

Acts Scripture Study: "Witness to Jesus" Part 3

New Revised Standard Version

10 Studies

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– Bob Grahmann, editor

Introduction:

This is the third in a series of three small-group Bible study discussion guides (Luke 1-9, Luke 10-24 and selected portions of Acts) which explore the meaning of “witness.” These are designed to accomplish two purposes. One is simply to strengthen believers as witnesses to the work and life of Jesus, both in history and in their lives. The second is to serve as preparation for Urbana®96. The Book of Acts is a fascinating account of the early disciples as they formed the early church and spread the Good News of Jesus. Luke—a doctor who traveled along on some of these adventures—tells the story in an interesting, accurate and reliable way. May God give your small group rich and rewarding insights as you study his Word together!

Notes for the Discussion Leader

- Each study guide will have a copy of the notes and then following a copy of the scripture passage ready to print.
- You only need to print the notes for yourself and the passage for your entire study.
- A printed copy of the scripture passage is helpful for students who may not own a bible.
- *Helpful leader's notes are in italics throughout the guide*
- Put the questions into your own words if you'd like, yet try to stay within the intent of each question.
- Since the questions are based on the construction of the passage, they will lead the group to major teachings. Decide how much discussion time each group of questions is worth. This will help you pace the discussion.
- Make sure that each study ends with one or two questions of application, even if that means watching the clock and leaving out a few of the suggested questions.
- Pray for the members of your group—that they'll be prepared and open for the study-discussion, and that God would speak powerfully to them as they dig into his Word together.

Helpful hints for effective discussion:

- Approach the Bible as you would any good primary source: be open to learn.
- Let the text speak for itself rather than depending on something you've heard or read about it.
- Expect the text, rather than the leader, to answer questions that come up.
- Stay in the passage. On occasion, when background information is necessary, the study guide may refer the group to another passage. But that is the only time to go out of the passage. Don't go off on tangents into different passages.

- Stay on the point under discussion.
- Keep in mind that each person's part in the discussion helps the group to learn more. People who talk easily in discussion can provide for quieter people to contribute also. God can use what each one says to help the rest of us. And we can honor each other by listening to each other.
- Begin and end on time.
- The second time the group meets, it may be helpful to run lightly over these guidelines again.

Study 1: Acts 1:1-11
Called to be Witnesses
Written by Christian Anible

Getting Started: In common usage, what is a witness? *[Someone who has seen something and is able to talk about it.]* How are people witnesses in everyday situations? *[Think of news reporting, an accident scene or a court scene.]*

Discussion Questions:

1. Acts is Dr. Luke's sequel to his Gospel, taking up the story where he left off in the book of Luke. Read Luke 24:36-53 to set the stage for the opening to Acts.
2. Now read Acts 1:1-11. How was Jesus occupied during the time between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven? How would these things prepare the disciples for his departure?
3. Why couldn't they begin spreading the word of the kingdom of God immediately? What did Jesus mean by "the promise of the Father"? (See John 14:16-17, 25-26 for more background.)
4. What expectation is reflected in the disciples' question in verse 6? *[Note: Most Jewish people had expected the Messiah to be a political/military ruler who would set Israel free from Roman rule and establish Israel as a great political power.]* How does Jesus redirect their attention *[verses 7-8]*? Are there similar concerns we struggle with that can distract us from our primary responsibilities as Jesus' representatives? How should we keep these in proper perspective?
5. What are the disciples told they'll receive in verse 8? For what purpose will they receive it? What is the scope of their assignment? If this had taken place in your town or on your campus, what places could be substituted for those in verse 8?
6. What happened next? What kinds of reactions might this have produced among the disciples? What do the men in white robes tell the disciples? How would this information have helped the disciples just then? And later?
7. At the beginning we defined witness. In verse 8 the disciples were called to be witnesses to Jesus. How does this call extend to us?

In Closing: Spend some time praying for power to be witnesses to the person and work of Jesus, beginning where we are and continuing to the ends of the earth.

Study 1: Acts 1:1-11

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Study 2: Acts 3:1-26

Witness to and through Jesus' Power

Written by Hary Lew

Getting Started: When was a time you asked for something, but got something better in return?

Discussion Questions:

1. Have someone (or a few people) read Acts 3:1-26 aloud. How does Luke describe the condition and situation of the beggar in verse 2?
2. Recount the actions of Peter in verses 3-7. What details does Luke give in verses 7-9 to let us know that this is a miracle?
3. What was the reaction of the crowd in verses 10-11? What possible misunderstanding of the miracle on the crowd's part did Peter anticipate in verse 12?
4. From verse 12 to the end of the chapter, Peter speaks to the crowd about Jesus. Looking at verses 13-15, contrast the titles Peter uses to designate Jesus with the horrendous ways the people treated him. What "excuse" do they have [verse 17]?
5. In verses 19-23, what does Peter say is a proper response to Jesus Christ? What are the benefits? What is the consequence if they do not respond positively?
6. While scanning through Peter's entire speech, pick out the promises that God had made through his servants. How has Jesus already fulfilled those promises? How is he fulfilling them presently? How will he fulfill them in the future? [Note: Verse 25 says that through the descendants of Abraham "all the nations of the earth will be blessed." The offspring of Abraham who were to be the instruments of this blessing were the Jewish people originally (verse 25), Jesus Christ ultimately, and believers in Jesus now (Galatians 3:29).]

In Closing: Peter and John certainly brought a "blessing" to this lame man, and a "blessing" of the Good News to those who heard their message. How can you be an instrument of God's blessing to your campus this week? To the world?

Study 2: Acts 3:1-26

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. **2** And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. **3** When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. **4** Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." **5** And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. **6** But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,^[a] stand up and walk." **7** And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. **8** Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. **9** All the people saw him walking and praising God, **10** and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. **11** While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished. **12** When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? **13** The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed

over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. **14**

But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, **15** and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. **16** And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. **17** "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. **18** In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. **19** Repent therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, **20** so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, **21** who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. **22** Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. **23** And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.' **24** And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. **25** You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, 'And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' **26** When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Study 3: Acts 4:23-37

The Witness of Life Together

Written by Laura DeKoning

Background: In the section leading up to this (Acts 3–4:22), Peter and John had been brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council of priests and elders. After considerable debate, they were released but sternly charged not to continue to preach the gospel. Yet Peter tells them, “. . . we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Act 4:23–37 gives us an inside look at a community of witnesses to Jesus.

Getting Started: Think of a group of people—a community (Christian or non-Christian)—of which you are a member. What defines your community? How do its members relate to one another? How does the community relate to those outside it?

Discussion Questions:

1. Get someone with a keen sense of drama to read Acts 4:23–37. After Peter and John are released, what is the first thing they do? How does the community respond to the situation? How does your Christian community respond to opposition?
2. Look for a moment at verses 24–28. How is God described? What do these different descriptions tell us about him?
3. As they pray, the community quotes from Psalm 2, a prophetic psalm referring to the coming kingship of Christ. Turn for a minute to Psalm 2:1–9, but don't lose your place in Acts. How are the events recounted in this psalm similar to the events recounted in Acts 4:27–28?
4. In each case, who is standing in opposition to God? How does God respond? Why is this opposition “in vain”?
5. How would recalling God's past dealing with those who conspire against him be an encouragement to this fledgling community?
6. Now look at the rest of the prayer in Acts 4:29–30. In light of what God has done in the past, what do they ask him to do for them? How does he respond to them in verse 31?
7. Verses 32–37 give us a closer look at the Christian community. What are some specific ways they lived out their “one heart and soul [*or mind*]”? What does this tell us about their priorities?
8. Verse 33 tells about their “witness” or “testimony.” What adjectives are used to describe their witness?

9. Put yourself in the story. If you were on the outside looking in, what might be going through your mind as you observe these Christians interacting with each other and with others?

In Closing: What does it mean to be “one in heart and soul?” What doesn’t it mean? What would your fellowship on campus look like if it really was of “one heart and soul?” What would your witness be like? What are some things you can do to strengthen your community?

Study 3: Acts 4:23-37

23 After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. **24** When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, **25** it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? **26** The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.' **27** For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. **29** And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, **30** while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." **31** When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. **32** Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. **33** With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. **34** There was not a needy person among them, for as many

as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. **35**

They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. **36**

There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). **37** He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Study 4: Acts 6:1-15

Stephen's Witness

Written by Max Goss

Getting Started: What do you think was the cost for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the first century? What is the potential cost on your campus or in your family?

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 6:1-8. What words are used here to characterize Stephen [verses 3, 5, 8]?
2. Now read verses 9-15. Compare the way Stephen's opponents handled the "problem" that they had (Stephen's powerful preaching) with the way the believers in verses 1-8 handled the problem of food distribution.
3. Why do you think the activities of Stephen and the church aroused opposition [verses 7-8]? What led Stephen's opponents to resort to deception [verse 10]? Why do you think Luke mentions in verse 15 that Stephen's face was "like the face of an angel"?
4. What are the prevalent attitudes on your campus toward the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do the things Christian students do and preach arouse opposition? Why or why not?

If you have time skim through Acts 7 and the first four verse of chapter 8

5. Give the group a few moments to skim Acts 7:1-50, which records Stephen's defense against the charges of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. Have them try to summarize the central point of Stephen's speech. *[By tracing God's calling and promise through the patriarchs, Stephen demonstrates that it is the religious establishment—not the Christian community—that misunderstands the temple and the law of Moses. He draws the distinction between God's faithful prophets and those who rejected them. He identifies Christians as God's truly faithful people and the religious leaders as being opposed to God.]*
6. Read Acts 7:51-60. In what ways are Stephen's opponents just like their ancestors [verses 51-52]? What is the irony of verse 53? As this story unfolds, why do Stephen's opponents become so hostile? How does Stephen respond?
7. Read 8:1-4. How did the purposes of Stephen's persecutors contribute to the mission of the church [verse 4]? What does this say about God?

In Closing: Compare the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to the conventional wisdom on your campus. Do you see any evidences of hostility or suspicion toward the gospel? In what ways does your behavior affect the credibility of your witness (both positively and negatively)?

Study 4: Acts 6:1-15

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴ while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the world." ⁵

What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. ⁸ Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit^[c] with which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes;

then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council.

13 They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; **14** for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us." **15**

And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Study 5: Acts 9:1-22

Witness to the Power to Convert & Transform

Written by Andrea Thomas

Getting Started: If you were to vote for the person “most likely never to become a Christian” whom would you choose? Why? If you had lived in the first century, you probably would have chosen Saul of Tarsus—and you wouldn’t have been alone. In the passage you will read the powerful story of a very unlikely convert.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 9: 1-2. What do these verses, as well as the previous study, tell us about Saul and his relationship with the early believers? What symbols of power does Paul have as he travels to Damascus?
2. Now read Acts 9:3-22 to get the rest of the story. Looking at verses 3-9, what happened to Saul on his journey? Try to visualize the scene, and put yourself in the place of the eyewitnesses mentioned in verse 7. What do you see and hear? What are you feeling? How do you think Saul felt?
3. What does the Lord tell Ananias to do? How does Ananias respond? Thinking of the person you chose as the “most unlikely Christian,” what would you do if Jesus came to you in a vision telling you to confront this person?
4. In verse 15, Jesus responds to Ananias’s fear and objections by commanding him to go and by sharing his plans for Saul’s life. What is the Lord’s plan for Saul’s life? [*Saul later becomes the famous apostle Paul.*]
5. What happens in verses 17-20 as Ananias is obedient to Jesus’ call? How does Saul respond? What might this tell us about facing someone we don’t want to talk to but whom we feel God wants us to talk to?
6. In verses 21-22 what are the words used to describe people’s response to the message (Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ) and the messenger (Saul)? How is Saul’s life transformed?
7. Look back through the whole passage. Who has the power in this passage and who is reacting to that power? While most conversions are not as dramatic as Paul’s, how was yours similar? How did Jesus show himself to you? Was there an “Ananias” in your life?

In Closing: Think again of your choice for “the most unlikely Christian.” From this passage, what have you learned that speaks to your doubts about their becoming a believer? Take a few minutes as a group to pray for the people you mentioned.

For further Discussion: Put yourself in Ananias's place and imagine what he was feeling in this passage. We're not all public preachers like Paul, but we are called to be witnesses and encouragers like Ananias. To whom can you be an "Ananias" this week? Is there a young Christian you can encourage to grow? Is there someone you need to challenge?

Study 5: Acts 9:1-22

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest **2** and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. **3** Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4** He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" **5** He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." **7** The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. **8** Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. **9** For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **10** Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." **11** The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, **12** and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." **13** But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; **14** and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." **15** But

the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; **16** I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." **17** So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, **19** and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, **20** and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." **21** All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" **22** Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Study 6: Acts 13:1-12

Sent to be Truth-Speaking Witnesses

Written by Sam Perry and Bob Grahmann

Getting Started: Have you (or someone you know) ever felt called by God to do something unusual or radical? Talk about the situation and how you (or that person) responded. What were the results?

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 13:1-12. Look carefully at the list of prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. *[Note: According to Acts 11:19-22, this was the first truly multi-ethnic local church, with Jews and Gentiles together in one local congregation.]* What do you notice about these people? What were they doing?
2. How often are praying and fasting mentioned in verses 2-3? Why do you think the people prayed and fasted before and after the selection of Barnabas and Saul?
3. Who sets them apart for the work? Who sends them on their way? How does the Spirit's initiative interact with the people's listening and obeying?
4. What would you think, and how would your church react, if next Sunday the elders announced, "This week the Holy Spirit told us to send two of our leaders off to the mission field full time. And so we sent them off. They're gone, and we're not really sure where they'll end up"?
5. According to verses 4-5, where did Barnabas and Paul go? *[Note: You might want to locate these places on a map in the back of a Bible or in a Bible atlas.]* What did they do when they got there? Why do you think they started in the synagogues?
6. They continued to preach until they came to Paphos, the seat of the Roman government on the island. In verses 6-8, who was interested in what they had to say? Who tried to stop them? Why?
7. Imagine that you are doing evangelism in another state, and a senator of that state invites you to share the gospel with him. How would you feel? What if while you are there one of his top aides opposes you? What would you do?
8. In verse 9, before Paul responds to Bar-Jesus/Elymas in words, what does Luke say about Paul? Why do you think Luke mentions these things?
9. How does Paul respond to Bar-Jesus' (Elymas's) opposition? Note that verse 6 calls the man Bar-Jesus, which means "son of Jesus." In verse 8, Luke calls him by his translated name, Elymas. In verse 10, what does Paul call him? Why do you think Paul responds with such harsh sounding words? Do you think that

what happened to Elymas was fitting? What would you be feeling if you were there and witnessed these events?

10. How did the Proconsul react when he saw what happened? Does his response surprise you? Why or why not?

In Closing: Do you know anyone like the Proconsul—someone who is open to the gospel and seeking to learn more? How can you help them? Do you know anyone like Elymas—someone who openly opposes the gospel, or who tries to interfere with your sharing the gospel? How can you pray for them? How can you, led by the Holy Spirit, speak the truth to them in a way they will understand?

Study 6: Acts 13:1-12

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler,^[a] and Saul. **2** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **3** Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. **4** So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them. **6** When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. **7** He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. **8** But the magician Elymas (for that is the translation of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **9** But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **10** and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? **11** And now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand. **12** When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.

Study 7: Acts 16:16-34

Witness in Macedonia: the Philippian Jailer

Written by Heather Danielkiewicz

Background: While in Macedonia, Paul and his companions go to a place of prayer and meet a businesswoman named Lydia. The Lord opens her heart, and she responds to Paul's message. Our study begins at this point.

Getting Started: Tell of a time you shared the gospel with another person in your everyday experience.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 16:16-34. On their journey to a place of prayer, Paul and his companions meet a young woman [verses 16-18]. How is she described? What is she saying and why would this trouble Paul so much? What place do you think this woman held in society?
2. Why were the owners of the slave girl angry with Paul and his companions? What charge do they bring against them? What were Paul and Silas saying from the clues in verse 17? How might this message have sounded to Roman ears? Does the gospel threaten anyone's vested interests on your campus?
3. Describe how Paul and Silas were persecuted for preaching the gospel in verses 22-24. How might they be feeling now? In verse 25, how is the response of Paul and Silas to their persecution different from the way most people would react?
4. Picture yourself as a fellow prisoner of Paul and Silas. What would you be wondering or feeling? Describe what happens to the prison in verse 26. What does this tell us about God?
5. What is the jailer's initial reaction to the earthquake? Why does he react this way [verses 23-24, 27]? What does the jailer realize in verse 30? Why is the question he asks such an urgent one?
6. How do Paul and Silas respond to his question in verses 31-32? In the light of all that has happened, how does the jailer then respond?

In Closing: How do the happenings in Acts 16:16-34 motivate you to share the gospel where you are? How does this account encourage you to move out of your comfort zone on campus?

Study 7: Acts 16:16-34

16 One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. **17** While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." **18** She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. **19** But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. **20** When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews **21** and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." **22** The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. **23** After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. **24** Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. **25** About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. **27** When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide

open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." **29** The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" **31** They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." **32** They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. **33** At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. **34** He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Study 8: Acts 17:16-34

Witness to the Unknown God: Paul in Athens

Written by Scott Erbe

Getting Started: “The world’s major religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, are making inroads as are a variety of cults, New Age philosophies, occult activities and even traditional paganism. How do we cope with a world that knows or cares so little about the truth of Jesus Christ? Paul left us a helpful model when he visited the world center of pagan philosophy and religion—Athens” (The NIV Quiet Time Bible, IVP®). What are some of the “idols” people worship on your campus? What is so attractive about these idols?

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 17:16-34. What upset Paul about Athens, and what did he do about it [verses 16-17]?
2. Describe the Athenians’ reaction to the gospel message in verses 18-21. What are some things that might have caused this response? [Note: *Epicureanism* was a school of Greek philosophy that emphasized the remoteness of uncaring gods, a world governed by blind chance, the absence of an afterlife and the pursuit of pleasure. *Stoicism* emphasized a world determined by fate, where human beings must pursue their duty, “resigning themselves to live in harmony with nature and reason, however painful this might be, and develop their own self-sufficiency” (John Stott). The Areopagus was a hill overlooking Athens that served as the chief courtroom of the day; it was also a place to hold philosophical discussions.]
3. What strategies does Paul employ when he begins his address at the Areopagus in verses 22-23?
4. What does Paul emphasize as he describes the “unknown god” in verses 24-28? Why might he stress these particular things to this group of listeners?
5. Note how Paul quotes from Greek philosophy and poetry in verse 28. Why do you think he does this? What implications does this have for us as we share Christ on campus?
6. In verses 29-31, what else does Paul say about God? How does he introduce the concept of Jesus? What does he emphasize about Jesus? If you had time or opportunity to say just one or two things about Jesus, what would you emphasize?
7. In verses 29-31, what kind of response does Paul think the Athenians should have to his message, and why? What kind of response do they give him in

verses 32-34? How are these responses like those you get as you share the gospel?

8. Paul uses the altar with the "unknown god" inscription as a "launch pad" to share God's truth. What starting points do you have with those around you? How could you use these more effectively?
9. Paul shares the gospel with the Athenians in a way that is relevant, sensitive and uncompromising to the truth. In what ways might you be tempted to water down God's message to groups of people you share with? In what ways are you tempted to be too harsh? How can you avoid either extreme?

In Closing: How are you involved in the lives of non-Christians around you? If you're not, what specific steps can you take? How can you become better equipped to effectively communicate the gospel with these people in a way they can understand?

Study 8: Acts 17:16-34

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. **17** So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. **18** Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) **19** So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20** It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." **21** Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. **22** Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. **23** For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. **24** The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, **25** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. **26** From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the

boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹ Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." ³² When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ At that point Paul left them. ³⁴ But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Study 9: Acts 25:23-27; 26:1-32

Witness before Kings and Rulers

Written by Carla Bieler

Background: As a Roman citizen, Paul could not be bound or imprisoned without a trial, and he is about to go before King Agrippa. Agrippa and Bernice were the great grandchildren of Herod the Great, the king who ruled when Jesus was born. Festus was the procurator or governor of Judea.

Getting Started: If you were called before your dean of students or your college president to give a defense of your actions as a Christian on campus, how would you feel? What would be running through your mind?

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 25:23-27. Observe verses 23-24 carefully, and try to picture what this scene must have looked like. What feeling was this pomp intended to convey to a person who is brought before the king and queen for interrogation?
2. Why is Paul appearing before them [verses 24-27]? According to verse 27 how long has Paul been waiting in jail? What would you be feeling at this point if you were Paul?
3. Now read chapter 26:1-23. In verses 2-3 how does Paul start his defense? Why do you think he does it this way?
4. In verses 4-14 Paul tells his story. What are his major points? What does he emphasize about Jesus's commands to him in verses 16-18?
5. To what does Paul appeal in verses 19-23? How does he summarize the gospel? In verse 24, how does Festus respond? Why? How does Paul respond? Why do you think Paul asks King Agrippa if he believes in the prophets?
6. In verse 28, King Agrippa answers Paul's question with a question of his own. What feeling was Agrippa expressing? What do you see about Paul's passion for and vision for the gospel in his heartfelt statement in verse 29? How does this compare with your passion for the gospel?
7. Note the rulers' conversation in verses 30-32. How had they been affected by Paul's presentation?
8. Go back over Paul's speech and summarize some of the things that Paul does to share effectively with the king, Bernice and the governor. [*He affirms the king (verses 2-3), shares his own conversion story (verses 4-19), describes his calling and assures the king of his good motives (verses 16-19), explains the gospel clearly (verse 23) and appeals to the king to believe (verses 26-29).*]

In Closing: What do you learn here about tailoring your message to the situation? About boldness, clarity and respect? About the power of your story? Spend some time praying for opportunities for you to share the gospel boldly with those around you. Remember, God is in control; he is sovereign and powerful!

Study 9: Acts 25:23-27; 26:1-32

23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in. **24** And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish community petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. **25** But I found that he had done nothing deserving death; and when he appealed to his Imperial Majesty, I decided to send him. **26** But I have nothing definite to write to our sovereign about him. Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write— **27** for it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him." **26.1** Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself: **2** "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, **3** because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently. **4** "All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. **5** They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. **6** And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, **7** a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! **8** Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? **9** "Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. **10** And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints

in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. **11** By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities. **12** "With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, **13** when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. **14** When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.' **15** I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord answered, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. **16** But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. **17** I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **18** to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' **19** "After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, **20** but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. **21** For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. **22** To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: **23** that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." **24** While he was making this defense, Festus exclaimed, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!" **25** But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. **26** Indeed

the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. **27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." **28** Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" **29** Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains." **30** Then the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those who had been seated with them; **31** and as they were leaving, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." **32** Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor."

Study 10: Acts 28:17-31

Witnessing to the Ends of the Earth: Rome

Written by Melen-too Wesley

Background: Rome was the capital of the Empire, a multicultural setting where decisions were made that affected the world. Paul had planned for a long time to visit Rome as a missionary. Instead he was brought as a prisoner. Yet this change of plans didn't deter him from his real mission: sharing the gospel.

Getting Started: Think of a time when you made plans that you thought were from the Lord—and then had to watch them change. What was your attitude?

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Acts 28:17-31. What does Paul do when he arrives in Rome? In his meeting with the Jewish leaders, what does he say? Why do you think he went to such great lengths to introduce himself and clear himself before the Jewish leaders [verses 17-20]?
2. How do the Jewish leaders respond [verses 21-22]? How do you think Paul might have felt when he heard this response?
3. Describe the meeting between Paul and the Jewish leaders in verses 23-24. Paul tried to convince them about Jesus Christ from the Law of Moses and from the prophets. Think about the needs and backgrounds of students you encounter on campus. How can we put the truths about Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God into a cultural context that they can understand?
4. How do Paul's listeners respond to his case for Jesus in verses 24-25? In verses 25b-28, Paul passes judgment on his listeners. He uses a text from the Old Testament: Isaiah 6:9-10. What point was he trying to make about them? How do you think they might have responded?
5. Look carefully at verse 28. How does this summarize some of the themes we have seen in the book of Acts? How does it fit with Acts 1:8?
6. Looking at the rest of the passage, describe how Paul spent the next two years in Rome. Whom do you think "all" refers to in verse 30? What was he proclaiming? Compare this to Jesus' words in Acts 1:1-8.

In Closing: God has put you where you are. How can you be an obedient witness in sharing the gospel with the people around you?

Conclusion: Many people think Acts has a rather abrupt ending. But in light of Acts 1:1-11, why is this a good ending? Perhaps Acts 29, 30 and so forth are really for our

stories! Take some time as a group to review some of the themes you've seen in your study of Acts. Which ones affected you most? How have you been encouraged to be bolder witnesses? To rely on the Spirit more? To appreciate God's sovereignty? To cross a cultural barrier? Decide together on a bold step you will take as a result of something God has shown you in Acts.

Study 10: Acts 28:17-31

17 Three days later he called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, yet I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. **18** When they had examined me, the Romans wanted to release me, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. **19** But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to the emperor—even though I had no charge to bring against my nation. **20** For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." **21** They replied, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken anything evil about you. **22** But we would like to hear from you what you think, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against." Paul Preaches in Rome **23** After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. **24** Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. **25** So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, **26** 'Go to this people and say, you will indeed listen, but never

understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. **27** For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.' **28** Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." **30** He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, **31** proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Create Your Own Bible Studies

If you want to continue with the book of Matthew or create your own studies - here is a helpful guide to get you started.

Inductive Method (OAI): *a way of approaching scripture that is finds clues to uncover a main truth rather than finding multiple scriptures to support a single main point.*

Observation

- Goal is to be emotionally and intellectually engaged by the scripture

Interpretation

- Goal is to come to wisdom and understanding about the meaning of the text for the original audience for those studying it today.

Application

- Goal is to participate with God in the transformational power of the Word.

Writing your Bible Study

Step 1: Preparation

1. Write down all questions that come to mind as you read the passage.
2. Look up any context or definitions that will help interpret the passage.
www.blueletterbible.com or biblegateway.com has dictionaries, commentaries and concordances.
3. Decide how God is calling you to personally or communally live out the passage.
4. Pray for your small group members and for the active response.

Step 2: Discussion Questions

1. Debrief: How did you live out what we studied last week? (You can use this as an icebreaker.)
2. Read the passage as a group.
3. What stands out to you? ...Anyone want to add anything to that? 3. What's one question you have? *(You can write out questions as people share - if you don't know the answer ask the group: Does anyone have thoughts about that question? ...Or you can look up later and answer it the next week.)*
4. What do you learn about what God is like?
5. What one thing do you want to do to live this passage out? *(If there is something you can do together as a small group - suggest that as a discipleship cycle.)*

Step 3: Debrief with co-leader or mentor

1. Write down who attended and **pray** for each person.

2. Figure out who each leader needs to follow up with that week.
3. Discuss where you saw God at work during your small group.

Helpful Hints:

- Call members the day before to invite them. Cast good vision for why come.
- Bring snacks. People come when there is food. We want to physically and spiritually feed them.
- Print out the passage for your group. It helps those who don't come from a Christian background feel welcomed, because owning a bible isn't necessary.