let the Holy Spirit overcome for the sake of fulfilling Acts 1:8?**

The courage and power we see on the Day of Pentecost lead the church to grow from one hundred twenty people to over three thousand in a matter of hours. This group quickly becomes a close-knit community.

Read Acts 2:42–47.

**What qualities marked the early church? What habits were they committed to practicing?**

There is a lot to admire about the early church. Their generosity and hospitality alone set a high bar for every church community today.

**In what ways is your church community marked by the early church's heart and habits? What could it look like for you and your small group to practice imitate early church?**

In the video, Louie described Acts 2 as the hinge of the book, the point where the people of God shifted from waiting to acting. The Holy Spirit lit a fire in the church that started in a small group and began to spread throughout the city of Jerusalem. But it did not spread without serious opposition.

Read Acts 3:1–10; 4:1–4, 23–31.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit used the gift of tongues to confirm the truth of the gospel. As we move through Acts, we will see many more confirming signs, often the same miracles Jesus used to confirm his identity as the Son of God. But these miracles are never meant to draw focus to the apostles. Instead, attention is always directed to God and his works.

**What does the lame man want from Peter and John? In what ways is their offering better than he expected?**

Peter and John, like Jesus, addressed the lame man's spiritual needs *and* physical needs. Even though they did not have any money, which the man asked for, they were able to help him in a way that changed his life and led to rejoicing.

Think of the people in need in your community. **In what ways can you serve their spiritual and physical needs so that they walk away from you rejoicing in Jesus, first and foremost?**

The Jewish authorities were threatened by Peter and John, jailing them for spreading the message of Jesus. It is important to note that they were opposed for their message, not their character. The authorities jailed Peter and John because they were teaching people about Jesus.

**What is the cultural stereotype of Christians today? In what ways are these stereotypes earned?**

**Do you think Christians are more opposed because of our attitudes and judgments or because of our commitment to sharing the gospel? Why do you think that is?**

After they were released from prison, Peter and John shared what happened with the church. Amazingly, the church's first reaction was to pray for more boldness, and they became more eager to share the gospel. Look at verses 29–30. **What would it look like for you and your small group to pray for boldness in living out your faith?**

**Note:** To learn more about living boldly by the power of the Holy Spirit, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

**Note:** To study the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Read Acts 5:17–33.

In the early days of the church, the apostles were regularly arrested and jailed by the Jewish leaders. But prison could not hold them, and the message of Jesus continued to spread. **What authority compelled the disciples to disobey the authority of the Sanhedrin and High Priest, according to verse 29?**

If you are opposed because of the message of Jesus, you are presented with a decision: Whose authority will you obey—those who oppose the gospel or the God of heaven and earth?

**What makes you afraid to share the gospel? What is the worst-case scenario for sharing the gospel in your context?**

**In what ways is God calling you to be obedient to his call and his mission to seek and save the lost?**

**LAST WORD**

The fire God lit in the early church was fanned into a burning flame through the boldness, faithfulness, and resolute focus of the apostles. We have the opportunity to follow their lead, to live boldly for the name of Jesus in our own communities. Instead of letting fear stifle our role in the mission of God, imagine what God could do with your faithfulness.

God is on the move and is calling you to join him in purpose and power.

### **Acts 2–5 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 2–5. As you examine the earliest days of the church, prayerfully consider the ways you can live boldly for Jesus.

Day 1: The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–47)

Day 2: The First Days of the Church (Acts 3:1–4:22)

Day 3: The Courageous Faith of the Church (Acts 4:23–5:11)

Day 4: Growing Persecution Against the church (Acts 5:12–42)

# Session 3: Serve & Scatter

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

Fear can silence Christians, but God calls us to boldly proclaim the gospel in every circumstance, no matter the outcome.

### **Head Change**

To know that hardship is a part of following Jesus and God does not abandon us in our difficult circumstances.

### **Heart Change**

To feel confident in our calling to follow Jesus when our faith is challenged.

### **Life Change**

To serve the church and spread the gospel, regardless of the results of those actions.

## **OPEN**

**In what ways do you use your gifts to serve your church? What might cause you to stop using your gifts?**

So far in Acts, the leaders of the church have been threatened, jailed, and beaten. In all these circumstances, they grew bolder and more eager to share the gospel. We rarely, if ever, experience that degree of opposition to our faith.

In this session, we meet the first Christian martyr, Stephen. While it may seem inconceivable to us, his tragic death caused the gospel to spread like wildfire in the region around Jerusalem and even among the people farthest from Jesus.

Difficult circumstances are not a divine mistake. God may even call us into a situation we never wanted. Are we willing to follow him wherever he might lead us?

## **READ**

Acts 6:1–15; 7:51–8:1.

**Note:** If you have time to read all of Stephen’s defense in front of the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1–50) in your small group, we encourage you to do so. If you do not and would like to read all of Acts 6–7 during the week, see our reading guide in **Go Deeper Section 5** at the end of this session.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What is the benefit of unglamorous service in the church?**

**Who was Stephen? In what ways did he serve the church?**

**In what ways was Stephen's death a catalyst for fulfilling Acts 1:8?**

*Show Session 3: Serve and Scatter (18 minutes).*

### **DISCUSS**

The road to this point in the book of Acts has not been easy. As Louie said in the video, the incline of the early church's path was steep, and things did not improve in Acts 6–7. But these chapters give us a picture of service and a model of faith we should aspire to. Let's start our discussion by thinking through the spiritual high points in our lives.

**When do you most enjoy following Jesus?**

**Are there any particular circumstances that make you feel most loved by him?**

**When do you feel God's presence the most?**

For many of us, the most spiritually gratifying moments of our lives are in the good times with friends, family, in worship, or prayerful solitude with God. They are emboldening moments when our calling feels sure. Despite the difficult circumstances the church was experiencing in Acts 2–5, the people of God were seeing signs and wonders, witnessing miraculous movements of God's Spirit, and were increasing in number. Their lives weren't peaceful, but they were experiencing God's power.

As the church grew in spiritual power and boldness, God called more people to serve in church leadership. Read Acts 6:1–7.

**What problem in the church required the apostles to appoint deacons?**

**What did the apostles need to focus their attention on?**

**What qualities were the disciples looking for?**

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles appointed seven men to oversee the distribution of food. But this was not the first time these men served the church. Like the apostles, they were "full of the Spirit" and "men of good reputation." In other words, they were visible figures of high character in the church and already active evangelists.

The men chosen to serve in Acts 6 were already serving God and his people before they were given special appointments by the disciples. In our culture, church can feel like a place we go to receive spiritual fulfillment. We want a service that gives us good music, good preaching, and good production quality. But the early church saw their

church service differently. Instead of looking to receive, they searched for ways to give their lives to the church. **In what ways could a service mindset change the ways we interact with our church on Sundays and throughout the week?**

**Note:** To learn more about how Acts 6 relates to the office of deacons, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The men chosen to serve were the rock stars of the early church, yet they were asked to do a mundane job. But, as Louie taught in the video, even mundane jobs can change the world. **What are the practical, mundane needs in your church that you could meet? How might you sacrifice to serve your church?**

As these men became more visible fixtures in the church, they came under fire from those who opposed the church. Read Acts 6:8–15.

**How do verses 8–10 characterize Stephen when he was preaching and when he was opposed?**

It is rare to see someone act like Stephen did when people opposed him. **What is a common way people respond to opposition in our society?**

**In what ways do you respond when someone contradicts or questions you?**

Despite his grace and wisdom, Stephen did not persuade everyone. He didn't even make friends with everyone. Some people still rejected the gospel and stirred up false rumors and lies about Stephen.

**What encouragement or discouragement does it give you knowing that even at your most Christlike, not everyone will like or agree with you?**

**Even so, what should our behavior look like towards those who actively oppose us?**

**Note:** To learn more about how to behave when opposed, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Stephen's inability to win over his whole audience is a normal response to the gospel, and opposition is not persecution. But, when men stirred up lies and rumors to anger the Jewish leadership, he began to suffer for the mission of God.

**Would you classify the hardships experienced by Christians in your community as opposition or persecution? Why or why not?**

Being called to leadership was not a comfortable promotion in the early church. Those who served God's people became targets for persecution. Read Acts 7:51–8:1.

Stephen was accused of blasphemy and defended himself with a sermon, walking the Sanhedrin through the Old Testament and highlighting all the ways it points to Jesus. We do not need to have Stephen's knowledge of the Old Testament to tell people about Jesus, but we should want his boldness.

**Note:** To learn more about Stephen's defense in front of the Sanhedrin, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

**What circumstances, if any, tend to make you want to downplay your faith in Jesus? When is it difficult to be an outspoken Christian?**

**What experiences in your own life tempt you to stop telling people about Jesus?**

As Stephen's life ended, he looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing to welcome him into glory. For all Stephen knew, he had done little to change the church. He waited on tables and met the same opposition the apostles had, but instead of experiencing a sign or wonder, he died. But his death caused the church to spread and fulfill Acts 1:8.

**What is Stephen's legacy? What was his reward?**

**What would it look like for you to look forward to God's reward in your current circumstances? What could it practically look like to trust God with today?**

**Note:** To learn more about why Jesus stood to receive Stephen, go to **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.

### **LAST WORD**

It is very unlikely that we will be persecuted like Stephen. We may never be persecuted for our faith at all. Even so, we quickly give into fear and close our mouths when opposed or even when we are afraid we *might* be opposed for talking about Jesus.

Opposition, persecution, and a brutal death did not stop Stephen from spreading the gospel. The only thing that could have stopped the gospel from being preached was if Stephen gave into fear and closed his mouth. No matter your circumstances, no matter who you are with, boldly proclaim Christ like Stephen. You never know how God might use your courage to change lives.

### **Acts 6–7 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, the reading guide will take you through Acts 6–7, the story of the church's growth and scattering throughout Judea and Samaria.

Day 1: The Appointment of the First Deacons (Acts 6:1–7)

Day 2: Stephen's Service (Acts 6:8–15)

Day 3: Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1–53) *Because of the length of this passage, we encourage you to read it over two days.*

Day 4: Stephen's Defense (Acts 7:1–53) *On the second day of reading Stephen's defense, notice the ways Stephen is proclaiming the gospel.*

Day 5: Stephen's Death (Acts 7:54–8:1)

# Session 4: Breakthrough Miracle Power

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

The gospel is for all people, which means we should eagerly share the good news of Jesus Christ with everyone.

### **Head Change**

To know that anyone can be saved; no one is too sinful to know Jesus.

### **Heart Change**

To love the outcasts, enemies, and spiritually lost people in our lives the way God loves them.

### **Life Change**

To freely share the gospel with all people and hope for God to work miracles in the most surprising moments.

## **OPEN**

**What is one of the best surprises you have ever had?**

Some of our favorite surprises come out of the most unexpected circumstances. When we think we know what will happen, when we least expect change, when we are certain of what will happen tomorrow, we are set up for a surprise.

After the death of Stephen in Acts 7, we might expect things to go poorly for the church. We might even expect Christians to walk away from the faith under that intense persecution. But that's not what happens. Instead, God surprises us by building his church among the people we would least expect him to save.

## **READ**

Acts 8:1–8, 14–17, 26–31; 9:10–20; 10:25–35, 44–48.

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 8–10 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What groups of people does God save in Acts 8–10?**

**Who was Saul and what did Christians think of him?**

**What is the purpose of God's breakthrough miracle power?**

*Show Session 4: Breakthrough Miracle Power (24 Minutes).*

### **DISCUSS**

Up to this point in Acts, the church had never moved out of Jerusalem. The apostles and first members of the early church had been wholly focused on fulfilling the first part of Acts 1:8, to "be [Jesus's] witnesses in Jerusalem . . ." But after the death of Stephen, the church scattered. In the wake of tragedy, God worked a series of miraculous salvations, and the church began to flourish in all of Judea and Samaria. Read Acts 8:1–4.

**What challenges was the church facing? What was the result?**

This is the first time we meet Paul, the most prolific writer and evangelist in the New Testament. Before his conversion, he was called Saul and was known for his violent persecution of Christians. **What do you think it would take for someone like Saul to become a Christian?**

Even during a time of violent persecution, God was still sovereignly building his church. He worked through Philip, one of the deacons in the early church, to spread the gospel to the Samaritans. Read Acts 8:5–8, 14–17, 25.

God used the tragedy of Stephen's death to reach "unclean" people groups, those whom most Jews would never associate with. In the video, Louie pointed out the one place a faithful Jew would never have wanted to go was Samaria. Samaritans were outsiders, disliked, and looked down on. No one would have wanted to be where Philip was.

**When has God taken you where you did not want to go? What was your reaction to that circumstance?**

Jews disliked Samaritans because they were ethnically half-Jewish, but Philip saw them as people loved by God and became the first witness of Jesus in Samaria. **How does Philip show the Samaritans that they are loved by God?**

For the first time in Acts, the gospel is preached specifically to people who were not Jewish, to outsiders looked down on by society. **Are there any groups of people our society looks down on? Who are our modern-day outsiders?**

**Who is a witness of Jesus to these people?**

After seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the Samaritan church, Peter and John stopped at many small villages to preach the good news. Jesus broke down the barriers

between Jew and Samaritans, making outsiders brothers and sisters in the church. **What would change if you looked at the outsiders in your community the way Peter and John did?**

**What could you and your small group do to reach out to the outsiders in your community?**

**What barriers might there be to reaching these people with the gospel?**

**In what ways can you pray and trust God to overcome these barriers as he did with Philip and the Samaritans?**

**Note:** To study Simon, the Samaritan magician, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The second group of people we see the gospel spread to are the searchers, those who are curious about Jesus and willing to ask Christians about him. Read Acts 8:26–31, 35–38.

The Ethiopian eunuch was in Jerusalem to worship God but was struggling to understand the Scriptures. **According to verse 31, what did this man need? How did Philip respond to this need in verse 35?**

Every Christian should be ready for encounters like the one Philip had with the Ethiopian. If someone asks us about Jesus, we should be both willing and able to proclaim Jesus to them.

**How would you share the gospel with someone who does not know Jesus? To practice, share the good news of Jesus with someone in your group.**

**What makes you nervous about talking to someone who is asking questions about Jesus? How might you overcome your concerns and fears?**

Philip's willingness to talk about Jesus with a searcher changed the Ethiopian's life. But not all evangelism is that easy. Sometimes God calls us to courageously be his witnesses to those who are adamantly opposed to Jesus. Read Acts 9:10–20.

**Note:** To study Saul's encounter with Jesus, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Saul was not only opposed to Christians—he was also infamous for zealously persecuting them. Ananias had good reason to be afraid of him. But, like Philip, he was willing to go to the people God called him to. **Who in your life is adamantly opposed to Christianity? What reasons do you have to believe they would reject you if you shared the gospel with them?**

God did not command Ananias to do something impossible. Jesus had done the hard work of converting and saving Saul. **In what ways can you pray for God to prepare the way for you as you share the work of Jesus with people who are opposed to him?**

Saul became a pillar of the church, spreading the gospel across the known world and writing most of the New Testament. But we often forget Ananias, who overcame fear to be faithful. Ananias simply showed up and was willing to serve God. **What could it look like to “show up” and love the people in your life who are opposed to Jesus?**

The final group of people who are converted in this section of Acts is the Gentiles. Like the Samaritans, they were disliked and rejected by the Jews. Like the seekers, they sometimes sought out and worshipped God. But more often than not, they were like Saul, opposed to the gospel. The Romans we meet in Acts 10 were oppressors and enemies. Read Acts 10:25–35, 44–48.

**Note:** To learn more about the Holy Spirit coming upon the Samaritans and Gentiles, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing Roman centurion. He was seeking God, much like the Ethiopian eunuch. A supernatural vision had told him to wait for Peter, much like Saul was waiting for Ananias. But it was unlawful for Peter to even be near him. **In what ways might our society erect barriers between the church and those seeking God?**

In verse 34, God has reoriented Peter’s vision. **What realization has God given him?**

Sometimes, the people in the church need to have their views reoriented. We can be tempted to think we are better than others, more loved by God, or even that God does not love certain groups of people. **In what ways does the church today think that God shows favoritism?**

**How might favoritism lead us to treat people differently or disregard certain people?**

As Louie said in the video, there are no boundaries for the gospel. It is for everyone. The Holy Spirit fell upon Gentiles before the church in Jerusalem thought it was possible. It shocked Peter and the men he was with.

**Is there anyone you have given up on or assume cannot be saved? How might the conversion stories in Acts 8–10 change your view of that person?**

**In what ways can you eagerly pray for and witness to that person this week?**

**LAST WORD**

There is nothing that hems in the work of God. He is not stopped by unwanted situations, nor does he avoid unwanted people. The work and good news of Jesus is for everyone. But we can forget God loves *everyone*, fencing in our faithfulness according to the boundaries of society and our own prejudice.

We do not know whom God will save, but we do know that God can save anyone. All he asks of us is to be faithful to share the gospel with everyone, no matter whom he puts in our path.

### **Acts 8–10 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 8–10, the stories of God's love for all people.

Day 1: Witnesses in Samaria (Acts 8:1–25)

Day 2: Witnesses throughout Judea (Acts 8:26–40; 9:32–43)

Day 3: The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–31)

Day 4: Two Visions (Acts 10:1–23)

Day 5: Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:24–48)

# Session 5: The Church Is Built through Blocking & Tackling

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

The most powerful thing we can do to build the church is the ordinary, common work of discipleship and evangelism.

### **Head Change**

To know that staying faithful to our calling is the most powerful way we can build God's church.

### **Heart Change**

To feel boldness in the face of opposition to the gospel.

### **Life Change**

To seek out ways we can be missionaries for Jesus, wherever God has placed us.

## **OPEN**

**What habits have you taken up in your adult life that have changed the way you live or work?**

It is often the little things, the small habits, that make the biggest changes in our lives. Small habits—things like eating healthier, practicing an instrument, or reading one chapter of a book every night—reap big rewards over time.

In today's session, Louie Giglio will show us the fundamental habits that built God's church. They are so basic we might not think of them as revolutionary. But when we practice them, we will see incredible breakthroughs for the kingdom of God.

## **READ**

Acts 11:19–26; 12:1–7, 13–17; 13:1–3, 14:8–20.

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 11–14 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What is the regular pattern of church growth?**

**What was new about the church in Antioch? Why was it important?**

**What was Paul's response to opposition?**

**When should we take opposition personally?**

*Show Session 5: The Church Is Built through Blocking and Tackling (22 minutes).*

### **DISCUSS**

These four chapters of Acts represent a radical change in the early church. For the first time, God established a predominantly Gentile church in Antioch. While most of the leaders of the church lived in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch began to lead the way in sending missionaries and establishing new churches.

Read Acts 11:19–21.

In the last session, we saw God sending his witnesses to people who had never heard about the work of Jesus. **In what ways did those who came to faith continue in evangelism without the apostles?**

We don't know the names of the men from Cyprus and Cyrene who proclaimed the good news of Jesus to the people of Antioch. But through them, God established one of the most influential churches in the ancient world. **How important is it to you to be recognized for your accomplishments? What do you want people to think when they hear your name?**

Our ambitions to make an impact or to be remembered aren't necessarily evil. But we get into trouble when we would rather be remembered for temporary success rather than eternal impact. **In what ways could your passions and ambitions be used to build God's church?**

**Would you be okay if you, like the men of Cyprus and Cyrene, had an impact but were forgotten by history? Why or why not?**

Louie spent a lot of time in this session talking about "the power of stay." In today's culture, many of us are drawn to the next fun thing and find it difficult to anchor ourselves in familiar work. But the familiar work God calls us to can change our workplaces, neighborhoods, and churches when we stick with it. Read Acts 11:22–26.

Saul was hidden away in Tarsus so that the Jewish authorities would not kill him (9:29–30). We don't know what Saul did in Tarsus, but it wasn't the influential ministry he would do later in life. Today, we want our work to be visible and appreciated and we tend to believe the most visible ministry leaders are the most influential and worthy of praise. But we forget that God protected Saul by hiding him. **In what ways can a quiet**

**and small ministry be impactful? How might God be protecting you by not making you more visible?**

Saul and Barnabas spent a year actively ministering to the Gentiles, a group of people most followers of Jesus had dismissed as unsavable (see 11:1–18). But it was these unlikely converts who became so enraptured by Jesus that they were called Christians, meaning “those of Christ.” **When do people realize you are “of Christ”? What actions, reputation, and attitudes in your life mark you as a person who follows Jesus?**

**Note:** To take a deeper look at the word “Christian,” go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Saul and Barnabas nurtured the faith of the Antioch Christians for a year, which can feel like a long time. But their long commitment to these Gentiles established a church sold out to Jesus and his work. **What could you do to help establish the church in your community? How long would you be willing to do this work?**

While the church in Antioch was thriving, the church in Jerusalem was suffering from a famine (11:27–30) and ongoing persecution. Read Acts 12:1–5.

The persecution of the church in Jerusalem had escalated. King Herod, the political leader of the Jews, killed the disciple James and imprisoned Peter. We could ask: Where was God in all of this chaos? **When life gets difficult, what do you think God is up to?**

**In what ways have you felt forgotten or punished by God in difficult circumstances?**

In the midst of this trouble, the church in Jerusalem earnestly prayed. We often think of prayer as a nice thing to do but may not consider it the most important or powerful action we can take in times of distress. **What do you think prayer actually accomplishes? Do you think it changes anything?**

**Note:** To learn more about the power of prayer, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Peter was rescued from jail by an angel and delivered to the house of Christians who were praying for his release. However, the people praying did not believe that Peter had been rescued. Read Acts 12:13–17.

**When you pray, do you believe that God can do what you are praying for? What causes you to doubt that your prayers can be answered?**

Louie pointed out that we often have trouble noticing miracles, even when they present themselves to us like Peter at Mary’s house. **What prayers have been answered in**

**your life? Do you think of these answered prayers as miraculous? Why or why not?**

One way to remind ourselves of God's faithfulness is by reminding ourselves of our prayers and the way God has answered them. **What could you do to regularly recognize God's provision for your prayers?**

Acts cuts back to the church in Antioch just as Saul and Barnabas are being sent out on their first missionary journey. Read Acts 13:1–3.

Just as God sent Philip to the Samaritans and Peter to Cornelius, he sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles of the Mediterranean. Through Paul, God repeats the fundamental pattern of the church Louie talked about in the video: sending and establishing. Even if you are not a missionary or a pastor, you should still be involved in God's mission through sending missionaries and establishing God's church. **Where do you see God sending workers and establishing his church in the world today? In your own community?**

**Note:** To learn more about the elders in Antioch, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

During Paul's first missionary journey, he found both success and opposition wherever he went. It was on this journey that he was first called Paul (13:9), which Louie mentioned was his Greek name. Read Acts 14:8–20.

Paul and Barnabas were called by God to take the gospel to Gentiles. The church in Antioch had laid hands on them and prayerfully commissioned their missionary journey. Though they had every reason to believe that they would be successful on their journey, they were often met with opposition and misunderstanding. **When reading about Paul and Barnabas's experience in Lystra, would you call it a success or failure for their mission?**

**In what ways did Paul and Barnabas do exactly what they were called and commissioned to do?**

We often define spiritual success and failure by our results. We sometimes think opposition or struggle is a sign that we are moving in the wrong direction. But God had not called Paul and Barnabas to be universally successful. He had called them to be faithful. **In what ways is God calling you to be faithful to him and his mission? What could faithfulness to him look like as you go about your week?**

### **LAST WORD**

We often confine the work of the church to Sunday mornings, but the basic work of the church is a week-long endeavor. Whether we are sending people to share the gospel or staying in a place to enrich the church, God has called all of us to participate in the good

work of building his kingdom. The question we must answer is, “What are we doing to participate in the fundamental work of the church?”

Your faithfulness does not have to be flashy; it may be as simple as encouraging a friend to follow Jesus more deeply, praying for those who don't know Jesus, or supporting a missionary or church planter as they bring the gospel to new places. Pray that God would show you opportunities to be faithful, then boldly follow him into the faithful work of building his church.

### **Acts 11–14 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week's reading guide will walk you through Acts 11–14. There is a lot in this section of Acts, from the opposition of Peter's Gentile evangelism to Paul's first missionary journey throughout the known world. Note how quickly the church mobilizes to reach Gentiles and the variety of ways God uses Paul to reach cultures throughout the northern Mediterranean region.

Day 1: The Opposition to Gentile Salvation (Acts 11:1–18)

Day 2: The Church of Antioch (Acts 11:19–30)

Day 3: Herod Persecutes the Church (Acts 12)

Day 4: The First Missionary Journey pt. 1 (Acts 13:1–12)

Day 5: The First Missionary Journey pt. 2 (Acts 13:13–52)

Day 6: The First Missionary Journey pt. 3 (Acts 14)

# Session 6: The God Above It All

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

In hopeless situations, our first response should always be to turn to God in worship.

### **Head Change**

To know God does not change with our circumstances.

### **Heart Change**

To feel peace, knowing that God is with you no matter what you are going through.

### **Life Change**

To trust God in the midst of our difficulties, knowing that he is unchanging when our circumstances are unsure.

## **OPEN**

**Think of a time when you have overcome a big obstacle in your life. How did you get over that hurdle? Who helped you along the way?**

In this session, the church faces a series of obstacles that threaten to derail God's mission. But when times of difficulty come against his church, God, who is above it all, sits sovereignly on his throne.

When Paul seems to have met his match, when conflict looks like it will tear God's people apart, and when evangelism seems impossible, God moves in incredible ways. No matter what you are facing, no matter how hard the road gets, our God is still on the throne.

## **READ**

Acts 15:5–29, 36–41; 16:16–33; 17:16–31; 18:24–28.

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 15–19 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What sorts of conflicts were in the early church?**

**Why should we worship God when life gets tough?**

**What common longing do all people share? How could this commonality help us reach more people with the gospel?**

*Show Session 6: The God Above It All (24 Minutes).*

## **DISCUSS**

In this session, we saw a series of difficult circumstances put in front of God's people: conflict, injustice, unwanted circumstances, and hostility towards evangelism. Each of these obstacles threatened the early church in different ways and could have caused Paul to stop the expansion of the mission. But through all the hurdles and troubles, Acts shows us the God who is above it all. Worshipping him is always the right way to move forward.

First, let's look at the conflicts in Acts 15–19 and examine how conflict continues to affect us today.

**In what ways has conflict affected the relationships between you and the people in your church?**

***Note:** Answering this question could draw you and your group into gossip. Guard the discussion by focusing on the ways conflict has affected you personally and the ways it can build walls between us and other Christians rather than on the specifics of a conflict or on other people.*

**Has there been any resolution to this conflict? If so, how was conflict overcome? If not, in what ways does this conflict continue to affect your church?**

Louie pointed out three different conflicts in this section of Acts: conflict with legalists, Paul's personal conflict with John Mark, and the division in Corinth. Briefly, we can categorize these as theological, interpersonal, and invented conflicts. Read Acts 15:5–29, 36–41; 18:24–28; and 1 Corinthians 3:2–7.

Think about each instance of division in the church. **In what ways were they justified? In what ways were they avoidable?**

**What would you change about the way those conflicts were handled?**

Think about the disagreements and divisions you have had with other Christians. **In what ways were those conflicts justified or avoidable? What, if anything, do you wish you had done differently?**

In the video, Louie talked about a better way to approach conflict in the church and encouraged us to seek reconciliation and unity as God's people. Read Romans 12:17–21.

Often, we do not want peace in an argument. We want to get even or get back at those who hurt us, even if they are our brothers or sisters in Christ. **What makes vengeance so appealing when we are in a disagreement?**

**What makes it difficult to let go of getting even and choose to forgive instead?**

Louie said that conflict tends to turn us inward, dividing us and slowing the spread of the gospel. Therefore, creating peace in the church is a way to obey God and expand his worship throughout the world. **What could you do to fulfill Romans 12:18 and create peace where there is conflict between you and other Christians?**

**Note:** To examine biblical ways to approach theological, interpersonal, and invented conflicts, go to **Go Deeper Sections 1–3** at the end of this study.

Second, Louie talked about how we should respond to the difficult circumstances in our lives that appear to derail us and what we are doing for God’s mission. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were unjustly imprisoned, bringing their missionary journey to a screeching halt.

Read Acts 16:16–33.

**What was Paul and Silas’s response to difficult circumstances?**

**What is your typical response to difficult circumstances? Where do you think God is in those moments?**

It seemed like things couldn’t get any worse for Paul and Silas. But they knew that God had not changed, even though their situation had. Louie said, “The God of the mountaintops is the God of the valleys, and he is worthy of our praise today. It may not change your situation, but [worship] will change you in the midst of your situation.” **What would it look like for you to praise God, even in your current circumstances?**

Paul and Silas’s situation was a part of a much larger plan. Ultimately, it was used to introduce the prisoners and guards to Jesus. **What opportunities could your current circumstances give you to tell others about Jesus?**

At the end of the video, Louie explained why worship is always the right response to tough situations. **Do you agree with him? Why or why not?**

**What might make it difficult for you to worship through pain and sorrow?**

The final hurdle to God’s mission in this session was the philosophical elite in Athens. These men were some of the brightest minds in the western world and they wanted to hear more about Jesus. That may not seem like a hurdle, but oftentimes evangelism is intimidating. Fear can keep us from sharing Jesus with people, especially when we do not understand their beliefs.

Read 17:19–32.

Paul usually visited the synagogues in a city first (17:1, 10, 17), reaching out to those who did not know Jesus using the common ground of the Old Testament. **What common ground do you use in your own evangelism? How can a shared interest or connection help pave the way for you to share Christ with those who do not know him?**

Paul was in a foreign place with foreign beliefs and was set in front of foreign rulers. There were many reasons for him to be intimidated. Evangelism can be intimidating on its own, but when we lose common ground with the people we are talking to, it can be terrifying. **Think of some people you work with or live nearby but have nothing in common with. What hurdles do you think would keep them from accepting Jesus?**

While it may seem like we have nothing in common with some people, we all share the same desire to know God. The Athenians were so desperate to please the gods that they made an altar to an unknown god. Today, people search for spirituality in various ways, seeking meaning, purpose, and identity. **In what ways do the people around you reveal their longing for God through their passions? What do they fill their lives with instead of God? Be as specific as you can.**

**In what ways could you use our cultural expressions of our longing for God to point people to God?**

Some of the men at the Aeropagus laughed at Paul, some wanted to know more, and some believed in Jesus and joined the church. Our evangelism very often has the same mixed results. **What could it look like for you to share Jesus in hope of the few that would believe instead of in fear of the few that might laugh?**

Often, people don't make immediate decisions about Jesus and want to learn more about him. Their curiosity can take us off guard if we are not prepared to walk with them as they investigate God. **In what ways could you prepare to introduce a curious person to Jesus beyond a single gospel presentation?**

### **LAST WORD**

Life will not always be easy, even when we are focused on the mission of God. But the valleys of life often advance God's mission further than the mountaintop experiences. No matter where you are in life, no matter how things are going, God has not left you. Whether you are facing opposition, are in the middle of conflict, are at rock bottom, or feel you are the wrong person to witness to those around you, look to the God who is above it all.

He is worthy of your worship, obedience, and courageous faith. Trust him and see what he can do in your midnight moment.

### **Acts 15–19 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 15–19. These chapters cover conflict in the church and Paul's ongoing missionary journeys. Take time each day to note Paul's travels, the receptions he receives in each town or city, and how the gospel spreads in hostile situations.

Day 1: The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

Day 2: Paul's Second Missionary Journey: Derbe to Philippi (Acts 16)

Day 3: Paul's Second Missionary Journey: Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens (Acts 17)

Day 4: Paul's Second Missionary Ends and the Third Mission Begins (Acts 18)

Day 5: Paul's Third Missionary Journey: Ephesus (Acts 19)

# Session 7: The Supreme Value of the Mission

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

As Christians, the most important thing we can do is faithfully pursue God's mission so that others might come to know him.

### **Head Change**

To know that our faithfulness to God, no matter how mundane, will result in fruitfulness.

### **Heart Change**

To feel encouraged to keep serving God even when we don't feel influential.

### **Life Change**

To apply God's mission to every area of our lives so that we might be a part of his work.

## **OPEN**

**What motivates you to get out of bed in the morning? What are you most passionate about?**

Our passions not only give us purpose, but they also set the course of our futures. They establish our hope for our careers, our families, where we want to live, and what we want our legacies to be. Our values are extremely important. Therefore, we need to make sure we spend our lives chasing after the right passions. In this session, Louie will talk about our motivating mission and how serving God will be the greatest adventure we could ever agree to.

## **READ**

Acts 20:17–24; 21:10–14, 26–36; 24:24–27; 26:12–26.

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 20–26 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**In what ways can God's mission be applied to any person's passions?**

**What should we do if we think our story is boring or doesn't have any value?**

## What is the benefit of continual faithfulness?

*Show Session 7: The Supreme Value of the Mission (17 minutes).*

### **DISCUSS**

This session is all about your primary motivation in life, what Louie called your “why.” For Paul, his motivation was to carry the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth. That may seem like a broad motivation, but it gave him a specific purpose throughout his ministry.

As we examine Paul’s ministry, think about your own “why.” Start by thinking broadly. This mission should be applicable in every area of your life, not just in your work or on Sunday mornings. Louie challenged us to avoid the “wheres” and “whos”—where you are, who you are with, and where you would like to be—and simply to focus on your mission no matter where you are or who’s around you. **What would you say is your primary purpose in life? What is your greatest goal?**

In the video, Louie talked about the four things that will help us live like Paul, sold out for the mission of Christ. First, we must have a new mindset understanding that “the greatest thing [we] can do with [our] li[ves] is to help someone else come to life.”

Read Acts 20:17–24.

**According to these verses, what is Paul’s primary motivation? How much is he willing to endure to accomplish the mission God has given to him?**

**In what ways do your goals in life serve the mission of God?**

As we learned in the video, Paul’s specific mission was to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, but he did not wait until he got to Rome to serve Jesus. **In what ways are you serving God through your career, your free time, and in your social life?**

Following Jesus causes us to have a new mindset, giving us a new way to see everything we do, no matter where we are or who we are with. **How could you use the normal events of your life to help others find life in Jesus?**

**Note:** To learn more about Paul’s motivation and values, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

The second challenge Louie gave us in the video was to “keep your ‘yes’ on the table.” It can be easy to follow Jesus at times, but following him will not always be easy. We have to be willing to follow him, even when the road ahead looks difficult. Read Acts 21:10–14, 26–36.

Paul knew exactly what God was calling him into and was still completely committed to God's plan. **How would you react if someone like Agabus told you about the difficulty in your future?**

**What's unique about Paul's response to Agabus?**

When Paul was attacked in Jerusalem, things went worse than expected. He was not only arrested, as Agabus had prophesied, but was also beaten by an angry mob. Despite these circumstances, God had not abandoned Paul. **When things go worse than you expect, where do you think God is? Are you ever tempted to think that God's plan has gone wrong?**

In the video, Louie said, "If I had seen all the twists and turns in my story, I would have had difficulty completely surrendering to God's plan." **In what ways has God been faithful to you in unexpected and difficult times?**

Louie's advice to us was to commit to God's plan before we know what life holds for us, to trust God with our future life as we have trusted him with our eternity. **What would it look like to trust God and to stay faithful to your "why" even when your life takes an unexpected turn?**

**Note:** To think more deeply about a right perspective of difficulty, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

The third encouragement Louie had for us was to keep telling our story, no matter where we are or who we are with. Every time we see Paul in these chapters, he is using his story to share the gospel.

Some of us have incredible stories of radical life change. Some of us grew up in the church and don't think our stories are very impressive. **How would you characterize your story?**

We have to stop thinking that some stories of salvation are better than others. Whenever God redeems a sinner, it is a miracle. Louie said, "If you have a story of grace, you have a story to share." Read Acts 26:12–29.

When Paul shared his story with Agrippa, he began by explaining who he was before he met Jesus. **In broad strokes, who were you like before you met Jesus? What motivated you? Where did you look for hope?**

Paul then described his personal conversion. **When did you come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ? What was it like?**

Finally, Paul described his life after meeting Jesus—his new motivation, his sure hope, and his new lifestyle. **What changed after you met Jesus? In what ways is God still changing you?**

Those three beats—life before Jesus, your conversion, and life after meeting Jesus—are your story of grace. **Who could you share that story with this week?**

The fourth and final encouragement Louie gave to us was to remain faithful to God because faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. There are some seasons of life that seem quiet, when it doesn't seem like God is doing much in our lives. But even in those quiet moments, God's call remains the same. Read Acts 24:24–27.

Paul was arrested and left in chains during the most prolific time in his ministry. This appeared to be the worst time to be inactive. Even so, Paul was left in prison for two years. Unlike when Peter was arrested or when Paul was imprisoned with Silas, there was no miracle that released him. **When has it felt like God has forgotten you?**

Remember, Paul's primary goal was to travel to Rome to preach the gospel. Read Acts 25:9–12.

God had not forgotten Paul. Paul's difficult circumstances had actually paved the way for his mission to Rome. Like Paul, our mission for God may take some unexpected paths. We must be committed to serving God no matter where we are, because he may change the road to get us to where he wants us to be. **What do you expect God will do in your future? What will you do if God does not meet your expectations?**

**In what ways could God use your current circumstances to build his church?**

**What can you do to trust God with your path, even if it is not a path you would choose for yourself?**

Think back to your “why.” **In what ways, if any, is it confined to a specific place or circumstance?**

**In what ways can you refine that purpose statement to fit your life no matter where you are?**

In every season and every place, God is working through us. Like Louie said, if we are alive, we are called to share our stories with the people in front of us. If we are faithful to God, regardless of where he takes us, there will eventually be incredible fruit.

**What does it look like to be faithful to God where you are today? Whom has God put you in front of that you could help find life in Jesus?**

### **LAST WORD**

We tend to over-focus on where we want to be in life, but “where” is not an important issue for a Christian. God wants us to focus on his mission, the great “why” of our lives. No matter where God takes us, even if it is far from where we want to be, we can fulfill God's purpose for us. That frees us to go anywhere and to be around anyone!

The most important question we can answer today is not “Where do I want to be?” Rather, it is “How can I be faithful to God, no matter where I am?”

### **Acts 20–26 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won’t be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God’s Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Acts 20–26. Paul’s traveling ministry comes to an end and most of these chapters cover his repeated trials and appearances in front of Hebrew and Roman rulers. Take note of the way Paul engages with the rulers, what is most important to him, and the way he endures life in prison.

Day 1: Paul in Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20)

Day 2: Paul Travels to Jerusalem (Acts 21)

Day 3: Paul’s Defense (Acts 22)

Day 4: The Assassination Plot Against Paul (23)

Day 5: Paul in Front of Felix (Acts 24)

Day 6: Paul Appeals to Caesar (Acts 25)

Day 7: Paul in Front of Agrippa (Acts 26)

# Session 8: Nothing Can Stop God's Plan

## **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

### **Main Idea**

We can trust God with the detours of our lives, knowing that they will serve to accomplish his mission and make us more like Jesus.

### **Head Change**

To know that God has a purpose for every circumstance in our lives.

### **Heart Change**

To feel seen by the God who created us and sends us out to do his work.

### **Life Change**

To use the unique gifts and circumstances God has given us to accomplish his mission for our lives.

## **OPEN**

**Think of a time when you were lost. What did it feel like? How did you find your way to where you needed to be?**

There are times in our lives when we feel lost, like we have missed God's directions, or we aren't where we are supposed to be. Our discomfort can leave us scrambling, praying, searching for a way to change where we are in life. But God has not forgotten us; even when we feel lost, God is at work. In this session, we will see that detours are purposeful and can be some of the most impactful moments in our lives.

## **READ**

Acts 27:21–26, 39–44; 28:16–31.

**Note:** We have made a daily reading guide of Acts 27–28 so that you might read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie Giglio's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**How does God use Paul's difficult circumstances?**

**Why is it important that God sees and personally knows you?**

**In what ways is Acts "living history"?**

*Show Session 8: Nothing Can Stop God's Plan (14 minutes).*

## **DISCUSS**

A lot of us have expectations for how our lives will go, particularly when we are following Jesus. We think that if we are following God's plan, fulfilling his purpose for us, that life will be easy sailing. But in these last two chapters of Acts, when Paul was doing exactly what God called him to do, things continually went wrong. Read Acts 27:1–8, 21–26, and 28:1–3.

### **How would you describe Paul's road to Rome?**

Paul wanted to go to Rome and Jesus had confirmed this goal in a dream (Acts 19:21; 23:11). By all accounts, Paul was going in the right direction, but his road was anything but easy. Slow travel, poor decision-making, and stormy seas turned his simple path into a winding, difficult journey. In the same way, following Jesus will not always be an easy road. At times, there will be roadblocks and hindrances to get where God wants us to go.

### **What challenges do you feel are keeping you from reaching your God-given potential?**

Louie shared the story of his friends, Jay and Katherine Wolf, whose lives took a detour after Katherine suffered a stroke at a young age. But the Wolfs did not view the effects of the stroke on Katherine as a punishment or God failing them, rather they saw it as a God-given platform to fulfill his mission in their own lives. **In what ways could the detours in your own life be God's assignment to fulfill his mission through you?**

Louie said, "Your detour is for someone else's deliverance." The detours in our life can make us hyper-focused on ourselves and our own problems, but God might use your detour to bring more people to salvation. **What makes it hard to believe that your detour could help someone else believe in Jesus?**

Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, but his detour took him to Malta. God detoured Paul so that people could be healed and know the name of Jesus. **What new opportunities has a detour in your life given you to serve others or introduce someone to Jesus?**

God may change your path without changing your final destination. It may be more difficult or entirely different than you imagined. **What could it look like to hold your expectations for your path loosely?**

**In what ways could you prepare your heart for the divine detours in your plan?**

**Note:** To learn more about Paul's ultimate missionary goals, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Louie showed us a small detail in Acts that points to a much larger truth. In Acts 27:37, there is a quick note of the exact number of people on this ship. Through this we see that God is concerned with everyone, not just the heavy hitters like Paul. **In what ways have you compared your purpose to others'?**

**Have you ever felt less important to God's mission than other Christians? What has made you feel that way?**

In the video, Louie reminded us that God has a purpose for every one of us. "You are not insignificant. You are not incidental. You are not forgotten. God created you for a reason and he uniquely gifted you to be a part of the story of his church." **What is your role in your local church? In what ways are you using your gifts to serve the body of Christ?**

**What is your role in building the church? Whom has God providentially placed you next to that do not know him?**

It may be that you do not know what your role in God's story is yet. That is okay! Instead of trying to discover your life's grand purpose, think of the opportunities God has given you to be his witness in your sphere of influence. **In what ways could you serve God at work?**

**In what ways could you serve God through your free time or hobbies?**

**What passions do you have that could be used to serve God?**

**Note:** To work through an exercise in discovering what your purpose in God's story might be, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Things did not get easier for Paul when he arrived in Rome. When Paul finally got to where he wanted to be, he was rejected by the Roman Jews and put under house arrest. Read Acts 28:16–24, 30–31.

**Would you say that Paul's mission to Rome was a success or a failure? Why?**

**In what ways was Paul doing exactly what God called him to do in Rome?**

When we look at Paul's life and ministry, we realize that God's mission will often bring us into difficult circumstances. Paul was rejected by his countrymen, run out of cities, imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, snake-bitten, and attacked by angry mobs. **In what ways does Paul's example change the way you see the hurdles to God's mission in your own life?**

House arrest may have stopped Paul's missionary travels, but it did not stop the spread of the gospel. In the video, Louie pointed out that Paul penned the books known as the

Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—while he was in the Roman prison. God can work through any circumstance. **In what ways is God working through your current circumstances?**

**What could it look like to trust God, even when you don't understand where he is leading you?**

Acts ends with Paul in a prison cell. But the story of the church did not end shackled in Rome. The living story of Acts is now being written through us. **Who handed you the baton of faith? Who might you hand that baton off to or welcome into the work you are already doing?**

**Note:** To examine Paul's final thoughts on his life and ministry, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

We have reached the end of The Acts of the Apostles. Take a moment to think back over the last eight sessions and your own time reading the book of Acts.

**What have you learned about the mission of God and your place in it?**

**In what ways has your perspective of your current circumstances changed while reading Acts?**

**As you leave this study, what specific acts of faithfulness will you practice to help build and establish God's church?**

### **LAST WORD**

It may be easy to feel small or inconsequential. In the age of social media, we are told that only the people with hundreds of thousands of followers have any influence. But in God's view, every single person is important to the mission of God. You have a role to play in continuing the story of Acts in your office, your city, or even internationally.

Remember what you have learned in this study: God has a promise and a purpose for your life and there is no circumstance that can separate you from him and no detour that can derail his mission. At the end of the session, Louie reminded us, "The greatest thing you can do with your life is to bring someone else to life." When you take that step, Acts is not over; it is still being written through you.

### **Acts 27–28 Reading Plan**

Acts is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's word.

This week, use this reading guide to examine the final chapters of Acts.

Day 1: Paul Sets Sail (Acts 27:1–38)

Day 2: Shipwrecks and Snake Bites (Acts 27:39–28:10)

Day 3: Paul Reaches Rome (Acts 28:11–16)

Day 4: Paul's Evangelism in Rome (28:17–28)

Day 5: Paul's Life in Rome (Acts 28:30–31)