

THE EXPERIENCE A Study in Acts Part One (Acts 1-5)  
*A Crosswalk Sermon Series*

Introduction:

If you're new to Crosswalk, then let me be among the first to introduce you to one of our three core values; Experience. There are many things wrapped up in this value, like excellence, intentionality, creativity, talent, and beauty. But we're not the first to value this concept within the religious world.

In the Old Testament, God instructed the Israelites to worship in such a way, celebrate feasts in such a way, and create rhythms to their life in such a way so that they could remember their God. He wanted to remember how He led them and blessed them in the past, in hopes to assure them that He's with them in the present, and remind them of all He's promised to do in their future.

Why were these experiences so important to the religious rhythm of a follower? In part, it's because we are so quick to forget. So quick to forget the good things, especially in the midst of a difficult season in life, or when we're consumed with worry about our future. God wanted to design experiences to help us remember Him and strengthen our trust in Him.

In Deuteronomy 8, we find these words, *"Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years..."* (verse 2). Then later in the chapter, we read, *"Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. Do not forget that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness..."* (Deuteronomy 8: 14-15a).

So we create experiences and practice rituals, or liturgies, that help remind us of who God is and what God has done. But with Crosswalk, we also work hard to create these experiences because we desperately want people to come to see a better picture of Jesus than maybe the one they've received in the past. We want people to experience the love of the Father for all of His children, and we want an experience that cause people to want too bring their friends, family, coworkers, neighbor, and grocery store clerk so they can experience it as well.

For the next five weeks, we're going to reflect on The Experience from the lens of the birth of the early church. The book of Acts is the second volume of work from the Physician, Luke, who though not an eye witness to the story of Jesus, he spent countless hours learning the stories, investigating the claims, and writing it all down so that all people had access to Jesus. The gospel of Luke tells the story of Jesus, his life, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection. Luke's second volume, often called the Acts of the Apostles, is the continuation of Jesus' ministry in and through his followers as they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Keep in mind, many scholars think that Acts was not written so much in the style of evangelistic preaching in order to convert new believers, but rather to encourage and strengthen those who had chosen to believe. Through this journey, we'll see miracle after miracle. We'll witness God's power show up mightily. And if we use our imaginations to enter into the story, we might just taste the excitement of the experience the first followers had as the Spirit moved, and the gospel spread, from 12 followers of Jesus, to over 9 million in just 300 years. It's going to be an amazing ride.

So buckle up, hold on, and let's enjoy watching the first followers experience the Spirit and the power of the resurrection.

Lovewell...Always,  
Pastor Paddy McCoy  
Crosswalk Portland - Lead Pastor

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF THE IN-BETWEEN**

### **Day 1 - Acts of the Apostles 1:1-3, NLT**

*1 In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. 3 During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.*

Though the above verses are technically the introduction to Luke's second book, we have to go back to his first book to catch the full purpose of why he writes both. There, we find these words...

*1 Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. 3 Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.” Luke 1:1-4 NLT*

So Luke writes these two volumes to add yet another definitive account of the accuracy of all the events that took place. One scholar said that the purpose of Luke’s books is not so much to convert unbelievers, but to encourage and strengthen those that do believe.

Most scholars date Luke’s writings to somewhere between 80-100 AD. By this time, the temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed, the Jews scattered, persecution is on the rise, and slowly, the Gentile converts are outpacing the growth of the Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah. In the midst of so much change, so much struggle, so much pressure, it would be easy for followers to doubt, become discouraged, and give up.

Luke is trying to avoid that from happening, so he adds his voice, his research, and his own experience as one who spent a lot of time with the church’s first real missionary and theologian, the apostle Paul.

And Paul writes both books to someone named Theophilus, a name that comes from the Greek for “Loved by God.” So in one sense, Theophilus could be any and all of us, in another sense, scholars believe it was a specific person, likely a Roman convert to the faith. Either way, I like to lean into the idea that Theophilus represents us all; for we all go through challenges seasons in life, we all have our questions, and Luke records and share these stories to help us believe that Jesus actually did live, die, and was resurrected. This same Jesus, as we learn in Acts of the Apostles, continues to live and work in us, through his Holy Spirit, so that all people everywhere may know the one true God, and His love for us.

1. Have you ever gone through a season of doubt in your faith journey? If so, what was that like and are you still there, or has God led you through that valley? If you feel you’re on the other side of that doubt, what helped you come back to a trust in God?

2. What about your life and/or your faith needs a strengthen and encouraging today? If Jesus were sitting across from you now, what do you think he'd have to say?
3. Are there things about your faith that you are certain of? Things you have no doubt about?

## Day 2 - Acts of the Apostles 1:4-5

*4 Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. 5 John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

It's interesting how many times were told that Jesus ate with his followers after the resurrection. The authors were fighting back against the idea that Jesus' body wasn't resurrected because many believed the body was bad. So the authors had to make sure their audiences knew that Jesus was resurrected, mind, body, and soul, and that His resurrection is complete and transformative.

But then the disciples had to "wait" in Jerusalem until they received the "gift" of the Holy Spirit. They didn't know exactly how they were going to receive this gift, nor did they know exactly when it was going to come. The New Living Translation says, "in just a few days," but a more accurate translation would be, "not many days from now." Either way, it wasn't a set day, it was just, "Sometime soon."

Have you ever had to wait for a gift you knew was coming? When you're a kid, it's pure torture. I can remember at Christmas, my family would always wait until after dinner to open our Christmas presents. That dinner was the absolute SLOWEST dinner in the history of mankind. The adults would talk about literally anything and everything, as if they knew the children would spontaneously combust with anticipation if they just kept talking.

And though Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit and given the disciples a list of the things the Spirit would do (read through John 14:15-31, John 15:26-27, John 16: 4-15), they still were not exactly sure how it was going to happen or what it would look like. So they had to wait; wait in the in-between.

In my spiritual journey, waiting is one of the hardest things to do. I've often identified with King David's words in Psalm 27 when he says, "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14 ESV) Why do we need to be strong and take courage? Because waiting is hard.

Yet there is a beauty found in the waiting. We can grow, in the waiting. Our trust in God can be tested, but it can also mature in the waiting. And maybe most important, we are never alone in the waiting even though at times it can feel like it. God is with us in the waiting, and working all things together for good (Romans 8:28). It may take longer than we'd like, the answer may be something unexpected, but God loves us and is always at work toward our good. The question is, do we trust Him in the in-between?

1. Have you ever had to wait, a long time, for an answer from God? If so, did the answer every come and what was it like? If not, have you given up, moved on, or are you still waiting?
2. What kinds of gifts do you think God has given us to help us wait for Him to answer, remembering that His time is not our time, His ways are not our ways?
3. Is there something you've been stuck in the in-between over, that you could surrender to God now and try to trust in Him more no matter the outcome?

### Day 3 - Acts of the Apostles 1:6-11, NLT

*6 So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"*

*7 He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

*9 After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. 10 As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has*

*been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"*

After everything the disciples had heard and seen, they still were waiting for their chance to sit next to Jesus on an earthly throne. They still thought the story was all about them. They were still in the in-between; in-between what Jesus taught and lived, and what they understood.

Again, Jesus elevates the conversation to what matters most. He doesn't answer the question with times and dates, rather, He says the Spirit is coming and when she does, your reach will go continue in Jerusalem and Judea, but it will expand to Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

Luke was pointing to the geographical explosion that was about to take place. The gospel was going to spread in ways the disciples could never have imagined, and it was going to do so quicker than they could have imagined. People were hungry for something more satisfying than what the world had to offer. They were search for their story to be more than the sum of it's parts. They wanted to know that there was true goodness in the world, real love, and when those things had a name, Jesus, then the people wouldn't be able to contain their joy.

That's why we often say at Crosswalk that evangelism isn't a program, but rather an attitude of the heart turned towards Jesus. When you catch a glimpse of the Savior, and recognize who He is and all He's done for you and me, you're so overwhelmed with gratitude, joy, and love that you don't have to be told to share it. No. Instead, you go about sharing it freely because you can't imagine living any other way. You want other people to have what you have, and so the gospel grows.

One final point for today. I can't imagine what it felt like to see Jesus lifting off the ground and into heaven, but in some ways, I wonder if the disciples maybe felt like they were losing him, again! Of course, this time it was angelic, not horrific, but still, he was there best friend, their Savior, their hope. So they watched him go up, much like a child who watches a balloon they released until the balloon is out of sight.

But while they're still looking up, two angels appear and ask why they're staring into heaven. They assure them that Jesus will return the same way he

left, and that they shouldn't worry. In fact, instead of watching for Jesus to return, looking for all the signs, obsessing about the times and dates, the angels tell them to get to work. They tell them, in essence, that the kingdom of God chooses them to be it's ambassadors, so stop looking to heaven, and start impacting the world around you. That's what Jesus has called us to do.

1. Have you ever had something happen to you that was so exciting, you couldn't keep to yourself but had to share it with someone immediately?
2. What does it look like today for you to do kingdom work? Is it something you do in your home, at work, in your community, at your church? Please share your thoughts.
3. What is one thing you are beyond excited about experiencing when Jesus does return the way he left?

#### Day 4 - Acts of the Apostles 1: 12-14, NLT

*12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. 13 When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.*

*Here are the names of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the zealot), and Judas (son of James). 14 They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.*

Few things can bring people together more than tragedy.

I can remember that after the terrorist attacks on the United States, on that infamous day of September 9, 2001, our country rallied together in a way I hadn't witnessed it do before. Flags were flying on houses in neighborhood after neighborhood, churches were holding prayer vigils, and even the different political parties in government were crossing their ideological divides to embrace one another. It was a beautiful time.

And it lasted about three, maybe four weeks, before we started at each other again. We started to place blame, point fingers, and put up walls.

What I am most impacted by in the passage for today is the line that they “all met together and were constantly united in prayer.” Oh how I wish that happened more often. How I wish that in this in-between time, in-between Jesus resurrection and His final return, we could be more united in prayer; across political divides, across theological disagreements, across behavioral differences. But more and more, we draw lines in the sand and seem to care way more about other people knowing how right we are, then we care about getting to know the person we disagree with.

I just wonder what would happen if prayer once again became the driving force behind our gatherings, our conversations, our jobs, and our worship? I wonder what kind of people and communities we’d be, if we stopped bickering over our differences, and started uniting under the banner of love and our humanity? I bet we’d do a better job living in the in-between, depending on God, growing in trust, and letting Him worry about the big stuff, while you and I care for one another and love, as He loves us. Man, just imagine, what a world that would be. Maybe that is the most important of our calls as we live this life, in the in-between; in-between the now and the not yet, what we can see and what we can’t, and what we long for, the next coming of Jesus.

1. What are some of the most common disagreements or divides that you have with those around you (family, work, church)?
2. Do you think it’s possible to set an example of laying those things down in order to seek commonality? If so, what is one thing you could do today to work in that direction?
3. Have you ever had a season in life where you were united with others in prayer over someone or something? What was that like? And if you don’t have that opportunity right now, what’s stopping you from reaching out to people to begin a weekly prayer experience right now?

#### Day 5 - Acts of the Apostles 1: 15-20, NLT

*15 During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. 16 “Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. 17 Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us.”*



18 (Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. 19 The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means "Field of Blood.")

20 Peter continued, "This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' It also says, 'Let someone else take his position.'"

If ever there was a tragedy in the gospels, this is it. Someone who heard all the stories the other disciples heard, witnessed the miracles and the power of Jesus, and sat at His feet day after day after day, yet this was his end; alone, dying by suicide.

I know Judas fulfilled prophecy. I know someone had to give Jesus up. I also know the other disciples don't have anything good to say about Judas. But I don't believe Judas was all bad.

Judas wanted what the other disciples did; He wanted Jesus to sit on the throne of Israel. He wanted Jesus to put the Jews back on top. He wanted those things that the prophecies spoke of - peace, prosperity, justice. But what Judas couldn't let go of was...himself. He couldn't allow the first to be last, and the last to be first. He couldn't deny himself, take up his cross, and follow. He couldn't lose his life to gain his life.

I believe Judas betrayed Jesus with mostly good intentions. He thought he would force Jesus' hand. Surely, Jesus wouldn't let them arrest him. Surely, Jesus would finally become the king and Messiah they all believed him to be. But when the tables turn and Jesus allows himself to be arrested, and then when Jesus dies, Judas dies with him. Judas couldn't bear what he did, so instead of seeking forgiveness, which Jesus taught, instead of receiving grace, which Jesus introduced him too, Judas took his own life.

I believe that when Jesus got to Judas, to wash his feet on the night of the last supper, Jesus didn't need water in that basin to wash Judas' feet. My guess is, like Mary Magdalene did to Jesus, Jesus did to Judas; his tears poured out over Judas' feet. That's how Jesus loves, even knowing the evil in us, he loves more than we can possibly imagine. As painful and tragic as the story of

Judas is, it teaches me that there is nothing I can do, no where I can go, where Jesus won't chase after me.

1. Have you ever betrayed someone? What did that feel like?
2. Have you ever been betrayed? What was that like?
3. What do you learn about Jesus in how he treated Judas?

#### Day 6 - Acts of the Apostles 1:21-25, NLT

*21 "So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus— 22 from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection."*

*23 So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they all prayed, "O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen 25 as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.*

I'm sure every single one of us reading this thought today has a story about being chosen, or being overlooked, or we've heard plenty of those kinds of stories. I have my own, from little league, to varsity sports, and even to speaking opportunities I felt called to give but in the end, got overlooked.

But there are several aspects to today's passage that give me reason to have courage.

One, I'm encouraged by how many there were that, though not chosen to be a part of the original 12 disciples, continued to remain as close to Jesus as possible. They were never rejected by him, mind you, there were just so many Jesus could invest in at once. So here was a group of people, 120 according to Luke, who were also followers of Jesus. We don't know if Peter refers to all of them when he says "we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time," or just a few, but either way, I'm encouraged they had a good number of devoted followers to choose from.

Two, I'm encouraged that this group of leaders didn't seem to fight over names, but chose in one spirit to nominate two worthy individuals, and after praying about it and casting lots (a process that involved throwing stones to see how they landed, trusting God for the outcome), they graciously accepted and moved forward to continue the work of the gospel.

In our world, our churches, there is so much fighting. Everyone wants their voice heard, yes, but they also want their voice to win the day. Churches split over a difference of opinion, or belief, or practice, and because of this, not only is there damage done to that local body of Christ, there are people that don't get to hear the gospel because Jesus followers were fighting among themselves.

The devil doesn't care what you're focused on, as long as it's not Jesus.

I pray that our communities could have the Spirit of the apostles in this part of the Jesus movement. They were humble, honest, and they put the good of the community ahead of their own. May we have the courage to do the same so that the gospel may advance, so people may come to see Jesus more clearly, and so that we may be empowered to continue to love well.

1. Have you ever been involved in, or witnessed, a painful battle between believers? What was the outcome? Were those that were hurt reached out to and reconciled with, or left behind?
2. How can you and I avoid these types of division in the body of Christ?
3. Spend some time today praying for unity in the church, and that the followers of Christ could have the courage to lay their lives down for the sake of Jesus and his church?

## Day 7 Small Group Study

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with, or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN QUESTIONS

Was there ever a gift or a promise you had to wait way too long to receive or be fulfilled (a diploma, someone's hand in marriage, a job offer, a trip you

longed to take)? How long did you wait and what was it like to finally receive it, assuming you did?

## HEAD

1. Read Acts 1 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. What were some of the ways that Jesus proved to the apostles, and over 500 others, that he was alive? Why was this so important?
3. Do you think the apostles had any idea what would really happen when the Holy Spirit was poured out? Explain.
4. When Jesus was taken up into heaven, do you think they were startled or were they beyond being surprised by anything Jesus did at this point? Do you think any of them would have been sad again to see him go?
5. What were some of the things you think they prayed over in the in-between?
6. Do you think the disciples ever forgave Judas for what he did?

## HEART

1. If you come from the Adventist faith tradition, we've spent a lot of time looking for signs and trying to make predictions about when Jesus will return. The angels appear to tell the disciples, "Don't look to heaven, you've got work to do (Jesus had just said that they'd be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth)". Do you think the message is the same today, or should we be continuously looking to the sky?
2. Which do you think was more daunting to the disciples to think about, Jerusalem, Judea, Samara, or the ends of the earth? Explain.
3. What kinds of things could you and I, today, be united in prayer over?
4. How could we make prayer a more important element to our faith community, since it seems to be so critical in the early church?

## HANDS

You and I live in the in-between; in-between the resurrection and the final return of Christ. Spend some time today praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to come to life in you. Maybe you could pray for God to help you be strong and take heart while you wait for him. Then think of one way you could advance the work of His kingdom today; one act, one kind word, something.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Matthew 28:18-20 NLT

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Week 2

Day 8 - Acts of the Apostles 2:1-6, NLT

*1 On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.*

*5 At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.*

Pentecost would have happened approximately 50 days after the celebration of Passover. Luke tells us that Jesus spent 40 days with the disciples and other followers following his resurrection, which would suggest that for 10 days after Jesus' ascension, "all the believers were meeting together in one place."

What were they doing during this time? My guess is they were invested in three things: One - they spent a lot of time in prayer. Two - they likely spent time talking to each other and processing all the events that had taken place in the last several weeks. The resurrection, Jesus' appearances, it was all so amazing and surreal. Three - they were obeying their Master's last instruction which was to remain in Jerusalem until they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised would come (John 14: 15-18, 15: 26, 16:7-9).

And though I want to jump to the experience of the Spirit, I want to linger a little longer in the waiting. Note that they waited for the promise, together. Chapter 2 of Acts will end in the same way as it begins, together in community. Let us not look past this too quickly for community is a critical ingredient in the experience of the Holy Spirit. I fear sometimes we are too quick to want to make all of our deeply meaningful spiritual experiences, solo events; off on our own, in a wilderness. But those experiences seem to be the exception, not the rule. The Spirit comes and is experienced and enjoyed and on display most within community.

Then, as they are meeting together in one place, the experience begins. And the experience is immersive, it includes sound, sight, as well as action.

It's also interesting to note that the sound they heard was "like" a windstorm, but it wasn't a windstorm. And what descended upon them was "like" tongues of fire, but they weren't tongues of fire. This was a supernatural experience and they described it as best they could, much like when the apostle John tells us in Revelation that the streets of heaven were made of pure, translucent, gold. Were they actually streets of gold, or was gold the best comparison the John could make? Guess we'll find out, but the emphasis is that supernatural things are simply that, super-natural, more than our natural experiences can comprehend.

This experience, however, wasn't just for those in the room. The Spirit came into the believers who were meeting together, praying and waiting, but the result was a message and impact that went beyond the walls of that room. Jews from all over the world who had gathered in Jerusalem came running. What they heard, blew them away. Each one heard a message spoken in their native tongue. And this was only the beginning.

1. Can you remember back to something you wanted, but had to wait a long time to receive? What was the waiting like? Were there people who waited with you, or were you alone in the waiting?
2. Thinking back over your life with God, what were some of the most powerful experiences you had with Him, of Him? Were you alone? With others? And what did being alone or with others do to add, or maybe even subtract, from the experience?
3. Have you ever had what you would call an experience of the Holy Spirit? If so, what was it? If not, take some time to think and define what you

expect an experience with the Spirit to be like. Then take some time to reflect on what seeking and waiting might look like for you, and who might join you in the wait.

### Day 9 - Acts of the Apostles 2:7-13, NLT

*7 They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, 8 and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! 9 Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" 12 They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. 13 But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!"*

I love this passage because it speaks to God's desire for the gospel to be taken to all nations (Matthew 28:19). Remember, up to this point, God had spoken to the nation of Israel in hopes to use them to be a blessing to all people. However, as time went on, and as Israel waited for their promised Messiah to arrive, they became more and more selfish. They wanted Israel to be the nation in power, they felt they were truly the only special and chosen people of God, and they were keeping the truth to themselves.

When Jesus came on the scene, part of what got Him in trouble was that He spent time with all sorts of people that the typical God-fearing Jew went out of their way to avoid. Jesus goes to Samaria and meets a woman at a well when most Jews avoided Samaria at all costs. Jesus healed the servant of a hated Centurion, a pagan no less. Jesus crossed the sea to the region of the Gerassenes, a Gentile area, in order to heal a man trapped by demons. Of course, it wasn't just people from other nations, Jesus spent time in the homes of tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners.

However, though we have glimpses into the spaces Jesus wanted the gospel to enter, His ministry was by and large focused on Israel. But this passage in particular is the beginning of the global nature of the gospel message. And it didn't take us long to get here. 10 days after Jesus ascends, 50 days after His

resurrection, people from the known world begin to hear the gospel “in their language.”

The Jews believed that there was one sacred language, one language to pray in. That language was obviously Hebrew. However, Jesus opened the door to using other languages in prayer when in the Lord’s Prayer He used the Aramaic word for Father, Abba. When He taught His disciples to pray in a different language, He opened the door for us to go to God in our own native tongue. Some scholars believe that this simple teaching is the reason we have the Bible now in our own language instead of ancient Hebrew.

So now, as the breath of life (i.e. the Holy Spirit) is breathed into Jesus new body (i.e. His church), we see that the continued work of Jesus was now to truly go, “to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

As the periscope for today ends, I’ve always found it interesting that some in the crowd thought those with the Spirit were drunk. Peter will refute this in tomorrow’s passage, but for today let’s just say that it’s our human nature to try and explain everything we see and hear. We want answers, logic, control. But sometimes, seeking an answer for everything robs us of the beauty in the mystery; the many colors of a sunset, the incredible length an eagle can glide, or the shivers I get up my spine at a thunder crack. There is beauty in the mystery, that gap between the supernatural and our human understanding. And I wonder what kind of person I’d be if I spent less time trying to explain everything, and more time appreciating the mystery? I hope to find out.

1. God calls us all to share His message to our Jerusalem (our homes), our Judea and Samaria (the places we live and work), and to the ends of the earth (the larger impact to the world around us)? If you were to define who some of the people were in those spheres, people you may be here to bless, who would they be and how might you bless them?
2. What are some of your favorite mysteries in creation, or those things in creation that you love to experience and contemplate? Do you think those things tell you anything about God?
3. Have you ever been ridiculed or made fun of for sharing Christ? If so, how did you respond? If not, how might you respond if it did happen, in a way that resembles Christ?



*14 Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. 15 These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that. 16 No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:  
17 'In the last days,' God says,  
'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young men will see visions,  
and your old men will dream dreams.  
18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike— and they will prophesy.  
19 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below— blood and fire and clouds of smoke.  
20 The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives.  
21 But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Have you ever been caught in a rain storm?

There is a difference in how it rains depending on what part of the country you live in. I am from the Pacific Northwest, and the reason most of us don't carry umbrella's has to do with the fact that the rain is often more misty than it is hard. Unlike my times spent in the midwest and south, for example, when I would sit in my parked car, just 10 feet from the entrance I needed to go in, asking myself if it's worth getting out of the car or if I should wait for the storm to pass. I knew that in the 10 feet from my open car door to the entrance, I would be soaked to the bone.

This moment of Pentecost was definitely one of those soaked to the bone outpouring moments of the Holy Spirit. I often wonder if people standing near them didn't get some Spirit power splattering on them because of proximity alone. It was a deluge for sure, but it was a deluge that had been promised 100's of years before through the prophet Joel.

Peter picks up on this prophecy and recognizes that it's fulfillment is now. And, he recognizes that where God/Yahweh is the acting agent in the visions and the salvation they lead to, they know have a picture of that God in Jesus.

It's another "Aha" moment for Peter, and certainly for the crowd listening to him.

The prophecy in Joel was predicting the coming age of the Messiah. When the Spirit is poured out, when signs are seen, when dreams and visions come, the Messianic age has arrived. We are in that Messianic age. The Spirit is still here, still working, still creating, still giving life. Let us not think that the Spirit was something the early church enjoyed, or those Saints in the Protestant Reformation got to enjoy, or those alive in the Second Great Awakening of the 19th century benefited from. No. The Spirit is alive and well and continue to move and work, but the Spirit doesn't go where the Spirit isn't welcomed. God is love and love doesn't force itself on anyone. But love also doesn't give up. So we're told, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."

Do you want to experience the Holy Spirit? Do you want Jesus to be Lord of your life? Do you want transformation? Would you love to produce more love, joy, grace, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control?

Then answer the door. Surrender to the Way of Jesus. Let Him into your life to take up residence in your heart, your home, and your church. Then watch as He uses you to bless others in ways you could have never imagined.

1. Do you think you've every felt, heard from, or witnessed the work and presence of the Holy Spirit?
2. Take a moment, today, to surrender yourselves to Jesus, and invite the Holy Spirit into your heart, your home, and your church. Clothes your eyes, and breathe in God's Holy Spirit, and breathe out your sins, fears, and concerns. Do this for several minutes before going about your day.

#### Day 11 - Acts of the Apostles 2:22-36, NLT

*22 "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. 23 But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. 24 But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. 25 King David said this about him:*

*'I see that the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.  
26 No wonder my heart is glad, and my tongue shouts his praises! My body rests in hope.  
27 For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.  
28 You have shown me the way of life, and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.'*

*29 "Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. 30 But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on his throne. 31 David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave.*

*32 "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. 33 Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. 34 For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said, '*

*The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand 35 until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet."*

*36 "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!"*

I believe there are at least two things we can take from this longer passage today.

First, after 3.5 years listening to Jesus, Peter is finally getting it. Sure, he had professed Jesus as the Messiah (Mark 8:29), but Peter's version of the Messiah was different than Jesus' version. Peter knew that now. He now knew the Messiah had to die to save us all, and, to usher in the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

Though we're not exactly sure what Peter's "Aha" moment was, we know it could have been in the upper room, or on the beach when Jesus fixed them some fish, or maybe, it was right as the Spirit filled him. Jesus said, "When the Spirit comes, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13). Either way, we can have hope, that if a stubborn, selfish, impulsive fishermen can spend 3.5 years in the presence of Jesus before he finally began to understand, maybe you and I shouldn't give up. Maybe we should keep pursuing Jesus to our "Aha" moments.

Secondly, Peter began to realize and show in his speech that he began to see the Scriptures differently, in the way his Rabbi taught. Jesus had told them, "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!" (John 5:39)

Eugene Peterson once wrote that without Jesus as the center of all Scripture, the guiding principle, the “controlling center,” then “the Bible is a mere encyclopedia of religion with no more plot than a telephone director.” We must remember that if we look hard enough, we can find Jesus on every page, teaching, speaking, and revealing and even clearer image of God. Thankfully, we don’t go about this business alone, for we have the Holy Spirit to show us the way.

1. To our knowledge, this is Peter’s first sermon and because of the Holy Spirit, it resulted in over 3,000 baptisms. Can you remember a sermon you heard, or a book you read, that had a profound impact on your faith? What was it and why?
2. Can you remember any “Aha” moments in your journey of faith? Something that you struggled to understand, that one day become more clear to you?
3. How can we keep Christ at the center of our faith, the Scriptures, and all that we seek to do and say?

#### Day 12 - Acts of the Apostles 2:37-41, NLT

*37 Peter’s words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”*

*38 Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” 40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!”*

*41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.”*

If I’m reading this story correctly, then it may have been words spoken by Peter that were used to “pierce the hearts” of those listening, but it was the Spirit who was ultimately doing the piercing. Yes, Peter partnered with the Spirit, but as Jesus said, “And when he [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of its sin and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgement.” (John 16:8)

We must always remember where the power comes from, because the minute we begin to think that it was all us, we're in trouble. When a little success goes to our heads and we begin to think that it's our talent and our abilities that are growing the kingdom, we're in danger of leaving the Spirit behind.

Rest assured, the power that showed up in Acts 2 was the Spirit. The conviction people experienced came from the Spirit. Peter's role was to surrender, to put himself in a position to be used, and to say yes to what God's Spirit wanted to do in and through him. But Peter wasn't the source, the Spirit was.

That said, I do love how simple our response to those convictions can be. Repent, yes. Turn from your sin and shame and the things that are holding you back from the person God created you to be, yes. Believe in and accept Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as God's ultimate example of love and the expression of His character, absolutely. All these things happen in your heart, just like falling in love happens in your heart. Then, as a sign of that love and an expression of your commitment, there is a public ceremony to promise your life, publicly, to the one who gave you His.

My favorite baptism I've ever done involved a young adult who had struggled with whether or not they had to be baptized. They knew what the Bible said about baptism, but they also knew that Jesus saved the thief on the cross without baptism. so which is it? Did she have to get baptized or not?

After a lot of prayer, I felt impressed to talk to her about baptism as if it was a wedding. You fall in love with another person. You come to a place of knowing you want to journey through life with them, and that you'd even be willing to give your life for them if needed. Then, to commemorate and celebrate this decision, you share your vows with this person in front of family, friends, and God.

I told her that I think baptism is the same thing. You fall in love with God, you recognize all He's done for you, you desire to live your life with and for Him, and then you have a ceremony to let others know of your desires. Those "others" will help you when it gets tough, but they will also celebrate you and cheer you on along the way.

After my conversation with that young adult that day, she called me that evening and said, “I want to get married to my best friend.” What she meant was, she wanted to get baptized. So shortly after that call, we found ourselves down by a river, with friends gathered, and she came down into the water in white while music played in the background. She read out loud her vows to God, what she was promising Him that day, and I read vows to her from God that came from Scripture. She went down under the water, and came up a new creation, absolutely glowing.

All God wants is for you to realize how much He loves you, how much He’s done for you, so that you will trust Him with your life and become the person He created you to be. Because He knows that from that day forward, as you walk with Him, you will learn to live freely and lightly in His unforced rhythms of grace, as you were meant to do, in the beginning.

1. If you have been baptized, take a moment to think back to that day. Was it special to you? What did you feel like afterwards? Would you make that decision again today?
2. If you haven’t been baptized, what may be holding you back and is there someone (a pastor, elder, friend) you could talk to about your questions or concerns? What’s keeping you from Jesus?

### Day 13 - Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47, NLT

42 **All** the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them **all**, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And **all the believers** met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of **all the people**. And each day **the Lord added** to their fellowship those who were being saved.

This passage, for many, is a favorite. It paints what seems like an idyllic picture of what real community, real church, is supposed to be; a community that devotes itself to

teaching, fellowship, and an ongoing commitment to Jesus; a community that is regularly aware of how big God is, and how small they are; a community shares and cares for each others so no one has to go without; and a community that grows.

What's amazing that we often miss about this passage is that the outpouring of the Spirit led to this kind of community. So it seems that when the Spirit is unleashed, the fruit is togetherness, along with the other fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23.

This is yet another passage that affirms what has been true since the beginning; you and I were created by community (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit... "*Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us."* Genesis 1:26, emphasis added), and we were created for community. Jesus didn't call one disciple, He called twelve. He didn't send them out one by one, but two by two. Jesus said, "For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20). God longs for us to have community because community is who God is. God is love and love doesn't exist in isolation.

So why don't we have these kinds of communities described in this passage all over in Christianity? Why is there more judgment, condemnation, us and them behaviors in that which is supposed to reflect the image of Christ, His body, the church?

In one word - sin. "sin, both our own and that of others, drivers us into customized selfishness. Separation from God becomes separation from neighbor." (-Eugene Peterson, Reversed Thunder). And the devil would love to have us think we don't need anyone else, that we're better off on our own. Because people are messy, because community is hard. And yes people are messy, and yes, community is hard, but when "The Holy Spirit breathes on the chaotic and random population [in Jerusalem]...He makes a people of God, a church...A church only has being in relation to Christ." (-Peterson)

You and I were meant for community. We were meant to grow in community, to love in community, to serve in community, and to follow Christ in community. Our modern day problem is that we're so consumer driven, when we go to a community and feel it doesn't meet all our needs, we bail. Problem is, no community is perfect and it won't get better without you.

Have you ever thought that if you notice something about your church community that is missing, that maybe God put you there to notice? Maybe He even put you there to make it better?

I truly believe that if you and I are surrendering to the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, it will lead us to community, to be an active participant in what God is doing in this world. This is what happened in the early church, and it can happen again, but it's up to you. Are you going to go at it alone, or join a community and change the world?

1. What types of community experiences have you had in the past that were transformative for you? Can you pinpoint what it was that made it so special?
2. Have you had a bad experience with community? What made it difficult and how did you respond?
3. Are you connected to a community, and if so, how are you contributing to make it even better?

## Day 14 Small Group Study

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with, or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN QUESTIONS

Have you ever had a religious experience (been to a worship service, read a book, experienced a concert) that was different than the one you grew up in or are a part of now? What was it like? Did you learn anything? Were inspired by anything? Did you disagree or question anything?

### HEAD

1. Read Acts 2 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Knowing that the believers spent 40 days with Jesus after His resurrection, do you think any of them were still afraid of the religious leaders and what they may do to them, or had their joy of seeing Jesus and their hope of what was to come next enough to help them get over any fear? Explain your answer.



3. What do you think your reaction would be to a person who you knew couldn't speak English, suddenly speaking English to you?
4. Why do you think some of the people in the crowd claimed the disciples were drunk?
5. Knowing that traditionally, the Jews had become an isolated people who thought they were the only chosen ones, how do you think they received this more global invitation to the gospel and knowledge of God?
6. Why do you think the outpouring of the Spirit led to a beautiful picture of community?

## HEART

1. Have you ever experienced something that you had no other explanation for other than it was from God/supernatural/otherworldly?
2. Do you think we are more open, or less open, to the work and presence of the Holy Spirit as a denomination? How about as a Crosswalk movement? If you answer yes, why? If you answered no, why?
3. What obstacles do we put in people's way today when it comes to baptism? Should we make baptism easier or harder? Explain why.
4. Why do you think we struggle to find many communities like the one we see described in Acts 2: 42-47?
5. What can you and I do to work towards creating more of these types of communities in our homes, with our churches?

## HANDS

Who is your community and what are you doing to make it a better one? This week, really spend some time in prayer thinking about the opportunity you have to pour into a community of faith, both to help you grow in your love for God and others, and, to help others grow as you share the love of Christ with those we're called to serve. Then come up with 2-3 actionable items you can do in the next two weeks to work in this direction (*sign-up to volunteer at church, join a connect group, lead a connect group, lead a ministry, etc...*).

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone*

*can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NLT

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF RESTORATION HOPE**

Week 3

### **DAY 15 - Acts of the Apostles 3:1-8, NLT**

*1 Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. 2 As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.*

*4 Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"*

*7 Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. 8 He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.*

I absolutely love this story. There's a children's song about it that gets stuck in my head, but because I'm so visual, as I read this story I am just beaming as I imagine observing this healing from across the street. Here's a man who gets carried to the temple gate every day in hopes to get a few more pennies to chase down another meal. And he's set down outside of the gate, because he's not allowed inside (he had a physical deformity and was therefore unclean and prohibited from entering).

We don't know how many years this has gone on, but we do know he's an outsider who has to fight to make it through every day.

Then, along come Peter and John, and in moments, this man gets way more than he could have hoped for that day. He went seeking alms, what he got was restoration in his muscles, his bones, and in moments, limbs that never worked before are now dancing ecstatically in praise to God.

Not only do I love this story, I love it's placement in the larger story of the birth of the church. You see, the Spirit is poured out, and immediately, lives are changed, communities of healing take form, and hope begins to spread. Remember how the Israelites wanted a Messiah that would rescue them from their oppressors and put them back on top of the food chain. But what they God was a Messiah who had the power to restore their bodies, their minds, their hearts, and their hope. They got so much more than they bargained for with Jesus.

Lastly, I'm also drawn to what Peter and John recognize about themselves. They recognize that they have nothing of worldly importance; no silver, no gold, no status to speak of. But what they do have is Jesus, and as it turns out, that's more than enough.

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need."* Psalm 23: 1

1. How is your hope doing today? Do you have hope you can lean on? Is your hope in what Jesus has can do and has promised to do, something you can cling to today? Why or why not?
2. If you were to have something in your life restored today, what would it be and why?
3. When we take a moment to really think about our lives, even in the toughest of times, there are things to celebrate. And with practice, even in the toughest of times we can still worship. What do you have that you can celebrate today? How might your celebration lead to worship?

#### Day 16 - Acts of the Apostles 3:9-11, NLT

*9 All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. 10 When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! 11 They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John.*

Have you ever seen something with your eyes that your mind that was a trick, or must not be real? Maybe a spouse or friend who you last knew was on the other side of the world, who comes home early to surprise you? Or what about a sports team that was a huge underdog, yet rally's for an unbelievable upset?

I had this type of experience recently, but it wasn't a good thing. To make a long story short, I had accidentally taken someone else's cell phone from the coffee shop I had been in earlier. Turns out, I had already put my phone in my pocket, but when I stood up, another man put his phone down at my spot to save it. Only problem is, I didn't see him place it there, so when I looked down, I just assumed it was mine (I was jet lagged and tired, by the way). I went to my car, that had a tire that was very low, and drove to a gas station to fix the tire.

However, the gas station I drove to had a broken air pump, so then I drove to the next nearest gas station, some five miles away. Their pump worked. I got out, was filling my tire, when a young man came up behind me, kept his distance, and asked if I had just been at that coffee shop. I said I had. Then he said he thinks I took his cell phone.

I was in complete disbelief. I just stared at him for a moment, then reached into my pocket, pulled out my cell phone, and showed him. It was mine. He said are you sure, because we traced my phone to this location just now. It still didn't register. Then all of a sudden it hit me, I opened the car door, looked in cupholder of the car, and there it was, a cell phone that was clearly not mine.

I am sure it took the people some time to realize that their eyes weren't playing tricks on them, that this was, in fact, the lame beggar they had seen there for years. Then, like the people who liked to crowd around Jesus, they wanted to see if this Peter and John had any other tricks up their sleeves. Little did they know they were about to change the world.

And I love how the man who has been healed continues to cling to Peter and John. Maybe he's not quite sure if the healing will stick, or because he's doing something he's never done before (i.e. walking) he needs them to show him how. Or maybe, and this is my favorite thought, maybe he clings to them because he knows that it was their gift of Jesus that made him whole. Maybe you and I could learn a lesson from the lame beggar who was healed - never stop clinging to Jesus.

1. Have you ever had something happen to you, something you witnessed, that you struggled to believe with your own eyes?
2. Who or what do you cling to when life is hard?

3. What is one way you could seek to cling to Jesus as you go about your day today? Maybe it's a verse you carry with you, or a phone call with a friend who you know will pray with you, or some time in prayer.

### Day 17 - Acts of the Apostles 3:12-16, NLT

*12 Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? 13 For it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. 14 You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!*

*16 "Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed—and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes."*

I have a friend I have grown up with who has almost always spent his life looking for an opportunity to share the love of Jesus with others. He has almost always believed in the goodness of saving work of Jesus, and has felt called to share Him with others.

And though his heart and motivation is always good, it obviously doesn't always work. Not everyone is open to receive, but that doesn't stop my friend from trying.

One time, as adults in ministry, we were hanging out in downtown Portland in a place surrounded by tattoo parlors. As we sat outside sharing a meal, my friend thought he saw an opportunity with the man sitting next to us.

He saw on the man's leg, among many other tattoos, a tattoo that said how he loved his mother. Thinking that was his open door, my friend asked the gentlemen, "So, you and your mom are pretty close huh?". The guy looked at my friend and said something he wasn't expecting. He said, "Well, if she was the last person on earth, I wouldn't kill her, if that's what you mean.". It was the first time in our lives, as friends, that I ever saw my friend speechless.

Peter saw his opportunity too, but not to draw more attention to themselves. It would have been easy for Peter and John to take the credit, but their Rabbi taught them better than that. He taught them that to gain their life, they had to lose it, and to be first, you had to be last. He lived a life of servanthood, of putting others first, and His death was the ultimate example.

So following in the footsteps of their Master, Peter and John know who made this miracle happen, and they take this opportunity to introduce the crowd to the giver of life and the restorer of hope.

I believe that the more connected to Jesus we are, the less conceited and arrogant we become. The more Jesus is the center of our lives, the less we are, and when we truly know and believe in who Jesus is and what He accomplished, we can't help but share that with others.

1. Can you remember who it was that first told you about, or showed you, the love of Christ?
2. Peter and John showed the crowd that there is power in the name of Jesus. Do you ever claim that name, and claim that power, when you need it? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever found yourself unable to pray anything else, but the name of Jesus? Do you think that praying His name can be enough?

#### Day 18 - Acts of the Apostles 3:17-18, NLT

*17 "Friends, I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. 18 But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things."*

When I was little, somewhere around 7 or 8 years old, I can remember getting into a fight with my oldest brother that led to a yelling match. Things got pretty heated, until I called my brother a word I had made up; at least, I thought I had made it up. As soon as I said it, the yelling stopped, and I heard my mom immediately inhale all the oxygen in the house as she stormed into our room.

"What did you say Paddy Sean?" Saying my nickname and my middle name in the same breath was a sure sign that I was about to die. But even though her reaction communicated that I had done something wrong, I had no idea what it was.

She then went on to tell me that she was going to wash my mouth out with soap, a punishment in our home for those times when you said a swear word. Only problem was, I didn't say a swear word, I said a made up word. It was then that my mother educated me that the word I said was, in fact, not made up, but a word that means a son without a father. She continued to educate me, as she cleaned my mouth with soap.

From my perspective, it was a sin of ignorance, but I was treated as it was a sin of presumption. Either way, my mom was right; what I said was wrong and correction was needed.

When Jesus was being nailed to the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." The soldiers didn't know who it was they were nailing to the cross, but I'm going to take it even further. What if Jesus was referring not just to those nailing Him to the cross, but the ones who put Him there in the first place? Because of their own stubbornness, they didn't know that He was who He was, even though He said who He was. Still, Jesus prayed for them. Jesus died for them. And He died for us; for the sins we know we do, and the ones we don't. He died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5: 6-7) because more than anything, He wants to spend eternity...WITH US!

That's a God I can get onboard with, that's a Savior I can follow, and that's a gospel I desperately want to share with others.

1. Because repentance is important, as is asking forgiveness for sin, what are the sins you know of today that you need to ask God to forgive you for? How about asking God to forgive the sins you do that you don't know about?
2. Jesus is the God who said to turn the other cheek, to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute you, and He is the God who prayed forgiveness over those that were murdering Him. Is there someone in your life that has caused you great pain, that you need to forgive? Ask God for help because these things aren't easy.

#### Day 19 - Acts of the Apostles 3:19-23

*19 "Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. 20 Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. 21 For he must*

*remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' 23 Then Moses said, "Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God's people."*

When my wife and I bought our current home, it was a solid structure, but one that had not been well cared for in a long time. What was funny is that in order to get the house, because the market was so competitive at the time, we had to write what they call a love letter to the owners so they would consider our offer more than others. The love letter was supposed to include who we are as a family, why we love their home, and what our vision for the home was.

I say it was funny, because we talked a lot about how much we loved the home, but then when we moved in, we changed almost everything about it. New flooring throughout, new paint inside and out, new doors, repaired fence, refinished deck, and the list goes on. The structure of the house was good, but the external pieces needed to be refreshed and restored to the former glory. Though this was incredibly hard work, the more we accomplished, the more exciting it became. It was invigorating to see new life come from something that had seemed well past its prime.

I love how in verse 20 of this pericope, it says that when God wipes away your sin, restoration comes or specifically, "refreshment.". The Greek word for refreshment is the word, *anapsuxis* which can also mean, "to recover your breath."

What a fitting metaphor with what happened in chapter 2 that we talked about last week. The Holy Spirit has breathed life into Christ's new body on earth, His church. And that breath brings healing, restoration, and hope.

The hope we have is not just in the restorative work being done in and through us now as we surrender more and more to Jesus; it is the hope in the final restoration that will come when Jesus returns again to this earth. We long for that time, hope for that time, because if you're anything like me, I'm tired of all the hurt and pain in this world. I'm tired of turning on the news to find out how many more have died in the war in Ukraine, or Gaza, or from fentanyl overdose, or in gang wars along the border. I'm tired of people hurting and people dying.



But God did raise up a Prophet for us, and His name is Jesus. Through Jesus, we have forgiveness of sins. Through Jesus, we have hope for what can happen with Him through His Spirit now, and what will happen with Him in the life to come.

So when we look at the world falling apart around us, know that we have been called to help bring Jesus restorative power to this earth, now. And, we have been called to help people know that this present world isn't all there is; a day is coming when we will live forever, when our mortal bodies will be made immortal, and when there will finally be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. In this we have hope.

1. Have you ever tried to restore something old to look like new again? If so, what was that process like?
2. Do you believe that the life Jesus died to give us begins now, not just in heaven, and that restoration and transformation begins the moment we accept Jesus as Lord?
3. What's one thing you can do today to remind you of the hope you have in the life Jesus offers now, and the life Jesus has promised to bring us soon?

#### Day 20 - Acts of the Apostles 3:24-26, NLT

*24 "Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. 25 You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways."*

As we read through the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we must remember that Luke is writing decades after these events took place. He has done his research, he has had likely countless hours of interviews and conversations, and he has carefully selected the stories that need to be retold and passed on. Why?

As stated in the introduction to this series, many scholars believe that Luke didn't write this account of the continued work of Jesus in order to convert new believers, but rather to strengthen those who do believe. Naturally, as we've experienced with our Crosswalk communities, when you focus on one

group, there is always a ripple affect of other groups connected to the target group. So is it likely that Luke's writings garnered new converts, yes, but that doesn't take away from his purpose for writing, which was to strengthen the church.

But why did it need strengthening?

A lot had happened since Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit was poured out. Those first few years were so exciting, so full of anticipation, hope, and joy. The good news message of Jesus Christ spread like wildfire throughout the known world, and change was happening. The poor were being cared for, the sick so often discarded by others found care in the homes of Christians, and those tossed to the side by society received their new titles as children of God.

But where there was good, evil was nearby. The temple in Jerusalem was laid to waste, taking with it the hope of a people. Persecution of Christians had begun and took on many painful forms. Some people were no longer allowed to do business because of their faith, others lost their families, and others watched their loved ones die all for the cause of Christ.

So Luke writes to help the people remember what this movement is all about, even when times are tough. He writes to remind them of God's promises, and how He fulfilled those promises. Like Paul wrote, "For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding, "Yes!" (2 Corinthians 1: 20)

Jesus is God's answer to all that plagues us. Through Jesus, God has fulfilled His promises. And with Jesus, you and I are called to be a blessing to the world.

1. What about your faith, and/or your life, needs encouraging today?
2. What promises do you cling to when life is tough? Are there verses you've memorized, stories you reread, that give you hope?
3. Who do you know, in your sphere of influence, that could use a blessing today, and how are you uniquely positioned to be that blessing?

## Day 21–Small Group Study

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with, or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add,

subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

## OPEN QUESTIONS

Share one of the most amazing gifts you have ever received, or, one you have given to another person.

## HEAD

1. Read Acts 3 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Why do you think the beggar chose the temple gate to sit and ask for alms all these years?
3. Do you think the beggar ever had hopes of being healed?
4. What is the people's response to the miracle (verse 10)? Why do you think that is often the response to witnessing something supernatural?
5. How do you think the crowd would have received being called murderers? Why might they have been more open to listen to them instead of immediately cast them out?
6. What are "times of refreshing" and why would they follow repentance?

## HEART

1. Have you ever received anything from God that caused you to walk, leap, and praise Him?
2. Peter and John claimed to not have a dime to their name, but they "gave" Jesus Christ. What else do we try to give people to help them, instead of introducing them to Jesus? (recognize that some of those other things may not be bad, they may be what the person needs, but how could we also help them know Jesus?)
3. When did you first realize who Jesus really was? What helped you know Him more?

## HANDS

As the body of Christ, we are called to be the presence of Jesus in our communities. Of course we are able to do this because of the Holy Spirit. So what is one way this week that you could be the presence of Jesus to someone in your community (church, neighborhood, work, home)? Pray over it, ask for the Spirit to lead and to guide, then go and share Jesus in some tangible way.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Psalm 73:25-26 ESV*

## THE EXPERIENCE OF UNWAVERING CONVICTION

### Week 4

Day 22 - Acts of the Apostles 4: 1-4, NLT

1 While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. 2 These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead. 3 They arrested them and, since it was already evening, put them in jail until morning. 4 But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men who believed now totaled about 5,000.

Our story from last week continues. Peter and John healed the crippled beggar, and then started to speak to preach to all those in the temple about Jesus as the fulfillment of all Scripture and Prophecy, and as our path to salvation.

In those temple courts, among others, were Sadducees, a sect of Jews who did not believe in a resurrection from the dead. But they weren't the only ones that were "very disturbed" by the message of Peter and John. The Greek word for "very disturbed" is diaponeomai, which can mean troubled, displeased, offended, or pained. It's a feeling that would have been hard to hide. I'm sure their faces were contorted and even filled with a rush of blood making them red with anger and frustration.

So what were they so worked up about? Yes, the Sadducees didn't like the talk of resurrection, but the other leaders were upset because their attempts to stop the message of Jesus hadn't worked. They had tried to rid themselves of Jesus, but His message was spreading even more though He was gone. And even if they wanted to, the disciples couldn't stop sharing the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For them, it was just like what the prophet Jeremiah wrote about God's message given to him, "But if I say I'll never

mention the Lord, or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can't do it." (Jeremiah 20: 9, NLT) In fact, Peter and John will say something similar in just a few verses, "We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard." (Acts 4: 19, NLT)

So have you ever felt that kind of conviction? Something you were so sure about that you knew you couldn't keep it to yourself even if you wanted too? Something you were so excited about, believed in so much, that you had to share it with others? Sure, we see this when someone finds an exercise routine that worked for them and changed their lives, or an investment opportunity that got someone out of debt. But for the disciples, they had not only seen Jesus go from death to life, they had experienced it themselves. They had a firm hope not just in a better life now, but in eternity to come, and they had to share it with others. This, friends, is the experience of unwavering conviction, and it continues throughout the book of Acts.

Questions to consider:

1. Have you ever been so convicted of something that you had to share it with other people?
2. Are there certain beliefs that you cling to, that you know you couldn't let go of even if someone tried to force you to do so?
3. What questions or concerns do you have, if any, about Jesus that you think might be holding you back from the experience of unwavering conviction?

Day 23 - Acts of the Apostles 4: 5-12, NLT

5 The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. 7 They brought in the two disciples and demanded, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of our people, 9 are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? 10 Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but

whom God raised from the dead. 11 For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, 'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' 12 There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

Peter and John spent the night in jail because there are consequences to following Jesus. A friend once shared that truth with me at a critical time in my life, that if I truly wanted to surrender all to follow Jesus, that there would be consequences. Some of the consequences are good; a life of meaning and purpose, a growing love for God and people, the opportunity to share Him with others. But some of those consequences can cause pain, like being misunderstood, or being called names like a heretic or demon-possessed or an apostate, or having every one of your beliefs investigated and called into question, or losing out on job opportunities because of your Jesus associations. And yes, all of these have happened.

But when you are convicted that Jesus was who He said He was, God in the flesh, when you realize what He came to do, save us all from our sins and restore us to the life He wanted us to have in the first place, that is news you can't help but share with other people, no matter the consequences.

Of course, the religious rulers want to know by what authority the disciples are acting. Notice that Luke tells us that Annas and Caiaphas were presiding, both of whom had a part in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Peter and John had watched some of that trial, they knew that justice wasn't served, and they may have wondered if history would repeat itself so quickly. Would their current trial end in death as Jesus' had done? Only time would tell.

But one difference is clear between the trial of Jesus from just a few weeks before, and what happens now. This time, Peter and John don't go on the run. They don't hide? They don't deny. This time, they stand tall and strong before their accusers, and they profess the name of Jesus as the only name by which we can be saved. They are bold, clear, and unwavering. How? Thanks to the Holy Spirit taking residence in them, coupled with what they had seen and heard, their convictions are clear. It is only by the name of Jesus that they are able to heal, only by the name of Jesus that they can be saved, and it is under the name of Jesus that they have been given authority to act.

The religious leaders hated that Jesus' name continued to be preached, but as we'll find out in tomorrow's passage, there were things they couldn't deny that took place under that same name (like the healed beggar). There was fruit from this Jesus movement that was making a positive impact in the lives of others, and the religious leaders would have to make up a whole lot of stuff to make it appear as if that wasn't the case. But just as Jesus said, we will know them by their fruits, and no matter how hard the religious leaders tried to stop the fruit of the gospel, there was nothing they could do to make that happen.

Questions to Consider:

1. Have you ever faced negative consequences because of your faith? If so, what were they and why do you think that happened or is happening?
2. What fruit do you think is being produced in your life because of your faith? Is it good fruit, bringing more life to you and those around you? Or, is it bad fruit, causing harm to you and those around you?
3. Peter and John stood tall and acted boldly even in the face of danger. They did so in part because the Holy Spirit had taken up residence in them. Do you believe you have received the Holy Spirit? If so, how do you see the evidence of the Spirit in your life? If not, why not, and might it be time to talk with a mentor, pastor, or friend about your journey so that the Spirit may take up residence in your life?

Day 24 Acts of the Apostles 4: 13-22

*13 The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say. 15 So they ordered Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves.*

*16 "What should we do with these men?" they asked each other. "We can't deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. 17 But to keep them from spreading their propaganda any further, we must warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again." 18 So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.*

*19 But Peter and John replied, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? 20 We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."*

*21 The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go because they didn't know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God for this miraculous sign—the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years."*

There are several lines I love in today's passage.

First, I love the line that they noticed that boldness of Peter and John and were surprised by it, because they recognize that Peter and John were "ordinary men with no special training."

The word in the Greek for the above phrase is, I kid you not, idiots, from where we get the word, idiots. Yep, the religious leaders recognize that these men were, idiots.

Though that idea makes me chuckle, from their perspective, Peter and John were fishermen, not men schooled in the way of the prophets. They had flunked out of the Hebrew schools, and had gone into the trade of their fathers and families. Whereas those sitting in the Sanhedrin, the religious rulers, had all had teachers, they were all the best of the best, the ivy league graduates of the Hebrew tradition. And yet, these ivy league teachers were being "schooled" by idiots! How was this possible?

Well, the only thing they could figure that made them different was that these men, "had been with Jesus." And we know this not just from the stories, but being "with Jesus" is exactly what Jesus appointed them to do, "And he (Jesus) appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him..." (Mark 3:14, ESV)

Spending time at the feet of Jesus, learning from His life, His teachings, His interactions with others, is exactly what sets us apart from others. When we spend that time, we should be growing in the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5: 22).



And as much as the leaders wanted to rid themselves of Peter and John, and ultimately the nuisance of Jesus and his teachings, they couldn't deny the healed beggar "standing" in front of them. They struggled to know what to do.

As the story goes, the Sanhedrin orders the men to stop teaching in the name of Jesus, to which Peter and John reply, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him?" Ouch! That one had to hurt because the Sanhedrin would have seen themselves as the arbiters of what God does or doesn't want. I'm sure these men felt as if they were losing control, and that scared them to death. As the story unfolds, they are willing to do anything to hold onto that control, even if it means killing more people.

But just like Peter and John said that no matter what happens to them, they can't stop telling about everything they have seen and heard, I pray that we too could live with that same conviction. I pray that our eyes are open to the things that we have seen and heard that have no other explanation but that Jesus was involved, and that no matter what happens to us, we can't stop telling others about what we have seen and heard along our own faith journeys.

Questions to Consider:

1. When you think of people in your life that you feel pretty confident that they have "been with Jesus" what are the qualities they exude? What is different about them?
2. What are some of the ways you most enjoying "being with Jesus"? What ways are harder for you, stretch you?
3. What have you seen and heard that is hard to deny was supernatural, or of Jesus, His Spirit, and our God?

Day 25 - Acts of the Apostles 4: 23-30

*23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. 24 When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— 25 you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,*

*'Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans?*

*26 The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.'*

*27 "In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. 28 But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. 29 And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. 30 Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

In today's passage, I am challenged by the people's response to the news that Peter and John shared. Peter and John told them all that had happened, and about the threats that were made towards them and their movement if they keep speaking in the name of Jesus. And the response of the people was to lift up their voices, together, in prayer.

I say challenged because I know myself well enough to know that I too often turn to "fix-it" mode when problems arise. I think of all the things I can do to make the situation better. Sometimes, though I hate to admit it, one of the last things I do is pray. I even say, "Well, I can't think of anything else to do so I guess I'll pray." (I even had a hard time writing that just now because I know it's true more often than I want to admit)

But what if prayer was our first go-to response? What kind of people would we be if we turned to God, first? What kind of communities would we be if we united together in prayer whenever we faced challenges or opposition? What kind of people and communities in deed? Maybe we'd be 1st century kinds of followers, full of the Holy Spirit, used by God to share the good news to the ends of the earth.

And notice the first line in the prayer. When faced with opposition, threats, they turn to God and offer Him their worship in prayer. They recognize Him as their "Sovereign Lord" and the "Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them." This is a call back to their roots, to the God of the beginning. They are recognizing that all things are within His power, that whatever comes their way, God is bigger and in control. Worship is a great

first response when facing trouble because it reminds us of what is most true, God is always bigger than what we face.

The start of their prayer guides the rest of it, for though they ask for boldness and healing and signs and wonders, they do so all in the name of Jesus. They recognize where their power and hope come from, the maker of heaven and earth.

Oh that I could always remember the source of my strength, instead of thinking that it's all up to me. That I could remember how big God is, and how small I am. That I could trust in the power of Jesus' name first and always. This is how I want to live, who I want to be, but I know I can't do it alone. I'm going to need my community to help me remember, we all do. So what do you say Crosswalk? Can we become a "Pray-First" community, united in worship and always leaning on His everlasting arms? Can we lay down our way for His way, and can we do that, together? I sure hope so. In fact, I'm going to try to do better and praying that we would be a community of prayer first, always.

#### Questions to Consider

1. When faced with challenges or opposition, what is your go-to response?
2. When do you turn to prayer? What kinds of things push you to your knees the most?
3. Would you be willing to pray, once a day, for our Crosswalk communities? Would you be willing to commit to praying that our communities would turn to prayer first; and that we'd lean on our Sovereign God each day to show us the way?

Day 26 - Acts of the Apostles 4:31, NLT

31 After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

Oh how I wish that every prayer I finished resulted in the room shaking and everyone being filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, sometimes I wonder if I'm not doing the right things, or praying in the right ways, when my prayers don't result in this same type of response.

Do you ever feel that way? Or do you ever wonder if your prayers are really making any difference?

Well, at least two things to note.

One, the people were praying together “all the believers lifted their voices in prayer to God,” (Acts 4:24) and I think that’s critical.

In fact, it’s often said that every major reformation in history has come at the heart of people who gathered together for prayer. This is something I pray our churches could receive and practice even more. Finding times for us to gather and pray is critical; critical if we want our communities to grow, critical if we want the Holy Spirit to continue to lead and guide, and critical so that God will open up more doors for us to walk through.

I truly believe in the power of prayer, yet I know that many of us struggle with it. What do we say? How do we say it? Doesn’t God already know what I’m thinking, feeling, needing?

Look, though we could talk about prayer for years, in it’s purest form it’s a conversation with God. In our conversations, we need to listen, maybe even more than we talk. And listening could mean reading Scripture, it could mean listening to a sermon, it could be contemplating the words in a worship song, it could mean listening to the sounds of nature.

But we also need to talk. I believe God loves to hear our voice, even if all we can say is the name of Jesus. Prayer isn’t about getting God to do what we want, it’s about opening us up to what God wants to do in us and through us. The more we are open to receive, the more we will receive.

Two, prayer was a part of the rhythm of this movement. They prayed regularly, often, when things were good and when things weren’t. The early church was fueled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, and their prayers.

I really do pray that our Crosswalk communities would be epicenters of prayer. That we could gather together, as a people called to lovewell, and lift each other up, lift our communities up, and lift our call up to God that He may do in us and through us what His will sets forth. All so that more people can

come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, because when that happens, the whole earth will shake.

Questions to consider:

1. Reflect on your prayer life and its rhythm. What works? What doesn't? What could help you grow?
2. What questions do you have about prayer? Consider not just writing them down, but talking them over with another person who may feel the same way.
3. Is there anyone in your community that you'd be willing to connect with regularly for prayer? Whether that's just one other individually praying together over the phone, or on Zoom, or over coffee, or that's a group that meets each week.

Day 27 - Acts of the Apostles 4:32-37, NLT

32 All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. 33 The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. 34 There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them 35 and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

36 For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. 37 He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.

Here again I am taken aback by the result of being "filled with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 4: 31 from yesterday's reflection) Yes, they preached the word of God with boldness, but similarly to what happens in Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit is poured out, a deep sense of community and connection is fostered (Acts 2: 42-47 and in Acts 4: 31-35).

There are all sorts of things we could focus on in this passage, about how the meeting place shook, or how the believers shared what they had to make sure that everyone among them was taken care of, all of which are great and beautiful attitudes to strive for, but I want to focus our reflection today on two aspects of this passage.

First, “the believers were united in heart and mind.” (Acts 4:32). Think about all of your different church experiences in your lifetime. How many times could you have said this about those communities? I hope you have some, but if your journey was anything like mine, there was always something that the “church folk” were fighting over. Whether it was the color of the carpet, or whether coffee could be served in the lobby, or whether certain types of people were truly welcomed in the church or not, there are all sorts of things that tend to divide us.

So how was this early movement able to be “united in heart and mind.” I’d like to suggest that in addition to surrendering to the Holy Spirit, that it was their proximity to Jesus. Yes, many of them had seen Jesus, witnessed His power, maybe even experienced the resurrection, but not all of them had. What made the difference is that everyone was talking about Jesus. Jesus the Messiah. Jesus who was crucified and raised from the dead. Jesus, the one and only true King of all people. They couldn’t stop talking about Jesus, and therefore, they stay very close to Him in heart and mind.

We may not be close in proximity to the events that took place 2,000 years ago, but we can be just as close to Jesus. We can talk of Him often, turn our attention to Him throughout the day, imagine walking with Him in all His journeys, as He walks with us in all of ours. We too can live in close proximity to Jesus and my guess is, when we do that, we can as a community be more united in heart and mind. It doesn’t mean we agree on everything, but if we can agree on putting Jesus first, last, and all throughout our lives, then maybe we can better recognize which things matter and which things don’t.

Second, “the apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all.” (Acts 4: 33)

We talked about this before, about how the apostles couldn’t keep quiet about Jesus even if they wanted to, but they weren’t just having these conversations when they were out preaching, or on Sabbath, or in the temple. They were talking about Jesus everywhere, with everyone. And what’s fascinating is that though this came with opposition, though their circumstances weren’t comfortable, they continued to focus on God’s great blessings. I think that kind of focus is the secret to the continued growth of the fruit of the Spirit even when times are tough. We must keep talking

about Jesus and we must always take time to be grateful for all that He's done for us.

Questions to Consider:

1. When you think of the most important things for us to be united over, what are those things?
2. How can we avoid getting distracted by disagreements over things that don't matter?
3. What blessings can you be grateful for from God today, or this week?
4. Is there a practice you can put into your spiritual rhythm that can help you think of Jesus more often, and, share your gratitude with God daily?

Day 28 Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with, or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

Have you ever witnessed or experienced something that couldn't be explained away by human reasoning? Something that you would call supernatural?

HEAD

1. Read Acts 4 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Other than the Sadducees not believing in the resurrection, why would the leaders have been "disturbed" by Peter and John teaching about resurrection through Jesus?
3. Even in opposition, the message grew and more people came to believe. What is it about trials that can make a movement even stronger?
4. In verse 13, it says that because of the boldness of Peter and John the religious leaders recognized that they had been with Jesus. What else do you think was different about Peter and John because of their time with Jesus?
5. In verse 16, the leaders couldn't deny the miraculous sign, but why do you think they couldn't receive it either?

6. Why do you think prayer was such a critical part of the early church?
7. What helped the communities be so united in heart and mind? Was it just the work of the Holy Spirit? Do you think there was anything the people had to let go of, or cling to, in order to grow such strong community?

## HEART

1. What are some of the practices that most help you “be with Jesus”? Which, if any, are harder for you?
2. Why do you think some of us have such a hard time praying, whether that’s praying with others, or just praying by ourselves?
3. What are some ways that you and I can work to help foster a more united community (church, home, etc...)?
4. How can you and I help each other keep our focus on Jesus and not get distracted by the many things of the world?

## HANDS

Schedule time this week to spend more time in prayer than what may be typical for you, or look for an opportunity to pray together with another person, or group, during the week. Then consider how you may try to incorporate the above practice into your rhythm throughout the week.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

“For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 NLT

## THE EXPERIENCE OF OPPOSITION

Week 5

Day 29 - Acts of the Apostles 5:1-11, NLT

1 But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. 2 He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife’s consent, he kept the rest.



3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. 4 The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

5 As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. 6 Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

9 And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too."

10 Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

Rest assured, opposition comes for us all. Remember Jesus' words in John 10:10, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy." Who is the thief, aka the devil, trying to steal, kill, and destroy? Anyone and anything that reminds him of his enemy, and in case you didn't know, you and I are created in the image of his enemy.

Ellen White once wrote, "it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour." (Steps to Christ, p71) And we know this to be true because we see it in Acts chapter 5, but we experience it in our own lives as well. The devil just doesn't seem to want to leave us alone.

And since the devil's attempts to derail Jesus' sacrifice didn't work, now the devil turns his attention on the new humanity created through the resurrection of Jesus. That new humanity we refer to as the church, Christ's body.

In the new movement, new humanity, opposition came from several different directions - religious leaders (persecution), social responsibilities (distraction), and moral corruption (struggles from within the movement).

The religious leaders tried to put out the flame of Christ's church through arresting, persecuting, and even killing the early followers of Jesus. But nothing they did worked. In fact, the movement only grew.

As the movement grew, the devil tried to distract the apostles by getting them so focused on the social needs, that they wouldn't have time to continue to share the message. Take note, addressing social needs are a good thing, but knowing what you are specifically called to do is a good thing as well. The apostles were called to share the message of Jesus, so they had to find others called to care for the social needs of others.

Then, ever so early in this movement, the devil tried to derail Christ's church with moral failings, like that of Ananias and Sapphira. It's a crazy story for sure, but at the end of the day, it was another distraction to the cause of Christ.

So how do you and I avoid these attacks and distractions the devil throws our way? How do we keep on track, continuing to move within the gospel call?

Ellen White had a great answer for that as well. Just one line, "Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in him." (Steps to Christ, p71).

When we are under attack for our beliefs, when life isn't going our way, when we are continuously distracted from our calling by a wide variety of things, we need to help remind each other about what matters most in this life - Jesus. Talking and thinking of Jesus may not fix all our problems, but it will probably put those problems in perspective and help us weather our current storms.

#### Questions to Consider

1. Have you ever experienced opposition when it comes to your beliefs? If so, how did you handle that opposition?
2. What are some of the ways the devil tries to distract you from Jesus? Those ways can be as many as there are people on the planet, a different struggle for each one of us.
3. Who are your people, where do you turn, that helps you talk and think of Jesus?

12 The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. 13 But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. 14 Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. 15 As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. 16 Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

Oh how I long to have this kind of church experience; one where signs and wonders are almost commonplace, where more and more people come to believe in the Lord, and where the curse from the Garden of Eden is reversed on a daily basis.

But all too often, when we think of church, we think of how long the sermon went, or that one song that got sung that we either loved or hated, or whether our coffee came quick enough (this last one may just be a struggle for Crosswalk people). We tend to look at church as consumers, and not participants. We wonder when the pastor is going to come up with the right idea to address my needs, or when the greeters are going to finally remember our name, or when our favorite social event will happen again.

Here's the problem, as we see in the above text, "all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple." All the believers were engaged in prayer, in sharing the good news, in caring for one another. This wasn't a consumer audience, this was a group of people committed to living out the gospel of Jesus Christ, and amazing things happened.

I find it interesting that there were some who dared NOT join in with the movement. Maybe they didn't understand, maybe they disagreed, or maybe the commitment was going to cost too much for them and they liked their current status in society. Whatever the case, there are always those that would rather sit on the sidelines and judge, then get involved.

But for those that chose to contribute, for those that were willing to participate in what the Spirit was up to, they saw miracles on a daily basis.

You might think this only happened at the birth of the church, but I see miracles all the time in our church. It's a miracle when someone who was hurt by church, somehow finds the courage to walk back into a church like Crosswalk and give it one last shot. It's a miracle when anyone chooses to surrender their life to Christ. It's a miracle when someone offers to serve as a volunteer. There are miracles happening all around us if we open our eyes and hearts to what the Spirit is up to in the lives of those She leads to our communities.

So may you and I continue to meet together, in our homes, at our churches, in our communities, and have the courage to join in to what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst. When we do, my guess is, we'll see even more miracles.

#### Questions to Consider

1. What do you think a modern-day "early church" community should look like? What kinds of activities are they involved in?
2. How are you involved in your local community, working towards helping your community be that kind of church?
3. What is one thing you could commit to this week to help serve your church in some way or another? (this could mean writing a note to encourage a leader, it could mean giving to support the mission of the church, it could mean volunteering for a ministry you've been thinking about, it could mean joining a connect group, and so much more)

#### Day 31 - Acts of the Apostles 5: 17-20, NLT

17 The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, 20 "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!"

Jealousy is a nasty thing, isn't it? We do awful things when we're jealous.

But what were the high priests and officials jealous of? Well, more and more people were accepting Jesus as the Messiah and their Savior. More and more people chose to believe that this Jesus had been resurrected. More and more lives were being changed. In all their years as leaders in the Jewish faith

tradition, they had never experienced such excitement, such transformation, and they had nothing to do with it (except for killing Jesus, of course).

And again, I love that no matter how hard they tried to stop the Jesus movement, they couldn't. Throw them in jail? Sure, until the middle of the night when an angel let's them go.

Just imagine going to bed one night, having locked up all these people who were causing you so much trouble. You can finally have some peace and quiet. That is until morning comes, and some loud commotion in the marketplace outside your home rudely awakens you. You look out the window to see the same people you put in jail that night, doing the same things that made you put them in jail in the first place.

The Jesus movement simply could not be stopped, and we'll see why as we get close to the end of the chapter. For now, let's just look at the instructions the angel gave the people, "Go to the temple and give the people this message of life!"

You see, what's so amazing about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it's not just an escape plan to get out of this horrible world, it's a way of living life that adds to your life, now. Jesus came to give us abundant life (John 10:10), but not just in heaven; right here, and right now.

In the Jesus message, people were coming to realize that God actually loves them, and wants to be with them. In the Jesus message, people were coming to recognize God's redemptive work in their lives, seeking to make them whole, even new creations. In the Jesus message, people were finding a hope that no person and no situation could steal away from them, and it was so contagious that no human or force of darkness could extinguish it.

But I don't believe this was just something that happened in the early church and couldn't possibly happen again. I believe God wants us all to experience the new life He died to give us. I believe God wants to restore us now, every day, and that He'll continue that work in us until the day of completion (Philippians 1:6).

Questions to Consider

1. As you look at your life, what has your faith told you about the gospel. Is it simply about getting out of this world, or is it also about being a force for good in this world? Explain.
2. Has your life changed because of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, how?
3. Do you believe that what happened in the early church could happen again today? If so, how? If not, why not?

#### Day 32 - Acts of the Apostles 5: 21-32, NLT

21 So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council — 22 the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial. But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, 23 “The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!”

24 When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. 25 Then someone arrived with startling news: “The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!”

26 The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. 27 Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. 28 “We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man’s name!” he said. “Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!”

29 But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. 31 Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. 32 We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him.”

When the temple guards went to the jail and found that those they had securely locked up the night before were missing, I am sure they went into a panic. They wanted to place blame somewhere; someone forgot to lock the door, someone fell asleep during the watch. But there was really no human explanation.

I'm sure they doubted that the religious leaders would believe them. If they weren't careful, the guards were going to end up being the ones in prison. There wasn't much time for an investigation, as the guards received a report about where the prisoners had escaped to; they were back in the temple preaching the same message that got them locked up the night before. What in the world was wrong with these people?

Carefully, the guards rounded the gospel preachers up again, trying not to upset the crowd who was excited about the message they were hearing, and took them back to the religious leaders. As if the apostles had forgotten, the high priests reminds them of their strict orders to not teach in this man's name, they couldn't even say the name of Jesus they were so upset. Peter reminds them of what he told them before, that they must obey God rather than man, and then he again gives witness to what happened to Jesus. You want to talk about a thorn in your flesh, no matter how hard the religious leaders tried, they couldn't stop the gospel message. Every time they thought they had put the issue to bed, it pops back up with more force than before.

And less you think that God was out to destroy the religious leaders, He wasn't. He was hoping that eventually they'd see that they couldn't stop what was going on, because what was going on wasn't made up by men. It wasn't a tale told by an idiot. It was the story of God and His love for His people, and nothing and no one could stop the story from being told.

#### Questions to Consider

1. When did you first begin to accept that Jesus loves you, died for you?
2. What do you think we can do to help make us more sensitive to what God is trying to tell us, instead of closed off or reluctant?

Day 33 - Acts of the Apostles 5:33-40, NLT

33 When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. 34 But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. 35 Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! 36 Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. 37 After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered."

38 “So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

40 The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.”

Ok, I’ll admit that this has been one of my favorite passages in the New Testament since I was in high school. Let me try to share why.

First of all, you can easily see how charged people’s emotions were in this moment. They were so upset that they were ready to kill these men, just like they had Jesus, because nothing else they tried, shut them up. And they may have succeeded in doing this, had there not been a sage in their midst.

I’m sure we all have people in our lives that when they speak up, you listen. They’re often grandma’s and grandpa’s, but not always. I worked for many years at Walla Walla University, and while there I had the privilege of working with two of these types of people. One was Dr. Jon Dybdahl, professor emeritus, author, and friend. The other was Dr. Dave Thomas, the former dean of the school of theology. Both of these men exuded such wisdom, that whenever they spoke up, people listened.

Gamaliel was one of these people. He was a revered teacher of the law, and if you want to know how good he was, you can simply look to his star pupil, a young man named Saul who we know better as Paul. When Gamaliel stood up, I’m sure the crowd hushed in silence to hear what wise instruction he had to give in this instance.

What Gamaliel basically says is that there have been previous revolts, so-called Messiahs, and other revolutionaries that would seem to fit a similar bill as this Jesus of Nazareth does. In each of those previous cases, Gamaliel points out, once the leader of the movement was killed, the movement died out.

Then Gamaliel makes a statement that sends chills up my spine every time I read them. Basically, he says that if this Jesus thing is like those other things, man made, it’ll fail just like those movements failed. However, if this Jesus



thing is actually from God, guess what? You won't be able to stop it no matter how hard you try.

And here we are, over 2,000 years later, and this Jesus movement is still going. In all these years, no one has been able to snuff out the message of Jesus, erase the memory of him, or extinguish the impact He made in his short 33 years of life.

As Gamaliel said, who as far as we know, was not a sympathizer to Jesus, His disciples, or His message, if these Jesus thing doesn't end it must be from God. So the fact that we're still having this conversation, that I'm writing this series guide, that you're reading it, that we have places of worship to attend and Bibles on our bedside to read, is all proof that all that took place, was of God. The immaculate conception, the incarnation, the life and teachings, the signs and miracles, the crucifixion and resurrection, as well as growth of the Jesus movement and the gospel message, all from God. Though it has faced much opposition, no one and nothing has been able to stop it.

#### Questions to Consider

1. What do you think? Do you agree with Gamaliel's logic?
2. Do you have any proofs that you hold on to that help you believe that what Jesus said and did, as well as the stories about him, are real?
3. Who are the sages in your life, the people you go to when you need wisdom?

#### Day 34 - Acts of the Apostles 5:41-42, NLT

41 "The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. 42 And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah.""

Yesterday's passage ended with these words, "They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go." (Acts 5: 40)

In those days, to be flogged was basically a nice way of saying, "beaten to within an inch of your life." So they sent the disciples a strong message that they needed to stop teaching and preaching Jesus. Which worked, right?

No. Not only do the disciples immediately go out and continue to preach Jesus every day and from house to house, they even rejoice over the fact that they were considered “worthy to suffer” for the name of Jesus.

Wow, what faith, what conviction. Makes me question those who think the disciples simply made up the story of Jesus’ resurrection. Would you be willing to be beaten, imprisoned, ridiculed, and ultimately killed, for something you knew was a lie? Carry that sentiment on as the church continued to grow and persecution of Jesus followers were common place. Do you think that many people, 100’s of 1,000’s, would go to their death in some of the most horrific ways possible, all for a lie?

These stories, and my own journey and experiences, are proof to me that this story of Jesus wasn’t just fabricated by a few followers who didn’t get their way. They are proof that this Jesus story is of God, and it’s worthy of my life. And these stories give me hope, that if what happened to Jesus was true, then maybe it’s all true. That would mean that one day soon, we will look up to the sky and hear a trumpet call. Then we will see the face of Jesus, looking down on us with arms wide open. We’ll be caught up in the air to be with Him forever (I Thessalonians 4:17). And knowing that, helps me live today with hope that I want to share with anyone who will listen.

#### Questions to Consider

1. What do you most look forward to about the second coming of Jesus Christ?
2. How does your hope in that day help you live out this day differently?
3. Who in your circle of influence do you want to come to know the truth of the Jesus story? Can you begin praying over them today?

#### Day 35 Small Group Study

##### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you’re studying with, or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

##### OPEN QUESTIONS

When you get to heaven, aside from Jesus, who is one of the first people you want to talk to and why? What would you talk with them about?

#### HEAD

1. Read Acts 5 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Do you think it was God who struck down Ananias and Sapphira, or was it something else? Explain your answer.
3. In verse 15, Luke says that Peter's shadow had the power to heal when it fell on someone. Was it his shadow or something else?
4. We regularly see, like in verse 26, that the religious leaders were afraid of the people's reactions. Why do you think they were more afraid of the people and not of God?
5. After hearing and accepting Gamaliel's advice, why do you think they still flogged and threatened the disciples?

#### HEART

1. At the beginning of this week, we talked about how the devil was out to destroy the Jesus movement, and so attacked from three different angles. What are some of the ways the devil attacks us today, and tries to get us to forget or forsake, Jesus?
2. The early church met together regularly, both in homes and weekly at Temple. It was how they survived challenging times and stayed on the road of faith. How important is meeting together as a church community for you personally? What do you get out of it? What do you contribute to it?
3. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? If so, what happened? If not, how do you think you would respond?
4. What "proofs" do you have for your faith?
5. Who in your circle of influence needs to know that Jesus is the Messiah?

#### HANDS

This week, think over and pray about some tangible way to share the good news of Jesus and His love with someone you know. Maybe it's an act of kindness that shows God's love in a tangible way, maybe it's writing a promise from Scripture, or a statement about God's love, on a card that you share with someone. Just think of a way to do it that is thoughtful, and pray before and after, offering to be available to talk more if the person ever wanted.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.”

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NLT