

New York Times BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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LIFE LESSONS *from*

ACTS



INTRODUCTION TO *The Book of Acts*

They aren't the same men.

Oh, I know they look like it. They have the same names. The same faces. The same mannerisms. They look the same. But they aren't. On the surface they appear no different. Peter is still brazen. Nathanael is still reflective. Philip is still calculating.

They look the same. But they aren't. They aren't the same men you read about in the last four books. The fellows you got to know in the Gospels? These are the ones, but they're different.

You'll see it. As you read you'll see it. In their eyes. You hear it in their voices. You feel it in their passion. These men have changed.

As you read you'll wonder—are these the same guys? The ones who doubted in Galilee? The ones who argued in Capernaum? The ones who ran for their lives in Gethsemane? You'll wonder, "Are these the same men?"

The answer is no. They are different. They have stood face-to-face with God. They have sat at the feet of the resurrected King. They are different.

Within them dwells a fire not found on earth. Christ has taught them. The Father has forgiven them. The Spirit indwells them. They are not the same.

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And because they are different, so is the world.

Read their adventures and be encouraged. Read their adventures and be listening. What God did for them, he longs to do for you.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Luke, who also wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Luke included few personal details about himself in his writings, but early church historians held that he was a native of Antioch in Syria, and there is evidence that he resided in Troas and was a frequent traveling companion of the apostle Paul (see Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). He is first mentioned in Colossians 4:14, where Paul refers to him as a physician, and he is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 1:24. It is believed that he wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts c. AD 60.

SITUATION

The book of Acts ends with Paul still in Rome, which has led scholars to conclude that Luke wrote his books from Rome during Paul's imprisonment. In his dedication to "Theophilus" (Acts 1:1), he indicates he composed his former book (his Gospel) to provide a carefully ordered account of the events of Jesus' life and birth of the early church. Luke appears to have written to a primarily non-Jewish audience, for he frequently relates stories of how the disciples and early church leaders came to welcome those from Gentile (non-Jewish) backgrounds.

KEY THEMES

- The foundations of the early church were established in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.
- The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to spread the gospel into the world as Jesus commanded.

INTRODUCTION

- The first struggle of the gospel was to stand independently of Jewish tradition and faith.
- The sacrifice Jesus made was for all people.

KEY VERSES

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

CONTENTS

- I. The Gospel in Jerusalem (1:1–7:60)
- II. The Gospel in Judea and Samaria (8:1–12:25)
- III. The Gospel in the Non-Jewish World (13:1–28:31)

LESSON ONE

JESUS CHANGES LIVES

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

ACTS 2:37-38



REFLECTION

Community. Unselfish sharing. Unity. These are things we hope to experience in our families, our churches, and our society. Unfortunately, these qualities are often lacking. The book of Acts, titled the “Acts of the Apostles,” records the continuation of the story of the disciples after Jesus ascended to heaven. The first followers of Jesus came from different backgrounds yet demonstrated amazing community as the early church was formed. Think about your church. In what ways can you see the transforming power of Jesus’ presence?

SITUATION

For almost two months, Jerusalem had been buzzing with plots, a headline crucifixion, rumors of a resurrection, transformed lives, visits from the risen Jesus, and his sudden departure to heaven. After Jesus left his followers gathered to pray in an upper room, and the Holy Spirit showed up! In the early-morning hours of Pentecost, a new sound was heard in the temple courts: Galileans speaking various languages, praising God in tongues other than their own. A crowd gathered. Conclusions were reached. Then one of the disciples stood up and spoke. Peter, the transformed fisherman who had betrayed his Lord, delivered the first sermon, explaining from Scripture who Jesus really was and why he died. The results were remarkable.

OBSERVATION

Read Acts 2:29–47 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

²⁹ “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand

³⁵ until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet.”

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

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⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

²⁹ "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹ he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. ³³ Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

³⁴ "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

"The LORD said to my Lord,

"Sit at My right hand,

³⁵ "Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."

³⁶ "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall

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receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

EXPLORATION

1. What did Peter say about David? How would this have resonated with the crowd?

2. What bold statements did Peter make in his sermon?

3. How did the people react to Peter's declaration?

LIFE LESSONS

- 4. What instructions did Peter give to the people?

- 5. What did Peter say to the crowds of onlookers about the Holy Spirit?

- 6. How did the new believers grow in their faith? How did they practice that faith?

INSPIRATION

A transformed group stood beside a transformed Peter as he announced some weeks later: "So, all the people of Israel should know this truly: God has made Jesus—the man you nailed to the cross—both Lord and Christ."

No timidity in his words. No reluctance. About three thousand people believed his message.

The apostles sparked a movement. The people became followers of the death-conqueror. They couldn't hear enough or say enough about him . . . Christ was their model, their message. They preached "Jesus Christ and him crucified," not for the lack of another topic, but because they couldn't exhaust this one.

What unlocked the doors of the apostles' hearts?

Simple. They saw Jesus. They encountered the Christ. Their sins collided with their Savior and their Savior won!

A lot of things would happen to them over the next few decades. Many nights would be spent away from home. Hunger would gnaw

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at their bellies. Rain would soak their skin. Stones would bruise their bodies. Shipwrecks, lashings, martyrdom. But there was a scene in the repertoire of memories that caused them to never look back: the betrayed coming back to find his betrayers; not to scourge them, but to send them. Not to criticize them for forgetting, but to commission them to remember. *Remember* that he who was dead is alive and they who were guilty have been forgiven. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

- 7. What changes has Jesus made in your life?

- 8. What circumstances caused you to open your heart to God?

- 9. Why do you think some people resist the convicting work of the Holy Spirit?

- 10. The Holy Spirit gave Peter boldness to speak the truth. What ability or gift have you received from God?

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11. How have you discovered the spiritual gifts God has given you?

Handwritten lines for response to question 11.

12. How can you use your gifts to help bring others into God's kingdom?

Handwritten lines for response to question 12.

LIFE LESSONS

Authentic followers of Jesus always have company. In fact, if we feel all alone in our faith, one of the explanations may be that we're not following Jesus as closely as we think we are. The first disciples went from feeling all alone to speaking out and discovering more than 3,000 new companions. The practice of faith involves others. So make it a point to pursue healthy relationships with other believers. Ask Jesus to change you into an agent of peace in every situation you find yourself in. Ask him to make you into good company.

DEVOTION

Father, we invite the powerful indwelling of your Spirit, because we know that we do not have the power to change ourselves. May we be open to your convicting work. May we be sincere and willing to grow as you lead us. Father, transform us into your likeness.

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JOURNALING

In what area of your life have you resisted the Spirit's work? How can you change that attitude?

Handwritten lines for journaling response.

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FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Acts during this twelve-part study, read Acts 1:1–2:47. For more Bible passages about God’s power to change people, read Romans 1:16–17; 8:9–14; 16:17–19; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 3:16–20; Colossians 1:10–12; and 2 Peter 1:3.

LESSON TWO

WE ARE WITNESSES

*Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have,
but what I do have I give you: In the name of
Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”*

ACTS 3:6 NKJV



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REFLECTION

Think back to your life before you knew about Christ. Perhaps you were acutely aware that something was wrong with life. You were missing something. Or maybe you had a vague feeling of unease. Then someone spoke words of truth into your life. Someone witnessed to you about what Jesus meant to him or her. Someone explained who Jesus was. Who helped you understand the truth of the gospel? How did that person accomplish that task?

SITUATION

The days of excitement and new faith in the early church made the apostles' lives hectic and full. They had to stay focused. There were great spiritual and physical needs everywhere. One day, Peter and John had an eye-opening encounter with a crippled man. He was merely hoping for some financial help, but the apostles gave him something far better.

OBSERVATION

Read Acts 3:1–16 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw

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Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹ Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; ³ who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. ⁴ And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” ⁵ So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name

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of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.⁸ So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God.¹⁰ Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon’s, greatly amazed.¹² So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.¹⁴ But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,¹⁵ and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.¹⁶ And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

EXPLORATION

1. What was the crippled man’s life like before he met Peter and John?

2. What were Peter and John unable to give the crippled man? What did they give instead?

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3. How did the crippled man react to the miracle?

4. How did the people at the temple respond to Peter and John after they heard about the miracle?

5. What opportunity did this miracle provide for Peter?

6. How did Peter explain the healing of the crippled man?

INSPIRATION

This word *compassion* is one of the oddest in Scripture. The New Testament Greek lexicon says this word means “to be moved as to one’s bowels . . . (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity).” It shares a root system with *splanchnology*, the study of the visceral parts. Compassion, then, is a movement deep within—a kick in the gut.

Perhaps that is why we often turn away. Who can bear such an emotion? Especially when we can do nothing about it. Why look suffering in the face if we can’t make a difference? Yet what if we could? What if our attention could reduce someone’s pain? This is the promise of the encounter.

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“Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong” (Acts 3:6–7). What if Peter had said, “Since I don’t have any silver or gold, I’ll keep my mouth shut”? But he didn’t. He placed his mustard-seed sized deed (a look and a touch) in the soil of God’s love. And look what happened.

The thick, meaty hand of the fisherman reached for the frail, thin one of the beggar. Think Sistine Chapel and the high hand of God. One from above, the other from below. A holy helping hand. Peter lifted the man toward himself. The cripple swayed like a newborn calf finding its balance. It appeared as if the man would fall, but he didn’t. He stood. And as he stood, he began to shout, and passersby began to stop. They stopped and watched. . . .

An honest look led to a helping hand that led to a conversation about eternity. Works done in God’s name long outlive our earthly lives.

Let’s be the people who stop at the gate. Let’s look at the hurting until we hurt with them. No hurrying past, turning away, or shifting of eyes. No pretending or glossing over. Let’s look at the face until we see the person. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. What can you learn from Peter’s example about spreading the gospel?

8. Why is it important for believers to encourage others to follow Jesus?

WE ARE WITNESSES

9. What does it mean to be *bold* witnesses for Christ?

10. What excuses do Christians often use to keep quiet about their faith?

11. What steps can you take to prepare yourself to explain the gospel to others?

12. Think of one person in your life who does not know Christ. When can you share the gospel with that person?

LIFE LESSONS

Witnessing is simply sharing what you have seen. Start each day with a heartfelt request: “Lord, send someone my way today whose need is so obvious that even I can’t miss it! Remind me that what I have in you is the very best gift I could give that person, no matter what he or she has asked of me. And when I meet that person, help me resist the temptation to come up with something witty to say, but to instead simply depend on you for what to say.”

