

Power to Live By

Part I
Studies from the Book of Acts
Chapters 1-12

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Foreword

Welcome to this life-enriching seminar for men and women who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and others who may be seeking Him.

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Power to Live By

Part I

Studies from the Book of Acts Chapters 1 - 12

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Before you begin . . .

The Book of Acts is action-packed and fun to read in one or two sittings. In this book, that meticulous gatherer of details Dr. Luke records what has become the most reliable source of information about the beginnings of the Christian church. While his treatise is not an exhaustive historical account of the early church, he gives us enough information to see that the spreading of Christianity throughout the Roman world was nothing short of miraculous.

What people in the early church experienced was not unlike what we face today as we seek to know Christ and practice godly living. They yearned for others to know the living Lord, were rejected and sometimes persecuted for their faith, and faced daily problems that sought to overwhelm their trust in God.

In our study of the divinely inspired work of Dr. Luke, we will concentrate on finding *power to live by*. We will seek to answer the daily questions about commitment to Christ and the living out of that commitment in today's world. We will seek to learn from the early believers about how to experience supernatural power in the battles of life and faith.

It is my prayer that this study will help you discover or rediscover the incredible power that God makes available to us through the indwelling of His Spirit. But more importantly, may knowing that Power accomplish its purpose: to bring you and, through you, others to know God's boundless love and care through Jesus Christ.

Diana Schick

Author

Creative Living Bible Studies

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts is fast-moving and definitely one of the most exciting books in the Bible. It is the second book in a two-part series written by a physician and missionary named Luke. The first of the series, the book of Luke, records the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts then gives an historical account of the early church as it spread across the Roman Empire in the first century A.D.

Luke traveled with the apostle Paul and probably wrote Luke and Acts during Paul's imprisonment in Rome between 63 and 70 A.D. Luke's writings are addressed to a Roman aristocrat named Theophilus, who most likely helped pay for publication costs. The Lucan series encouraged the faith of believers in Christ while it displaced ill-founded reports about Christianity to the unbelieving world.

Luke did not attempt to give an exhaustive historical account of the early church in the book of Acts. However, his careful compilations form the chief source book regarding first century Christianity and provide firm historical foundations for the Christian faith.

THE RISEN LORD

Acts 1

Acts begins with the forty days during which Jesus appeared to His disciples¹ after His resurrection. During this time, Jesus explained Messianic prophecies² about Himself found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. That Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah³ of Israel was such good news--it would have to be proclaimed! However, Jesus instructed the believers to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit⁴ came upon them to empower them as witnesses to the truth about the resurrected Christ. After this, Jesus ascended into heaven before their eyes, and angels appeared to declare that the Lord would return in the same way He left!

The disciples were filled with awe and joy as they returned to Jerusalem to pray and wait for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 1:1-11.

1. What did Luke write about in his first book to Theophilus (1:1-2)?

2. How long did Jesus appear to the disciples after His resurrection, and what did He do during this time (1:3; Luke 24:44-45)?

3. During a meal together, what command did Jesus give the disciples (1:4-5)?

References: Notes 4 and 5 on the *Holy Spirit*, pp. 13.

4. What was Jesus' answer to the disciples' question regarding the kingdom (1:6-7)?

5. Onto what did Jesus encourage the disciples to turn their focus? What did He promise regarding the Holy Spirit (1:8)?

Reference: Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

6. What events took place after Jesus made this promise (1:9-11; see also Luke 24:50-53)?

Read Acts 1:12-26.

7. a. Who joined the apostles as they gathered in the upstairs room (1:14)?

Note: *the women* (1:14) possibly refers to the wives of the apostles and some of the women who had traveled with Jesus and ministered to Jesus and His disciples out of gratitude (Matthew 27:55, Luke 8:2-3).

b. What occupied the disciples' time (1:14a)?

8. a. Peter showed how prophecy pointed to the death and replacement of Judas as an apostle (Psalm 69:25; 109:8). What requirements did Peter propose for the new apostle (1:21-22)?

Reference: Note 1, *Apostles, disciples*, and Note 3, *Messiah*, p. 13. See also *Major Prophecies Concerning Jesus*, p. 14.

b. How did the disciples seek God's leading in choosing another apostle (1:23-26)?

Note: The casting of lots was used in Old Testament times to determine God's will. With the indwelling of believers by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, casting lots for guidance was never needed again.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

When the Task is Too Big

Imagine, if you can, what the disciples experienced as they walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry. They witnessed crippled people straightening their backs and blind men suddenly receiving sight. They saw the sores on ten lepers healed simultaneously and watched as Jesus fed five thousand people from five loaves and two fish. A man named Lazarus walked out of his grave at the command of Jesus, and the only son of a widow sat up in his coffin. Jesus walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee before their very eyes and calmed a ferocious storm with the words, "Quiet, be still!" The list of miracles could go on, but in recent days, they had witnessed the most incredible of all. For forty days they had walked and talked with Jesus after His *resurrection from the dead*. During that time, He had opened the Scriptures to explain prophecies written hundreds of years before that were fulfilled through His life. There was no doubt in their minds: He was the Messiah, Savior and King of creation.

If you had been one of those disciples, you might have thought that everyone would want to know the wonderful truth about the Christ. But Jesus knew that while many would want to know, countless others would not, and persecution would come. For this reason, the 120 disciples were instructed to wait until they were given God's power to accomplish the humanly impossible task of spreading the truth about Jesus Christ. The

triumphant spread of Christianity throughout the world in the face of bitter persecution would be nothing short of supernatural. We all face tasks that overwhelm us from time to time, and many of us seem to have difficult challenges before us most of the time. Words and phrases such as, "It's over my head," "unattainable," "out of the question," "too much..." bombard our minds evoking negative emotions which drain our energy and hasten defeat.

One of the main themes of the book of Acts is that God can give us supernatural power to face the seemingly impossible challenges of life. It is appropriate to begin our study on Power to Live By with some observations about facing the impossible task.

1. a. What kind of impossibilities can overwhelm our lives?

b. What types of emotions do these challenges elicit?

c. What are the results of these negative emotions?

2. a. What did Jesus promise the early believers as they prepared to undergo the humanly impossible task before them?

Matthew 28:20b

Acts 1:8

b. What do these truths suggest about difficult tasks we face today?

3. Hebrews 11:33-34 speaks of godly people gone before us who accomplished humanly impossible feats of courage and strength through faith in God. What truths do you observe in these verses?

4. What do the following verses say about strength?

Psalm 46:1

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 41:10

Ephesians 3:16, 20

5. What is important to know about seemingly impossible tasks?

Luke 1:37

II Corinthians 12:9-10

Philippians 4:13

6. a. We cannot expect God to enable us to do something that is not in our best interests. What do the following verses say about God's character that encourage us to seek His best for our lives?

Psalm 36:5-9

b. What was the Psalmist's continual prayer?

Psalm 25:4-5

c. What do the following verses encourage us to do as we seek God's strength for the impossible task?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Summary

7. a. What tasks in your life today seem humanly impossible?

b. What truths in this lesson stand out to you as you contemplate your situation?

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *Apostles and disciples.* A *disciple* is a pupil of a certain teacher. New Testament *disciples* were those who followed Jesus and were committed to his teachings. From such disciples, Jesus chose twelve men to be his *apostles* meaning "ones sent with a special commission." The apostle named Judas Iscariot committed suicide after betraying Jesus, and Matthias was appointed to take his place (Acts 1:12-26). Paul was also called to be an apostle after his conversion. The apostles took seriously their commission to lay the foundations of the Church. The majority died as martyrs.

2 *Major Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ,* see p. 14. *Prophecy* is given by God through prophets in both Old and New Testaments who preach, exhort, explain or, as in this case, foretell.

3 Messiah (Hebrew/Greek), *Christ* (Greek/English), *Son of David*. The meaning of the word Messiah or Christ is "anointed one." The term Messiah or Christ refers to the anointed one promised by God to deliver Israel from their enemies and establish them as *the* world power. Old Testament prophecy described the Messiah as a King and Savior who would come from the line of David. (I Chronicles 17:11-15). Those Jewish people who did not recognize Jesus overlooked prophecy that their Messiah would be a suffering servant who must suffer and die for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53; John 1:29). **(For other Messianic prophecies, see p. 14).**

4 Holy Spirit. God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity, three divine persons with the same essence as God. The Holy Spirit, known as the Third Person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Christ (John 1:12, John 14:16,17). When we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26,27).

Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in us", as in Colossians 1:27b. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit 57 times in the book of Acts; this is why Acts is sometimes referred to as the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*.

Reference: Note 6, *Trinity*, p14.

5 Holy Spirit's coming. The Holy Spirit did not come initially at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is eternal God, omniscient and omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-10), the Holy Spirit appears from the beginning of Scripture (Genesis 1:2). In the Old Testament, as in the New, He came upon individuals to empower them to accomplish certain God-given tasks (ex: David, I Samuel 16:13; Peter, Acts 4:8). Before His death and resurrection, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26) would one day indwell His disciples as Comforter, Counselor and Advocate. At Pentecost, God would fulfill this promise (Acts 2), thus beginning a new phase in God's revelation to man.

6 Trinity (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). While "Trinity" as a word is not in the Bible, Christian doctrine historically has used this term to describe God as He has revealed Himself. The Bible explains that God is one God in three equal persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Certain passages in the Old Testament hint of a plurality in God (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:22, 11:7; Isaiah 6:8). The Old Testament also speaks of someone coming from God who is God (i.e. Christ, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6). The New Testament clearly portrays Jesus Christ as God (John 1:1; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit as God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3-4; Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14). All three persons of the Trinity share the divine characteristics of holiness, power, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. While they all may be involved in an activity such as teaching, for instance, each is associated with certain specific works. The Father is associated with the work of creating, the Son with the work of redeeming, and the Holy Spirit with the work of sanctifying believers. In many New Testament passages, mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit occurs in the same sentence (Jude 20-21; Ephesians 4:4-6, I John 4:2; I Peter 1:2; Titus 3:4-6; II Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 5:5-6; John 15:26).

***Major Prophecies Concerning Jesus and Their Fulfillment
Arranged Chronologically***

Description of Prophecy	Prophecy Fulfillment
Would be the "Offspring of a Woman"	Gen 3:15 Gal 4:4
Promised Offspring of Abraham	Gen 18:18 Acts 3:25
Promised Offspring of Isaac	Gen 17:19 Mt 1:2
Promised Offspring of Jacob	Num 24:17 Lk 3:34
Will descend from the tribe of Judah	Gen 49:10 Lk 3:33
The Heir to the throne of David	Isa 9:7 Mt 1:1
Place of birth	Mic 5:2 Mt 2:1
Time of birth	Dan 9:25 Lk 2:1-2

Born of a virgin	Isa 7:14 Mt 1:18
Slaughter of Infants	Jer 31:15 Mt 2:16
Escape into Egypt	Hos 11:1 Mt 2:14
Ministry in Galilee	Isa 9:1-2 Mt 4:12-16
As a Prophet	Dt. 18:15 Jn 6:14
His rejection by Jews	Isa 53:3 Jn 1:11
Some of his characteristics	Is 11:2 Lk 2:52
His triumphal entry	Zec 9:9 Jn 12:13-14
Betrayed by a friend	Ps 41:9 Mk 14:10
Sold for thirty pieces of silver	Zec 11:12 Mt 26:15
Money to be returned for a potter's field	Zec 11:13 Mt 27:6-7
False witnesses accuse him	Ps 27:12 Mt 26:60-61
Silent when accused	Is 53:7 Mt 26:62-63
Struck and spit on	Is 50:6 Mk 14:65
Hated without cause	Ps 69:4 Jn 15:23-25
Suffered vicariously	Isa 53:4-5 Mt 8:16-17
Crucified with sinners	Isa 53:12 Mt 27:38
Hands and feet pierced	Ps 22:16 Jn 20:27
Mocked and insulted	Ps 22:6-8 Mt 27:39-40
Given gall and vinegar	Ps 69:21 Jn 19:29
Hears prophetic words repeated in mockery	Ps 22:8 Mt 27:43
Prays for His enemies	Ps 109:4 Lk 23:34
His side to be pierced	Zec 12:10 Jn 19:34
Soldiers cast lots for his clothes	Ps 22:18 Mk 15:24
To be buried with the rich	Isa 53:9 Mt 27:57-60
His resurrection	Ps 16:10 Mt 28:9
His Ascension	Ps 68:18 Lk 24:50-51

LESSON 2

PENTECOST--THE CHURCH IS BORN

Acts 2:1-41

The day of Pentecost¹ was a busy one in Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of devout Jews and Gentile converts² from all over the Mediterranean world and Middle East filled the streets of the city to celebrate this Jewish holiday. It was on this day, fifty days after the crucifixion, that the disciples, numbering one hundred twenty (1:15), were gathered together in a house in Jerusalem. Suddenly the place was filled with the reverberation of a mighty wind, and what appeared to be tongues of fire separated and rested on each one there. Simultaneously, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit^{3,4} and began to speak in languages unknown to them. The sound attracted a curious crowd as the believers moved to the street, continuing to praise God in other tongues. People from various parts of the world heard their native languages and were filled with wonderment about what was happening.

The twelve apostles rose to give explanation to the people. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter became the apostles' spokesman. He explained that the tongues phenomena was evidence that the Spirit of God was in their midst bearing witness of the truth about Jesus Christ. Peter proceeded to confront the crowd of thousands with facts about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The events of which Peter spoke had happened in the presence of many who were living in Judea during their occurrence, and no one disputed his words.

By referring to Old Testament prophecy regarding the resurrection of the Messiah (Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-31), Peter was able to show that Jesus of Nazareth and the Jewish Messiah were one and the same Person. Pierced by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, people in the crowd asked what their response should be to these truths. Peter instructed them to repent, receive God's forgiveness and be baptized⁸ in the name of Jesus Christ. The repentance of which Peter spoke required a revised perspective about Jesus; He was not just a carpenter or a religious

impostor but the divine Lord and Messiah. After this change of heart, the act of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ symbolized one's identification with the message of Jesus and His people. The result of Peter's preaching and the work of the Holy Spirit was no doubt incredible to the initial band of disciples: three thousand new believers were baptized that day.

Read Acts 2:1-13.

1. For what were the believers waiting (1:4-5)?

Reference: Notes 4,5, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

2. a. Who was in Jerusalem at the time (2:5)?

b. How did God equip the disciples to reach the individuals in Jerusalem during Pentecost (2:4, 6-11)?

c. What characterized the responses of the crowd (2:7, 12-13)?

Read Acts 2:14-21.

3. a. Who stood before the crowd (2:14)?

b. Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:17-21) to explain that the phenomenal miracle the people were witnessing was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy regarding the time after their Messiah had come. To what promise did Peter refer (2:17,18)?

c. After the Messiah had come, what had Joel prophesied that would allow one to receive salvation (2:21)?

Read Acts 2:22-41.

4. a. What major signs did God give to identify Jesus as the promised Messiah (2:22-24)?

b. Of what crime did Peter remind the people (2:23)?

5. a. Referring to Old Testament prophecy as he spoke, what explanation did Peter give for the fact that people were hearing the words of the disciples in their native tongues (2:31-33)?

Note: The Jews listening understood this prophecy as the words of the Messiah spoken through David, i.e. the words of the Messiah from David's mouth.

b. After showing how the death and resurrection of Jesus matched the prophecy about the death and resurrection of the Messiah, what was Peter able to intelligently proclaim to his Jewish brothers (2:36)?

6. How did the people respond to Peter's words (2:37)?

7. a. What two things did Peter encourage them to do, and what two gifts would they receive in return (2:38)?

Note: Biblical repentance involves turning from sin to righteousness and always results in the forgiveness of God.

References: Note 7, *Repent*, and Note 8, *baptized*, p. 25. Also, Notes 3, 4 on the Spirit, p. 24.

8. a. What did Peter continue to do (2:40)?

b. What resulted (2:41)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Power to Live By

Anyone who seriously studies the life of Jesus finds a model to emulate. He was kind, patient and compassionate, but firm about the truth. He had access to the infinite wisdom of God and was able to at once see the spiritual world as well as the physical. He was a whole person, at peace with God and Himself and able to unselfishly serve the needs of others. All of us want to be whole as Jesus was...we yearn to function as God created us to function...at peace within and significant to the lives of others. Yet we often find it impossible to overcome fear, self-doubt, anxiety, indecisiveness and selfishness. As hard as we may try, we find it impossible to be like Jesus. Peter was such a man. The fearless Peter we find in Acts 2 is far different than the one who 50 days earlier had lacked the courage to confess his association with Jesus. He denied even knowing the Man he had been close to for the past three years (Luke 22:54-62).

What made the difference in Peter? How had he overcome his fear, inconsistency, self-doubt, anxiety? The Scriptures make it clear that the source of Peter's strength came from the risen Christ, living His life through Peter in the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit. If we learn nothing else from our study of Acts than the truth that the Holy Spirit allows Jesus to live His life through us, this would be enough. Let us look at what the Bible has to say about the incredible *power to live by* that God makes available to each of us.

1. a. Compare Luke 22:54-62 with Acts 2:14,36-41. What emotions did Peter struggle with in Luke?

b. What characterized him in Acts?

2. What emotions do we fall prey to today that hinder our relationships with God and others?

3. What promises had Jesus made about the Holy Spirit?

John 14:16-17

John 14:26

John 15:26

4. How is the working of the Holy Spirit described in the following?

Ephesians 3:16,20

Philippians 2:13

5. In John 15, Jesus used the analogy of a vine abiding in a branch to illustrate how Christ can live His life in and through us in the power of

the Holy Spirit. What does Jesus say about trying to live the Christian life apart from Him (John 15:5)?

6. a. How does Galatians 5:22-23 describe the characteristics the Holy Spirit seeks to produce within us?

b. How does Romans 8:26-27 further describe the Holy Spirit's help?

7. What changes does God make in our lives through His Holy Spirit according to the following?

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Ephesians 1:13-14

8. How can we choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit according to the following?

Acts 2:38

Luke 11:13

Summary

9. Are there areas in which you are struggling to be more Christ like? What hope is offered in this lesson? What one or two verses would you like to claim for your situation?

10. a. Have you ever imagined Christ living His life in you through the power of the Holy Spirit? What difference would it make in your home, workplace, neighborhood?

b. What is your prayer regarding the Holy Spirit and your life? If you have never asked Christ to fill you with His Spirit, perhaps you would like to ask Him for the first time now.

LESSON 2 NOTES

1 Pentecost. This was a Jewish holiday that occurred 50 days (7 weeks) after the celebration of the *Passover*. The *Passover* was the first of the annual feasts of Israel and celebrated God's miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt. *Pentecost* celebrated the Law being given to Israel on Mt. Sinai as Moses communed with God. It is appropriate that Jesus, the Savior and deliverer, died on the Passover eve, and the Holy Spirit, who gives the believer power to fulfill the laws of God, came on the day of Pentecost.

2 Gentile converts were non-Jews by birth (Gentiles) who observed all of the Mosaic law and were thus enabled to fellowship with the Jews.

3 Reference: Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

4a Baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), *filled with the Holy Spirit* (2:4). *Baptized with the Holy Spirit.* On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to baptize the disciples into the Body of Christ, thus welding them as a unit into the risen Lord and Head of the Church (Acts 11:15-16; I Cor 12:13). This is experienced by each individual at the moment he personally accepts Christ (see also Romans 8:9-11). At Pentecost, the Spirit also inaugurated His permanent relationship of *indwelling* all believers in fulfillment of the Jesus' promise recorded in John 14:17.

4b Filled with the Spirit. Pentecost was the beginning of the age of the Spirit whereby believers can, *through choosing to completely yield to God's will, experience the unhindered working of the Spirit in their lives.* Luke uses the words *filled with the Holy Spirit* when people initially receive power from the Spirit to equip them for God's work (Luke 1:15, Acts 9:17); also when the Holy Spirit gives one the words to speak (Acts 4:8,31; 13:9). Other passages describe being filled with the Spirit as a continuous process (Acts 13:52, Ephesians 5:18) whose corresponding state is being full (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3,5; 7:55; 11:24). These Scriptures collectively seem to indicate that *baptism* (Acts 1:5, 11:16) with the Spirit

occurs when one personally receives Christ, is baptized into the body of Christ and receives the indwelling Holy Spirit, as did the disciples at Pentecost. (Romans 8:9-11; I Corinthians 12:13). All recurring experiences of receiving special power from the Spirit are referred to biblically as being *filled with the Spirit*. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 69.

5 *languages unknown to him* (2:4). The ability to speak in *other tongues* (literally *other languages*) referred to in Acts 2:4, 11, 10:46 and 19:6 is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. One New Testament passage deals with this spiritual gift extensively (I Cor 12-14). Different commentators interpret the tongues spoken of in four different ways: 1) in Acts 2 they are the human languages of the various nations, but in I Corinthians 12-14 they are non-human, heavenly languages; 2) both Acts and I Cor. refer to human languages not known to the speaker, 3) both Acts and I Cor. refer to non-human languages; 4) I Corinthians alludes to languages both of "men" and of "angels" (13:1), while Acts portrays only the languages of men not known to the speaker. *Life Change Series, Acts*, Navpress, p. 37.

6 *Messiah, Christ*, note 3, p. 13.

7 *Repent* (2:38; 3:19). "Repentance is a change of mind and will arising from sorrow for sin and leading to transformation of life." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1649.

8 *baptized* (Acts 2:38). Water baptism was not new to the Jewish community. It had been practiced since Old Testament times as an initiation rite. John the Baptist transformed the meaning of baptism from a rite to a moral act initiated by an individual making a commitment to personal holiness. The meaning of baptism took on yet new meaning when Jesus inaugurated baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Baptism always quickly followed one's conversion in New Testament times. The action symbolized identification of the new believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:1-4); i.e. it depicted dying with Christ, being cleansed of sin, and being raised to newness of life in Him.

LESSON 3

HEALING OF A LAME MAN

Acts 3:1-4:4

The first Christians were all Jews who continued to worship regularly at the temple, gathering in a section called Solomon's Colonnade. One day, as Peter and John were on their way to the temple, they walked by a lame man who begged them for money. The forty-year old man (4:22) had been lame from birth, and every day he was placed by the temple gate to beg. Peter explained he had no money, but by the authority of Jesus Christ commanded the man to walk. The lame man rose to his feet and started walking, jumping and praising God. He clung to the apostles as the crowds gathered. Peter seized the opportunity to tell the people about Jesus Christ.

Once again, the apostle turned to the Old Testament promises and prophecies to show that Jesus of Nazareth was their fulfillment. While ignorance may have caused the Jews to crucify Jesus, Peter left his audience with no excuse for refusing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord now. He encouraged the people to repent, turn to God, and experience forgiveness and refreshment from the Lord.

While they were speaking to the people, the priests, captain of the temple guard and Sadducees¹ came up. They were greatly annoyed by the apostles' teaching and seized Peter and John. The apostles were imprisoned to await trial before the Sanhedrin² the next day. Meanwhile, many had believed Peter's words, and the number of men alonewho believed in Jesus grew to five thousand.

Read Acts 3:1-16.

1. What needs did the beggar have, and how did Peter meet those needs (3:1-7)?

Note: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth* means *by the power and authority of Jesus the Messiah*.

2. What was appropriate about the beggar's response (3:8-11)?

3. a. To whom did Peter immediately give credit (3:12-13a)?

b. How might Peter have responded to the crowd differently?

4. a. What did Peter declare about Jesus to the attentive Jewish crowd (3:13b-15)?

b. What did he declare about the lame man's healing (3:16)?

Read Acts 3:17-26.

5. a. How did God redeem the ignorant actions of the Jewish people (3:17-18)?

b. What did Isaiah 53:7-8, 10-11 declare about the Messiah that was fulfilled in Jesus?

Reference: *Salvation*, Note 5, p. 42.

6. What did Peter encourage and why (3:19)?

7. Peter cited promises God had given the Jewish forefathers that referred to Jesus Christ. What did God desire Israel to do with the gift of His Son (3:22-23, 25-26)?

Reference: Note 3, *Abrahamic Covenant*, p. 33.

Read Acts 4:1-4.

8. What positive and negative results came from the lame man's healing and Peter's boldness (4:1-4)?

Reference: *Sadducees*, Note 1, p. 32.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Experiencing the Healing We Need

The lame man in our story had a disability obvious to all. Often our greater areas of crippledness are not outwardly visible, however. Socially,

emotionally and spiritually, we can experience painful problems. While God can and does sometimes perform physical miracles of healing, the most important healing He performs in our lives is in the spiritual arena. He desires to use our every experience--both good and bad-- to orchestrate the healing of damaged emotions, to correct misconceptions about God and to free us to enjoy relationships with others.

Let's take a look at what the Bible says about how we can experience God's healing in our lives as we trust Him.

1. What types of "crippledness" do people commonly experience spiritually?

emotionally?

socially?

2. What kinds of feelings about self, others and life do these handicaps create?

3. a. What are some of the reasons people do not go to God with their needs in these areas?

b. What truths about God support the fact that He desires to heal us, not to hurt us?

Psalm 103:2-5

Psalm 103:8, 13-14

Isaiah 53:5 (prophecy about Christ)

Romans 8:32

4. Sometimes we believe that we are unable to come to God until we perfect ourselves. What did Jesus say about coming to Him?

Matthew 9:10-13

Matthew 11:28-30

5. How do these verses describe the healing God desires to give?

Jeremiah 33:6b

Malachi 4:2

6. Peter explained that faith in Jesus is the foundation for complete healing (Acts 3:16,19). What does Jesus invite us to do in order to begin to realize the healing He can give?

Revelation 3:20

7. How does the Lord promise to care for our damaged emotions?

Philippians 4:7

Psalm 34:18

8. How would being controlled by God's Spirit enable us to find healing in the area of relating to others? What does Galatians 5:22-23 suggest?

9. According to Ephesians 3:20, to what extent is God able to affect healing in our lives as He works within us?

Summary

10. a. As we have briefly touched on the topic of experiencing the healing we need, perhaps an area of crippledness in your own life has come to mind. What truths about God's healing stand out to you from this lesson?

b. Have you begun to ask God to provide healing in this area of your life? What would you like for Him to do?

If you have never realized the spiritual healing that begins by opening the door of your life to Christ, perhaps you would like to do that now. A simple prayer might be: *Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life and invite you to begin the healing that will make me the person you created me to be. Amen.*

LESSON 3 NOTES

1 Sadducees. Sadducees were a Jewish party that represented the wealthy aristocracy in Israel. Theologically unorthodox, they flatly rejected the strict adherence to Jewish law practiced by religious leaders known as Pharisees.

The Sadducees did not believe in life after death, so Peter's teaching about the resurrection infuriated them. Because they held the majority of the priestly positions in the Jewish governing body, the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees were very powerful in national decision-making. In order to guard their prestige and possessions, they went to great lengths politically to maintain friendly relationships with Rome.

Convinced that the teaching in the name of Jesus would eventually lead to public disorder and knowing that Roman authorities would deal mercilessly with such, the Sadducees desperately wanted to put an end to the apostles' teachings. While the Pharisees had posed the greatest problem to Jesus, the Sadducees became the greatest enemy of the early church.

2 Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. It was comprised of *priests, scribes and elders*. The court had seventy-one members with the *high* priest as president. In former days, the position of *high* priest came by family heritage and was for life. In the Roman times, however, existing bribery and corruption brought twenty-eight high priests in and out of power between 37 B.C. and 67 A.D. Of these high priests, all but six came from four "priestly families," highly prestigious families whose members inherited priestly positions. Practically all the *priests* on the Sanhedrin were Sadducees, wealthy aristocrats devoted to preserving the status quo in Judea in order to preserve their wealth and prestige. *Scribes* were the experts and translators of the traditional Jewish law. *Elders* were respected men in the community who sat on the court. While the Sanhedrin had authority to arrest, it had no authority to pass the death sentence. Barclay, pp. 38-39.

3 Abrahamic Covenant. Around 2100 B.C., God called a man named Abraham to become the father of the Jewish nation. The one true God would reveal Himself to these people, and from their midst would come the Redeemer of mankind. The covenant God made with Abraham is sevenfold and appears in Genesis 12:1-3. Peter quoted the seventh promise of the covenant in Acts 3:25 as he alluded to the fact that the nations of the earth were to be blessed through the Redeemer Christ of Israel.

LESSON 4

INITIAL PERSECUTION

Acts 4:5-31

In our last lesson, we saw Peter heal a lame beggar over forty years old who had been crippled all his life. When crowds of amazed people gathered around the apostles in the temple, Peter explained that the phenomenal healing, done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, proved the resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Greatly disturbed by the apostles' teaching, some Sadducees¹ and the temple guard captain arrested Peter and John. After a night in jail, the apostles were brought to trial before the Sanhedrin.

When Peter presented their defense to the Sanhedrin, he was speaking to the most intellectual, wealthy and powerful men in Judea. The Sanhedrin was also the same court that had condemned Jesus to death. With the possibility of the same sentence, Peter, a simple Galilean fisherman, spoke with astounding boldness. In essence, he turned the trial back on his accusers as he stated exactly what they did not want to hear: the lame man who stood before them was healed in the name of Jesus Christ whom they had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead. Peter quoted Old Testament prophecy that predicted the Jewish rejection of their Messiah, and boldly declared that only faith in Jesus could save them.

Peter and John were sent from the room as the Sanhedrin discussed the issue. They were amazed at the courage and eloquence of the apostles. They were simple, uneducated men whom they recognized to have been Jesus' disciples. While the miraculous healing of the lame man was undeniable, the Sanhedrin was determined to stop the spread of teaching about the resurrection of Jesus.

The healing had given Peter favor with the people, however, and a strong sentence on the apostles could lead to riots and trouble with the Roman

authorities. The Sanhedrin had no choice but to severely threaten the apostles and let them go.

Summoning Peter and John back into the room, they warned them never to speak in the name of Jesus again. The apostles' response was simple: we will obey God and continue to tell what we have seen (4:19-20). Peter and John returned to report the day's happenings to the other believers. With one accord, they lifted their hearts in prayer, acknowledging the sovereign power of God and His ultimate victory over man's resistance to His plans. Remembering the suffering and triumph of Jesus Christ, they prayed for the courage needed to witness boldly about Him. They also asked God to continue the signs and miracles that confirmed the truth of their witness.

As they prayed, the place was shaken as the Holy Spirit once again filled⁴ and enabled the believers to speak boldly about their faith, even in the face of possible death.

Read Acts 4:5-22.

1. a. Describe the court setting. Who sat in judgment (4:5-6)?

Reference: Note 1, *Sadducees*, and Note 2, *Sanhedrin*, pp. 24-25.

b. Who appeared as evidence (4:10,14; cf. 3:1-10)?

c. Who was on trial (4:7)?

2. What question was directed to the apostles (4:7)?

3. How was Peter able to face this sophisticated and powerful audience with boldness (4:8)?

4. a. Peter was able to turn the trial back on the Sanhedrin. What initial points did Peter make?

Acts 4:9

Acts 4:10

b. Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 which predicted Israel's initial rejection of their Messiah, who would become the cornerstone of the Christian faith. With what declaration did Peter end his defense (4:12)?

Reference: *Salvation*, Note 5, p. 42.

5. How did the Sanhedrin initially respond to the witness of Peter and John (4:13-15)?

6. What did the Sanhedrin privately decide and why (4:16-17, 21-22)?

7. What courageous response did Peter and John give to the threats they received (4:18-20)?

Read 4:23-31.

8. a. What truths did the believers acknowledge in their prayer (4:24-28)?

b. What two requests did they make (4:29-30)?

c. How did God respond to their prayers (4:31)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Power Over Negative Emotions

No doubt Peter and John and the believers in Acts 4 could have panicked over their situation. Peter's earlier denial of the Lord showed that he could be shaken by fear, yet courage and boldness triumphed over his circumstances in the courtroom.

Throughout the book of Acts, we will see incredible power over potentially defeating emotions. In this wonderful book there are numerous examples of people overcoming incredible odds because they were able to control rather than be controlled by their feelings.

While even negative emotions can be helpful and are not in and of themselves bad, examples abound of paralysis and defeat that result from uncontrolled emotions. When the child inside each of us screams with fear, hurt or anger, how can we stand secure?

Let's make some observations about how ordinary people did it in the book of Acts.

1. a. What are common negative emotions that can overwhelm us?

b. What can happen if we let these feelings control us?

2. a. Imagine the apostles' situation as they faced the Sanhedrin. What negative feelings could have controlled them?

b. From where did the apostles' ultimately get the power to boldly testify before the Sanhedrin? Acts 4:8,31

c. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit,⁶ what does He produce in our lives regardless of the situation? II Timothy 1:7

3. The apostles' focus on Jesus gave them power over their emotions. Of what does He assure us?

John 14:27

John 16:33

4. According to the following, what can we trust God to do when we are faced with overwhelming circumstances?

Exodus 14:14

Job 42:2

II Corinthians 9:8

5. What are we instructed to do instead of trusting our feelings, and what is the result? Proverbs 3:5-6

6. Prayer protected the early believers from negative emotions. What does Philippians 4:6-7 command and promise?

7. Knowing God's love and care is important in controlling our feelings. How would you summarize what Matthew 6:25-34 reveals about God's care?

8. The believers offset their fear by praising God, acknowledging His power as Creator of all things (Acts 4:24). What does Isaiah tell us about God's power, love and ability to help us in our weakness? Isaiah 40:6-8, 1,26

Isaiah 40:11

Isaiah 40:27-28

Isaiah 40:29,31

Summary

9. a. In difficult situations, what can keep you from drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit to help you overcome negative feelings?

b. What prayer would you suggest for yourself at such a time?

10. What biblical truths in this lesson are most helpful to you in controlling harmful emotions?

LESSON 4 NOTES

1 Reference: *Sadducees*, note 1, p. 32.

2 Reference: *Sanhedrin*, note 2, p. 33.

3 Resurrection evidence. Had the Jewish leaders been able to produce the body of Jesus, they certainly would have done so. The fact that they did not refute Peter's claims about the resurrection of Jesus in this trial is further evidence of its historicity.

4 Reference: Note 4b, *Filling of the Spirit*, p. 24.

5 Salvation. The Jewish belief was that the blood sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament represented the death penalty necessary to be forgiven and saved from sin (Genesis 2:16,17; Romans 6:23; Leviticus 17:11,14; Hebrews 9:22). The Old Testament sacrifices established the principle that shedding of blood is necessary for forgiveness of sins. They also point to the blood of Christ shed on the cross as He became "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). His death on the cross for the sins of those who would believe in Him paid the penalty for sin. Christ's death on the cross made it possible for the one who trusts in Christ to receive the forgiveness of God (Ephesians 1:7), become a child of God (John 1:12), and experience the holiness and victory of God in his life. Christ's voluntary death on the cross was the supreme example of His love for us as individuals as He made provision for our salvation from the power and penalty of sin.

6 Reference: Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

LESSON 5

THE FIRST CHURCH COMMUNITY

Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-5:16

There was awe and great joy among the first believers in Christ. As devout Jews, they continued to keep Jewish traditions, meeting together in the temple in a large area called Solomon's Colonnade. Empowered by God's Spirit¹, the apostles spoke boldly of the resurrection and Lordship of Jesus and performed miraculous signs of healing and deliverance.² Thousands had accepted Jesus as their Messiah (cf. 4:4), and the number of believers was growing daily.

The oneness among the believers was evidenced by the sharing of possessions to meet each other's needs. Some even sold property and gave the proceeds to the church. Luke records one instance, however, when a couple named Ananias and Sapphira lied about their giving. They determined that they would say they were giving the entire amount received for the sale of some property when in fact they were only giving a portion of their profit to the church. When Peter confronted them about their deceit, Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the apostle's feet.

As a result of this incident, a reverent fear of God gripped the church community as well as the general public. Counterfeit or halfhearted believers began to keep their distance from the committed believers in the temple (cf. 5:13). Even so, the teaching and healing ministries of the apostles continued, and the church grew steadily.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

1. a. What did the first Christians do in order to stay united and grow spiritually (2:42)?

b. What continued to encourage their faith (2:43, 47b)?

c. How did their commitment to the Lord and each other manifest itself (2:44-47)?

Read Acts 4:32-37.

2. After the first persecution (Acts 4), what characterized the church (4:32-35)?

3. Caring for one another's needs was a major characteristic of the oneness of the early believers. What example of such care did Luke highlight (4:36-37)?

Read Acts 5:1-11.

4. a. How did Ananias and Sapphira sin (5:2-3,8-9)?

b. What freedom did they have (5:4)?

Reference: Note 3, *Ananias and Sapphira*, p. 50, and Note 4 *Satan*, p. 50.

c. What do you think motivated the evil action of this couple?

5. What did this incident prove to all about dealings with God? (See also Galatians 6:7.)

Read Acts 5:12-16.

6. How did God continue to confirm the message of salvation through Christ (5:12-16)?

Reference: Note 2, *evil spirits*, p. 50.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Power Over Hypocrisy

How many of us have heard someone say, "I don't believe in God because of all the hypocrites in the church." Many people are turned away from Christian faith because there is a lack of integrity in the lives of the believers they know. The duplicity in the lives of professed Christians is poison to the cause of Christ.

God knows the power of hypocrisy and throughout history has often publicly exposed the person who pretends to be holy while practicing ungodliness. God could not allow hypocrisy to begin to perpetrate itself in the young body of believers in the early church. Hypocrisy develops

subtly, and any one of us can be pulled into its grip. In this lesson, we will look at some of the roots of hypocrisy and where power is found to live the Christian life authentically.

1. a. How would you define hypocrisy?

b. How do these verses define hypocrisy?

Matthew 23:3c

Luke 6:46

2. What are some examples of hypocrisy in professed Christians?

3. What causes for hypocrisy are referred to in these verses?

James 1:22-24

Matthew 6:24

Psalm 36:2

4. Hypocrisy often comes from seeking honor for ourselves. What does the Bible warn about self-exaltation in Proverbs 16:18?

5. The reason why hypocrisy is so serious is because it mocks God and hurts the cause of truth (cf. 2 Peter 2:2; Nehemiah 5:9). Ananias and Sapphira's lie not only mocked the holiness of God but also jeopardized the life of the Christian church in its infancy. God's action with this couple was protective of the greater body of faithful believers. What do the following verses reveal about God's character that were proven in His dealings with Ananias and Sapphira?

Psalm 101:7

Proverbs 2:8

Daniel 2:22

6. What must we realize about God that will motivate us to avoid hypocrisy in our lives?

Psalm 69:5

Proverbs 16:2

Galatians 6:7

7. What does God do when we are honest about our hypocrisy? Ps 32:5

8. How can we avoid hypocrisy in our lives? Proverbs 11:3

James 1:23-25

Galatians 5:16,25

9. What must be our continual prayer?

Psalm 19:12-14

Summary

10. Anyone can fall into hypocritical practices as a Christian. What truths about God's holy character motivate you to maintain an honest relationship with Him?

11. While none of us will achieve perfection as Christians, what can ensure your integrity as a believer?

12. What is your desire in the area of Christian integrity? Make this your prayer.

LESSON 5 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

2 *evil spirits, demons* (5:16). Demonic possession was common in Jesus' day, and exists today where Satanic powers are recognized and worshipped. Demons or evil spirits are intelligences who seek to gain control of human beings as media of expression. In New Testament times, these evil spirits caused instances of seizures (Matt 17:15), speechlessness (Mark 9:17), mental disorder (John 10:20), violent action (Luke 8:26-29), bodily disease (Lk 13:11,16) and rebellion against God (Revelation 16:14). In all these cases, the evil spirits recognized Jesus and expressed fear and hatred of Him. His authority over demons, and the authority *in His Name* given the apostles over evil spirits, was proof that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God as He claimed. See also Note 4, *Satan, demons*.

3 *Ananias and Sapphira fell dead*. Pretended generosity and love for money led to the first recorded sin in the life of the church. Ananias and Sapphira could have kept all the money for the land had they chosen. To make it appear that they had given all when they had not was to lie to the Spirit of God, the unseen Guide of the early church. The death penalty seems not to fit the crime, but such action could not go unchecked. When the deceit became known, it would have appeared that dishonesty was rewarded and the Spirit could be deceived. As it was, no one doubted that God would certainly expose and deal with hypocrisy and deceit. *NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1651-1652.

4 *Satan, demons*. The Bible refers to Satan as an angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God and consequently was cast out of heaven with his rebelling host of angels (II Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9). Under his leadership, these angelic beings became known as *demons*, and are very organized in their schemes and attacks on human beings (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his forces work to get people to worship Satan (Luke 4:7) and to prevent individuals from turning to God (Luke 4:8). Satan's defeat is promised in Genesis 3:15 and completed at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). He is still a force to be reckoned with until Christ returns to judge the earth (Matthew 16:27). James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil (or demonic forces) by continually willing God's leadership in their lives.

LESSON 6

PERSECUTION CONTINUES

Acts 5:17-42

As a result of the apostles' miracle-working power and the growth of the Christian movement, the high priest and Sadducees¹ were filled with jealousy. They had the twelve apostles arrested to face trial before the Sanhedrin.

Their plans were interrupted, however, when an angel of the Lord³ released the apostles from jail in the middle of the night. The angel instructed them to resume teaching in the temple, so the twelve men did so at daybreak. In the meantime, the Sanhedrin assembled, only to discover the need to locate their prisoners. Angry as they may have been, the court could not use force in this second arrest because of the apostles' popularity with the people. Finally, after gathering the church leaders again, the Sanhedrin trial began.

As the trial ensued, there was no mention of the unexplained escape from prison the night before. Instead the court went directly to the business of charging the apostles with (1) disobeying their earlier orders not to speak about Jesus, and for (2) blaming the Jewish leaders for Jesus' death. With incredible boldness, Peter and the apostles answered the charges. They first declared that God's authority in their lives came before the Sanhedrin's. With that said, they went on to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jewish leaders had crucified, to be the risen Christ and Savior of Israel.

The response was predictable: the Sanhedrin was enraged and ready to kill the apostles. However, Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee and teacher of the law, prevented the Sanhedrin from harming the apostles. After having the apostles sent from the room, Gamaliel advised that the court be cautious in their treatment of the church leaders. He reasoned that if the Christian movement *was not* of God, it would dwindle and die out as had

other fanatical movements. But if it *was* of God, they would be powerless to stop its growth.

Persuaded by the speech of Gamaliel, the court strictly ordered the apostles not to speak of Jesus again, had them flogged and released them. The apostles left rejoicing to have suffered for Christ. Without hesitation, they continued to teach about Jesus in private homes and in the temple.

Read Acts 5:17-26.

1. Why were the twelve apostles arrested (5:17-18)?

2. What divine intervention took place (5:19-20)?

3. Describe the apostles' response to the instructions of the angel (5:21)?

4. What did the Sanhedrin discover (5:22-26)?

Read Acts 5:27-42.

5. Of what did the high priest accuse the apostles (5:28)?

6. a. What truths did Peter and the apostles declare in answer to the Sanhedrin's charges (5:29-32)?

b. What was the Sanhedrin's response (5:33)?

7. a. Summarize Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin (5:34-39).

b. How did the Sanhedrin respond (5:40)?

8. What was the apostles' response to the persecution they had experienced (5:41-42)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Dealing With Jealousy

Jealousy is listed among the greatest evils in the Bible. It is closely associated with envy, anger, greed and the desire to monopolize or control. It was jealousy that caused the Jewish leaders to crucify Jesus, and it was jealousy that brought persecution to the early church leaders.

Jealousy is often the real motive behind cruel actions that claim to be dealing with another's wrongdoing. For example, the high priest's jealous actions toward the apostles were disguised as pious dealing with the "criminal" actions of the apostles.

The jealous person often become suspicious and imagines criticisms about the one of whom he is jealous. He then believes his imaginations and seeks to carry out punishment. The true problem is jealousy, which manifests itself in the desire to tear down the other person. While jealousy may not always surface so obviously, it may reveal itself quietly with a hidden delight over someone else's bad fortune.

When we are the recipient of jealousy, we often do not recognize this evil motive behind another's cruel actions. We may find that person distant and generally difficult to deal with, but we are not sure why. Their suspicion and hidden agendas seem to intend to hurt us, but the reasons behind such actions do not make sense. Knowing our own faults and weaknesses, we may never conceive of being the source of another person's jealousy. However, that person has their eye on a strength we possess, and wants to neutralize that strength. Because it is carefully disguised, jealousy is very difficult to confront and deal with honestly.

Devious, deceitful and very destructive, jealousy is indeed a monstrous emotion. For this reason, the Bible clearly warns us not to permit jealousy in our lives. It also gives some principles that can help us deal with jealousy when it comes our way from another. Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about dealing with jealousy.

1. a. Even though the apostles had been supernaturally delivered from prison, the officials of the Sanhedrin refused to address this reality. Because of jealousy, what did the religious leaders miss?

b. What does this reveal about jealousy?

2. a. Why were the religious leaders jealous of Peter and the apostles (cf. Acts 5:12-16)?

b. What did their jealousy reveal about their character? What would a healthy response to the apostles have required?

3. a. What are some of the ways jealousy toward another can affect our lives?

b. How can we be hurt by the jealousy of another person?

4. a. What do the following verses reveal about jealousy?
Proverbs 27:4

James 3:14-16

b. What "company" does jealousy keep in the following? Romans 13:13

c. Wherein lies the power to overcome jealousy according to Romans 13:14?

5. a. Jealousy is born out of pride, selfishness and greed. What answers for the problem of selfishness are found in the following?
Romans 12:10

Romans 12:16

b. Wherein lies the power to make these choices? Romans 8:5-6

Reference: Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

6. a. What prayers did the Psalmist pray that would allow God to help us identify and overcome hidden jealousy in our lives? Psalm 119:29a, 36

b. What are the result of such choices? Psalm 119:45

7. Why is jealousy directed toward us often difficult to detect?

8. When we know someone is jealous, what is the healthy response?
Romans 12:14

Romans 12:17-18

Romans 12:19

9. What constructive responses did the apostles practice in the face of jealousy? Romans 12:11, 21

Summary

10. What negative effects can jealousy have on your life?

11. a. Can you identify any jealousy in your life at this time?

b. What choices can you make to overcome jealousy?

12. What are healthy responses to the one who is jealous of you?

Note: The healthy attitudes referred to in this lesson are not natural. According to the Bible, only Christ, living His life through us in the power of the Holy Spirit, can enable us to practice these principles. For further help, see note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13; also *Building on the Basics*, Lesson 2, "Power to Live By."

LESSON 6 NOTES

1 Reference: Note 1, Sadducees, p. 32.

2 Reference: Note 2, *Sanhedrin*, p. 33.

3 Angel of the Lord (Acts 5:19; 7:30,38; 8:26; 12:7-10,23). "Angels are spiritual beings, created by God early in creation. Though we know only three by name--Michael, Gabriel and Satan--the Bible refers to numerous ranks and divisions. Satan is the leader of the company of evil angels while good angels are under the authority of God. Angels, like human beings, have been created to serve their Creator.

They have many duties: (a) to praise and worship God; (b) to bring messages from God to mankind; (c) to protect God's people; (d) to carry out God's will; and (e) to punish God's enemies, including Satan." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 1367.

4 Gamaliel. The most famous Jewish professor of the time, Gamaliel was respected and very popular with the Jewish people. Saul (Paul) was one of his students (Acts 22:3).

LESSON 7

STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

Acts 6:1-8:3

At the time of the early church, Jerusalem was made up of two types of Jews. The Grecian, or Hellenistic, Jews spoke Greek and were originally from countries outside of Palestine. The Hebraic, or Palestinian, Jews spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, were native Palestinians and observed all the customs of Judaism.

We do not know how much time had gone by since the close of Acts chapter 5,¹ but the church had grown vastly. At this time, all the believers in Christ were Jewish, either Hebraic or Hellenistic. The Hellenistic Jews complained that their widows² were being neglected in the daily distribution of relief money. Overloaded with responsibility, the twelve apostles allowed the multitude of believers to elect seven godly men to assume administrative responsibilities. The Seven, as they were called (Acts 21:8), were named by the people and commissioned into service by the apostles. They all had Greek names and were probably Hellenistic believers.

One of the Seven, Stephen, became a powerful teacher, particularly among the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. With signs and miracles, God confirmed Stephen's words about the Christian faith. However, when a certain group of non-believing Hellenistics called Freedmen³ failed in their attempts to oppose Stephen, they caused an uprising of the people. Falsely accused, Stephen was seized and brought to trial before the Sanhedrin.⁴ Stephen was charged with speaking against the temple, changing the law of Moses and blaspheming against God. With "the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15), Stephen answered the court with the longest sermon recorded in the book of Acts. As he carefully traced the history of the Jewish faith from Abraham to Jesus, Stephen showed how the Jewish people had always rebelled against God and the leaders God had given them. Stephen's main point is found in verse 51, "You are just like your

fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" Stephen then charged the Sanhedrin with the rejection and slaying of Jesus Christ.

The furious court gnashed their teeth and covered their ears to avoid hearing any more of what they considered blasphemy. Rushing on him, the angry group dragged Stephen from the city to stone him. In the midst of the chaos, Stephen remained serene as he gazed heavenward at a vision of the risen Lord standing at the right hand of God. After praying that the Lord would receive his spirit and forgive the sins of his executors, Stephen died.

On the sidelines during the commotion was a young man named Saul, who held the witnesses' clothing and gave approval to the stoning of Stephen. Although vehemently opposed to Christianity at this point, Saul would soon take up where Stephen left off in proclaiming the gospel to Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles.

Read Acts 6:1-7.

1. a. Why did the apostles delegate the administrative responsibilities of the church (6:2,4)?

b. What were the qualifications of the leaders the congregation was to choose (6:3)?

c. What did the new organization in church leadership promote (6:7)?

Read Acts 6:8-15.

2. How was Stephen described (6:5,8)?

3. a. What motivated Stephen's opposition to conspire against him (6:9-10)

References: Notes 3, *Freedmen*, p. 69, and Note 8, *Synagogue*, p. 70.

b. What characterized the assault against Stephen (6:9-14)?

Reference: Note 5, *the false accusations against Stephen*, p. 69.

4. a. How was Stephen described as he faced the Sanhedrin (6:15)?

b. Why do you think the Sanhedrin was unimpressed by Stephen's holy countenance? Compare John 3:19-21.

Read Acts 7:1-53.

5. Stephen's speech was a clear summary of Jewish history.⁶ From the time of Abraham to that of Christ, Stephen highlighted unfaithful Jewish

leaders persecuting faithful ones. What actions of the Jewish people did Stephen highlight with regard to Joseph (7:9)?

Moses (7:35-36,39-41)?

Reference: Note 6, *Stephen's speech*, p. 69.

6. Of what perspective on the temple did Stephen remind the court (7:48-50)?

7. How did Stephen compare his accusers to unfaithful Jewish people of the past (7:51-53)?

Reference: Note 9, *Circumcision*, p. 70.

Note: *Angels* (7:53). The Jews of the time believed God had spoken to Moses through angels, although this is not how. Exodus 3:2 records that the Lord appeared to Moses.

Read Acts 7:54-8:1a.

8. What final proclamation by Stephen brought about his public execution for blasphemy (7:55-56)?

Note: *Son of Man* was a term Jesus used to refer to Himself. Daniel used this term to prophesy about the Messiah (Daniel 7:13-14).

9. How did Stephen die (7:57-60)?

10. Whom did Luke point out at the stoning of Stephen (7:58b, 8:1a)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Victory When You Cannot Win

There are times when it seems one cannot win, and it was such a time for Stephen. Humiliated by his wisdom, Stephen's opposition was intent on his destruction, and the Sanhedrin was looking for a way to scatter the Christian movement and banish it from Jerusalem.

It is a common experience to face a no-win situation. It could have to do with a difficult job situation or lack of a job; financial disaster; marital, family or dating relationship problems that seem unresolvable; or health problems that are beyond our control. The common denominator in the nowin situation is that there is no way to avoid pain and loss; there is no acceptable solution, perhaps not even a preferable choice.

But the Bible gives us principles that can help win even in a no-win situation. In fact, for the believer, no situation is truly "no-win." Let's look at the principles and promises from the Word of God that assure ultimate victory, even in no-win situations.

1. How would you describe a "no-win" situation? Can you think of an example?

2. a. What would it have taken for Stephen to win the approval of the Sanhedrin and his accusers?

b. What might have happened if Stephen had made this choice?

c. What did Stephen choose instead?

3. a. What does God instruct us to do in the midst of a no-win situation?
I Peter 5:6-7

Deuteronomy 31:6

b. If we continually walk with God through a no-win situation, what does He promise?

Psalm 32:8, 10

Romans 8:28

Philippians 4:19

I Peter 5:10

4. If we are filled with the Spirit as Stephen was, what will be our Christian conduct, no matter what the situation?

I Corinthians 13:3,5

I Peter 3:9-11

I Corinthians 15:58

5. How can we grow from no-win situations? Romans 5:3-5

6. a. All of us will eventually face death. Why was death not a threat to Stephen?

I John 5:11-12

John 11:25-26

b. According to these verses, how can we know power over death?

7. a. No matter what our circumstances, what does the Psalmist say cannot be taken from us as we walk through life with the Lord?

Psalm 73:24-26

b. What does God promise, regardless of the situation? Jeremiah 29:11

Summary

8. In your opinion, what made Stephen victorious in the no-win situation he faced?

9. Are you facing any no-win situations right now? What biblical principles and promises help you know victory?

LESSON 7 NOTES

1 *Time lapses in Acts.* "It is easy to assume that the first 12 chapters of Acts cover a span of only a few weeks, because the writer does not tell us when the various incidents took place. The episodes seem to follow each other naturally. But, in fact, from Acts 2 to the end of Acts 12, at least 15 years elapse." This time element is figured by Jesus' birth in 5 B.C. plus

his lifetime of 33 years = death, resurrection and the beginning of the church in 29 A.D. The death of Agrippa I (King Herod) recorded in Acts 12:20-23 historically occurred in 44 A.D. There is an obvious lapse of 15 years between the beginning of Acts (29 A.D.) and the death of Agrippa (Herod) recorded in Acts 12 (44 A.D.).

The absence of Roman intervention in the illegal execution of Stephen might indicate that it occurred during the time Pilate was recalled by Tiberias Caesar in 36 A.D. This would place the events of Acts 6 and 7 about 6 to 7 years after Pentecost. Eddy Swieson, Bible Study Aid, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 68-69.

2 Widows (6:1) were vulnerable because wage work was scarce and there were few legal rights for women at the time. Many of the Hellenistic widows who had moved to Jerusalem from other parts of the world did not have family to rely on and had to depend on the church's care rather than the synagogue when they became Christians.

3 Freedmen. These were persons Rome had freed from slavery. They came from *Cyrene* in north Africa, *Alexandria* in Egypt, *Cilicia* in southeast Asia Minor near Syria, and *Asia*, a Roman province in western Asia Minor.

4 Reference: Note 2, *Sanhedrin*, p. 33.

5 The false accusations against Stephen greatly resembled those against Christ (Matthew 26:61). Stephen declared worship of God was not confined to the temple (Acts 7:48-49) which gave his opposition opportunity to accuse him of attacking the temple, attacking the law of Moses and ultimately blaspheming God. In his teachings, Stephen may have referred to Jesus' words in John 2:19 which his opposition misinterpreted (Acts 6:14) to support their charges against Stephen, as at the trial of Jesus.

6 Stephen's speech on Jewish history. Stephen's speech may be difficult for those who aren't fully versed in Israel's history and Jewish attitudes

toward the Law and the Temple. In short, Stephen's speech highlighted a pattern of men rejecting the Deliverer whom God had chosen. He observed that the Jews were treating the manmade Temple like man-made idols (7:41,48). Against the Jews' pride in Jerusalem, he stressed God's activity in Ur, Egypt, and the "holy ground" of Sinai. Against their pride in the Law, Stephen discussed the promises to Abraham that predated that Law by over five hundred years. He was accusing them of idolizing the temple, being proud of God's Word but disobeying it and boxing God into their traditions. It would have taken a great deal of humility and repentance for them to have responded to Stephen positively. Navpress Life Change Series, *Acts*, p. 84.

7 *Laying on of hands* "was used in the Old Testament period to confer blessing (Genesis 48:13-20), to transfer guilt from sinner to sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4) and to commission a person for a new responsibility (Numbers 27:23). In the New Testament period, laying on of hands was observed in healing (Acts 28:8), blessing (Mark 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Acts 6:6; 13:3) and imparting of spiritual gifts (Acts 8:17; 19:6)." NIV Study Bible, p. 1654.

8 *Synagogue*. Ten or more adult Jewish men could form their own synagogue for study of the Scriptures and worship. People preferred to join with others of like background in relatively small groups; mass meetings were for the temple. There were about 400 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the early church, probably a handful of which were Freedmen.

9 *Circumcision* was the cutting off of the foreskin, a practice which originated in various western Semitic cultures as a religious act. The Hebrew rite was instituted by God as a sign of the covenant between Him and Abraham. God commanded Abraham and all his household to be circumcised. The rite was required of every male Jew (descendant of Abraham) and any foreigner joining themselves to the Hebrew nation. This act assured the recipient of admittance to the fellowship of the covenant people and of a share in the promises of God to Israel.

Circumcision metaphorically symbolized cutting away "pride and sinfulness of the heart" (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4, Acts 7:51). Marshall, p. 147. Because circumcision predated the Law or the Temple, the heart attitude behind this act was first and foremost true faith in God.

LESSON 8

THE JOURNEYS OF PHILIP

Acts 8

Immediately after Stephen's death, great persecution of the church began. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem where the church went underground. Most of the other believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, sharing their faith as they went. Consequently, the church experienced growth in numbers and expansion in territory.

Philip, one of the Seven in the Jerusalem church, journeyed to Samaria where he became a powerful preacher of the gospel.¹ He was enabled by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles of healing and deliverance² in the name of Jesus Christ, and many Samaritans believed and followed Philip. Previously, a man named Simon had dazzled the Samaritans with his sorcery and led many to believe he was a chief representative of God. When his followers became believers in Christ through Philip's ministry, Simon also claimed to accept Christ and began to follow Philip. He was amazed and intrigued by the miracles Philip was able to perform through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Upon hearing of the awakening in Samaria, Peter and John came from Jerusalem. When the apostles laid hands³ on the new Samaritan⁴ believers, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit⁵ which the Jews had received at Pentecost. When Simon saw this, he tried to bribe the apostles to give him the power to impart the Holy Spirit. Simon's request clearly revealed the selfish motives of his heart, and Peter strongly rebuked him, exhorting Simon to repent and ask God's forgiveness.

After Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, an angel of the Lord⁶ led Philip south about 50 miles on the road to Gaza. There the Spirit led him to the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch, an official of the Queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch was either a Jewish proselyte or a God-fearing Gentile⁸ who had been to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. As Philip joined him, he was reading in the book of Isaiah (53:7,8), and welcomed

Philip's help in understanding the prophecy. Philip explained that the prophet spoke of Jesus of Nazareth, a Person whom the Ethiopian no doubt had heard much about in Jerusalem. The Ethiopian eagerly accepted Jesus Christ, asked to be baptized, then went on his way rejoicing. Immediately, the Spirit led Philip away to preach the good news in Azotus and various towns all the way to Caesarea. It was there the evangelist eventually made his home (cf. Acts 21:8).⁹

Read Acts 8:1-8.

1. What happened to the church when persecution erupted (8:1b,4)?

2. What drew the people of Samaria to Philip (8:5-8)?

Reference: Note 2, *evil spirits*, p. 50.

Read Acts 8:9-25.

3. Through his sorcery, how had Simon presented himself to the people (8:9-11)?

Note: In early Christian literature the 'sorcerer' (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church. *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1658.

4. a. What did Simon offer to buy from the apostles (8:18-19)?

b. How did Peter describe Simon (8:20-23)?

Read Acts 8:26-40.

5. After Peter and John left for Jerusalem, whom did Philip instantly obey (8:26, 29)?

Reference: Note 3, *angel of the Lord*, p. 59.

6. a. What means did God use to introduce the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus Christ (Acts 8:26-35)?

b. What resulted from the eunuch's encounter with Christ (8:36-39)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Benefiting from Hardship

Hardship can come in many forms. However, hardship in any form always involves change and loss which tend to depress the human spirit. For this reason, hardship often creates fear of the future and the additional pain it may hold. After a tragedy, it is especially hard to risk involvement with situations or relationships that could produce similar grief. The tra-

gedy of Stephen's death gave the early believers reason to fear the future, especially with regard to being associated with and living for Christ.

The seriousness of the situation was intensified by the fact that they had to move their families in order to survive the persecution. Yet the early Christians remained positive and courageous, sharing their faith wherever they went. The hardship they encountered with its changes and losses did not defeat them. Wherein lies the power to "get up on the horse and ride again" when we have suffered the severe fall? Let's take a look at the biblical principles and perspectives that give power to resist the undertow of hardship and move forward in its benefits.

1. a. What hardships did the early Christians experience?

b. What are examples of hardships we encounter over the courses of our lives?

c. What is often our initial reaction when we face hardship? What negative affects can hardship have on our attitudes:
toward God?

toward others?

toward ourselves?

2. a. How would you describe the response of the early Christians to the hardship they faced?

b. What was the result of their response to hardship?

3. What did Jesus promise to those who would experience persecution for their faith in Him?

Matthew 5:11-12

Matthew 19:29

4. While God did not cause the persecution of the early church, we can be sure He used it in the lives of the early Christians. How does God use hardship to build our spiritual lives based on the following?

Hebrews 12:11

Psalm 119:67

I Peter 1:6-7

James 1:2-4

5. What can we know about God when we suffer hardship?

Psalm 34:18

Romans 8:38-39

6. What are we encouraged to do in order to reap benefits from hardship?

Joshua 1:9

Psalm 62:8

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Luke 6:47-48

7. What is important that we do with others who are experiencing hardship? I Thessalonians 5:11,14

8. In spite of the trauma they experienced, what did God do for Stephen and the early believers? II Corinthians 2:14

Summary

9. What truths does the Bible encourage you to embrace in times of hardship?

10. Are you facing hardship right now in your life? What can you expect as you move through hardship with God? How can you benefit from hardship?

11. Where is God when you are hurting?

LESSON 8 NOTES

1 *gospel* is an Old English word that means "good news." It translates the Greek word euangelion (eu-, "good" and angelion, "message"). The first four books of the New Testament--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--are called Gospels. These books are documentaries of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ written by contemporaries. Gospel is also used to simply refer to the "good news" about Jesus Christ; that through Him, one can know God personally and inherit eternal life (John 3:16; 14:6).

2 *Deliverance*. See note 2, *evil spirits, demons*, p. 50.

3 Reference: Note 7, *laying on of hands*, p. 70.

4 *Samaritans...received the gift of the Holy Spirit*. The reason the Samaritans did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when they accepted Christ as did the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2) was to unify them with the Jewish believers. Samaritans were half Jew, half Gentile and had their own rival worship system. Orthodox Jews considered Samaritans "unclean" and did not associate with them. When the laying on of hands by the apostles (Jewish believers) brought the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Samaritans became united with Jewish believers. In this way the Spirit broke down the barriers between Samaritan Christians and Jewish believers, unifying the infant church as it grew to include Samaria. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

5 References: Notes 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

6 Reference: Note 3, *angel of the Lord*, p. 59.

7 *Ethiopia* at this time was all of Africa south of Egypt.

8 Reference: Note 1, *God-fearing*, and Note 2, *Gentile*, p. 97.

9 *Jesus had told the disciples* their witness would be to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Because of the persecution in Jerusalem, the gospel spread to Judea and Samaria. With Philip's faithful witness, the gospel began to reach the ends of the earth.

LESSON 9

SAUL'S CONVERSION

Acts 9:1-31

While the church grew and spread throughout Judea and Samaria, a zealous young Pharisee named Saul continued to pose a deadly threat to the believers. He went to great lengths to capture, imprison and even put to death (cf. Acts 22:4; 26:10) the followers of Christ. But, in an incredible encounter with the risen Lord, Saul was converted to the faith he had bitterly opposed. As he neared Damascus with plans to capture Christians there for trial in Jerusalem, he was halted and blinded by heavenly light and the voice of God. Falling on his face, Saul asked who spoke. The answer: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

From this moment on, the zeal of this young Pharisee would be channeled into obedience and service to Jesus Christ. The Lord led a disciple named Ananias to minister to Saul as a new believer, restoring his sight and baptizing him. After several days with the believers in Damascus, Saul, also known as Paul (Acts 13:9),¹ began to preach Christ in the synagogues where people were astonished at his conversion.

At this point, as he later states in Galatians 1:17-18, Paul spent three years in Arabia, perhaps reorienting his faith to match his Damascus Road experience. When he returned to preach in Damascus again, he was more powerful than ever, and the Jews plotted to kill him. To save his life, some of the disciples let him down over the city wall in a basket during the night. From there, Saul went to Jerusalem.

Initially, the believers in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul, but a man named Barnabas testified on his behalf and helped Saul to be accepted. For fifteen days (cf. Galatians 1:18), Saul witnessed primarily to the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem (whom he had previously helped to plot Stephen's death). Because of his effectiveness, Saul's life became the target of yet another deadly conspiracy. Fellow believers helped him escape to Caesarea, from which he sailed for his hometown of Tarsus. It

is believed Paul spent about ten years there before Barnabas invited him to help with the ministry at Antioch.

Read Acts 9:1-19a.

1. What showed the intensity of Saul's hostility toward the Christians (9:1-2; see also 8:3)?

2. How did Jesus change Saul's direction (9:3-9)?

3. a. What did the Lord instruct Ananias to do (9:10-12)?

b. Why did Ananias question the Lord's instructions (9:13-14)?

c. In reply, what did Jesus declare about Saul (9:15-16)?

4. How did Ananias minister to Saul in his Christian infancy (9:17-19)?

Read Acts 9:19b-31.

5. a. What did Paul do immediately after his conversion (9:20)?

b. What resulted (9:21-25)?

Note: *after many days* (9:23) referred to three years Saul spent in Arabia (Galatians 1:17-18), probably reorienting his theology to Christianity.

6. a. How was Saul received by the believers in Jerusalem (9:26-27)?

b. Again, what did Saul do (9:28-29a)?

Reference: *Grecian or Hellenistic Jews*, Lesson 7, paragraph 1, p. 60.

c. What resulted from Saul's witness for Christ (9:29b-30)?

7. What was the state of the church at this time (9:31)?

Note: *fear of the Lord* (9:31) means "reverent trust" in the Lord.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Facing Big Mistakes

Sometimes it is hard to face ourselves and God with the big mistakes of the past. We tend to avoid even thinking about times when our actions were shameful, and we fear God is more upset about them than we are. Consequently, we "stuff" our guilt and shame, continually trying to hide the failures from ourselves and God.

As Saul sat for three days in blinded silence, he was faced with the fact that he had brought about the death of innocent believers in Jesus Christ, the living Lord. His Damascus Road experience dramatically revealed the fact that he had been fighting against God and His faithful servants. Surely, he could still see the faces of Stephen and other Christians martyrs who died for their faith.

But the Lord had chosen the apostle Paul¹ to impact the world for Christ unlike anyone else who has ever lived. He led the evangelistic ministry to the Gentile peoples. His letters to various churches, which make up much of the New Testament, have disciplined believers around the world over the last two-thousand years...all because Paul moved beyond the shame to know forgiveness and freedom from his sin.

While we do not want to remember big mistakes, God wants to face them with us and move us beyond the shame and guilt we prefer to bury. Rather than living in guilt and feeling we could never be used of God, the Lord wants to use our negative experience to make us stronger servants of Him and others.

In this lesson, we will take a look at the power that can emerge from practicing biblical principles in dealing with big, as well as small, mistakes.

1. What big mistakes did Saul have to face during his days of blindness (cf. Acts 8:1a,3; 9:5; 22:4; 26:10)?

2. While his sin must have grieved him deeply, what did Paul know about God from Old Testament Scriptures?

Isaiah 43:25

Daniel 9:9

Isaiah 1:18

3. a. What did Paul know about sin and God's forgiveness of sin from the Old Testament Scriptures?

Isaiah 59:2

Leviticus 17:11

Note: *atonement* refers to payment for sin.
Hebrews 9:22b

b. What did Isaiah 53:3-6 prophesy about the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

4. a. What did Paul declare as he began preaching Christ?
Romans 5:8

Ephesians 1:7

Note: *redemption* refers to being bought out of slavery to sin.

b. What is the one thing Paul explained we must do in order to be declared righteous before God? Romans 1:17, 3:22-24

5. The Bible says that it is always the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ that procures our forgiveness from sin. In order to experience this forgiveness, what must we continually do?

II Chronicles 7:14

I John 1:7, 9

Matthew 6:14

6. Sometimes we find it hard to forgive ourselves. After receiving God's forgiveness in Christ, what did Paul determine to do with his life?

Philippians 3:12-14

II Corinthians 5:20-21

Summary

7. a. Are there any situations you have never taken before God to receive His forgiveness?

b. Perhaps you would want to take a moment to do that now.

8. To begin to experience God's forgiveness, you may want to get alone, take a sheet of paper and write out past sins that come to mind. After completing the list, thank God for His forgiveness through the blood sacrifice of His Son. Write I John 1:7, 9 and Isaiah 1:18 over the list and destroy it.

LESSON 9 NOTES

1 *Paul* or *Saul*. The apostle Paul's Hebrew name was Saul. He referred to himself as Paul in his ministry to the Gentile world (Acts 13:9). As a Jewish Roman citizen who grew up in Tarsus, Paul most likely bore both the names Paul and Saul from youth.

Note: Because of the reading involved in this lesson, it may take a little longer to complete.

LESSON 10

PETER GOES TO GENTILES

Acts 9:32-11:18

After the believers scattered, Peter traveled about Palestine visiting the various churches. In Lydda, God enabled Peter to heal a man paralyzed for eight years. In Joppa, his prayers brought a much-loved believer named Dorcas back to life. As the word spread about these miracles, many placed their faith in Jesus, and Peter stayed in Joppa for an extended time. Luke's narrative moves thirty miles north to the Caesarean home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Commander of a hundred men in the Italian band of the Roman army, Cornelius was a generous and God-fearing Gentile. During prayer one afternoon, Cornelius had a vision of an angel of God who instructed him to send for a man named Simon Peter in Joppa. As Cornelius' men began the journey to fetch Peter, the Lord began to prepare Peter to accept his mission to the Gentile home of Cornelius. He gave Peter a vision of a sheet descending from heaven, full of animals considered unclean to the Jew (Leviticus 11). Along with this vision, the voice of the Lord instructed Peter not to call unclean that which God had cleansed. The sheet descended and Peter heard the Lord's command three times; then the vision ended. As Peter pondered the meaning of the vision, the Holy Spirit instructed him to go with Cornelius' men who were now at the door.

The next day, Peter arrived in Caecarea to find Cornelius waiting with relatives and friends. As the godly centurion told Peter about the angel's appearance to him, Peter understood the meaning of his own vision: faith in Christ would cleanse Jew and Gentile alike from sin. Peter began to tell his audience about Jesus Christ when the Holy Spirit filled those who were accepting the message. As they began to speak in tongues and praise God, no doubt was left in the Jewish believers present that these Gentiles

had received salvation⁴ through faith in Jesus. With this, the new believers were baptized.

When the word spread that Peter had shared Christ with uncircumcised⁶ Gentiles, he was highly criticized. The church until this time was made up only of believing Jews who still considered Gentiles unclean. But when Peter told the whole story to the other apostles and Christians in Jerusalem, they had no further questions. Praising God, they rejoiced that He would grant salvation through faith in Jesus to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

Read Acts 9:32-42.

1. What miracles did God bring about through Peter in Lydda and Joppa and what resulted (9:32-34, 36-37, 40-42)?

Read Acts 10:1-7.

2. a. Describe Cornelius (10:1-2). **Reference:** Note 1, *God-fearing*, p. 97.

b. What was Cornelius' response to the angel's instructions (10:3-8)?

Read Acts 10:9-23.

3. a. The Lord knew His command to eat animals declared unclean by Jewish law (Leviticus 11) would be repulsive to Peter. Interaction with

Gentiles would be just as wrong to the apostle. What did the Lord declare (10:15)?

Reference: Note 2, *Gentiles*, p. 97.

b. How would God cleanse the Gentiles from sin as He had the Jews (I John 1:7); see also note 5, *Salvation*, p. 42.

4. a. How did the Holy Spirit further prepare Peter to minister to Gentiles (10:19-20)?

b. What was the first step Peter took toward accepting Gentiles (10:23)?

Read Acts 10:24-48.

5. Because Peter was God's messenger, Cornelius fell in reverence at the apostles feet. How did Peter quickly respond (10:26)?

6. Soon Peter found himself in the midst of many Gentiles. What was his declaration (10:28)?

7. After repeating the story of his encounter with the angel, what did Cornelius explain they were gathered to hear (10:33)?

8. What great truth about God's character did Peter first proclaim (10:34- 35)?

9. What main points stand out to you from Peter's clear presentation of the gospel (10:36-43)?

10. a. Before Peter finished speaking, what happened (10:44,46)?

b. How did Peter respond (10:47-48)?

Read Acts 11:1-18.

11. After Peter gave the complete account of what had taken place with Cornelius, how did the Jewish believers in Jerusalem respond (11:18)?

Reference: Note 7, *brothers*, p. 98.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Power of a Teachable Spirit

Sometimes we are blinded to new truth because we are cemented into old ways of thinking. Because we are finite and God is infinite, we can only hope to understand part of His infinite mind as He unfolds truth to us over time. We need to be humble and teachable at all times in order to continue to grow in our understanding about ourselves and God. Peter was open to God's new revelation, even though it went against a lifetime of learning. As a result, this leader of the early church opened the doors of evangelism to the Gentile world.

The Christian life is not meant to be stagnant, rather a dynamic, abundant learning experience. If we are open to God's truth, there is no end to the Christian growth process. In this lesson, we will look at the powerful results of developing and maintaining a teachable spirit before God.

1. a. Why might we tend to stop learning? What does learning require?

- b. While God's plan to reach the Gentiles would not have been thwarted, what would Peter or Cornelius have missed had they been unteachable?

2. a. Not all new ideas are true. It is important that new spiritual understanding be in line with the Word of God. What do the following verses say about this?

Psalm 119:160

Proverbs 30:5-6

b. According to Acts 17:11, what did people do when they received the new truth about Jesus Christ?

c. How did the new truth Peter received about going to the Gentiles line up with Scripture?

Isaiah 42:6-7 (prophecy about Christ)

Genesis 12:3b

Reference: Note 3, *Abrahamic covenant*, p. 33.

3. What does the Bible encourage us to do continually in order to grow in truth?

James 1:21-22

Proverbs 1:5

4. What are the results of a teachable heart before God?

Proverbs 2:1-7

Ephesians 1:17-19a (Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers)

5. What can happen if we cease to maintain a teachable heart before God?

Proverbs 15:12

6. Without a teachable spirit toward God, what happens to a society?

Romans 1:21

7. a. According to this parable of Jesus, what works against a teachable heart? Luke 8:11-14

b. How is the teachable heart described by Jesus in Luke 8:15?

c. What gives us this heart according to Ezekiel 36:26-27?
Romans 8:5-6?

Summary

8. What part does the Word of God play in helping us discern truth in the spiritual realm?

9. What are the dangers of feeling you have learned everything spiritually?

10. a. Have you ever experienced spiritual blindness because you lacked a teachable heart before God? What are the benefits of maintaining a humble teachable heart toward God?

b. What is your prayer today?

LESSON 10 NOTES

1 *God-fearing* (10:2). "The term used of one who was not a full Jewish proselyte but who believed in one God and respected the moral and ethical teachings of the Jews." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1662.

2 *Gentile* or non-Jew. Gentile nations were people that were not descendants of Abraham. God had set apart the nation of Israel to carry the knowledge of Him to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). Although this nation was to be a means by which Gentiles could become believers in the one true God through circumcision, Jews were strictly ordered not to intermarry with non-Jewish people. By the time of Christ, many Jewish leaders looked at Gentiles as unclean, thus the thought of God's blessing on them was despicable. Peter's reaction to the non-kosher foods (Acts 10:9-16) depicted the Jews current feeling toward the Gentiles. Peter's statement in Acts 10:28 declared the law of the day regarding Jews and Gentiles.

3 Reference: Note 3, *Angel of the Lord*, p. 59.

4 Reference: Note 5, *Salvation*, p. 42, Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 13.

5 Reference: Note 8, *baptism*, pp. 25.

6 *Uncircumcised* (11:3). "The Gentiles who would not observe the laws of clean and unclean food and would violate Jewish regulations concerning food preparation." NIV Study Bible, p. 1666. See also Note 9, *circumcision*, p. 70.

7 *brothers* (11:1). "At times 'brothers' is used to refer to those of common Jewish lineage (2:29; 7:2), but in Christian contexts it denotes those united in Christ (6:3; 10:23b)." NIV Study Bible, p. 1666.

LESSON 11

HERODIAN PERSECUTION

Acts 11:19-12:25

The persecution that broke out after the martyrdom of Stephen scattered believers as far as Phoenicia (where Tyre and Sidon are located), Antioch and Cyprus. Wherever they went, they told others about Christ, and the church grew rapidly. In Antioch, some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene began to share the gospel message with Greek Gentiles, and a great number accepted Christ.

When news of the conversion of many Gentiles in Antioch reached the church leaders in Jerusalem, they sent one of their best men, Barnabas, to investigate the new church. Finding a great movement of God there, Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to help in the ministry. Together, Barnabas and Paul taught the large congregation for a year as it continually grew in numbers.

With the prophecy¹ that there would be famine in the Roman Empire, the believers at Antioch collected money for the believers in Jerusalem and sent their gift by way of Barnabas and Paul.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, King Herod² had begun to oppress the Christians. He arrested some and beheaded the apostle John's brother, James. When he saw the delight of the Jews at his actions, Herod also arrested and imprisoned Peter to be tried publicly after the Passover.

However, during the night before Peter's trial, an angel of the Lord arrived to release Peter. Somehow the four guards on duty were made oblivious to what was happening as Peter's chains fell off and the angel guided him through the prison gates to the street. Peter thought he was seeing a vision until the angel left him in the street, at which time the apostle realized that the Lord had brought about his escape. Peter went straight to Mary's home where many believers had gathered to pray. They were, of course, astonished to see Peter and hear his story. He stayed a

short time, then left for a secure place of hiding. The next day, Herod searched unsuccessfully for Peter and had the guards who had been in charge put to death.

The king had decided to settle for awhile in Jerusalem when the people of Phoenicia sought public audience with him. They needed his support and flattered him by acclaiming his divinity. He accepted the compliment, so an angel of the Lord struck him to the ground where he was eaten by worms. In the meantime, the church continued to grow in numbers as the believers shared their faith in Christ everywhere they went.

Read Acts 11:19-30.

1. Locate Antioch, Cyprus and Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) on the map at the front of the book. How did the people in these cities come to know Jesus Christ (11:19)?

2. How did great numbers of Greek Gentiles in Antioch become Christians (11:20-21)?

3. a. The church leaders in Jerusalem were prepared for the movement among Gentiles because of Peter's experience with Cornelius (11:18). How did they help the new church at Antioch (11:22-24)?

b. How did Barnabas further accommodate the needs of the huge church in Antioch (11:25-26)?

Reference: Note 7, *Christians*, p. 107.

c. Why did the believers at Antioch send help to those in Jerusalem (11:27- 30)?

Reference: Note 1, *Prophecy*, p. 106.

Read Acts 12:1-19a.

4. a. Who began to persecute the Christians, and what did he do (12:1-4)?

Reference: Note 2, *King Herod*, p. 106.

b. How did Peter escape (12:5-11)?

5. The believers at Mary's home were gathered to pray. What happened in answer to their prayers for Peter (12:12-17)?

Reference: Note 4, *Mary's home*, p. 106.

Read Acts 12:19b-25.

6. How did Herod die (12:21-23)?

Reference: Note 5, *eaten by worms*, p. 106.

7. How were the believers encouraged in their faith (12:24)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

When the Doors Shut

As chief leader of the early Christians, Peter found himself locked in prison, chained between two guards and awaiting public trial before Jews who yearned for his death. There was nothing humanly possible that could be done to save Peter. Even so, God was not ready for Peter's death and supernaturally intervened. All at once, Peter was free, Jesus Christ was again glorified by the miracle, and the believers were encouraged to keep praying about their needs!

We all face times in our lives when we see doors of freedom or opportunity shut before us. Even though we cannot see beyond the closed door, the Bible promises that God will *always* lead the way forward for those who trust Him. As we contemplate the miraculous deliverance of Peter, let's observe some biblical principles related to trusting God when the doors shut.

1. Try to imagine being in Peter's place in prison. Why do you think he was sleeping peacefully before his trial the next day?

2. Peter's deliverance was a picture of how God frees each one who puts faith in His Son. How does Isaiah 42:6-7, a prophecy about Christ, depict what Jesus does when we accept Him?

3. What can the Lord do when doors seem to be shut to our need? What do these verses suggest?

Isaiah 42:16

Isaiah 45:2-3

4. What are we encouraged to do in order to receive God's provision and guidance?

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 43:18-19

5. Of what can we be assured in the face of the shut doors in our lives?

Jeremiah 29:11

Psalm 84:11

Note: *blameless* does not mean perfect, rather forgiven in Christ.

Romans 8:28

6. What prevents people from finding God's better way when faced with shut doors?

Acts 28:27

Ephesians 4:18

7. What constructive choices does the Bible instruct us to make when we face disappointments?

Philippians 2:14

Proverbs 3:5-6

Psalm 27:14

Summary

8. What, if any, doors seem to be shut before you at this time in your life?

9. What do you see in Peter's experience that encourages you in your own?

10. What is the constructive way to face the shut doors?

11. What can you know about God amidst your situation?

LESSON 11 NOTES

1 *Prophecy* is given by God through prophets in both Old and New Testaments who "preach, exhort, explain or, as in this case, foretell." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1667. The prophecy given by Agabus (Acts 11:28) was actually fulfilled during the reign of Claudius (41-54 A.D.) when shortages abounded continually.

2 *King Herod* (Acts 12) or *Agrippa I* was the nephew of Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3-12) and tried Jesus. Agrippa I was also the grandson of Herod the Great, a ruthless man who murdered his wife, three sons, many relatives and numbers of others, including the babies in Bethlehem at Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:16). The King Herod in Acts, also known as Agrippa I, ruled over Samaria, Judea and some other territories until his death in 44 A.D. recorded in Acts 12.

3 Reference: Note 6, *angel of the Lord*, p. 59.

4 *Mary's home* (12:12). This Mary was John Mark's mother and Barnabas' aunt (Mark and Barnabas were cousins--Colossians 4:10). Apparently her home was a gathering place for Christians. It may have been the location of the upper room where the Last Supper was held (Mark 14:13-15; Acts 1:13) and the place of prayer in Acts 4:31." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1667. Mary's son, John Mark, wrote the Gospel of Mark and accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey.

5 *eaten by worms* (Acts 12:23). "A miserable death associated with Herod's acceptance of acclaim to be divine, but may also be seen as

divine retribution for his persecution of the church." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1669.

6 *Progress reports on the growth of the church:* Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20.

7 *Christians* (Acts 11:26). Latin for "those of the party of Christ," as "Herodians" means "those of the party of Herod" (Matthew 22:16). To the Jews, "Christ" was a sacred title--the Messiah--so they would never have used it in a nickname. The Gentile Antiochenes probably thought *Christos* was someone's name. "Christians" seems to have been what outsiders called the group; they called themselves "believers," brethren," "those of the Way," or "disciples." "Christian" rarely occurs in the New Testament, and only in a possible context of ridicule (Acts 26:28, I Peter 4:16). Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 203, Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts*, p. 99.

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