



THE UNLIKELY:

*SIX UNLIKELY TRANSFORMATIONS IN
THE BOOK OF ACTS*

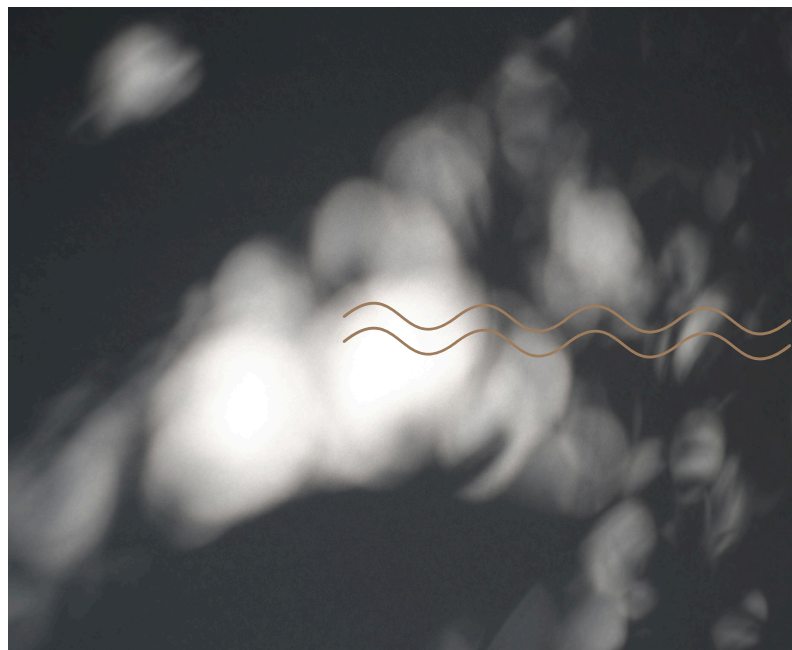


APOSTLES UPTOWN | LENT GUIDE

The Unlikely

On Sundays and in our community groups we've been looking at the book of Acts, and we've said repeatedly *"What's redemptively true in Christ must become actively true in the Church"*. This means that if Jesus accomplished reconciliation with God, the church should be a place where we see God's reconciliation at work among us. If Jesus accomplished redemption for people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, the church should be a place where we see a reflection of the diversity of his kingdom. If Christ has torn down the dividing wall of hostility between race, ethnicity, gender, class, and culture, the church should be a place where we see unlikely people worshipping God side by side.

We're entering the season of Lent, a time where we acknowledge the distance between our God-given desires and our reality. We recognize our sin and our weakness; our failures and our limitations. Lent is a time to repent where we've sinned and a time to ask the Spirit for help where things feel challenging or even impossible in our own strength. So as we look at the book of Acts, we want to consider the following questions:



1 What are the barriers in my own life preventing me from being an agent of God's mercy and grace to those around me - particularly those who are different from me?

2 Who are the people around me that seem unlikely to come to faith in Christ? Where are the relationships and the spaces I need the Holy Spirit to work in power?


During Lent we'll be looking at the unlikely transformation in six people from the book of Acts. If the Lord sought out and redeemed this diverse group of people, what does that mean for our neighbors who need Christ? What does that mean for how we think about our own stories and how the Lord has rescued us? Let's pray that the Lord shapes us into a people who are more courageous, more hopeful, and more dependent upon the Spirit for the work he has for us.



How to use this guide

Prayer

Lent has historically been marked by three practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (serving and caring for those in need). So during this season, we want to press into each of these things:

- Mid-Week Zoom Prayer (Wednesdays at 12pm)
 - Weekly Prayer Prompts (on the Apostles app and Instagram)
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Fasting

Paired with prayer, fasting is a means of increasing our awareness, longing, and focus upon the Lord during this season, consider fasting three meals each week. At the start of each week, mark down the meals you'll skip. Maybe it's three lunches to make room for prayer.

Use this time to engage in prayer personally and corporately - if you can, try to fast during our Wednesday prayer time. If three meals seems too much, start with one meal a week!

Almsgiving

Traditionally, the Church has intentionally sought to demonstrate mercy (almsgiving) to those in need during the season of Lent, along with fasting and prayer. (See Isaiah 58)

During Lent consider loving those in need in the following ways:

- Serve with Dream Center - on the last Saturday of each month, we host our community market at King's Housing, around the corner from our church office.
- In your daily routine, who do you regularly see—especially those different from you or in need? How might you bless them through conversation, care, or prayer? In Acts, believers paid attention to those God placed in their path—we are called to do the same.

WEEK 1: The Ethiopian Eunuch

Give yourself 3-5 minutes to begin in prayer; if possible find a place clear of distractions. Today we will be looking at the Ethiopian Eunuch's story found in Acts 8 (v. 26-40). Take some time to read through it and answer the questions below.

- What do you relate to in the eunuch's story? Have you ever felt like an outsider seeking understanding?

- Pastor Philip mentioned how we see in this story God's pursuit and intention of the eunuch. How does God's pursuit of the eunuch through Philip encourage you in your own faith journey?

- Lent is a season of preparation. What might God be inviting you to surrender or seek understanding in during these 40 days?

"Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"



WEEK 2: Saul, The Persecutor

Give yourself 3-5 minutes to begin in prayer; if possible find a place clear of distractions. Today we will be looking at the transformation of Saul, found in Acts 9 (v. 1-31). Take some time to read through it and answer the questions below.

- Saul's transformation was radical. What does his story teach you about God's ability and power to change hearts?

- Sharie highlighted our tendency to rely on rule-keeping. How might God be inviting you to let go of morality as a way to earn His love? Like Saul, have you ever needed God's loving confrontation to see things differently?

- Historically Lent was used as a season of preparation for those seeking baptism, new life, and transformation. How would you like God to transform you in this season of Lent?

*“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to
proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their
kings and to the people of Israel.
I will show him how much he must suffer for my
name.”*



WEEK 3: Cornelius, The Centurion

Give yourself 3-5 minutes to begin in prayer; if possible find a place clear of distractions. Today we will be looking at the transformation of Cornelius, found in Acts 10 . Take some time to read through it and answer the questions below.

- The Good News of Jesus continues to break barriers. Cornelius, a Gentile (Non-Jew) receives a notification that he should go and look for a man – this man has a message for him. What strikes you about the manner in which God wants to share this message with Cornelius?

- Peter overcame cultural barriers to share the gospel with Cornelius. Julissa shared how we can unintentionally create barriers when we don't relate to others. How have you seen yourself do this?



- Almsgiving is an important Lenten practice. Notice how Cornelius' generous spirit was pleasing to the Lord. How can you give generously as Cornelius did?

“Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.”



Reflect

As we get to the halfway point in Lent, take a moment to reflect on what you've experienced the past three weeks. Consider again the two questions we considered at the beginning of the guide:

- What are the barriers in my own life preventing me from being an agent of God's mercy and grace to those around me - particularly those who are different from me?
- Who are the people around me that seem unlikely to come to faith in Christ? Where are the relationships and the spaces I need the Holy Spirit to work in power?

As you consider these questions, would you answer them differently than you would have three weeks ago?

Consider your practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. What has gone well? What's been hard?

What has the Lord been teaching you during this time? Where has he been present? Thank him for it, and ask for help where you need it.

WEEK 4: Lydia, The Businesswoman

Give yourself 3-5 minutes to begin in prayer; if possible find a place clear of distractions. Today we will be looking at the transformation of Lydia, found in Acts 16 (v 11-15). Take some time to read through it and answer the questions below.

- In this week's video, Thais shared the concept that we come to Jesus through either love or pain. Lydia's story doesn't neatly fit into those categories. Reflect on what drew you near to Jesus.

- The Scriptures tell us, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to the message". Lydia's heart was opened, as were the literal doors of her house. Where is God calling you to open your heart or your home to others?

- Learning from Lydia's story, how can you practice hospitality as a form of almsgiving and worship during Lent?

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.

WEEK 5: The Philippian Jailer

Give yourself 3-5 minutes to begin in prayer; if possible, find a place clear of distractions. Today we will be looking at the transformation of the Philippian Jailer, found in Acts 16 (v 16-38). Take some time to read through it and answer the questions below.

- In this week's video, Jeff shared how the jailer's orderly life was upended, making him an unexpected recipient of grace. How have you responded when your own life has been suddenly uprooted?

- The jailer responded immediately with faith and action. Take note at not just his belief, but the actions that follow! (Refer to verses 31-34). What step of obedience or trust might God be calling you to take right now?

- Lent reminds us of our dependence on God, how our lives are but a vapor. How does this story shape your trust in and respond to Him?

The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

WEEK 6: The Philosophers

Give yourself 3-5 minutes to begin in prayer; if possible find a place clear of distractions. Today we will be looking at the transformation of Dionysius and Damaris, found in Acts 17 (v 16-34). Take some time to read through it and answer the questions below.

- Sharing Jesus can feel challenging, especially with those who think differently. In this week's video, Jordan highlighted how Paul communicated the gospel to intellectuals. What do you find most difficult about explaining the good news?

- Where do you see God at work among people who don't yet believe? How might He be inviting you to be part of that work?

- Easter celebrates Christ's victory over sin and death. This good news is for all! Rich and poor, intellectual, and simple. How can this Lent prepare your heart to fully embrace that joy?

Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.





Expect

What is redemptively true in Christ, must become actively true in the Church.

As we sit in Holy Week awaiting Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, take a moment consider what the Lord has been doing in your heart these past six weeks.

- What prayers have you seen God answer?
- What longings have been stirred during this season?
- What are you hoping for this weekend?
- Who could you invite to our Easter service this Sunday? Make a commitment to invite them (even if they're unlikely to accept the invitation!).